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TECHNIQUES AND THEMES IN EARLY ENGLISH
AND AMERICAN NATURALISTIC NOVELS

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WILLIAM T. LENEHAN

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TECHNIQUES AND THEMES IN EARLY ENGLISH
AND AMERICAN NATURALISTIC NOVELS

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TECHNIQUES AND THEMES IN EARLY ENGLISH
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INTRODUCTION

Commenting on the conflicting ideas developed by scholars of literary naturalism, Charles Walcutt concludes,

These authorities are not all mistaken. On the contrary they are all correct. But each has reached his conclusion by looking at different aspects of naturalism, at different times between 1890 and 1940, and having committed himself to a confining definition he has found it difficult to consider other areas and aspects of the subject.¹

At first glance the many books and articles on naturalism seem to have resulted in a loss of definition of the term itself, leading to a confusion about which writers should be called naturalistic; but probably this is not attributable to faulty scholarship but the inevitable progression toward complexity which has occurred with other terms, such as romanticism, realism, and existentialism. A brief survey of the main trends of modern scholarship on literary naturalism in England and the United States will not only indicate how much of value has been done but also point to some gaps which may need

¹Charles Child Walcutt, American Literary Naturalism: A Divided Stream (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1956), p. 3.

filling.

Two historical attitudes are developing which should allow scholars to put literary naturalism in perspective. The first of these is the belief that naturalism is declining, and may even be dead.² Thus naturalism seems to have ceased to be an active literary credo and to have receded into a comfortable niche as historical fact. The second attitude opens the way to a new study of the complex problem of the relationship between naturalism and realism as literary movements: certain scholars are suggesting that the distinction between these two as methods of writing is false and are asserting that they are really a single movement.³ Although neither of these attitudes, in themselves, reduces the problems associated with literary naturalism, they both show that the time has come when the student can exclude passion and apply his scholarly tools to the solution of these questions.

Despite a lack of an adequate definition or any final answer to the question of the relationship between realism and naturalism, a working definition of literary

²Philip Rahv published "Notes on the Decline of Naturalism" (reprinted in George J. Becker /ed., Documents of Modern Literary Realism /Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1963/, pp. 579-590.) as early as 1942, and only James T. Farrell is willing to assert that he is still writing in the naturalistic tradition.

³George J. Becker, "Introduction," ibid., passim.

naturalism has emerged among American scholars.⁴ Because the very structure of the description reflects the general scholarly dissatisfaction with it, I present this dominating idea in the words of Arthur Edwin Jones, Jr.: "The bald statement that realism as a literary technique plus tough pessimistic evolutionary thinking yields naturalism may seem greatly oversimplified, yet it is not a wholly inaccurate formulization."⁵ Hartwick, Ahnebrink, Cargill, Walcutt, and many others⁶ find mechanistic or pessimistic determinism to be the factor differentiating the two fictional traditions. Perhaps the uneasiness about this distinction springs only from its abuse of the rules of classification--classifying realism by the principle of technique and naturalism by its philosophy. Or perhaps it has simply proved not very efficient: are Hardy and Gissing naturalists; are Garland and Frederic naturalists; how much of Crane's work is naturalistic? Despite the dissatisfaction, we seem forced to perpetuate this distinction.

Perhaps the weakness of the distinction can be seen in some of the arguments it has given rise to. George W.

⁴English scholars seem to be ignoring the problem.

⁵Arthur Edwin Jones, Jr., "Darwinism and Its Relationship to Realism and Naturalism in Fiction, 1860-1900," Drew University Bulletin, XXXVIII (December, 1950), 17.

⁶See Bibliography.

Meyer has proved that the term pessimistic determinism is fallacious in terms of both Zola's theory and practice.⁷ Both before and after Meyer's article, one of the primary problems brought up about individual authors has been whether the purpose was to lead to amelioration or to express a complete lack of hope for mankind. Before solving this crux for us, Charles Walcutt outlines the stand of three groups of commentators on the optimism-pessimism question.⁸ Another argument, which again Walcutt explores, has been a favorite basis for attacks on literary naturalism from its inception: if the author believes in determinism, he is not being logically consistent when he exercises the freedom to write a book.

But the study of naturalism involves many more problems, some almost as basic as the description. Closely allied to the question of the relationship between naturalism and realism is naturalism's place in the history of ideas. Edmund Wilson is typical of the group which sees naturalism as a reaction to romanticism.⁹ Harry Levin is typical of

⁷George W. Meyer, "The Original Social Purpose of the Naturalistic Novel," Sewanee Review, L (Oct.-Dec., 1942), 563-570.

⁸Walcutt, pp. 23-24.

⁹Edmund Wilson, Axel's Castle: A Study in the Imaginative Literature of 1870-1930 (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1931), p. 6.

those who believe realism and naturalism grew out of or are, at least, complimentary to romanticism.¹⁰ Morse Peckham, finding "realism, naturalism, objectivism . . . characteristic of the whole nineteenth-century vision," finds all the standard terminology inadequate to express the change, and suggests that the "objectist orientation" (realism and naturalism) was a reaction against transcendentalism and yet another step in the pursuit of the same end.¹¹ Much more information than we now possess will be necessary before this particular problem can be solved.

Perhaps the most complex and most studied aspect of the history of the idea of naturalism is that of direct sources and influences, and much of this work is excellent. But the complexity of sources and influences is such that more needs to be done, especially in relation to some of the oversimplifications which have become standard. Even naturalism in France--the source from which it spread to other countries--is more complex than generally realized. Understanding the reasons for Zola's creative work and critical ideas involves a study of literary sources (Balzac, Stendhal, Flaubert plus a knowledge of the literature he

¹⁰Harry Levin, "What Is Realism?" Comparative Literature, III (Summer, 1951), 193-199.

¹¹Morse Peckham, Beyond the Tragic Vision: The Quest for Identity in the Nineteenth Century (New York: G. Braziller, 1962), p. 271.

was reacting against), scientific and philosophical sources (Positivism, Taine, Darwin, the work of Claude Bernard and his contemporary experimenters, especially those working on theories of heredity), and historical and economic conditions in France, which, as Cargill and others have shown, were as important as literary trends.¹²

As soon as one starts tracing the movement of literary naturalism to England and America, the problems become even more diffuse. The delineation of the relationship between the English novelists and their French predecessors has been given much attention. The two most helpful books are W. C. Frierson's L'Influence du naturalisme français sur les romanciers anglais and The English Novel in Transition, 1885-1940. As Frierson notes, the process in England is even more complex than that in France because of the variety of models imitated by English writers: in addition to, and often in place of, Flaubert and Zola, the English chose to imitate the Goncourts, Huysmann, de Maupassant, or even some of the lesser figures. Concurrent with the impact of French naturalism on English writers, the Russian realists were being read in French and German and, finally, English translations. As Gilbert Phelps demonstrates in The Russian Novel in English Fiction, English realism of the 1880's and

¹²Oscar Cargill, Intellectual America: Ideas on the March (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1941), chap. ii.

1890's was the result of an amalgamation of native, French, and Russian influences. Further complicating matters is the fact that the English writers were caught up in the fight about Ibsen, and the possibility of the creation of the problem novel as an analogy to Ibsen's problem plays has received too little study.

It is a truism that science had an impact on English writers, both realistic and naturalistic, but measuring the sources and force of this impact is again not simple. George Eliot had integrated Comtean Positivism into the novel, but the bitterness of the fight over the hypothesis of natural selection led writers away from her models: as Leo Henkin in Darwinism in the English Novel shows, writers, who were inevitably affected by the struggle, tended to become either evolutionary propagandists or religious apologists. Madeleine L. Cazamian in the three volume Le Roman et les idées en Angleterre: L'Influence de la science (1860-1890) traces the struggle for the integration of science in general, not just Darwinism, into fictional forms. Some of the dangers inherent in linking a literary movement too closely with an intellectual movement become painfully obvious in England. Both Meredith and Hardy absorbed some of the pessimistic determinism associated with Darwinism, and yet they do not seem to fit into the naturalistic pattern. The two novelists who most directly reflect the new scientific ideas,

Butler and Wells, are placed among the naturalists only by those who blur almost all vital distinctions. Ironically, George Moore, certainly the central figure in bringing French naturalism to England, was almost totally ignorant of science and thought determinism a false hypothesis. That there is a connection between philosophical naturalism, springing from scientific hypotheses, and literary naturalism is undeniable; the precise correlation between the two in England is still vague.

A final variable in this complex movement is the social and economic conditions in England which at least made the materials of French naturalism interesting to English writers and adaptable to English settings. In whatever ways the English writers interpreted the stated purposes of Zola and his French followers, the fact that the effect of the French novels included an inherent protest about current conditions could not be avoided. A study of English fiction which has been nominated naturalistic shows that one of the writers' purposes was protest against things as they were. Noting the difference between English and French naturalistic writing and remembering the long tradition of protest fiction in England, some historians have suggested that both foreign and scientific influences have been overstressed--that what is called English naturalism is an indigenous continuation of an old

tradition. As with almost all generalizations about literary naturalism, this has an element of truth, but the question of how much truth awaits more intensive studies of naturalistic fiction in England and of individual English writers.

Although much more scholarship is available on literary naturalism in the United States than in England, the same questions have received no final answers in this country. Not only general studies like Lars Ahnebrink's The Beginnings of Naturalism in America and Oscar Cargill's Intellectual America but also more specialized studies like Albert J. Salvan's Zola aux États-Unis, Carl J. Weber's Hardy in America: A Study of Thomas Hardy and His American Readers, and Royal Gettmann's Turgenev in England and America trace the variety of foreign influences which have affected American naturalistic writers. A mass of more general studies of the American novel and American ideas as well as an even greater mass of books and periodical studies on specific writers and problems offers further insights into specific influences. The impact of new scientific ideas is outlined by Richard Hofstadter in Social Darwinism in American Thought and by Cargill, Curti, and a host of scholars working on specific writers. Harry H. Clark has published several articles on what should become a badly needed study on the specific ways in which scientific thought affected American criticism and literature in the last half of the Nineteenth

Century. Charles Walcutt's American Literary Naturalism is more precise and more useful criticism than anything as yet published on English naturalism.

A group of American scholars is even more insistent than their English counterparts that what is called naturalistic fiction was an indigenous growth in America, arising as a protest movement. Certainly a strong case for the gradual shift from the harsh realism of Howe, Eggleston, and Kirkland to the naturalistic elements of Garland, Crane, Frederic, Norris, and Dreiser can be made. However, I think that our nationalistic spirit has already been dampened by the scholarship on the debts owed to foreigners by Eggleston, Garland, and Norris, and if it is ever possible to establish a fairly accurate list of Crane's early reading, we will clearly see American naturalism as part of a wider movement.

This brief review of major scholarly problems has ignored the question of placing this movement known as naturalism into critical perspective. There is no doubt that realism, sharing many common sources with the naturalistic tradition, represented by such nineteenth-century and early twentieth-century figures as Joseph Conrad, Ford Madox Ford, Henry James, and William Dean Howells, is considered productive not only of better literature but also of more influential literature than naturalism. Although naturalistic literature seldom elicits the cries of pain or fury that it

once did, there are still those who see the naturalistic method as productive of bad literature or, at best, second-rate literature. The increasing number of studies on individual works or authors, extremely valuable in many ways, is doing little to further overall critical evaluation of the movement in England and America. This is caused by a variety of limitations: critical perspective is often marred by the almost inevitable over-enthusiasm of the critic for his subject; often there is a kind of special pleading, such as arguing that the individual work is good despite or because of the tradition in which it falls; and finally there are too often limitations arising from seeing the author or work divorced from any tradition. Much critical evaluation is still needed.

Thus despite the mass of scholarship which has accumulated on naturalism and American and English artists identified as naturalistic, few final answers have emerged. And it is only recently that the right questions have been asked so that an orderly pursuit of answers can be undertaken. Charles Walcutt and, more recently, Harry Levin¹³--offering an instructive method but limiting himself to a study of the French realists and naturalists--have accepted the traditional distinction--the deterministic philosophy posited by the

¹³The Gates of Horn: A Study of Five French Realists (New York: Oxford University Press, 1963), passim.

author--and then studied authors and their works in terms of the forms, techniques, or conventions which the works exhibit. Both attempt, finally, to describe naturalism as a literary mode, not a philosophical attitude. What they have done in their respective areas of study is the most productive approach to an understanding of naturalism that we have. They work comparatively and fuse historical perspective with close study of the texts.

My study is designed as a footnote to the growing body of scholarship on the naturalistic tradition. I cannot hope to solve a single one of the complex historical problems of naturalism which I have outlined, but I do hope to fill a notable gap which now exists. This gap is the description of the beginnings of literary naturalism in England and the United States. It has been known almost since the first signs of naturalism in England and America that the naturalism written in these countries was different from that of Zola. This difference is most often explained as a result of the cultural differences between France and the two English-speaking countries, but explanations in terms of race or Anglo-Saxon character are frequent. My purpose is, by analyzing those books written in England and the United States during the 1880's and 1890's which have been described as naturalistic, to arrive at some conclusions about the nature of the early naturalistic tradition in

these two countries.

Implicit in my conclusions will be the variations of these works in English from their French predecessors. Explicit will be major differences between the English and American writers. Even though the moral and literary beliefs of the mass of readers in England and America during the period which I study were not very different, certain cultural differences between the two countries will be apparent in the subjects and techniques chosen by the writers. Also, variations in the closeness with which the writers of the two countries imitate the French pattern will be noticeable, although this study is not intended to be a study in literary influences but simply to reflect the excellent work which has already been done on this facet of naturalism. And finally the variation in the aims and the skill to carry out these aims will be obvious in each of the writers studied. These are the primary variables with which I work within the given constant of a group of writers nominated as naturalistic.

My approach is inductive, as inductive, that is, as it is possible or even desirable to be in the study of literature. My primary presupposition is that naturalism, if it deserves to retain its place as a fictional tradition separate from realism, will exhibit this difference in terms of technique as well as philosophy. Whatever the relationship

between romanticism, realism, and naturalism, the organic ideal of fusion of content and form underlies each. Therefore if a deterministic attitude unites the novels known as naturalistic, this attitude should affect the techniques of the better writers. Thus part of my purpose is to isolate those techniques, if any, which are common to naturalistic novels and, if possible, determine whether these techniques are unique within the naturalistic tradition. In addition to this presupposition, I am burdened with a group of almost unconscious critical attitudes concerning what is good and what is bad in fiction; an apology for these attitudes would be an admission that I have no right to attempt this study. I can only hope that the exercise of my judgment will prove that, if these beliefs are simply products of the tastes of an age, these prejudices will be sufficiently timely to help define this critical age.

The problem of limitation and selection is, of course, central to the validity of this study. The most important restriction is of historical period--that of the early naturalists in each country. The early writers have a special interest because, if they deserve the name naturalist, they have relied on common literary traditions for whatever sets them apart from other writers in their language. They are also the ones who won a recalcitrant public for a new kind of writing, or at least subject matter, in their

respective countries. With Arnold Bennett in England and Theodore Dreiser in America, naturalism achieved more or less acceptance in the two countries. Therefore, 1900 seems a logical cut-off date for any study of early naturalism. According to most scholars, the movement was first visible in England in the 1880's and in the United States in the 1890's. Therefore, my study is limited to two decades in England and to one decade in the United States.

As there is no universal agreement as to whether naturalism even existed in these two countries before 1900, there is little general agreement as to who the naturalists were or what novels were naturalistic. George Moore and Frank Norris are most often mentioned because of their acknowledgment of a debt to Zola. In England, other names commonly associated with naturalism in general studies of English fiction are George Gissing, Thomas Hardy, Mark Rutherford, Arthur Morrison, Richard Whiteing, and W. Somerset Maugham. Thomas Hardy, because of his stated rejection of Zolaism and because of his greatness as a novelist, has so far refused to fit into any neat category. I hope my reasons for the omission of Hardy as a central figure will become clear within the study itself. Although Rutherford, Morrison, and Whiteing deserve more study, their small output and their imitativeness have led me to sacrifice them for a more intensive study of Gissing and Maugham. It is

also generally agreed that none of the three English novelists--Gissing, Moore, and Maugham--adhered to the naturalistic tradition throughout their creative lifetimes. I have focused my study on those novels which are usually associated with the naturalistic tradition, essentially ignoring their later productions.

Among the writers of the United States, although there is still no universal agreement, the choices were easier. Of those suggested as exhibiting naturalistic characteristics during the early period, Hamlin Garland, Stephen Crane, Harold Frederic, Frank Norris, and Jack London, I have included the first four, although Frederic's naturalistic novels were limited to, at most, two, and thus I have subordinated my treatment of him within a chapter on Crane. London's major creative works were written after 1900 and thus fall outside the scope of my study.

Although any omission weakens the historical completeness of my study and my particular selective procedure may be defective, by focusing on six authors from two countries, I achieve a kind of symmetry which makes the task of comparison easier. Gissing and Garland are "adumbrations"¹⁴ of naturalism; Moore and Crane, both serious artists, at-

¹⁴Walcutt, p. 45.

tempted to achieve a form and a style appropriate to a new subject matter; Maugham and Norris attempted to fuse older traditional forms and techniques with those they learned from the French. But even if my selective process is faulty, I hope that the comparisons which I develop will isolate certain conventions common to these writers and will throw some light on the historical development of literary naturalism in England and the United States.

A final word of warning is required to keep the critical record straight. I am under no delusions about the absolute aesthetic value of most of the works analyzed within this study. Most of them have earned their current place in obscurity. However, as a part of an important tradition, they deserve study. I have felt it necessary to arrive at critical judgments on most of these novels because in the historical study of the tradition a delineation of the ways both in which individual works fail and in which they succeed is important. I hope I have succeeded in judging these novels as autonomous works, not simply as part of a limited tradition. I have tried to avoid the common error of judging works in relation to their success or failure to fit into a preconceived plan. In other words, I have tried to avoid the limitation of calling these books good or bad naturalistic novels in order to

make the more important distinction between good and bad novels.

CHAPTER I

GEORGE GISSING: THE NEW SUBJECT MATTER

The earliest recognition of literary naturalism in England was an attack on the crudity of the subject matter, and it is generally recognized today that one of the most important results of naturalism was the modern writers' gaining a greater freedom of fictional content. In 1864 Edmond and Jules de Goncourt in their preface to Germinie Lacerteux clearly stated that a new content was part of the program for the novel as "contemporary moral history":

Living in the nineteenth century, in a time of universal suffrage, of democracy, of liberalism, we asked ourselves if what is called "the lower classes" did not have a right to the Novel; if that world beneath a world, the people, must remain under the literary interdict and the disdain of authors who have so far kept silent upon the soul and heart which it may have. We asked ourselves if, for the reader, there were still, in these years of equality in which we live, unworthy classes, troubles too base, dramas too foul-mouthed, catastrophes too little noble in their terror. We became curious to learn if that conventional form of a forgotten literature and a vanished society, Tragedy, was definitively dead; if in a country without caste and without a legal aristocracy, the troubles of the little and the poor could speak to interest, to emotion, to pity, as loudly as the troubles of the great and the rich; if, in a word, the tears which are wept below could cause weeping,

as do those which are wept above.¹

This focusing downward in the social scale--the treatment of the impoverished, the uneducated, the socially outcast--when carried on by Zola and others became the touchstone for the identification of the new movement of the novel originating in France. The new subject matter, although not definitive of the naturalistic novel, appealed to several of the young writers in England.

Although the reasons given for the choice of the new subject matter by the French writers who were trying to fuse science and literature are numerous and contradictory, a cursory reading among the early works which are identified as naturalistic shows that the choice of subject matter is the trait in which there is nearly universal similarity. This use of "the nether world" as matter for fiction had a profound effect not only upon the shocked readers of L'Assommoir, The Mummer's Wife, and Maggie but also upon the techniques of the novels themselves. One of the ways of seeing the effect of the new subject matter on other elements of the novel is to look at the earliest example of the conscientious use of the new subject matter in England, the work of George Gissing.

¹Quoted in Erich Auerbach, Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature (Garden City: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1957), p. 436.

Gissing (1857-1903) is consistently identified as a naturalist in survey studies of the English novel. The identification is usually justified by two elements found in his novels--a pessimistic tone and a proletarian or lower middle class setting. Critics who focus on Gissing alone either disagree or equivocate when faced with the question of his naturalism. Swinnerton asserts that Gissing is not even a realist but "a romantic historian of life."² Gettmann finds his novels "in origin and purpose . . . akin to the novels of Jane Austen and George Eliot."³ Donnelly calls The Odd Women "an important specimen of the style of Zola on Victorian soil."⁴ But there is almost universal agreement, from H. G. Wells in 1897 to the most recent scholars, that the works of Gissing exhibit some differences from those of the English novelists who preceded him and that his works show some kinship to the works of the "modern" novelists. As Samuel Chew phrases it, "George Gissing is the most important figure in the period of transition from the Victorian to the modern novel."⁵

²Frank Swinnerton, George Gissing: A Critical Study (New York: George H. Doran Co., 1923), p. 86.

³Royal A. Gettmann (ed.), George Gissing and H. G. Wells: Their Friendship and Correspondence (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1961), p. 21.

⁴Mabel Collins Donnelly, George Gissing, Grave Comedian (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1954), p. 170.

⁵Albert C. Baugh (ed.), A Literary History of England (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, Inc., 1954), p. 1490.

Until the last five years, much more scholarship had been expended on Gissing's life than upon his works. However, Swinnerton, correctly pointing to the major flaw in his novels, found Gissing too personal to be a realist,⁶ and the close relationship between the author's life and his work has been recognized ever since, thus justifying much of the study of his biography. The most important, and the most generally over-stated, fact of Gissing's life was his constant struggle against poverty, either a real or an imagined threat. Born in the Midlands, after the death of his father in 1870, Gissing continued to study strenuously and won a scholarship at Owens College, Manchester, where he was a promising classicist until he was caught stealing money, presumably to aid a local prostitute with whom he was involved. Escaping his disgrace by going to the United States, he taught in Massachusetts, wrote some short stories for a Chicago newspaper, and finally, finding poverty in America more unbearable than disgrace in England, returned home, determined to be with the fallen Nell, the Manchester girl for whom he had suffered. He went to London to become a writer, where he was joined by Nell and legally married to her in 1879. The early years in London were undoubtedly difficult: he had to pay for the publication of his first novel in 1880 with a portion of a small legacy he received upon his majority; his income from

⁶Swinnerton, p. 149.

writing was almost non-existent; and he and his wife moved from one lodging house to another in the cheaper sections of London as his finances fluctuated. But his first novel brought an end to the worst of his economic difficulties by attracting Frederic Harrison, president of the English Positivist Committee, who arranged for Gissing to become a tutor to his own sons and as many other students as Gissing chose to take. Although one would never guess it by reading Gissing's letters, which are filled with complaints and fears about money, Gissing was never again in danger of privation of the necessities of life, although the total income derived from a prodigious amount of writing seems rather poor recompense for Gissing's struggles.

As his financial problems became less acute, his personal problems increased. In addition to his dislike of tutoring and his strenuous efforts to increase his fictional output, Nell, with no sympathy with any facet of Gissing's intellectual life, became intolerable with her verbal attacks and tendency toward alcoholism. She and Gissing separated, but until her death in 1888 she remained a financial and emotional burden. Idealist that he was--at least about marriage--he married another uneducated girl in 1891. But again lack of common interests led to separation from Edith Underwood Gissing, and as there were now children, the emotional strain on Gissing was even greater. His fear of

his second wife led to a series of melodramatic hideouts and finally an abandonment of England to spend his last years on the continent with Gabrielle Fleury, an educated French woman whom he met as a result of her desire to translate one of his novels.

His painful mismatches, his desire for and insecurity with cultured society, his sympathy with and then aversion for the lower classes with whom he lived during his early years in London, his struggles with his literary ideals and with publishers and public--all of this is reflected again and again in his novels. But the more pleasant aspects of his life--his friends, including Meredith and Wells, his growing security in the world of letters, his enjoyment of Italy--are found only in his travel book and his late intellectual biography, The Private Papers of Henry Ryecroft. On turning to his novels, one recognizes the truth of Shafer's assertion that "to a peculiar extent he [Gissing] lived what he wrote and made the study of his books inseparable from the study of their author."⁷

However, with the exception of the few early years in London, there is no chain of events apparent in Gissing's life which explains the cause of his decision to abandon the

⁷George Gissing, Workers in the Dawn, ed. Robert Shafer (New York: Doubleday, Doran and Co., c. 1935), I, xxviii.

traditional novelistic subject matter of the great Victorians. His youthful admiration of Thackeray and Dickens persisted throughout his life; in fact, the later realists are rather cruelly treated when he compares them to Dickens in his critical study of Dickens (1898). Structurally and technically, as the familiar historical story goes, his first novel was typical of the "three-deckers" which had dominated the English novel since Scott. Important questions are not only why but how this lower middle class, classically educated young man broke with the dominant English tradition.

That Gissing's break with tradition was gradual rather than dramatic is illustrated by his first published novel, which is traditional in both theme and purpose. Workers in the Dawn (1880) is a social reform novel, one of the most popular types in England before 1880. On November 3, 1879, Gissing reports that he has finished the book and describes its function: "The title is to be Far, Far Away--a somewhat singular name, but which, I think, conveys the idea of the book, which is very greatly directed to social problems, principally the conditions and prospects of the poorest classes."⁸ Earlier he had outlined the particular problems which he thought needed attention: "The

⁸Algernon and Ellen Gissing (eds.), Letters of George Gissing to Members of His Family (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1927), p. 50.

establishment of a complete system of education, supplemented by a thorough network of free libraries, is the first thing to be aimed at. To that end we have a destructive task to perform; we must destroy the state church, and do our utmost to weaken its hold upon the popular mind. By hacking away here, and ploughing there, surely the field will at length be got into something like a fit state for the sower."⁹

Using the novel in the tradition of Dickens, Reade, and Gaskell, he brought to it, he thinks, a more coherent philosophical basis for social criticism than these novelists--the positivism of Comte, the Religion of Humanity.¹⁰ Even here, however, he had been anticipated by George Eliot, who had integrated positivist doctrines within her novels.

In the handling of his subject matter, he links himself with George Eliot and the other realists as opposed to the more sensational sociological novelists: "My novel is only deficient in dramatic interest in the sense in which all the best novels are deficient. It is not sensational in plot, since its object is to depict real life."¹¹ Here is the recognition, central to both the realistic and naturalistic traditions, that the depiction of "real life" requires a new

⁹Ibid., p. 43.

¹⁰Shafer's suggestion that the Positivist ideas spoken by Helen Norman are those of Gissing is valid.

¹¹A. and E. Gissing, p. 56.

principle for organizing action. In rejecting the "sensational" at the expense of "dramatic interest," he is supposedly renouncing unmotivated and improbable events as well as manipulation of plot to achieve a happy ending. This search for a new basis of organization of plot, or, as some would have it, the rejection of plot, is central to the tradition I am studying, as I hope to demonstrate; but as I also hope to show, a new sensationalism replaces the old so that Gissing's renunciation, important as it is, must not be taken too literally.

The weakness of Gissing's first novel is not only a result of his inability to apply his theories but also to some inconsistency in his theories. With the lack of logic of the rejected author, he wrote to his brother refuting the charge of a publisher's reader that the novel was only a vehicle for doctrinal opinions: "It is not I who propagate a doctrine, but the characters whose lives I tell. Because I choose to take my subjects from a sphere hitherto unused by novelists, shall I therefore be accused of making fiction the vehicle of doctrinal opinions."¹² He is groping toward the concept of the objective author whose attitude is apparent only in the structure of the work, not in authorial comment, but both the inconsistency of his statements in his letters

¹²Ibid., pp. 56-57.

and his practice in his first novel show how far he was from being able to put this ideal into practice. His claim to a new subject matter, however, has a factual basis. Drawn to radical ideas by his reading, his experience, and his only intellectual friends, Harrison and Eduard Bertz,¹³ Gissing, using ideas, many techniques, and a purpose already a part of the tradition of the English novel, set out to ameliorate the conditions of the lower middle classes and the proletariat by picturing the misery of their lives in the London of the 1870's. Unlike the earlier English novelists who had treated the lower classes as subject matter, he attempted to reject comic and what he called "sensational" effects in order to portray the milieu realistically.

Workers in the Dawn would have been a better novel if Gissing had possessed the skill and clear-headedness to carry out his intention of writing a novel of social propaganda. It exists rather as a record of the emotional and intellectual confusion of Gissing himself, exhibiting not only "an allegiance divided between social reform and art,"¹⁴ a pattern which Korg finds running throughout Gissing's work, but also

¹³The early influence of this idealistic socialist on Gissing is hard to assess since, for all practical purposes, their correspondence before 1888 has not been found.

¹⁴Jacob Korg, "Division of Purpose in George Gissing," PMLA, LXX (June, 1955), 323.

an uncertainty about the relationship between ideals and practicality in all phases of life--moral, economic, and social. Basically the subject is that of "the sensitive young man"--the youth seeking a place in society but failing to find it because of some defect in character.¹⁵ The unwieldy structure is built around a series of contrasts between the milieux through which Arthur Golding progresses: these include the horrible poverty of Whitecross Street; the narrow world of respectable workmen; the economically precarious existence with the radical printer Samuel Tollady; and the economically and socially static worlds of the Normans and the Greshams, representatives of the artistic and clerical professions. Gissing used three techniques to present his theme of social reform: shocking descriptions of the environment of the lower classes, over-simplified characterization, and, for the positive reforms he advocated, propagandistic set pieces, either spoken or written, by reflectors of the author's opinions--Helen Norman, Samuel Tollady, and, at times, Arthur Golding.

Neither the protest presented through stock characterization, limited to those characters on the upper social levels, nor the social preachments are integrated with the central problem of the novel. Gissing's primary attack on

¹⁵Roy Male (ed.), Types of Short Fiction (Belmont, Calif.: Wadsworth Publishing Co., n. d.), p. 11.

the church is exhibited in the characterization of Orlando Whiffle, a grotesque who is treated with too much sarcasm to be comic, and his son, a despicable seducer, who enters the church following his unsavory career as rake. His attack upon economic repression, through characterization, is confusing. John Waghorn, owner of the property in which Mr. Tollady has his shop, a villainous forecloser of mortgages, and an unfaithful husband to Maud Gresham, is the standard "diabolical scoundrel."¹⁶ Gilbert Gresham, who as guardian of Helen Norman falls in love with her, is a skeptic whose lack of values leads to hypocrisy. The effect of these characters, intended or unintended, is to lead the reader to believe that money and morality, in some strange way, are incompatible. The preachments of the sympathetic characters fail to become integrated as elements of plot or characterization; they exist as interesting examples of what a young writer, full of undigested reading, believed in 1879. Neither the oversimplified characters nor the expressed social beliefs are necessary to the central subject of the novel-- Arthur Golding's struggle for social recognition, his resolution of the conflict between art and direct social action, his search for love, first with a girl of the streets and later with the ideal of perfection, Helen Norman.

¹⁶A. and E. Gissing, p. 46.

But my primary concern with this first novel is to notice the nature and function of the new subject matter. It consists of descriptions of a slum and a lower middle class district of London and characterization of certain types inhabiting these environments. Characteristic of the way in which the physical background is established is the opening of the book where Gissing describes the vice and squalor of the inhabitants of Whitecross Street and the interior of a typical apartment building. He easily makes his point that the environment is destructive. The description serves both as social protest and as prophecy of what Arthur Golding will become if his environment is not changed. Gissing's descriptions are not centered upon things, a trait often associated with the naturalistic tradition, but upon people. It is seldom the ugliness of the physical background but the degradation of the people which shocks the reader. His pictures of the way of life of the inhabitants of repressive environments create some of his most effective isolated scenes. The most striking examples of this material are those chapters describing the activities of the people during a holiday. He pictures, with a tone of disgust, the general drunkenness of a Christmas Eve in Whitecross Street. Later using one of Arthur's landlords as a typical family, he shows the harmful moral and economic effects of the English Christmas. Although these chapters remain reflections of the author's idiosyncratic beliefs rather than insights into social problems or

human actions, they demonstrate the new kind of sensationalism Gissing created to replace that which he rejected. These scenes are clearly designed to elicit shock and disgust.

The characterization of the people of the lower classes is more nearly an innovation than his use of setting. Although not totally consistent, Gissing refuses to equate poverty with goodness as so many of his predecessors have done. Mrs. Blatherwick and her son Bill, with whom Arthur lives for a time, are crude, sadistic, and unscrupulous. Among workmen of a little higher class, Arthur finds kindness as well as a practical selfishness. There are numerous lower class characters, both morally good and bad, but the best and most complex example of Gissing's ability to use his new material is the creation of Carrie Mitchell. Full of humane ideals and unconscious sexual longings, which are only vaguely suggested by Gissing, Arthur Golding marries this lonely, pregnant (by Augustus Whiffle) lower class girl. Her exhibition of gratitude and selfishness, love and hate, acquiescence and aggressive attack and the dramatic presentation of her slow destruction by alcoholism, leading her to prostitution, are effective and novel. Carrie's story, used here as only one of the many involvements of Arthur, is an embryonic naturalistic novel. Although he generally avoids sentimentalizing his characters of the lower worlds (Samuel Tollady, a kind of

Squire Allworthy with no ironic overtones, is an exception), thus exhibiting the kinds of effects which can be gained with these characters, Gissing allows this tendency toward innovation to be lost in the confusion of events in Arthur's story. Arthur himself may be an example of the new subject matter, but it has nothing to do with that which is typical of a class. He is peculiarly classless, feeling at ease nowhere and sharing only momentarily the attitudes of any of the groups presented in the novel. There is new subject matter in the book--an unsentimental treatment of lower class characters, setting, and action--but its tendency to be extraneous to plot and theme creates the impression that the earlier English writers were wise in not using it.

To the readers of the eighties who had not read George Eliot and to unwary modern readers, the discussion of determinism might appear as a new and effective element. Samuel Tollady is made to expound the Spencerian idea that individuals can, through the exercise of will, do nothing to aid or retard the inevitable course of civilization toward perfection.¹⁷ And Arthur's flight to America and final suicide--flinging himself into Niagara Falls with a cry of Helen on his lips--is explained by Gissing:

The secret of his life lay in the fact that his was an ill-balanced nature, lacking that element

¹⁷G. Gissing, I, 161.

of a firm and independent will which might at any moment exert its preponderance in situations of doubt. Hence it resulted that he was one of those men whose lives seem to have little result for the world save as useful illustrations of the force of circumstances--one of those whom had Fortune directed his path among congenial scenes, might have developed a rich individuality. As it was, though noble impulse unmistakably constituted the soil of his mind, adverse circumstances forbade his giving to the implanted seeds that care which might have nourished them into flower and fruit.¹⁸

The clarification of "circumstances" comes with the words "more congenial scenes"; environment has prevented Arthur's attaining his potential maturity, just as it has determined the fates of many of the minor characters of the novel. But Gissing's lack of clarity in this passage reflects his own confusion: the initial stress in the passage is on the determinism of character, and certainly character as determination of fate is not new. We are left free to believe that free will is a reality but that Arthur as an individual was weak. But even this level of determinism is apparent in the novel only as assertion, not exhibited in the action.

The "circumstances" are neither from character nor from environment but spring from the imposed plot, sub-plot, and sub-sub-plot. An example is the crucial event of Arthur's separation from Helen, causing his pursuit of Carrie and all his ensuing troubles: the separation is not caused by Arthur's character or by environment but by Mr. Gresham's jealous love

¹⁸Ibid., II, 378.

of Helen. The end of the novel is as carefully plotted away from a happy ending as the earlier novel was toward the happy ending. Both Arthur and Helen, having escaped their oppressors, have been reunited and have expressed their love for each other. But Helen discovers that Arthur is married, and idealistically, she sends him back to the impossible life with his wife. Having rejected happiness for both of them, Helen dies and Arthur melodramatically kills himself. The difficulty is that the unhappy ending has not grown from the set of forces developed in the novel. Art, social purpose, development of an independent character capable of withstanding the pressures of outworn dogma--all of these values are sacrificed thematically to allow the unraised, as yet, conflict between love and honor to be resolved in favor of a concept of honor that appears silly at best. Here we are to assume strength of character shows itself, for Helen is the ideal. Any remnants of the intended theme of the interrelation between character and environment is destroyed by this action based upon moral standards more appropriate to the early Victorians than to a novel searching for solutions for social problems. Through his insistence upon carrying out his, at best, unlikely plot, Gissing makes his novel reflect an ethical standard which, even in 1880, must have seemed outmoded rather than any new or "natural" morality.

The only justification for this rather extensive treatment of this first novel is to illustrate what Gissing

borrowed from an older tradition and to investigate his early struggle toward a new tradition. Seccombe's description of the earlier Victorian novel--"moral thesis, plot, underplot, set characters, descriptive machinery, landscape coloring, copious phraseology, Herculean proportions"19--is an adequate delineation of Gissing's first novel. Authorial intrusion is the most common technique for transitions: the novel opens with "Walk with me, reader, into Whitecross Street . . .";20 not atypical is a later transition: "The reader--whom it is the author's happy privilege to suppose profoundly interested in the book before him--may possibly have felt some little inquisitiveness relative to Mr. Gilbert Gresham's movement"21 Donnelly describes the effect gained by this technique: we see the author as "an officious leader of a Cook's Tour of the slums."22 The novel fails through Gissing's inability to control the structure which he had inherited from the Mid-Victorian novelists. The plot obliterates the social theme--any hope that the workers are living in the dawn of a new and better society is given by Tollady's assertions, not the action--and makes the new

¹⁹Thomas Seccombe, "Introduction," in George Gissing, The House of Cobwebs (London: Constable & Co., 1931), p. viii.

²⁰G. Gissing, I, 1.

²¹Ibid., I, 224.

²²Donnelly, p. 68.

subject matter--a complex view of the characters and lives of the lower classes--seem incidental. Workers in the Dawn is a totally English book. Gissing's economic and social radicalism led him to include new subject matter in a novel with a traditional pattern and purpose.

Between the publication of Workers in the Dawn and the publication of his next novel in 1884--the longest period between books in his career--Gissing was seeking a solution for the problem he had raised for Arthur Golding: is the proper function of art propagandistic or wholly aesthetic? Late in 1880 he seems to have no doubts: "I mean to bring home to people the ghastly conditions (material, mental, and moral) of our poor classes, to show the hideous injustice of our whole system of society, to give light upon the plan of altering it, and, above all, to preach an enthusiasm for just and high ideals in this age of unmitigated egotism and 'shop.' I shall never write a book which does not keep all these ends in view."²³ Moreover, in 1881 he began dating his letters according to the Positivist calendar and became active in a socialist society. In October, 1882, however, he writes of "The pessimistic article . . . which has developed into nothing more nor less than an attack on Positivism."²⁴ He continues by asserting, with some uncertain-

²³A. and E. Gissing, p. 83.

²⁴Ibid., p. 120.

ty, that his new ideas will lead his writing toward "philosophico-social speculation. I feel more inclination at present to write in this abstract way than to go on embodying theories in fiction. But I suppose one cannot hope to strike the final course at all events before thirty."²⁵ By February, 1883, Gissing is struggling toward a new artistic ideal: "This book [an unfinished work] is addressed to those for whom Art is dear for its own sake. Also to those who, possessing their own Ideal of social and personal morality, find themselves able to allow the relativity of all Ideals whatsoever."²⁶ And in May: "Only this, I am growing to feel, that the only thing known to us of absolute value is artistic perfection. The ravings of fanaticism--justifiable or not--pass away; but the works of the artist, work in what material he will, remain, sources of health to the world."²⁷ What is happening to the young Gissing is fairly obvious: finding Positivist and economic and political radical values inadequate, he is searching for new values and discovering only the "relativity of all Ideals whatsoever." Facing the dominant issues of the last half of the Nineteenth Century in England, he sought the absolute in aestheticism.

²⁵Ibid.

²⁶Ibid., p. 122.

²⁷Ibid., p. 126.

Shelley, as Korg suggests,²⁸ may be the influence leading him away from didacticism in art, but several French theorists may have played a part in this change. In July he outlines his new aesthetic position:

I am by degrees getting my right place in the world. Philosophy has done all it can for me, and now scarcely interests me any more. My attitude is henceforth that of the artist pure and simple. The world is for me a collection of phenomena, which are to be studied and reproduced artistically. In the midst of the most serious complications of life, I find myself suddenly possessed with a great calm, withdrawn as it were from the immediate interests of the moment, and able to regard everything as a picture. I watch and observe myself just as much as others. The impulse to regard every juncture as a "situation" becomes stronger and stronger. In the midst of desperate misfortune I can pause to make a note for future use, and the afflictions of others are for me materials for observation. This, I rather think, is at last the final stage of my development, coming after so many and various phases. Brutal and egotistic it would be called by most people. What has that to do with me, if it is a fact?²⁹

This, as Shafer observes, is the statement of a man who has adopted the program of art for art's sake.³⁰ But the passage does not reflect Shelley or even Gautier so much as Flaubert, the Goncourts, and Zola. The stress on "phenomena," "fact," and "observation" echoes Zola in Le Roman Experimentale, published in 1880. Therefore, by the end of 1883, Gissing had

²⁸Korg, PMLA, LXX, 325.

²⁹A. and E. Gissing, pp. 128-129.

³⁰Shafer, in G. Gissing, I, xxvi.

his original interest in a new subject matter for the novel bolstered by a new aesthetic.

In his next five novels, Gissing searches for structural principles and techniques to make his new aesthetic effective. The Unclassed shows an improvement in technique over Workers in the Dawn, but the same major flaws persist: as H. G. Wells stated it, it is "plottesque" and filled with "exponent" characters who function only as Gissing spokesmen.³¹ Waymark, speaking for Gissing, outlines his ideals for the novel:

Let me get a little more experience and I will write a novel such as no one has yet ventured to write, at all events in England The fact is the novel of every-day life is getting worn out. We must dig deeper, get to untouched social strata. Dickens felt this, but he had not the courage to face his subjects; his monthly numbers had to lie on the family tea table; not virginibus puerisque will be my book, I assure you, but for men and women who like to look beneath the surface, and who understand that only as artistic material has human life any significance.³²

Only in the description of Litany Lane, a slum area, in the irony that his idealistic heroine is an occasional prostitute, and in the delineation of the destruction of another shrewish wife does Gissing explore the "untouched social strata" in this novel. It is significant in terms of proving Gissing's

³¹Gettmann, pp. 247 and 251.

³²George Gissing, The Unclassed (London: Ernest

knowledge of current French literary battles that Waymark's novel is castigated by critics as one of the "unsavoury productions of the so-called naturalistic school."³³

Gissing worked simultaneously on two novels of upper class life, Isabel Clarendon (1886) and A Life's Morning (1888), but was warned by a reader for Chapman and Hall, George Meredith, to return to "low-life scenes."³⁴ Writing of Isabel Clarendon, Gissing shows his concern for a realistic structure. "I have done my best to make my story as realistic as possible. The ending is as unromantic as could be, and several threads are left to hang loose; for even so it is in real life; you cannot gather up and round off each person's story."³⁵ Demos: A Story of English Socialism (1886) is as didactic in purpose as Workers in the Dawn; however, it is an attack on all the values which the earlier novel was intended to preach. With a plot based upon lost wills and multiple loves, the novel shows little improvement over The Unclassed. It is structured around a series of contrasts between the aristocratic beauties of life and nature in a country town and the proletarian ugliness of London. The climactic mob scene is effective and has elicited the

³³Ibid., p. 278.

³⁴Quoted in Donnelly, p. 84.

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³¹Gettmann, pp. 247 and 251.

³²George Gissing, The Unclassed (London: Ernest Benn, Ltd., 1930), p. 112.

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³³Ibid., p. 278.

³⁴Quoted in Donnelly, p. 84.

³⁵A. and E. Gissing, p. 164.

inevitable comparisons with Zola's presentations of crowds. In Thyrza (1887) both structure and technique improve. For the first time in Gissing's novels, the everyday life of the London poor is presented for itself rather than as a bad example to be contrasted with the life in a better environment. The plot is still centered on a love triangle, but Gissing is more interested in the people than in a series of problems, and thus coherence is maintained. By abandoning his search for the typical, the socially significant, in order to focus on unique and generally admirable central characters, Gissing achieved one of his few popular successes and also a novel which has been generously treated by subsequent critics. The title itself, the name of the heroine, is indicative of Gissing's shift of emphasis from class problems to the individual character. Between 1880 and 1887, Gissing learned many artistic lessons. He gained greater distance between himself and the reader, thus increasing irony and subtlety of effects. He discovered complexity of characterization and means to present it to the reader. Although still working within the rather awkward three-volume tradition, he made some progress toward finding adequate structural patterns for his novels.

Most critics have found The Nether World (1889) the most nearly naturalistic of any of Gissing's novels. In this novel Gissing studies the world of the lower classes in

minute detail. Abandoning the focus on a few characters with which he gained success in Thyrza, he achieves a "surprising order amidst a disorder redolent of Hobbes."³⁶ It is his most extensive use of the new subject matter, and the nature of this subject matter and the ways in which it is presented are central to this study.

The book opens on Clerkenwell Green, the geographical center of the setting which holds the diverse elements of the book together. A description of the graveyard of St. James' Church and of the Middlesex House of Detention suggests the limited possibilities of the inhabitants of this slum area. The nature of the milieu, Gissing's attitude toward his subject matter, and the attitude he forces upon the reader are all apparent in an early passage in the novel:

At noon today there was sunlight on the Surrey Hills; the fields and lanes were pregnant with the first breath of spring, and from the shelter of budding copses many a primrose looked tremblingly up to the vision of blue sky. But of these things Clerkenwell takes no account; here it has been a day like any other, consisting of so many hours, each representing a fraction of the weekly wage. Go where you may in Clerkenwell, on every hand are multiform evidences of toil, intolerable as a nightmare. It is not as in those parts of London where the main thoroughfares consist of shops and warehouses and workrooms, whilst the streets that are hidden away on either hand are devoted in the main to dwellings. Here every alley is thronged with small industries; all but every door and window exhibits the advertisement of a craft that is

³⁶Donnelly, p. 118.

carried on within. Here you may see how men have multiplied toil for toil's sake, have wrought to devise work superfluous, have worn their lives away in imagining new forms of weariness. The energy, the ingenuity daily put forth in these grimy burrows tasks the brain's power of wondering. But that those who sit here through the livelong day, through every season, through all the years of the life that is granted them, who strain their eyesight, who overtax their muscles, who nurse disease in their frames, who put resolutely from them the thought of what existence might be--that these do it all without prospect or hope of reward save the permission to eat and sleep and bring into the world other creatures to strive with them for bread, surely that thought is yet more marvellous.³⁷

This passage, with its contrasts, its statement of Gissing's disgust, its appeal to the reader to share this feeling, announces the primary subject of the novel: the hopeless struggle against economic forces and the concomitant cultural limitations exhibited in the lives of a group of characters within this environment. The title names the subject.

As a device to give his group of central characters some semblance of unity, Gissing associates them with an apartment house owned by the avaricious Mrs. Peckover. There are Clem Peckover, the sadistic animal who is the daughter of the landlady; the Hewetts, a "superfluous family" consisting of an ineffectual father, an ill mother, a daughter Clara, who desires to escape, and a son Bob, a weak young man unable to resist the degrading influences of the environment; Jane

³⁷George Gissing, The Nether World (London: Smith, Elder, & Co., 1907), pp. 10-11.

Snowden, a persecuted girl acting as servant to the Peckovers; and Sidney Kirkwood, an idealistic lover of Clara. These and the many people with whom this nucleus of characters is ultimately involved are intended to represent the variety of wasted lives of the nether world. It is a panoramic novel, organized around a series of love affairs--or, to speak more precisely, mating attempts--and reactions to economic pressures, with each of the series related to each other by means of contrast. As the coal mines exist as the unifying symbol of Zola's Germinal, so the moral and economic atmosphere of Clerkenwell should exist as the center of The Nether World.

The subject and one of the organizing devices of the novel can be seen by analyzing the contrasting careers of Bob and Clara Hewett. Clara, with "her unfortunate endowment of brains and defect of tenderness,"³⁸ is rebelliously determined to escape Clerkenwell, her parents, and her admirer Sidney Kirkwood through an acting career which will lead, she thinks, to her acceptance by the people of the upper classes, a world made romantically desirable by her unwise reading. Aided, at some cost to her morality, by a shady lawyer's clerk named Scawthorne, she achieves a place in a traveling acting company, but just as she is to get her chance to act in a starring role,

³⁸Ibid., p. 79.

a jealous actress disfigures her permanently by throwing acid in her face. She returns to Clerkenwell and marries Kirkwood; her constant dissatisfaction plus the responsibility of her family make Kirkwood's life a degrading series of cares. Here, except for the melodramatic acid incident, is the typical story of the attempt to escape by the young girl from the slums. Bob, a talented workman in metal, is too weak to desire to escape and succumbs to the sensual and moral dangers of his environment. Marrying Pennyloaf (Penelope) Candy, the daughter of an alcoholic mother, he neglects his wife to spend his evenings with the lowest elements of the community, drifts into a relationship with Clem Peckover, and finally begins making counterfeit coins. The gradual degradation of Bob and the increasing miseries of the life of Pennyloaf are climaxed by Bob's death in Shooter's Gardens as a result of a wound received while fleeing from police. Just as Clara's attempted escape was futile, the story of the talented young man in the slums ends with equal meaninglessness. These characters are not oversimplified to gain typicality but remain complex: although described as "pathological,"³⁹ Clara has decent impulses; although criminally cruel to Pennyloaf, Bob is motivated by a blind selfishness rather than hate; Pennyloaf's continued love for

³⁹Ibid., p. 78.

Bob, despite her suffering, offers an effective contrast to the selfish amorality of Clem.

In addition to this device of contrasting characters, Gissing continued to use descriptions of typical social behavior, like those he used in Workers in the Dawn, to make vivid the environment. Several of these are effective in adding to the reader's knowledge not only of the nature of the environment but also of the inhabitants' reaction to this environment: a funeral at the Peckovers, dominated by the conflicting desires of exhibiting respectability and saving money, ends with a drinking bout; the variety of fanatics making speeches on Clerkenwell Green shows the futility of the workmen's plans to help themselves; the disappearance of the burial fund of a workingmen's club and the resulting furor among the members dramatize the lack of unity among the members; and many smaller scenes add depth to the picture of the world of Clerkenwell. The most fully developed and effective of these set pieces is the chapter "Io Saturnalia" describing the aesthetic and moral horror of a bank holiday spent at the Crystal Palace. Since the center of interest in this novel remains the environment and its many inhabitants rather than any one of the plots, these pictures of life become integrated parts of the novel rather than interesting digressions.

Through descriptive detail, through characterization, and through the paralleling of contrasting stories, Gissing

has for the first time come close to making the new subject matter his real subject rather than a novel background for a traditional plot. But Gissing was either an insufficiently gifted artist or too much a product of the English tradition to create an English equivalent to Germinal. When Donnelly states that "in the nether world there are only force and matter and anarchy as each character pursues his own self-interest in blind collision with others,"⁴⁰ she ignores the fact that threading through the new subject and pattern of The Nether World is Gissing's Victorian plot, concerned with unexpected riches, with the inevitable will, and with the triangular romance. Sometimes the movement of this plot becomes intertwined with the vital picture of Clerkenwell, but too often the structural flaw of the novel is visible in the transitions between the Clerkenwell world, motivated by "force and matter," and the plot world, motivated by ideals. The traditional plot centers around Michael Snowden, who has returned from Australia with riches and a plan to put them to philanthropic use. He takes Jane from the Peckovers and begins training her to help the poor. Sidney Kirkwood, sympathetic with the old man's plan, loves and is loved by Jane, but with a super-subtle morality more apposite to the characters of Henry James than to a working man

⁴⁰Donnelly, p. 118.

of the nether world, he fears Jane's future riches and marries the returned Clara out of a sense of responsibility, thus ruining both his and Jane's chances for happiness. Jane's father, who had abandoned Jane to the Peckovers, hears of his father's riches and returns to act as the contrite and dutiful parent; his ruse is successful so that he inherits most of the elder Snowden's money. Jane, though weak in body and mind, is the idealized girl typical of Gissing; Kirkwood, perfectly good though confused, is also an idealization. It is not the forces in the slum world which destroy their happiness but a kind of false morality within Kirkwood; however, the last words in the book seem to condone his decision: Gissing asserts that, despite the personal misery of each, their aid to Clara and Pennyloaf is the right kind of philanthropy in contrast to the grandiose sort planned by the fanatic Michael Snowden.

In each life little for congratulation. He /Kirkwood/ with the ambitions of his youth frustrated; neither an artist nor a leader of men in the battle for justice. She /Jane/ no saviour of society by the force of a superb example; no daughter of the people holding wealth in trust for the people's needs. Yet to both was their work given. Unmarked, unencouraged save by their love of uprightness and mercy, they stood by the side of those more hapless, brought some comfort to hearts less courageous than their own. Where they abode it was not all dark. Sorrow certainly awaited them, perchance defeat in even the humble aims that they had set themselves; but at least their lives would remain a protest against those brute forces of society which fill with wreck the abysses of the nether world.⁴¹

⁴¹Gissing, The Nether World, pp. 391-392.

They "remain a protest against those brute forces" because in some strange, unexplained way their characters have never been really affected by those forces. This flaw of mixing the ideal and the real points to the structural problem Gissing never solved. Committed both temperamentally and aesthetically against the tradition of the happy ending, he introduced these two idealizations into a world without ideals and led them to final lack of fulfillment without adequately motivating their failure. Both the series of negations and the stilted prose of the passage stress the sentimentality not only of the presentation of this passage but also of the traditional plot which runs through the novel. Gissing is attempting to stir our emotions concerning two characters who never exist beyond the level of plot devices, characters who are essentially outside the vivid setting of the novel. Technically, the fault results from a confusion of aesthetic distance: presenting his real subject in a cold tone of aesthetic disgust and moral indignation, Gissing presents these incongruous abstractions with a sympathy which only the sentimental common "reader of fiction," whom he supposedly disdained to please,⁴² could share. Finally, Gissing could not achieve his goal of the objectivity necessary for the experimental novel, the study, because of a confusion of his own values. He was emotionally committed

⁴²A. and E. Gissing, p. 56.

against the social conditions of his time, and yet he was intellectually disillusioned with all of the suggested plans of amelioration. His technical failure to fuse effectively the real and the ideal reflects his intellectual failure to integrate his traditional idealism with any practical means of achieving the ends he dreamed of.

The plot of the novel results in a number of other less serious flaws in the unnecessary development of certain minor characters and the abuse of the reader's sense of probability. Scawthorne, the lawyer's clerk, is an example of both these flaws. We are told his background, the nature of his lodgings, his progress in his career, his social habits, none of which has any real interest or relevance. And it so happens that sometime previous to the action of the novel he has been involved with shady dealings with the younger Snowden, that he is now a member of the legal firm handling the elder Snowden's business, that he is the agent for beginning Clara's stage career, and with slightly more causal relation, that in the closing scene of the book he is proposing marriage to Jane. In Scawthorne we see a strange mixture of fictional waste and economy, both weak.

Despite its flaws, a survey of the solid accomplishments of this novel reveals several. The people of The Nether World, excluding what I shall call the plot characters, show Gissing's greatest mastery of characterization up to this

point in his career. One of the reasons for this mastery is his ability to create believable complexity in characters or what Walter Myers has called "incongruity": "the more advanced realistic characterization shows a disregard of artistic, traditional, or conventional consistency or unity and permits often an effect that may be called incongruity."⁴³

The frankness of Clem's brutality went far towards redeeming her character. The exquisite satisfaction with which she viewed Jane's present misery, the broad joviality with which she gloated over the prospect of cruelties shortly to be inflicted, put her at once on a par with the noble savage running wild in the woods. Civilisation could bring no charge against this young woman; it and she had no common criterion. Who knows but this lust of hers for sanguinary domination was the natural enough issue of the brutalising serfdom of her predecessors in the family line of the Peckovers? A thrall suddenly endowed with authority will assuredly make bitter work for the luckless creature in the next degree of thralldom.⁴⁴

It is surprising that in the mostly savage activities of Clem she does exhibit her amoral motivation which makes the reader hesitate to condemn; Clem is not simply a selfish girl but a complex person who can even at times show decency. The characterization is so effective that Donnelly names her the "dominant figure in the novel."⁴⁵ The same incongruity is visible in Clara and Bob Hewett, the elder Hewett, Pennyloaf,

⁴³Walter Myers, The Later Realism: A Study of Characterization in the British Novel (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1927), p. 4.

⁴⁴Gissing, The Nether World, p. 6.

⁴⁵Donnelly, p. 119.

and even Joseph Snowden, a plot character.

A second cause for Gissing's success with characterization is a firmer foundation for motivation than he had exhibited before. In his analyses, the innate character rather than either heredity or environment is still the chief means of explanation, but he does investigate the formation of character and show a greater awareness of the way in which personality and environment interact. In analyzing almost all of his characters, he toys with heredity as determinative, but these statements seldom have more force than the rhetorical question quoted in the above paragraph suggesting the effect of heredity on Clem's character. Moreover, environment is seldom made totally determinative in these analyses. Gissing can only exclaim, "The bitter injustice of it!"⁴⁶ when telling how the varied fortunes of John Hewett developed a sense of rebellion in Clara. But when analyzing the cause of a specific action, Gissing's typical method is this explanation of Clara's quitting her job: "Why on this occasion rather than fifty times previously? It was not her own doing; something impelled her, and the same force--call it chance or destiny--would direct the issue once more."⁴⁷ However vaguely the deterministic pattern is analyzed, the reader feels the force of the environment on the actions of the characters,

⁴⁶Gissing, The Nether World, p. 81.

⁴⁷Ibid., p. 95.

excepting, always, the plot characters. By his vivid portrayal of Clerkenwell, Gissing, despite his lack of conviction about environmental determinism, creates an environment which has the effect, on the reader, of a powerful motivating force for the characters within the novel.

The "solidity of specification" of the environment, to use James's phrase, Gissing achieved most effectively in this novel for a number of reasons, some of them already suggested. One of the major changes from his previous practice is that he limits the action to a single social milieu, thus keeping the nature of the setting ever present in the reader's mind. The amount of description devoted to the setting is much less than the amount of analysis devoted to characterization, and there is little piling up of descriptive detail. In fact, the following statement, which closes a brief and colorless description of Shooter's Gardens, the worst slum of Clerkenwell, is typical: "Needless to burden description with further detail; the slum was like any other slum; filth, rottenness, evil odours, possessed these dens of superfluous mankind and made them gruesome to the peering imagination."⁴⁸ However, as the reader is brought back again and again to Shooter's Gardens, this slum and its inhabitants come to represent one pole of the nether world. At the other pole is the Byass household, in which poverty is not a problem;

⁴⁸Ibid., p. 74.

yet even here the environment has its effect. The Byasses are first presented as having an ideal marriage; then the marriage slowly deteriorates owing to the lack of adequate opportunities for personal development on the part of both husband and wife. This breadth of presentation is another technique which makes the setting real; despite the variety of economic levels, the effect of the environment is the same on all of the characters--a constricting influence preventing individual development. Thus the setting, with its presentation given primarily in terms of its universal effects upon the persons of the novel, becomes the unifying force in the book.

To illustrate that Gissing's novel, imperfect though it is, has elements which are new to the tradition of the English novel dealing with the lower classes, we have only to compare it with the more traditional and the more popular novels of Walter Besant, a serious artist (cf. his "Art of the Novel") who has chosen the proletariat for his subject matter. The title All Sorts and Conditions of Men (1882) seems to imply at least the breadth of scope of The Nether World, and the setting of Whitechapel is a slum equivalent to Clerkenwell. Besant's device for introducing his characters is much like that of Gissing: his central figures are residents of Mrs. Bormalack's boarding house. Other resemblances are the plots centered on the love of an idealistic

young man and an equally idealistic young woman plus the unexpected riches. But here the resemblances end: the structure of the Besant novel is superior to that of The Nether World; all of the elements of All Sorts and Conditions of Men focus on the plot, the common aspirations of the young lovers, and thus there is no sense of division of purpose. Few of the characters are connected with Whitechapel except by sentimental attachment and chance. Harry Goslett, the hero, has been reared as a gentleman although his familial background is Whitechapel. Angela Messenger, the heroine, one of the richest heiresses in England due to inheritance of breweries, had Whitechapel ancestors who founded the first brewery in that area. Both take rooms at Mrs. Bormalack's, Harry posing as a workman to get to know his relatives, Angela posing as a dressmaker to put her wealth to useful purposes. Their fellow boarders are Dickensian caricatures: Lord and Lady Davenant, rustic Americans, have come to place a claim for a title; Mr. Fagg, an untutored scholar from Australia, has come to publish his book on the universal alphabet; the professor, a magician, has come because of lack of money; Josephus Coppin, a brewery Clerk, is doomed to his lowly position because of a long-past scandal; and Mr. Maliphant, a senile carver of figureheads for ships, holds the key to the past. The caricatures are manipulated for comedy and pathos and then all of their problems are solved by Harry and Angela.

The villain is Mr. Bunker, Harry's uncle, a scheming miser. Harry and Angela have grandiose plans for reforming White-chapel. Angela establishes a model dressmaking shop with short hours and provisions for recreation. Their dream is "The Palace of Delight," a huge structure providing facilities for practical study (no spelling) and enlightening recreation (dancing, singing, acting). "The Palace of Delight" is Besant's answer to the social problem.

Besant's conception of his setting is that it is a pleasant but neglected place:

Two million people, or thereabouts, live in the East End of London. That seems a good-sized population for an utterly unknown town. They have no institutions of their own to speak of, no public buildings of any importance, no municipality, no gentry, no carriages, no soldiers, no picture-galleries, no theatres, no opera--they have nothing. It is the fashion to believe that they are all paupers--which is a foolish and mischievous belief, as we shall presently see. Probably there is no such spectacle in the whole world as that of this immense, neglected, forgotten great city of East London.⁴⁹

He has chosen his setting, as is appropriate for a historian of London, for its strangeness to the rest of the world. His interest is in the picturesque, not in that central element which Auerbach associates with modern realism, the "problematic."⁵⁰ Some people are poor and some misguided, but on the

⁴⁹Walter Besant and James Rice, All Sorts and Conditions of Men (New York: A. L. Burt, n. d.), p. 22.

⁵⁰Auerbach, passim.

whole the population has no unusual social problems except its lack of cultural opportunities. Whitechapel, unlike Clerkenwell, exists as a rather distant background for the display of a traditional happy love story. Characterization is simple: moral blacks and whites for the serious characters and ruling passions or humours for the caricatures. The genre of All Sorts and Conditions of Men is traditional sentimental social comedy; The Nether World, on the other hand, is an attempt to study the proletarian world, the novelistic equivalent of the problem play being popularized by Ibsen, although Gissing omits the advocacy of a revolution in morals, an advocacy which characterizes the work of Ibsen.

The last distinction leads to a contrast of the purposes of the two novels. Traditionally comedy's function has been described as corrective of social and individual faults through the presentation of precept and example. In Besant's novel the ideals of the lovers furnish an example leading to happiness, and specific actions are suggested to alleviate the conditions of the lower classes. Although The Nether World is presented in a tone that leaves no doubt of Gissing's abhorrence of the conditions and even, at times, the people pictured in the novel, an attitude that we are made to share, he presents no effective examples of what he considers ideal, nor does he present a coherent solution for

the conditions which he has made us condemn. At one place Gissing offers his "panacea for the ills of society": change the economic conditions, "preliminary step of which every tyro will recognise the easiness"; and then bring the "constant influence of music." "Destroy, sweep away, prepare the ground: then shall music the holy, music the civiliser, breathe over the renewed earth, and with Orphean magic raise in perfected beauty the towers of the City of Man."⁵¹ Both the language and the position of this passage, in "Io Saturnalia," indicate its ironic nature, and it has the sound of a burlesque at Besant's expense. In a diary entry of November, 1888, Gissing writes of the last three chapters of his novel: "In these I wish to emphasize that the idealistic social reformer is of far less use than the humble discharger of human duty."⁵² Despite this assertion of didactic purpose, the final passage showing Sidney and Jane's "love of uprightness and mercy"⁵³ offers no solution, in terms of its effect on the reader, because of the final frustration of the goals of these two characters. The destruction of such slums as Shooter's Gardens offers no solution; the barren ugliness of the newer tenements tempts "one to say that Shooter's Gardens are a preferable abode."⁵⁴ That relative affluence offers no

⁵¹Gissing, The Nether World, p. 109.

⁵²A. and E. Gissing, p. 220.

⁵³Gissing, The Nether World, p. 392.

⁵⁴Ibid., p. 274.

solution can be seen in the disintegrating marriage of the Byasses and the death of Joseph Snowden. "Neutrality" toward values, to use Wayne Booth's term,⁵⁵ is really not very complete in Gissing. There is no doubt of the badness of the conditions described; there is simply an absence of the good, of any plan for amelioration. In purpose, then, Gissing uses his new material in a manner similar to that of the journalistic exposé, gaining many of his best effects through a kind of sensationalism which shocks the comfortable readers' sensibilities. And though he has not attained his goal of the effect of art for art's sake, Gissing's novel does not conform to Besant's description of the ideal purpose of the novel: "it [the modern novel] gives ideas, it strengthens faith, it preaches a higher morality than is seen in the actual world"56

In The Nether World Gissing wrote about the "untouched social strata" of which Waymark spoke,⁵⁷ bringing it forward as central subject rather than as incidental or picturesque background. To accomplish this, he developed, somewhat imperfectly, a structural pattern built upon a series of comparisons and contrasts within a social and economic community. At his best, he abandoned oversimplified characteri-

⁵⁵Wayne C. Booth, The Rhetoric of Fiction (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1961), p. 67.

⁵⁶Walter Besant and Henry James, The Art of Fiction (Boston: DeWolfe, Fiske & Co., n. d.), p. 10.

⁵⁷Gissing, The Unclassed, p. 112.

zation to create complex personages whose effect is both real and morally disturbing. Almost despite himself, he performed a study of the influence of environment on character, although he most often calls the determining influence fate or circumstance, both undefined causes. For a variety of reasons--aesthetic, ethical, and temperamental--he abandoned moral and social didacticism, thus breaking with one of the major traditions of the earlier Victorian novel. Whether these alterations added to the aesthetic values of the novelistic tradition or had any influence on subsequent novelists is not the question. It is important to note that these particular characteristics were used by Gissing in the 1880's and that they will recur in later works on both sides of the Atlantic.

The remainder of Gissing's works contributes little further to a study of naturalism, although some of his best novels were produced in the following decade. In The Emancipated (1890) he turned his problem-novel method to the treatment of the cultivated classes in a setting of Italy. In his most famous book, New Grub Street (1891), he used the structure developed in The Nether World, even including the love triangle, to portray the lower middle class publishing world with Milvain, Reardon, Biffen, and Yule as types of writers. The theory of the novel as outlined by Biffen offers an interesting, but overstated, exposition of Gissing's

view of the novel:

"What I really aim at is an absolute realism in the sphere of the ignobly decent. The field, as I understand it, is a new one; I don't know any writer who has treated ordinary vulgar life with fidelity and seriousness. Zola writes deliberate tragedies; his vilest figures become heroic from the place they fill in a strongly imagined drama. I want to deal with the essentially unheroic, with the day-to-day life of that vast majority of people who are at the mercy of paltry circumstance. Dickens understood the possibility of such work, but his tendency to melodrama on the one hand, and his humour on the other, prevented him from thinking of it Other men who deal with low class life would perhaps have preferred idealising it--an absurdity. For my own part, I am going to reproduce it verbatim; without one single impertinent suggestion of any point of view save that of honest reporting. The result will be something utterly tedious. Precisely. That is the stamp of the ignobly decent life. If it were anything but tedious it would be untrue. I speak, of course, of its effect upon the ordinary reader."⁵⁸

Other ideals of Biffen include the following: "I want, among other things, to insist upon the fateful power of trivial incidents";⁵⁹ "I want to take no side at all; simply to say, Look, this is the kind of thing that happens"; and he discards Reardon's idea of "the art of fiction" with "It is worked out. We must have a rest from it."⁶⁰ All of these have been Gissing's aims except verbatim reproduction

⁵⁸George Gissing, New Grub Street (London: Oxford University Press, 1958), pp. 149-150.

⁵⁹Ibid., p. 150.

⁶⁰Ibid., p. 151.

and a rejection of the art of fiction. Mr. Bailey, Grocer, Biffen's proposed novel, would have been an interesting precursor of the works of Dorothy Richardson or perhaps even James Joyce, but for Gissing fiction was a serious art involving careful selection. The reviews of Biffen's work elicit a moral from Gissing: "'The first duty of a novelist is to tell a story:' the perpetual repetition of the phrase is a warning to all men who propose drawing from the life."⁶¹ The phrase, indicative of the treatment books without traditional plots received in the late Nineteenth Century, explains why many of Gissing's studies are marred by an irrelevant plot, and the quotation expresses a desire, much like that of E. M. Forster, to write without plot. A little more smoothly written, its subject and plot a little more integral, New Grub Street simply develops the novelistic discoveries made in The Nether World.

Strongly influenced by Meredith, Gissing published two novels on the problem of egoism in 1892. Denzil Quarrier, interesting only as Gissing's first break with the three-volume tradition, is a much weaker novel than Born in Exile. Although Born in Exile exhibits a half-hearted attempt to use the panoramic method by creating a series of figures exiled from cultivated society, Godwin Peak is such a central figure as to deserve the name hero. A rather subtle study of an

⁶¹Ibid., p. 513.

egoist as well as the social structure of late nineteenth-century England, the book is an invaluable historical document reflecting the attitudes and emotions connected with the clash of science and religion. Technically, the book is most interesting for its use of the interior monologue, which, as Donnelly has pointed out, is "not entirely successful."⁶²

Publication of one or more volumes per year by Gissing continued until two years after his death. One of the indications that his major struggle for recognition was over and that he was accepted as a man of letters was his abandoning of his single-minded devotion to the novel; in the Nineties he published a critical study and a series of prefaces on Dickens, a travel book, and several volumes of short stories. Only two of his later volumes have any relevance to this study. In The Odd Women (1893) he returned to his older problem-centered structure; here Gissing's concern is with the unmarried women of England, limited, of course, to those who are "ignobly decent." Taking three sisters as typical of the class, Gissing traces the deterioration of two of them under the double burden of loneliness and poverty, and the third he presents in his favorite situation, the unhappy marriage. The novel, is, as Donnelly notes, "a shambles in construction," but not primarily for the reasons

⁶²Donnelly, p. 165.

she assigns, i.e., "that Victorian monster, plot and double plot,"⁶³ although the love story is complex. The structure fails, it seems to me, because Gissing develops no relationship between the various threads of his novel. As I have pointed out, his favorite device for linking scenes and characters has been comparison and contrast; his failure to use this or any other linking device and his emphasis on Rhoda Nunn, the modern independent woman, cause his panoramic structure to fail. The Whirlpool (1897), generally acclaimed as Gissing's best long novel, turns the methods he has developed onto the social whirlpool of London life. Here is Gissing's realization that his life-long dream of happiness in a leisurely and cultivated society is as empty as all of the other dreams he has had. His subject is as broad as that of The Nether World, and if he relies on Harvey and Alma Rolfe as organizational centers more than he relies on single characters in his other panoramic novels, he uses them in addition to the device of comparison and contrast to gain a more coherent structure than he has achieved before. He can be more explicit in his treatment of sex than he could be in 1889, but his basic theme of the destructiveness of social pretense makes this, historically, a less interesting novel than the more experimental, if less successful, The Nether World.

⁶³Ibid., pp. 169-170.

A survey of Gissing's work illustrates his earnestness in his claim that the novel was a serious art form and shows a fairly steady development of craftsmanship with each succeeding novel. His importance for this study lies primarily with his work in the 1880's: he was a man with a new aesthetic, imperfect as it might be, constricted by the devices of his predecessors. One of his primary interests was to present the nether world as phenomena, not for propagandistic, humorous, or sentimental effects. This aim was motivated as much, if not more, by his experiences with the poor, his inability to arrive at philosophical absolutes, and his pessimistic temperament, as by the novels and theories of Flaubert and Zola. In his reaction to the past and his struggle toward what he considered the truthful presentation of materials, he developed a series of technical devices suitable to the presentation of his new subject matter, but he never succeeded in achieving the objectivity of tone which his aesthetic theories demanded. This may be the result, as Swinnerton suggests, of Gissing's real fictional interest being himself, not objective reality. But the way it demonstrates itself in his fiction is in a confusion of values: he could not establish a consistent attitude toward his materials because he was disillusioned with the values of the past as well as the radical new values of his time. Thus he could attack current conditions, show his disillusionment with modern man, and

treat ironically the many suggested solutions to these problems, but he could neither be satisfied with this negation nor his own set of ideals.

Although certainly not a great writer, Gissing's works are inherently interesting for a number of reasons: Virginia Woolf values his work because it reflects an intelligent man struggling with the serious problems of life;⁶⁴ J. M. Murry sees the novels as studies in the psychological relationship between man and woman to be compared, not totally unfavorably, with some of the work of D. H. Lawrence;⁶⁵ and the novels, seen as a whole, offer one of the most complete and detailed reflections of the ideas and problems of late nineteenth-century English society--from the nether world to the cultivated society of town and country--that exist.

⁶⁴Virginia Woolf, "George Gissing," The Second Common Reader (New York: Harcourt, Brace & Co., 1923), pp. 238-244.

⁶⁵John Middleton Murry, "George Gissing," Katherine Mansfield and Other Literary Essays (London: Constable, 1959), pp. 1-68.

CHAPTER II

GEORGE MOORE: THE FOREIGN INFLUX

When Gissing wrote in 1886, "The writers who help me most are French and Russian: I have not much sympathy with English points of view,"¹ he was, of course, pointing honestly to the source of most of the innovations which are found in his novels; however, his works seem like beefsteak spiced with some foreign sauces. George Moore, on the other hand, gives us the key to his early work in a passage in Confessions of a Young Man: "I am instinctively averse to my own countrymen; they are at once remote and repulsive; but with Frenchmen I am conscious of a sense of nearness; I am one with them in their ideas and aspirations, and when I am with them, I am alive with a keen and penetrating sense of intimacy."² Despite certain concessions to English tastes, Moore's early novels exhibit his conscious attempt to bring French forms and literary ideals into the English novel. As he explained to Barrett Clark, with typical overstatement, near the end of

¹A. and E. Gissing, p. 183.

²George Moore, Confessions of a Young Man (New York: Capricorn Books, 1959), p. 117. This edition is used rather than The Collected Works because it contains much of the original material which was excluded in the later edition.

his life: "I was present at the beginning of an important artistic and literary rebirth. I came to France, I wrote the first serious novels in English. I invented adultery, which didn't exist in the English novel till I began writing"3

In addition to this contrast of their relationship to the English novelistic tradition, two writers who are consistently grouped together in literary histories could hardly be more different. Moore was a member of the Irish landed gentry who, despite his constant anxiety about money after 1880, never faced privation. He was always accepted and at ease in cultivated society and, if we accept his written statements literally, was afflicted with an attitude directly opposite Gissing's social inferiority complex. Resisting education throughout his youth, Moore never really mastered his only second language, French. How different Moore is from Gissing is obvious in Gissing's cry of triumph when, late in life, he read Don Quixote in the original, the last literary masterpiece which had eluded him owing to lack of knowledge of a language. Never married, Moore seems to have invented most of the many affairs which fill his autobiographical writings. A polemicist worthy of his early master, Zola, Moore used journalism to make himself a popular writer. Both Gissing and Moore read Schopenhauer, but the great

³Joseph Hone, The Life of George Moore (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1936), p. 373.

pessimist had opposite effects on the two: he furnished a rationale for Gissing's temperamental pessimism; he offered novelistic material to the temperamentally optimistic Moore.

Born in 1852 to the Catholic owners of Moore Hall, County Mayo, Moore was a rebellious youth whose energies were devoted to horses, gambling, and the gay life of a gentleman in London. After his father's death he studied art in London, and upon reaching his majority, rushed to Paris to become a painter. Between 1873 and 1880 he received his education in Paris--an education not only in painting and literature but also in the contrasting social milieux of the Nouvelle Athènes, the Bohemian haunt of the Parisian avant-garde, and the drawing rooms of the nobility. The Confessions of a Young Man, factually inaccurate but emotionally valid, gives a picture of the successive enthusiasms and rejections of which this non-academic education consisted. In 1880 a letter from his uncle, who was looking after his estates in Ireland, called him home to undertake his responsibilities. Moore's description of his reaction to this letter, despite its being a "Moorism"--"a violent rhetoric of mingled self-assurance and self-mockery peculiar to his vision"⁴--indicates the extent to which he

⁴Malcolm Brown, George Moore: A Reconsideration (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1955), p. xv.

had adopted an attitude toward life akin to that of Flaubert, the Goncourts, and Maupassant:

That some wretched farmers and miners should refuse to starve, that I may not be deprived of my demi-tasse at Tortoni's, that I may not be forced to leave this beautiful retreat, my cat and my python--monstrous. And these wretched creatures will find moral support in England; they will find pity!⁵

However, Moore left France and undertook responsibilities, but not those which his uncle planned for him. He returned to Ireland only long enough to find a new caretaker, and then he settled in London. Having failed as a painter, he had a new goal:

And so it was that I came to settle down in a Strand lodging-house, determined to devote myself to literature, and to accept the hardships of a literary life. I had been playing long enough, and was now anxious for proof, peremptory proof, of my capacity or incapacity.⁶

Although he first followed journalism, his ambitions were artistic. As a result of his unique education, his artistic ideals were revolutionary in England. Brown's analysis of the essential elements of Moore's French education is instructive. Moore learned three precepts in France: Manet's "One should be ashamed of nothing but to be ashamed"; Gautier's "The correction of form is virtue" and "The visible world is visible." "The transplantation of these three

⁵Moore, p. 142.

⁶Ibid., p. 162.

precepts to English ground was Moore's basic lifework."⁷ In these statements we can see Moore's rejection of Victorian morality, his demand for freedom of subject matter, his realistic and documentary methods, his concern for form for form's sake.

Moore knew well the works of almost all the nineteenth-century French poets, novelists, and painters. In Confessions he traces his great enthusiasms: Shelley, Gautier, Balzac, Baudelaire, Zola, and Pater. In these he found a dedication to art and a rejection of old moral patterns. After failing to achieve any of these ideals by painting, Moore began to write poetry while in France. His two volumes of poetry failed to create much interest in England, but Flowers of Passion (1878) and Pagan Poems (1881) are, as is obvious by their titles, an attempt at a transplantation of French ideas and techniques to England. Although not good poetry, they are the earliest precursors of the dominant twentieth-century English poetic movement. But Moore discovered that he had little more talent for poetry than painting, and besides he wanted public notice, which his poems failed to give him.

Although in 1880, the date of his return to England, Moore had little knowledge of English literature, he had discovered a new enthusiasm for Zola, and typically he was

⁷Brown, p. 36.

almost fanatic. He explained his attraction in Confessions:

I frequently met M. Duval at breakfast at a neighboring café, and our conversation turned on l'exposition de la pièce, préparer la situation, nous aurons des larmes, etc. One day, as I sat waiting for him, I took up the Voltaire. It contained an article by M. Zola. Naturalisme, la vérité, la science, were repeated some half-a-dozen times. Hardly able to believe my eyes, I read that you should write, with as little imagination as possible, that plot in a novel or in a play was illiterate and puerile, and that the art of M. Scribe was an art of strings and wires, etc. I rose up from breakfast, ordered my coffee, and stirred the sugar, a little dizzy, like one who has received a violent blow in the head.

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And now for the third time I experienced the pain and the joy of a sudden and inward light. Naturalism, truth, the new art, above all the phrase, "the new art," impressed me as with a sudden sense of light. I was dazzled, and I vaguely understood that my "Roses of Midnight" were puerile eccentricities, dead flowers that could not be galvanised into any semblance of life, passionless in all their passion.

I had read a few chapters of the "Assommoir," as it appeared in La République des Lettres; I had cried "ridiculous, abominable," only because it is characteristic of me to instantly form an opinion and assume at once a violent attitude. But now I bought up the back numbers of the Voltaire, and I looked forward to the weekly exposition of the new faith with febrile eagerness. The great zeal with which the new master continued his propaganda, and the marvellous way in which subjects the most diverse, passing events, political, social, religious, were caught up and turned into arguments for, or proof of the truth of naturalism astonished me wholly. The idea of a new art based upon science, in opposition to the art of the old world that was based on imagination, an art that should explain all things and embrace modern life in its entirety, in its endless ramifications, be, as it were, a new creed in a new civilisation, filled me with wonder, and I stood dumb before the vastness of the conception, and the towering height of the ambition.

In my fevered fancy I saw a new race of writers that would arise, and with the aid of the novel would continue to a more glorious and legitimate conclusion the work that the prophets had begun; and at each development of the theory of the new art and its universal applicability, my wonder increased and my admiration choked me

. But it was the idea of the new aestheticism--the new art corresponding to modern, as ancient art corresponded to ancient life--that captivated me, that led me away, and not a substantial knowledge of the work done by the naturalists. I had read the "Assommoir," and had been much impressed by its pyramid size, strength, height, and decorative grandeur, and also by the immense harmonic development of the idea; and the fugal treatment of the different scenes had seemed to me astonishingly new--the wash-house, for example: the fight motive is indicated, then follows the development of side issues, then comes the fight motive explained; it is broken off short, it flutters through a web of progressive detail, the fight motive is again taken up, and now it is worked out in all its fulness; it is worked up to crescendo, another side issue is introduced, and again the theme is given forth. And I marvelled greatly at the lordly, river-like roll of the narrative, sometimes widening out into lakes and shallowing meres, but never stagnating in fen or marshlands. The language, too, which I did not then recognise as the weak point, being little more than a boiling down of Chateaubriand and Flaubert, spiced with Goncourt, delighted me with its novelty, its richness, its force.⁸

Moore's reiteration of the newness--new subject, new ideas, and new form--shows his youthful zeal. Except for Paul Alexis, Moore had little personal acquaintance among the naturalists in 1880; he had met Zola only once at a ball. But between 1881 and 1883, Moore corresponded with Zola, pub-

⁸ Moore, pp. 90-96.

lished articles on Zola in the English press, and planned a translation of L'Assommoir. Moore made himself the leader of the fight for freedom in English literature, and he fought shrewdly and well so that by the early Nineties this fight was essentially won.

But in these early London years, he was not simply a journalist; he was writing his first novel using a variety of French novels as models. His concern with the new in art can be seen from the title A Modern Lover (1883). He wrote Zola after its English publication:

I have just published a novel which has had success. A Modern Lover: in the French papers they call it Un Amant d'aujourd'hui! I don't know why my phrase has been altered. The fact that my novel has been successful may interest you; for, as I have already told you, I owe you everything. My book alas is not good. I know it well, but it has succeeded. I was obliged to attenuate dreadfully, but what else could I do? I had to take a step and the step is taken.⁹

But in the Preface to the revision called Lewis Seymour and Some Women (1917), he was more candid about his first novel:

"'A Modern Lover' was the book of a young man who, in a moment of inspiration, hit upon an excellent anecdote, and being without literary skill to unfold it, devised a strange text out of his memories of Balzac, Zola, and Goncourt."¹⁰ The

⁹Hone, p. 96.

¹⁰George Moore, Lewis Seymour and Some Women (New York: Brentano's, 1920), p. v.

anecdote was a fictional treatment of the life of Lewis Hawkins, an art student in Paris with whom Moore lived; Milton Chiakin has shown that the specific literary models were Balzac's Les Illusions perdues, Goncourt's Manette Salomon, and Zola's La Curée.¹¹ Moore gives a summary of the plot:

Three women undertake to work for a young man's welfare: a work-girl, a rich woman, and a lady of high degree. All contribute something, and the young man is put on a high pedestal. One worshipper retains her faith, one loses hers partially, and one altogether.¹²

More specifically, the story tells of the rise of a young and not very skillful artist from impoverishment to membership in the Royal Academy. One of the ways of seeing the modernity suggested by the title is to contrast it with the pattern of "the young man from the provinces" which Lionel Trilling has described as the "backbone" of nineteenth-century fiction.¹³ Lewis Seymour, a penniless aspiring artist, acquires his "transformation"¹⁴ in his meeting with Mrs. Bentham, who introduces him to artistic opportunities and the world of ballrooms. But his series of tests are not against

¹¹Milton Chiakin, "The Composition of George Moore's A Modern Lover," Comparative Literature, CLVII (Summer, 1955), 259-264.

¹²Moore, Lewis Seymour, pp. viii-ix.

¹³Lionel Trilling, "The Princess Casamassima" in The Liberal Imagination: Essays on Literature and Society (Garden City: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1954), p. 67.

¹⁴Ibid., p. 70.

a static society whose values he must understand and learn to conform to; instead the society is made up of sentimentally and sensually motivated personages whom, with his absolute ego, Lewis can use for his own ends. He uses the three women, from three levels of society, and it is only Gwynnie Lloyd, the laundress, who faces any moral problem--a conflict between the Methodist virtues of "modesty" and "duty"¹⁵ in conceding to the demands of Lewis. Mrs. Bentham's hesitancy to become Lewis's mistress is motivated by fear of scandal, and Lady Helen has only to overcome the old-fashioned prejudices of her parents in order to marry Lewis. In this novel, then, there is an ironic comment on the traditional story of the provincial young man: modern society has lost its ability to test the outsider if he is equipped to use the moral softness of society against it.

Lewis Seymour is the structural center of the book. He is the "modern lover" incapable of love who finds this incapacity an asset. He supposedly sacrificed an artistic greatness of which he dreamed, but despite the extent of the discussions of art, this is no Kunstlerroman. We are convinced that Seymour has no element of greatness in him, and if we are meant to consider Seymour a failure, his

¹⁵George Moore, A Modern Lover (London: Tinsley Brothers, 1883), p. 24.

failure is never made clear.

However, the aesthetic discussions and intrigues of the novel, although having little to do with the central story, do function as an attempt to give the novel historical concreteness, to follow Zola's ideal of embracing "modern life in its entirety,"¹⁶ and to express Moore's aesthetic position at the time of the writing of the novel. The central conflict is between the medievalists, represented by most members of the Academy, and the moderns, represented by the painter Thompson and the novelist Harding. The moderns are, of course, given all the right values. Thompson, insisting that modern art is based on logic ("It is the positivism of art,"¹⁷ as a minor modern exults), explains the new movement: "The novelist is gaining the day for the study of the surroundings; the painter for atmospheric effects; and the musician will carry the day for melodious uninterrupted deductions, for free harmony which is the atmosphere of music."¹⁸ For the painter this leads to subjects lacking idealization, such as dirty housemaids. Harding defines the new novel:

We do not always choose what you call unpleasant subjects, but we try to go to the roots of things;

¹⁶Moore, Confessions, p. 92.

¹⁷Moore, Modern Lover, p. 269.

¹⁸Ibid., p. 41.

and the basis of life, being material and not spiritual, the analyst inevitably finds himself, sooner or later, handling what this sentimental age calls coarse. But like Thompson, I am sick of the discussion. If your stomach will not stand the crudities of the moral dissecting room read verse; but don't try to distort an art into something it is not, and cannot be. The novel, if it be anything, is contemporary history, an exact and complete reproduction of social surroundings of the age we live in. The poem, on the other hand, is an idealisation, and bears the same relation to the novel as the roast beef does to the rich, ripe fruit which you savour when your hunger is satisfied.¹⁹

This, I assume, is the aim of A Modern Lover, and the discussion itself is a part of the "social surroundings" which the novel presents.

The success of the presentation of morally decaying society has already been discussed. In addition to the world of the artist, other facets of the social surroundings which the novel presents are a rather non-specific picture of lower class life, extensive descriptions of a country ball and a country tennis party, the social life of Paris, and the fashionable life in London. Much of this presentation is in the form of satiric caricature: the lecherous Lord Senton, the grasping Mr. Carver, the ineffectual parents of Lady Helen. The result of this kind of presentation is that the reader finds it difficult to believe that what is presented is social history: comic exaggeration is not a device com-

¹⁹Ibid., pp. 41-42.

patible with social realism.

Harding does not make the naturalistic connection between the picture of the surroundings and the actions of the characters; he fails to raise the question of determinism except in his denial of the spiritual. And Moore fails to find any consistent causal relationship between environment and action. He carefully traces Seymour's background, but we must accept his character as given by the author and thus find the springs of action in his weakness of character. Gwynnie Lloyd's actions spring from her Methodist environment, and since she remains a minor character, her background does explain her consistent idealism. Moore states that Helen Bentham has been "spoiled by aristocratic tastes,"²⁰ but this does little to explain her temperament. Lady Helen is a sensualist seeking new sensations, but this is given, not developed causally. Thus there is little stress on determinism, and the springs of action remain on a priori temperament.

A statement by Harding early in the novel can be used to sum up the theme:

The age is dying of false morality and sentimentality, and neither you nor I can do anything about it, nor a host like us. These confounded women with their poetry, their art, their aspirations, have devoured everything, like a plague of

²⁰Ibid., p. 32.

locusts; they have conquered the nineteenth century as the Vandals did Europe in the sixth.²¹

Unfortunately, either Moore failed to understand his theme clearly or failed to find a structure and technique to present his theme, for the final effect of the book is not consistent with the theme. By using Seymour as an organizational center and by analyzing him so that little sympathy can be extended by the reader, Moore has made us sympathetic with the false morality of the three women, the representatives, in varying degrees, of the "false morality and sentimentality" of the age. In its effect then, the book is a condemnation of amoral Don Juanism, a favorite subject of Moore, rather than an indictment of a decaying society. Rather than an objective social history, the book exists as a study of a character who is what has come to be known as an anti-hero. One of the earliest reviewers saw this discrepancy between intent and result:

One is made aware by certain passages that Mr. Moore would fain imitate the methods of Zola and his odious school, but two obstacles are in his path--the faith of a Christian and the instincts of a gentleman; the author recognizes and respects goodness, purity and disinterestedness, and if M. Zola or any hogs of his sty could write such an episode as that with which the story opens, the workgirl's sacrifice for the penniless artist, one would have as much hope for their future as that of Mr. Moore.²²

²¹Ibid., p. 39.

²²Quoted in Hone, p. 96.

Perhaps the confusion--I should reiterate that the flaw is not that Moore did not write a Zolaesque novel but that theme and effect are not consistent--is due to Moore's having to "attenuate dreadfully" in order to make the work palatable to the English public. Certainly, at this period it was not due to his "faith of a Christian," since Moore was still violently denouncing Christianity, Roman Catholicism especially. But the most likely explanation is that the sentiment of disgust with humanity, which he preached in Confessions and which aided the French writers in attaining their apparent amoral attitude, was still only a pose. Basically, as the reviewer pointed out, he had "the instincts of a gentleman," and the instincts of the true nineteenth-century gentleman were moral and humanitarian.

From its publication onward, this novel has been singled out as introducing something new to English fiction. As Chiakin phrases it,

It [A Modern Lover] was the first published English novel directly affected by the traditions of French realism It was the first considered departure from Victorian modes of fiction and the starting point of the transformation that has taken place in the English novel in the last sixty or seventy years.²³

The question of what is new remains. The most obvious novelty is the abandonment of poetic justice--the rewarding of the good, the punishment of the wicked. Second, the effort, not

²³Chiakin, Comparative Literature, 259.

entirely successful, to present the facts about at least three layers of English society, though not without previous examples, is still something of an innovation. Third is a greater freedom of subject matter, reflected in Moore's overstated claim to have invented adultery in the English novel; sexual motivation is often used, Seymour's promiscuity is stressed, and as Brown puts it, there is a "leering at undraped females"²⁴ in the book. In structure and in techniques of characterization and narration, the novel offers nothing much that is new, and in the final analysis the novel is "pallid and unexceptionable"²⁵ except in its abortive study of the decay of society. But in this attack upon society, upon traditional values, Moore, even in his first novel, found a solution to the problem which caused Gissing to mar many of his novels. The values of Moore's women are being attacked on the basis of a new standard of values which is anti-sentimental and anti-traditional. The fault of the three women is not their immorality in the traditional sense--that they will yield their honor to Lewis--but their sacrifice of their own selfish interests. Although the point is not yet clearly defined here, traditional values are being weighed against "natural" values and found wanting. It is by means of this critical standard that Moore will

²⁴Brown, p. 90.

²⁵Ibid.

push beyond the kind of sensational effects created by Gissing.

Some of the flaws as well as the assets of A Modern Lover are discovered upon comparing it with "a new novel"²⁶ which Moore made in 1917 out of this first anecdote. The most noticeable change is trimming the three volume version to one volume. In order to accomplish this, Moore removed two elements of the earlier version: the long descriptions of parties, social life, and general surroundings and the authorial character analysis. At the time of the revision, Moore had long since renounced naturalism and renounced the desire to present social history, and he had discovered techniques for showing the reader rather than telling him about character. Another noticeable change is the greater freedom in the treatment of sex: in the second version Seymour and Mrs. Bentham are described together in bed; the honeymoon with Lady Helen is pre-marital rather than post-marital; and there is a lengthy analysis of the strong and weak points of Helen's body. Most of these changes were designed to shock or titillate the reader rather than function effectively in the novel, although they do strengthen the sexual motivation of the characters. Psychological depth has been added. The Oedipal nature of the relationship of Seymour and Mrs. Bentham is developed; the sensually moti-

²⁶ Moore, Lewis Seymour, p. ix.

vated rebellion of Lady Helen is stressed--she has become the common fictional free woman of the Twentieth Century; the background figures have receded until they are neither caricatures nor characters, only props. Some improbabilities have been removed, such as Gwynnie Lloyd's being employed as a maid by Lady Helen. The novel has become a psychological novel produced by a writer who has mastered his craft, but it is a novel told for the purpose of the story. The women have become the value characters, and at the end Seymour is a simple cad. It is no longer a picture of a society; it is a story--a plotted novel based upon the unnaturalistic belief that "it's the story that counts."²⁷

To escape the censorship of the circulation libraries and to appeal to an audience which found the circulating library system economically prohibitive, Zola advised Moore to publish his next novel in a cheap one-volume edition. Having written of the two subjects with which he was thoroughly familiar--the social and artistic worlds of Paris and London--he set out, notebook in hand, to visit an ugly town noted only for its pottery and then travelled with a group of provincial players. Brown suggests his motivation during this period:

He had composed A Modern Lover in a spirit of reasonable moderation, but, finding no reciprocal mood in the opposition /the publishers and the lending libraries/, he prepared to intensify his

²⁷Ibid., p. vi.

attack. He thereupon set out to write his one strictly naturalistic novel, a tale of dipsomania, adultery, asthma, and obesity among a troupe of provincial players, A Mummer's Wife, printed in 1885.²⁸

The reader of 1885 did not have to read far before he knew he had something different from his usual fictional fare:

Kate ran to the window and threw it open. The paroxysm had reached its height, and, resting his elbows well on his knees, he [the husband] gasped many times, but before the inspiration was complete his strength failed him. No want but that of breath could have forced him to try again; and the second effort was even more terrible than the first. A great upheaval, a great wrenching and rocking seemed to be going on within him; the veins on his forehead were distended, the muscles of his chest laboured, and it seemed as if every minute were going to be his last. But with a supreme effort he managed to catch breath, and then there was a moment of respite, and Kate could see that he was thinking of the next struggle, for he breathed avariciously, letting the air that had cost him so much agony pass slowly through his lips. To breathe again he would have to get on his feet, which he did, and so engrossed was he in the labour of breathing that he pushed the paraffin lamp roughly; it would have fallen if Kate had not been there to catch it. She besought of him to say what he wanted, but he made no reply, and continued to drag himself from one piece of furniture to another, till at last, grasping the back of a chair, he breathed by jerks, each inspiration being accompanied by a violent spasmodic wrench, violent enough to break open his chest. She watched, expecting every moment to see him roll over, a corpse, but knowing from past experiences that he would recover somehow. His recoveries always seemed to her like miracles, and she watched the long pallid face crushed under a shock of dark matted hair, a dirty nightdress, a pair of thin legs; but for the moment the grandeur of human suffering covered him, lifting him beyond the pale of loving or loathing, investing him and clothing him

²⁸Brown, p. 92.

in the pity of tragic things. The room, too, seemed transfigured. The bare wide floor, the gaunt bed, the poor wall plastered with religious prints cut from journals, even the ordinary furniture of every-day use--the little washhandstand with the common delf ewer, the chest of drawers that might have been bought for thirty shillings--lost their coarseness; their triviality disappeared, until nothing was seen or felt but this one suffering man.²⁹

The horrible details of the asthma attack and the suffering they communicate, the dirtiness and ugliness of the man in pain, the almost incidental description of the room and its contents, stressing tastelessness and consciousness of cost--here is the medically and economically painful subject matter with which Zola gained his greatest effects. And it is the world of Kate Ede, the viewer, the evaluator of this particular scene. The scene functions not only as pure description but as a characterization of Kate's ability to understand and sympathize.

He was her husband; he had suffered terribly, and was now better; and she was his wife whose duty it was to attend him. She only wished he would allow her to love him a little better; but against her will facts pierced through this luminous mist of sentiment, and she could not help remembering how petulant he was with her, how utterly all her wishes were disregarded. 'What a pity he is not a little different!' she thought; but when she looked at him and saw how he suffered, all other thoughts were once more drowned and swept away. She forgot how he often rendered her life miserable, well nigh unbearable, by small vices, faults that defy definition, unending selfishness and unceasing irritability.

²⁹George Moore, A Mummer's Wife (New York: Brentano's, 1917), pp. 6-7.

But now all dissatisfaction and bitternesses were again merged into a sentiment that was akin to love; and in this time of physical degradation he possessed her perhaps more truly, more perfectly, than ever in his best moments of health.³⁰

Moore has learned his lesson from Madame Bovary, not only in the basic motivations of Kate but also in his ability to use Kate as central consciousness (only in parts of the novel) and at the same time develop ironically the conflicts and inconsistency of her character.

Kate's vacillating attitude toward her environment, summed up for practical purposes in the previous passage concerning her attitude toward her husband, is skillfully rendered in the opening chapters of the book. In a house with her husband Ralph and her mother-in-law, a strict puritan, Kate has a dressmaking business, Ralph a small shop, and they have an apartment for rent. The income is secure though small. In Chapter III, Moore pauses to give us Kate's background, fairly typical of the lower middle class girl except for her lack of religious feeling and her sentimental tendencies which have been fed by reading popular romances. But this is her world, a world of mixed satisfaction and frustration, equally balanced, until Dick Lennox, the manager of Morton and Cox's Operatic Company, moves into the Edes' lodging, engendering dreams of a world beyond the confines of the ugly manufacturing town of Hanley--"An ugly little brick town--brick of all colours: the pale reddish-brown of decaying

³⁰Ibid., p. 8.

brick-yards, the fierce red brick of the newly built warehouses that turns to purple, and above the walls scarlet tiled roofs pointing sharp angles to a few stars." ³¹

The casual romance between Kate and Lennox develops in the ugly streets and on a tour of one of the potteries, where Moore allows the documentary method to overcome any ideal of economy by giving us a full description of the many rooms and functions of the pottery. Even after Kate has resisted Lennox's first attempt to kiss her, she cannot be angry with the man:

The man was coarse and largely sensual, but each movement of his fat hands was protective, every word he uttered was kind, the very intonation of his voice was comforting. He was, in a word, Human, and this attracted all that was human in her.³²

After Lennox's departure, Kate's sentimental feeling for him grows rapidly, and upon his return, she finds, while attending one of the performances of the opera, a fulfillment of her many dreams. Dick finds it easy to conquer her reticence, and they become lovers. Dick, an impulsive sensualist, likes Kate and convinces her that she should abandon Hanley and travel with him. Her weak conscience overcome by her dreams, Kate abandons "a strict and austere mode of Life"³³ to enter the Bohemian life of the acting company.

³¹Ibid., pp. 35-36.

³²Ibid., p. 83.

³³Ibid., p. 195.

Despite her desire for marriage and her constant fear of losing Dick's love, Kate is happy with the troupe, especially after she is given a singing part in several of the operas. On the night of her first success as a star, she is taken to a bar to drink to her triumph, but she has missed Dick at the theater. Upon finding him, she, inspired by drink, attacks him with jealous rage. The instrument of her success and her downfall are the same: the star's spraining her ankle. Dick felt obligated to see the star after the performance, and this act initiated Kate's drunkenness and jealousy. From this time, Kate is constantly suspicious of Dick, and although their period of happiness is over, Dick, "from a mixture of lassitude and good nature,"³⁴ bore these trials without undue annoyance. Kate's strange behavior is explained:

And in wonder these men /Lennox and Montgomery/ watched the progress of Kate's malady without ever suspecting what was really the matter with her. She was homesick. But not for the house in Hanley and the dressmaking of yore. She had come to look upon Hanley, Ralph, and Mrs. Ede, the the apprentices and Hender as a bygone dream, to which she could not return and did not wish to return. Her homesickness was not to go back to the point from which she had started, but to settle down in a house for a while.³⁵

Another reason for her emotionalism, as she confides to Montgomery, is her pregnancy.

³⁴Ibid., p. 258.

³⁵Ibid., p. 259.

Dick, when informed of Kate's condition, quickly sets a date for the marriage, and in the midst of the celebration, the height of happiness is reached by Kate:

The past seemed now to be completely blotted out. What more could she desire? She would go on acting, and Dick would continue to love her. By some special interposition of Providence all the hazards of existence over which she might have fallen had been swept aside. What broader road could a woman hope to walk in than the one that lay before her in all its clear and bland serenity? God had been good to her! and he was going to be good to her. What a tie the child would be, what an influence, what a source of future happiness! They would work for their child; a boy or girl, which? Would it not give them courage to work? Would it not give them strength to live? It would be something to hope for. Oh, how good God had been to her; and how wicked she had been to Him! Her heart filled with a fervour of faith she had never felt before; and facing the gracious future which a child and husband promised her, she offered up thanksgivings for her happiness, which she accepted as eternal, so inherent did it seem in herself.³⁶

This bourgeois mental paradise is short-lived: "The ebb of the company's prosperity dated from Kate's marriage."³⁷ As Dick faces the problems of company expenses exceeding income, Kate becomes more restive: "For the twentieth time since she had donned them the robes of the Bohemian fell from her, and she became again in instincts and tastes a middle-class woman longing for a home, a fixed and tangible fireside where she might sit in the evening by her husband's

³⁶ Ibid., pp. 281-282.

³⁷ Ibid., p. 286.

side, mending his shirts, after the work of the day."³⁸

The economic depression of northern England, bringing the disintegration of the troupe, leads, strangely, toward this ideal of security. Kate has a daughter, and Dick, with no more plan than "the scavenger dog that prowls about the gutter in search of offal,"³⁹ goes to seek money among the crowds of Manchester.

Despite their poverty, Kate resists going to work, stays at home pretending to care for the baby but actually indulging herself in the medicinal doses of brandy the doctor prescribed. The most concrete result is neglect of the child, leading to its death as Kate lies in bed in a drunken stupor.

Already the rim of light had become a crescent, and before her eyes closed in sleep the full moon looked down through the window into the cradle, waking the sleeping child. But her cries were too weak; her mother lay in sleep beyond reach of her wails, heartbreaking though they were. The little blankets were cast aside, and the struggle between life and death began: soft roundnesses fell into distortions; chubby knees were wrenched to and fro, muscles seemed to be torn, and a few minutes later little Kate, who had known of this world but a ray of moonlight, died--a glimpse of the moon was all that had been granted to her. After watching for an hour or more, the moon moved up the skies; and in Kate's dream the moon was the great yellow witch in the pantomime, who, before striding her broomstick, cries back: 'Thou art mine only, for ever and for ever!'⁴⁰

³⁸Ibid., pp. 290-291.

³⁹Ibid., p. 322.

⁴⁰Ibid., p. 334.

The loss of Dick's love and the loss of the only element which tended to render her morally responsible, the child, make this the climactic point of the novel.⁴¹

Mixing Kate's jealousy and alcoholism in ever-increasing intensity, Moore paints the complex pattern of the destruction of the marriage. Kate's rationalizations--she drinks because of Dick's unfaithfulness, because of her sorrow for her lost child, because of her loneliness--are counterpointed against her weakness of character and her essential purposelessness in life. Lennox's desire for peace from Kate's increasing rages leads him to hope for Kate's drunkenness. Reconciliation flows into physical violence in a progressive pattern of alienation. At this point Dick finds hope in the aid of the rich but eccentric mystic, Mrs. Forest, who wants Dick to produce plays she is writing. She is a flaw in the novel because of the obviousness of her function--she offers Dick a solution for his monetary problems and serves as a center for Kate's rage. Hone states that Mrs. Forest is introduced because of Moore's fear of the monotony of this section of the book,⁴² but

⁴¹Moore's lack of technical facility is noticeable in this passage. To gain the stress necessary to make the reader notice that the passage is climactic, Moore must resort to sentimental word choice and the personification of the moon.

⁴²Hone, p. 106.

whatever the reason, she serves only to distract the reader from the effective presentation of the deterioration of Kate. Kate's drinking and jealousy lead her not only to physical attacks upon the ever-patient Lennox but lead her to pursue him about London. In the scene most shocking to the Victorian reader, the drunken Kate has taken a cab in search of Dick:

Then her dream was brought to an end by a gulp. Oh! the fearful nausea; and she did not feel better until, flooding her dress and ruining the red velvet seat, all she had drunk came up. But the vomit brought her great relief, and had it not been for a little dizziness and weakness, she would have felt quite right when she arrived at the stage door. In a terrible state of dirt and untidiness she was surely, but she noticed nothing; her mind being now fully occupied with what she would say⁴³

There follows a minor triumph for the serious novelist: Moore succeeds in creating a street scene involving a drunken wife raving at an embarrassed husband without making it humorous to the reader.

Kate's doom is inevitable. Through a series of broken promises, ineffective cures, and painful illnesses, Kate loses her beauty (symbolized by the loss of her hair), the last of her will, and her husband. Lennox's adherence to his wife has a dual motive: "In the first place, he pitied his wife; in the second, he did not know how to leave her"⁴⁴ Lennox is essentially as weak as Kate--only

⁴³Moore, Mummer's Wife, p. 389.

⁴⁴Ibid., p. 417.

more fortunate. He is finally forced to leave, and he adjusts to the wifeless state with the remarkable ease characteristic of his nature. Kate, alone, can only dwell upon the past happiness with Dick, when she is sober enough to think.

Preceding the inevitable conclusion to the novel, the death of Kate, Moore weakens his pattern of consistent degeneration by two examples of action designed for rather cheap ironic effects. Kate and Ralph Ede, her former husband, meet accidentally on the street and spend an evening together, full of unexpressed regrets and mutual self-recrimination. The scene does communicate Moore's idea that the pathetic state of these two human beings is no one's fault, but in the usual tightly structured causal pattern in which Kate is caught, it is intrusive. The other weakness is having Mrs. Forest, Lennox's theatrical angel, nurse the dying Kate; the scene involves the discrepancy between the muttering of the incoherent Kate about concrete memories and the attempt of Mrs. Forest to write transcendently optimistic poetry by the bedside.

W. Somerset Maugham's rather unfair stricture of Esther Waters, "no one could attach so great a value to that work who had an intimate knowledge of the French novel during the nineteenth century,"⁴⁵ is probably more appropriate to

⁴⁵W. Somerset Maugham, The Summing Up (Garden City: Doubleday & Co., 1948), p. 21.

A Mummer's Wife. The central problem as well as many of the details of the results of alcoholism is drawn from Zola's L'Assommoir, and Kate's distorted picture of the world caused by misguided reading and many details about the disintegration of her marriages owe much to Madame Bovary. But it is precisely this obvious kinship as well as many less obvious similarities to the preeminent examples of naturalism that make this novel central to any study of naturalism in England. The failure of A Mummer's Wife to attract scholarly attention to its true historic importance is strange. In addition to being the first full attempt to Anglicize naturalism, it, "Instead of proving futile, as previous defiant gestures had, . . . started a new [publishing] trend: one house after another began to issue new books at 6s."⁴⁶ It was the first major step in breaking the economic power of the lending libraries and thus in actually reforming the structure of the English novel as a result of freeing it from the three-decker format. In addition, the novel contributed another major step in the continuing process of gaining greater freedom of subject matter for the English novel.

The central theme is indicated by the original epigraph to the novel, quoted from the historian Victor Duruy:

⁴⁶ Richard D. Altick, The English Common Reader: A Social History of the Mass Reading Public 1800-1900 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1957), p. 312.

"Change the surroundings in which man lives, and in two or three generations you will have changed his physical constitution, his habits of life, and a goodly number of his ideas."⁴⁷

The structure of the novel is basically simple but adequately designed to present this experiment in environmentalism. The introductory chapters present the natural environment of a fundamentalist middle class woman: Hanley with the struggle for economic security, the conscience of Mrs. Ede, the ugliness of Ralph's illness reflected in the town itself, and the escape into romantic literature. Here Kate's moral vision is as constricted as her travels, limited to the city limits, but in this constriction there is safety. Like many women of her class, she dreams of romantic escape, but unlike most, her beauty and her fortuitous meeting with Dick Lennox allow the dream to come true. Breaking the primary rule of her environment, she is unfaithful to her husband. The second section develops Kate's futile struggle to reconcile the conflicting values of two environments--the clear rules of Hanley with the ephemeral, ever-shifting values of a Bohemian group of actors. This new environment offers some very real rewards: a love for Dick Lennox which is both passionate and romantic; a gratification of her desire for beauty in music, clothes, and person; and a satisfaction of her vanity through the

⁴⁷Quoted in Brown, p. 93.

praise she receives as a result of her appearance on the stage. Despite these achievements, she wants to impose upon Dick her old values: marriage, permanent home, church attendance. She fails to accept or even understand the basis of the values of Dick and his Bohemian world--an instinctive hedonism in which usual moral norms have no place. Freed from the old restrictions and unable to find any stable ideals in the new environment, Kate indulges herself in jealousy (the old moral law applied to the freer society of the acting troupe) and brandy. The concluding section of the novel portrays in simple physical but complex psychological terms the destruction that ensues from Kate's inability to adjust to her new environment. The final symbol of her degradation--the indication that she has lost all values--is her marital infidelity to Dick: while drunk, she is picked up and taken to a hotel by someone she met in the bar. Her horror at this half-remembered act shows the continued strength of her original fundamentalist values.

As subjects for his well-designed experiment in testing the effects of change of environment, Moore creates his primary subject Kate and two control groups, one from the Hanley environment and one from the Bohemian world. Mrs. Ede, Ralph's mother, and Hender, Kate's assistant seamstress who marries Ralph after Kate's departure, are so lightly characterized as to remain representations of values in the

environment, the first its fundamentalist morality, the second its superficial desire for romance counterbalanced by a basic desire for security. Ralph Ede's sickness renders concretely the ugliness of the environment and his commercial dreams are typical of Hanley's real romance, but even though in his meeting with Kate at the end of the novel there is a sense of pathetic lack of accomplishment, he, by adhering to his environment, has escaped the degradation of Kate. The Bohemians, led by Dick Lennox, are perfectly adjusted to their world. They are vain, often amoral, perpetually financially insecure, but they are never self-destructive. And attesting to Moore's bravery in 1885, they are mostly humane, unlike the elder Mrs. Ede. An example of their values is the actions of Lennox. He is attracted to Kate by her beauty, which arouses his sexual desire. Like most of his actions, his decision to take Kate with him is a casual one. He loves Kate and desires to please her even long after she has become a detriment rather than an asset to his life. He marries her to please her: marriage is a meaningless ceremony in his world. He supports her even after he leaves her, not primarily because it is the honorable thing to do but because it is easier to do so than not. He leaves her only when he is forced in order to protect his way of life. In any comparison of humane actions in the novel, the actions of Lennox, even though based upon totally

selfish values, would be most praiseworthy. As long as he is in his natural environment, he is a successful human being. I think Brown's finding of the pattern of inverse relationship--Kate's fall simultaneous with Dick's rise⁴⁸--distorts the structure of the novel. Kate falls, but Dick, in essence, remains the same. His apparent economic success at the end of the novel is, like all his economic gyrations, incidental. As long as he can act freely in his environment, he is safe. If Brown means moral rise and fall, he is even further wrong. Dick Lennox's morality has not changed. His actions toward his next Kate will be as praiseworthy or as morally reprehensible as were his actions with the Kate of this novel. The point is that, given his environment, Lennox is stable.

Aided by this simplicity of structural contrast, Moore achieved in the characterization of Kate Ede an "effect that may be called incongruity," an avoidance of the consistency which was a convention of the older novel.⁴⁹ This incongruous effect is gained through ironic techniques, and it is in his use of irony that we can see Moore's greatest technical progress beyond A Modern Lover. We see through Kate's mind her basic motivations--love for Lennox, desire for security, fear of loneliness--and we are shown dramatically the incongruous actions springing from these motivations--

⁴⁸Ibid., p. 95.

⁴⁹Myers, p. 4.

brutal jealous rages, repeated reliance on drink, and the public spectacles of a drunken, self-destructive female. This ironic pattern is structurally underlined in the last third of the book by a series of progressive contrasts: Kate alternates between irrational harridan and contrite, tender, determined wife, and the process is climaxed by her final plunge into total degradation, when deserted by Lennox, and the incoherent ramblings on her deathbed when she remembers the values the Hanley environment represents. However, in order to retain critical perspective, one must add that this pattern of incongruity is not to be confused with the complexity we find in Henry James a little later or in Flaubert a little earlier. Moore does not have the ironic techniques dependent upon James's strict manipulation of point of view nor Flaubert's mastery of tonal variations based upon strict manipulation of language. What we do have is the development of incongruity of characterization based upon a discrepancy between motive and act, an incongruity which is presented in terms of environmental change rather than rendered in terms of complex human action.⁵⁰

One of the central tenets of Zola's formula for the experimental novel was objectivity, and certainly this was one of Moore's goals in A Mummer's Wife. Authorial

⁵⁰See the theoretical writings of Henry James, Joseph Conrad, and Ford Madox Ford.

objectivity as a technique, once considered a relatively simple idea involving such issues as control of point of view and the avoidance of generalizations by the author, has become a complex question of aesthetic theory through the subtle analyses of Wayne C. Booth and others. Since objectivity has traditionally been one of the defining terms of naturalism, Moore's attempt at this quality must be analyzed in light of Booth's statement that "none . . . of the claims to objectivity in the author has any necessary bearing on technical decisions."⁵¹ Booth's classification of kinds of objectivity, "neutrality toward all values,"⁵² "impartiality toward characters,"⁵³ and "an unimpassioned feeling toward characters,"⁵⁴ is useful in any approach to this problem. It is apparent in A Modern Lover that there is neither impartiality nor unimpassioned feeling toward the characters because Moore considered and wanted us to consider Lewis Seymour a cad. Except in a few places such as the climactic passage on the death of the child which I have quoted, Moore created the effect of objectivity toward character in A Mummer's Wife because it was a thematic necessity: any

⁵¹Wayne C. Booth, The Rhetoric of Fiction (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1961), p. 83.

⁵²Ibid., pp. 67-68.

⁵³Ibid., p. 74.

⁵⁴Ibid., p. 81.

preference or sympathy shown for any one character would have reflected upon the values of the environment which that character represents and would thus disrupt the structural balance of the novel. To gain this effect, Moore manipulated novelistic conventions, i.e., adapted techniques to gain specific ends. One of these techniques is a combination of abstention from authorial analysis and the irony inherent in the structure. The central irony of the novel--Lennox's stability springing from a lack of traditional values juxtaposed with Kate's destructive instability arising from her inability to control the traditional values associated with Hanley--depends upon Moore's allowing the idea to be worked out structurally rather than analytically. Another device leading to the effect of objectivity is the creation of incongruity in characterization, a facet already analyzed. Necessary to Kate's realistic characterization and the reader's varied reactions to her is the author's neutral presentation of the reality of both Kate's motivation--which elicits sympathy from the reader--and action--which is repulsive to the reader. In the characterization of Lennox, Moore gained the effect of objectivity by relying on the reader's knowledge of and expectation of the traditional hero in a love story and then ironically thwarting this expectation with the reality. Lennox's romantic impulsiveness and, later, his patience with the deranged Kate are conven-

tions of the hero; these traits are carefully overbalanced by the stress upon his fatness, his grossness of appetite, his insensitivity, his selfishness, his action in leaving Kate, and his lack of concern at her death. In terms of the techniques available to him and his only partially developed ability to use these techniques, Moore attempted to give the effect of objectivity. The reader may delve dangerously into the author's intentions to say that Moore really preferred Lennox over Kate, or he may react impressionistically to say that he prefers Lennox, but either of these attitudes ignores one of Moore's major achievements in this novel.

An even more important question is that concerning objectivity in terms of "neutrality toward all values." Moore's creation of Lennox as a stable personality and Kate as an unstable one, associated with his use of these characters as representations of values, implies, after all, a distinction in values. If the unstable character dies due to the failure of her values and the stable one lives, the author has certainly sacrificed, in terms of the effect of the novel, any claim to absolute neutrality. Booth's argument that strict neutrality of values, if possible in fiction, leads to confusion rather than artistic success⁵⁵ seems unanswerable.

⁵⁵Ibid., Chap. III, passim.

And of course there is a set of norms present in A Mummer's Wife: to put the central norm in its simplest terms, we might say that the book is about the survival value of adhering to one's environment. But neither Booth's valid contention nor Moore's illustration of this contention makes fools of Flaubert and Zola with their assertions about objectivity, nor does it negate the fact that belief in an ideal of objectivity brought change in the techniques of the novels by Flaubert, Zola, and their imitator Moore.

Regardless of whether Flaubert and Zola thought that they were rejecting all values or only outmoded values, it becomes obvious in both Le Roman Experimentale and all of Zola's novels that Zola was attempting to substitute new values, which he described as scientific, for traditional moral norms. Moore's claim that his disillusionment with naturalism came with the recognition that Zola was not an objective artist but a propagandist for social improvement only indicates that he was a very careless reader, but his practice in A Mummer's Wife proves that he was a better imitator than theoretician. What he gained from Zola was this new set of values--thought of by Moore, no doubt vaguely, as natural as opposed to the dominant social morality--and a way of presenting these values in fiction with apparent objectivity, i.e., without the author's stating these values himself or presenting them, like Gissing, through a spokesman for himself. Thus

when we compare Moore's enthusiasm for Zola and the "new aestheticism--the new art"⁵⁶ with Moore's practice, we find that at least part of this enthusiasm was for a new technique for shocking--a new iconoclasm.

For Moore and for many of the early followers of French fiction, the ideal of objectivity offered a technique of what one might call built-in irony. The shift from traditional morality allowed Moore to create a discrepancy between the factual mode of narration and the moral expectations of his audience. As much as Moore attacked the Vigilance Societies and their reflection of the low taste of English readers, the effects of his early novels are dependent upon the existence of the morality that he condemned.⁵⁷ The effect depends on irony of situation combined with a factual tone. I have already pointed out some of the structural ironies dependent upon this use of objectivity in A Mummer's Wife, e.g., the failure of the girl with morals and the perseverance of the amoral man. Others are obvious: the punishment of the seduced, the freedom from punishment of the seducer; the success, although not permanent, of illicit love; the calm, common ac-

⁵⁶ Moore, Confessions, p. 95.

⁵⁷ Novel readers' consistently increasing freedom from moral shock, a freedom which the naturalistic tradition both caused and reflected, has made the early works of Moore, Maugham, Frederic, and many other writers of the late Nineteenth and early Twentieth Centuries aesthetically ineffective to the modern reader.

ceptance in the scene between the adulterous wife and the cuckolded husband. The same technique can be seen in other elements of the novel: the stress upon sexual motivation, the relative happiness of the Bohemians, the shrewish character of the moral mother-in-law. Thus Moore is using the moral conventions of older fiction to set up an expectation which he consistently thwarts. To see this pattern of action as a means to gain greater realism is, in Moore's novel, only a partial answer. He selects his material not so much because it is like life as because it will remind the reader of the author's rejection of the old Victorian moral norms. Brown recognized this in seeing that "Moore unhesitatingly dispossessed the moral conscience of its Victorian prestige as the pure center of serious fiction, and in its place he put raw instinct and physiology By simple fiat, so it seemed, all the elaborate evangelical moral machinery of Dickens and George Eliot were simply obliterated."⁵⁸ Although Moore was not so permanently committed to "raw instinct and physiology" as he was to the structural technique of ironic shock in the novel, the facts that the novel communicates a set of values, which for convenience sake I will call natural or scientific, at variance with the values held by a majority of its readers, and that these values are inherent in the structure and therefore

⁵⁸Brown, p. 92.

must be inferred by the readers--thus justifying, within strict limitations, authorial objectivity or neutrality toward values--are vital to the association of A Mummer's Wife with the naturalistic tradition.

Thus Moore was led to the choice of the sensationalism of this technique as well as of characters and setting by the desire to shock, the means for which he had gleaned from French aesthetic theory favoring the study of the lower classes. A study of the members of an acting company--known for their immorality--was in itself a daring choice. The choice of provincial, industrial Hanley as setting for the early scenes allowed the use of the documentary method as well as presented an opportunity for contrasting its ugliness with the greater beauty of the "immoral" outside world. In addition to the theme of the effects of environmental change, A Mummer's Wife presents a panorama of social reporting, not only in Hanley and within the acting company but also throughout the northern towns in which the company entertains and finally in London. The failure of Morton and Cox's Opera Company is explained by the problems of unemployment and strikes in northern England. A study of English boarding and rooming houses, complete with their variety of types of owners from the first chapters in which the Edes rent one room, through the suspicious owners of houses in Manchester, to the grasping cold-heartedness of the managers of the lower

class houses in London is presented. An example of the concrete description of background as well as Moore's audacity for his time is illustrated by this picture of London, given as the lonely Kate wanders after being rejected by Dick:

The lamps were now but like furred patches of yellow laid on a dead grey background, and a mud-bespattered crowd rolled in and out of the darkness. The roofs overhead were engulfed in the soot-coloured sky that seemed to be descending on the heads of the passengers. Men passed carrying parcels; the white necktie of a theatre-goer was caught sight of. From Lambeth, from Islington, from Pimlico, from all the dark corners where it had been lurking in the daytime, prostitution at the fading of the light, had descended on the town--portly matrons, very respectable in brown silk dresses and veils, stood in the corners of alleys and dingy courts, scorned by the younger generation; young girls of fifteen and sixteen going by in couples with wisps of died hair hanging about their shoulders, advertisements of their age; the elder taking the responsibility of choosing; Germans in long ulsters trafficked in guttural intonations; policemen on their beats could have looked less concerned sic. The English hung around the public houses, enviously watching the arched insteps of the French women drifting by. Smiles there were plenty, but the fog was so thick that even the Parisians lost their native levity and wished themselves back in Paris.⁵⁹

On the level of theory, Moore's use of description and social documentation proves his awareness of Zola's desire to destroy, or at least widen, the romantic concept of aesthetic beauty. In terms of function, realistic descriptions of the contrasting environments, Hanley and the outside world, and the picture of boarding house life with Kate's descent into ever-lower environments contribute to the thematic structure of

⁵⁹Moore, Mummer's Wife, pp. 443-444.

the book. Much of the background material, however, fails in terms of function. The descriptions of the Hanley pottery works and many of the street scenes, such as the one quoted above, seem justified only because they happen to be true. Moore falls into the most common trap of the researcher: the inclusion of material on the basis of its availability rather than on the basis of structural requirements. The lack of a strict principle of selection increases the reader's interest in the novel as a social document but decreases its value as a structured novel.

Hone finds "The writing in A Mummer's Wife . . . still poor, the sentences short and common."⁶⁰ The passage quoted above illustrates not only this basic weakness but also the more obvious fact that commonness of short sentences is preferable to the awkwardness Moore created when he worked in longer patterns. Moore's early novels helped form the critical generalization that the naturalistic writer ignored the problems of the development of an artistic style.

The choice of character and setting, the experimental nature of the theme, and the objective reportorial technique, with its consequent sensational effect, show A Mummer's Wife to be an imitation of the French naturalistic tradition. The stress upon simple behavioristic psychology, the use of sexual desire as a basic motivation, and the achievement of incongru-

⁶⁰Hone, p. 106.

ity in the character of Kate are major advances beyond Moore's achievements in A Modern Lover. A Mummer's Wife is not only Moore's purest attempt to write a naturalistic novel but also the novel most nearly like that produced by the French naturalists which was created in England before the turn of the century. Its failure to be an excellent novel is due to Moore's limitations as an artist rather than his lack of understanding of his French masters or any inherent flaw in the theory which he adopted in creating the novel. The fact that it was written and published was of vital importance to Moore as well as to a whole line of imitators of the French in the 1890's. A Mummer's Wife helped to open England to the experimental novel and was one of the major steps in gaining freedom for new subject matter in the English novel.

At the time that A Mummer's Wife was being published, Moore was developing a new enthusiasm; Walter Pater's Marius the Epicurean appealed to Moore's basic aestheticism. Pater set Moore off on a search for style. Moore's next book A Drama in Muslin is a combination of Zolaesque techniques and themes with experiments in style--"or rather styles,"⁶¹ as Hone suggests. Although Pater was the source of Moore's new interest in subtle stylistic effects, Hone thinks the actual styles of the new novel were imitations of French sources rather than of Pater. Certainly some of Moore's new tech-

⁶¹Ibid., p. 119.

niques were imitations of Flaubert.

The basic plan of the novel springs from Moore's admiration for the ambitious panorama exhibited by Zola's Rougon-Macquart series. Moore described his purpose in the novel:

"A Drama in Muslin" is a study of the life of a group of girl-friends. The men in the story are all silhouettes--a mere decorative background, in fact. I propose to write a similar work dealing with a group of young men, in which the women will be blotted out, or rather constitute in their turn the decorative background. In this way I hope to produce two books that will picture completely the youth of my own time.⁶²

It is another social study, but Moore has abandoned the treatment of small, unusual segments of society to attempt a study of Ireland encompassing all classes. His subjects for his experiment consist of five girls of varying degrees of beauty and intelligence and with various temperaments. A major change in both technique and purpose is that this novel does not present an objective study of two contrasted environments but a critical study of a fairly homogeneous--with some variations within it--environment, that of late nineteenth-century Ireland. The central problem of the novel is summarized by Alice Barton, the heroine:

In that neat little house, their uneventful life dribbled away in maiden idleness; neither hope nor despair broke the cruel triviality of their days--

⁶²George Moore, A Drama in Muslin: A Realistic Novel (London: Vizetelly & Co., 1886), facing p. 1.

and yet, was it their fault? No; for what could they do if no one would marry them?--a woman could do nothing without a husband. There is a reason for the existence of a pack horse, but none for that of an unmarried woman. She can achieve nothing--she has no duty but, by blotting herself out, to shield herself from the attacks of ever-slandering friends. Alice had looked forward to a husband and a home as the certain accomplishment of years; now she saw that a woman, independently of her own will, may remain single.⁶³

As a complex background for the study of the marriage problem, Moore juxtaposes the society life of Ireland with the struggle of the peasants against high rent. This counterpointing of empty society life with the misery of the Irish peasant is probably the outstanding achievement of the novel. The ironic double level is best achieved through brief descriptions of social conditions in Ireland. In a more awkward manner Moore creates this contrast through a mechanical imitation of a scene from Madame Bovary; the scene of Mr. Barton's bargaining with his renters is alternated with the concurrent scene of Mrs. Barton's rejection of a suitor for Olive because the suitor does not satisfy the grandiose ambitions of the mother.

In this novel Moore shifted his emphasis from environmental determinism to hereditary determinism; this theme is presented by means of authorial comment, most of which is so superficial as to be of doubtful functional value. In one of the better explanations of heredity, presented through Alice

⁶³Ibid., p. 58.

Barton, Moore offered his intended central conflict of the novel:

Here Alice paused, and she sought vainly to define her ideas. She was conscious of the truth that conscience is no more than the indirect laws--the essence of the laws transmitted by heredity; and had she been able to formulate her thought she would have said, "and the ideal life should, it seems to me, lie in the reconciliation--no, reconciliation is not the word I want; I scarcely know how to express myself--well, in making the two ends meet--in making the ends of nature the ends also of what we call our conscience."⁶⁴

Although a rather confusing idea as stated here, the novel exists as a plea for the transformation of a society which frustrates the natural goals of its members: this is seen in the patterns which frustrate the females' social and physical desire for a man; in the economy which frustrates the workers' desire for the basic requirements of life; and in the society which substitutes meaningless formality for natural human relationships between the sexes.

Dramatically this pattern is most clearly seen in the contrasting lives of Alice Barton, May Gould, and Lady Cecelia Cullen. Desired by and desirous of a man whom society will not accept as her husband, May becomes pregnant and must withdraw from society. The deformed Cecelia, physically incapable of entering the husband contest, turns her natural energies toward religious mysticism accompanied by a loathing of all that suggests male sensuality; however,

⁶⁴Ibid., p. 228.

this unnatural outlet is insufficient, and her only other outlet is a love, described in rather shocking Lesbian terms, for Alice Barton. Alice manages to reconcile the ends of society and the ends of nature in her marriage to the local doctor and her subsequent escape from Ireland.

Either Moore realized that the natural was a pretty shaky norm by which to live or he was impressed by the spiritual naturalism of Huysmann's A Rebours, which he had reviewed approvingly in the Pall Mall Gazette,⁶⁵ for he went beyond materialism to posit a cosmic system which resembles ideas later developed by George Bernard Shaw and D. H. Lawrence.

Is it therefore unnatural or even extraordinary that Alice Barton, who is if anything a representative woman of 1885, should have, in an obscure and formless way, divined the doctrines of Eduard van Hartmann, the entire and unconditional resignation of personal existence in the arms of the cosmic process? Cecelia, as has been shown, with her black hatred of life concentrated upon a loathing of the origin of existence, was but another manifestation of the same stratum of thought.⁶⁶

Although interesting, the primary importance of this element in the novel in terms of this study is to show Moore's abandoning the experimental objectivity of A Mummer's Wife and going beyond the kind of social and moral criticism which he could have learned from Zola to become an advocate of a "cosmic process."

⁶⁵Hone, p. 119.

⁶⁶Moore, Muslin, p. 229.

Except for the stress upon "a study" and a panoramic structure supposedly exhibiting the effects of heredity, Moore abandoned most of the techniques of A Mummer's Wife in this novel. Character analysis is most often given in moral terms and there is little attempt to gain incongruity in characterization.

Alice Barton was what is commonly known as a plain girl. At home, during the holidays, she often heard that the dress-maker could not fit her, that her eyes were not so large nor so sweet as her sister's. But the clear, sweet mind was so often revealed in those grey eyes, that the want of beauty was forgotten in love of her personality. Although her shoulders were narrow and prim, her arms long and almost awkward, there was a character about the figure that demanded attention. Alice was now turned twenty, she was now the eldest, the best-beloved, the cleverest girl in the school.⁶⁷

Although physically not the stereotyped beautiful heroine of fiction, she fulfills the promise of moral idealism contained within this initial description: she sacrifices her ego to her sister; she sacrifices her pride by going to church, even though she does not believe, to please her parents; she sacrifices her health by working to support the pregnant May. Angelic throughout, she gets her reward in happy suburbia.

Although the reliance upon documentary fact to establish setting is still dominant in this novel, such as the descriptions of the life of the lower classes, the streets of Dublin, and the governor's ball, Moore's interest in style changed the effect of his descriptions, often for the worse

⁶⁷Ibid., p. 2.

because of a strained artiness.

The Dublin streets stare the vacant and helpless stare of a beggar selling matches on a doorstep, and the feeble cries for amusement are like those of the child beneath the ragged shawl for the red gleam of a passing soldier's coat. On either side of you, there is a bawling ignorance or plaintive decay. Look at the houses! Like crones in borrowed bonnets some are fashionable with flowers in the rotting window frames--others languish in silly cheerfulness like women living on the proceeds of the pawnshop; others--those with brass-plates on the doors--are evil-smelling as the prescriptions of the threadbare doctor, bald as the bill of costs of the servile attorney. And the souls of the Dubliners blend and harmonise with the connatural surroundings.⁶⁸

A comparison of this description with the one quoted above from A Mummer's Wife concerning the London streets dominated by prostitutes is instructive. Much of the awkwardness of sentence structure has been smoothed away, but the substitution of the forced similes for the relatively concrete cataloging of the first passage mars the total effect rather than improving it. But more important than the question of stylistic taste is that of tone. Although in the first passage there is an overt criticism of London weather, if the reader feels there is a tone of moral outrage, he gathers this by implication, not from authorial statement. In the latter passage, the author's attitude is clearly one of disapproval, and whether this disapproval is based upon aesthetic or moral standards makes little difference in terms of the effect upon the reader. Moore has chosen to abandon objec-

⁶⁸Ibid., p. 158.

tivity in describing environment as well as character. This fact may or may not make A Drama in Muslin a better novel, but it does indicate a major shift in technique from the more nearly naturalistic A Mummer's Wife.

Moore summarized his conception of the place of this novel in the school of Zola: according to Hone, he told Zola "that, although his new novel preserved the root idea of the school, it contained novelties in composition and marked a great advance in language compared with A Mummer's Wife."⁶⁹ I think the "novelties" more important than the "root idea," the purpose of experimental social study and the theme of the revolution in morality. The interpretations of the reason for and the nature of Moore's reaction to Zola's methods vary: that all of these can be supported by quotations from Moore proves his inconsistency of explanation. Brown's idea that Moore reacted against Zola when he found that he was not objective but rather that he was committed to social reform seems least tenable;⁷⁰ on almost all levels, A Drama in Muslin is a movement away from objectivity. Hone suggests that the reaction was a reasoned theoretical progression: "the definitions of the Naturalistic school are shown in an essay on Turgenev⁷ to be not only brutally material but con-

⁶⁹Hone, p. 119.

⁷⁰Brown, pp. 96-105.

tradictory in themselves."⁷¹ Frierson asserts that the shift was motivated by a desire for more readers as well as a new interest in style.⁷² The problem is complicated by the number of influences which have been isolated: Schopenhauer, Huysmann, Dujardin, Pater, de Quincey, Jane Austen, Balzac, Turgenev, and others.

I think the subject sufficiently important, especially in the context of this study, to bear one more interpretation. I think Frierson's suggestion of stylistic reaction comes closest to the truth, but the fact that he can call A Drama in Muslin "the first 'impersonal' social study that appeared in English fiction"⁷³ indicates that he has not seen the full effect of Moore's stylistic experiments. Twice in Confessions of a Young Man Moore speaks of his reaction to Zola in terms of style; the following is typical of both: "What I reproach Zola with is that he has no style; there is nothing you won't find in Zola from Chateaubriand to the reporting in the Figaro."⁷⁴ It is also fair to note that there are other explanations for his reaction given in Confessions, the only major critical document written during the transitional period

⁷¹Hone, p. 150.

⁷²William C. Frierson, The English Novel in Transition, 1885-1940 (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1942), pp. 72-73.

⁷³Ibid., p. 70.

⁷⁴Moore, Confessions, pp. 118-119.

(1886-1888). In another place he praises the French naturalists for "untiring striving for intensity of expression, for the very ozmazome of art."⁷⁵ However, under the influence of Pater and others, Moore did become more interested in style; and in developing a style, he abandoned the neutral simplicity he had used in A Mummer's Wife. He sacrificed objectivity, an effect he had learned from Zola. Whether Moore justified the sacrifice of objectivity for style at the time the change took place or only after the fact when he recognized there was a conflict is not important. The fact is that in Moore's case a conscious style was too directly a reflection of the man; his choice of word, of image, of sentence structure communicated authorial judgment. This conflict between one element of naturalism--scientific objectivity--and style is not a problem of naturalism in general but of George Moore in particular. Flaubert's stylistic mastery and Moore's admiration of the "Goncourts' brilliant adjectival effects"⁷⁶ show that a solution to the conflict is possible. But Moore, at this point in his career, was unable to manipulate his style to fit his continued naturalistic theory, and his choice of stylistic experiment and development determined the path of his later career. This failure to fuse style and technique

⁷⁵Ibid., p. 225.

⁷⁶Ibid., p. 211.

caused A Drama in Muslin to be a combination of satire and propaganda.

Whatever the cause, the fact is that after 1885, after the birth of his novelistic career, Moore's novels illustrate, with one exception, an increasing divergence from anything that can be called naturalism. The period of transition was painful for Moore: the ensuing novels were, justifiably, badly received, and Moore desperately wanted a large audience. The last novel of Moore's which has any link to the naturalistic tradition is Esther Waters, but before investigating the ironies involved in the popular success of this book, I must notice at least one of the novels which precede it. Mike Fletcher (1889) seems to be the novel which completes the promise of the foreward to A Drama in Muslin; it is a study of bachelorhood. It also illustrates Moore's tendency to work in the grandiose series tradition of Balzac and Zola since it contains characters from almost all of his other novels. The primary influence, however, is not Zola but Huysmann's A Rebours and La Bas. One way to see the failure of the novel, as well as Moore's artistic directionlessness at this time, is to detect the multiplicity of unassimilated-- in the sense of existing only as idea, not in the structure-- influences in the novel. Mike Fletcher is the man desiring all exotic experience, like the heroes of Huysmann. Both he and his friend Escott are constantly talking about and occa-

sionally acting upon Schopenhauer's idea of the denial of the will. In addition there is a pagan-Christian theme drawn from Pater; a rather functionless use of the "leitmotif" borrowed from Wagner; a series of set "characters" like those found in seventeenth-century character books; and much burlesque of manners in both high and low life. The subject concerns young men searching for something to live for in a milieu offering no values. Like A Drama in Muslin, the novel presents a contrast between the natural desires of the characters and the repressive social norms, but no real focus on this conflict is attained because no more value is associated with the characters than with the society. The ultimate failure is in the characterization of Mike Fletcher: the reader is asked to believe that his suicide is a damning indictment of a society which offers no meaningful path of development for this talented young man; instead the reader's reaction is one of relief at being rid of a silly young man. In other words, the characters do not seem products of a repressive milieu but sports who would exist parasitically in any society. Moore has so far abandoned the objective techniques of the naturalists, as well as the basic techniques of story telling, that he thinks that his telling the reader that characters have value makes these characters valuable.

Two other facets of the novel deserve comment. Moore was still struggling toward a style; typical of his descrip-

tions is the following:

The smoke of the little steamer curled and rolled over, now like a great bird with a snake hovering in its talons; and the little steamer made pluckily for Blackfriars. Carts and hansoms, vans and brewer's vans, all silhouetting. Trains slip past, obliterating with white whiffs the delicate distances, the perplexing distances that in London are delicate and perplexing as a spider's web. Great hay-boats yellow in the sun, brown in the shadow--great hay-boats came by, their sails scarce filled with the light breeze; standing high, they sailed slowly and picturesquely, with men thrown in all attitudes; somnolent in sunshine and pungent odour--one only at work, wielding the great rudder.⁷⁷

Whether regression or progression, this exemplifies a shift from the functions of the descriptions quoted from both A Mummer's Wife and A Drama in Muslin. The description is objective, rather than an expression of values as in the latter, but it is unlike the former, where the objective description evokes a particular attitude in the reader. Instead, this description is used for its own sake. Mike Fletcher is filled with these functionless, as far as I can tell, set pieces. This one seems to have more to recommend it than most. One of the repeated images of the book is the river; the river and two lines of a popular song are repeated as motifs. As E. M. Forster, among others, has pointed out, repetition is one of the primary means to achieve form in the novel, but no meaningful structure emerges from the patterns of repetition in this novel. In fact, even meaningful use

⁷⁷George Moore, Mike Fletcher (London: Ward and Downey, n. d.), p. 18.

of motifs would have had little unifying effect on the plot of this novel. Moore, who insisted on logical structure in the plot of the novels which he read, seemed to have forgotten all lessons about causation which he learned from his French masters. The plot wanders incoherently. But this novel was the low point of Moore's career. He soon learned to use repetition in a more satisfactory manner, to make his style functionally effective through the "melodic line," and to regain control of plot structure.

His most popular and most famous novel (as measured by number of reprints) is Esther Waters (1894), in which he returned to the subject matter associated with the French naturalists and used some of the techniques which he had been experimenting with in the preceding transitional period. Subtitled "An English Story," the novel presents a study of the servant class by means of focusing on the life of one woman. Well-reviewed in its time, praised by Gladstone, designed to make its author popular, Esther Waters is a kind of test case today both among critics and among classifiers. Most critics find it the best of Moore's early works, but Frierson calls it "as dull and unpleasant a book as was ever written" and thinks A Mummer's Wife "of far more distinction."⁷⁸ Although all commentators agree that Esther Waters is realistic, few fit it into the naturalistic tradition. Hone's critical de-

⁷⁸Frierson, p. 73.

scription, "so full of humanity and affection,"⁷⁹ points to the heart of the problem of classification: a novel with this quality can hardly belong to a tradition defined by terms like pessimistic determinism. Historically the problem is complicated by our inability to reconstruct Moore's intention in the novel. Brown suggests, rightly I think, that some of the motivation for the sympathetic treatment of Esther was a desire to gain popularity, and he quotes a letter supporting this view: "My next novel will be more human. I shall bathe myself in the simplest and most naive emotions, the daily bread of humanity."⁸⁰ Opposed to this pragmatic explanation is the evidence of Hone who traces Moore's sincere interest in the subject from at least the time of the composition of Confessions. After its publication Moore made fun of the goodness of the novel, enjoyed the irony that the novel caused the establishment of homes for illegitimate children, and yet he accepted the public decision that it was one of his best novels, arguing with the popular opinion only by insisting that it was pure art with no propagandistic intentions. One other complication which is relevant to the purposes of this study is that many of the early reviewers compared this novel to Hardy's recently (1891) published

⁷⁹Hone, p. 194.

⁸⁰Quoted in Brown, p. 128.

Tess of the D'Urbervilles, a novel Moore had read while composing Esther Waters. One of Moore's favorite critical scapegoats was Tess, and he even suggested once that Esther Waters was written to show how Hardy should have handled his subject.⁸¹ Perhaps through a comparison, a little light can be thrown on the complex question of Hardy's relationship with the naturalistic tradition.

Structurally Esther Waters is a study of a subject--the milieu of the servant class in England, a class trapped by hopeless economic bonds complicated by its reliance upon gambling as a means of gaining freedom. The structure is similar to that of A Drama in Muslin: a group of characters is introduced, and the diverse fortunes of the members of the group, determined by their differences of character, are traced in the development of the novel. The improvement of structure in Esther Waters is due to the more consistent focus on a single character and an abandonment of the thematic ambitiousness of the earlier novel; Moore no longer presented a major theme of social criticism nor consistent counterpointing of upper and lower levels of society. The novel has a three-part structure, each part approximately twelve chapters. The first of these portrays Esther's service at Woodview, with the introduction of a group of servants and the development of the manic racing atmosphere. The second section

⁸¹Ibid., p. 136.

contains Esther's varied experiences in London, the bearing of her illegitimate child, and her attempts to support the child. The third section concerns Esther's marriage to William, her seducer, and their experiences in operating a bar in which William makes book on races, an activity which leads to their economic failure and the death of William. The final chapters serve as an epilogue completing the circle with Esther's return to Woodview. In the London section, Esther is made to meet several of the servants who were at Woodview. Margaret, lacking the moral strength of Esther, has been seduced by an employer and has drifted into prostitution. Sarah falls in love with a cad addicted to gambling, steals from her employer for him, and is sent to prison. Mr. Randal, the ex-butler, is destroyed by a combination of the economic system--his age prevents his getting a job--and his weakness for betting. Only Esther, through her basic strength of character and through her love for her son, escapes total degradation.

The subject is given reality by the documentary method of establishing the environment. The most important element is the description of the various kinds of employers--from the kind but unhappy Mrs. Barfield to the equally kind writer who employs Esther. Between her service with these two, Esther has a series of employers, ranging from the prudish through the lecherous to the sadistic. At one point Moore

abandoned all pretense of objectivity to sum up this aspect of his study:

Hers is a heroic adventure if one considers it--a mother's fight for the life of her child against all the forces that civilisation arrays against the lowly and the illegitimate. She is in a situation today, but on what security does she hold it? She is strangely dependent on her own health, and still more on the fortunes and the personal caprice of her employers; and she realised the perils of her life when an outcast mother at the corner of the street, stretching out of her rags a brown hand and arm, asked alms for the sake of the little children. For three months out of a situation and she, too, would be on the street as a flower-seller, match-seller, or--⁸²

The determining force, other than inherent character, is economic. Trapped in economic insecurity, the ambitious servant turns to gambling as the only escape. Moore, drawing on his youthful memories, created a panoramic vision of the lure of horse racing--from the interest of the country gentry to the desperation of the lower classes betting in a local bar. Moore was justifiably proud of the two chapters devoted to the Derby: "30 or 40 pages: no racing, only the sweat and boom of the crowd--the great Cockney holiday."⁸³ His delineation of racing and its effect on his characters was sufficiently effective to lead the editor of the Sporting Times to misname Moore "A Puritan killjoy."⁸⁴

⁸²George Moore, The Collected Works (New York: Boni and Liveright, 1922-1924), V, 180.

⁸³Quoted in Hone, p. 186.

⁸⁴Ibid., p. 195.

Moore stressed the function of gambling by placing in a climactic position William's hope of life dependent upon betting on a winner. Doomed to die of consumption unless he can get the money to go to Egypt, he wagers his remaining resources on a single horse; the development of the grotesque scene in which life and death are decided by a horse race makes the climax dramatically and thematically effective.

It was not the sensational treatment of gambling, however, which most affected the readers of the novel but the depiction of the baby farm, the woman who kept illegitimate children while the mothers worked as wet nurses and who, for five pounds, would relieve the mothers of the burden by allowing the children to die. Moore gave this scene all of the grotesque horror of which he was capable. Esther is outraged by the suggestion, but the woman continues her grisly trade without interference.

In addition to the subject matter of the lower classes and the sensational material which the public had learned to associate with naturalism, this novel also shows Moore's controlling the styles with which he had been experimenting.

And standing at the kerb of Piccadilly Circus, waiting for a bus to take her to Ludgate Hill Station, the girl grew conscious of the moving multitude that filled the streets. The great restaurants rose up calm and violet in the evening sky, the Cafe Monico, with its air of French newspapers and Italian wines; and before the grey facade of

the fashionable Criterion hansoms stopped and dinner parties walked across the pavements. The fine weather brought the wenches up earlier than usual from the suburbs, and they came up the long road from Fulham, with white dresses floating from their hips, and feather boas waving a few inches from the pavement. But through this elegant disguise Esther could pick out the servant girls. Their stories were her story. Each and all had been deserted; but perhaps each had a child to support. But they hadn't been as lucky as she had been in finding situations, that was all.⁸⁵

This description is much like the one picturing the prostitutes in A Mummer's Wife in its stress upon habitations of the girls and their attire; even the contrast between rich and poor appears in both, but the awkwardness has disappeared in the later passage. This passage lacks the many forced similes of the one from A Drama in Muslin, the "calm and violet" restaurants being the only figure which gains attention. The most important contrast, however, is that this passage is more functional than the other two. Like the passage in A Mummer's Wife, this is seen by a character, but rather than a simple scene, it is made directly relevant to the situation of Esther. Although the above quotation is fairly typical of Moore's descriptions in Esther Waters, he did not totally escape his habit of creating forced figures: "the pale air woven with delicate wire, a gossamer web underneath which the crowd moved like lazy flies, one half watching the perforated spire of St. Mary's, and all the city spires

⁸⁵Moore, Works, V, 185-186.

behind it now growing cold in the east"⁸⁶ A student of the total career of Moore may see Esther Waters as an abandonment of his pattern of stylistic development, but from the point of view of an evaluation of this novel as "this rough page torn from life,"⁸⁷ Moore achieved a fusion of style and structure dependent on a simplicity equalled only in A Mummer's Wife.

I have suggested that style and objectivity are closely related; yet in this novel, despite a style that is object-oriented rather than value-oriented, the effect is that the reader shares with the author a sympathetic attitude toward Esther and William. I think the reasons for this sympathy are complex and not attributable to the few passages of authorial comment such as the one quoted above on Esther's "heroic adventures." The most obvious cause for sympathy is control of focus; the point of view is that of omniscient author, but the reader's knowledge is primarily, though not exclusively, limited to the actions and thoughts of Esther. The difference in reader reaction to Esther and Kate Ede is that Esther's thoughts are "reliable"⁸⁸ as opposed to the unreliable rationalizations of Kate Ede. Esther analyzes situations realistically, attempting to choose a course of action,

⁸⁶Ibid., 187.

⁸⁷Ibid., 256.

⁸⁸Booth, Chap. VI, passim.

and if her choice fails, she is capable of persisting despite the failure. This does not mean that Esther is a simple, consistent character. The incongruity in her character is plainly visible in the following: "The simplest human sentiments were abiding principles in Esther--love of God, and love of God in the home. But above this Protestantism was human nature; her twentieth year thrilled within her; and no longer half-starved, her eyes opened to the beauty of the world" ⁸⁹ She tries to live according to her fundamentalist religious beliefs, and although she fails, these principles are part of her strength. ⁹⁰ Her "human nature," which Moore seemed at times to equate with sexual motivation, causes her to be seduced by William. Through seven years of struggle she adheres to the morality dictated by her religion. She is drawn into an engagement with another young fundamentalist, excited by this opportunity to return to the ways of God. But when William returns to invite her to live with him, she agrees: "She sighed and felt once again that her will was overborne by a force which she could not control or understand." ⁹¹ She not only enters the world of drink and gambling,

⁸⁹Moore, Works, V, 35.

⁹⁰It is significant that Moore, who had no sympathy with fundamentalism, rejected the opportunity to show that Esther's religion was a romantic delusion.

⁹¹Moore, Works, V, 247-248.

a world antithetical to her religious beliefs, because of her desire for William but also finds there several years of happiness because her love for husband and son transcends those values taught by her religion. The reader finally sympathizes with William because of the reliable evidence of his value given by Esther. But combined with these conflicting elements of her character, supporting first one and then the other, deriving strength from both, is the basic urge to serve her son. Much later, and therefore of doubtful validity as pure fact, Moore described the germ of the novel as the idea of "the indomitable mother who will sacrifice her life for her child Women bear the world on their shoulders when they lack that eternal instinct of motherhood that pervades the world from end to end, and perhaps extends to the farthest star."⁹² Thus Moore presented Esther's character as determined by three forces, one environmental and two "instinctive." Her reliability, the fact that she does not try to deceive herself about these forces, draws the reader's sympathy.

The major difference between Esther Waters and A Mummer's Wife appears to be that Moore rejected the moral sensationalism of the earlier novel. There is no longer the ironic shock of a contrast between the values inherent in the

⁹²George Moore, A Communication to My Friends (London: The Nonesuch Press, 1933), p. 66.

novel and the values of the reading populace. Like Kate Ede, Esther sins and suffers, but her suffering, though extreme, is finally alleviated, seemingly because she is basically good. William sins, even more than Esther, and finally suffers more than Esther. Gamblers and prostitutes meet bad ends; Esther's virtue pays off by her success in rearing her son. Poetic justice is rampant. Religion is defended; virtue is defended; motherhood is defended. All the moral expectations of Moore's audience are fulfilled. By limiting his sensationalism to baby farms and the horrors of gambling, Moore gave his reader the opportunity to react with him rather than against him.

Although the apparent moral message of the novel helped it to be a best-seller and may even explain its continuing fame, it is questionable whether this is the correct interpretation of the novel. Although this argument about theme is usually based on the question of Moore's sincerity (such a morally propagandistic novel violates his published theories on the function of art), a solution is possible only through studying the novel's final effect. Moore's improvement in his use of repetition as a structural technique is clearly visible at the end of the novel, and his most obvious use of this technique throws doubt on the moral interpretation. The novel opens with the following description of Esther:

She stood on the platform watching the receding train. The white steam curled above the few bushes that hid the curve of the line, evaporating in the pale evening. A moment more and the last carriage would pass out of sight, the white gates of the crossing swinging slowly forward to let through the impatient passengers.

Her oblong box painted reddish-brown and tied with a rough rope lay on the seat beside her. The movement of her back and shoulders showed that the bundle she carried was a heavy one, and the sharp bulging of the grey linen cloth that the weight was dead. She wore a faded yellow dress and a black jacket too warm for the day. A girl of twenty, firmly built with short, strong arms and a plump neck that carried a well-turned head with dignity.⁹³

After William dies, Esther returns to Woodview, now the scene of poverty and decay, inhabited only by Mrs. Barfield. As Esther disembarks, the first paragraph quoted above is repeated and then the changes in her features are described:

An oblong box painted reddish brown lay on the seat beside a woman of seven or eight and thirty, stout and strongly built, short arms and hard-worked hands, dressed in a dingy black skirt and a threadbare jacket too thin for the dampness of a November day. Her face was a blunt outline, and the grey eyes reflected all the natural prose of the Saxon.⁹⁴

This repetition with variation stresses only the failure of economic progression and the physical changes. Eighteen years of moral struggle have gained Esther nothing but a return to her starting place; the futility of it all is stressed by the description of the decay of Woodview. This is not moral reward but the purposeless circularity of the treadmill.

⁹³Moore, Works, V, 1.

⁹⁴Ibid., 392-393.

This technique may be awkwardly mechanical, as E. K. Brown suggests,⁹⁵ but it is functional: it does throw ironic doubt on reading the final chapters of the novel as Esther's reward for her moral struggle. But she has been rewarded by bringing her son to manhood, by her adherence to the parental instinct.

A tall soldier came through the gate. He wore a long red cloak, and a small cap jauntily set on the side of his close-clipped head. Esther uttered a little exclamation, and ran to meet him. He took his mother in his arms, kissed her, and they walked toward Mrs. Barfield together. All was forgotten in the happiness of the moment--the long fight for his life, and the possibility that any moment might declare him to be mere food for powder and shot. She was only conscious that she had accomplished her woman's work--she had brought him up to man's estate; and that was her sufficient reward. What a fine fellow he was!⁹⁶

"Her sufficient reward" is real, but here at the end of the novel the reliability of Esther fails. The contrast of the happiness of the moment with the struggle of the past and the possibility of the future throws doubt on the validity of Esther's basic motivation--parental love. Thus the built-in ironies--the discrepancy between the values of the novel and the values of the reader--are present if the novel is read carefully. All of Esther's instinct, all of her moral struggles are purposeless. This particular kind of sensationalism is muted--so quiet as to seem different from the

⁹⁵E. K. Brown, Rhythm in the Novel (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1950), p. 13.

⁹⁶Moore, Works, V, 411. Italics mine.

work of Moore's French predecessors--but the essential contrast between the morality of society and the facts of life remains the central theme. In terms of values, Moore's final experiment in pure realism is as iconoclastic as A Mummer's Wife.

The question of authorial objectivity is central to the evaluation of the novel. As already noted, the reader's sympathies are gained by the major characters, and the reader feels, justifiably, that he is sharing with the author this evaluation of Esther and William. Even if the suggestions I have made about the effect of the final chapters of the novel are erroneous in terms of Moore's intention, these chapters are, at least, a sign of equivocation on the author's part; when the author reverses his apparent attitude toward both characters and values, the effect on the reader is one of shock. Instead of manipulating his techniques so that the reader feels that he is sharing the author's objectivity, Moore misleads the reader's sympathies and then demands that the reader return to objectivity. After over three hundred pages of evidence establishing this sympathetic attitude, this reversal is an impossible task--a device which seriously mars the novel. Fortunately for Moore's reputation, the impossibility of what Moore asked of the reader is demonstrated by the almost universal blindness of readers toward the function of the last chapters.

After reading the survey studies of nineteenth-century fiction or the specialized studies of Hardy, one finds little agreement on Hardy's relation to the naturalistic tradition. The critics and scholars can be divided about equally: those working within the framework of the history of ideas call Hardy the preeminent English naturalist; those working with technique find him non-naturalistic. Although certainly I cannot offer a resolution to this disagreement by comparing a single work of Hardy, Tess of the D'Urbervilles, with Esther Waters, the juxtaposition of the two, often made by Moore's contemporaries and, as a result, picked up by Moore himself, may be helpful in making one point. I agree with Hone in finding "That the two books should be compared is strange, one being primarily a statement of metaphysical grievance, the other a human document."⁹⁷ I hope that from my discussion it is apparent that all of the novels I have connected with the naturalistic tradition have been oriented around society--usually anti-social in theme--rather than metaphysically oriented.

Dorothy Van Ghent in her analysis of Tess of the D'Urbervilles in terms of technique stresses both the non-objectivity of the author--his metaphysical theme--and his symbolic method.⁹⁸ Both of these facets are in marked con-

⁹⁷Hone, p. 195.

⁹⁸Dorothy Van Ghent, The English Novel: Form and Function (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1961), pp. 195-209.

trast to Esther Waters. In Tess, although certainly the reader is expected to disapprove of the selfish actions of Alec D'Urberville and the psychological prudery of Angel Clare and there is an ironic interplay between the moral ideals demanded by Christianity and the actual, though unwilled, actions of Tess, the novel contains no contrast between traditional values and new values. In fact, the structure of the novel suggests that traditional codes are as valuable as any, despite their uselessness in opposing supernatural force. Incongruity of characterization is exhibited by the three major characters, but as Myers pointed out, this is a characteristic trait of almost all serious novelists after 1880. In summary, the naturalistic novels of both France and England have as their subject a social problem--theoretically remediable. Hardy's best novels do not have this limitation, and although probably better novels than almost all of those which belong to the naturalistic tradition, Hardy's work exhibits only incidentally those techniques developed by Zola and his followers. The final point is that pessimistic determinism is a very poor single criterion by which to define naturalism.

The publication of Esther Waters, with which I see the end of Moore's naturalistic period (others would set it much earlier), marks the conclusion of only the first one third of his writing career. He created a major portion of his total literary output after 1894, and it was this later

work which caused him to be thought a major writer by many of his contemporaries and by some of the scholars of the present time. However important this later work might be in terms of evaluating George Moore or in creating a history of the modern novel, it is clear from the two novels following Esther Waters, Evelyn Innes (1898) and Sister Teresa (1901), that Moore's interest had shifted from society to psychology. No longer interested in the lower classes, the traditional subject matter of naturalism, he soon turned his attention from the present to the past, except for his constant revelation of his own life in his autobiographical works. Although abandoning the subject matter, purpose, and lightly assumed philosophical attitudes of naturalism, he did not reject all of the techniques which he had developed during his novelistic apprenticeship. He was still fond of the effect of sensationalism, springing from the discrepancy between the values inherent in the novel and those of his reader, and although he continued to use this technique in terms of sexual mores, his primary interests were art and religion. Of course with his new focus on the individual psyche rather than broad social patterns, panoramic structure was abandoned.

In a little over ten years of novel writing, Moore accomplished much for both the tradition of naturalism in England and, in fact, the English novel generally, although

his contributions were not quite so great as he claimed. Concurrently with Gissing, he had brought the new subject matter to England, and with the help of Vizetelly, the publisher, he had made French naturalistic fiction as well as his own Anglicized version of naturalism not only publishable in England but also palatable to the reading public. He did not invent adultery in the English novel, as he claimed, but he made the effective presentation of such a subject possible in England. His fight with the circulating libraries, although not so single-handed as he would have the reader believe, was a major contribution because it gained for English writers a greater freedom of subject matter and moral attitude and made possible the creation of novels with an organic rather than a prescribed three-volume form. Sharing the historical importance of these accomplishments are at least two novels, A Mummer's Wife and Esther Waters, which supported by example what Moore had been asserting in his journalistic propaganda. Aside from their historical importance, these novels, although not so great as the works of such contemporaries as Conrad, James, and Hardy, are still quite readable and even vital works of art.

CHAPTER III

W. SOMERSET MAUGHAM: THE FRENCH SUBJECT AND THE ENGLISH COMIC ATTITUDE

William Somerset Maugham is consistently associated with the naturalistic tradition on the basis of his "philosophical pessimism"¹ and the subject matter of his first novel Liza of Lambeth (1897) and the more famous Of Human Bondage (1915). Born in France and a master of the French language before English, Maugham repeatedly admitted the influence of de Maupassant and Flaubert. Although Claude McIver suggested Gissing as a major influence in the early work,² the formative experience determining the nature of his early fiction was his training at St. Thomas Medical School combined with the possibilities of using facts from lower class life for fiction, possibilities which he absorbed from both his French and his English predecessors. In The Summing Up Maugham explained what he learned from his medical training and described his attitude toward the world at the time that he wrote Liza of

¹Richard A. Cordell, W. Somerset Maugham (New York: Thomas Nelson and Sons, n. d.), p. 59.

²Claude McIver, William Somerset Maugham: A Study of Techniques and Literary Sources (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Dissertation, 1936), pp. 12-14.

Lambeth.

Besides teaching me something about human nature my training in a medical school furnished me with an elementary knowledge of science and scientific method. Till then I had been concerned only with art and literature I grew familiar with certain principles. The scientific world of which I attained a cursory glimpse was rigidly materialistic and because its conceptions coincided with my own prepossessions I embraced them with alacrity I was glad to learn that the mind of man (himself the product of natural causes) was a function of the brain subject like the rest of his body to the laws of cause and effect and that these laws were the same as those that governed the movements of star and atom. I exulted at the thought that the universe was no more than a vast machine in which every event was determined by a preceding event so that nothing could be other than it was. These conceptions not only appealed to my dramatic instinct; they filled me besides with a very delectable sense of liberation. With the ferocity of youth I welcomed the hypothesis of the Survival of the Fittest. It gave me much satisfaction to learn that the earth was a speck of mud whirling round a second-rate star which was gradually cooling; and that evolution, which had produced man, would by forcing him to adapt himself to his environment deprive him of all the qualities he had acquired but those that were necessary to enable him to combat the increasing cold till at last the planet, an icy cinder, would no longer support even a vestige of life. I believed that we were wretched puppets at the mercy of a ruthless fate; and that, bound by the inexorable laws of nature, we were doomed to take part in the ceaseless struggle for existence with nothing to look forward to but inevitable defeat. I learned that men were robbed by a savage egoism, and that love was only the dirty trick nature played on us to achieve the continuation of the species, and I decided that, whatever aims men set themselves, they were deluded, for it was impossible for them to aim at anything but their own selfish pleasures I was violently pessimistic. All the same, having abundant vitality, I was getting on the whole a lot of fun out of life.³

³W. Somerset Maugham, The Summing Up (Garden City: Doubleday & Co., 1948), pp. 72-73.

Armed with theory and literary models plus a notebook full of first-hand research resulting from his experiences as an obstetric intern in Lambeth, the young author was ready to contribute to the growing literature on the subject of the nether world.

At least as significant as the inherent value of Maugham's first novel is the history of its publication. The three-decker tradition had been smashed, and Maugham submitted two stories to Fisher Unwin for its inclusion in the series of inexpensive volumes entitled Pseudonym Library. The editor rejected the stories, after praising them, and invited the young writer to submit a short novel. It is indicative of the success of Moore's struggle for freedom of subject matter that Maugham did not hesitate to choose as his subject an illicit love affair set in a slum; unlike Gissing and Moore in their first novels, he could assume the right to use in his first novel both relatively new subject matter and techniques, which would have been unpublishable fifteen years before. Although some of the older members of the Fisher Unwin firm insisted that the first edition be kept small and that the objectionable word "belly" be deleted, that the book was published and, strangely enough, included such apparently unobjectionable words as "dirty bitch" and "prostitute" (as an epithet) indicates the change of temper in England concerning the proper

subject and language for novels.⁴ It is also significant that the serious reviewers spoke highly of the novel, and when one considers the history of the twenty-year period between 1880 and 1900, the contemporary critics' severity with Maugham when he abandoned his naturalistic manner in The Making of a Saint and his later novels is amusingly ironic. The naturalistic method was never triumphant in England, but by 1897 it was generally received as a serious approach to art. The struggle for acceptance was won.

Another proof of the growing strength of the tradition in England is that Maugham's first novel is technically superior to the first efforts of Gissing and Moore. The techniques and the subject matter had been defined; Maugham could forego any sugar-coating as a compromise with his audience. This hard-won security allowed Maugham to impose strict limitations upon setting and structure. Establishing his environment as Vere Street, Lambeth, "a short, straight street . . . [which] has forty houses on one side and forty houses on the other,"⁵ Maugham pictured a world populated by bored inhabitants, the dominant fact for women being repeated pregnancies and that for men alcohol.

⁴Karl G. Pfeiffer, W. Somerset Maugham: A Candid Portrait (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 1959), pp. 36-37.

⁵William Somerset Maugham, Liza of Lambeth (London: T. Fisher Unwin, Ltd., 1897), p. 2.

Maugham focused his narrative on Liza Kemp, a product of but a contrast--beautiful, vivacious, energetic--to the ugly background. Liza is unconsciously striving for values which do not exist in the pattern of the Vere Street environment, a pattern consisting of marriage, children, drink. Rejecting Tom, a nice young man who wants to marry her, she is driven by her sensual nature, which she translates into the magic word love, into an affair with Jim Blakeston, a man bored with his wife, who is worn-out with child bearing.

Maugham wisely adopted a simple, straightforward structure in which to develop his story of illicit love set against a background of ugliness. He presented in the early chapters expository material on the physical and social environment, the character of Liza, and her life with her alcoholic, hypochondriac mother through a series of dramatic episodes. The next section shows Liza and Jim developing their relationship; this material is presented through a series of scenes portraying the typical means of escape of the lower classes: a tavern-sponsored trip to the country, attendance at a sentimental melodrama at the local theater, and recreation in the pubs of Lambeth. The culmination of this section--Liza's acceptance of Jim's love--stresses the physical motivation.

"Liza," he said in a whisper, "will yer?"
 "Will I wot?" she said, looking down.
 "You know, Liza. Sy, will yer?"

"Na," she said.

He bent over her and repeated--

"Will yer?"

She did not speak but kept beating down on his hand.

"Liza," he said again, his voice growing hoarse and thick--"Liza, will yer?"

She still kept silence, looking away and continually bringing down her fist. He looked at her a moment, and she, ceasing to thump his hand, looked up at him with half-opened mouth. Suddenly he shook himself, and closing his fist gave her a violent, swinging blow in the stomach.

"Come on," he said.

And together they slid down into the darkness of the passage.⁶

The following section of the novel traces, in narrative rather than scenic development, the summer of sensual happiness and then the increasing difficulties of the relationship. Their happiness is complicated by the coming of winter, leaving them no place except train stations in which to be together, as well as the growing scandal as the affair becomes known to the inhabitants of Vere Street. The fact that this is a study is emphasized by the counterpointing of Liza's affair with the "normal" life chosen by her friend Sally. Sally marries Harry, has two months of happiness, and then discovers that she is pregnant and that Harry beats her when he has been drinking, an activity which becomes habitual. Obviously Sally's way is not the route to happiness, although in a bit of mechanical juxtaposition the drunken Jim's striking Liza follows a scene in which Harry beats Sally, thus showing

⁶ Ibid., p. 124.

that there is really not much difference between the two kinds of matches. The climax of this section of the novel stresses again this world as one of physical violence. In the fight between Liza and Mrs. Blakeston and in the subsequent beating of Mrs. Blakeston by Jim, Maugham achieved his best effects: he pictured a population, with no intellectual resources, forced to act in physically violent terms. The final section of the novel is the weakest: the death of Liza due to a miscarriage is set within the framework of Mrs. Kemp and Mrs. Hodges' conversations on morality and economy, a juxtaposition which creates an irony that is maudlin rather than effective.

The novel is a study of a lower class environment in which the inhabitants are doubly trapped. On the one hand is their belief in traditional middle class virtues--chastity, marriage, devotion to parent and children. On the other are the economic, physical, and psychological realities which pervert these virtues into a necessity for escape through drink or sex. The conflict is inevitably destructive. All action seems ultimately purposeless.

Maugham created his characters within the patterns outlined by the predecessors covered in this study. The characters have a basic inconsistency, and they create a reaction of shock in the reader because of their simultaneous sympathetic motives and morally repulsive actions. The in-

congruity of Liza is dramatized by her vacillation in her reactions to Jim. She refuses to see him, then desperately desires him to come by her house, and finally castigates him for his neglect of her, which she had imposed. Although this has an air of coquettishness, the real problem is that of an internal moral conflict: desire for love balanced against the accepted social maxim that one does not love married men. This basic conflict between middle class morality and urge for self-fulfillment is also apparent in her relations with Tom. She knows it is morally wrong to encourage Tom when she does not love him and thus refuses to go with him to the picnic; yet when she sees the happy party formed, her desire for pleasure overcomes her moral sense and she accepts Tom as an escort. The pattern of conflict is repeated at the end of the novel when the faithful Tom offers to marry her despite her pregnancy. Liza's moral sense causes her to refuse his offer, but her sense of gratitude forces her to offer Tom sexual satisfaction. Although the reader's knowledge of Jim is almost totally external, his internal conflict reflects a complex character. He can be an ardent lover of Liza and a good father to his children. His conflict is not so much between social norms and inner needs as it is between divergent requirements within himself--a need for vital, sensual love and a sincere paternal affection. He is both strong and impulsive, but

the inconsistency of his impulses debilitates his strength as the novel progresses. The minor characters, typically, fall into consistent stereotypes: Mrs. Blakeston as the outraged wife, Tom as the ever-faithful suitor, Sally and Harry as good people trapped by their environment.

The incongruity between sympathy and moral judgment set up in the reader is partially dependent upon the complexity of characterization and partially the result of the contrast between the vitality of the central characters and the repressive nature of the environment. Frierson hints at this basic technique of shocking the reader when he points out that "Unlike other English heroines who are seduced, Liza is monstrously happy."⁷

They did not meet till they got over Westminster Bridge, and thence they made their way into the Park; they would lie down on the grass in one another's arms, and thus spend the long summer evenings. After the heat of the day there would be a gentle breeze in the Park, and they would take in long breaths of the air; it seemed far away from London, it was so quiet and cool; and Liza, as she lay by Jim's side, felt her love for him overflowing to the rest of the world and enveloping mankind itself in a kind of grateful happiness.⁸

Clearly this love is not to be condemned as gross sensualism but is to be admired because of its power to unite Liza with the world, a unity impossible within the accepted norms of her environment. Adultery becomes the only means of self-

⁷ Frierson, p. 99.

⁸ Ibid., pp. 146-147.

fulfillment among the many repressive forces of Vere Street. Certainly the reader for whom the novel was designed would be shocked at the choice of sympathetic response which the author forced upon him; he must choose between the adulterous escape and destructive conformity to the environment. And he would be ever more shocked to find that there was really no freedom of choice--that the illicit affair was clearly preferable.⁹

The pattern of shock which Maugham was creating presented a serious problem for the ending. In this study of two people against the setting of Vere Street, the recurrence of the environment as an interrupter of their love makes clear that the environment is stronger than the lovers. The theme demands the triumph of environment, but the central effect of moral shock demands that the defeat of the protagonists must not appear as punishment for immoral action. Maugham's solution to this problem is one of mixed success and failure. The immediate causes of Liza's death are the beating administered by Mrs. Blakeston and the alcoholic treatment for her bruises administered by Mrs. Kemp. Trapped by a primary evil of Vere Street, pregnancy, Liza meets and is defeated by two of the primary forces of the street: Mrs. Blakeston is the outraged moral norm, surrounded during the fight by

⁹Much of this sensationalism is gained by objective tone, but a major problem in tone necessitates that this subject be treated later in the chapter.

cruelly cheering members of the neighborhood; Mrs. Kemp represents the selfish alcoholic escape which pervades the street. The animalistic viciousness of Mrs. Blakeston and the maudlin drunkenness of Mrs. Kemp are equally repulsive symbols for the destructive nature of the environment. But Maugham, perhaps feeling that his theme was still capable of distortion by the morally sensitive reader, surrounded the dying Liza by two chorus-like figures of the community whose function is to show the emptiness of community values and underline the futility of Liza's death. The fault is that the irony becomes so heavy as to become humorous--creating a discordant conflict between the seriousness of the ending and the nature of the dialogue. The parasitic Mrs. Kemp describes her life with her daughter:

"It's a great trial ter me that this should 'ave 'appened . . . Mine's always been a very respectable family, an' such a thing as this 'as never 'appened before. No, Mrs. 'Odges, I was lawfully married in church, an' I've got my marriage lines now ter show I was, an' thet one of my daughters should 'ave gone wrong in this way--well, I can't understand it. I give 'er a good education, an' she 'as all the comforts of a 'ome. She never wanted for nothin'; I worked myself to the bone to keep 'er in luxury, an' then thet she should go an' disgrace me like this."¹⁰

The sense of personal outrage fades into pride when the subject turns to insurance: "I've 'ad 'er insured ever since she was born. Why, only the other dy I was sayin' ter myself

¹⁰Maugham, Liza, pp. 233-234.

thet all thet money 'ad been wisted, but you see it wasn't; yer never know yer luck, you see!"¹¹ A discussion of the relative merits of undertakers inevitably leads to talk of memorable funerals, climaxed by this macabre description of the funeral of Mrs. Kemp's husband:

"Well, Mr. Brownin', 'e was a great big man, thirteen stone if 'e was a ounce. Well, 'e stood on the coffin, 'an a young man 'e 'ad with 'im stocd on it too, an' the lid simply wouldn't go dahn; so Mr. Brownin', 'e said, 'Jump on, missus,' so I was in my widow's weeds, yer know, but we 'ad ter git it dahn, so I stood on it, an' we all jumped, an' at last we got it to, an' screwed it; but, lor', we did 'ave a job; I shall never forget it."¹²

One might argue that this kind of thing is functional in that it points to the hypocrisy, the cheapness of life, the lack of human feeling in the environment, but the above passage is immediately followed by this paragraph:

Then all was silence. And a heaviness seemed to fill the air like a grey blight, cold and suffocating; and the heaviness was Death. They felt the presence in the room, and they dared not move, they dared not draw their breath. The silence was terrifying.¹³

Even if this paragraph were without the inappropriateness of the Poe-like tone, the shift between the ludicrous and the serious is ineffective. Maugham's choice of this technique for his conclusion is significant because it stresses

¹¹Ibid., p. 237.

¹²Ibid., p. 241

¹³Ibid.

the individual-environment conflict which had become the standard pattern for English novels intended as experimental studies and because it indicates how important the element of moral shock--the avoidance of any overtones of poetic justice--was to Maugham in the kind of novel he was writing. The failure of Maugham's conclusion shows his insecurity in knowing how to control his reader; partially this insecurity is due to Maugham's status as a novice novelist and partially to the relative newness of this technique.

Maugham was experimenting with style in Liza of Lambeth, and his experiments with style are closely related to the question of objectivity. Maugham has outlined his ideal of style for this period: "I wanted merely to set down the facts. I began with the impossible aim of using no adjectives at all. I thought that if you could find the exact term a qualifying epithet could be dispensed with."¹⁴ A basic attitude which most critics find in all of Maugham's work shows the relationship between stylistic ideal and character portrayal: "I cannot bring myself to judge my fellows; I am content to observe them. My observation has led me to believe that, all in all, there is not so much difference between the good and the bad as the moralists would have us believe."¹⁵ As long as Maugham was describing or analyzing

¹⁴ Maugham, Summing Up, p. 29.

¹⁵ Ibid., p. 58.

character in this novel, he achieved his objective ideal. Too often, however, when he treated character in its relation to setting, he sacrificed objectivity. A passage near the beginning of the novel, in which Maugham established the nature of the environment, illustrates this recurrent weakness.

Worst of all were the very young children, for there had been no rain for weeks, and the street was as dry and clean as a covered court, and, in the lack of mud to wallow in, they sat about the road, disconsolate as poets. The number of babies was prodigious; they sprawled about everywhere, on the pavement, round the doors, and about their mothers' skirts. The grown-ups were gathered round the open doors; there were usually two women squatting on the doorstep, and two or three more seated on either side on chairs; they were invariably nursing babies, and most of them showed clear signs that the present object of the maternal care would be soon ousted by a new arrival. Men were less numerous, but such as there were leant against the walls, smoking, or sat on the sills of the ground-floor windows. It was the dead season in Vere Street as much as in Belgravia, and really if it had not been for babies just come or just about to come, and an opportune murder in a neighboring doss-house, there would have been nothing whatever to talk about. As it was, the little groups talked quietly, discussing the atrocity or the merits of local midwives, comparing the circumstances of their various confinements.¹⁶

All of the elements necessary for delineating the environment are here: the crowded conditions, the boredom, the inertia are presented concretely. A major element of the environment--its productivity of children--is developed. But even here the mixture of tone which characterizes the

¹⁶Maugham, Liza, pp. 3-4.

novel is present. It is seen in the humorous conception of the children without mud and the relief of having a murder to talk about, the lightness resulting from the circumlocution regarding the women's pregnancies, and most overtly in the functionless simile "disconsolate as poets." Maugham disproves the generalization that naturalistic novels are without humor, but he may also lead one to the perception that this generalization should not be a criticism but a statement of praise. One of the most serious examples of tonal incongruity occurs in the crucial scene in the country where Liza and Jim develop an interest in each other. The function of the scene is to juxtapose gross sensuality and a delicate psychological relationship. Not satisfied with the inherent irony, Maugham subtitled one part of the scene "THE IDYLL OF CORYDON AND PHYLLIS." The first two paragraphs of the section adequately illustrate the crudeness of the irony:

Gallantry ordered that the faithful swain and the amorous shepherdess should drink out of one and the same pot.

"'Urry up an' 'ave your whack," said Corydon, politely handing the foaming bowl for his fair one to drink from.¹⁷

Frierson decides it is this "genial good humor that makes the cruel situations and the satire all the more biting."¹⁸ Among

¹⁷Ibid., p. 62.

¹⁸Frierson, p. 98.

other things, this judgment ignores the problem. The effect of the novel depends upon the reader's accepting the reality and, thus, the seriousness of both the major characters and the setting; this becomes impossible if the writer refuses to control his tone. The problem lies in Maugham's famous cynicism, a valuable asset which allowed him to become a successful comic dramatist and popular writer of short stories. This cynicism leads not to objectivity but to a lack of seriousness--an implied attack upon everything.

Although one whose primary interest was Maugham would explain this conflict in tone in terms of the writer's personality, the problem is sufficiently crucial in a study of the naturalistic tradition to pursue it a little further.

In the only naturalistic catalog¹⁹ in the novel, Liza notices the decorations of her home:

She did not want to dress yet, but rather to sit down and think, so she twisted up her hair into a little knot, slipped a skirt over her night-dress, and sat on a chair near the window and began looking around. The decorations of the room had been centred on the mantelpiece; the chief ornament consisted of a pear and an apple, a bunch of grapes, and several fat plums, all very beautifully done in wax, as was the fashion about the middle of this most glorious reign. They were appropriately coloured--the apple blushing red, the grapes an inky black, emerald green leaves were scattered here and there to lend finish, and the whole was mounted on an ebonised stand covered with

¹⁹This term is usually used with derogatory connotations; certainly this particular catalog has too little function to justify the space allotted to it.

black velvet, and protected from dust and dirt by a beautiful glass cover bordered with red plush. Liza's eyes rested on this with approbation, and the pineapple quite made her mouth water. At either end of the mantelpiece were pink jars with blue flowers on the front; round the top with Gothic letters of gold was inscribed: "A Present from a Friend"--these were products of a later, but not less artistic age. The intervening spaces were taken up with little jars and cups and saucers--gold inside, with a view of a town outside, and surrounding them, "A Present from Clacton-on-Sea," or, alliteratively, "A Momento of Margate." Of these many were broken, but they had been mended with glue, and it is well known that pottery in the eyes of the connoisseur loses none of its value by a crack or two.

Liza looked at it all and felt perfectly satisfied; she put a pin in one corner of the noble Marquess to prevent him from falling, fiddled about with the ornaments a little, and then started washing herself.²⁰

This occurs on the morning after Jim has seduced Liza, and one of the functions of the description is to show the reader Liza's satisfaction following her sexual initiation. Another function is to show the bad taste reflected in the environment and to link this aesthetic limitation to Liza, the product of the environment. Maugham's goal was to make Liza's appreciation concretely real and then ironically to undercut this appreciation by making the reader's perception of the ugliness equally real. He created the situation as if he were going to use the Flaubertian technique of allowing Liza's perception to make the irony clear--to create irony objectively (cf. Moore's success with this at the beginning of A Mummer's

²⁰ Maugham, Liza, pp. 126-130.

Wife quoted in Chap. II). But Maugham aborted this device of concurrently presenting the object and the character's reaction to the object, at the same time making it inherently clear that our reaction to the object should be opposite to that of the character. Instead he substituted the heavy irony of "this most glorious reign," "products of a later, but not less artistic age," and the sentence about the connoisseur. The effect achieved strikes one as much more false than all of Thackeray's "dear readers." This passage is an example of the necessity of something approaching objectivity on the part of an author in the naturalistic tradition. The concrete objects lose their primary function of developing the nature of the environment and delineating character. Instead, the description becomes a device for humorously showing the superior taste of the author, and it is faulty because it diverts the reader's sympathy from a character who must appear sympathetic in order for the novel to have its intended effect. More important for my purpose than what this shows about Maugham as writer is what it demonstrates about the necessity of the values of the novelist to be implicit rather than explicit in the novel utilizing moral sensationalism.

In subject matter, structure, characterization, and intended effect, Liza of Lambeth fits into the tradition which I have been tracing. Its greatest importance for this study is to demonstrate the incompatibility of satire, implying the

overt presence of the author's values, and naturalism. The book is an amazingly good first novel, but Maugham's inability to control tone not only prefigures his future career as a dramatist and novelist of manners (in the strictest sense) but also creates a major weakness in the novel. Although this technical flaw makes a bald statement of the theme of the novel sound more insincere than it otherwise would, a comment listed under 1896 in A Writer's Notebook sums up the statement the novel makes:

Everything in life is meaningless, the pain and the suffering are fruitless and futile. There is no object in life. To nature nothing matters but the continuation of the species. And is not this last a hasty proposition based on over-brief periods of time, the observation of an eye that sees but a little way.²¹

Despite the presence of many of the naturalistic techniques and its pessimistic theme, the element of satire disqualifies it for the place Walter Allen assigned it: "the completest specimen of the Naturalistic novel in English."²²

Written immediately after Liza of Lambeth but not published until 1902, Mrs. Craddock is called both a better novel and more naturalistic than Liza by some critics. Certainly its central subject--the disintegration of a marriage--is part of the tradition as seen in Madame Bovary, several of

²¹W. Somerset Maugham, The Partial View (London: William Heinemann, Ltd., 1954), p. 27.

²²Walter Allen, The English Novel: A Short Critical History (New York: E. P. Dutton & Co., Inc., n. d.), p. 392.

Gissing's works, and Moore's A Mummer's Wife. Like its predecessors on the theme, the novel's basic conflict is between a husband and wife of disparate character and social background. The study is concerned with whether an intelligent, educated, passionate woman of the gentry can be happy with a practical, unimaginative, cold man of the farming class. Except for some early satire, the difference in class becomes subordinated to differences in personality.

Structurally the novel is simple: the passionate Bertha Ley, wanting love desperately, woos and wins one of her tenants, Edward Craddock; there follows a period of happiness; next is the period of disillusionment climaxed by Bertha's realization that she no longer loves her husband; after a futile attempt to find love with a younger cousin, Bertha returns home to gain her freedom by means of the accidental death of Edward.

Although there is no attempt to limit point of view, in the technical sense, both the plot and the psychological interest focus on Bertha Craddock, and because of this, she is the only complexly realized character. The violent sensuality of her love, the repression of her ideals and tastes in favor of those of Edward, the vacillation between willfulness and subservience, and her final cynical rejection of all that Edward represents contribute to her effective incongruity. The changing values she assigns to Edward are

both subtly and believably presented. After finding it impossible to continue to love Edward, she desperately needs an outlet for her love, which for her is the only meaningful thing in life; she transfers her love to her profligate cousin, nine years her junior. Even this episode would have been acceptable in terms of Bertha's complex need if Maugham had succeeded in creating something other than a slang-spouting stereotype as the young lover. The inanity of Gerald makes the reader doubt Bertha's taste and finally the adequacy of her goal--the all-consuming love in which she may submerge herself.

Unfortunately for the effectiveness of the novel, all the characters except Bertha are stock figures. Edward Craddock is the insensitive farmer who repeatedly defeats Bertha by the simple device of not recognizing there is a conflict. He exists almost entirely as an object against which Bertha reacts. But as soon as Edward's unchangeably moral character is established dramatically, Maugham inappropriately chooses to use him as a satirical device--an excuse for the author to show his wit. Typical of Maugham's handling of Edward is the following:

If the gods, who scatter wit in sundry unexpected places, so that it is sometimes found beneath the bishop's mitre and, once in a thousand years, beneath a king's crown, had given Edward two-pennyworth of that commodity, he should undoubtedly have been a great as well as a good man. Fortune smiled upon him uninterruptedly; he enjoyed the envy of his neighbors; he farmed with profit,

and, having tamed the rebellious spirit of his wife, he rejoiced in domestic felicity. And it must be noted that he was rewarded only according to his deserts. He walked with upright spirit and contented mind along the path which it had pleased a merciful Providence to set before him. He was lighted on the way by a strong Sense of Duty, by the Principles which he had acquired at his Mother's Knee, and by a Conviction of his own merit.²³

In addition to the inherent weakness of irony by capitalization, Maugham sacrificed objectivity and repeated in terms of analysis what he had already established dramatically only in order, as far as I can see, to present a rather weak witticism at the expense of kings and bishops. This kind of treatment of one of the major characters inevitably weakens the conflict, thus depriving the novel of some of its inherent interest.

In the opening chapters of the novel, Polly Ley, the aunt of Bertha, serves as the spokesman for the author. Uninvolved and cynical, she satirically presents the author's attitude toward empty pretensions. Typical of her expressed opinions are these two, both of which reflect Maugham's ideas: "Marriage is always a hopeless idiocy for a woman who has enough money of her own to live upon," and "The particular function of a woman is to propagate her species; and if she's wise she'll choose a strong and healthy man to be the father

²³William Somerset Maugham, Mrs. Craddock (London: William Heinemann, 1902), p. 248.

of her children."²⁴ Using a witty raisonneur in a realistic novel creates at least two difficulties: first the character is too witty to be real, and second the character as spokesman for the author inevitably directs the values of the reader, thus depriving the novel of the complexity necessary for reflecting reality. Perhaps an even greater flaw in this novel is that Miss Ley disappears for long periods and her humorous function is taken over by the author himself, a situation which is even more fatal to the realistic effect than the presence of the author's voice within a character.

The other characters of the novel are all satirical scarecrows, making no claims for reality or interest. Their major function is to serve as a deluded jury--deciding that Edward is a far more valuable person than Bertha. The types are all well known: the prudish sister of the parson, the snobbish country lady, the pompous general, and the ineffective ex-politician. They are far more appropriate--and in fact their types reappear--in Maugham's popular comedies of manners.

Mrs. Craddock is a strange mixture of social study and comedy of manners. One way to see the naturalistic element Maugham included is to work with a comparison Polly Ley offers: "Better ten thousand times . . . was it to be Becky Sharp and a monster of wickedness than Amelia and a

²⁴Ibid., pp. 47 and 49.

monster of stupidity."²⁵ Edward, full of moral earnestness, represents the monster of stupidity, and Bertha, though certainly not so extreme as Becky, represents the monster of wickedness. She is sensually passionate, she gives a tirade against the goodness of God, she turns against her husband--and yet Maugham makes her the sympathetic character of the novel. Maugham, like Moore, uses the technique of moral shock, playing off the values inherent in the novel against those of the reader. But in Mrs. Craddock, even more than in Liza of Lambeth, the authorial intrusion of Maugham the wit prevents the reader's taking the problem seriously. In fact in the second novel, Maugham's contempt for "the monster of stupidity" makes the conflict so uneven that, rather than being shocked by Bertha, the reader shares her values because he does not wish to be associated with the laughter directed at Edward. Old values are under attack, but the primary weapon is comedy, not the presentation of a realistic problem, although there is an attempt--if not impossible, at least a failure in this attempt--to fuse the two.

Even though Maugham failed to create a naturalistic novel with Mrs. Craddock, this fact alone does not make it a bad novel. Mrs. Craddock fails in its strongest point, the presentation of the heroine. Bertha's movement is from a love of Edward based upon delusion to a realistic vision of

²⁵Ibid., p. 41.

her husband in which love is impossible. Although Polly Ley and Maugham have both warned us that marriage is a repressive state and even hinted that love is a delusion, Bertha's belief in love is presented as a real value. It is only when she transfers this love to the vapid Gerald that a note of ironic incongruity throws doubt upon her values. The question becomes whether Maugham intended Bertha to be seen as the deluded romantic woman--a Madame Bovary--or he simply failed in the creation of Gerald, thus unintentionally making their love scenes ludicrous. The anticlimactic conclusion showing Bertha "tired of love and hate"²⁶ offers little aid. Is she finally facing the reality that love itself, like her love for Edward, is a delusion, or is she a woman whose admirable capacity for love has been thwarted by the repressive rules of a ludicrous society? If the former is true, the ending is the final unmasking of a comedy in which all the characters, except the witty Polly Ley, are fools. If the latter, the novel is a pathetic picture of the determinism imposed by social pressures. The novel is a failure because there is no solution to this problem. In attempting to fuse witty comedy and naturalistic purpose, Maugham lost control of his theme. The problem is symbolized by the two possible titles of the novel: the first sentence of the novel is

²⁶ Ibid., p. 371.

"This book might be called also The Triumph of Love."²⁷ With its obvious ironic overtones and its echo of Restoration comedy titles, it is in strange contrast to the realistic sound of Mrs. Craddock.

The two novels Maugham published after Liza of Lambeth were mistakes, according to both Maugham and his critics. The Making of a Saint (1898) was a historical novel set in Italy, and The Hero (1901) was an exercise in iconoclasm in which the author failed to create either a plot or characters adequate to bear the weight of his ideas. It is filled with Darwinian speeches and contains an interesting attempt to show that the protective love of a middle class environment can be just as deterministic and destructive as the economic and cultural deprivation of Vere Street. However, the protagonist James Parsons is incapable of holding the reader's interest, and the action alternates between scenes offering James opportunities for morally shocking bombast and scenes of pure satire on the members of the middle class community. In the line of poetry Maugham chose as an epigraph--"O Sophonisba, Sophonisba, O!"²⁸--I detect a hint that he too had trouble taking this novel seriously.

Soon after the turn of the century, Maugham became primarily a writer of plays, and the novels he published be-

²⁷Ibid., p. 1.

²⁸William Somerset Maugham, The Hero (London: Hutchinson and Co., 1901), facing p. 1.

tween 1904 and 1915 were weak attempts to make money. Only with Of Human Bondage (1915) did Maugham return to the novel as a serious art form, and the technique and tone of that novel prove the permanence of what he learned from his early experiments in naturalistic fiction.

Although certainly it would be erroneous to claim that the naturalistic movement was dominant or even fully accepted by English readers and reviewers at the time Maugham began writing, that a young man in search of a monetarily successful literary career would choose to create his first work in that growing tradition proves that the literary climate of England had undergone a great shift since 1880. Unlike Gissing, Maugham was not forced to choose the lower classes as subject because of limited experience and personal bitterness. Unlike Moore, he was not inspired to lead a literary revolution. Instead the young Maugham was convinced that "The ordinary is the writer's richer field. Its unexpectedness, its singularity, its infinite variety afford unending material."²⁹ Maugham's remark that "such a success as Liza of Lambeth had was due to a lucky chance"³⁰ is not quite accurate; a public had been prepared for books on the subject, and techniques had been developed to treat the subject. It is also significant that, in addition to money,

²⁹Maugham, Summing Up, p. 6.

³⁰Ibid., p. 164.

Maugham's goal has always been artistic rather than propagandistic; he shared this aesthetic goal with both Gissing and Moore. Thus it was possible at the end of the Nineteenth Century for a young artist to begin his literary career in the naturalistic tradition with as little struggle--both in terms of aesthetic and public problems--as in any other tradition.

The early books of Maugham show him as an imitator rather than an originator. His subjects had been treated by both his French and his English predecessors; both city slum and country estate had been exploited as settings by Gissing and Moore. His primary effect of sympathetically presenting characters and incidents which would be classed immoral by his readers was already well established as part of the tradition. In his creation of complex, incongruous characters, he is in the tradition of both the naturalists and the realists. If Maugham contributed anything, it was the tightening of structure: his selection of character and event is based upon a desire to compare and contrast to gain a panoramic effect, but by carefully limiting the environments which he presented, he gained a greater structural simplicity than had been exhibited by either Gissing or Moore. Seldom does he rely upon massive detail to establish his setting. In his first two novels the focus is narrow and the movement is rapid, facts which indicate Maugham's superiority of form over, at least, Gissing.

But Maugham's major weakness in his early novels is his most instructive aspect in terms of this study. His failure to be objective--to permit the reader to feel that he is allowed to judge the characters for himself--is a consistent flaw. Maugham's witty cynicism not only creates an inconsistent tone, which is aesthetically unpleasant, but also causes confusion in evaluation of the characters and the action. The conflict between Maugham the social satirist and Maugham the objective reporter causes the reader to doubt the sincerity and, finally, the truth of the work. It leads to the question of how, if the author can take his situations no more seriously than he does, can they be worth reading about. His failure attests to the necessity of giving the effect of objectivity in the naturalistic novel. It is odd that it is objectivity in which Maugham has taken consistent pride and the trait for which he is most consistently praised. Typical is Walter Allen's statement: "Maugham's has always been the role of the impartial spectator who watches but does not judge."³¹ This is a quality demanded by the tradition in which he was working in his early novels, and it is precisely where he failed. Maugham and his critics failed to make an essential distinction between cynical contempt and impartiality.

³¹ Allen, p. 392.

Maugham's scientific determinism, attested to during this period in the passage quoted earlier in this chapter, is, except in The Hero, not overtly apparent in the early novels. There are Malthusian overtones in the fecundity stressed in Liza of Lambeth, but the theory of "the Survival of the Fittest" is not apparent because Liza is both physically and emotionally the fittest of the characters. The determinism of the novel is social, not biological. This is also true of Mrs. Craddock. Both books serve as a protest against outmoded social and moral norms, and although the motivation of both Liza and Bertha is sexual, this is raised above the animalistic level by linking it with love and human self-development. But the techniques, not the deterministic theory, are what link these two early novels to the naturalistic tradition.

Two of Maugham's early novels are still readable, and many scenes in Liza of Lambeth and the study of the disintegration of the marriage in Mrs. Craddock still have power. Neither is a consistently good novel, but both, in their strengths and their weaknesses, illustrate the essential elements of the naturalistic tradition for which they were designed. Their existence shows the growing tradition and the increasing acceptance of this kind of novel. By 1900 naturalism was a sufficiently integrated part of the English novelistic tradition so that more creative men could adapt its techniques to new uses to create great novels.

CODA

LITERARY NATURALISM IN ENGLAND

The causes of the introduction of literary naturalism in England are so complex and seemingly inexplicable that one is tempted to agree with John Davidson's cockney lady in Earl Lavender when speaking of decadence, a movement closely associated with naturalism: "It's the fang-de-seeaycle that does it, my dear, and education, and reading French."¹ Cargill has summed up the scholarship showing that French naturalism was a product of political, economic, and moral disillusionment.² Despite the depressions of 1873-1886 and 1893-1894, no series of events in England during the 1880's and 1890's can be equated with those in France in the 1870's. The development of the social and moral implications of natural selection and, even more important, the influence of foreign literary theories and practices appear the most likely causal factors of the growth of naturalism in England.

The naturalistic novels created by the English writers exhibit several differences from those created by Flaubert,

¹Holbrook Jackson, The Eighteen Nineties: A Review of Art and Ideas at the Close of the Nineteenth Century (London: G. Richards, 1914), p. 20.

²Cargill, Chap. I, passim.

Zola, and their followers. The most obvious of these differences is the English reticence in using some of the subject matter of the French works. In English there is no study of prostitution equivalent to Nana; there is no study of degradation with the concreteness of L'Assommoir. The treatment of sex is, of course, the subject in which the contrast is most noticeable, but the English writers never achieved the stress upon the sensuality of man that Zola did, for instance in his descriptions of odors. Another element of French practice which the early English writers never used was the symbolism of, most notably, Madame Bovary, L'Assommoir, and Germinal. The closest approximation to this technique of adding depth is Gissing's tentative use of graveyard and jail in The Nether World, rather weakly analogous to the device in L'Assommoir. The first of these differences points to the concessions which had to be made to the English reading public, the second to the heart of any comparison between French and English naturalists of the Nineteenth Century--unlike Gissing, Moore, and Maugham, Flaubert and Zola were masters of their techniques; they created great novels.

But the central question of what the English writers, limited though they may be, had in common with each other remains. Despite Zola's vagueness in Le Roman Experimentale on the relationship between experimental truth and beauty or art, the statements of Gissing, Moore, and Maugham show that they, like their decadent contemporaries, were interested in the

novel as an art form and in art for its own sake. Despite Gissing's failure to achieve this goal, all three writers are to be taken seriously in their rejection of the propagandistic or moral function of the novel. For each of them art for art's sake meant an abandonment of the purpose of the older novel, with its always implicit and too often explicit support of current middle class moral norms. They each realized that a rejection of the traditional purpose meant rejection of many of the traditional techniques; the tracing of their often painful search for new techniques has been the subject of this study so far. Their statements of artistic aims indicate that each thought that in rejecting the old moral patterns he was rejecting moral judgments altogether. The fallacy of this belief is, I hope, now obvious.

This common goal of art for art's sake led them, with the example of French practice as an additional guide, to a choice of new subject matter: one way to evade the traditional preachment of middle class morality was to avoid writing about the middle class. Gissing, Moore, and Maugham, like Zola, tried to apply naturalistic techniques and attitudes to middle class and even higher class society, but in each case--in The Whirlpool and Born in Exile, in A Modern Lover and A Drama in Muslin, and in Mrs. Craddock--they created social satire rather than an objective study. Perhaps because of the relative simplicity of the characters, the

ease of defining environment and thus linking character to environment, or the lack of necessity to study manners rather than morals, each writer created something closer to Zola's description of the experimental novel when he took as his subject the lives of characters in lower class surroundings. The fact that choice of subject is part of the tradition is proven by the recurrence of certain subjects in the works of these three writers: the disintegration of a marriage (almost all of Gissing's books, A Modern Lover, A Mummer's Wife, Mrs. Craddock), adultery (The Nether World, A Mummer's Wife, Liza of Lambeth), the unmarried woman (The Odd Women, A Drama in Muslin), and economic difficulties (almost all). Although these subjects are not unique to the naturalistic tradition, the combination of the theoretical beliefs of these three writers and the opportunities and problems posed by the nature of the subject matter caused the writers to adopt techniques which are associated with naturalism.

One of the ways of stating the problem of Gissing, Moore, and Maugham when faced by the new subject matter is that they wanted to avoid using the environment as a simple backdrop for a traditional plot. The problem was to make the setting both realistic and functional: concrete description gained the effect of reality but only by creating a causal relationship between the setting and the actions of the characters could any real functional effect be gained. Gissing's

technique for gaining a sense of reality for his setting was to delineate not only the appearance of the environment through description but also its power through an analysis of economic, social, and moral patterns. This kind of presentation of the setting demanded a breadth which could not be effectively created through a limited focus on one or two or even four characters. To make all facets of his environment real, he had to avoid the effect of over-simplification by illustrating the environment in a number of ways, and each of these ways had to be made to appear functional through showing its effect upon character. The requirement of breadth of presentation created the central structural problem--how to gain unity for this panoramic presentation. Gissing solved this problem by interrelating his many characters and scenes through comparisons and contrasts. This offered a principle of selection for both scenes and characters, and gave the effect of a study of the environment not only in breadth but also in depth.

This structural technique used by Gissing was a borrowed one, available from both French and Russian models. Moore's use of this structure is apparent in A Modern Lover in his choice of three women from three social levels, his contrasts of various environments, and his presentation of the artistic community. It is used more effectively, because of greater selectivity, in the contrast of the Hanley-

Bohemian environment and of the characters representing these two environments in A Mummer's Wife. Although also apparent in A Drama in Muslin and Mike Fletcher, it is more effective in Esther Waters where the world of the servant and the world of gambling are both developed through a series of contrasting scenes and characters. A much more economical use of the same structural technique is apparent in Liza of Lambeth, especially in terms of choice of characters. Maugham achieves this economy by narrowing his setting--the eighty houses of Vere Street as opposed to the sprawling mass of Gissing's Clerkenwell--and omitting any comparison between his central environment and an outside one. I am not suggesting that this panoramic method is the only means of organizing a naturalistic novel but only that this was the most common method used by the English writers who first exhibited naturalistic tendencies.

A principle of selection of characters did not, of course, furnish a means of characterization. In absolute terms, Gissing, Moore, and Maugham relied on the two traditional devices, analysis and dramatic presentation, although Gissing toyed with the interior monologue and all used the indirect discourse of Flaubert's Madame Bovary rather awkwardly. But led by Zola away from the use of ideals in fiction and recognizing that real people did not act upon a consistent ideal, as earlier writers had seemed to think, these writers

developed characters exhibiting what Myers called incongruity. This kind of characterization was not only more like life but also was necessary for the functional linking of character and setting. The favorite way of showing this link was to demonstrate that a shift in environment brought a shift in character. Thus Kate, Esther Waters, Clara Hewett, and Mrs. Craddock undergo radical changes under varying conditions. This close connection between incongruity of character, also a trait associated with the realistic tradition, and environment is one of the ways in which naturalism differs from realism.

But more important than general structure or incongruity of characterization in differentiating the naturalistic tradition from the realistic one is the technique used to gain the effect of authorial objectivity. The goal of objectivity was important to these writers not only because it was central to Zola's methodology for the experimental novel but also because it offered a means of reaction against the moral themes of the traditional British novel. The first requirement for gaining the effect of objectivity was impartiality toward characters, which was partially achieved by incongruity of characterization and restraint of authorial generalization. More important to this effect, however, was the rejection of plots in which the morally good were rewarded and the bad punished. It appears to me, at this point in this

study, that the pessimism associated with English naturalism is due at least as much to a reaction against traditional plot forms as it is to a commitment to a new philosophy, although, of course, the two are closely related. The final unhappiness of the morally upright Sidney Kirkwood, the death of Kate Ede with its implicit contrast to the happiness of Dick Lennox, the futility of the death of Liza Kemp function, in each case, to stress the writer's impartiality toward a character whom the reader has judged sympathetically. These denouements shock the reader because they throw doubt upon his belief, created by fiction rather than reality, that there is a system of rewards and punishments dependent upon human action. This final effect, so often noticed by critics of naturalism, is the central sensational element of naturalism.

In terms of this moral sensationalism, Gissing is different from Moore and Maugham. The death of Arthur Golding is meaningless, if not silly, rather than shocking. The final unhappiness of Jane Snowden and Sidney Kirkwood is a moral assertion in traditional terms; like Isabel Archer's return to Gilbert Osmond at the end of The Portrait of a Lady, their decision is morally right because it reflects moral strength. In the destruction of Clara's ambitions and in the death of Bob Hewett, Gissing might have achieved moral shock, but by his final focus on the plot characters he implies that the destruction of Clara and Bob is due to their lack of moral

self-restraint. Although akin to the naturalists in many of his techniques, Gissing is, in this aspect, a social realist.

Gissing, like Moore and Maugham, uses the more easily achieved sensationalism which is akin to that of the journalistic expose. Many of the shocking scenes are not designed to affect the reader's moral perspective but only his sensitivity or feeling of decorum. Gissing's descriptions of slums, holidays, and economic injustice, Moore's treatment of sickness, alcoholism, the conditions of servants, the destructiveness of gambling, and the baby farm, and Maugham's presentation of alcoholism, the ugliness of Vere Street, and the fight between the two women are repulsive and sometimes grotesque. The reader may react by feeling that something should be done about these horrible conditions, but his sense of moral security is not attacked by these scenes.

The effect gained by Moore and Maugham through the frustration of the reader's moral expectations is that of throwing doubt upon the validity of these moral expectations. Gissing's failure as a novelist can be seen in this context: he sacrifices impartiality by causing the reader to judge one set of characters by a traditional moral ideal and yet introduces another set of characters, e.g., the amoral Clem and the helpless Pennyloaf, who are expected to be judged objectively outside the posited moral realm. Inevitably this leads to the confusion of the reader, a confusion spring-

ing from Gissing's own inability to sacrifice or reconcile traditional moral norms and a new scientific morality. Gissing, striving for neutrality toward values, only arrived at inconsistency. In contrast, the effect of both A Mummer's Wife and Liza of Lambeth is that of an attack on the Victorian moral code; Bohemian sexual promiscuity is preferable to Hanley morality; Liza is destroyed because in her justified striving to be human she does not conform to the injunction against adultery and to the empty ideal of respectability. Although Moore and Maugham claim complete objectivity toward all values, an attack upon one set of values implies something other than absolute neutrality toward values. If their attack upon outmoded values is to avoid the confusion in which Gissing was trapped, if the moral shock is to be effective, the novels must imply, if only lightly, a more or less consistent alternate set of values. That this alternate set of values exists is not only logically but historically apparent, as can be seen by the consistent linking of literary naturalism with pessimistic determinism, monistic materialism, or the values of nature. Although almost all scholars insist that these new values are in the novels and can usually prove it by quoting from letters or non-fictional works, just as I have done, locating these values in the novels themselves has proved a rather bewildering task for at least two reasons: first, these writers attempted to avoid the overt expression

of values within their novels because they associated this technique with the traditional novel; second, intellectually for Gissing, Moore, and Maugham these new ideas were tenuous, temporary, and sometimes confused. Partially because of their own intellectual insecurity and partially because of their artistic ideals, Moore and Maugham could not attack old values explicitly as Butler attacked the values of parenthood in The Way of All Flesh or satirically as he attacked the machine age in Erewhon.

Perhaps one way of approaching an understanding of the new values inherent in the novels of Moore and Maugham is to isolate a few generalizations which can be compared with the effects of the novels. Although it is little better than quoting an author's statements outside his fiction, I have chosen the following statements from Maugham's The Hero, one of whose weaknesses is the explicitness with which Maugham's ideas on natural morality are presented. Although in the following passage, James Parsons is talking to his uncle, it might serve as a direct speech to the reader on the justification for the stress upon sexuality in the early novels of Moore and Maugham:

"You live here surrounded by all sorts of impossible ways of looking at life. How can your outlook be sane when it is founded on a sham morality? You think the body is indecent and ugly, and that the flesh is shameful. Oh, you don't understand. I'm sick of this prudery which throws its own hideousness over all it sees. The soul and the body are one, indissoluble. Soul is body, and body is soul.

Love is the God-like instinct of procreation. You think sexual attraction is something to be ignored, and in its place you put a bloodless sentimentality--the vulgar rhetoric of a penny novelette. If I marry a woman, it is that she may be the mother of children. Passion is the only reason for marriage; unless it exists, marriage is ugly and beastly. It's worse than beastly; the beasts of the field are clean I know nothing purer than the body, nothing higher than the divine instincts of nature."³

It is some such theory as this implicit in the action that enables Moore to make the reader sympathize with Kate's abandonment of her husband for the sensual Dick Lennox and with Esther's refusal to marry the religiously and financially secure young man to return to William, her seducer, and to make Esther's ensuing happiness understood. The talk of love and the portrayal of sensuality between Liza and Jim depend upon this theoretical basis as does the discrepancy between Mrs. Craddock's great expectations from marriage and the disappointing reality. One of the bases of the attack on traditional morality, therefore, is a redefinition of love: love is no longer an ideal matching of souls but a concrete sensual experience. Gissing's inability to align himself with either the old or the new is obvious in his contrasting treatment of Jane and Sidney, Bob and Pennyloaf. It is in the treatment of love that Moore and Maugham achieve their best effects of moral shock.

Another rejection was that of decorum, the tradition

³Maugham, The Hero, p. 208.

of manners. James Parsons expresses it in this way:

But we all know that Nature is a goddess with no sense of decency, for whom the proprieties are simply non-existent; men and women in her eyes have but one point of interest, and she walks abroad with her fashioning fingers, setting in order the only work that she cares for. All the rest is subsidiary, and she is callous to suffering and to death, indifferent to the Ten Commandments and even to the code of Good Society.⁴

Despite Lionel Trilling's persuasive argument that manners and morals are the same in the novel,⁵ I think that it is helpful in dealing with the early naturalistic novel to keep a distinction between the two. Gissing, especially in Born in Exile, Moore, in A Modern Lover and A Drama in Muslin, and Maugham, in Mrs. Craddock and The Hero, deal primarily with manners--the concern with methods in social activity--and in each case they sacrifice objectivity as the tone becomes satirical. Although it may limit the value of the novel, the more naturalistic novels of these writers are concerned with an attack upon false moral patterns--centered upon "the Ten Commandments" rather than "the code of Good Society." It is a shocking breach of decorum when Kate vomits in a cab and makes a spectacle of herself on the street, but the real issue is that Kate is destroying herself because she is hopelessly burdened with a belief in the Ten Commandments. Liza is equally aware of and equally affected by the

⁴Ibid., p. 37.

⁵Trilling, "Manners, Morals, and the Novel," The Liberal Imagination, pp. 200-215.

moral law against adultery and the environmental reality of inhuman stagnation of those who obey the Commandments in Vere Street; inherent in the novel is that she made the right choice in rejecting traditional morality. Both Moore and Maugham attempt to give the effect that they are as "indifferent to the Ten Commandments" as nature, but ultimately their attitude is not indifference but rejection in favor of a vaguely defined natural morality.

And finally there is the appeal to nature as the new biology defines it; James Parsons sums up the conception which was apparently held by Moore and Maugham and, to a lesser extent, Gissing:

Many people say that war is inhuman and absurd; many people are uncommonly silly. When they think war can be abolished, they show a phenomenal ignorance of the conditions of all development. War in one way or another is at the very root of life. War is not only conducted by fire and sword; it is in all nature, it is the condition of existence for all created things. Even the wild flowers in the meadow wage war, and they wage it more ruthlessly even than man, for with them defeat means extermination. The law of nature is that the fit should kill the unfit. The Lord is the Lord of Hosts. The lame and the halt and the blind must remain behind, while the strong man goes his way rejoicing.⁶

It is one of the ironies of the history of criticism that the norm of the survival of the fittest should have been used as one of the touchstones for the identification of naturalistic fiction when the idea remains either obscure or non-existent

⁶Maugham, The Hero, p. 65.

in most of the novels identified as naturalistic that I have analyzed. In purely biological terms, the most fit character is Clem Peckover, and she certainly impresses no reader as the desired norm; but Gissing's confusion of values makes this an unfair test. Lewis Seymour and Esther Waters survive, but in both cases the price of survival is so high that the characters seem a pattern for the unfit rather than the fit. Liza seems far stronger and more worthy of survival than any other character or than Vere Street itself, but she fails to survive. Bertha Craddock survives as a disillusioned woman, but she hardly seems to furnish a norm of values with which to test impersonal nature. Ironically James Parsons, the hero of The Hero, the man free enough to reject all that is old and recognize the pattern of survival of the fittest, commits suicide; the implications of this action for the theme of the novel are obscure, but one way of interpreting it is to see the old values and the characters who adhere to them as the fittest. They are certainly the survivors.⁷ Only in A Mummer's Wife, with its form controlled by a strict focus on contrasting environments, does it become clear that Dick Lennox has found a route to survival that is impossible for Kate, who has lost her fitness by abandoning her natural environment.

⁷The Hero is either intended as a satire on naturalism or else is the most pointless novel in the early naturalistic tradition.

The reason for the relative absence of the idea of the survival of the fittest and the corollary implication from the hypothesis of natural selection, determinism, is not solely due to the lack of conviction on the part of the writers. The problem, as Walcutt and others have pointed out, is a technical one of finding a device through which the mechanics of survival and determinism can be presented. The economic factor seemed most usable with the subject of the lower class world, but both Gissing and Moore found it too imprecise to be useful as a determinant of actions. Starvation was hard to make probable, and even without money, a character still had many possible choices of action. Even Zola could not make heredity a very convincing force, and Moore and Gissing had neither as much scientific knowledge nor talent, and Maugham, as a doctor, knew better than to attempt to use it. This left only social and moral forces, and although all three writers achieved some success in making these forces seem real and in making them seem to affect the lives of their characters, a close reading of any of these novels, with the possible exception of A Mummer's Wife, will allow the reader to detect an uncertainty about values which contribute to survival and, without exception, decisions by characters in no way determined by outside forces. It is significant that, despite the examples of Zola and Hardy, none of these writers presented the forces

of nature, other than human nature, as the opponent for their characters. One of the characteristics of early English naturalism is its complex social setting--mostly urban, but even when rural, highly civilized--with the exclusion of any kind of natural primitivism in the setting.

Of these major points underlying their criticism of current English morality, a criticism presented by means of moral shock, the rejection of old sexual taboos in favor of a new definition of love in terms of passion and procreation is the only positive value. These novelists rejected the morality symbolized by the Ten Commandments but offered little in its place. They probably believed in the natural values which lead to survival, but they could seldom decide what these values were and could not find any way of integrating those few they did perceive into fiction, just as they could find no way of fictionally demonstrating determinism, a doctrine they all believed in at one time or another. Although the work of all three men sometimes has the effect of economic and social protest, except for Gissing's earlier work, there is no attempt to suggest solutions for these problems. In fact, again with the exception of Gissing, it is doubtful if they were seriously interested in the conditions of the lower classes except as a source of fictional material. The purpose of Moore and Maugham, other than aesthetic, was moral protest, vaguely defined though it was.

The three English writers who have been called early naturalists shared a general common purpose. They were interested in communicating reality--truth--in the form of the novel. Although each was capable, in the heat of creating propaganda to defend his particular method of searching for truth, of echoing Zola's assertion that the only valid criticism of a naturalistic novel emerges from a comparison of the novel with the reality it imitated, they asserted, in their more serious theoretical writing, that their purpose was artistic--not purely imitative. Their primary purpose, therefore, was to transmute reality into art so that the novel simultaneously reflected the reality and the art.

To achieve this purpose and to break away from the patterns of their predecessors they adopted and developed a series of techniques as well as selected a new subject matter. Most of these techniques served as means to give the reader the effect of authorial objectivity. Gissing, both unsure of his values and his techniques, failed to achieve this effect of impartiality which seems central to some of the work of Moore, whose A Mummer's Wife is the nearest thing to an experimental novel, as described by Zola, that England produced during this period. Maugham, at the end of the period, sacrificed objectivity in the opposite way from Gissing; rather than showing sympathy with one set of characters, he rejected impartiality by a cynical contempt for his characters, trans-

forming them from figures whom the reader can take seriously to satirical caricatures. But Maugham's weakness does not totally obscure his effect of moral sensationalism, nor does it cause Liza of Lambeth to fail through confusion of theme as does much of the work of Gissing. The contrasting flaws of Gissing and Maugham illustrate the closeness of naturalism to two other prose fiction forms. On the one hand, there is critical or social realism, in which the reflection of reality is placed within a traditional moral framework; on the other hand is satire, in which reality is often sacrificed to gain both humor and the satirist's vision of the truth. These two traditions share many of the characteristics isolated in the naturalistic novels studied so far: lower class subject matter (Gaskell, Reade, Dickens), panoramic structure organized around comparisons and contrasts (War and Peace, Conrad's Nostromo), incongruity of characterization (almost all serious fiction after 1880), and objectivity (James, Conrad, and Ford). Only the technique of moral sensationalism based upon natural values seems to be distinctive of naturalism.

CHAPTER IV

HAMLIN GARLAND: CONFLICTING PURPOSES AND THE AMERICAN TRADITION

Gissing began his writing career, because of his reaction to the unpleasant experiences forced upon him, as an idealist exposing the weaknesses of society. Despite his change of literary theory and social ideals, almost all of his novels illustrate his struggle between the novel as didactic protest against the failure of English society to attain its ideal aims and the novel as objective presentation of truth. Both Moore, in A Drama in Muslin, and Maugham, in The Hero, indulge in social protest. None of these works fit very neatly into the naturalistic tradition, but these writers as well as Zola illustrate the overlapping of didactic practice and naturalistic theory. Zola, Gissing, Moore, and Maugham were conscious of the failure of their cultures to achieve the mythic ideal conceived by the people of these cultures. Although La Terre centers on and A Drama in Muslin touches upon the pastoral element of the dream, most of the European and English works took urban or tightly structured societies as their subjects. One of the major differences between the United States and England or France was a differ-

ence in national ideals: the American dream was Jeffersonian agrarian individualism. It was natural, therefore, that, under the pressure of the mass of dream-shattering ideas which flooded western civilization in the last half of the Nineteenth Century, in the United States the first fictional expressions of disillusionment should be concerned with rural life. The laboratory in which the agrarian dream was tested and found wanting from 1870 to 1900 was the Middle West. As Grant C. Knight asserts, perhaps underestimating the power of foreign influences, the recognition of the conflict between the dream and reality led writers to present the reality, thus creating an indigenous realistic tradition in America.¹ The works of Edward Eggleston, E. W. Howe, and Joseph Kirkland had, by 1890, established a tentative tradition for the realistic treatment of the agrarian society of the Middle West. Their contribution was almost wholly in terms of new subject matter, not techniques, but limited though their contribution was, it was enough to inspire a more conscious artist, the young Hamlin Garland.

Hamlin Garland has proved more difficult for historians to classify than any minor figure has a right to be. He seems better than the local colorists with whom he associated himself. He seems different from Howells whom he admired.

¹Grant C. Knight, The Critical Period in American Literature (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1951), Chap. II, passim.

Identified as the first of the American naturalists because of his evolutionary ideals, his sometimes apparent pessimism, and his use of sex as a motivation, he rejected this tradition in Crumbling Idols (1894). Among the critics, the major questions are the extent of his failure as an artist and the causes for this failure. The difficulties spring from Garland's theoretical inconsistency--or perhaps progress--between 1884 and 1894 and the variations in the value and purposes of his creative work during this same period. These elements can only be explained by examining a combination of personal and historical causes.

Born in 1860 to a family of farmers, Garland's youth was spent in a combination of farm labor and intellectual aspiration. Like George Gissing, his choice of subject matter as a writer was not so much dependent upon literary tradition as upon painful personal experience. When Garland abandoned the life of a homesteader in Dakota to seek his fortune in the cultural center of Boston in 1884, he was not a disillusioned young man. It was only after his Boston education, consisting of the reading of Charles Darwin, Herbert Spencer, Henry George, Ibsen, Veron (he had read Taine before leaving for the East), and most of the famous artists and thinkers of the Nineteenth Century, that he was able to compare the ideal and the real during his various trips back to Dakota beginning in 1887. The impact of his studies is obvious

in passages like this, dated May 15, 1885:

Spencer's Studies in Sociology I have just read. It is a work preparatory to the great work upon which he is now at work. The thought most prominent in my mind as I lay down the book is how he riddles our petty ideas of society and the state. In his statement of the biases toward a one-sided view of the world he lays open the whole hidden machinery which moves us like puppets upon a wire. How ridiculous we will look to men a century hence with the hypothesis of evolution already grandly stated, yet men cling to the follies and nonsense of special dispensation and a carpenter God.²

Later in A Son of the Middle Border, he described this period:

I became an evolutionist in the fullest sense, accepting Spencer as the greatest living thinker. Fiske and Galton and Allen were merely assistants to the Master Mind whose generalizations included in their circles all modern discovery.³

These were growing days! I had moments of tremendous expansion, hours when my mind went out over the earth like a freed eagle, but these flights were always succeeded by fits of depression as I realized my weakness and my poverty. Nevertheless I persisted in my studies.

Under the influence of Spencer I traced a parallel development of the arts and found a measure of scientific peace. Under the inspiration of Whitman I pondered the significance of democracy and caught some part of its spiritual import. With Henry George as guide, I discovered the main cause of poverty and suffering in the world, and so in my little room, living on forty cents a day, I was

²Lars Ahnebrink, The Beginnings of Naturalism in American Fiction: A Study of the Works of Hamlin Garland, Stephen Crane, and Frank Norris with Special Reference to Some European Influences, 1891-1903 (New York: Russell and Russell, Inc., 1961), p. 66n.

³Hamlin Garland, A Son of the Middle Border (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1956), p. 324.

in a sense profoundly happy.⁴

He summed up his new attitude:

My study of Spencer, Whitman, and other of the great leaders of the world, my years of absorbed reading in the library, my days of loneliness and hunger in the city had swept me into a far bleak land of philosophic doubt where even the most daring of my classmates would hesitate to follow me.⁵

From these passages, the reasons for historians' uneasiness with Garland can be traced to Garland's confusion as he was about to become a writer of fiction. Spencer, Whitman, George--here indeed is proof of Knight and Walcutt's contention of philosophic confusion on the part of Garland during this period. Spencer and Whitman, although superficially at opposite ends of the materialist-transcendentalist argument, are reconcilable through their shared belief in inevitable progress. Despite his occasional arrival at "the far bleak land of philosophic doubt," it is important to note that Garland belonged to the group of optimistic evolutionists. But reconciling Spencerian laissez faire with Henry George's single tax was as difficult as reconciling objective truth and the advocacy of economic reform in the novel. Thus present in his intellectual ideals before he had created a single piece of fiction was one of the central conflicts which

⁴Ibid., p. 331.

⁵Ibid., p. 357. A study of this question has been made by Donald Pizer, "Herbert Spencer and the Genesis of Garland's Critical System," Tulane Studies in English, VII (1957), 153-168.

kept greatness from Garland's grasp.

The close link between Garland's personal responses and his intellectual beliefs can be illustrated by Garland's reversal of his opinion of Howells in 1887. In an undated manuscript (Ahnebrink presents evidence for a date of 1885-86) on "The Modern Novel in Germany and America," Garland finds Howells inadequate when compared to German novelists.

How many fill the measurement of being of value? Does Howells, James, Crawford, Fawcett, Julian Hawthorne? Do any of these men touch the deeper life of this nation? Do they portray the inner causes which move this age? Let us be just but let us also attempt to get at some principle apart from patriotic pride in "our" writers.⁶

In an unpublished notebook dated 1886, Garland is unwilling to include Howells and James in the realistic tradition:

There is a great cry of Realism among certain classes of men today which involves a very great mistake . . . Realism as advocated by Spielhagen means a study of the manners and customs of the present age and as such has a very great meaning but as carried out by the writers above-mentioned Howells and Henry James is an absurd characterization of very weak work. Those men chronicle conventional trifles mainly. They no more give a real idea of this life of ours than a painter gives an idea of the landscape by painting the grasses with painstaking care. Their realism is of such character that to understand this age through their works would require as much reading and generalization as to judge of the present without any aid. They generalize nothing. They represent conventional personages not types. They study no great psychological movement . . . They seem to know

⁶ Ahnebrink, p. 445.

passion only when it is conventional, or clothed in conventional forms.⁷

Upon meeting Howells in 1887, Garland reversed his opinion, finding that Howells accomplished all of the ideals Garland held for fiction. By the time of Crumbling Idols, Garland echoed the theories of Howells as expressed in Criticism and Fiction, praised Howells' work, and had taken up "patriotic pride" as a criterion for his judgment of writers. Garland had studied Emerson sufficiently to avoid allowing a foolish consistency to be his hobgoblin.

Already an admirer of local color writers, hopeful that they held the key to a truly American literature, Garland was still unsure of his literary theories or talents in 1887. He was writing verse and descriptive sketches of western life, but as he explained to Joseph Kirkland, he was unwilling to attempt fiction because of his inability to write dialogue.⁸ In May, Garland had reviewed Kirkland's Zury: "To say that Joseph Kirkland has written the most realistic novel of American interior life is to state the simple fact. It is as native to Illinois as Tolstoi's 'Anna Karenina' or Tourgenieff's 'Fathers and Sons' are to Russia."⁹ A meeting with Kirkland later in the year and Garland's ensuing disillusionment with

⁷Quoted Ibid., pp. 138-139.

⁸Jean Holloway, Hamlin Garland: A Biography (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1960), p. 26.

⁹Quoted Ibid.

the life of the people of the West combined to turn him into a writer of fiction.

In A Son of the Middle Border, Garland described the new perspective he had gained of the West through his stay in Boston and through his reading. The Middle Border of 1887 was not much different from what it had been in 1884, but the mind of Garland was greatly changed.

Something deep and resonant vibrated within my brain as I looked out upon this monotonous commonplace landscape. I realized for the first time that the east had surfeited me with picturesqueness. It appeared that I had been living for six years amidst painted, neatly arranged pasteboard scenery. Now suddenly I dropped to the level of nature unadorned, down to the ugly unkempt lanes I knew so well, back to the pungent realities of the streamless plain.

Furthermore I acknowledged a certain responsibility for the conditions of the settlers. I felt related to them, an important part of them. Once fairly among the fields of northern Illinois everything became so homely, uttered itself so piercingly to me that nothing less than song could express my sense of joy, of power. This was my country--these my people.¹⁰

But joy and power soon gave way to outrage upon reaching Dakota.

All the gilding of farm life melted away. The hard and bitter realities came back upon me in a flood. Nature was as beautiful as ever. The soaring sky was filled with shining clouds, the tinkle of the bobolink's fairy bells arose from the meadow, a mystic sheen was on the odorous grass and waving grain, but no splendor of cloud, no grace of sunset could conceal the poverty of these people, on the contrary they brought out, with a

¹⁰Garland, p. 355.

more intolerable poignancy, the gracelessness of these homes, and the sordid quality of the mechanical routine of these lives.

I perceived beautiful youth becoming bowed and bent. I saw lovely girlhood wasting away into thin and hopeless age. Some of the women I had known had withered into querulous and complaining spinsterhood, and I heard ambitious youth cursing the bondage of the farm. "Of such pain and futility are the lives of the average man and woman of both city and country composed," I acknowledged to myself with savage candor, "Why lie about it?"

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In those few days, I perceived life without its glamor. I no longer looked upon these toiling women with the thoughtless eyes of youth. I saw no humor in the bent forms and graying hair of the men. I began to understand that my own mother had trod a similar slavish round, with never a full day of leisure, with scarcely an hour of escape from the tugging hands of children, and the need of mending and washing clothes. I recalled her as she passed from the churn to the stove, from the stove to the bedchamber back to the kitchen, day after day, year after year, rising at daylight or before and going to bed only after the evening dishes were washed and the stockings and clothing mended for the night.

The essential tragedy and hopelessness of most human life under the conditions into which our society was swiftly hardening embittered me, called for expression, but even then I did not know I had found my theme. I had no intention at the moment of putting it into fiction.¹¹

Out of outrage at the human suffering caused by economic conditions Garland had found his theme, and now it was only a question of finding a vehicle adequate to the presentation of the theme and a publisher willing to print it.

I think Joseph Kirkland especially and the local color writers in general have been underestimated as influ-

¹¹Ibid., pp. 365-366.

ences on Garland,¹² primarily because Garland's career is too often thought to consist of his short stories while his novels are ignored. Kirkland not only encouraged him to write fiction, but also his work served as a model for the subject matter of middle western farm life and offered techniques with which to present that life. After all, with Garland's Americanism and abhorrence of literary masters, there was practically nowhere else to turn for guidance. That Kirkland's conceptions served as a guide for the early Garland can be seen in his letter to Garland concerning Garland's first attempt at a novel.

Your observation of farm life so far toward the frontier must be very valuable. The next thing is to be "bold, vigorous, and faithful" (as they used to say in bestowing the accolade of knighthood) to write it in truth and sentimental perception. I do not like your title "Boomtown. A Social Study": Our fiction is a social study, but we must conceal the study part. You might as well call it an essay, and so damn it at once. And if, as I fear, your study of the subject is perceptible in your treatment of it, you must write it all over again to eliminate self and make your characters seem to act and talk with perfect spontaneity. The "art to conceal art" is the one indispensable thing in realism. Of course you have to throw light on your theme, but you must fool the reader with the idea

¹²For instance, Clyde E. Hensen in "Joseph Kirkland's Influence on Hamlin Garland," American Literature, XXIII (January, 1952), 458-463, concludes that Kirkland probably aided Garland in achieving objectivity in some of the short stories. Only Donald Pizer in Hamlin Garland's Early Work and Career (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1960) notes this important influence in Chapters II-IV, passim.

that the light shines from within it, outward.¹³

Here, rather weakly, is a plea for objectivity, a warning to Garland against his habitual weakness of didacticism. Theory is all very well, but for the writer it usually comes after the artistic accomplishment, as in Kirkland's case, and is of very little use to the artistic follower unless it has been put into practice. What did Zury: The Meanest Man in Spring County (1887), universally acknowledged as the most realistic of the midwestern local color novels, have to offer the young Garland as he attempted to become a novelist?

The story of Usury Prouder's climb to riches and, finally, happiness after his third marriage to Anne Sparrow offers an intensive study of rural Illinois during the period between approximately 1820 and 1850. Opening with the arrival of the Pennsylvania Prouders in Illinois and their settling of four sections of virgin land, A Novel of Western Life focuses on the career of Zury, the talented, hard-working son. The subject is stated early: "So sets out a traveler magnificently equipped with natural gifts. Let us see how circumstances favor, or dwarf, or distort their growth."¹⁴ In basic structure, the novel differs little from the Horatio Alger story, moving from Zury's penniless insecurity through

¹³Quoted in Holloway, p. 29.

¹⁴Joseph Kirkland, Zury: The Meanest Man in Spring County: A Novel of Western Life (Boston: Houghton Mifflin & Co., 1887), p. 16. Italics mine.

his amassing of money by shrewdness, luck, and penuriousness, to his triumph as state legislator, happy father, owner of the largest and finest house in the county. However, this simple pattern is varied, in the interest of both plot and realistic study of the environment, by devoting well over half the novel to the view and trials of Anne Sparrow, an educated, free-thinking young woman brought from Boston to teach in the local school. Kirkland found it necessary to present the environment from two points of view (not in the technical sense of the term; the technical point of view is that of omniscient author) because Zury viewed his environment as natural and useful; to Anne Sparrow, however, rural Illinois and its people appear unromantically ugly and uncouth, the reality which Kirkland wanted to stress.

Kirkland communicated the reality of life on the frontier through a variety of techniques. One of the least effective is the use of dialect dependent almost totally upon cacography. More important is his description of the life of the people in such a way that it forms an obvious contrast to idealized pastoral patterns. The minor characters are work-hardened illiterates whose highest aspiration is getting the mortgage paid. Most of them are good people, but they are all very limited. And finally there is the inclusion of fact for fact's sake in which descriptions are presented to attract the interest of the curious. Thus fence-

building, school teaching, hog-raising, corn gathering, etc., receive extended descriptions, as much because they will serve as interesting curiosities as because they increase the realistic effect.¹⁵

But Zury is intended as the central exhibit of realism--the hard-working hero achieving the mythical dream of getting rich. The passage quoted above indicates that at least part of Kirkland's plan was to show environment as the controlling "circumstance" in forming Zury into the most miserly man in Spring County, but this effect is never quite achieved. Zury wants power; money is power, and Zury wills to get it and does. As all of his admiring neighbors agree, Zury has the same motives they have--only he is a shrewder trader and a better handler of money. But a miser for a hero was a major step toward realism in 1887. Zury is also the most unromantic lover in American fiction up to this time. His first two wives he marries for their land; his proposals are as brief and to the point as the negotiations for the sale of a hog. But these disqualifications for the traditional hero are ultimately superficial; underneath them is the all-competent, almost omnipotent man, fully qualifying for the

¹⁵The ambiguous sensationalism of what happened between Zury and Anne in a cave where they were trapped for one night by a forest fire is a kind of unrealistic gimmick more appropriate to the detective story, not any progress toward freedom in the treatment of sexual relations. It increased sales by titillating suspicious moral sensibilities, thus accomplishing its aim.

reader's as well as his neighbors' admiration and adulation.

One of the difficulties of the novel is that the realism functions in one of two ways: as esoterically interesting in itself or as comedy. Thus Zury's miserliness and his treatment of his wives are handled in a comic tone so that he remains a hero. Kirkland created irony through failure to fulfill the reader's romantic expectations, but the irony is always comic rather than serious. Typical of this effect, as well as indicative of how little Kirkland has succeeded in his goal to "eliminate self," is the passage on Anne's marriage of convenience to the witless and worthless John McVey:

A wedding and a bridal trip. What an opportunity for the romancer! How easy to enchain all readers, of any age, sex, color, or previous condition of servitude! No need to be graphic, witty, picturesque in order to be interesting, the mere theme does it all. No need to condense; the more diffuse, minute, circumstantial, familiar, and confidential, the better, with such events to tell about.¹⁶

There follows a ten-hour journey to Springville and a vow between bride and groom to be aunt and uncle to each other. The conscious breaking of the romantic pattern is obvious, but the effect is one of comic unimportance, a feeling that this anti-romanticism is just as contrived, and finally unreal, as the romantic pattern. In other words, Kirkland had no confidence in his realistic urge; realism had to be dressed up with specific humorous effects and interesting facts in

¹⁶Kirkland, p. 303.

order to have any value.

That Kirkland's realism is not the social or moral realism of Howells or James is proved by the plot which forms the center for the mass of descriptive, illustrative, and humorous material. It is obvious almost from the first that Zury and Anne are destined for each other, but a series of complications, such as wives, husband, children, keep them apart. Finally, Zury gives up miserliness to win Anne and happiness. Zury becomes the kind helper of his neighbors under the guise of helping them pay off their mortgages, all of which he holds. The inherent theme might be stated in this way: after you have accumulated your riches, become beneficent and be happy. The ending is as implausible and sentimental as that of any novel by F. Marion Crawford.

Here then was a work admired by Garland. Essentially a traditional romantic plot with realistic trappings, a novel with no more serious effect on the reader than that of the historical romances of the day, the book offered very little in terms of technique that was useful to the realist, and yet, due to the limitations Garland imposed upon himself, it was essentially the only model available to him. He had found on his trip West a serious purpose, his theme of economic protest, and a literary model and mentor; his subsequent struggle as a serious novelist was an attempt to fuse these elements, and his lack of success reflects not so much on the

limited talent of Garland as upon the inadequacy of his model.

Equipped with the ideals of freedom gained from Eugene Veron and Posnett¹⁷ and Taine's idea of the close relation between literature and environment, Garland attempted his first piece of fiction, "The Rise of Boomtown." In "'To the Readers'" Garland's aims and artistic confusion are apparent:

This is not a novel, neither is it a history. Its descriptions can be relied upon, for I have aimed to be true to the scene and people. It is an attempt at recording some little portion of a unique social movement--the modern railway settlement of the vast prairie west. There are problems suggested that are worthy attentive thought and yet I hope there is human interest enough to make the book readable, that the interest of fiction may make the fact lighter and the fact lend dignity to the fiction. Ahem! As the Major said, "Tell it as it is, Seagraves, and it'll be read."¹⁸

Visible are two errors: first, the idea, hinted at in Kirkland's letter, of a study sugar-coated with the interest of fiction; second, the Major's belief in fact, reflecting Garland's uncritical faith in truth as a solution to the problems of American literature, not only is proved wrong by the fact that the work was not published but also points to the work's central weakness. The genre of the work is history based upon Garland's experiences as a homesteader around Ordway, Dakota, in the early 1880's. The first person narra-

¹⁷ Ahnebrink, pp. 139-140, and Pizer, "Spencer and Garland's Critical System," Tulane Studies in English, 161-163.

¹⁸ Hamlin Garland, "The Rise of Boomtown," ed. Donald Pizer, South Dakota Report and Historical Collections, XXVIII (1956), 345-352.

tor, Seagraves, is autobiographical, and at least two of the characters are representations of residents of Ordway.¹⁹ The action consists of the growth of the town, interspersed with typical scenes of the life of the people. In reacting against the traditional plotted novel, Garland has replaced plot interest with sociological and historical interest. It is interesting to note that in removing plot he also removed all novelistic elements. Although he has not written a novel, he has also not written a propagandistic tract as might be expected after his disillusioning trip West. Life is not pictured as pleasant, but there is a nostalgic tone. The land boomers are not yet villains; the railroad management is simply a distant, impersonal force. This reportorial effect springs, perhaps, from Kirkland's urging for a lightening of the study element but, more importantly, from a mixture of the knowledge of hardships and a simultaneous admiration for land and people. Garland simply set out to give the facts in an interesting form. I suppose the work still has an interest for those concerned with the facts of South Dakota history. The work fails because Garland had not yet mastered a fictional tradition which he could use.

The material used in this early work was not wasted. Much of it appears to better purpose in later novels and short

¹⁹Pizer, Ibid., 362.

stories. The conflict which characterizes Garland's early work--his insecurity as to the purpose of literature--is illustrated by "Rise of Boomtown. Part Second." "In the late fall of 1887 Garland became active in the Henry George single-tax crusade [and produced a work] which is so infused with single-tax doctrine it is a tract."²⁰ Truth or social reform--Spencer or George--was the intellectual dilemma. There could be no solution--at least none in fictional terms--until Garland found some fictional form in which to work.

Although it is dangerous to attempt to reconstruct Garland's aims of the late 80's by means of the essays published in 1894, his ideas expressed in "Local Color and Art" and "The Local Novel" seem to be developments of ideas expressed in the early lectures and a reflection of his continuing admiration for Kirkland and the other local color writers. "Local color--what is it? It means that the writer spontaneously reflects the life which goes on around him. It is natural and unstrained art."²¹ "Local color in a novel means that it has such quality of texture and back-ground that it could not have been written in any other place or by anyone

²⁰Ibid., 347.

²¹Hamlin Garland, Crumbling Idols: Twelve Essays on Art and Literature (Gainesville: Scholars Facsimiles and Reprints, 1952), p. 62.

else than a native."²² The stress is upon truth, change, the avoidance of the picturesque. And finally, "The individuality of the artist is the saving grace of art; and landscape painting will not be fantastic so long as men study nature. It will never be mere reproduction so long as the artist represents it as he sees it. The fact will correct the fantasy. The artist will color the fact."²³ Although this quotation includes the stress upon temperament of the artist, advocated by Zola among others, an understanding of the complexity of the relationship between fiction and fact has not progressed much since the foreward to "Rise of Boomtown." These ideals furnish little insight into techniques, but they are the ideas underlying Garland's best single work, Main-Travelled Roads (1891), written between 1888 and 1891, and his first published novels.

Although my concern is with the novel and not the short story, the violent public and critical reaction to the six stories of Main-Travelled Roads (1891) is one of the facts which has caused Garland to be linked with naturalism, and therefore, these stories should exhibit some traits which the earlier local colorists do not exhibit. In one of Howells' statements about the book, he notes the effect of the stories, an effect not achieved by earlier American writers: "The type

²²Ibid., p. 64. Author's italics omitted.

²³Ibid., p. 76.

caught in Mr. Garland's book is not pretty; it is ugly and often ridiculous, but it is heart-breaking in its rude despair."²⁴ One of the qualities contributing to this effect is Garland's achievement of his aim of communicating "quality of texture and background"--he has made environment not only a background but also shown it in relation to the actions of the characters. These stories cannot be called environmental studies--either singly or in cumulative effect--in the sense that Zola, Moore, Maugham, or Gissing created such studies because they lack the necessary breadth. Yet the environment and its effects upon single characters is made both real and functional by means of description and by means of statements like the following, spoken by Grant McLane in "Up the Coule":

"More than that, farmin' ain't so free a life as it used to be. This cattle-raisin' and butter-makin' makes a nigger of a man. Binds him right down to the grindstone and he gets nothin' out of it--that's what rubs it in. He simply wallers around in the manure for somebody else. I'd like to know what a man's life is worth who lives as we do? How much higher is it than the lives the niggers used to live?"

"A man like me is helpless," Grant was saying. "Just like a fly in a pan of molasses. There ain't any escape for him. The more he tears around the more liable he is to rip his legs off."²⁵

²⁴Quoted in Knight, p. 49.

²⁵Hamlin Garland, Main-Travelled Roads: Six Mississippi Valley Stories (Boston: Arena Publishing Co., 1891), pp. 126-127.

Although the beautiful and kindly aspects of the Middle Border are included--the many descriptions of the productive land, the helpful Councils in "Under the Lion's Paw," the camaraderie of the harvesters in "A Branch Road," and the vitality of Old Widow Gray and her family in "The Return of a Private"--the combination of realistic description and the break with the convention of the happy ending contributes a new force to the stories.

Although Garland is consistently praised for the vitality of his characterization in these stories, Howells was right in seeing the characters as types. Although I do not agree with Walcutt's severity with "Under the Lion's Paw," he is correct in seeing the characters as "very good or very bad people."²⁶ Most of Garland's characters in these stories fall into the category of very good people. In Will Hannan of "A Branch Road" and in Howard McLane of "Up the Coule" there is an attempt to pass beyond black and white into the gray of a complex character, but in the first case Will Hannan is simply the very good man who happens to be afflicted with jealous pride, and in the second Howard is simply the good man who has been carelessly selfish. The fact that the two characters who do have some complexity occur in the novelettes rather than the four short stories probably proves more about the limitations inherent in short fiction than any basic atti-

²⁶Walcutt, p. 57.

tude toward characterization which Garland held.

By abandoning the first person narrator of "The Rise of Boomtown," Garland did achieve greater objectivity. But as I have already noted, impartiality toward characters and incongruity of characterization are closely linked. Garland's care in directing the reader's attention toward the sympathetic characters and his concern with types rather than complex individuals are illustrated by his treatment of Smith in "The Return of a Private": "Sombre, pathetic figure! His wide, round, gray eyes gazing down into the beautiful valley, seeing and not seeing, the splendid cloud-shadows sweeping over the western hills and across the green and yellow wheat far below."²⁷ "In the dusk of that far-off valley his figure looms vast, his personal peculiarities fade away, he rises into a magnificent type."²⁸ Although not impartial toward his characters, Garland's restraint from generalization and his creation of characters which the reader recognizes as real enough to have value save him from the sentimentality common to many of the contemporary writers of romances.

As Taylor has noted, "Description and exemplification . . . are the common fictional methods of Garland. Mindful of Howells's counsel to exemplify and not to preach, he was

²⁷Garland, *Main-Travelled Roads*, pp. 196-197.

²⁸*Ibid.*, pp. 215-216. That Garland was conscious of the ideal of objectivity is shown by his omission of this and other passages of generalization from the edition of 1899.

almost over-careful in avoiding the explicit statement of any economic views, particularly his own."²⁹ And yet Walcutt states, "There is a quality of reproach and indignation in every line [of the early stories]."³⁰ By making his characters sympathetic and his farm environment real and then showing the effect of the environment on the characters in terms of broken bodies and frustrated ambitions, Garland presented his theme of economic protest. Only in "The Return of a Private" with "They are fighting a hopeless battle and must fight till God gives them furlough"³¹ did he close with a moral. His points are clarified by making his protest implicit; this fact makes these better stories than they would be otherwise. But Garland had no ideal of art for art's sake at this time. His themes were all social and economic--greater freedom for women, the need for cultural values in the West, and above all, the need for economic reform. The continued power of these stories depends upon the concreteness with which he presented his themes.

All in all, Main-Travelled Roads was not a very revolutionary book in terms of technique. It brought to fruition Eggleton's attempt to show the relationship of environment

²⁹Walter Fuller Taylor, The Economic Novel in America (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1942), p. 162.

³⁰Walcutt, p. 55.

³¹Garland, Main-Travelled Roads, p. 216. This was also omitted in 1899.

and character. Garland's scenic rather than narrative development helped to give the American short story a new direction. His abandonment of the happy ending, creating the effect of despair that Howells noted, was an advance. And in terms of Garland, the stories proved that he had developed a form for himself which was far superior to either his earlier sketches or his first attempt at a novel; it is the form he achieved in his short fiction upon which his continuing fame rests.

In addition to the creation of the stories published as Main-Travelled Roads, Garland met two sets of friends in 1889-90, meetings which were crucial in terms of his literary production for the next several years. The first of these meetings was with a young actor-playwright James A. Herne and his actress-wife Katharine. This meeting led to a close and fruitful friendship. Garland, who was already an admirer of Ibsen, urged Herne to be more truthful in his plays, and Herne introduced Garland to the technical problems of the drama, thus furthering Garland's understanding of Ibsen. Urged by Herne, Garland was soon attempting to write plays, two of which were later turned into novels. In 1890, Garland met B. O. Flower, the editor of the radical magazine, The Arena. Flower's magazine was fighting for all that was new and against all that was old. Interested in articles, fiction, drama, poetry that expressed protest, Flower encouraged the already insecure Garland to infuse protest in all his

writing. It was Flower who commissioned and published serially Garland's next novel (really his first), A Spoil of Office. It seems to me that both Herne's encouraging him to write dramas and Flower's leading him toward propaganda are two branch roads which should have been avoided by Garland, although his study of dramatic practice with Herne was ultimately useful in his fiction and the money gained from Flower was immediately useful.

Flower published two of the stories and finally the volume Main-Travelled Roads as well as articles by Garland on the single tax, drama, and other miscellaneous topics. Garland described how his first published novel came into being and, incidentally, explained its structural flaw:

Flower, of course, was delighted with this discussion /the critical struggle over the first volume of stories/ and one day asked me if I could not write for him a serial novel based on the Farmers' Alliance, a prodigious uprising among the farmers, then at its height. I replied that I had already on my desk several chapters of a story dealing with farm life in Iowa and the Grange, an earlier agricultural organization, and that I could undoubtedly bring this narrative down to the present day.³²

A Spoil of Office, published in The Arena, January-May, 1892, reflects the dual subject--the Iowa Grange and the Kansas Farmers' Alliance; indicates a confused purpose--truth telling and propaganda; and altogether bears out Garland's tentative

³²Hamlin Garland, Roadside Meetings (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1930), pp. 179-180.

admission that this time was "a confused, wavering, experimental period."³³ Dedicating the book to Howells, Garland called it "this study of the great Middle West, its contemporary life and landscape."³⁴

A Spoil of Office is the story of the ambitious young man from the provinces who rises through the Iowa House of Representatives to the U. S. House of Representatives only to become disillusioned with the greed and pettiness of the political rulers; to resist the spoil of office and preserve his principles, he returns to the West to aid the Alliance Movement. The society to which he aspires proves corrupt so that the only environment conducive to his idealism is that of the downtrodden farmer. One of the weaknesses of the book as a "study" is that Garland pushed his central character through so many environments that no feeling of the reality or determining power of any environment is developed. In order to avoid the picturesque effects which Garland associated with superficial travel literature, he resorted to such a contrast as the following:

The rustle of flashing, blade-like corn leaves, the vast clean-cut mountainous clouds of June, the shade of shimmering popple trees, the whistle of plover and the sailing hawk do not satisfy the man who follows the corn-plow with the hot

³³Ibid., p. 181.

³⁴Hamlin Garland, A Spoil of Office: A Story of the Modern West (Boston: Arena Publishing Co., 1892), dedication page.

sun beating down all day upon his bent head and dusty shoulders. His point of view is not that from the hammock. He is not out on a summer vacation. If he thinks, he thinks bitter things, and when he speaks his words are apt to be oaths.³⁵

But as Garland traced Bradley Talcott's abandoning of his northern Iowa farm country to exercise his "mysterious power of self-development"³⁶ in law school, the state capital, Washington, and finally Kansas, Garland became a kind of tourist and could only substitute moral outrage for the equally superficial picturesque. Although Garland described tired farmers and used-up farmers' wives, no sense of the interaction of environment and people is ever developed.

The main characters are as idealized as any of Gissing's plot characters. Bradley Talcott is full of hidden power which needs only a set of ideals in order to become active. Ida Wilbur, beautiful, young Grange speaker, is the supplier of these ideals. The education of Talcott proceeds from Republican protectionism, through single-tax and woman's rights advocacy, to the activist policies of Populism. Apparently one of the rewards of arriving at the truth that the poor of both town and country must unite is marital happiness. Talcott struggles throughout the novel to win the love of Ida, only to be met with kind rebuffs, but as soon as he agrees to work with the Farmers' Alliance, Ida marries him.

³⁵Ibid., p. 27.

³⁶Ibid.

Failing to be an adequate "study" of the West, the novel might be expected to be an effective piece of contemporary propaganda. But the means by which the poor can be helped are never presented except in terms of rejecting "the spoil of office" in the lobbying centers that are state and federal legislatures and of joining the Alliance. The vagueness of structure, of conflict, and of characterization recurs in the vagueness of the solution offered:

"Oh, the pathos, the tragedy of it all! Nature is so good and generous, and men are so ignorant and selfish. Can it be remedied? It must be remedied. Every thinking, sympathizing soul must help us."³⁷

Garland's first published novel does not even come up to the artistic standards exhibited by the better works in the local color tradition.

Economically, socially, and artistically Garland's experiences as a young realist in America are preferable to those of Gissing in London. Garland experienced economic difficulties, but they lasted a relatively short time. Garland had his social feelings of inferiority, but literary Boston--the Boston that really counted for him--was open to a young man from the West. Unlike Gissing, whose journalistic efforts appeared in small non-paying radical papers or Russian journals, Garland soon found lucrative employment with the respected, widely-circulated magazines. Garland

³⁷ Ibid., p. 377.

as a novelist never knew the restrictions imposed by any three-volume requirement. But these American opportunities, created by the ever-increasing number of magazines, contained an aesthetic limitation at least as harmful to the artist--certainly to the artistic aspirations of Garland--as the three-decker tradition. On the one side was The Arena and later the less honestly radical muckraking periodicals. The alternatives to propaganda and sensationalism, offered to Garland "in the middle of this period of unrest, of vacillation between social reform and fictive art,"³⁸ were the Atlantic Monthly, Harper's Weekly, and Century Magazine, edited by Thomas Bailey Aldrich, Henry M. Alden, and Richard Watson Gilder. These men believed in art, but Aldrich and Alden deserve, with Gilder, Walcutt's epithet of "apostle of the genteel tradition."³⁹ They were sympathetic with the realists' desire for truth, but they, feeling their responsibilities to the mass audience, thought that truth should reflect the refinement of their audience.⁴⁰

Garland was elated when Gilder accepted a novelette, Ol' Pap's Flaxen, and published it in March-May, 1892. But that Gilder's way was as dangerous to truth as Flower's way was to art is apparent, except to Garland at the time of writ-

³⁸Garland, Roadside Meetings, p. 183.

³⁹Walcutt, p. 53.

⁴⁰Pizer, Garland's Early Work and Career, p. 69, develops this antithesis.

ing Roadside Meetings, in a letter from Gilder:

"I think if, without making the story too inartistically pointed, you could set in those ideas which you have expressed to me in your letter, it would dignify and make more useful the really very striking picture of life which you have presented. If you will do this and let me see the story again, I shall be greatly obliged to you.

"I must tell you what embarrasses me in stories of this sort. As you know, the newspaper press nowadays is vulgarizing. It not only expresses the vulgarity of the American masses but increases it--that is, to a large extent. Every decent man and woman, including many newspaper men, deprecates this condition of things. Now if we print too many stories which are full of the kind of language which should not be used, we seem to many persons to be continuing the work of vulgarization. On the other hand we value correct pictures of life--of even pretty common life--and the consequence is we are giving an undue proportion, possibly, of dialect fiction. People who are trying to bring up their children with refinement, and to keep their own and their children's language pure and clean, very naturally are jealous of the influence of a magazine--especially of the Century Magazine--in this respect.

"Here is really a predicament, and feeling that predicament, we at least think a dialect story--especially of this kind, where 'youp' is used for yes, for example, and where all sorts of vulgarisms occur--should very strongly represent itself before being sent into almost every cultivated household in the United States! Had you thought of the matter in this connection? I am very far from wishing to go to an extreme in the other direction--lords and ladies--but I think we should not go to an extreme in this direction."⁴¹

Whether the truth seeker who insisted that "Both drama and novel will be colloquial"⁴² and that literature must be

⁴¹Garland, Roadside Meetings, pp. 182-183.

⁴²Garland, Crumbling Idols, p. 74.

democratic⁴³ could call this a "wholesome lesson"⁴⁴ in 1892 is not known, but repressive as this editorial policy may be for realism, Gilder's stress upon art rather than propaganda was one of the factors that made A Little Norsk or Ol' Pap's Flaxen the best of the four novels Garland published in 1892.

Using the setting of Boomtown, Garland created a character study of two homesteaders and their adopted daughter, whose parents have been killed by a Dakota winter. The central conflict is between the girl's desire to escape from the repressive loneliness of the farm and the men's possessive longing for her company, complicated by the gradual change of attitude of Bert Gearheart from paternal to amorous. Both the beauty and the horror of the environment are made real:

The heavy-headed grain and russet grass writhed and swirled as if in agony, and dashed high in waves of green and yellow. The corn-leaves had rolled up into long cords like the lashes of a whip, and beat themselves into tatters on the dry, smooth spot their blows had made beneath them; they seemed ready to turn to flame in the pitiless, furnace-like blast. Everywhere in the air was a silver-white, impalpable mist, which gave to the cloudless sky a whitish cast. The glittering gulls were the only living things that did not move listlessly and did not long for rain. They soared and swooped, exulting in the sounding wind; now throwing themselves upon it, like a swimmer, then

⁴³For Garland and many others of this period, this seems to mean that literature was both about and intended for the masses, but there is much uncertainty on the whole matter exhibited by Garland in his comments.

⁴⁴Garland, Roadside Meetings, p. 182.

darting upward with miraculous ease, to dip again into the shining, hissing, tumultuous waves of the grass.⁴⁵

The contrast between the happy freedom of the birds and the depression of the farmers, suffering from heat and the knowledge of economic loss, is made vivid in the above passage without resorting to the melodramatic explicitness of the following:

And all night long the blasting wind, sweeping the sea of icy sands, hissed and howled around the little sod cabin like surf beating on a half-sunken rock. The wind and the snow and the darkness possessed the plain; and Cold (whose other name is Death) was king of the horrible carnival. It seemed as though morning and sunlight could not come again, so absolute was the sway of night and death.⁴⁶

But despite all of the realistic description, the novel remains a character study in which environment is simply a background. The interaction between character and environment is superficial: it ages Pap, Anson Wood; its loneliness makes Gearheart dissatisfied; its provincialism makes Flaxen seek a more vital world. But the principle of selection for event, the determinative force of the structure, is plot-- the story of the young girl seeking fulfillment in the city, making a mistake in marriage, and finally finding what she is seeking in the boy back home, in this case Gearheart, who joins her in the city for the prescribed happy ending. As in

⁴⁵Hamlin Garland, A Little Norsk or Ol' Pap's Flaxen (New York: D. Appleton and Co., 1892), pp. 115-116.

⁴⁶Ibid., pp. 20-21.

Zury, environment and plot are never fused in any effective manner.

The novel contains many fine scenes, and Garland maintained sufficient objectivity to avoid excessive sentimentality, but the three central characters are all good, and the villain, Kendall, whom Flaxen marries, is all bad. One of Garland's verses serves as epigraph; these are the closing lines:

God! What a power is in the wind!
 I lay my cheek to the cabin side
 To feel the weight of his giant hands--
 A speck, a fly in the blasting tide
 Of streaming, pitiless, icy sands;
 A single heart with its feeble beat--
 A mouse in the lion's throat--
 A swimmer at sea--a sunbeam's mote
 In the grasp of a tempest of hail and sleet!⁴⁷

Garland may have intended to use the environment of Dakota Territory as the wind of the poem; however, the forces determining the actions of the characters are inherent traits of personality, not external environment. The tradition to which A Little Norsk belongs is not that of the experimental study; rather it is a good local color novel juxtaposing an old plot and a realistic setting.

The other two novels published in 1892 present special problems because they were first written as plays and, proving unplayable, then expanded into novels. Almost all critics agree that Jason Edwards is "Garland's closest approach to

⁴⁷ Ibid., p. iii.

naturalism."⁴⁸ Both Knight and Taylor feel that the hasty conversion from dramatic to novel form caused the weakness of the novel,⁴⁹ but I think that its initial form as play gains for the novel whatever objectivity it possesses, thus contributing as much as the new subject matter of the city to the novel's being classified as naturalistic. But that the play Under the Wheel (published 1890) and the novel were published by the Arena Publishing Company indicates that the objective effect is simply a matter of omission of comments by the author, not any real objectivity toward characters or values.

Structurally Jason Edwards: An Average Man is as tightly planned as Moore's A Mummer's Wife. Jason Edwards is divided into two parts, the first part establishing the environment of Boston slum and factory and the second presenting the equally repressive environment of Boomtown, Dakota Territory, and the surrounding countryside. Caught in the economic forces of both environments, Jason Edwards is destroyed. Ahnebrink's comparison of Garland's descriptions of Boston with those of Paris in L'Assommoir⁵⁰ is suggestive although not conclusive, but regardless of influence, Garland made street, home, and factory vivid.

⁴⁸ Ahnebrink, p. 83.

⁴⁹ Knight, pp. 60-61.

⁵⁰ Ahnebrink, pp. 238-246.

It was about five o'clock of a stifling hot day on Pleasant Avenue. Ironically bitter, the name of the street seemed now, like many another old-time name in Boston.

The sun had gone out of it, but the heat still pulsed from the pavements and breathed from the doors and open windows of the four-story brick and wooden buildings, rising like solid walls on each side of the stream of human life which filled the crevasse with its slow motion.

Children, ragged, dirty, half-naked and ferocious, swarmed up and down the furnace-like street, swore and screamed in high-pitched, unnatural, animal-like voices, from which all childish music was lost. Frowzy women walked with a gait of utter weariness, aged women, bent and withered, and young women soon to bring other mouths and tongues and hands into this frightful struggle, straggled along the sidewalks, laden with parcels, pitifully small, filled with food.

Other women and old people leaned from the open windows to get a breath of cooler air, frowns of pain on their faces, while in narrow rooms foul and crowded, invalids tortured by the deafening screams of the children, and the thunder of passing teams and cars, and unable to reach the window to escape the suffocating heat and smell of the cooking, turned to the wall, dumbly praying for death to end their suffering.⁵¹

Although this passage is certainly no example of fact for fact's sake, Garland does refrain from moralizing, does furnish a concrete picture, and does make the interaction of environment and character obvious. Distrusting the description to carry its own effect to the reader, Garland sometimes directed the reader's response through the thoughts of one of the characters:

He seemed to see more of the hideous future of these people, these young people born for a

⁵¹Hamlin Garland, Jason Edwards: An Average Man (New York: D. Appleton and Co., 1897), pp. 24-25.

prison or a brothel in so many cases. How long can this disease go on intensifying, he thought. He stopped a moment, and looked at it all with a sudden sweep of the eye, a hot, unwholesome alley, poison-tainted, vice-infected. He thought of the miles of such streets in Boston, a street almost typical. Boston was predominantly of this general character, as he well knew. The real Boston does not get itself photographed and sent about the country.⁵²

Entry into an apartment house or even an individual apartment offers little escape from the horrors of the street.

They turned in at last at one of the cave-like apertures opening upon the narrow walk, and passed into a hall which led straight through to the foul-smelling yard and alley behind.

There were two families on each floor, and as the doors were open, the smells of cooking food were mingled into the indescribable hot stench--boiled beef, onions, cabbage, fried pork and the smell of vile coffee. Babies were squaling /sic/, loud-voiced women, worried with their cares and bad-tempered from weariness, were scolding and slapping the children who ran in and out with a prodigious clatter, and shrieking and squalling.⁵³

The room they entered was the usual living room of the average mechanic, except that it had a carpet and a piano, as if it had laid claim to the name of parlor. But the table, partly spread for supper, told that it was also the dining room. The furniture was of very humble sort, and was a peculiar mixture of old-fashioned pieces and bargains at the shoddy furniture rooms of the city.

The carpet on the floor was bright-colored. The curtains were very neat and clean, and the whole effect was of tasteful economy, but not comfort. The windows of the side, the only windows, looked out upon another similar tenement, across a narrow disc /sic/ street, along which boomed and thundered passing teams loaded with heavy plates of iron, or with immense flapping loads of lumber. Venders of

⁵²Ibid., pp. 90-91.

⁵³Ibid., p. 28.

fruit were crying loudly and unmusically. It was very close and unwholesome, and Reeves drew a sigh of pain as he glanced about the room as Alice sat down on the piano stool in a meditative position.⁵⁴

From the insecure tidiness of his home, Jason Edwards passes through even worse environments to arrive at the foundry at which he works.

As Edwards looked in at the foundry door on his way back, about five o'clock, men were "pouring". It was a grewsome /sic/ sight. With grimy, sooty shirts, open at the throat, in a temperature of deadly heat, they toiled like demons. There was little humanity in their faces, as the dazzling metal threw a dull red glow on them.

Here and there, with warning shouts, they ran, bent like gnomes, with pots of shining, flame-colored liquid lighting their grimy faces. Here toiled two stalwart fellows, with a huge pot between them; with hoarse shouts they drew up beside a huge "flask" or moulding-box. The skimmer pushed away the slag, the radiant metal leaped out and down into the sand, sending spurts of yellow-blue flame out of a hundred crevices.

There was a man calking the next flask with wet sand. He paid no attention to the pot of deadly liquid, which passed close enough to singe his hair. A little further on, another man was knocking off the clamps that held the flask together. Everywhere was heat, the smell of burning wood, gases, steam, and the sight of leaping, exploding, shiny metal.⁵⁵

In this final scene, as well as the others, the documentary method is apparent. This dangerous, repugnant, perverse world has trapped Jason Edwards and his family.

But the real trap is not physical violence or even the moral degradation of the environment; it is the economic forces at work. Rent and food prices go up and wages go down.

⁵⁴Ibid., pp. 29-30.

⁵⁵Ibid., pp. 76-77.

The villains are the owners of apartment and factory, an undefined "they" to Jason Edwards.

"Hain't they got no mercy, these human wolves? Hain't it all I can stand now? Look at it!" he cried, flinging his hand out toward the wall. "Look at this tenement--hotter, shabbier, rottener--but rent must go up Jennie, children, I don't know what we're goin' to do. I don't see what's comin', but we're bein' squeezed out, that's sure." ⁵⁶

The means of escape is almost mythic in its simplicity--go West.

"Free land is where they ain't no landlords an' no rent," said her father. "Where they ain't no rich and no poor. Where they ain't no bosses an' no servants. Where people don't live all cooped up in dens like this. Where they raise such corn as that." Here he unrolled a gaudy poster, which showed a bunch of resplendent, enormous ears of corn. "Where people have homes of their own, and cows, and trees, and brooks full o' trout runnin' by like this," he ended displaying a poster, on which was an alluring picture of a farm house with a broad river in the background, on which a boat floated idly, containing two women, presumably the farmer's wife and daughter. The farmer himself in the foreground was seated on a self-binding reaper, holding the reins over an abnormally sleek and prancing pair of horses. He wore a fine kossuth hat and a standing collar, and his shirt was immaculate. A deer was looking at him (with pardonable curiosity) from a neighboring wood-lot. It was the ideal farmer, and the farm of the land-boomer and the self-glorifying American newspaper.⁵⁷

With high hopes for the first time since he attained manhood, Jason Edwards travels with his family to Dakota.

Three years have passed with the opening of the second

⁵⁶Ibid., p. 53.

⁵⁷Ibid., pp. 61-62.

section of the novel. The great dream has been replaced by the reality of a summer on the prairie:

It was hot in the town, it was frightful on the prairie, bare of trees as a desert. The eyes found no place to rest from the hot, brazen glare of everything--the grass, the grain, the sky. There was absolutely no fresh green thing to be seen, no cool glint of water, no pleasant shade--only a radiant, mocking, sinister sky, flacked with the white bodies of the gulls that rose and fell, swooped and circled in the blazing air. The farmers toiled at their scanty crops of hay, and eyed the sky with prayers and curses alternating on their lips. Every year at this same date those blighting winds had blown.

Bare on the immense plain stood the unpainted wooden shanties, unshaded and unsheltered, the sun beating down upon them with the same merciless severity the mariners tell of in the tropic seas. Like a boat becalmed on a russet sea, each little hut parched and cracked and grew odorous in the terrific heat.

The wind was rising, but it had no moisture in it, no coolness; it was like the wind from a furnace. It appalled the stranger, and even to those familiar with it, it brought terror. As the men stopped in the fields and leaned on their forks and turned their throbbing faces to its sweep, it brought small relief.⁵⁸

The heat and the despair are the same as that in Pleasant Avenue. One difference is significant: now every member of the family, not just Jason, is coarsened by labor. The economic oppressor has taken on a name: he is Judge Balser, land agent, who gave Edwards his choice--pay ten dollars an acre for land or go thirty miles from the railroad for free land. The storekeeper explains this freedom: "A man once jumped overboard because he wanted to. It was a free choice--only

⁵⁸Ibid., pp. 132-133.

the ship was on fire--that's about as much free choice as Edwards had."⁵⁹ The Judge holds the mortgage and demands payment of the interest, despite recurrent crop failures.

Jason sums up his life:

"My life is a failure--I don't know why. Don't seem 's if it was my fault. I know it ain't yours, mother. Fifty years of work--an' here we be! I've worked every well day of my life since I was ten years old; we've worked early and late, an' pinched an' saved. I never was a drinker, we ain't had the necessities of life--rent went up an' fuel went up, an' wages went down--an' here we are."⁶⁰

However, the West is different from Boston in another way: Jason's fight is no longer against simply economic entrepreneurs but also the impersonal forces of nature. The prayed-for clouds arrive, but instead of rain, they bring wheat-destroying hail. Jason has a stroke, paralyzing his legs. "Life had brought him nothing--death had no terror."⁶¹

In this concrete portrayal of the crushing forces of economic exploitation in two contrasted but essentially similar environments, Garland achieved the effect of presenting economic determinism aided by impersonal natural forces. Before Frederick Jackson Turner read his famous paper in 1893, Garland had dramatically presented the closing of the American frontier with its consequent destruction of the American dream.

⁵⁹Ibid., p. 103.

⁶⁰Ibid., p. 165.

⁶¹Ibid., p. 212.

Garland's attempt to give his study breadth depends upon those techniques common to the French naturalists and their English imitators. Slightly awkwardly, Garland introduced characters in both eastern and western environments to show the universality of effect of the forces at work and the variety of response possible. In Boston, Mike, the Irishman, has lost his job due to over-production; Berg, the German, feels he has fled from political persecution only to find a worse form in the economic persecution of Boston.⁶² In Dakota, a number of owners of mortgaged farms are presented, the most startling being Charley Severson who, on the way to the train which will take him to the asylum, raves of his expected riches. This is melodramatic, perhaps, but it adds irony to the comment on the American dream which the structure makes.

The basic structure of *Jason Edwards*, which I have outlined, could have made it the most pointed American novel of social protest yet written, but like Gissing, Garland was too unsure of his form, too insecure in his ideas--or perhaps too sure of them--to allow this plotless structure to stand alone. Even more clearly than in any Gissing novel, the plot characters of this novel seem disruptive excrescences. Garland apparently felt he needed Walter Reeves as a spokesman,

⁶²Garland's insecurity with this attempt at panoramic structure is seen in a functionless hint that Berg loves Alice Edwards, thus linking him with the plot as well as the environment.

and to link Walter to the subject of the novel, the destruction of Jason Edwards, he needed Alice Edwards for him to be in love with.

Garland attempted to make Reeves something more complex than simple spokesman for the author by describing his rise from young man from the provinces to leading city journalist and by tracing the growth of his social conscience. The following is a summation of Reeves' early position:

"The air is full of revolt against things as they are. I don't know why, something has brought them up. Here's something I wrote standing on Brooklyn Bridge the other day, looking down on New York. 'Over me swung and surged those giant cables, etched against the sky delicate as cobwebs. Under my feet that marvel of man, the bridge itself. I stood there looking down on that lava-like flood of bricks and mortar called New York, cracked and seamed and piled into hideous forms, without grace or charm. I saw men rushing to and fro there in those gloomy scenes, like ants in the scoria of a volcano. I saw pale women sewing in dens reeking with pestilence and throbbing with heat. I saw myriads of homes where the children could play only on the roof or in the street. Whole colonies of hopeless settlers, sixty feet from the pavement. And I said, man has invented a thousand new ways of producing wealth, but not one for properly distributing it. I don't understand the problem, but it must be solved. Somebody will solve it.'"⁶³

Although Reeves characterizes the first speech by Henry George which he hears as "the fine spun theories of a dreamer,"⁶⁴

⁶³Garland, Jason Edwards, p. 84.

⁶⁴Ibid., p. 84.

by the time he appears in Boomtown at the beginning of Part II of the novel, he is a confirmed single-tax advocate. It is Reeves' function to sum up the meanings to be drawn from the narrative. First there is Jason Edwards as average man caught in an economic trap: "'He's a hero!' exclaimed Reeves, with kindling eyes. 'He has fought heroically. No battle can test the courage of a man so much as this endless struggle against the injustices of the world--this silent, ceaseless war against hunger and cold.'"⁶⁵ There is also the theme of the impersonality of nature:

Sitting by Edwards' side, Reeves felt again the force of Nature's forgetfulness of man. She neither loves nor hates. Her storms have no regard for life. Her smiling calms do not recognize death. Sometimes her storms coincide with death, sometimes her calms run parallel to men's desires. She knows not, and cares nothing.⁶⁶

And finally there is the statement, apparently for those who missed the subtitle of the novel, which gives the universal application to the story of Jason Edwards:

"I don't suppose Edwards ever knew freedom from care--few of us do. Our whole infernal civilization is a struggle. We are like hunters climbing a perpendicular cliff, a bottomless gulf below, clinging wildly to tiny roots and crevices, and toiling upward, eyes fixed on the green and alluring slopes above. We strain and strive, now slipping, now gaining, while our hair whitens with the agony of our aching, failing muscles. One by one we give up and fall with a curse or groan, but the others keep on, not daring to look down. There is

⁶⁵Ibid., p. 210.

⁶⁶Ibid., p. 182.

no rest from the fear of fall, save in the black depths below. Graham, the most of us will never know what rest is. It makes me savage to think of men like Edwards toiling all their lives to die at sixty, unrewarded and unsatisfied."⁶⁷

The central weakness of the novel is reflected by the unfortunate choice of we as point of view here; Walter Reeves has apparently reached the "alluring slopes above" and gained leisure without undue struggle because of inherent talents and "level-headed"⁶⁸ character.

In addition to his function as spokesman, Reeves is protagonist in the love story which runs through the novel and often smothers the story of Jason Edwards and his environment. Reeves loves Alice, the flower which grew from such unpromising soil to become talented musician and new, independent woman. The climax of the first section is diverted from Jason's decision to go West to Alice's decision between love for Reeves and duty toward family. This love-duty conflict persists even after three years of struggle on the plains so that the focus of interest in the second section is divided between the economic struggle of Jason and the temptation of Alice to abandon her family for a cultured life of ease in Boston. The love story is needlessly complicated by Alice's single-tax theories against charity and her fear that Reeves persists in his proposal of marriage out of pity rather than

⁶⁷ Ibid., pp. 187-188.

⁶⁸ Ibid., p. 1.

love. After allowing the climax of the second part of the novel to be the storm followed by the stroke of Jason, Garland avoided resolving both his economic and amorous conflicts by allowing Reeves to marry Alice and carry the whole family back to Massachusetts, which with Reeves' protection will apparently be a refuge from the ubiquitous economic and natural forces of the novel.

The same conflict of effect visible in the lack of relationship between the study of Jason Edwards and the romantic plot is visible in other elements of the novel. In characterization, the strange discrepancy between the universal degradation caused by the lower class Boston environment and the moral uprightness of Jason, his wife, and two daughters is immediately obvious. The implication, unintended as it may be, is that environment is an overpowering moral force, with the exception of the central figures of this novel. The novel is another negative proof that effective study of the interaction between environment and character necessitates some incongruity of characterization. The consistently morally good Edwards family reacts to its environments by becoming poorer and more coarsened by labor, but there is no change in character. Environment remains an external force, a background. The superficial link between economic environment and the actions of the characters is, of course, further weakened by the existence of Walter Reeves,

who lives outside the power of these forces. Just as the ideal people are inexplicably good, so the antagonists are inexplicably bad, thus giving a melodramatic exactness to the characterization within the novel. Despite the factory owner's "And that's all I can afford to pay 'em I'm pinched too"⁶⁹ and Judge Balser's claim that he is only an agent for the syndicate, the owners and land managers remain inhumane villains.

If I may avoid, for the moment, the grand explanations of Garland's failure to fulfill his artistic promise in terms of character and environment to look at specific problems in technique, I think one of his basic problems was in his method of characterization. As a realist Garland was convinced that "In all that is particular we may be shown the general, in all that is finite the infinite."⁷⁰ However, in both his theory and his practice, the means to achieve this goal remained vague. At one point he advocated "a drama of average types of character, infinitely varied, but always characteristic."⁷¹ His hesitancy on this point is most easily recognized in his most concrete essay on technique, "The Influence of Ibsen." "At his best [Ibsen] takes a common man or a representative man and follows him through a moral

⁶⁹Ibid., p. 78.

⁷⁰Garland, Crumbling Idols, pp. 117-118.

⁷¹Ibid., p. 28.

or mental change, with all his logical connections, and leaves him as abruptly as he began,"⁷² and thus Ibsen avoids "heroines, villains, and heroes."⁷³ In praising Ibsen's treatment of motives, Garland concluded, "Thus each character has, in a sense, his justification. We see things from their standpoint. The fluent and the all-embracing sympathy of the dramatist has gone around these men and women. Malformed and twisted as they are, they have always a dramatic justification for their action."⁷⁴ I think Garland recognized in "moral or mental change" and "all-embracing sympathy" including even the "malformed and twisted" Ibsen's use of what Myers calls incongruity of characterization and also what Booth calls impartiality toward characters, both of which tend to increase the lifelikeness and individuality of effect in characterization; yet even here Garland saw these characters as "representative." He also grasped the implication, present in European naturalists and realists, that "To have the action spring from the characters is to destroy the traditional plot."⁷⁵ But there is a hint that Garland had not substituted the truth of nature--of what is--for the traditional criteria of the typical or the probable: when

⁷²Ibid., p. 105.

⁷³Ibid.

⁷⁴Ibid., p. 107.

⁷⁵Ibid., p. 109.

he turned to Ibsen's women, he found, "he has in my estimation used too large a proportion of remarkable women to be perfectly true to his time and his country. . . ." ⁷⁶ In creating characters, Garland in his longer fiction never solved this problem of type versus individual, the ideal versus the real. As a result the characters in his novels have the effect of "only pasteboard figures." ⁷⁷ One element of the "genteel elegance and romantic compromise" ⁷⁸ which weakened Jason Edwards and several other novels was the result of the failure to solve the problems of technique in characterization.

Just as the characterization remains oversimplified and inconsistent with the descriptive passages, the apparent objectivity of the author is superficial. Although an authorial spokesman may be preferable to direct authorial comment, the idealization of Reeves and the Edwards and the attack upon the factory and land owners direct the reader's sympathy so that the ideal characters' comments are taken as literal truth. The only real concession which Garland made toward objectivity of values was that he prevented Reeves' having a final speech advocating the immediate institution of the single-tax program. Supposedly inherent in the defeat

⁷⁶Ibid., p. 115.

⁷⁷Taylor, p. 166.

⁷⁸Walcutt, p. 59.

of Jason Edwards is the theme that only a change in the system can aid this typical man and thousands like him. Even as propaganda, however, the novel is weakened by the use of impartial nature, which the single-tax will change very little, and the happy ending of returning East which, as Walcutt points out, "is not a victory for the frontier spirit but an abandonment of it."⁷⁹

Like Gissing's early novels, Jason Edwards is essentially a novel of social protest. It is marred in much the same way Gissing's novels are marred--the use of a spokesman for the author and a failure to integrate a traditional ideal love plot and a study of man caught up in uncontrollable forces. Ahnebrink's comparisons of descriptions in this novel with those of Zola in L'Assommoir and La Terre⁸⁰ illustrate that Garland was superior to the writers in the local color tradition in creating a realistic environment, but despite the realistic environment and serious purpose, Jason Edwards is still much more like Zury than the Zola novels. That this novel contains a description of Boston slums does not make it an experimental novel in tradition or intention. To judge it by naturalistic standards only furnishes additional angles of attack upon what is a weak novel in any tradition.

⁷⁹Ibid.

⁸⁰Ahnebrink, pp. 247-249.

The causes for the failure in technique are multiple. Central to this failure, I believe, is Garland's uncertainty of intention springing from the conflict between social purpose and aesthetic goals--a struggle between one veritist principle, beauty for the sake of truth, and another: "The realist or veritist is really an optimist, a dreamer. He sees life in terms of what it might be, as well as in terms of what it is; but he writes of what is, and, at his best, suggests what is to be, by contrast."⁸¹ This theoretical contradiction is further emphasized and becomes more directly relevant to his failure in technique if placed in terms of tradition or, more simply, publishing outlets. On the one hand there was the propaganda of The Arena, reflecting the old tradition, in America as elsewhere, of fiction as a sweetened essay; on the other was the more artistic goal symbolized by the Century, a tradition of plotted love stories and happy endings. It is obvious that Garland wanted to avoid both of these, but with his Emersonian belief in democratic, American art and his Veronesque doctrine of originality, Garland found that the only model which seemed to offer an acceptable balance was the local color tradition; in terms of technique, it was woefully inadequate.

Garland's fourth novel of 1892, another expansion of a play, is less ambitious and less interesting than Jason

⁸¹Garland, Crumbling Idols, p. 52.

Edwards and, perhaps because of the limitation of purpose, less striking in its failure. A Member of the Third House is another "exposure of the evils of American society,"⁸² this time the political evils being perpetrated by city transit companies. Garland said later, "The [sic] Member of the Third House really sprang obscurely from experiences in Chicago and Boston and certain transactions in Washington some three or four years ago. It is probable that Boston contributed the largest part."⁸³ However, "obscurely" seems a strange adverb when Flower had to warn him that the play was probably libelous of Boston politicians.⁸⁴ The novel has little relevance to this study and offers little to interest anyone except historians interested in a rather naive view of how lobbyists (the third house) influence legislators. The idealistic senator, spokesman for the author, exposes the vicious plot and wins for his wife a girl of such shallowness that the reader would be tempted to pity the hero if he could believe in him. The political story and the love story are implausibly linked by the hero's being pitted against the villain in both contests. Perhaps for legal reasons, the setting is left so vague that the only fact the reader is certain of is that it is hot.

⁸² Ahnebrink, p. 84.

⁸³ Quoted Ibid.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

The only fiction Garland published after 1892, other than his short stories, which had enough power to cause any critical struggle among his contemporaries was Rose of Dutcher's Coolly (1895). John Burroughs, a close friend, felt it necessary to warn Garland about his dangerous tendencies in this novel: "This morbid sex-consciousness is one of the diseases of the age. At least this feature of your book strikes me as unfortunate. It is extraneous and plays no part in the story. In such a master as Ibsen the sex problem is vital and plays a part and one is not offended. . . . I do not think Zola a safe guide in such matters."⁸⁵ But both Burroughs, unknowingly criticizing the novel and not the sex interest, and Ahnebrink, in suggesting that "the handling of sex in Rose of Dutcher's Coolly reminds us more of Zola than of Ibsen,"⁸⁶ are wrong, it seems to me, because the theme is an imitation of Ibsen, not Zola, and the sexual material seems extraneous only because of Garland's failure to achieve his theme. The conflict in the novel is between society's demand that an attractive girl marry, thus entering the subservient, functionless world of a doll's house, and a girl's will to exercise her talents and seek personal fulfillment independently. The stress upon sexual passion, "coy"⁸⁷ as it is when

⁸⁵Quoted Ibid., p. 207.

⁸⁶Ibid.

⁸⁷Walcutt, p. 61.

compared even to the contemporary English treatment of sex, is justified because it is one of the forces which the girl must overcome in order to avoid marriage. Rose is the new woman, treated by Ibsen and others, fighting a society which demands that she conform to an outmoded pattern of action.

The novel is not focused on environment, passionate forces, or even social repression but is, as Ahnebrink has noted, "a psychological novel."⁸⁸ Rose, with inherent intelligence and force of character, overcomes her passion for a young schoolmate and her father's weak resistance in order to attend the University of Wisconsin. At the University she resists the conformist pattern and her own desires by refusing the college suitors who want to marry her. Going to Chicago, she resists the temptations offered by the rich and socially prominent young men who want to marry her. She feels she must become a writer--a veritist, of course, after some advice from a newspaper reporter. Then with the flare of old-fashioned, inexplicable, pure love, she marries the newspaperman and, as I believe the reader is expected to think, achieves the freedom and ability to continue (or rather begin) her career. It is this ending, begging the questions of both passion and freedom which have been raised by the novel, that makes the stress upon sex seem non-essential and also makes nonsense of the intended feminist theme.

⁸⁸ Ahnebrink, p. 87.

Having almost totally abandoned his economic and political themes and writing for publication by Stone and Kimball, two young men who had been touched by the art for art's sake ideal, Garland wrote what is generally considered his best novel. One of the primary reasons for this judgment is that Rose is the first character in his longer fiction to be believable. His achievement with Rose is due partially to the greater space he devotes to analysis of her motives. Although the farm environment of the first third of the novel is made real, Garland makes little attempt to link the environment with Rose's will. In fact, Rose is contrasted with her environment. Thus free to make a character study, Garland, like Ibsen, traced "the moving forces of his characters. He sees them completely in form and dress, speech and motive."⁸⁹ Rose, although clearly idealized, becomes complexly realized:

God only knows the temptations which came to her. She had days when all the (so-called) unclean things she had ever seen, all the overheard words of men's coarse jests, came back like vultures to trouble her. Sometimes, when she walked forth of a morning, the sun flamed across the grass with ineffable beauty. The whole earth was radiant; every sound was a song; every lithe youth moved like a god before her, and it was then that something deep in her, something drawn from generations of virtuous wives and mothers, saved her from the whirlpool of passion.

At such times she felt dimly the enormous difference between her own nature and that of Josephine. Josephine's passion was that of a child--

⁸⁹Garland, Crumbling Idols, p. 106.

while hers was that of an imaginative and complex woman.⁹⁰

The confusion of the first paragraph is partially that of Rose, confused by the recognition of the freedom of nature and the constrictions on man, and part of it is Garland's insecurity with or fear of his ideas, but in addition to the weak assertion that Rose is complex, the quotation illustrates what Garland attempted to create in Rose. Repulsed by the "coarse jests" and at the same time doubting whether the subject is really "unclean," Rose sees a natural analogue to her passion all around her and at the same time inexplicably finds means to control this passion. This incongruity is reflected in her motives and actions: her desire to save her father from loneliness and her knowledge that Dutcher's Coolly will destroy her; her passionate desire to accept the love of the young college man and the knowledge that acceptance means renunciation of her ambitions; her temptation to become the belle of the Chicago social season and her knowledge that it is all empty show. This complexity may seem superficial when compared to Madame Bovary or even A Mummer's Wife, but it reflects the best that Garland ever achieved in extended character development.

Since environment is not his subject, Garland made little of the contrast between the western Wisconsin farm and

⁹⁰Hamlin Garland, Rose of Dutcher's Coolly (New York: Harper & Brothers, n. d.), p. 104.

Chicago. The Chicago section of the novel fails, partially because the environment never becomes as interesting as that of Wisconsin (Chicago lacked that picturesque quality which Garland professedly deplored but used consistently) but more importantly because Garland did not know what the new woman did when she had struggled upward to freedom. Thus, almost as if from desperation, Garland had Rose marry the broad-minded journalist. Nothing comes of the theme of natural as opposed to unnatural attitudes toward passion.

It is very difficult, even after extensive reading in late nineteenth-century fiction, to understand how anyone could find Rose of Dutcher's Coolly shocking. The only protest the novel contained against the ideals of the period was the truncated theme against the social attitude that woman's sole function was marriage. Rose is a good girl in every sense of the word, and Garland's sympathy and thus that of the reader is directed toward agreement with Rose's values. Those who see the sexual element as in conflict with Garland's echoes of Howells in Crumbling Idols seem to me to have identified themselves a little too fully with the contemporary readers of the novel. Typical of Garland's theoretical statements is the following: "This literature will not deal with crime and abnormalities, nor with deceased [sic] persons. It will deal, I believe, with the wholesome love of honest men for honest women, with the heroism of labor, the comradeship

of men. . . ."91 The treatment of Rose's passion is "wholesome"; like Burroughs, Garland felt that such a subject was a part of truth and deserved treatment. However, Burroughs was right in believing that Garland failed to make the subject relevant to the inherent theme of the novel. Garland, even in the best of circumstances such as writing this novel free from the pressures of both Flower and Gilder, was not sufficient master of novelistic form to carry out his imitation of Ibsen. Thus to call Rose of Dutcher's Coolly Garland's best novel is not really very high praise.

Rose of Dutcher's Coolly foreshadowed the artistic future of Garland, the abandonment of realistic experimentation for sentimental and picturesque traditionalism. Howells recognized the flaw in Rose; after praising its portrayal of truth about Wisconsin farm life, he pointed to the failure: "But along with this valuable truth, there is a strain of sentimentality which discredits it; and the reader is left in an uncertainty as to the author's meaning in one essential which is at least discomfiting. If fiction is to deal with things hitherto not dealt with in the evolution of character, it must be explicit."92 With his next two years devoted to

91 Garland, Crumbling Idols, p. 28.

92 Quoted in Holloway, p. 121. The specific problem Howells refers to is analogous to the sexual mystery in Zury. Something happened between Rose and her schoolmate Carl which shocked her father and left a lasting impression on Rose. In 1895, the prudery explaining this mysteriousness is as much Garland's as it is his audience's.

research and writing of his life of Grant and to romantically picturesque pieces about the mountain country, Garland ceased to be a creative force in the growth of realism. With the disappearance of his purpose of social protest, there was a concurrent loss of interest in realistic subject matter and techniques.

Garland's failure to be a better artist while he was writing seriously and his subsequent abandonment of his early artistic ideals have been explained in a number of ways. Although not a complete explanation, I think a major cause was Garland's failure to decide upon the purpose of literature, a failure made permanent by the inadequate tastes of the publishers and editors in America in the 1890's. The radical protest of a Flower or the gentility of a Gilder--these symbolize the alternatives for Garland, who had to make a living by his pen. The failure of the firm of Stone and Kimball in 1897 symbolized the failure of America to offer an outlet to the artist who was neither raking muck nor purveying gentility. Garland had enough insight to recognize the problem and its results upon himself as artist.

I had the wish to be a kind of social historian and in the end fell, inevitably, between two stools. I failed as a reporter, and only half succeeded as a novelist.

What I am saying is this: Gilder and his associate, Robert Underwood Johnson, of The Century, stood for the aristocratic in literature. Along with Stedman, Howells, Alden, Burlingame, and in less degree Walter Page, they supported the true

magazine, while McClure, Lorimer, and Bok representing the popular or journalistic side led the all-conquering host which in later years loaded the news stands with gaily colored pyramids of snappy stories and easy-going comment. In the end the "yellow journal" and the "tabloid daily" circulated in billions.

.
 In the beginning these popular editors were so high in mind, so genial and so persuasive, that they won me to their plans before I realized my danger. Page, Bok, Doubleday, Phillips, Lorimer, and McClure appeared so genuinely interested in me that it was hard not to write to their order, especially as I was poor and could only now and again finish a story which Alden or Gilder considered worthy of their approval. . . . I claim no alibi. If I am less guilty than other writers, it is only because I had less ability. My journalistic efforts were too feeble, too half-hearted to be of much service. I wrote for McClure's, but I continued to visit The Century's literary salon.⁹³

Perhaps more instructive than the admission of failure is Garland's inability to recognize the problem fully. There is irony in the advocate of democratic literature upholding the defenders of the "aristocratic in literature," but there is pathos in the realistic Garland's visiting the Century as a haven of artistic ideals. Dream and reality--recognized as an economic dilemma in the West--Garland never fully realized that it was the artistic dilemma of the East. Garland was weak, having neither the mania for artistic integrity of Henry James nor the mania for self-destruction of Stephen Crane.

The combination of the themes of social protest and the techniques of the local color realists does not place

⁹³Garland, Roadside Meetings, pp. 342-343.

Garland in the naturalistic tradition. Only in short stories and novelettes, in which his major advance over his predecessors was his abandonment of the happy ending, was Garland able to fuse technique and theme to achieve artistic integrity. In his longer fiction, his ideals were based upon a rather confusing mixture of English biologists and sociologists and French critics, but his techniques were primarily those used by Kirkland and others in the same tradition. Again the dream and reality refuse to coincide: the theme presents the dream of the ideal society cleansed of economic and political injustice; the techniques restrict the work to a hopeless conflict between realistic background and romantic plot with the inevitable happy marriage as the ending.

Garland, like Gissing, did go beyond his predecessors in the presentation of the "ignobly decent," "the nether world" of the midwestern farmer, the Boston mechanic, and the corrupt politician. He went beyond Kirkland's realism by letting the reality he presented gain its own effects rather than heightening it by stressing its novelty or comedy. Like Gissing, he failed to find a consistent technique for characterization: idealization and objective observation are in constant conflict. Like Gissing, Garland found objectivity to be an unattainable goal. Like Gissing, Garland weakened his novels through his failure to find techniques, a tradition, by means of which he could create a fusion between purpose and effect.

Due to this failure, Garland as novelist, like Gissing, had little influence and deserved little fame. Unlike Gissing, however, Garland turned his failure into the pleasant life of a commercial writer. There was less competition in the United States than in England.

CHAPTER V

STEPHEN CRANE: THE TRIUMPH OF IRONY AS TECHNIQUE

Hamlin Garland, although he has posed many problems to the literary classifier, offered a tenable solution in his explanation of his choice of the word "veritism" as a way of distinguishing himself from "a realist in the sense in which the followers of Zola used it,"¹ thus linking himself with the realism of the local colorists and Howells. Partially because of the universal recognition of Stephen Crane's (1871-1900) artistic superiority over Garland and partially because Crane left no consistent guide to his intentions, both critics and historians have failed to agree upon the nature of Crane's art and its place in any single literary tradition. The listing of movements with which Crane has been identified goes beyond the artistic movements of the Nineteenth Century; realist, naturalist, romanticist, symbolist, impressionist, moralist, nihilist, Christian, pagan, and gentleman form a rather bewildering list of terms to apply to any single author, but this list does not exhaust the names applied to Crane as

¹Letter to Eldon C. Hill quoted in Ahnebrink, p. 139.

artist. This general disagreement on how to classify the work of Crane is reflected in the variety of influences which have been suggested: Twain, Garland, Howells, James, Bierce, and the moral propagandists of the magazines are the most commonly cited Americans; Kipling, Hardy, Moore, and Conrad are the English suggestions; Flaubert, Zola, Maupassant, and Stendhal are the most mentioned French writers; Tolstoy, Dostoyevsky, Turgenev, and Chekhov are offered as the most likely Russians. Mix these elements with a variety of critical approaches--biographical, psychological, impressionistic, Marxist, and new critical--and the total effect becomes one of scholarship gone mad. All of the confusion does lead the student to one inescapable conclusion: Crane created work which is individual and interesting.

In a life that did not span 29 years and with much of the creative activity of his adult years devoted to journalism, Crane accomplished a great deal besides creating enigmas for scholars. Spiller suggests that with the republication of Maggie (1896) "modern American fiction was born";² The Red Badge of Courage has been widely acknowledged as one of the four or five great novels produced by an American in the Nineteenth Century; and at least six of Crane's short stories have received that highest encomium of the twentieth-century

²Robert E. Spiller, et al, Literary History of the United States (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1960), p. 1022.

critic, "modern." To explain this output from a young man whose background consisted of a rebellious childhood, brief and unsatisfactory experiences in two colleges, and a mysterious life among New York Bohemians, scholars have been forced to the safe and inevitable conclusion that Crane was a genius. Accepting this as an adequate explanation of the relationship between his life and his work, I must limit my attention to Crane's methods in those works of longer fiction which have been called naturalistic.

Although the works of Crane have been compared with those of Zola and have been identified as naturalistic from the time of their publication, this classification has been under consistent attack. The standard proof of Crane's naturalism consists of an extended analysis of Maggie as naturalism par excellence and a note on George's Mother (1896), with reservations about its naturalism. It seems logical, therefore, to assume that these two books will exhibit the "purest" naturalism which Crane achieved.

Maggie may have been begun in 1891,³ but the form in which it was printed in 1893 was much different from the conception of 1891; therefore, the Sullivan County Sketches, first published in the New York Tribune during 1892, are not only Crane's first published fiction but are also indicative of a

³Robert Wooster Stallman, Stephen Crane: An Omnibus (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1952), pp. 4-8.

stage of artistic development preceding Maggie. Although in structure and effect these stories exhibit an obvious manipulation for humorous incongruity, mostly bitter, they also contain stylistic traits important in Crane's later fiction. The first of these is the conscious effort to eliminate authorial comment in order to gain objectivity, and the second, a result of this objectivity, is the development of an incongruity beyond the humorous one of the manipulated plot, an ironic incongruity dependent upon the discrepancy between the character's view of himself and the reader's view of the character. It is interesting to speculate on Crane's philosophy beyond this "ironic study of vanity and conceit,"⁴ but the consistent confrontation between the characters and the "unknown" is made meaningless by the contrived humor of the endings.

If one may believe Crane's letter to Lily Brandon Munroe, probably written in 1894, Crane's rejection of the style and techniques of The Sullivan County Sketches was a matter of conscious choice leading to improvement:

To speak, to tell you of my success, dear, is rather more difficult. My career has been more of a battle than a journey. You know, when I left you, I renounced the clever school in literature. It seemed to me that there must be something more in life than to sit and cudgel one's brains for clever and witty expedients. So I developed all alone a

⁴James B. Colvert, "Structure and Theme in Stephen Crane's Fiction," Modern Fiction Studies, V (Autumn, 1959), 203.

little creed of art which I thought was a good one. Later I discovered that my creed was identical with the one of Howells and Garland and in this way I became involved in the beautiful war between those who say that art is man's substitute for nature and we are the most successful in art when we approach the nearest to nature and truth, and those who say--well, I don't know what they say. They don't, they can't say much but they fight villianously sic and keep Garland and I sic out of the big magazines. Howells, of course, is too powerful for them.

If I had kept to my clever, Rudyard-Kipling style, the road might have been shorter, but, ah, it wouldn't be the true road. The two years of fighting have been well-spent. And now I am almost at the end of it. This winter fixes me firmly. We have proved too formidable for them, confound them. They used to call me "that terrible, young radical," but now they are beginning to hem and haw and smile--those very old coons who used to adopt a condescending air toward me. There is an irony in the present situation, that I enjoy, devil take them for a parcel of old, cringing, conventionalized hens. In one magazine office once, the editor kept me waiting for a good long hour and then made a cool apology in a careless manner that I wouldn't have used upon a dog. I stopped in at that office the other day to see the manager and the editor caught sight of me through the door of his office. "Ah, Crane, my dear boy," he said, "come in and have a cigar and a chat. I'm always glad to see you." And he made haste to be rid of an authoress of some kind who was haggling with him about a story. The bare-faced old grey-headed diplomatist, I wondered if he considered that I had lost my memory. "No-thanks--I'm in a hurry."⁵

Searching for a tradition and caught within the same publishers' trap as Garland,⁶ Crane exhibits his critical limitations in

⁵R. W. Stallman and Lillian Gilkes (eds.), Stephen Crane: Letters (London: Peter Owen, 1960), pp. 31-32.

⁶Other than his work for newspapers, The Arena was the only outlet for Crane's early writing. The editor referred to in this quotation is McClure, whose handling of The Red Badge of Courage is famous. Gilder's refusal of Maggie is equally

his equating the theories of Howells and Garland, but that the ideas of Howells and Garland helped to direct the final form that Maggie took seems very likely, although the extent to which Crane understood or was even interested in their theories is debatable.⁷ However, by the end of 1892, Crane had the literary ideal of truth, a subject--life in the Bowery, which he had first conceived in 1891 and then investigated thoroughly--and even a model for the literary treatment of the slums--if not L'Assommoir, certainly some knowledge of Jason Edwards and the exposés printed in The Arena. It seems reasonable, in terms of the 1894 letter about his complete agreement with Garland and Howells, that Crane shared their ideas on the moral purpose of the novel as well as their desire to avoid excessive didacticism. But it is difficult, if not impossible, to reconstruct Crane's complete purpose of 1892-93 because evidence is scarce and contradictory. Since he conceived Maggie while he was a college boy and since the word recurs often in his comments on the novel, it seems clear that one of Crane's purposes was to shock the reader. In several inscriptions to the novel, the following one written in 1895 to the Reverend Thomas Dixon, Crane made this point and included

famous. Only after the critical success of The Red Badge of Courage in England did Crane escape the publishing dilemma by which Garland was trapped.

⁷The question of the Garland-Crane relationship in terms of their common choice of impressionism as a device seems insoluble.

another important statement of purpose:

It is inevitable that this book will greatly shock you, but continue, pray, with great courage to the end, for it tries to show that environment is a tremendous thing in the world, and often shapes lives regardlessly. If one could prove that theory, one would make room in Heaven for all sorts of souls (notably an occasional street girl) who are not confidently expected to be there by many excellent people.⁸

Perhaps because Crane had changed his ideas on the function of literature, a letter of 1896 to Catherine Harris fails to have any of the overtones of social protest which the earlier note exhibits. "I had no other purpose in writing 'Maggie' than to show people to people as they seem to me. If that be evil, make the most of it."⁹ Perhaps it is safer to study the novel than it is to attempt to reconstruct Crane's intentions.

Printed at Crane's expense in 1893, Maggie: A Girl of the Streets by Johnston Smith was a novel with a few more damns and one more character than the 1896 version which forms the basis for the standard edition.¹⁰ As many have noted, the fable of Maggie Johnson is concerned with the destruction of the innocent--the story of youth failing to adjust to society.

⁸ Stallman and Gilkes, p. 49.

⁹ Ibid., p. 133.

¹⁰ Robert Wooster Stallman, "Stephen Crane's Revisions of Maggie: A Girl of the Streets," American Literature, XXVI (January, 1955), 528-536.

But the plot centered on Maggie is, as Stallman notes, "a sentimental melodrama,"¹¹ and the book is more than the tracing of Maggie's fate; it is an environmental study using Maggie for plot interest.

Many have noted that the novel is "a panorama of impressionistic vignettes,"¹² and Joseph X. Brennan, among others, has pointed out ironic and symbolic patterns linking the episodes.¹³ Maggie forms a motive for the actions of Pete, Jimmie, and Mary Johnson, but only six chapters really center on Maggie--VI, VII, and VIII, tracing the growth of her love for Pete, and XIV, XV, and XVI, outlining her rejection by Pete and her family. The climactic Chapter XVII, in which Crane depicted the nameless wanderer rejected by men on all social levels, should remind the reader that not Maggie but trapped womanhood is the subject of the chapter. Except for Chapter XII, which contains a description of another of the series of drinking places presented in the novel, the remainder of the chapters focus on the family in general, Jimmie, Mary, or Pete. In other words, the principle of selection is not based upon the story of the individual Maggie but upon

¹¹R. W. Stallman, "Crane's 'Maggie': A Reassessment," Modern Fiction Studies, V (Autumn, 1959), 259.

¹²Ibid., 252.

¹³Joseph X. Brennan, "Ironic and Symbolic Structure in Crane's Maggie," Nineteenth Century Fiction, XVI (March, 1962), 303-315.

the typicality of the Bowery family, the Bowery bars, and the Bowery lover. Interrelating these parts is a pattern of comparison and contrast.¹⁴ For instance, in the first two chapters the violence of the street is compared with that of the home; VIII and IX contrast the melodramatic dream and the reality of home life; X and XI contrast Jimmie's moral outrage with his immoral means of gaining revenge. Like Maugham,¹⁵ Crane gained his panoramic effect within a severely limited length, but hints of the broader sociological patterns of Gissing and Moore are visible in Jimmie's rejecting the girl on the street as he thinks of the problem of his sister and in the women's surrounding Pete in the penultimate chapter. Environment, then, is the subject, and the conflict, like that in Liza of Lambeth, is between the confusing forces of the environment and the individuals of the novel.

"Innocence thwarted and betrayed by environment is the sum of Maggie,"¹⁶ according to Stallman, and this fact is supported by Crane's statement to Reverend Dixon. Crane, like other writers attempting to make environment a fictional force, faced the problem of defining the environment, making it real, and showing the interrelation of environment and character. The predominant characteristic of the environment

¹⁴Stallman, Modern Fiction Studies, V, 252.

¹⁵Maggie probably influenced Liza of Lambeth.

¹⁶Stallman, Omnibus, p. 9.

in Maggie is physical violence. From the opening scene of Jimmie's defense of "the honour of Rum Alley,"¹⁷ the first three chapters delineate the pervasiveness of fighting as a way of life. Ironically undercutting the idea of the fight for honor is the fight between Blue Billie and Jimmie, broken up by the parental kicks of Mr. Johnson. That brutality is an environmental trait rather than a personal trait is stressed by the delight and encouragement elicited by the fighters from the surrounding crowds. Chapter II continues the pattern of violence: despite Maggie's protest at Jimmie's fighting, she is brutally jerking Tommie, the baby, along with her; Jimmie responds to her rebuke by beating her; the mother physically attacks the children and the husband. The final scene of Chapter III is the destructive battle between the two parents, concluded by unconsciousness, a result of alcohol and exertion. The children's reaction to their parents' violence is cowering fear. Having established violence as a major characteristic of the environment, Crane expanded the brutality beyond its existence as a simple factual element into a part of the values of the world of the Bowery. Pete becomes a hero to Maggie by means of his boasts about his ability as a fighter. Jimmie's image of himself is dependent upon his ability to fight. The irony of brutality as a value becomes explicit

¹⁷Wilson Follett (ed.), The Work of Stephen Crane (New York: Russell & Russell, 1963), X, 137. Hereafter referred to as Work.

in Jimmie's moral outrage at the ruin of his sister and his method of gaining justice, the animalistic battle in the bar in Chapter XI. In addition to these dramatic presentations, the viciousness of the environment is stressed through images and by means of statements of the characters.

Two other characteristics of the environment are presented concretely. The alcoholism of the mother and the drinking of the father both occur in the opening chapters and are closely related to the violence exhibited. The elder Johnson explicitly states the escapist function of alcohol when he explains his reason for drinking: "My home reg'lar livin' hell! Why do I come an' drin' whisk' here thish way? 'Cause home reg'lar livin' hell!"¹⁸ Drinking as recreation and escape is stressed by the progression of the Pete-Maggie relationship: from music hall, through beer hall, to a bar whose attractions are both alcohol and women. Pete's drunken scene among the women not only climaxes the alcoholic element of the environment but also sums up the other environmental escape--sexual promiscuity. Despite the subject of prostitution, this facet of the novel is presented relatively vaguely. Pete's desire for Maggie, Jimmie's two girls on opposite sides of town, and the final juxtaposition of whiskey and women in Pete's experience in the back room indicate that sex, like

¹⁸Ibid., X, 148.

whiskey, is a form of escape from the brutality of the environment, but Jimmie's treatment of his girls, Pete's treatment of Maggie, and the six prostitutes' abandonment of Pete prove that sex and brutality are as closely linked as alcohol and brutality.

Fighting, drinking, fornicating--these are the outstanding traits of the environment which affect the characters. Compared to these elements, the details of the physical background remain rather vague. One of the relatively extensive descriptions of environment occurs at the beginning of Chapter II:

Eventually they entered a dark region where, from a careening building, a dozen gruesome doorways gave up loads of babies to the street and the gutter. A wind of early autumn raised yellow dust from cobbles and swirled it against a hundred windows. Long streamers of garments fluttered from fire-escapes. In all unhandy places there were buckets, brooms, rags, and bottles. In the street infants played or fought with other infants or sat stupidly in the way of vehicles. Formidable women, with uncombed hair and disordered dress, gossiped while leaning on railings, or screamed in frantic quarrels. Withered persons, in curious postures of submission to something, sat smoking pipes in obscure corners. A thousand odors of cooking food came forth to the street. The building quivered and creaked from the weight of humanity stamping about in its bowels.¹⁹

The dominant impression created is one of crowdedness and ugliness, but this impression is not created by a concrete, organized presentation of the facts but by a series of

¹⁹Ibid., X, 141.

loosely connected sentences.²⁰ Physical background and inhabitants receive about equal stress in the paragraph, thus giving the impression that the people are suffering from "submission to something" (environment) but avoiding the vexing question of how physical environment is defeating its inhabitants. Although the focus is almost always on people or activity rather than concrete descriptions of things,²¹ the brief descriptions create a sufficiently strong impression so that the reader can perceive the contrast between the disorder of the streets and the Johnson home and the order and, in one sense, beauty of the bars.

On a corner a glass-fronted building shed a yellow glare upon the pavements. The open mouth of a saloon called seductively to passengers to enter and annihilate sorrow or create rage.

The interior of the place was papered in olive and bronze tints of imitation leather. A shining bar of counterfeit massiveness extended down the side of the room. Behind it a great mahogany-imitation sideboard reached the ceiling. Upon its shelves rested pyramids of shimmering glasses that were never disturbed. Mirrors set in the face of the sideboard multiplied them. Lemons, oranges, and paper napkins, arranged with mathematical precision, sat among the glasses. Many-hued decanters of liquor perched at regular intervals on the lower shelves. A nickel-plated

²⁰ Although not as often commented upon as the striking images created by Crane, the organization of descriptive paragraphs such as this one is as important to Crane's impressionistic effects as the startling images.

²¹ If those who find a carefully planned, coherent pattern of images in the book are correct, the oft-repeated "gruesome doorways" must be the outstanding characteristic of the environment.

cash-register occupied a place in the exact centre of the general effect. The elementary senses of it all seemed to be opulence and geometrical accuracy.²²

In addition to the first paragraph stressing alcohol as a means of escape and linking it with brutality, the passage emphasizes lightness, color, order, all elements missing from Rum Alley; obvious here is another link in the structure of comparison-contrast. Unlike Maugham, who takes away the apparent value of his characters by obvious humorous irony, Crane makes the reader understand that the escape to the bar is inadequate by the more subtle irony of the inherent contrast between the apparent and the real. By the repetition of "imitation," the use of "counterfeit," and the stress upon the lack of function of those things which are in perfect order, Crane's irony becomes clear, but not obtrusively so. The brutality of the street moving into the order of the bar with the fight which follows this passage makes the apparent contrast between the street and the bar disappear. In another famous descriptive scene, Chapter XVII where the impression rendered is of movement through every environmental level of the city, the effect is gained through a description of nameless men and a movement from light to dark, not through concrete descriptions of the environment.

It is, of course, generally recognized that Crane,

²²Work, X, 181.

like Maugham and Garland, is an impressionist. Certain facets of Crane's impressionistic creation of environment have not been generally recognized. The concrete background is lightly sketched, mostly in terms of people, through two superficially contrasted elements of the Bowery world--the street, including the building in which the Johnsons live, and the bars. The contrasts inherent in the description of these two elements make the description more functional than it would otherwise be; their relationship through contrast makes them elucidate each other. As the reader sees the bars more concretely, he is also made to see the world outside the bars. Thus an economy of description is achieved. But both in the description and in the action of the novel, the apparent contrast between the street world and the bar world is ironically shown to have no real basis so that the outside world and the world of escape become identical. At the end of Chapter XVIII, the darkness, the viciousness, the stench, the disorder of the outside world have engulfed Pete in the back room of the bar; Pete is analogous to the exhausted Johnsons in their room at the end of Chapter III.

The woman of audacity and brilliance stayed behind, taking up the bills and stuffing them into a deep, irregularly shaped pocket. A guttural snore from the recumbent man caused her to turn and look down at him. She laughed. "What a fool!" she said and went.

The smoke from the lamps settled heavily down in the little compartment, obscuring the way

out. The smell of oil, stifling in its intensity, pervaded the air. The wine from an overturned glass dripped softly down upon the blotches on the man's neck.²³

Thus Maggie contains relatively little concrete description, but that which it does contain has an ironic intensity which not only furnishes a feeling of the sordid, ugly environment but also contributes to movement and unity of structure.

The question of how this physical environment affects the characters is a difficult one. To show the link between the Bowery environment and the viciousness, alcoholism, and sexual promiscuity is, according to Crane's early comments, part of his intention. It is significant that Crane rejected Garland's economic explanation; economic repression, although implied in the ugliness of the environment and Maggie's suicide, is never made very real. In fact, there is no real logical link between the physical background and the action of the characters; yet all of the critics who have recognized a deterministic study of environment in Maggie are not misreading the book. Although the descriptions of the Bowery, which I have outlined above, are integral parts of the novel, they do not define the effective environment. The destructive nature of the environment does not depend upon a sense of place but the nature of people. The relatively great amount of description devoted to characters, both named and unnamed,

²³Ibid., X, 215.

supports this observation. Chapter IX, whose function is to show the contrast between the "transcendental realism"²⁴ of the melodrama seen by Maggie in Chapter VIII and the reality of Rum Alley, exhibits an example of the presentation of the deterministic environment of the novel:

A group of urchins were intent upon the side door of a saloon. Expectancy gleamed from their eyes. They were twisting their fingers in excitement. "Here she comes!" yelled one of them suddenly. The group of urchins burst instantly asunder and its individual fragments were spread in a wide, respectable half-circle about the point of interest. The saloon door opened with a crash, and the figure of a woman appeared upon the threshold. Her gray hair fell in knotted masses about her shoulders. Her face was crimsoned and wet with perspiration. Her eyes had a rolling glare. "Not a cent more of me money will yehs get--not a red! I spent me money here for t'ree years, an' now yehs tells me yeh'll sell me no more stuff! Go fall on yerself, Johnnie Murckre! 'Disturbance'? Disturbance be blowed! Go fall on yerself, Johnnie--"²⁵

The boys attack the drunken woman and she curses the spectators. Mary Johnson arrives home only to fight with her son. The ugliness, the drunkenness, the violence are here, but they expand beyond the individual to be reflected in the viciousness of the children and the oaths and missiles of the neighbors. The environment which entraps Maggie, Jimmie, and all of the characters is one of people without usable values. The question of how the physical surroundings of the Bowery shapes fate may go unanswered, but by limiting his subject to a group

²⁴Ibid., X, 171.

²⁵Ibid., X, 173.

of people isolated in a single area, Crane achieves the effect of environmental determinism.

The novel contains two means of characterization, one dependent on exterior description and dramatization and one combining these means with internal analysis. Crane never enters the minds of the elder Johnsons or any of the minor characters; the reader is allowed to see the inner motives of only Maggie, Jimmie, and in one place Pete. Pete is not only a necessary device for forwarding the plot centering on the fall of Maggie but also a complete representative of the milieu, an amalgamation of the violence, drunkenness, and sexuality which determine the environment. Pete, as typical young man, is not a complex character, but even in his characterization, the basic conflict of all the major characters is visible. This conflict is noticeable in the introduction of Pete, a passage which illustrates Crane's technique of remaining outside the character and yet showing the character's motivation:

Down the avenue came boastfully sauntering a lad of sixteen years, although the chronic sneer of an ideal manhood already sat on his lips. His hat was tipped over his eye with an air of challenge. Between his teeth a cigar-stump was tilted at the angle of defiance. He walked with a certain swing of the shoulders which appalled the timid. He glanced over into the vacant lot in which the little raving boys from Devil's Row seethed about the shrieking and tearful child from Rum Alley.

"Gee!" he murmured with interest, "a scrap. Gee!" He strode over to the cursing circle, swinging his shoulders in a manner which denoted that he held

victory in his fists. He approached at the back of one of the most deeply engaged of the Devil's Row children. "Ah, what d' hell," he said, and smote the deeply engaged one on the back of the head.²⁶

Although the sarcasm of "ideal manhood" strikes a false note of authorial comment, the other elements of the passage, all visible to an outsider, emphasize Pete's pride in his strength, his toughness. But forming a contrast to the final curse is the innocent-sounding "Gee,"²⁷ a contrast between overt worldliness and internal insecurity, a conflict which characterizes Pete throughout the novel. His insecurity demands the support of sexual mastery: "Pete took note of Maggie. 'Say, Mag, I'm stuck on yer shape. It's outa sight. . . .'"²⁸ His wish to become better in his own eyes through convincing the world of his masculine sophistication is shown by his abandoning Maggie for Nell and his final drunken plea for acceptance from the six prostitutes. Analogous to the incongruous innocence intimated by the "Gee" of the above passage is the introduction of a value which apparently has no place in the Bowery world.

²⁶ Ibid., X, 138-139.

²⁷ Perhaps "Gee" sounds more innocent to the current reader than to the reader of the Nineties; however, considering the uproar caused by the profanity used in the novel, I suspect the contrast between the privately murmured "Gee" and the publicly announced "hell" was intentional.

²⁸ Works, X, 160.

In Chapter XVI, devoted to Pete's rejection of Maggie, the recurrent word is respectability.

In this chapter, for the first time, Crane resorted to analysis in the characterization of Pete. I feel that the analysis is artistically weak because it is unnecessary: Pete's self-justification simply repeats what the careful reader already knows and, in addition, reduces Pete's role from that of inverted hero, the Bowery representative of the traditional romantic lover, to pathetic boy. But Crane's mistake, if it is one, elucidates his purpose with a kind of glaring clarity. The opening paragraphs of the chapter repeat the pattern of mixed toughness and insecurity:

Pete did not consider that he had ruined Maggie. If he had thought that her soul could never smile again, he would have believed the mother and brother, who were pyrotechnic over the affair, to be responsible for it. Besides, in his world, souls did not insist upon being able to smile. "What d' hell?"

He felt a trifle entangled. It distressed him. Revelations and scenes might bring upon him the wrath of the owner of the saloon, who insisted upon respectability of an advanced type. "What do they want to raise such a smoke about it fer?" demanded he of himself, disgusted with the attitude of the family. He saw no necessity that people should lose their equilibrium merely because their sister or their daughter had stayed away from home. Searching about in his mind for possible reasons for their conduct, he came upon the conclusion that Maggie's motives were correct, but that the two others wished to snare him. He felt pursued.²⁹

²⁹Ibid., X, 204.

Attempting to escape from the contemplation of this problem, Pete occupies himself "With lingering thoughts of the woman of brilliance and audacity. . . ." ³⁰ The purpose of the quotation is to remove any possibility of the reader's judging Pete by traditional moral standards. A traditional villain must be self-conscious; Pete is not. The point is that, although Pete's actions have led to the destruction of an innocent girl, he is not to be judged as a villain but, like Maggie, as a morally confused human being. The other function of this passage, as well as the chapter as a whole, is to develop the irony in Pete's belief in barroom respectability and his ignorance of the ideal of familial respectability. When Maggie appears, he can send her away with the justified outrage of the businessman whose respectability is being threatened. The scene between Pete and Maggie closes with "'Oh, go to hell!' cried he. He slammed the door furiously and returned, with an air of relief, to his respectability." ³¹ But the larger irony, the irony which pervades the novel, is that this ideal of respectability is a norm from outside the environment, a middle-class norm which, as in Pete's rejection of Maggie in pursuance of it, is destructive. Pete remains a simple character, lacking in incongruity, despite his

³⁰ Ibid., X, 205.

³¹ Ibid., X, 207.

inconsistencies. Seeking growth, he can find no adequate means to achieve personal growth within the values of the environment in which he lives.

Complementary to Pete as a force leading to Maggie's fall is Mary Johnson, the mother whose drunken brutality forces Maggie to dream of an escape from home. She, like Pete, has two sides to her simple character:

The mother sat blinking at them. She delivered reproaches, swallowed potatoes, and drank from a yellow-brown bottle. After a time her mood changed, and she wept as she carried little Tommie into another room and laid him to sleep, with his fists doubled, in an old quilt of faded red-and-green grandeur. Then she came and moaned by the stove. She rocked to and fro upon a chair, shedding tears and crooning miserably to the two children about their "poor mother" and "yer fader, damn 'is soul."³²

Although grotesque in her viciousness, she, too, has a sentimental, insecure element in her character, most usually visible as drunken bathos. But beneath her brutality and her drunken actions, she retains an incongruous ideal of respectability which is instrumental in driving Maggie from home. Maggie leaves only after Mary has forced the issue: "Yeh've gone t' d' devil, Mag Johnson, yehs knows yehs have gone t' d' devil. Yer a disgrace t' yer people. An' now, git out an' go ahn wid dat doe-faced jude of yours. Go wid him, curse yeh, an' a good riddance. Go, an' see how yeh likes it."³³ The mother repeats her moral rejection of Maggie after

³² Ibid., X, 145-146.

³³ Ibid., X, 176-177.

Pete has abandoned her daughter, and of course, her actions in the final chapter stress again the incongruity between her life and her values. First her reaction to Maggie's death is simply sentimental: "When she finished her coffee she began to weep. 'I kin remember when her two feet were no bigger dan yer t'umb, and she weared worsted boots,' moaned she."³⁴ When in the closing lines "in an agony of grief" Mary screams, "Oh, yes, I'll fergive her! I'll fergive her!"³⁵ there is no conscious hypocrisy. The ironies are so numerous that it is difficult to mention them all. Among the most often noted are the useless forgiveness after a death caused by the mother's failure to forgive while Maggie was alive and the forgiver's much greater guilt than the forgiven. The latter irony is inevitably felt, but it is beside the point: although Crane never allowed Mary the self-justification that he allowed Pete, she is no more guilty of Maggie's death than Pete, Jimmie, or the unnamed minister. The functional irony in this last scene is its emphasis of respectability, Christian virtue, and Christian forgiveness in a world in which these values have no place. Like Pete, Mary Johnson is ultimately destructive because of her adherence to middle class and, finally, Christian norms. A simple character, Mary Johnson is trapped in the reality of the Bowery but equally trapped

³⁴Ibid., X, 216.

³⁵Ibid., X, 218.

by an ideal of something better.

Jimmie Johnson, to whose character more analysis is devoted than to any other in the novel, is Crane's most ambitious characterization and his greatest failure in Maggie. It is through Jimmie that Crane developed his Darwinian theme--the survival of the fittest through the adjustment to environment--through the contrast between Jimmie's survival and Maggie's death and that he stressed the valuelessness inherent in the Bowery environment--"He became so sharp that he believed in nothing."³⁶ In Jimmie, Crane tried hardest to achieve incongruity of characterization. In Chapter IV, devoted to an analysis of Jimmie, the weakness is apparent in the uncertainty of tone and the inconsistencies, which reflect, finally, confusion rather than complexity.³⁷ The final two paragraphs of the chapter, in their emphasis upon violence

³⁶Ibid., X, 153.

³⁷At this stage of his development, Crane's technique was inadequate to present simultaneously Jimmie's vision of himself and the ironic picture from above showing how the reader should evaluate Jimmie's thoughts. As in Maugham's attempt at this, the irony too often has a comic effect; for instance, "When they would thrust at, or parry, the nose of his champing horses, making them swing their heads and move their feet, and thus disturbing a stolid, dreamy repose, he swore at the men as fools, for he himself could perceive that Providence had caused it to be clearly written that he and his team had the inalienable right to stand in the proper path of the sun-chariot and, if they so minded, to obstruct its mission or take a wheel off." Work, X, 154-155.

and sex, link Jimmie to his environment; they also attempt to develop the complexity of his character.

When Jimmie was a little boy he began to be arrested. Before he reached a great age, he had a fair record. He developed too great a tendency to climb down from his truck and fight with other drivers. He had been in quite a number of fights, and in some general barroom rows that had become known to the police. Once he had been arrested for assaulting a chinaman. Two women in different parts of the city, and entirely unknown to each other, caused him considerable annoyance by breaking forth, simultaneously, at fateful intervals, into wallings about marriage and support and infants.

Nevertheless, he had, on a certain star-lit evening, said wonderingly and quite reverently, "Deh moon looks like hell, don't it?"³⁸

But Crane was unable to develop Jimmie as both adjusted to his ugly environment and filled with admiration for natural beauty. The conflict in Jimmie emerges as that of both Pete and Mary--personal action based upon the amoral standards of the environment and a selfish morality based upon ideals outside the environment. Sometimes this is comic: "Jimmie had an idea it wasn't common courtesy for a friend to come to one's home and ruin one's sister. But he was not sure how much Pete knew about the rules of politeness,"³⁹ or "He was trying to formulate a theory that he had always unconsciously held, that all sisters excepting his own could, advisedly, be ruined."⁴⁰ In relation to Maggie he reacts with his mother's

³⁸Ibid., X, 155-156.

³⁹Ibid., X, 177.

⁴⁰Ibid., X, 180.

ideal of respectability, as when Maggie makes her last appearance at home: "Radiant virtue sat upon his brow, and his repelling hands expressed horror of contamination."⁴¹ Ultimately all the analysis of Jimmie is almost functionless, for he finally exists as a simple character reflecting both amoral reality and the ideal of useless standards. In the last chapter, "the soiled, unshaven man,"⁴² announcing calmly the death of Maggie, has become the perfect representative of the environment, but this involves no real change in character since Jimmie has always had this role. It seems to me that Crane had greater plans than this for Jimmie, but he found no satisfactory way to carry them out.

Although Stallman does not prove that Madame Bovary was the "inspirational source" of Maggie⁴³ any more than Ahnebrink proves L'Assommoir as direct influence,⁴⁴ certainly Maggie's fall through the pursuit of romantic dreams is within the pattern initiated by Flaubert. Maggie is not finally very much like Madame Bovary, however; she exhibits none of Emma's incongruity springing from complexity of motivation and change of character but is rather the good girl led astray. Maggie

⁴¹Ibid., X, 203.

⁴²Ibid., X, 216.

⁴³Stallman, Modern Fiction Studies, V, 253-256.

⁴⁴Ahnebrink, pp. 251-264.

"blossomed in a mud puddle"⁴⁵ not only in terms of physical beauty but also in terms of human goodness. Unfortunately her environment furnishes her adequate materials for dreams, but it offers her inadequate means to fulfill these dreams; in fact it offers no critical standard so that elegance is equated with the romantic ideal. Thus Pete seems to offer a means to her goal: "Maggie perceived that here was the ideal man. Her dim thoughts were often searching for far-away lands where the little hills sing together in the morning. Under the trees of her dream-gardens there had always walked a lover."⁴⁶ The arrival of Pete gives her the perspective to see the ugliness of her home, the boredom of the factory, and her loneliness. Not only her morality but also her dream of happiness is reflected in the cheap melodramas she witnesses.

Maggie always departed with raised spirits from these melodramas. She rejoiced at the way in which the poor and virtuous eventually overcame the wealthy and wicked. The theatre made her think. She wondered if the culture and refinement she had seen imitated, perhaps grotesquely, by the heroine on the stage, could be acquired by a girl who lived in a tenement house and worked in a shirt factory.⁴⁷

⁴⁵Work, X, 156.

⁴⁶Ibid., X, 159.

⁴⁷Ibid., X, 172-173. The "perhaps grotesquely" is an example of Crane's technical fumbling. After three paragraphs of ironic analysis of the melodrama in which the plays are made too clearly silly in their lack of realism, Crane apparently thought he had to make the point again in this paragraph devoted to Maggie's thoughts. The phrase is confusing

Maggie's story is one of dreams being crushed by reality.

Crane achieved the effect of inevitability through the action of external forces in the destruction of Maggie. Her initial error in choosing Pete, a mistake made possible by the limitations of her environment, is the only one of her actions which depends upon Maggie's volition. Each step toward suicide is determined by the characters who represent forces in her environment. Although she shrinks from the prostitutes she sees in the bars, the refusal of lover, minister, mother, and brother to offer a refuge drives her to prostitution. Her decision in favor of suicide is left unanalyzed, but the effect of Chapter XVII, describing the nameless girl's voyage through all levels of society, is that suicide is caused by loneliness rather than economic privation; again rejection by others rather than free choice is stressed. By the simple expedient of withdrawing from Maggie's mind, Crane achieved the effect of inevitability.

The simplicity of characterization--good girl driven to destruction by bad people--is the element which has caused Stallman and others to call the plot "sentimental melodrama." That this is the final effect of the novel is, I think, undeniable, but it was not the intended effect. As I have

since if Maggie thinks it she is stepping out of character and if Crane inserts it the phrase interrupts the purpose of the paragraph.

pointed out, Crane tried very hard--sometimes too hard--to remove the effect of moral black and white in his characterization by stressing that Pete, Jimmie, and Mary are neither aware of nor morally responsible for their actions. However, Crane's adherence to ironic internal conflict in essentially consistent characters rather than the development of truly incongruous motives not only leaves overtones of melodrama but also leads Cady to assert that Maggie is not a naturalistic novel because "all three of Maggie's antagonists . . . do literally make ethical choices which damn her."⁴⁸ As I have suggested before, the best technique to create the effect of environmental determinism is to show change of character due to change of environment. Although I think Crane attempted this in Jimmie, Jimmie exhibits no more change than Pete or Mary. Crane also paid a rather high price for a sense of inevitability through his withdrawal from further internal analysis of Maggie; the reader is allowed to assume that Maggie remains essentially good despite her descent into the most degraded level of prostitution. Thus in relation to the morally good Maggie, all of the other characters appear to be evil. Since one of Crane's announced purposes was to show the effect of environment, I believe it is valid to call the methods of characterization the weakest element in Maggie.

⁴⁸ Edwin H. Cady, Stephen Crane (New York: Twayne Publishers, Inc., 1962), p. 110.

Almost all critics agree that Maggie finally avoids being sentimental melodrama, and most people name Crane's irony as the device which saves it. Since irony is the best defense against excessive emotion, there can be little argument with this insight. In a book whose value depends upon irony, it is important to understand how the ironic effects are gained and what they contribute to the novel. As one critic notes, "In Maggie . . . the irony is so all-pervasive, ranging from the inversion of a single word or phrase to the thematic idea itself, that it is at once the most striking and yet most elusive aspect of the novel."⁴⁹ Having already illustrated irony of statement and several instances of irony of situation, I shall limit my discussion to the techniques and effects of the structural irony.

Ignoring for the moment the interrelationships between the individual chapters in order to determine the overall structure in the novel, I find three fairly homogeneous sections focusing on four main characters. The first nine chapters establish the environment, characterize the four people, and introduce the plot conflict in the form of the meeting of Pete and Maggie; the ninth chapter is climactic as Maggie is forced to leave home. Chapters X through XVII trace the disintegration of the Pete-Maggie affair and the reaction of the family; the last three chapters of this

⁴⁹Brennan, Nineteenth Century Fiction, XVI, 304.

section repeat the pattern of rejection, including rejection by family, Pete, man of God, and the men of the city, and are climaxed by Maggie's death. The final two chapters show the degradation of Pete and Jimmie and the forgiveness of the mother. Most commentators see these last two chapters as additions to the story of Maggie designed to prove that the power of environment is omnipotent, snaring the bad as well as the good. They do, of course, function in this way, but in this panoramic novel, they are not additions but are inherent to the structure since the environment as a whole, as represented by four people, is the center of interest. The last two chapters, however, have a further function.

Maggie is central to the story because she is the only one who actively strives to go beyond the Bowery environment. It is proof of the repressive nature of the environment that the only available means to gain her romantic goal is sex, and sexuality, like brutality and drunkenness, leads downward, not upward. Crane's characterization and plot seem anything but revolutionary--good girl makes sexual mistake and is punished, a movement which completely satisfies the expectations of the moral reader. But Crane's care in removing villainy as a motive for Pete and Jimmie indicates that this is not the point, and Crane's task throughout the novel and especially in the last two chapters is to reassure the reader that this is not the point. After the concrete picture of the human

environment in which Maggie lives, the reader expects her to desire to escape. The irony can be described in this way: Maggie must choose between what the reader considers two unsatisfactory modes of life--Rum Alley with her family or the world of bars with Pete; sympathizing with Maggie's moral dilemma, the reader is shocked in Chapter IX to find his moral ideal presented by Mary Johnson, and the rigidity of this ideal is stressed by Mary's ordering Maggie to leave. This moral shock is reinforced by the structure of Chapter IX: Mary is kicked out of a bar, taunted by children, spied on by neighbors, and finally brutally controlled by Jimmie. Only the totally insensitive reader could miss the incongruity between Mary's action and the norm by which she judges Maggie. The same ironic pattern structures the second section of the book. Still sympathetic with Maggie, the reader is shocked to find both Jimmie and Mary upholding the reader's ideal of respectability at the expense of Maggie. The irony is again emphasized, almost too obviously in Chapter XV, which opens with Jimmie's rejection of "the forlorn woman"⁵⁰ Hattie on precisely the same grounds that Pete uses to reject Maggie, and continues with Jimmie's virtuous exhibition of horror at Maggie. The major ironies of Chapter XVI are at least three: the reader is shocked to find that Pete can justify his

⁵⁰Work, X, 201.

actions; he is even more shocked at the grounds Pete uses to reject Maggie--respectability; and finally, he is shocked when in desperation Maggie seeks "the grace of God,"⁵¹ only to be once more rejected by his representative: "But as the girl accosted him he made a convulsive movement and save his respectability by a vigorous side-step. He did not risk it to save a soul. For how was he to know that there was a soul before him that needed saving?"⁵² Again in a complex set of ironic events, the reader's values have been claimed by the selfish characters and turned into a weapon against the character with whom the reader sympathizes. With Maggie's suicide, the fable of the destruction of innocence is complete and the ironic theme seems clear: in the world of the Bowery, the norm of respectability is more destructive than brutality, drunkenness, and sex.

But desiring to shock, Crane, like Moore in A Mummer's Wife and Maugham in Liza of Lambeth, has to try to make sure that the morally oriented reader would not feel that Maggie's death was a support to the traditional novelistic morality that sexual sin is punished. He attempted to make this point in Chapter XVIII in a number of ironic ways. First, Pete is shown as non-villainous in a far more effective way than he had been in the earlier chapter in which his motives were

⁵¹Ibid., X, 207.

⁵²Ibid.

analyzed. Pete, the sentimental drunk, seeking desperately for affection, self-esteem, escape through the whiskey and the six prostitutes, is both pathetic and despicable, but not villainous. The irony does not interfere with Pete's sincerity in the following: "He laid stress upon the purity of his motives in all dealings with men of the world, and spoke of the fervour of his friendship for those who were amiable."⁵³ Maggie's death has made no impression on Pete, but his own fate, rejection by the women, is analogous to his rejection of Maggie. "The woman of audacity and brilliance,"⁵⁴ pausing to take Pete's money and call him a fool, proves that Maggie's flaw was not turning to prostitution but being an inefficient prostitute. The scene, containing only non-respectable characters and actions, underscores the theme of the uselessness of respectability. The irony of Chapter XIX also makes Maggie's death meaningless. For the first time, the religious imagery which has permeated the book becomes focused through the presentation of the motif of Christian forgiveness, and the destructive moral ideal of respectability becomes associated with a futile Christianity. The final sentimental orgy of Mary Johnson and the "choir"⁵⁵ of neighbors in praise of respectability and Christian forgiveness is a worship of precisely

⁵³Ibid., X, 212.

⁵⁴Ibid., X, 215.

⁵⁵Ibid., X, 218.

those forces which destroyed Maggie. No matter how strong the reader's sense of morality and respectability, he can no longer look upon Maggie's death as a piece of poetic justice in the face of this final scene of unconscious hypocrisy. The destructive forces of the novel have taken over the reader's moral position, thus forcing him to reevaluate his standards.

The technique Crane used to achieve this effect depends upon objectivity of treatment. Crane never overtly comments upon the action and seldom makes moral judgments. His method is juxtaposition of incongruous scenes, creating an ironic attack upon false morality by showing the moral attitude and then either showing the character's unconscious hypocrisy or the disastrous effects of applying the moral norm. Although, as in his analysis of the melodramas and in some of the descriptions of the crowds in bars, Crane cannot refrain from either overt comment or such obvious irony that it serves as overt statement, these analyses are usually based upon aesthetic rather than moral grounds. A sentence like "Unmistakably bad men evinced an apparently sincere admiration for virtue,"⁵⁶ which describes the audience at the melodrama, is about as close as Crane came in this novel to overt statement of the moral problem, and even here his conscious desire for objectivity is visible in "apparently." The objective

⁵⁶ Ibid., X, 172.

technique reflects an apparent objectivity toward values and makes the values of the author concretely effective because the values are exhibited in the structure rather than by means of statements. However, Crane's achievement in attaining objectivity toward values is not equalled by his impartiality toward characters. Despite his repeated attempts in his structure to show that Mary, Pete, and Jimmie are confused, not evil, their final effect is one of hypocritic villainy, an effect which weakens the complex theme.

Walcutt has summed up the theme of the novel, although I would substitute the for the first word in his statement: "A dominant idea which grows from this landscape of hysteria is that these people are victimized by their ideas of moral propriety which are so utterly inapplicable to their lives that they constitute a social insanity."⁵⁷ The central conflict in the novel is not between the individual and the active forces of his environment--brutality, drunkenness, and sexual promiscuity--although certainly the presentation of these elements supports most of the motivation. The real conflict is between the individual who must act within the framework of these Bowery conditions and an extraneous morality which can only be destructive when applied to this world of force and escape. The novel exists as an attack upon inapplicable traditional moral ideals. A problem, both in

⁵⁷Walcutt, p. 69.

terms of this novel and in terms of Crane's career, is the extent of this attack. Was Crane attacking respectability as a value in the nether world or was he rejecting traditional morality altogether? In other words, what was his basis of criticism of respectability and Christianity? Cady answers the question in the following fashion: "any reader who congratulates himself that moral obtuseness and arrogance are confined to Rum Alley is incautious. He is dealing with a writer whom intimations of naturalism had reached, nobody knows how. But he is also dealing with an outraged Christian in agonies of doubt and rebellion against the pious smugness of non-Christian conventionalities."⁵⁸ There is little more basis in the novel for this reading than for that which asserts that its theme is a rejection of all values on all social levels. Exactly where the positive values lie is a critical problem in most of Crane's novels as well as in many works of other ironic writers. I suggest that in this novel whose setting is strictly limited to one environment one should not look beyond the setting for the positive values. It should also be expected that the presentation of these values should be ironic. Although the book is not without non-functional elements, "the gnarled old woman"⁵⁹ who appears three times should have a function. One function is that she presents a

⁵⁸Cady, p. 110.

⁵⁹Work, X, 204.

contrast to the chorus-like comments, based upon the norm of respectability, of the other inhabitants of the building in which the Johnsons live. In the first description of her, she appears as an epitome of Rum Alley--ugly, brutal, alcoholic:

The old woman was a gnarled and leathery personage who could don at will an expression of great virtue. She possessed a small music box capable of one tune, and a collection of "God bless yeh's" pitched in assorted keys of fervency. Each day she took a position upon the stones of Fifth Avenue, where she crooked her legs under her and crouched, immovable and hideous, like an idol. She received daily a small sum in pennies. It was contributed, for the most part, by persons who did not make their homes in that vicinity. Once, when a lady had dropped her purse on the sidewalk, the gnarled woman had grabbed it and smuggled it with great dexterity beneath her cloak. When she was arrested she had cursed the lady into a partial swoon, and with her aged limbs, twisted with rheumatism, had kicked the breath out of a huge policeman whose conduct upon that occasion she referred to when she said, "The police, damn 'em!"⁶⁰

But despite the lack of beauty communicated by the description, the old woman befriends Jimmie, when he flees the violence of his home, and offers him a place to sleep for the night. In her second appearance, she accosts Jimmie with the story of Maggie's crying and begging Pete to declare his love, an action which the woman finds "deh funnies' t'ing I ever saw."⁶¹ Although her description leads Jimmie to form his plan for

⁶⁰ Ibid., X, 147.

⁶¹ Ibid., X, 177.

revenge, the old woman, who closes her story by emitting "a laugh that was like a prophetic croak,"⁶² is both aware of the danger and conscious of the ludicrousness of love in the Bowery world. And then at the family's final rejection, Maggie meets "the gnarled old woman who possessed the music box,"⁶³ and the woman offers her refuge: "So . . . 'ere yehs are back again, are yehs? And dey've kicked yehs out? Well, come in an' stay wid me t'night. I ain' got no moral standin'."⁶⁴ The woman offers nothing hopeful to emulate, but her rejection of the moral ideals of respectability and her humanity toward Jimmie and Maggie make her the only positive force in the novel. Her presence, it seems to me, restricts the theme to the world of the Bowery: the ugliness and brutality are inevitable, but the exercise of human kindness and understanding, which can come only with the rejection of the rigid, false ideal of "moral standin'," is useful in this milieu. The basis of the moral criticism of the novel is not the values of scientific evolution but the ideals of basic humanitarianism. Crane had not yet become a commentator on the cosmic questions of his poems or, perhaps, The Red Badge of Courage; his theme is as narrow as his setting.

⁶²Ibid., X, 178.

⁶³Ibid., X, 204.

⁶⁴Ibid.

In subject matter, structure, theme, and several techniques, Maggie: A Girl of the Streets is much like A Mummer's Wife and Liza of Lambeth. Structure and objective tone are fused to create a pattern of moral shock whose effect presents the theme of the rejection of traditional values within the environment of the Bowery. Crane's failure to achieve incongruity of characterization separates him from his naturalistic predecessors and the realistic tradition in which Howells was working and also weakens the novel. This weakness and the absence of a discernible evolutionary ethic have caused several historians to place the novel outside the naturalistic tradition. I believe the novel exhibits a consistent effort on Crane's part to achieve effects through the techniques used by the naturalists; that characterization fails through oversimplification simply proves that even genius requires training. For the first time in America, realistic protest literature was created in which not economic or general social conditions but traditional moral patterns are attacked.

Crane was not simply an imitator, if he imitated at all, but a contributor to the naturalistic tradition. He showed the possibility of gaining concreteness of effect in establishing environment with great economy--of creating as vivid a world in one hundred pages as Zola, Gissing, and Moore had taken five hundred pages to create. This economy introduced a new problem, not so much for the novelist as for

the literary historian. Crane's dual aim of economy and sense of reality could only be gained by carefully structured repetitions of action and description, making the environment, in one sense, a very simple one characterized by a few simple traits. This has led to two scholarly problems: some students point out that reality is not so simple or precisely structured as it is pictured in Maggie, and therefore the novel is not a realistic, much less naturalistic, novel; and repetition in a variety of contexts tends to make an object or an action symbolic, and thus Maggie is symbolic, not naturalistic. There is no doubt that Maggie contains a distortion of reality beyond that which is inevitable when reality is structured into fiction, but as Walcutt points out, the reality "seems exact,"⁶⁵ and even naturalists write for effects rather than literal transcriptions of life. The distortion is necessary for economy; the distortion of Liza of Lambeth is basically the same kind. The question of symbolism is more complex. The symbolic reading of the book depends upon more than repetition; the flamboyant style, the outstanding trait of which is the unusual similes, often repeated in a variety of contexts, often lends itself to symbol-searchers. Despite the inherent interest of these images, I believe Walcutt is right when he asserts, "Elsewhere the tone is complicated, beyond the needs of his thesis,

⁶⁵Walcutt, p. 72.

into further impressionisms which demonstrate virtuosity of auctorial impression (and style) rather than exploration of the subject."⁶⁶ Despite several attempts, no satisfactory symbolic reading has been developed. Incidental symbolism does occur in this novel as in almost all novels, naturalistic or not: Maggie's making the lambrequin represents her desire for respectability and beauty; the bars represent a futile attempt to escape from the unbearable; Chapter XVII is symbolic of Maggie's downward path over a period of several months, not a single night. But the presence of an object or an action which takes on additional meaning in a novel does not make it a symbolic novel. The goal is the effect of reality of environment and character, not an appeal to a system of values outside the novel.

Maggie introduced naturalistic technique into America in as interesting a form as it had yet achieved in England. As a naturalistic novel, Maggie, up to the time of its publication, is better than anything produced in England except A Mummer's Wife. Judged as a powerful and effective novel, it is superior to most of the naturalistic fiction which had appeared in England but still inferior to the best work being produced in the already mature realistic tradition. For the first time in England or America, a creative genius became interested in the techniques of naturalism. In Maggie, Crane

⁶⁶ Ibid., p. 71.

was a gifted beginner experimenting; in The Red Badge of Courage he was a master using the techniques but making these techniques gain effects which earlier writers and later critics thought were beyond the goals of naturalism.

Although not published until 1896, the uncertainty of the date of composition of George's Mother and its relationship to Maggie in setting justify treating it after Maggie. Probably started in 1893 and perhaps finished in late 1894, George's Mother has received little but neglect from Crane critics, a neglect which is strange in view of Crane's estimation of the novel: "I have just completed a New York book that leaves Maggie at the post. It is my best thing."⁶⁷ Crane's judgment has not stood the test of time. It seems that the neglect of the novel can be explained in one word; despite the charged style and the new subject matter, the novel is dull. Crane's structural ironies fail him; there is no moral shock. This is rather odd since his techniques of characterization show some improvement over those of Maggie.

George and his mother live in the same tenement in Rum Alley which the Johnsons inhabit. The world outside, the reader is told, is inhabited by people who "were like animals in a jungle,"⁶⁸ but this is never made concrete as in Maggie.

⁶⁷Letter to Garland, November 15, 1894, in Stallman and Gilkes, p. 41.

⁶⁸Work, X, 25.

The nature of the outside world is represented by the brewery.

In the distance the enormous brewery towered over the other buildings. Great gilt letters advertised a brand of beer. Thick smoke came from funnels and spread near it like vast and powerful wings. The structure seemed a great bird, flying. The letters of the sign made a chain of gold hanging from its neck. The little old woman looked at the brewery. It vaguely interested her, for a moment, as a stupendous affair, a machine of mighty strength.⁶⁹

In contrast to the brewery's flying strength, which can even impress Mrs. Kelcey despite her strong aversion for alcohol and bars, the church of Mrs. Kelcey represents the other set of forces.

In a dark street the little chapel sat humbly between two towering apartment-houses. A red street-lamp stood in front. It threw a marvellous reflection upon the wet pavements. It was like the death-stain of a spirit. Farther up, the brilliant lights of an avenue made a span of gold across the black street. A roar of wheels and a clangour of bells came from this point, interwoven into a sound emblematic of the life of the city. It seemed somehow to affront this solemn and austere little edifice. It suggested an approaching barbaric invasion. The little church, pierced, would die with a fine illimitable scorn for its slayers.⁷⁰

The city and its bars are fated to defeat the church and its

⁶⁹Ibid., X, 25-26.

⁷⁰Ibid., X, 65. The city-church conflict is noted by Stallman in Omnibus, p. 20, and the symbolic effect of the brewery by Ahnebrink. However, there is no need to see the church signifying Christ, as Stallman would have it, and no need to trace the brewery to Zola, as Ahnebrink asserts. The brewery-church symbols seem to sum up the conflict centering on George Kelcey more precisely than the city-church pattern suggested by Stallman.

ally, Mrs. Kelcey, and the ill-matched battle is to be illustrated by means of George Kelcey.

Although in the same tenement as the Johnsons, the Kelcey's apartment is a haven of cleanliness, peace, and love. From this secure background, innocent youth seeks personal fulfillment and is defeated, supposedly by the power represented by the brewery. The structure of the novel is more nearly dependent on chronological order than Maggie, although the interrelationships of parts depends upon alternating contrasts between the church-home world and the world of bars and the streets. Thus Chapter I shows George's first entry into a bar, Chapter II his mother's anxiety at home, and Chapter III the beginning of the conflict between mother and son. Chapters VIII, IX, and X present a drunken orgy and the concomitant hangover, and Chapter XI contains the contrast of the church. The final chapters alternate between scenes at home and scenes in the outside world. There is no attempt to gain the panoramic effects of Maggie; the center of interest remains George Kelcey and his mother.

George Kelcey has been a good son to his mother, who has lost her husband and all her other sons and thus has only George to depend upon to carry out her schemes of greatness: "she made pictures in which he appeared as a benign personage, blessed by filled hands of the poor, one whose brain could hold massive thoughts and awe certain men about whom she had

read."⁷¹ George's distant dreams are not very different, but George's dreams have escaped the influence of the church: "he would have power, and he would enjoy having his bounty and his wrath alike fall swiftly on those below."⁷² But his more immediate dreams are romantic ones, affected by books read, of women ("there was a goddess in the world whose business it was to wait until he should exchange a glance with her."⁷³), of knowledge, and of admiration from others:

He had begun to look at the great world revolving near to his nose. He had a vast curiosity concerning this city in whose complexities he was buried. It was an impenetrable mystery, this city. It was a blend of many enticing colours. He longed to comprehend it completely, that he might walk understandingly in its greatest marvels, its mightiest march of life, sin. He dreamed of a comprehension whose pay was the admirable attitude of a man of knowledge. He remembered Jones. He could not but admire a man who knew so many bartenders.⁷⁴

The irony between the romantic aspiration and the ludicrously limited means which he finds to lead him to his goal is parallel to Maggie's situation. George picks Maggie Johnson to satisfy his dreams of woman, but her failure to recognize his "noble character"⁷⁵ causes him to decide the easier path

⁷¹Ibid., X, 42-43.

⁷²Ibid., X, 43.

⁷³Ibid., X, 44.

⁷⁴Ibid., X, 43-44.

⁷⁵Ibid., X, 46.

to glory is to get to know bartenders. George's character changes. He begins as a good boy living a pleasant life with his mother and ends as a jobless member of a street gang, capable of concern for his mother only when she becomes ill. He is not really a complex human being, only a weak, confused one. His degradation is due to the weakness of his character, not to outside influences. Despite the change of character which Crane succeeded in dramatizing, Crane never succeeded in making George sufficiently valuable to care about. The primary reason for this failure is Crane's failure to be impartial in his presentation of George. Another reason is the truism of the reviewers that to have an interesting psychological study the writer must create a character with an interesting psyche. The conflict within George's mind is really never very interesting.

Mrs. Kelcey, although more interesting than George, is not a completely successful characterization. She, like the little church, is a figure who resists the encroachments of the city by maintaining order at home, as the following passage describing her house-cleaning demonstrates:

It was a picture of indomitable courage.
And as she went on her way her voice was often
raised in a long cry, a strange war-chant, a shout
of battle and defiance, that rose and fell in
harsh screams, and exasperated the ears of the
man with the red, mottled face.

"Should I be car-reed tew th' skies
O-on flow'ry be-eds of ee-ease--"76

⁷⁶Ibid., X, 25.

But she, like George, has romantic dreams without adequate means to carry them out. Her visions are built upon the past: "Upon the dead altars of her life she had builded little fires of hope for another."⁷⁷ Her dying vision is of a scene from the past in which she sought to protect George. "A little swaggering nickel-plated clock,"⁷⁸ becoming the dominant object in the apartment through repetition, signifies not "life dissipated and unconverted"⁷⁹ but simply the passage of time which brings inevitable defeat to the representative of the past, Mrs. Kelcey. It is the passage of time which causes brewery and disordered city to become dominant over the little chapel. Although the significance of Mrs. Kelcey is clear, the reader's emotional attitude toward Mrs. Kelcey remains blurred. Is she, like George, a deluded creature pursuing impossible dreams, thus pathetic in her destruction? Or is she, like the church, a heroic creature dying "with a fine illimitable scorn for her slayers,"⁸⁰ thus tragic in death? In other terms, is George's defeat due, among other things, to his being "victimized by . . . an oversolicitous mother" as Ahnebrink

⁷⁷Ibid., X, 43.

⁷⁸Ibid., X, 25.

⁷⁹Stallman, Omnibus, p. 19.

⁸⁰Work, X, 65.

suggests,⁸¹ or is his defeat due to his rejection of his mother's values?

Crane's failure to clarify his intention in the character of the mother contributes to and points up other problems in the novel. It seems to me clear--even in the very dangerous realm of guessing at intentions--that Crane intended this to be a study concerned with the weakening of old values (church, mother, apartment) without any progression toward new values (brewery and city are powerful but valueless), a process that is inevitable with the passage of time (the swaggering clock). George, freed from the old, is trapped in the alcoholic disorder of the city. If this is an outline of Crane's plan, George's weakness of character is functional since there is no vital source of strength in his world. But in symbolic specification of environment rather than the realistic portrayal he used in Maggie, Crane lost the effect of inevitability. The source of George's weakness seems inherent character rather than milieu, and thus the reader sees George as despicable rather than helpless in his refusal of his mother's values. The thematic statement of the novel becomes that even the best mother can produce a bad son rather than the intended shocking theme that the inevitable evolution of values will destroy the moral power of Christianity.

⁸¹Ahnebrink, p. 98.

Technically this failure is primarily due neither to Crane's increased use of symbolic method nor, as Booth might claim, to the failure inherent in objectivity as an ideal. The major failure is Crane's lack of control of his favorite device, irony, both in his analysis of character and in his structure. The reader's attitude toward George must be ironic--a simultaneous sympathy with him as a human trapped by outside forces and a moral repudiation of him because of his reprehensible actions.⁸² Crane prevented the first pole of this irony by his consistent sarcasm in his analysis of George, such as in this description of George with a hangover:

Turning toward the other way, he saw that gold portals of vice no longer enticed him. He could not hear the strains of alluring music. The beckoning sirens of drink had been killed by this pain in his head. The desires of his life suddenly lay dead like mullein-stalks. Upon reflection he saw, therefore, that he was perfectly willing to be virtuous if somebody would come and make it easy for him.⁸³

Rather than objectivity or impartiality toward character, Crane's contempt for George is so obvious that sympathy from the reader becomes impossible. Having loaded his case against George, Crane presented Mrs. Kelcey more objectively, but with such hints as the passage containing "indomitable courage" quoted above plus the inherent contrast with George

⁸²As I have attempted to show earlier, this kind of irony is essential to the effect of moral shock.

⁸³Work, X, 59.

as villain, the reader's sympathies for the mother become stronger than they should. Instead of two complex, confused characters struggling within the inevitable forces of time, the novel presents the melodramatic pattern of good woman versus bad man.

The same oversimplification enters the structure of the novel in the treatment of the drinking bouts, the new "festival of religion"⁸⁴ which will replace the ritual of the church. The analysis of the drinker's motivations indicates the sarcastic tone Crane assumed, but the tone is more apparent in the longer descriptions of the drinkers:

Each man explained in his way, that he was totally out of place in the before-mentioned world. They were possessed of various virtues which were unappreciated by those with whom they were commonly obliged to mingle; they were fitted for a tree-shaded land where everything was peace. Now that five of them had congregated it gave them happiness to speak their inmost thoughts without fear of being misunderstood.⁸⁵

The viciousness and functionlessness, even pain, of the world of bar and street become so apparent that this world loses its function of escape which it had in Maggie. Thus in the recurrent contrast between home and bar which is one of the structural principles of George's Mother, the obvious unsatisfactoriness of the outside environment adds to the value of

⁸⁴Ibid., X, 53.

⁸⁵Ibid., X, 35.

the home environment, thus reducing the contrast to one of simple good and bad. The reader's contempt for George increases as George obdurately refuses to make the obviously right choice. Although an objective treatment was, I think, aimed for, Crane failed to achieve it; this oversimplification brings the effect of the novel dangerously close to temperance propaganda.

These failures obscure the effect of what, in itself, is a powerful ending. George's confusion is stressed in his being called from a street fight to be confronted with his dying mother, for whom he shows a pathetic need. The dialogue between the delirious mother and the suffering George is supposed to sum up the theme of old beliefs and contemporary doubts:

Then she again looked away. "Ah, there they come! There they come! Ah, look--look--loo--" She arose to a sitting posture without the use of her arms.

Kelcey felt himself being choked. When her voice pealed forth in a scream he saw crimson curtains moving before his eyes. "Mother--oh, mother--there's nothin'--there's nothin'--"⁸⁶

George is right, the mother wrong, but the reader lacks faith in George; instead of the recognition of moral shock, the reader may simply feel that the reprehensible George is taunting the truth of his mother even as she lies on her death-bed. The penultimate image of the book showing the outside world

⁸⁶ Ibid., X, 89.

present in the apartment is symbolic of the city's triumph over mother and church: "An endless roar, the eternal trample of the marching city, came mingled with vague cries."⁸⁷ But instead of the idea of the inevitable triumph of disorder, the image can elicit, with equal validity, the sentimental response of "Isn't it too bad the city triumphed over this good woman because of her profligate son?" The final scene of the book should function as a prophecy, giving universality to the defeat of Mrs. Kelcey and the degradation of George and showing that they are simply representative figures caught in the evolution of values.

Over the transom from the hallway came two voices.

"Johnnie!"

"Wot!"

"You come right here t' me! I want yehs t' go t' d' store fer me!"

"Ah, ma, send Sally!"

"No, I will not! You come right here!"

"All right, in a minnet!"

"Johnnie!"

"In a minnet, I tell yeh!"

"Johnnie--" There was a sound of a heavy tread, and later a boy squealed. Suddenly the clergyman started to his feet. He rushed forward and peered. The little old woman was dead.⁸⁸

The juxtaposition of death and minor incident emphasizes the meaninglessness, in moral terms, of death and sums up the mother-son conflict, with all of its moral implications. Crane's ironic mastery is, however, wasted at this point in

⁸⁷Ibid., X, 90.

⁸⁸Ibid.

the novel, for, to put it at its most ludicrous, the reader has a legitimate right to read with the thought, "Mind your mother, Johnnie, or you will grow up to be a mean drunkard and a disappointment to your mother." The failure in objectivity in characterization and structure throughout the earlier parts of the novel obscures the thematic irony of the ending, and rather than a theme of inevitable moral change, with the mother's death presenting the shock of the death of the old values, the ending can as easily be read as support for the Fourth Commandment.

There are some very good things in George's Mother. The study of drinking, its resulting sense of escape, and, later, the pain of the hangover are vivid and exact. Despite the sarcasm expended on the bars, the reader can perceive the city-dwellers' boredom and insecurity which make alcohol a necessity. This aspect of the novel was new to American literature and offered an admirable model for later writers, its treatment being as effective as that of Moore and Zola. As Howells noted, after the fact, the abandonment of amatory subjects in favor of "treating some of the other important things of life--the relation of mother and son, of husband and wife, in fact all those things we live in continuously"⁸⁹--was also a new field for American writers, and

⁸⁹Stephen Crane, "Howells Fears Realists Must Wait," Omnibus, p. 172.

although the presentation of the relationship between George and his mother is ultimately ineffective, the concreteness of the presentation equals those studies of the disintegration of a marriage which were a favorite with English realists.

Unlike Maggie, George's Mother is a symbolically structured novel. Church, brewery, city, clock, bars, and characters assume abstract meanings which transcend their value as objects within a story. This symbolism, however, is different in intention and effect from the correspondences searched for by romantic and mystic writers, a correspondence between natural object and supernatural value. The symbolism of George's Mother is used to gain compression; the effect of the symbols is not to superimpose a higher set of values upon the action of the novel but to suggest, through the repetition of objects and actions, a complexity of values within the environment. The little church, for instance, does represent Protestant values, but the values represented by the church are entirely relative, simply another aspect of the environment which deserves psychological and sociological study. The symbolism is neither that of the nineteenth-century Romantics nor that of the symbolistes but a device for establishing a complex milieu. Those who find symbolism and naturalism mutually exclusive accept too narrow a definition of both terms.

If my reading of George's Mother is correct, it is a

naturalistic novel in intention. I suspect Crane thought it superior to Maggie because it is a more complex study of the relation between man and his environment and because he had gone beyond the simple environmentalism of Maggie. Although there is finally no solution offered in Maggie, there is an explicit humanitarian theme and an implicit theme that if the conditions of the environment were changed the people would also change. Intended in George's Mother is a much broader theme, the inevitable evolution of values, an evolution which would be most destructive in Rum Alley because of its environmental limitations but also an evolution which man in any environment is powerless to stop. Unfortunately, Crane failed in his intention. The cause of the failure, of course, could be explained biographically, philosophically, or technically. Berryman's biographical guess remains unenlightening.⁹⁰ The philosophical critic would undoubtedly see the truth that the novel fails in its naturalism because Crane did not achieve his theme of determinism--both George and his mother exhibit free will. It seems to me more important to note that this failure is not necessarily due to any conflict within Crane concerning transcendentalism and philosophical naturalism but rather a failure in technique. By complicating the forces in the novel by his own entry by means of

⁹⁰John Berryman, Stephen Crane (New York: William Sloane Associates, 1950), pp. 318-319.

sarcastic tone toward George and the values of the brewery, Crane prevented the forces of his environment acquiring the strength that they needed. George becomes morally responsible because Crane's technique creates the effect that George is wrong, an effect which, I tentatively suggest, was unintended. The novel which was intended to present the purest theme of evolutionary pessimism yet attempted in England and America was still-born because of Crane's failure to control his naturalistic techniques.

Harold Frederic, often linked with Crane both because of their friendship and their common literary ideals, published in 1896 a novel which also dealt with the inadequacy of Protestantism for modern man. The Damnation of Theron Ware, published by Stone and Kimball, attracted more critical attention and readers at the time of its publication than did George's Mother, and although Carter's claim for it as "among the four or five best novels written by an American during the nineteenth century"⁹¹ is overstated, the novel is still widely respected, if not read. Except for The Damnation of Theron Ware and an earlier novel, Seth's Brother's Wife, combining the esoteric appeal of local color with the realistic techniques of Howells, Conrad's summation of Frederic as a "notable journalist . . . (who had written some novels)"⁹²

⁹¹Everett Carter, Howells and the Age of Realism (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott Co., n. d.), p. 239.

⁹²Quoted in Everett Carter, "Introduction," to

would be adequate, since his other seven novels and his short stories are clearly products of a commercial purpose. The argument about the novelistic tradition to which The Damnation of Theron Ware belongs has been as diffuse, though certainly not so heated, as that centering on The Red Badge of Courage; Howellsian social realism, Jamesian psychological realism, naturalism, symbolism--each of these has been isolated as the dominant influence. Perhaps a brief analysis of this novel in connection with the foregoing analysis of George's Mother will at least offer some new bases for argument.

Frederic, even more than Crane, was an admirer of Howells, and as Carter points out, "the techniques employed by Frederic /in The Damnation of Theron Ware/ were the techniques of Howells."⁹³ Yet Carter believes that in his stress upon sex as a motivation Frederic went beyond Howells in subject matter,⁹⁴ thus serving as a transitional figure leading toward the naturalism and psychological realism of twentieth-century American writers. The book is a rather strange mixture of psychological and social study. The first chapter posits one of the primary social problems by

Harold Frederic, The Damnation of Theron Ware (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1960), p. viii.

⁹³Carter, Howells and the Age of Realism, p. 244.

⁹⁴Ibid., p. 241.

presenting a contrasting picture of the older Methodist clergy, for whom faith was sufficient motivation for suffering the mental, physical, and social discomforts of the frontier, and the younger clergy, for whom faith is a means to a comfortable, secure livelihood. Within the context of the historical decline of fundamentalism under the pressures of new affluence, new comforts, new scientific ideas, and new criticism of the Bible, the young minister Theron Ware is sent to the provincial, predominantly Catholic community of Octavius to take over the Methodist Church. Again the fable concerns the failure of the innocent young man from the provinces to achieve adjustment to a larger society.

Although all of the characters except Theron Ware are static and consistent--so consistent in fact that Carter finds, with some justice, that they take on allegorical significance--Ware has within him a series of conflicts which lead to a change of character, thus achieving the effect of incongruity. An apparently good, ambitious, competent Methodist minister, deeply in love with his wife, he is slowly transformed into a vain, cruel, conniving doubter. One is tempted to see in the transformation of Ware the same kind of environmental experiment present in George's Mother: a product of a narrow fundamentalist environment is suddenly enveloped in a greatly expanded environment when he meets Father Forbes, the local Catholic priest who sees

Christianity as a useful myth, Dr. Ledsmar, the cynical Darwinian scientist, and Celia Madden, the new free pagan woman. Attracted by the sensuality and beauty of Celia and the intellectual freedom of the two men, Ware loses his old values but is incapable of understanding the new values. But this is not the contrast in the novel: the morality of the Protestant and Catholic environments is really the same; their manners, the techniques of social intercourse, are different.

Inherent in the novel is a criticism of Methodist narrowness and lack of sophistication, but for the sophisticates of Octavius, these qualities have value, as Celia Madden points out to Ware:

"You impressed us as an innocent, simple, genuine young character, full of mother's milk. It was like the smell of early spring in the country to come in contact with you. Your honesty of nature, your sincerity in that absurd religion of yours, your general naivete of mental and spiritual get-up, all pleased us a great deal."⁹⁵

Theron's failure in the society of the sophisticates is due to his inability to understand their manners and morals, not because their essential morality is different from that of the Methodists but because their manners are. In an attempt to be sophisticated, he becomes a seeker of scandal, a denigrator of his church and his wife, and, as Celia sums it up, "we find that you are a bore."⁹⁶ But if Methodism is narrow,

⁹⁵Frederic, p. 331.

⁹⁶Ibid.

what is the reader supposed to make of a group of highly intelligent people who will endanger the stability of a young man simply because he seems to be "a real acquisition"⁹⁷ whose sole function for them is to relieve the boredom of a small town? Are the new aestheticism, the new science, and the new liberal religion represented by the sophisticated characters bad, not only for Theron but in terms of the values inherent in the novel? They are, it seems to me, but Frederic's relative tentativeness in establishing this fact greatly weakens the novel as an example of social or ethical realism, the tradition to which it belongs.

The failure of Frederic to write an experimental study of values, if this was what he was attempting to do, springs from his failure to control the techniques of objectivity--the effect of impartiality toward characters and values. First there is the case of Theron. Walcutt points to the heart of the trouble: "One's judgment of Theron cannot be impersonal because his lack of background is not enough to account . . . for his contemptible weakness. This is laid to some personal failing within him, a failure which every line of the book suggests he is ethically responsible for."⁹⁸ As Crane does with George, Frederic directs the reader's sympathy away from Theron so that when his immoral

⁹⁷ Ibid.

⁹⁸ Walcutt, p. 51.

or unmannerly actions occur, there is not a sense of shock but rather a sense of fulfillment of expectations. The overall effect of this treatment of the central character is to oversimplify the reader's judgment of the other characters. If Ware is vain, selfish, and morally dense, those who reject him for these qualities become moral. The effect of this treatment is to support traditional values: since each of Theron's actions is wrong, the reader finds it quite easy to decide what is right.

But this moral simplicity turns into a flaw. In terms of the structure of the novel, it becomes clear that Celia is a tease, Ledsmar an inhuman scientist who can equate a lizard with a human being, and Father Forbes a professed humanist who can coldly send Theron away when he needs help. The sophisticates are ultimately as hypocritical as the Methodists. Neither their manners nor their new ideas are any more efficient in coping with the complexities of life than the uncouthness or old ideas of the Methodists. But this point is obscured by the oversimplification of Theron. The severity of Theron's punishment for his misdeeds compared to the sophisticates' final problems (one Madden son dying, another in trouble) tends to make the sophisticates morally superior. This, I think, was unintentional.

The positive ethical statement of the novel is presented in the Soulbys, a man and woman with varied backgrounds

in show business and confidence games, who have become professional money-raisers for the Methodist Church. As Carter notes, Brother and Sister Soulsby are "exuberant embodiments" of "pragmatic attitudes."⁹⁹ Accepting what is and adopting the goal of helping people, they steer a steady moral course, compromising with means to gain the larger goals. Their position can be seen in the musical symbolism of the book: the traditional Methodist hymns sung by the people of the Octavius Church are marvels of ugliness; Chopin's music played by Celia is wildly sensuous; the songs sung by the money-raisers are a combination of traditional words and Chopin melodies, fused for the practical purpose of keeping the congregation quiet so that its pocketbook may be reached through emotional appeal. The Soulbys save Theron and send him on his way to a new career in Seattle.

In terms of technique and theme, The Damnation of Theron Ware offered little that had not been done by Howells. Frederic may have chosen sex as a motive from the naturalistic tradition, but the ethical attitude exhibited toward sexual desire is certainly not that of Zola or Moore. Flawed in much the same way as George's Mother, Frederic's novel emerges as a much better book because it is less ambitious. Full of incidental shocks, the novel would not

⁹⁹Carter, "Introduction" to The Damnation of Theron Ware, p. xiv.

be praised by the Methodists, but its final thematic effect is on the side of traditional moral goodness. Theron is punished for being weak and immoral, not because he is trapped by an unjust and outmoded moral code or by an inevitable evolution of values.

To treat The Red Badge of Courage (newspaper version 1894; book 1895) is simply to add to the critical redundancy which has accumulated about the novel, but to omit it from a study of early American naturalism leads to gross distortion. Perhaps the best compromise is to treat the novel with relative brevity, avoiding a full analysis by allying myself with those who view the protagonist's final self-knowledge as simply another delusion in a complex pattern of errors, an interpretation which is presented as effectively and succinctly by Walcutt¹⁰⁰ as by anyone else.

The fable of the novel is the same as that of Maggie and George's Mother: innocent youth in pursuit of romantic dream encounters a world which offers no fulfillment of the dream. This fable is again structured through a series of contrasting scenes, each throwing added ironic light on the other. The greater complexity of the novel springs from Crane's virtual limitation of point of view to the protagonist Henry Fleming and Fleming's greater self-awareness and incongruity than that exhibited by any of the characters in the

¹⁰⁰Walcutt, pp. 75-82.

two novels already discussed. Crane's problem, like that of Flaubert in Madame Bovary, was to control tone and structure so that the reader's natural sympathy for the point-of-view character would be counterbalanced by a repugnance for the character's self-delusions and actions.

Perhaps as good a way as any to simplify the conflicts in the novel and the complexity of Henry Fleming is to accept the suggestion of Ray B. West, Jr., that the central conflict in Crane's fiction is man against two forms of nature--external nature and human nature.¹⁰¹ In Fleming's fight to become a man, eighteen chapters show his struggle with his own human nature--conflicts between love-hate, hope-despair, courage-fear, as well as all the other central conflicts which have been suggested--and that of his comrades, active upon Fleming as castigation-acceptance-praise. Eight chapters, devoted to his flight from his regiment, depict his struggle with outward nature or, as stated in a canceled passage, "his grapplings and tuggings with fate and the universe,"¹⁰² a struggle which is ironically symbolized by the squirrel and the grotesque forest chapel. Fleming's incongruous changes

¹⁰¹Ray B. West, Jr., "Stephen Crane: Author in Transition," American Literature, XXXIV (May, 1962), 215-228.

¹⁰²Stephen Crane, The Red Badge of Courage, Omnibus, p. 317. This edition is used rather than that in Work because of Stallman's very useful collation of two manuscripts, a short version (SV) and a long version (LV), with the first American edition.

of attitude occur with each change of environment, but in this novel, unlike the other two, the protagonist's environment is determined by his own perceptions. Thus, without change of physical environment, Fleming is first filled with fear of ridicule upon his return to his regiment, but upon his comrades' acceptance of his "red badge of courage," his fear disappears to be replaced by pompous pride. This pattern of vacillation creates the ironic incongruity of Henry Fleming, and since the novel is about Fleming's perception of his place in the world, the pattern structures the novel. Fleming is controlled by his perceptions of his place in the world, but it becomes obvious, I think, that Fleming has little control over these perceptions. In terms of action, the deterministic effect is stressed in the crucial episodes--Fleming's flight, his return, and his courageous fighting.

Although there are comments by the author in the novel, the few that occur are usually qualified by "seem" or "appear." In fact, objectivity toward characters and values is so nearly complete that some critics, despairing over the ironic complexity of the novel and the inevitable tendency of a great novel to mean different things to different people, have decided that objectivity is a technique which ruins the novel and makes the author's intentions ultimately unknowable. It seems to me, however, that the objective technique gains the effect of criticism of values,

an incongruity created between the reader's expectations and the presented reality. Crane is careful to set up a series of socially acceptable values early in the novel and then equally careful to show man's futility in attempting to adhere to these values. To illustrate a few of the most important of these values, I have chosen courage, humility, and humane unselfishness. The ideal of humility is presented by Fleming's mother: "Yer jest one little feller amongst a hull lot of others, an' yeh've got to keep quiet an' do what they tell yeh."¹⁰³ Henry's thoughts throughout the novel form a pattern of rejection of those realities which lead to an attitude of humility and a selection of those which bolster his vanity: the personal motive in running, the expansion of vision until he becomes the central concern of the universe, the reversal of roles with Wilson upon Henry's return to camp so that Henry becomes "the loud soldier," and his final belief that "In the space-wide whirl of events no grain like him would be lost."¹⁰⁴ The dual vision of the regiment's losses despite Fleming's exertions, leading only to a lost battle, and Fleming's vain show of humility underscore his failure to learn. Courage is part of Henry's early dreams of "Greek-like struggles"¹⁰⁵ and a value of his mother

¹⁰³Ibid., p. 231.

¹⁰⁴Ibid., p. 369. Restored from LV.

¹⁰⁵Ibid., p. 233.

who tells him to choose death rather than "anything 'cept what's right."¹⁰⁶ Even those who detect a morally uplifting learning process in Henry agree that the cultural and personal ideal of courage becomes ironically reduced to a matter of hate-inspired bestiality. In battle "a state of frenzy" is developed, "perhaps because of forgotten vanities," and courage is equated with lack of consciousness, so that a third value, "an enthusiasm of unselfishness,"¹⁰⁷ is present in the savage wastefulness of the battle. Henry Fleming's morality, as well as the reader's, demands a humaneness, an ideal equivalent to that exhibited by "the gnarled old woman" of Maggie. This goal of unselfishness is not only the basis of his mother's warnings but also a part of Fleming's dream as "He . . . imagined peoples secure in the shadow of his eagle-eyed prowess."¹⁰⁸ This value, too, is made meaningless because it is shown to be a patently ludicrous ideal in the battle and because Fleming constantly betrays this ideal. Cowardice produces a show of unselfishness with Jim Conklin and then cowardice leads to flight from responsibility with "the tattered soldier." Fleming's actions toward this man become a sin which must be rationalized away in his process of mental coronation in the last chapter:

¹⁰⁶Ibid., p. 231.

¹⁰⁷Ibid., p. 360.

¹⁰⁸Ibid., p. 229.

Yet gradually he mustered force to put the sin at a distance. /And then he regarded it with what he thought to be great calmness. At last he concluded that he saw in it quaint uses. He exclaimed that its importance in the aftertime would be great to him if it even succeeded in hindering the workings of his egotism. It would make a sobering balance. It would become a good part of him. He would have upon him often the consciousness of a great mistake. And he would be taught to deal gently and with care. He would be a man.

This plan for the utilization of a sin did not give him complete joy but it was the best sentiment he could formulate under the circumstances, and when it was combined with his success, or public deeds, he knew that he was quite contented.⁷ And at last his eyes seemed to open up to some new ways. He found that he could look back upon the brass and bombast of his earlier gospels and see them truly. He was gleeful when he discovered that he now despised them.¹⁰⁹

The dream of humility, ironically replaced by vanity, allows the knowledge of his own courage to displace the guilt of selfishness or inhumanity, thus permitting him to be "quite contented." Even the moral stature of Wilson, based upon his gaining humility and his selflessness toward Fleming, is reduced in the last chapter when he recalls that he had intended to get some water for the wounded Jimmie Rogers: "I clean forgot what I--say, has anybody seen Jimmie Rogers." His comrades answer briefly, "He's dead."¹¹⁰

Most critics agree that Crane's sparing use of

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., p. 369. The bracketed portion is a restoration from LV.

¹¹⁰ Ibid., p. 366. This passage is omitted from the published version as part of Crane's attempt to tone down his acid reduction of the virtue of masculine solidarity.

Fleming's name was a conscious attempt to make him universal rather than individual;¹¹¹ this fact, combined with Crane's shifts from Fleming's perceptions to those of the regiment as a uniformly motivated group, elevates the theme attained through objective presentation of structured ironies from simple relevance to a unique individual to relevance to mankind in battle. I think it probable that, in the context of a short paragraph in which the sentences preceding the last two are introduced with "He felt" and "He knew," the reader is supposed to sense the movement away from Fleming's mind to external statement of fact: "He had been to touch the great death, and found that, after all, it was but the great death and was for others". He was a man."¹¹² He is not only "a man" but man: the search for the moral definition of man which has pervaded the novel is complete. Man is that creature whose vanity is so complete that he can take pride in looking forward to a false humility; man is a creature whose cowardice becomes bravery only when all human qualities disappear, leaving him a beast; man is a creature whose selfishness is so pervasive that his humane acts are limited to those motivated by cowardice and vanity. Man's moral ideal of humility, courage, and selflessness is attainable but attainable only

¹¹¹One of the consistent revisions visible in LV is the crossing out of Fleming's name.

¹¹²Omnibus, p. 369. Brackets again indicate addition from LV.

in the destructive orgy of battle when man has no chance to be conscious of his manhood. The effect of this final moral shock on the reader, the realization that Fleming is man, is a painful feeling that it should not be so. Crane would probably have agreed, but the theme of the novel is that it is so. As in the other naturalistic novels of the period, The Red Badge of Courage presents an inherent theme of protest against the emptiness of traditional values. The final irony of this novel, unlike that of the novels of Maugham and Moore, is that there seems nothing to substitute for these traditional values. They remain valuable, but man, a limited, self-deluded creature living in a universe which is totally impartial, is incapable of attaining them in any meaningful situation.

Incongruity of characterization, objectivity toward characters and values, making possible the manipulation of the pattern of moral shock, and the inherent theme of revelation of the inadequacy of man's moral ideals link The Red Badge of Courage not only with Maggie and George's Mother but also with the novels of the nineteenth-century English naturalists. Crane's techniques, breadth and complexity of treatment, intensity of effect, and complexity of theme make The Red Badge of Courage superior to any other naturalistic novel produced in English in the Nineteenth Century. The Red Badge of Courage may go beyond previous English and American

naturalistic novels both in quality and in kind. Although Stallman's mythic reading, based upon a few curses and a central image, fails to convince and fails to explain the force of the novel, there is probably much more to the novel than any exegesis has yet shown. The universally acknowledged power of the novel tempts one to seek an explanation in some such theory as Jung's collective unconscious. I do not attempt to offer a full explanation of the novel but simply to show that in technique and theme it belongs to the naturalistic tradition.

Crane's writing career after 1896 is chiefly important for occasional masterpieces in short story form. "The Monster" (1899) is usually classed as a short story, but in terms of length, it almost equals Maggie or George's Mother. Although it has a restricted subject--the moral problem of personal principle versus the social pressures centered around Henry, the burned Negro--its structure shows tendencies of escaping the limitations of the short story form, leading some critics to find it disorganized. Walcutt connects the story with the naturalistic tradition by comparing it with The Red Badge of Courage as presenting "the same grim joke of the world."¹¹³ Although it poses the always interesting and insoluble problem of mercy killing, I do not find that "The Monster" offers such a shocking picture of the world.

¹¹³Walcutt, p. 82.

People in small towns can be hypocritical and inhumane, and a story which presents this truth as graphically as "The Monster" does is a good story. But except for a rather pessimistic view of the humanity of a small town, I see little to link this story to the themes and techniques of the naturalistic tradition. No one has found The Third Violet (1897), Active Service (1899), or The O'Ruddy (1903) worth much argument, and no one, so far as I know, has connected them with the naturalistic tradition. George's Mother was Crane's last published novel in the naturalistic tradition. In the three novels published by 1896, Crane had experimented with and mastered the techniques of naturalism.

CHAPTER VI

FRANK NORRIS: IDEA IN SEARCH OF TECHNIQUE

The works of Frank Norris (1870-1902) have consistently forced critics to face the problem inherent in a definition of a literary movement in terms of philosophy.

Knight's comments are representative of this critical dilemma: "McTeague was the first full-fledged naturalistic American novel . . ." ¹ but it is marred "because McTeague is photographic without being philosophic . . . and no true presentation of reality can disregard a philosophy . . . and because it has passages of brutality and coincidence which impair belief." ² Remembering, as most commentators do, that the traditional distinction between naturalism and realism is naturalism's expression of a philosophy of scientific determinism, a philosophy based upon the assumption of consistent causation and thus the denial of coincidence and chance, the scholars have consistently tripped on the "usual stumbling block of Norris as a naturalist." ³ The facts make

¹Knight, p. 161.

²Ibid., p. 162.

³Donald Pizer, "Evolutionary Ethical Dualism in

this central problem very complex. Norris is the first avowed disciple of Zola in America, and yet those who accept Norris' placement of himself in the tradition of Zola often find themselves discussing his novels in terms of lists of non-scientific elements. Norris' aligning himself with the anti-Romantic movement and then calling himself as well as Zola Romantic have brought most critics to the conclusion that Norris' published literary theories, which appeared posthumously as The Responsibilities of the Novelist (1903), are inconsistent hack-work which must be noted and then disregarded. As if all this were not sufficiently confusing, Norris, the naturalist, wrote three overtly romantic novels in the time between his first two naturalistic studies of degradation and his last two studies of economic and natural forces. Franklin Walker, Norris' biographer, warned the aspiring generalizer of the problems: "Call Frank Norris realist and ignore Moran of the Lady Letty; call him romanticist and ignore McTeague; call him romantic realist and escape by begging the question."⁴

Frank Norris' life, as has been noted by several writers, offers an interesting parallel to that of George

Frank Norris' Vandover and the Brute and McTeague," Publications of the Modern Language Association, LXVII (December, 1961), 552.

⁴Franklin Walker, Frank Norris: A Biography (Garden City: Doubleday, Doran and Co., 1932), p. 78.

Moore. Reared in a socially and economically secure environment, both went to Paris to study painting. Finding that their artistic talents were limited, they turned to writing upon their return to their native countries. Both became searchers for novelistic truth, using Zola's method to define truth, and both became propagandists for naturalism, by example in their novels and by precept in their journalistic writings. Interesting though they may be, these parallels must not be relied on too heavily. As Moore insisted, his residence in Paris was the great formative experience in his life; while there he discovered the ideals which were to control his art for over a decade. In contrast, Norris' Parisian experience seems to have been an immersion into the romantic past, the literature concerned with heroic knights and pure maidens; although it is hard to believe, he seemed to disregard the dominant artistic struggle in Paris in 1887-88, the debate over naturalism. Upon Moore's return to England, he published A Modern Lover; upon Norris' return to San Francisco, he published the romantic poem Yvernelle (1891). Moore, upon his return to England, quickly became a major figure in the struggle for the serious novel; Norris, upon his return from France, became a fun-loving fraternity boy at the University of California and created hardly a literary ripple for ten years. Moore could return to a cosmopolitan center and make himself heard through publication

in nationally-read magazines; Norris returned to a growing provincial town and, through The Wave, allied himself uneasily with the weakening tradition of the local color movement. But one parallel remains not only interesting but also important: both men discovered Zola and found in his work something that appealed to their individual literary aspirations. The common inspiration was filtered through different cultures and different personalities, and the differences in the works of these two writers can throw light not only on their artistic individuality but also on cultural differences and the nature of naturalism.

The facts of Norris' life offer only a few major problems to the biographer, but these few are among the things the student would most like to know. One of these problems is the date and source of Norris' interest in Zola. Although several writers on Norris insist, with much logic, that he must have become aware of the nature of Zola's work during his two years in France, no proof of his reading of Zola before his years at the University of California has been found. The other major problem is even more important--the chronology of the composition of his first two novels. Walker assumes that Norris began McTeague while he was at Berkeley, and he proves that he wrote some of McTeague during his only year at Harvard because Norris submitted sections of it to Lewis E. Gates and finally dedicated the novel to this

writing teacher. Norris ceased to work on McTeague after he created the scene of Trina's death⁵ and wrote Vandover and the Brute during this same year at Harvard (1894-95); he finished McTeague in 1897.⁶ McTeague was not published until February, 1899, and Vandover was published posthumously in 1914. Thus Norris' first published novel was his most romantic, Moran of the Lady Letty (1898), and while the horrors of McTeague were still being pointed out by reviewers, he published the innocuous love story Blix (September, 1899). Although I have seen no proof, I will assume with most modern scholars that Vandover was his first completed novel and McTeague his second, with the three minor novels being composed between the completion of McTeague and the beginning of The Octopus.

Most scholars of Norris and his works, faced with the many apparent contradictions in his theory and his novels, have accepted the truth of Walker's suggestion: "Norris, in identifying himself with the naturalists, revealed a more profound understanding of Zola than he did naturalism itself. Just as he missed its underlying mood, he failed to accept in its entirety the philosophy back of naturalism."⁷ Although his novels reveal that Norris was neither so anti-philosophical

⁵Ibid., p. 95.

⁶Pizer, PMLA, LXVII, 554.

⁷Walker, p. 84.

nor so philosophically inconsistent as some would have it, he was not searching for ideas but for techniques in Zola. He summed up, in The Responsibilities of the Novelist, his technical ideal: "And it seems as if there in a phrase one could resume the whole system of fiction mechanics--preparation of effect."⁸ Scott, Dickens, Stevenson, Kipling, Zola, Huysmans--a rather incongruous group of influences--were admired and imitated by Norris,⁹ and the common denominator which he found in these men was the creation of great effects. If Norris is to be connected with the naturalistic tradition, the approach must be made through a study of his techniques in gaining his effects.

The key Norris isolated to explain the powerful effects of the above-named group of writers--his conception of the naturalistic search for truth--is the choice and treatment of characters and the plot within which these characters operate. In an unsigned editorial in The Wave in 1896, an editorial which all scholars agree must have been written by Norris, the argument for Zola as romanticist is presented:

It is curious to note how persistently M. Zola is misunderstood. . . . Naturalism, as understood by Zola, is but a form of romanticism after all. That

⁸Frank Norris, Complete Works (Garden City: Doubleday, Doran & Co., Inc., 1928), VII, 116.

⁹Ahnebrink, passim.

Zola should be quoted as a realist, and as a realist of realists, is a strange perversion. . . . To be noted by M. Zola, we must leave the rank and file; . . . we must separate ourselves; we must become individual, unique. The naturalist takes no note of common people, common in so far as their interests, their lives, and the things that occur in them are common, are ordinary. Terrible things must happen to the characters of the naturalistic tale. They must be twisted from the ordinary, wrenched from the quiet, uneventful round of everyday life and flung into throes of a vast and terrible drama that works itself out in unleashed passions, in blood, and in sudden death. The world of M. Zola is a world of big things; the enormous, the formidable, the terrible, is what counts; no teacup tragedies here.

. Everything is extraordinary, imaginative, grotesque even, with a vague note of terror quivering throughout like the vibration of an ominous and low-pitched diapason. It is all romantic, at times unmistakably so, as in Le Reve or Rome, closely resembling the work of the greatest of all modern romanticists, Hugo. We have the same high dramas, the same enormous scenic effects, the same love of the extraordinary, the vast, the monstrous and the tragic. . . . Naturalism is a form of romanticism, not an inner circle of realism. . . . It is a school by itself, unique, somber, powerful beyond words.¹⁰

The reader may castigate the scholarship of Norris because he reduced romanticism to the love of the exotic, because he showed no knowledge of Zola's theoretical writings, and because he equated the broad movement of realism with Howells' realism of the commonplace, but he must also perceive that Norris has recognized the sensational element in naturalism. Norris developed an interest in Zola's techniques without any real knowledge of Zola's theoretical aesthetic and without his belief in scientific method.

¹⁰Quoted in Walker, pp. 82-84.

This chapter will be devoted primarily to the four novels in which Norris claimed he was following the naturalistic tradition. Techniques, no matter how effective per se, must be organized into a thematic pattern if a novel is to have value, and since the themes which emerge from the naturalistic techniques discussed so far have a common element, I must struggle with the overall thematic effect gained by Norris' adaptation of naturalistic techniques. From 1899 onward, McTeague has been called "meaningless"¹¹ or, at best, contradictory in its theme; Vandover and the Brute is usually accorded even less thematic value than McTeague. To agree with the critics is, in my estimation, to call these weak novels, and I do agree that these novels lack intellectual consistency. I think, however, that the best way to understand the failure of these novels is in terms of technique rather than in terms of an intellectually confused novelist.

Vandover and the Brute, according to many critics, is admirable in its conception but weak in its execution. Marchand gives the standard statement: "Norris had [In Vandover] a powerful theme, conceived . . . on more severely naturalistic lines than McTeague; but the execution is less good. . . ."¹² That the novel is in the naturalistic

¹¹Cargill, p. 99.

¹²Ernest Marchand, Frank Norris: A Study (Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, c. 1942), p. 68.

tradition has been universally acknowledged; it is a study in physical and mental degradation, filled with horrible descriptions of disease, drunkenness, and poverty and containing allusions to illicit sexual activity. This, combined with the unhappy ending, seems sufficient proof of its naturalism. Structurally the book seems to be a study of the individual destroyed by unexplained forces within himself. But this traditional interpretation has been challenged: Walcutt sees the conflict as "an ordinary attractive young man . . . caught and crushed . . . by social and personal forces which twentieth-century man knows all too well";¹³ and Pizer asserts, "Vandover is not simply the story of a decline; it is rather an account of a decline and a rise [that of Charlie Geary]."¹⁴ Both of these statements point toward what seems to me to be the structure of the novel, imperfectly achieved though it is: the structure is panoramic, the story of three young men from San Francisco--Vandover, Charlie Geary, and Dolly Haight--undergoing similar formative experiences and facing two forces--"the vast fearful engine" associated with "Nature" and "the brute"¹⁵ and the valueless society of San Francisco which demands conformity. Vandover's outburst against society is usually interpreted as false

¹³Walcutt, p. 123.

¹⁴Pizer, PMLA, LXVII, 555.

¹⁵Norris, V, 213.

self-justification of his immorality, but his generalizations are supported by the action of the novel.

"To a large extent I really believe it's the women's fault that the men are what they are. If they demanded a higher moral standard the men would come up to it; they encourage a man to go to the devil and then--and then when he's rotten with disease and ruins his wife and his children--what is it--'spotted toads'--then there's a great cry raised against the men, and women write books and all, when half the time the woman has only encouraged him to be what he is."¹⁶

The conversation immediately follows Turner Ravis' rejection of the pure, dull Dolly Haight; the passage predicts Vandover's social fall and abandonment by Turner. The study of the three young men and their varying relationships to brute force and society works out almost geometrically. Dolly Haight rejects all that is brutish and becomes the complete social conformist, only to be destroyed (unbelievably) by venereal disease, the ironic revenge of the "machine" for Dolly's rejection of that facet of life. Geary succeeds by becoming the perfect hypocrite, enjoying those activities associated with brutishness and even profiting through following the instincts whose source is supernatural force but controlling both social conventions and brutish urges so that he rises in the social world. Vandover rejects conformity and surrenders himself to the brute, thus creating his own degradation.

The recognition of some such structural pattern as

¹⁶Ibid., V, 85.

this is necessary if much of the book is not to be seen as superfluous. The delineation of the social background of San Francisco, including the seemingly trivial evening at the Ravises, becomes a functional part of the novel. Haight, often called an unnecessary and improbable figure, and Geary, seen by many as a simple plot device to further Vandover's fall, as well as Ellis and the Dummy, are recognized as necessary, although certainly not consistently effective, elements of the novel. With such a conflict in mind, even the sensational boat wreck, seemingly included only because of Norris' love for the delineation of violence, takes on some relevance. The refusal of the people in the boat to save the drowning Jew is explained as having survival value: "It was the animal in them all that had come to the surface in an instant, the primal instinct of the brute striving for its life and for the life of its young."¹⁷ The conflict between force and society is evident when Vandover learns that legal charges have been brought against the naval engineer, who was instrumental in refusing the Jew's plea.

Repeated assertions prove that Norris was interested in environment as a force upon character: again and again Vandover's "pliable character adapted itself to the new environment."¹⁸ But except in two instances--the social world

¹⁷Ibid., V, 122.

¹⁸Ibid., V, 157.

of Turner Ravis and the world of pure force on the sinking ship and the small boat--the settings of the novel seem to be formed or chosen by Vandover rather than forming his character. The various environments of Vandover are presented as rooms or houses, ranging from the vivacious comfort of the Ravises' parlor to the filth and poverty of Geary's Mission house, which Vandover must clean. His degradation is symbolized by a series of habitats, each less reputable than the last. Beginning his San Francisco life in the luxury of his father's home, he next symbolically chooses a "charming"¹⁹ apartment rather than a functional studio, and he transforms this apartment into a place of luxurious dissipation and, finally, a place for playing cards. As his money disappears, his lodgings become more mundane, until the Reno House becomes Vandover's home. Vandover adapts each of these places to his particular stage of degradation so that they become symbolic of his moral decline, but there is never any feeling of causation, as implied by the repeated assertions. Paralleling his changes in residence are the places of leisure which he visits. The Imperial Restaurant, symbolic of the demimonde to which fashionable young men devote much of their leisure, is the setting for some of Vandover's major errors. It is here that he meets Flossie, the non-drinking prostitute, and

¹⁹Ibid., V, 153.

that he seduces Ida Wade, the fast but good girl. The Imperial is a world without values, but its semi-respectability must be abandoned for the more degrading pleasures of drunkenness and gambling. The Luxembourg is the scene of the more destructive drinking parties. Although there is much concrete description of these houses, rooms, and bars, the extent to which Norris conceived of environment in terms of people and moral status rather than things can be seen from the description of Vandover's residence in the Reno House.

The Reno House, where Vandover had lived for some fifteen months, was a sort of hotel on Sacramento Street below Kearney. The neighbourhood was low--just on the edge of the Barbary Coast, abounding in stores for second-hand clothing, saloons, pawnshops, gun-stores, bird-stores, and the shops of Chinese cobblers. Around the corner on Kearney Street was a concert hall, a dive, to which the admission was free. Near by was the old Plaza.

Underneath the hotel on the ground floor were two saloons, a barber shop, and a broom manufactory. The lodgers themselves were for the most part "transients," sailors lounging about shore between two voyages, Swedes and Danes, farmhands, grape-pickers, and cow-punchers from distant parts of the state, a few lost women, and Japanese cooks and second-boys remaining there while they advertised for positions.

Vandover sank to the grade of these people at once with the fatal adaptability to environment which he had permitted himself to foster throughout his entire life, and which had led him to be contented in almost any circumstances. It was as if the brute in him were forever seeking a lower level, wallowing itself lower and lower into the filth and into the mire, content to be foul, content to be prone, to be inert and supine.²⁰

"Fatal adaptability" and the brute "forever seeking" show

²⁰ Ibid., V, 278.

Norris' uncertainty on the whole question of Vandover's will and its relation to environment.

Although Norris' interest in concrete, accurate detail is obvious in the names of the streets and the now meaningless reference to the "old Plaza," the most effective descriptions of the book, the ones which made it immediately recognizable as a naturalistic novel, do not establish a controlling environment but rather create a simple sensational effect. Among these are the descriptions of excessive drinking, of Vandover as wolf, of the people and activities on the sinking ship, and finally of the filth of the house which Vandover must clean. It is clear that Norris was attempting something he considered to be new from a passage like the following:

There was nothing picturesque about it all, nothing heroic. It was unlike any pictures he had seen of lifeboat rescues, unlike anything he had ever imagined. It was all sordid, miserable, and the sight of the half-clad women, dirty, sodden, unkempt, stirred him rather to disgust than to pity.²¹

Vandover's final degradation is made shockingly complete with a description of his cleaning under the sink of the Mission house:

The sink pipes were so close above him that he was obliged to crouch lower and lower; at length he lay flat upon his stomach. Prone in the filth under the sink, in the sour water, the grease, the refuse, he groped about with his hand searching

²¹ Ibid., V, 124.

for something gray that the burnisher's wife had seen. It was an old hambone covered with a greenish fuzz.²²

The great number of descriptive passages and Norris' theories, developed later, show that his conception of truth was one based upon the shocking nature of experience. I think his favorite device was one of relatively simple shock, an effect gained through descriptions of often grotesque scenes and activities.

But behind the concrete pictures of San Francisco and Vandover's rooms and the simple shock effects of a variety of descriptions, Norris created a pattern of environments defined by the morality of their inhabitants. At one point Vandover reviews "the eternal struggle between good and evil that had been going on within him since his very earliest years."²³ "Those influences that had tended to foster and to cultivate all the better part of him"²⁴ include his father, who failed because he "was not strong";²⁵ Turner Ravis, whose love "he had quite destroyed";²⁶ public opinion, which "he had cast from him";²⁷ and religion, which "had never

²²Ibid., V, 308.

²³Ibid., V, 188.

²⁴Ibid.

²⁵Ibid., V, 189.

²⁶Ibid., V, 190.

²⁷Ibid.

affected him very deeply."²⁸ With the evil brute leading him, he had abandoned these moral ties to enter the immoral world of Flossie, Ida, Ellis, a world of sexualism, alcohol, and gambling. "Conscience, remorse, repentance, all these had been keen enough at first, but he had so persistently kicked against the pricks that little by little he had ceased to feel them at all."²⁹ With the death of conscience, he moves beyond the immoral world to enter the amoral nether world of lost pride, hunger, and filth. Traditional society, equated in this crucial passage with the good, is incapable of offering values which would aid Vandover in attaining self-control, but the whole oversimplified moral scheme of the environments is not consistent with the narrative structure and characterization of the novel. The environmental study, rather than reflecting the theme of the equal inadequacy of force and civilization, equates civilization with goodness and force with evil. Norris failed to integrate his moral scheme with the pattern inherent in his panoramic structure.

It should be apparent from the above that Norris attempted to show change in character related to change in environment. In the creation of Vandover, he was attempting "not the Realism of mere externals (the copyists have that),

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Ibid., V, 191.

but the realism of motives and emotions."³⁰ Norris simply stated as one of the facts of the novel the basic character of Vandover: "a vague distaste for responsibility"³¹ and "the certain pliability of his character,"³² both of which determine the outcome of the internal conflict between "the brute" representing "a multitude of perverse and vicious ideas"³³ and his "artistic side" since he "seemed to be a born artist."³⁴ Norris offered hints that the weakness of Vandover's character may be explained by early environment--the weakness of the "Old Gentleman" and the lack of "feminine influence"³⁵--but these influences remain too vague to be effective. I believe the reader is to assume from the fact that the novel begins as a study of three similar young men that Vandover with his internal conflict of brute against art and morality is typical of all men; it is Vandover's weakness of character that is unique. Norris presented in the major plot in the novel a character study, starting with the above basic assumptions about Vandover's character and pursuing the following plan: "In a suitable environment

³⁰ Ibid., VII, 15.

³¹ Ibid., V, 22.

³² Ibid., V, 23.

³³ Ibid., V, 8.

³⁴ Ibid., V, 8-9.

³⁵ Ibid., V, 8.

Vandover might easily have become an author, actor, or musician. . . . As it was the merest chance decided his career."³⁶

With the dual impulse within Vandover, he is almost inevitably an incongruous character. His story is organized around a series of reversals--Vandover acting in terms of his praiseworthy artistic side and Vandover acting in terms of brutish urge--Vandover the sensitive creator contrasted with Vandover the vicious wolf. The basic pattern of shock arises from the reader's knowledge of Vandover's basic worth perverted into sub-human actions. The technique reaches its climax in Chapter XIV, when Vandover, having been inspired by listening to an opera, makes one final attempt to reform.

To be better, to be true and right and pure, these were the only things that were worth while, these were the things that he seemed to feel in the music. It was as if for the moment he had become a little child again, not ashamed to be innocent, ignorant of vice, still believing in all his illusions, still near to the great white gates of life.

The appeal had been made to what was best and strongest in Vandover, and the answer was quick and overpowering. All the good that still survived in him leaped to life again in an instant, clamouring for recognition, pleading for existence. The other Vandover, the better Vandover, wrestled with the brute in him once more, never before so strong, never so persistent. He had not yet destroyed all that was good in him; now it had turned in one more revolt, crying out against him, protesting for the last time against its own perversion and destruction. Vandover felt that he was at the great

³⁶Ibid., V, 9.

crisis of his life.³⁷

But by the end of the chapter, the outcome is apparent. He has tried to work and failed.

But the curious experience repeated itself again that night as soon as he tried to work. Once more certain shapes and figures were born upon his canvas, but they were no longer the true children of his imagination, they were no longer his own; they were changelings, grotesque abortions. It was as if the brute in him, like some malicious witch, had stolen away the true offspring of his mind, putting in their place these deformed dwarfs, its own hideous spawn.

Through the numbness and giddiness that gradually came into his head like a poisonous murk he saw one thing clearly: It was gone--his art was gone, the one thing that could save him.³⁸

The consistent pattern, up to this point, has been the presentation of Vandover's desire for good, his motivation toward artistic growth, followed by the reality of his dissipation. The pattern is a familiar one, but the technique of presentation and the clear-cut moral classification of good and evil prevent much of the subtlety and force which it achieves in Madame Bovary or A Mummer's Wife.

Since Norris aspired to "Realism of motive and emotion," a central question posed concerning characterization is that of motive or cause of Vandover's fall. The most obvious cause, of course, is Vandover's weakness of character. Indulgence through weakness of character leads to actual physical and mental change, diagnosed by a doctor as

³⁷ Ibid., V, 187..

³⁸ Ibid., V, 201.

"Lycanthropy-Mathesis,"³⁹ which, as Pizer has suggested, was believed to be caused by excessive drinking.⁴⁰ Thus Vandover's degradation seems to be explained as a basic weakness whose indulgence brings insanity. But there are additional explanations, vaguely presented but nevertheless vital to the understanding of the novel. Again in Chapter XIV, one of these causes is explained:

It was night. He looked out into a vast blue-gray space sown with points of light, winking lamps, and steady slow-burning stars. Below him was the sleeping city. All the lesser staccato noises of the day had long since died to silence; there only remained that prolonged and sullen diapason, coming from all quarters at once. It was like the breathing of some infinitely great monster, alive and palpitating, the sistole and diastole of some gigantic heart. The whole existence of the great slumbering city passed upward there before him through the still night air in one long wave of sound.

It was Life, the murmur of the great, mysterious force that spun the wheels of Nature and that sent it onward like some enormous engine, resistless, relentless; an engine that sped straight forward, driving before it the infinite herd of humanity, driving it on at breathless speed through all eternity, driving it to no one knew whither, crushing out inexorably all those who lagged behind the herd and who fell from exhaustion, grinding them to dust beneath its myriad iron wheels, riding over them, still driving on the herd that yet remained, driving it recklessly, blindly on and on toward some far-distant goal, some vague unknown end, some mysterious, fearful bourne forever hidden in thick darkness.⁴¹

³⁹Ibid., V, 243.

⁴⁰Pizer, PMLA, LXVII, 555.

⁴¹Norris, V, 201-202.

Here is a force that demands that man adapt to it. This monster, Life, is in the very terms of its description linked with the brutish force within Vandover, and yet by giving in to the brute, Vandover becomes one of those "who lagged behind the herd" and is crushed. Vandover, whose weakness prevents his adaptation to Life, is crushed by this amoral force by means of a psychosomatic disease. And finally entering into this formula in some strange way is Norris' intended portrayal of environmentalism. How the failure of the various San Francisco environments to supply Vandover with an adequate moral code with which to adjust to amoral Life fits into this causal scheme remains a problem. It is clear, however, that Norris used most of the standard naturalistic explanations for the incongruous character of Vandover--basically weak character, environment, and physical and mental illness--plus some explanations not associated with the naturalistic tradition--chance and life force.

Most of the minor characters remain consistent. Turner Ravis is the representative of moral society; Ellis is representative of the immoral environment of alcohol and gambling; the Dummy, who talks only when drunk, contributes macabre humor to the world of dissipation. Dolly Haight remains a moral abstraction, the completely social, moral man who meets an "unjustified fate."⁴² Charlie Geary deserves

⁴²Ibid., V, 268.

more attention: a self-centered young man, he is determined to become a successful lawyer. Combining self-indulgence with regard for public opinion, he justifies his legally unethical and morally unjustifiable manipulation of Vandover with the following rationalization: "Every man for himself, that was what he said. It might be damned selfish, but it was human nature; if he had to sacrifice Van, so much the worse. It was evident that his old college chum was going to the dogs anyway. . . ."⁴³ Geary recognizes, in much the same terms, the force which Vandover has earlier sensed; Geary, unlike Vandover, is determined to use the force rather than be crushed by it.

Every man for himself--that was his maxim. It might be damned selfish, but it was human nature: the weakest to the wall, the strongest to the front. Why should not he be in the front? Why not in the very front rank? Why not be even before the front rank itself--the leader? Vast, vague ideas passed slowly across the vision of his mind, ideas that could hardly be formulated into thought, ideas of the infinite herd of humanity, driven on as if by some enormous, relentless engine, driven on toward some fearful distant bourne, driven on recklessly at headlong speed. All life was but a struggle to keep from under those myriad spinning wheels that dashed so close behind. Those were happiest who were farthest to the front. To lag behind was peril; to fall was to perish, to be ridden down, to be beaten to the dust, to be inexorably crushed and blotted out beneath that myriad of spinning iron wheels.⁴⁴

In terms of the plot, Geary is triumphant, being well on his

⁴³Ibid., V, 220.

⁴⁴Ibid., V, 288-289.

way to success due to his using the brute within himself rather than being subdued by it; his triumph, if intended to have thematic effect on the reader, is negated by both his actions and the egotistical functioning of his mind, which the reader is shown. Geary is a triumphant villain, and it is hard to conceive of Norris' allowing his technique to be so misleading as to have intended Geary as the character of value, successfully adjusting to life by compromising between the two forces represented by Haight and Vandover. It might seem that Geary is the perfect example of moral shock, the technique so closely allied with the naturalistic tradition. This may have been Norris' intention, but again the moral pattern of the novel conflicts with the structural pattern so that our final judgment of Geary is in moral terms rather than in terms of the values inherent in the structure.

The flaw which has been pointed out most often in Vandover and the Brute is that Norris was inconsistent in his representation of Vandover: Vandover is said to be helpless before the forces in which he is trapped, and yet he is held morally responsible for his actions. Norris' objectivity toward character is almost non-existent. Using the third person point of view, Norris combined authorial summation and generalization, presentation of mental processes, and dramatic scenes. Norris achieved some good characterization at

times through allowing his irony to create its own effects, as in this passage in which Vandover is recovering from the suicide of Ida Wade:

Vandover was not given to self-analysis, but now for a minute he was wondering if this reaction were due to his youth, his good health and his good spirits, or whether there was something wrong with him. However, he dismissed these thoughts with a shrug of his shoulders as though freeing himself from some disagreeable burden. Ah, he was no worse than the average; one could get accustomed to almost anything; it was only in the books that people had their lives ruined; and to brood over such things was unnatural and morbid! He could not bring Ida back, or mitigate what he had done, or be any more sorry for it by making himself miserable. Well then! Only he would let that sort of thing alone after this, the lesson had been too terrible; he would try and enjoy himself again, only it should be in other ways.⁴⁵

The reader recognizes that Vandover's rationalization is another step toward moral degradation rather than a moral recovery, and Norris' refusal to make the point explicit increases the effect. However, Norris chose this method infrequently. His more common method is to serve as ever-present guide for the reader's judgment of Vandover. For example, as Vandover is recovering from the shock of his father's death, he wonders, "Was his nature shallow?"⁴⁶ Norris inserts, "However, he was wrong in this respect; his nature was not shallow. It had merely become deteriorated."⁴⁷ But whether

⁴⁵Ibid., V, 104-105.

⁴⁶Ibid., V, 139.

⁴⁷Ibid.

overtly commenting or leaving the reader in doubt as to whether he is reporting Vandover's thoughts or giving authorial judgments, Norris presented his moral judgment of Vandover, thus classifying him at each step of the narrative for the reader. As a result, the reader agrees with Norris that Vandover has a chance to be good but becomes bad. According to Walcutt, this presents no problem: "Vandover is accepted for what he is--not judged--and the reader, I believe, identifies himself with the struggling spirit of the protagonist as well as with the social and personal evil which destroys him."⁴⁸ However, when an author acts as judge and consistently condemns his protagonist as weak and immoral, the reader finds it very difficult to identify himself and sympathize with that character, and when the author consistently attaches such adjectives as vicious and evil to the antagonistic force, identification becomes equally impossible. Norris, through his lack of objectivity, prevents any emotional involvement of any kind, except perhaps a feeling of horror. There is no moral shock but only a shock to one's sensibility elicited by the actions of Vandover and the other characters. If the reader does not judge, as Walcutt suggests, it is because most of the judging is done for him. The effect is that of "a series of nightmare

⁴⁸Walcutt, p. 123.

pictures"⁴⁹ rather than a serious presentation of life.

Objectivity toward values is also apparently not a goal of Norris in this novel. His judgment of Vandover is consistently in terms of good and evil. Ultimately it is shocking that a Harvard graduate is driven to cleaning workmen's houses to earn money, but it is really a fate he deserves because of his evil actions. Throughout the novel, the author's morality is made explicit: lechery, excessive drinking, gambling, plus most of the other standard social transgressions are associated with evil. The pattern of environments is presented as support for this traditional morality. The overall effect upon the reader is that he feels in complete accord with the ethical views of the writer. Yet in strange contrast to the judgments of the author on Vandover and on the environments is the structure: Haight punished for innocence, Vandover for sin, and Geary rewarded for selfish hypocrisy. The reader has become so dependent upon ethical guidance from Norris that Norris' failure to offer a moral explanation of the structural values is bewildering. The basic inconsistency of the novel is much greater than Norris' failure to treat Vandover objectively. A good novel--perhaps even a good naturalistic novel--could have been created with either Vandover as morally responsible man or Vandover as hopelessly trapped. But

⁴⁹Taylor, p. 287.

Norris' juxtaposition of a morally defined story of degradation with an apparently amoral panoramic structure can only cause confusion. The reader perceives this confusion as a failure in technique. If Norris is to treat Vandover within a traditional moral frame of reference, he should be expected to judge Geary and Haight by the same standards; or in other terms, impartiality toward characters and objectivity toward values must be consistent.

Pizer attempts to explain the inconsistency of the novel by tracing within it a pattern of ethical dualism, the source of which was Professor Conde of the University of California, one of Norris' instructors. In this system of evolutionary humanism, both human values and evolutionary force are necessary values: evolution progresses toward its ideal end through a complex interaction of soul and body. A man's exclusive commitment to body (force) or to soul (ideals) is destructive.⁵⁰ Although I think Norris at the time of the composition of Vandover was struggling toward some such intellectual position, I do not find it consistently exhibited in the novel. Norris' intellectual problem, as it is exhibited in the novel, is that he cannot reconcile his belief in traditional good and evil with amoral force. He cannot adequately explain the relationship between the brute in Vandover, and all men, a monster which seems evil,

⁵⁰Pizer, PMLA, LXII, 552-555.

and the monster which is "Life," a force which is not evil. I think that the moral nature of evolutionary force remained an intellectual problem for Norris at least through his first four novels. Although Norris' intellectual confusion may be the cause of his failure to find adequate techniques for writing a totally successful novel, the immediate cause of the novel's failure is inadequate novelistic techniques. Norris found no believable way to fuse moral judgment and super-moral force in the novel. They exist as two separate norms in the novel, causing an unresolvable clash between most of the elements of the novel and the theme inherent in the structure. The passages on "Life" have the effect of improbable and functionless intrusions. Norris failed to find techniques with which to gain a unified effect upon the reader.

Entranced by the effects gained in Zola's novels, Norris attempted to imitate them in Vandover and the Brute. He probably chose his subject from Zola's La Bête humaine, using such Zolaesque devices as sexual motivation, alcoholism, obsessive gambling, and the medical explanation for degradation. He recognized Zola's use of environment as an explanation of action and reiterated the environmental formula throughout the novel, but he failed to find a technique whereby environment and action could be believably interrelated. He used the techniques available to achieve incongruity

of characterization. He achieved, with some skill, the sensationalism he recognized in Zola in the shipwreck scene, the descriptions of the drinking bouts, the portrayal of Vandover as wolf, and the final scene of degradation. Norris may even have recognized the pattern of moral shock inherent in the naturalistic tradition: Geary's triumph offends the reader's moral sense. However, Ahnebrink must be speaking of intention rather than performance when he states, "the novel conforms to naturalism in theme, treatment, and detachment";⁵¹ the detachment is missing, and as a result, the theme is ultimately undeterminable. An adequate summation of Vandover and the Brute is that it is a naturalistic novel which fails because of the author's failure to master the technique of objectivity.

McTeague is usually called a better book than Vandover and, in fact, is often called the best of Norris' novels. Because the environment is depressing and the authorial comment less, McTeague is considered the most naturalistic of Norris' novels. But as in Vandover, one of the primary criticisms of the novel is that Norris was inconsistent in his presentation of brute force: he seemed uncertain as to whether it was a value for good or for evil.

There is little doubt about Norris' intention in McTeague. In a letter to Howells, Norris wrote, "Mr.

⁵¹Ahnebrink, p. 110.

Doubleday has now in the presses a novel of mine, to appear in the Spring, of an entirely different style than Moran. I think it will be called 'The People of Polk Street' /sic/ It is as naturalistic as Moran was romantic and in writing it I have taken myself and the work very seriously."⁵² At least as interesting as his announcement of naturalistic intention is his proposed title, which elucidates the intention of the much-argued question of the structure of the novel. Almost everyone, from the time of the novel's publication, has found Old Grannis and Miss Baker incongruous in the novel. Norris' proposed title suggests that at least part of his naturalistic intention was that of gaining breadth of presentation through a panoramic structure rather than that of a study of a single individual. Just as Vandover, Haight, and Geary form the structural center in his first novel, so three couples of Polk Street--McTeague-Trina, Old Grannis-Miss Baker, and Maria-Zerkow--define the intended structure of his second novel. Norris adopted the common device of the apartment house as a way to bring the characters of his novel together. Despite the constricted environment of Polk Street and the occasional intrusion of the world outside, the central conflict of the novel is not even so socially oriented as that of Vandover; rather it is

⁵²Franklin Walker (ed.), The Letters of Frank Norris (San Francisco: The Book Club of California, 1956), p. 23.

a struggle between inexplicable brute force and human values. McTeague and Trina exhibit the two primary forms instinctive force can take--avarice and animal passion--forms which are often modified in these characters by a struggle toward human values. Maria and Zerkow represent greed so absolute that it causes insanity with no saving grace of humanity. Old Grannis and Miss Baker, devoid of brute force, are not quite so shocking in their pathos as Haight but, nevertheless, hardly offer any solution to the conflict in their absolute conformity to outmoded social graces.

Superimposed on this structure of contrasts is the melodramatic plot, built around a series of carefully structured climaxes, of the fall of McTeague. As in Vandover, the attention given to McTeague tends to obscure the larger structure, thus making the other two couples seem superfluous to the story of McTeague. McTeague's story is one dependent upon chance, not cause, and the much-criticized ending is such an overworking of chance that it fails to convince.

In the first chapter, Norris described Polk Street from sun-up to midnight and contrasted the scene on the street during the week with that on Sunday. It is a street of cheap businesses and the homes of laboring people, but it is not the slum of Rum Alley. It is essentially a respectable street. The apartment house, McTeague's dental parlor, and the apartment of McTeague and Trina are all carefully

presented. But despite all the care expended on the environment, it is really not vital to the novel. The absence of riches is important to the motivation; the availability of the bar is important to the tracing of McTeague's degradation; certain elements of the environment--the dogs, the gold tooth outside McTeague's shop, the canary and its cage--take on symbolic significance, but there is even less attempt in the first two-thirds of the novel to relate the actions of the characters to the environment than in Vandover. Nevertheless, the environment seems real, and perhaps as Walcutt suggests, "its existence is its justification for being included in the novel."⁵³

The apparent isolation of the Polk Street environment is interrupted occasionally by chance events from outside. The winning of the lottery, the prohibition of McTeague to practice dentistry, and finally the law which pursues McTeague in the latter part of the novel are all vague and inexplicable, understood neither by McTeague nor the reader. There is also visible an increased bestiality in McTeague when he abandons Polk Street. These elements remain so tenuous, however, that their effect is that of plot manipulation rather than meaningful environmental forces.

The characterization of McTeague is more effective than that of Vandover, partially because McTeague is a much

⁵³Walcutt, p. 128.

less complex character. Described as "immensely strong, stupid, docile, obedient,"⁵⁴ McTeague's body and mind are "heavy,"⁵⁵ and despite his animalism, "there was nothing vicious about the man."⁵⁶ Altogether, this is a unique conception of the protagonist in the American novel. But the unconscious Trina brings out the conflict which has been latent in McTeague: "Below the fine fabric of all that was good in him ran the foul stream of hereditary evil, like a sewer."⁵⁷ It is the brute, the animal, the monster. McTeague is not the noble innocent corrupted by society, as suggested by Carvel Collins,⁵⁸ but a man who has inherited "the evil of an entire race."⁵⁹ Torn between his human values, made up of love, tenderness, kindness, and a capacity for friendship, and the brute within himself, McTeague is naturally an incongruous character. As these two impulses, symbolized by the canary and its gilt cage, the concertina and the golden tooth, become unbalanced by outside forces--Trina's miserliness, loss of practice, alcoholism--McTeague changes from the friendly giant to the scheming animal.

⁵⁴Norris, VIII, 3.

⁵⁵Ibid.

⁵⁶Ibid.

⁵⁷Ibid., VIII, 27.

⁵⁸Carvel Collins, "Introduction" to Frank Norris, *McTeague: A Story of San Francisco* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, Inc., 1960), p. xiv.

⁵⁹Norris, VIII, 27.

Trina Sieppe, more intelligent than McTeague, has the same internal conflict in a slightly different form. First seen as a sexual ambivalence, an aversion to McTeague until he crushes her in his arms and then a kind of masochistic adoration of him, the animal in her ultimately takes the form of miserliness, a vice which her better nature rebels against but which she cannot avoid. She is transformed from an attractive young woman into a destructive shrew. Her movement, like that of McTeague, is toward degradation, and hardship brings out the worst of both husband and wife.

Most of the other characters are more consistent than McTeague and Trina. Old Grannis and Miss Baker, ruled by timidity and the proprieties, are the element of Polk Street without animalism; their love, seemingly triumphant, is really only pathetic. Maria Macapa, slightly insane especially on the subject of the gold plate once owned by her parents, is so convincing in her descriptions that Zerkow, the Jewish junk dealer insane with lust for gold, marries her in hopes of possessing the gold plate. Ironically, the fruit of the marriage, the birth of a child, drives this memory from Maria's mind so that Zerkow finally kills her because of her failure of memory. Sensational in conception, these characters never achieve credibility and remain structural devices offering a contrast to the other two sets of lovers. Marcus Schouler, at first friend and

finally enemy of McTeague, is the character who is used to bring successive reverses in the plot. It is he who introduces McTeague and Trina, who directs the romance, who turns viciously against McTeague because of his own failure to get Trina's lottery winnings, who reports McTeague for practicing without a license, and who dooms both himself and McTeague to death in the desert by handcuffing them together. Despite his reversal from friend to enemy and despite the presence in him of brutish avarice, he remains a device for forwarding the plot rather than an integral part of the structure of the novel.

Despite a great deal of authorial analysis in the novel and a consistent application of the adjective evil to the brutish motives of McTeague, Norris achieved an effect of objectivity in his treatment of his characters. The tone is that of scientific objectivity, and unlike the characters of Vandover, the personages of McTeague are so far removed from normal human motivations that both Norris and the reader share in the objective study of these specimens. Little sympathy is demanded of the reader, and as a result the sensational effects gained by Norris must depend upon even more violence than in Vandover. The final effect of McTeague, powerful though it is, exists as a series of nightmarish scenes: the brutal fight between Marcus and McTeague in the park, the murder of Maria, the climactic

murder of Trina, and finally the grotesque scene on the desert.

The effect of the impartiality toward characters in McTeague is different from that gained by Moore or even Zola. Rather than a pattern of ironic shock dependent upon the reader's sympathy for the goals of the protagonist and revulsion at his actions, the effect remains a relatively simple shock, arising not out of sympathy but rather simple surprise that human beings can act in such a way. However, this lack of sympathy, this emotional distance from all the characters, is the facet of the novel which is instrumental in giving the book a deterministic effect. As Walcutt points out, the structure depends upon neither "internal forces nor . . . external pressures operating in their regular courses," and yet "the incidents seem inevitable as they occur."⁶⁰ Unlike the empty assertions on the same subject in Vandover, generalization and effect coalesce so that the reader feels, when he finishes the novel, that the following assertion is true:

The very act of submission that bound the woman to him forever had made her seem less desirable in his eyes. Their undoing had already begun. Yet neither of them was to blame. From the first they had not sought each other. Chance had brought them face to face, and mysterious instincts as ungovernable as the winds of heaven were at work knitting their lives together. Neither of them had asked that this thing should be--that their destinies, their very

⁶⁰Walcutt, p. 131.

souls, should be the sport of chance. If they could have known, they would have shunned the fearful risk. But they were allowed no voice in the matter. Why should it all be?⁶¹

The lack of humanity in the major characters makes the reader willing to accept the fact that these characters are ruled by chance and have no will. The reader shares in the author's wonder expressed in the final question in the paragraph, but despite the vagueness of any answer, the reader almost accepts the destruction of McTeague and Trina as determined fact.

Norris gained a deterministic effect, but it was at a rather high cost to truth, for as Howells noted, "It is a little inhuman."⁶² Howells was also the first to point out that, even "within the ascertained limits" of Polk Street, the reader's belief is strained in "an anticlimax worthy of Dickens."⁶³ I suppose in terms of the law of averages, the ending in the desert is not much more improbable than Trina's timely winning of the lottery; however, the reader has been aware of the tension between his suspension of disbelief due to lack of involvement with the characters and the increasing improbability of a manipulated plot. Having already burdened the reader's belief with McTeague's amazing sixth sense, Norris destroys this belief with the series of

⁶¹Norris, VIII, 78.

⁶²Quoted in Ahnebrink, p. 116.

⁶³Ibid.

accidents leading to McTeague and Schouler's deaths in the desert. As in Vandover in which one of the inconsistencies was that between an experimental structure and the other elements of the novel, McTeague exhibits a failure of fusion between the experimental structure centering on the three couples and the contrived plot centering on McTeague; this point is most easily seen in the melodrama of the last third of the novel. Is Norris' sensationalism--his natural love of the grand effect--the cause of this weakness? Norris, writing to Howells concerning his review of the novel, defended his ending with "I am sure that it has its place."⁶⁴ Is Norris here the author incapable of self-criticism or is he the author with knowledge of his plan refusing to explain to those of limited vision?

I think a close reading of the section set in the mountains and desert shows that this section is an attempt to save the basic theme of the novel, an attempt which fails because of Norris' failure to achieve a unified effect. Norris had abandoned McTeague with the murder of Trina, and he finished it only after a visit to the mining country. In a book structured upon a series of contrasts--that between hereditary brute instinct and learned human values and the three couples who exhibit various combinations of these qualities--the natural setting offers a contrast to the con-

⁶⁴Walker, Letters, p. 34.

strictions of Polk Street. In the mountains, "A tremendous, immeasurable Life pushed steadily heavenward without a sound, without a motion. . . . In Placer County, California, nature is a vast unconquered brute of the pliocene epoch, savage, sullen, and magnificently indifferent to man."⁶⁵ McTeague has returned to the source of Life by "following a blind and unreasoned instinct,"⁶⁶ and "in the midst of the play of crude and simple forces,"⁶⁷ "the life pleased the dentist beyond words."⁶⁸ With the return to this world of relative simplicity, the brute, which in the first part of the novel was "hereditary evil,"⁶⁹ becomes transformed into the "strange sixth sense"⁷⁰ which is the instinct for self-preservation from the vaguely defined forces of society called "'They'"⁷¹ by McTeague. But like the bird in the gilt cage, which he desperately keeps with him, McTeague is trapped by a force associated with but greater than the brute within him. As in Vandover, McTeague exhibits a shift in values from the brute as evil to the brute as beneficent force for self-preservation, both connected in some unintelligible

⁶⁵Norris, VIII, 322.

⁶⁶Ibid., VIII, 327.

⁶⁷Ibid., VIII, 328.

⁶⁸Ibid., VIII, 329.

⁶⁹Ibid., VIII, 27.

⁷⁰Ibid., VIII, 348.

⁷¹Ibid., VIII, 362.

way with amoral "Life."

In the last part of the novel through the use of unstated contrasts and comparisons, Norris attempted to give Polk Street a power and meaning which it never achieved during the earlier parts of the novel. In the early part of the novel, Polk Street is a place lacking in culture and a place in which brutish passions are exhibited, but it is not the environment causing moral confusion as implied by the contrast with the mining country. Neither are the external forces which enter Polk Street during the early parts of the novel felt as a unified force which can be summed up as a single "They." Norris, by implication, made demands upon the first part of the novel for which he had not prepared the reader. Again his techniques were insufficient to express his themes. The demand in the last part of the novel is that the reader see Polk Street as a formative influence on the character of McTeague; Norris failed to show this interrelationship between environment and character. The result is confusion, inconsistency, and a feeling of incredibility on the part of the reader. Walcutt is right when, echoing other critics, he says, "Norris expresses no teleology"⁷² in this novel, but this fact results from failure, not intention. Norris had to experiment with both his ideas and his techniques in the freer forms of the

⁷²Walcutt, p. 132.

non-realistic novels, in which as he said of Moran, "I was flying kites,--trying to see how high I could get without breaking the string, . . ."⁷³ before he could achieve a more coherent statement of his theme in The Octopus.

Like Vandover, McTeague ultimately fails as a coherent work of art. The question remains as to why it has been consistently praised as a powerful book. Some of the elements contributing to this power have already been discussed: the simple sensationalism, the ever-surprising turns of plot "that might be found in any novel of adventure and intrigue,"⁷⁴ and the inherent interest of the realistic portrayal of Polk Street, nineteenth-century dentistry, and the mines. Another fascinating element is Norris' treatment of normal and abnormal psychology. His development of the corresponding increase of Trina's love with domination and the decrease of McTeague's love with possession, apparently included because Norris believed it as psychological fact, is a sign of the new psychology. The more functional development of Trina's masochism and McTeague's sadism is part of the sensational element of the novel. And finally the symbolism of the novel adds power despite its rather confusing inconsistency. The primary symbol is gold, seen in the gold-tooth sign, the gold motif of the Maria-Zerkow story, the gilt canary cage, the

⁷³Walker, Letters, p. 23.

⁷⁴Walcutt, p. 131.

gold hoarded by Trina, and the gold of the mines. Gold is part of the brute forces of the novel, dominating Trina, Maria, and Zerkow. Representing the other element of brute force is the animal imagery, obvious in the neighborhood dogs, the mousetrap, and McTeague himself. Apparently representing the standards opposed to avarice and animalism are McTeague's concertina, the canary, and, in extreme form, Old Grannis and Miss Baker. It is significant that this symbolism is different in function from that which Crane used. Crane's symbols were a device to exhibit materialistic forces with economy; there is nothing economical in Norris' symbolism. He is striving to represent the inexpressible--the supernatural element of "Life." Thus his romanticism is not simply built upon a belief in unique effects but has that element of supernaturalism which is supposedly antithetical to naturalism.

Although Norris is more effective in his sensational effects, most of them traceable to naturalistic practice, more objective in his treatment of characters and values, more typically naturalistic in his choice of milieu in McTeague than in Vandover, his theme is ultimately undeterminable and his symbolism goes beyond that of Zola or any other naturalist I have discussed in the direction of attempting to express the supernatural. If McTeague is the triumph of early American naturalism, it is naturalistic in terms of

techniques modified by other traditions, not philosophy.

One of the problems of Norris apparent from an analysis of his first two novels is that he was struggling with an evolutionary conception of force and attempting to reconcile it with his belief in the traditional concepts of good and evil. One of the unanswerable questions in both Vandover and McTeague is that of the relationship between internal brute and external Life, both forces present in each novel. More simply the question comes to be, both for Norris and for the reader, whether life force is good or evil. The three romantic novels written between the completion of McTeague and the beginning of The Octopus exhibit Norris' progression toward a definition of force. I think that a brief discussion of these three novels, Moran of the Lady Letty, Blix, and A Man's Woman, will not only aid in understanding Norris' purposes in his last two novels but also illustrate some continuity with what he was attempting in his first two novels.

Despite Norris' reputation as a naturalist, these three novels are always called non-naturalistic because of their traditional plots and subject matter and because all three are studies of the operation of the human will. I have noted before that one of the characteristics of the naturalistic novel is the search for an organizational form that avoids the plan of the traditional plot with the happy

ending. In "The Mechanics of Fiction," Norris does not indicate that he had any such revolutionary conception of structure; although his terminology varies slightly, his conception of structure is in the traditional pattern of exposition, complication, rising action, climax ("pivotal event"), and resolution.⁷⁵ Moran of the Lady Letty is a traditionally constructed adventure story except for its unbelievable avoidance of the happy ending; Elix has the traditional structure of the popular magazine love story (boy has girl, boy loses girl, girl gets boy); A Man's Woman is a standard variation of the same love story (boy and girl secretly love each other, girl admits love only to reject boy, marriage). Even in his better novels, one of Norris' central weaknesses is his melodramatic plots; in these novels, the melodramatic element is dominant.

The weakness of the novels, however, is one of the things that makes them useful for my purpose. Threaded, not fused, through these traditional plots is a non-traditional theme. This theme can be stated, in oversimplified form, as the male's discovery or recovery of a kind of supernatural force through a matching or a fusing of his force with that of an unconventional woman. In Moran, Ross Wilbur, a San Francisco fop, is shanghaied and meets Moran, a wild Scandinavian woman of the sea; tested by killing a man and

⁷⁵Norris, VII, 113-117.

brought to manhood by defeating Moran in an insane physical struggle, Wilbur suddenly has a new and a right, according to the values of the novel, perspective on life:

Never had he conceived of such savage exaltation as that which mastered him at that instant. The knowledge that he could kill filled him with a sense of power that was veritably royal. He felt physically larger. It was the joy of battle, the horrid exhilaration of killing, the animal of the race, the human brute suddenly aroused and dominating every instinct and tradition of centuries of civilization. The fight still was going forward.⁷⁶

Civilization versus atavism is not the conflict reflected in the plot, but it is the thematic conflict. The natural forces, despite their leading to brutality and killing, are the good forces of the novel. In talking to his socially prominent friends, Wilbur makes clear what the civilization side of the struggle has to offer:

"Why, man, I've fought--fought with a naked dirk, fought with a coolie who snapped at me like an ape--and you talk to me of dancing and functions and german favours! It wouldn't do some of you people a bit of harm if you were shanghaied yourselves. That sort of life, if it don't do anything else, knocks a big bit of seriousness into you. You fellows make me sick. . . . As though there wasn't anything else to do but lead cotillions and get up new figures."⁷⁷

It seems a pretty uneven struggle if civilization is to be equated with San Francisco foppery. The plot, the characters, the techniques make the theme silly, but the belief

⁷⁶Ibid., III, 286.

⁷⁷Ibid., III, 308.

in the necessity of brute instinct, not yet clearly defined, to counterbalance the emptiness of civilization is, I should guess, the one serious thing that Norris put into the book.

In Blix Condry Rivers, a morally weak young journalist with creative aspirations, is transformed into a responsible man by Travis Bessemer, "just a good, sweet, natural, healthy-minded, healthy-bodied girl, honest, strong, self-reliant, and good-tempered."⁷⁸ The antagonist in the novel is again immoral society:

"You see this card business is only a part of this club life, this city life--like drinking and--other vices of men. If I didn't have to lead the life, or if I didn't go with that crowd--Sargeant and the rest of those men--It would be different, easier maybe."⁷⁹

Pursuing their adventures outside the accepted San Francisco society, Condry and Blix develop the force which will replace social emptiness: "The simple things of the world, the great, broad, primal emotions of the race stirred in them."⁸⁰ With the rejection of the artificial, Blix becomes woman and Condry man, and the whole process is given cosmic significance:

The huge spaces of earth and air and water carried with them a feeling of kindly but enormous force--elemental force, fresh, untutored, new, and young. There was buoyancy in it; a fine breathless sense of uplifting and exhilaration; a sensation as of bigness and a return to the homely, human, natural life, to the primitive old impulses, irresistible, changeless, and unhampered; old as the ocean, stable

⁷⁸Ibid., III, 4.

⁷⁹Ibid., III, 57.

⁸⁰Ibid., III, 123.

as the hills, vast as the unplumbed depths of the sky.⁸¹

The brutishness of the force in Moran has disappeared in this novel, but again there is the praise of cosmic naturalism, primitivism, in preference to the dissipations and artificialities of society.

Norris continued and made slightly more complex the "apotheosis of force"⁸² within a more unbelievable plot in A Man's Woman. In this novel, Ward Bennett, forceful Arctic explorer, is shown exerting his will for necessary ends, even at the cost of the sacrifice of human life, in the Arctic. Facing "the scarred battlefield of chaotic forces, the savage desolation of a prehistoric world,"⁸³ man can only survive through his "Instincts--the primitive, elemental impulses of the animal. . . ."⁸⁴ Bennett loves and is secretly loved by Lloyd Searight, a forceful nurse who is oppressed by "a shape of terror, formless, intangible, and invisible."⁸⁵ Both meet "The Enemy"⁸⁶ and defeat it: for Bennett it is the natural destructive forces of the Arctic; for Lloyd it is the diseases afflicting her clients. In the

⁸¹Ibid., III, 169.

⁸²Walker, Norris, p. 85.

⁸³Norris, VI, 33.

⁸⁴Ibid., VI, 18.

⁸⁵Ibid., VI, 46.

⁸⁶Ibid., VI, 60.

horribly contrived "pivotal point" of the novel, the primitive force of Bennett clashes with the feminine force of Lloyd, and Bennett's triumph opens Lawrencian depths for the woman:

Lloyd saw deep down into the black, mysterious gulf of sex--down, down, down, where, immeasurably below the world of little things, the changeless, dreadful machinery of Life itself worked, clashing and resistless in its grooves. It was a glimpse fortunately brief, a vision that does not come too often, lest reason, brought to the edge of the abyss, grow giddy at the sight and, reeling, topple headlong.⁸⁷

Force has lost some of its benevolence since Blix and is identified with some of the violence of Moran; Norris is still struggling with the moral nature of force. The primitive forces of Bennett also collide with moral forces. In his will to conquer Lloyd, he sacrifices the life of his best friend; his choice of selfish love over honor causes self-doubt so that Bennett loses some of his force, but of course, as Lloyd subordinates her force to that of Bennett, his force is modified so that "they were both working out their salvation along the same lines."⁸⁸ Bennett's transformation is described in the following terms:

Humanity entered into the gloomy, waste places of his soul; remorse crowded hard upon his wonted arrogance; generosity and the impulse to make amends took the place of selfishness; kindness thrust out the native brutality; the old-time harshness and

⁸⁷ Ibid., VI, 120-121.

⁸⁸ Ibid., VI, 206.

imperiousness gave way to a certain spirit of toleration.⁸⁹

Thematically the book is still rather muddled, but it seems clear that what was intended is a reconciliation between the moral, humane force of Lloyd Searight and the primitive, brutal force of Ward Bennett to create in the union of the two a healthy balance between atavistic strength and civilized values. Although society is a less dominant antagonist in A Man's Woman, "salvation" depends upon a set of values above or below or, at least, outside the artificial values of society.

Despite Norris' failure to find adequate fictional forms or even adequate terms for his ideas in these three novels, there is an element of thematic consistency. Positing a conflict between natural forces and immoral, destructive civilization, he created an ineffective, if not downright silly, fictional conflict by confusing, at least symbolically, the values of civilization with the artificialities of high society in the first two novels. The nature of force is also left unfortunately vague: sometimes it is primitivism inherent in the individual and sometimes a cosmic machine with which the individual must align himself. Although often frightening and even brutal, natural force is essential to the complete human being. In the last of these novels, Norris recognized the conflict between

⁸⁹Ibid., VI, 205-206.

force and traditional values and attempted to reconcile them, keeping the best of both atavism and humanism.

In these three novels, Norris shifted fictional traditions but adhered to his evolutionary theme which was barely perceptible in his first two novels. I think that the conflict between civilization (society) and force evident in Moran and Blix is that which was intended to control Vandover and that which explains the intention of the last part of McTeague. In Moran and Blix, Norris exhibited the same confusion about whether force was good or evil that he had exhibited in his first two novels. In A Man's Woman, he repeated the conflict which structures McTeague, that between human values and atavistic force, and found a tentative solution which was to be developed in his last two novels.

With the encouraging, if partial, success of his published novels and with some financial security, Norris' plans, like his plots always rather grandiose, turned toward a project in which he could develop a more congenial form for his newly defined ideas on force. Interested as much in classical and Renaissance examples as in Zola, Norris planned the epic which he thought America lacked.

The plain truth of the matter is that we have neglected our epic--the black shame of it be on us--and no contemporaneous poet or chronicler thought it worth his while to sing the song or tell the tale of the West, because literature in the day when the West was being won was a cult indulged in by

certain well-bred gentlemen in New England who looked eastward to the Old World, to the legends of England and Norway and Germany and Italy for their inspiration, and left the great, strong, honest, fearless, resolute deeds of their own countrymen to be defamed and defaced by the nameless hacks of the "yellow-back" libraries.⁹⁰

In March, 1899, he wrote to Howells of the plan for his epic.

I have the idea of another novel or rather series of novels buzzing in my head these days. I think there is a chance for somebody to do some great work with the West and California as a background, and which will be at the same time thoroughly American. My idea is to write three novels around the one subject of Wheat. First, a story of California, (the producer), second, a story of Chicago (the distributor), third, a story of Europe (the consumer) and in each to keep to the idea of this huge, Niagara of wheat rolling from West to East. I think a big Epic trilogy could be made out of such a subject, that at the same time would be modern and distinctly American.

The idea is so big that it frightens me at times but I have about made up my mind to have a try at it.⁹¹

In a letter to Isaac F. Marcosson in November, 1899, he renounced the style of his last three novels in order to return to the methods of his first two novels.

I am going back definitely now to the style of MacT. and stay with it right along. I've been sort of feeling my way ever since the 'Moran' days and getting a twist of myself. Now I think I know where I am and at what game I play the best. The Wheat series will be straight naturalism with all the guts I can get into it.⁹²

Travelling extensively to carry out the research on his epic,

⁹⁰Ibid., VII, 47.

⁹¹Walker, Letters, p. 34.

⁹²Ibid., p. 48.

Norris devoted the last two years of his life to the project, producing two of the three novels planned, The Octopus (1901) and The Pit (1903).

The larger and better of the two works is The Octopus: A Story of California. The novel traces the struggle of the San Joaquin Valley against the all-powerful Pacific and Southwestern Railroad. With wheat as the central unifying conception of the book, Norris included in his attempt to gain breadth through panoramic structure so many characters and plots that one must search hard for the interrelationship of the parts. Donald Pizer has outlined the pattern of the novel:

The structural and thematic center of The Octopus is the growth of a crop of wheat. This cycle of growth, from October to July, contains two large substructures of conflict, both of which are resolved within the forward thrust of the wheat's growth. The first substructure deals with three young men--the poet Presley, the ascetic shepherd Vanamee and the rancher Annixter--each of whom undergoes a transformation of values and belief following a perception of the meaning of the process of growth. The second substructure is that of the struggle for the wheat by the ranchers and the railroad, each seeking the largest possible profit from its growth.⁹³

Fitting into this structural pattern only slightly, if at all, are other characters and plots, such as the Hooven family and the Dyke family. Norris attempted to organize this mass of material through a pattern of comparison and contrast. The

⁹³Donald Pizer, "Nature in Norris' The Octopus," American Quarterly, XIV (Spring, 1962), 76.

three young men exhibit the familiar pattern of difference in relationship to force, in this case the force of the symbolic wheat. Obvious are the contrived contrasts between the social events of the farmers, the dance and the rabbit drive, and the power struggle with the railroad. Norris' technique for interrelating the various parts of the novel is best illustrated in the last two chapters where he abandoned all attempts at subtlety of counterpointing. In Chapter VIII Presley's talks with the men of power, Cedarquist and Shelgrim, and attendance at a luxurious dinner party are interspersed with scenes depicting Minna Hooven's turning to prostitution and Mrs. Hooven's descent to begging and, finally, starvation. Chapter IX counterpoints the triumph of S. Behrman, the railroad representative, over Magnus Derrick and the triumph of the force of the wheat over Behrman as he is buried in the wheat being loaded on a ship, with a scene intervening in which Vanamee, the mystic unconcerned with the economics of wheat, joins his loved one. Although this relationship through comparison and contrast is evident throughout the novel, the multiplicity of plots which Norris set in motion often caused him to abandon this traditional organizational principle of the panoramic novel in order to summarize the progression of one or more of these story lines.

Despite much description devoted to wheat, flowers, and other aspects of nature in the San Joaquin Valley, the

primary environment which believably acts upon the characters is economic. The most dramatic transformations of character occur in Dyke, the good man who becomes an escaped criminal and is finally destroyed by the economic power of the railroad, the female Hoovens, changed from proud, moral women into prostitutes and beggars, and Magnus Derrick, changed from a natural leader into a snivelling shell. A kind of moral environment also acts upon character. In a world where the immoral acts of the railroad forces are consistently successful, the farmers lose sight of moral value and resolve to act with the same weapons the railroad uses. Ambitious Lyman Derrick betrays friends and family because moral action seems foolish in his environment. Magnus Derrick, famous for his morality, loses his principles in this moral wilderness and is transformed from a leader of men into a weakling. The transformation of the three young men, especially that of Annixter, is a moral process. But intended to be the controlling environment is the natural growth process, symbolized by wheat and flowers. Unfortunately, this environmental force is demonstrated only on the level of assertion and not in terms which convince the reader. Despite a magnificently wordy attempt, Norris failed once more to find a technique through which his concept of force as environment could be effectively communicated to the reader. This failure in technique can be illustrated

through the scene portraying Annixter's transformation. Alone in the fields, trying to reconcile his desire for Hilma Tree with his aloof, independent nature, Annixter experiences a wonderful insight:

Out of the dark furrows of his soul, up from the deep rugged recesses of his being, something rose, expanding. He opened his arms wide. An immense happiness overpowered him. Actual tears came to his eyes. Without knowing why, he was not ashamed of it. This poor crude fellow, harsh, hard, narrow, with his unlovely nature, his fierce truculency, his selfishness, his obstinacy, abruptly knew that all the sweetness of life, all the great vivifying eternal force of humanity had burst into life within him.

The little seed, long since planted, gathering strength quietly, has at last germinated.

Then as the realization of this hardened into certainty, in the growing light of the new day that had just dawned for him, Annixter uttered a cry. Now, at length, he knew the meaning of it all.

"Why--I--I, I love her," he cried. Never until then had it occurred to him. Never until then, in all his thoughts of Hilma, had that great word passed his lips.

.
There it was, the Wheat, the Wheat! The little seed long planted, germinating in the deep, dark furrows of the soil, straining, swelling, suddenly in one night had burst upward to the light. The wheat had come up. It was there before him, around him, everywhere, illimitable, immeasurable. The winter brownness of the ground was overlaid with a little shimmer of green. The promise of the sowing was being fulfilled. The earth, the loyal mother, who never failed, who never disappointed, was keeping her faith again. Once more the strength of nations was renewed. Once more the force of the world was revived. Once more the Titan, benignant, calm, stirred and woke, and the morning abruptly blazed into glory upon the spectacle of a man whose heart leaped exuberant with the love of a woman, and an exulting earth gleaming transcendent with the radiant magnificence of an inviolable pledge.⁹⁴

⁹⁴Norris, II, 81-83.

There is no doubt what is intended here: spring, dawn, risen wheat, natural rebirth is equated with the realization of love and spiritual and moral rebirth. Norris attempted here to communicate the working of the unconscious mind and to show the interrelationship between the character of Annixter and the natural environment. The first problem is that no causal relationship between the processes of nature and the realization of love by Annixter is established; the fact that Annixter's rebirth occurs on the night that the wheat comes up seems coincidental. Second, Annixter's new humanity, his new moral system, remains unbelievable because it exists simply as Norris' assertion: the reader wants to know how love transforms a man completely. The adjective-laden prose not only seems strained but fails to communicate the psychological process. The major point to be made here is that, despite the painfully apparent attempt to equate natural process and psychological process, the natural process, the environment, remains nonfunctional in terms of Annixter's character. When one considers that Annixter's transformation is relatively believable when compared to that of Vanamee, the failure of Norris to integrate environmental force, other than the economic aspects of the wheat, and character becomes a major flaw in the novel.

This failure, a failure in the central intention, is also visible in the techniques of characterization. Instead

of the usual pattern of one or two incongruous characters surrounded by a number of consistent types, The Octopus depicts a change in almost all of the major characters, except for the villains. Dyke, the Hoovens, Annixter, Vanamee, Presley, Magnus and Lyman Derrick, and Hilma Tree develop new characteristics giving them an incongruous pattern of action. Of first importance are the three young men, all searching for their place in the world and all undergoing a learning process leading to an understanding of nature. The three are first presented with three different attitudes: Vanamee, disillusioned because of the rape and death of his first love, is searching nature intuitively to find answers; Annixter is thoughtlessly and selfishly exploiting nature for his own profit; Presley is intellectually searching nature and studying people for "the True Romance."⁹⁵ Vanamee becomes reconciled to the world and a thematic spokesman in the novel through mystic communication with nature and through love for the dead Angelé's daughter; Annixter's transformation is a moral one, brought by love and an unconscious recognition of natural force; Presley comes to an intellectual understanding of "FORCE,"⁹⁶ but because he has not discovered love, he remains a personally insecure wanderer. Thus the three men are changed, each through a different kind of apprehension

⁹⁵Ibid., I, 11.

⁹⁶Ibid., II, 343.

of nature. Presley, the least changed of the three, is the most effectively characterized. Since his approach to the world is intellectual and since the theme of natural force as a pattern of rebirth exists in the novel only in intellectual, assertive form, or at best symbolic form, his learning process is believable. The link between nature and the other two young men is supposed to be deeper than intellect--mystic in Vanamee's case and moral in Annixter's case. An inevitable question is how these two are transformed by this force; Norris found no technique to answer this question. The two have a developed attitude; then something happens; the men are different. Despite the many words devoted to wheat, seed, flowers, and mystic forces, the changes are as vague and unbelievable as that. The change in the almost always passive Vanamee must be registered through Presley:

Instantly Presley was aware of an immense change. Vanamee's face was still that of an ascetic, still glowed with the rarefied intelligence of a young seer, a half-inspired shepherd-prophet of Hebraic legends; but the shadow of that great sadness which for so long had brooded over him was gone; the grief that once he had fancied deathless was, indeed, dead, or rather swallowed up in a victorious joy that radiated like sunlight at dawn from the deep-set eyes, and the hollow, swarthy cheeks.⁹⁷

The nature of Annixter's change is slightly more specific, and although the change is reflected in some of his actions, his early death leaves the proof of his transformation to

⁹⁷ Ibid., II, 344.

Norris' assertions. In "an invisible atmosphere of Love,"⁹⁸

Annixter's moral transformation is promised.

Where once Annixter had thought only of himself, he now thought only of Hilma. The time when this thought of another should broaden and widen into thought of Others, was yet to come; but already it had expanded to include the unborn child--already, as in the case of Mrs. Dyke, it had broadened to enfold another child and another mother bound to him by no ties other than those of humanity and pity. In time, starting from this point, it would reach out more and more till it should take in all men and all women, and the intolerant selfish man, while retaining all of his native strength, should become tolerant and generous, kind and forgiving.⁹⁹

Only Presley's new intellectual awareness, which must become something deeper as he wanders through life, is believable.

Except for Hilma Tree, who through the influence of Annixter's love becomes a woman instead of a girl, the other incongruous characters of the novel are relatively successful in comparison to the three young men. The economic defeat of Dyke and the Hooven women, forcing upon them immoral or degrading actions, exists as a device to show the inhumane power of the railroad, but these characters are portrayed as caught in understandable forces, and they elicit the pathos for which they were designed. However, the simple moral framework in which their destruction is traced and the overly dramatic nature of their falls make

⁹⁸Ibid., II, 209.

⁹⁹Ibid., II, 209-210. The combination of strength and humanity is precisely that gained by Ward Bennett in A Man's Woman.

their stories melodramatic rather than fully effective. Lyman Derrick is a weak, morally confused young man who believes in success at any cost and betrays his family and friends out of this inherent weakness. Magnus Derrick, moral giant, sacrifices his honesty for what he believes a worthwhile goal and is destroyed. Although his change is quite credible, again the primary technique is telling rather than rendering.

Ah, the bitterness of unavailing regret, the anguish of compromise with conscience, the remorse of a bad deed done in a moment of excitement. Ah, the humiliation of detection, the degradation of being caught, caught like a schoolboy pilfering his fellows' desks, and, worse than all, worse than all, the consciousness of lost self-respect, the knowledge of a prestige vanishing, a dignity impaired, knowledge that the grip which held a multitude in check was trembling, that control was wavering, that command was being weakened. Then the little tricks to deceive the crowd, the little subterfuges, the little pretences that kept up appearances, the lies, the bluster the pose, the strut, the gasconade, where once was iron authority; the turning of the head so as not to see that which could not be prevented; the suspicion of suspicion, the haunting fear of the Man on the Street, the uneasiness of the direct glance, the questioning as to motives--why had this been said, what was meant by that word, that gesture, that glance?¹⁰⁰

In a world of uncontrolled economic forces and a world of moral confusion, these people are destroyed, except for Lyman, who is rewarded for his treachery, and Hilma, who will continue to develop her ability to love. Unlike the three young men, whose incongruity depends upon increased

¹⁰⁰Ibid., II, 171-172.

apprehension of truth with little believable relationship between their actions and their environment, the people in the "substructure" of the novel controlled by economic and moral environment are both credible and presented with the techniques of characterization associated with naturalism.

From the above quotations, it is obvious that Norris made little attempt to create an effect of impartiality toward characters. The Octopus is a book with a thesis, and plot, character, and authorial comment are manipulated to present this thesis. In the handling of the characters most actively involved in the farmer-railroad struggle, Norris failed to be consistent in his attitude. The railroad itself is "the soulless Force, the iron-hearted Power, the monster, the Colossus, the Octopus,"¹⁰¹ and S. Behrman, usurious banker and heartless representative of the railroad in the San Joaquin Valley, has both the ugliness of body and cruel shrewdness to make the perfect villain. Surrounding him are a group of ill-defined but typical subvillains. On the farmers' side are complex and often confused but basically good heroes. Through most of the novel, this black-white moral pattern determines the reader's attitude toward the characters and creates sympathy for even the immoral actions of the farmers. But near the end of the book, Presley visits Shelgrim, the president of the railroad, and is

¹⁰¹Ibid., I, 48.

convinced by his argument that the representatives of the railroad are as innocent of evil intent as the farmers.

"Believe this, young man," exclaimed Shelgrim, laying a thick, powerful forefinger on the table to emphasize his words, "try to believe this--to begin with--that railroads build themselves. Where there is a demand sooner or later there will be a supply. Mr. Derrick, does he grow his wheat? The Wheat grows itself. What does he count for? Does he supply the force? What do I count for? So I build the railroad? You are dealing with forces, young man, when you speak of Wheat and the Railroads, not with men. There is the Wheat, the supply. It must be carried to feed the People. There is the demand. The Wheat is one force, the Railroad, another, and there is the law that governs them--supply and demand. Men have only little to do in this whole business. Complications may arise, conditions that bear hard on the individual--crush him maybe--but the Wheat will be carried to feed the people as inevitably as it will grow. If you want to fasten the blame of the affair at Los Muertos on any one person, you will make a mistake. Blame conditions, not men."

"Control the Road! Can I stop it? I can go into bankruptcy if you like. But otherwise if I run my road, as a business proposition, I can do nothing. I can not control it. It is a force born out of certain conditions, and I--no man--can stop it or control it. Can your Mr. Derrick stop the Wheat growing? He can burn his crop, or he can give it away, or sell it for a cent a bushel--just as I could go into bankruptcy--but otherwise his Wheat must grow. Can anyone stop the Wheat? Well, then, no more can I stop the Road."¹⁰²

That this is a plea for Presley and, through him, the reader to see Shelgrim, and by implication the other representatives of the railroad, as innocent actors driven by all-powerful forces is shown by Presley's stage of development at the time and by the scene in which Shelgrim generously doubles

¹⁰²Ibid., II, 285-286.

the salary of a drunken employee as an experiment in improvement. However, this attempt to infuse complexity into the novel comes too late, for the reader has been fully convinced by the preceding action and comments that the railroad is an evil force.¹⁰³ Norris presented the farmer-railroad group of characters, up until the chapter in which this quotation appears, within a good-evil frame of reference, complicated by the heroes having to sacrifice their high ideals to control the forces of evil, and then he attempted to shift the standard of judgment so that not ethics but force becomes the basis. Because of his failure to present both characters and values objectively, Norris makes it impossible for the reader to make this shift. Therefore, the defeated characters do not seem to be creatures caught in the power of an amoral machine but pathetic individuals destroyed by human evil.

¹⁰³I think Pizer in "Nature in Norris' The Octopus" attempts to make this a better novel than it is by arguing that "Presley is taken in by Shelgrim's defense because he has an incomplete awareness at this point of the relationship of individuals to natural law" (79n.). I find Walcutt's comparison of The Octopus with Germinal much more convincing; Zola "makes it clear that both his miners and mine owners are caught up in the strangling grip of the capitalistic system. . ." (p. 148). Norris, always drawn to Zola's effects, tried to achieve the same sense of all-encompassing force, but his attempt comes only after a non-objective presentation of the struggle. After carefully directing the reader's sympathies throughout the novel, Norris' lack of comment in this scene leaves only confusion. Again he has failed to control his techniques.

Annixter, Presley, and Vanamee are presented sympathetically by Norris. All three make mistakes, Annixter and Presley in terms of action and Vanamee in terms of idea, but ultimately, as I have suggested above, they are idealized figures divorced from the forces of the novel. These three young men are derived from a tradition outside naturalism. Their stories are the familiar one of the education of the young man about the nature of reality. The ironic technique, inherent in naturalistic characterization, is almost totally lacking in the presentation of these characters. Flaubert's L'Education Sentimentale exhibits the naturalistic irony of characterization in the education of Frederic Moreau; Norris did not attempt to make these characters part of the naturalistic pattern of the novel except for the possible exception in Annixter's death.

The general avoidance of objectivity of characterization leads inevitably to failure to give the effect of objectivity toward values. The moral basis of the novel is visible in Norris' comments, the comments of his spokesmen--Vanamee, Presley, and Cedarquist--and in the poetic justice of the plot. The farmers who have participated in the bribery plot to pack the Railroad Commission are killed or mentally ruined, as in the case of Magnus Derrick; S. Behrman is killed by the wheat; Dyke is given life imprisonment. Hints of a pattern broader than simple moral reward and

punishment are seen in the continuing success of Lyman Derrick, the continued affluence of Shelgrim and the other railroad officers, and the destruction of the innocent Hoovens. This pattern transcending the traditional moral framework of the novel is Norris' thesis of natural force, which includes both the economic law of supply and demand and the pattern of natural rebirth. Thus the force can be "benignant, calm,"¹⁰⁴ or as Presley recognizes, force really transcends man's moral sense. After his talk with Shelgrim, he sees the element of cruelty:

This new idea, this new conception dumbfounded him. Somehow, he could not deny it. It rang with the clear reverberation of truth. Was no one, then, to blame for the horror at the irrigating ditch? Forces, conditions, laws of supply and demand--were these then the enemies after all? Not enemies; there was no malevolence in Nature. Colossal indifference only, a vast trend toward appointed goals. Nature was, then, a gigantic engine, a vast Cyclopean power, huge, terrible, a leviathan with a heart of steel, knowing no compunction, no forgiveness, no tolerance; crushing out the human atom standing in its way with nirvanic calm, the agony of destruction sending never a jar, never the faintest tremor through all that prodigious mechanism of wheels and cogs.¹⁰⁵

And in the last lines of the novel, Presley achieves "the larger view, what contributed the greatest good to the greatest numbers,"¹⁰⁶ and he realizes that "good issued from this

¹⁰⁴Norris, II, 83.

¹⁰⁵Ibid., II, 286.

¹⁰⁶Ibid., II, 360.

crisis"¹⁰⁷ and thus that nature too is moral, although nature's good is so far removed from man's ideas of morality that it appears to be immoral.

Men--motes in the sunshine--perished, were shot down in the very noon of life, hearts were broken, little children started in life lamentably handicapped; young girls were brought to a life of shame; old women died in the heart of life for lack of food. In that little isolated group of human insects, misery, death, and anguish spun like a wheel of fire.

But the WHEAT remained. Untouched, unassailable, undefiled, that mighty world-force, that nourisher of nations, wrapped in Nirvanic calm, indifferent to the human swarm, gigantic, resistless, moved onward in its appointed grooves. Through the welter of blood at the irrigating ditch, through the sham charity and shallow philanthropy of famine-relief committees, the great harvest of Los Muertos rolled like a flood from the Sierras to the Himalayas to feed thousands of starving scarecrows on the barren plains of India.

Falseness dies; injustice and oppression in the end of everything fade and vanish away. Greed, cruelty, selfishness, and inhumanity are short-lived; the individual suffers, but the race goes on. Annixter dies, but in the far-distant corner of the world a thousand lives are saved. The larger view always and through all shams, all wickednesses, discovers the Truth that will, in the end, prevail, and all things surely, inevitably, resistlessly work together for good.¹⁰⁸

In this evolutionary utilitarianism, "Norris affirms the immediacy and reality of the moral order immanent in nature. . . . both natural and supernatural. . . ." ¹⁰⁹ Norris had finally defined Force, the theme with which he had been

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., II, 360-361.

¹⁰⁹ Pizer, American Quarterly, XIV, 80.

struggling since his first novel, as clearly as he was ever to define it. It seems to me that Pizer is correct in describing the evolutionary theism which is the basis of this theme but incorrect in seeing this theme as gaining unity for the novel.¹¹⁰ Not the consistency of the philosophy but its effect through the novel on the reader is my primary concern. Although the thematic passage quoted above should not have the effect of a tacked-on moral conclusion because natural force has been a major element in the novel since the beginning, it does have this effect because, as I have suggested, nature, except for its economic aspects, remains only an element of assertion in the novel, not an active force. Theme and action are never successfully fused. The effect of this final passage, if the reader chooses to peruse it carefully, is to deny the effects of the novel. The emotions of pathos and even, sometimes, the near-tragic stasis which one experiences in reading the novel are made unimportant because the characters for whom these emotions were felt are made unimportant. The characters' failures and successes, which the reader has been led to care about, are made meaningless by this transcendent view of human actions. If taken seriously, the idea of divine natural forces relieves the reader from any sense of emotional involvement or responsibility. Most of the novel progresses

¹¹⁰Ibid., 73-80.

within a pattern of traditional good and evil, more or less successfully causing the reader to respond to events and characters in terms of these values; then suddenly at the end of the novel the reader is told that the question of good and evil is not important because nature is working toward an inevitable higher good. This inconsistency arises from Norris' failure to integrate natural force as anything but a stated force in the novel. The "cycle of growth" which Pizer notes as the "structural and thematic center of The Octopus" is never fully realized except as symbol. Symbolic force and realistic action are never unified in the novel. With this failure of the central unifying principle, the novel naturally fails to attain a unified effect.

Again Norris utilized the superficial techniques of the naturalistic tradition without integrating them into a consistently effective pattern. The panoramic structure, the incongruity of characterization, the unhappy endings, the economic and political themes, and specific scenes and effects were available to him from Zola. Norris used them all. Again objectivity of presentation is lacking. A book as seriously marred as The Octopus cannot be a great work of art, but I agree with Walcutt that "in the last analysis The Octopus is one of the finest American novels written before 1910. It towers immeasurably far above the sickly sentiment

of Norris's contemporaries."¹¹¹ Its values are not those of the naturalistic tradition but those of the traditional novel of good and evil seen working in a set of characters who seem to matter. These values depend upon an ignoring of the theme of evolutionary force, and one can accomplish this with relative ease because the theme has little influence on character or action.

The Pit: A Story of Chicago is usually recognized as of less value than The Octopus because of its reduced scope and Norris' failure to control the structure of the relatively simple story. In The Pit Norris abandoned panoramic structure to focus on two characters, Curtis Jadwin, wheat speculator, and his wife Laura, sensitive new woman demanding a vital role in life. Again the force of wheat is the central unifying element and the two substructures of the novel are the bull-bear conflict in the Chicago wheat market, controlled by economic forces, and the Curtis-Laura conflict, centering on Laura's demand for love. As in The Octopus, the characters are traced through a learning process culminating in a transformation through the recognition of love. Two elements of the predominantly traditional love story exhibit techniques associated with naturalism: incongruity of characterization and the power of economic force to change character. Jadwin changes under the influence

¹¹¹Walcutt, p. 151.

of speculating from a powerful, self-controlled, moral man into a cruel automaton as he tries to corner the wheat market. Although Jadwin repeatedly insists upon his helplessness, such as "I simply stood between the two sets of circumstances. The wheat cornered me, not I the wheat,"¹¹² Norris does not succeed in attaining a sense of inevitability because the pit is more nearly a symbol than a concretely active force. Again Norris has failed to attain a believable interrelationship between environment and character. The changes in Laura Jadwin are so numerous and so detailed that the reader should understand her changes thoroughly, but Walcutt notes the weakness: "her character is . . . intellectually rather than emotionally apprehended. One feels that Norris thinks of new things to do with her as he proceeds with the story. . . ."¹¹³ Because no relationship exists between the forces that control Jadwin and the forces that control Laura and because Laura's search for love is never really emotionally meaningful to the reader, the story of the pit and the romance never coalesce into a single unit. One of the principles of selection in the story is a continuing contrast between the world of business and the world of love and art, but the basis of the contrast is never made clear.

Because of the omission of a set of villains, Norris

¹¹²Norris, IX, 402.

¹¹³Walcutt, p. 154.

came closer to achieving impartiality toward characters in The Pit than he did in The Octopus. Everyone, except a minor character named Crookes, is neither morally black nor white. However, the focus on Jadwin as hero and Laura as heroine directs the reader's sympathies to these two, and even when Jadwin disregards the hungry people of Europe and Laura contemplates adultery with the artist Corthell, the reader senses that these are temporary errors in moral judgment which will be quickly rectified.

Pervading the novel is Norris' sense of traditional morality, leading the reader to judge the characters according to their humanitarian actions and their adherence to a strict sexual code. No sense of moral irony is developed because of the poetic justice inherent in the plot. Jadwin sins and is punished by business failure, and although Laura has been tempted, she has suffered from her husband's neglect so that the final love scene is a reward for her patience. But coexistent with the evident morality of the judgments of the author and the plot is again the transcendent morality of natural force. The trading pit, in which petty men attempt to control the distribution of wheat, is the evil force of the book. Ultimately controlling the pit is the supply of wheat:

There in the centre of the Nation, midmost of that continent that lay between the oceans of the New World and the Old, in the heart's heart of the affairs of men, roared and rumbled the Pit. It was

as if the Wheat, Nourisher of the Nations, as it rolled gigantic and majestic in a vast flood from West to East, here, like a Niagara, finding its flow impeded, burst suddenly into the appalling fury of the Maelstrom, into the chaotic spasm of a world-force, a primeval energy, blood-brother of the earthquake and the glacier, raging and wrathful that its power should be braved by some pinch of human spawn that dared raise barriers across its courses.¹¹⁴

Even the pit, unconvincing as it is as a determining force on the actions of Jadwin, seems more believable than the force of the wheat. The grand natural force again is asserted but not integrated.

Both the popularity and the failure of The Pit are due to its effect being that of a traditional love story. Curtis Jadwin, torn between love and business, finally chooses love as the higher good. The posited natural force of wheat is easily ignored, and the economic forces represented by the pit seem a device to resolve the conflict in favor of love, thus leading to the traditional happy ending. The lesser artistic value of The Pit is not due to its containing fewer naturalistic techniques than The Octopus but due to its sacrificing the theme of complex good and evil which gave strength to The Octopus.

In summarizing the work of Norris, I agree with Walker, Marchand, and Walcutt that, to use Walcutt's words, "Norris was attracted by the sensational aspects of naturalism . . . and he imitated the spectacular effects of Zola without much thought for the underlying implica-

¹¹⁴Norris, IX, 74.

tions."¹¹⁵ The technique which he was not consistently attracted to was Zola's use of objectivity; despite Charles Norris' assertion that "no one, Frank Norris believed, could become a writer until he could regard life and people, and the world in general, from the objective point of view . . ."¹¹⁶ most of Norris' problems of inconsistency in his major novels can be traced to his failure to be consistent in terms of objectivity, both towards characters and values. In my view of his career, Norris was constantly struggling, without ever achieving total success, to discover techniques adequate to fuse his ideas on force and his portrayal of actions. This struggle toward an effective technique was complicated by the fact that in his first five novels he was attempting to define for himself the nature of force. Being in the romantic American tradition with a deep-seated belief in good and evil, he had to decide the nature of natural force in these terms. Having decided in favor of optimistic evolution, he created his last two novels to exhibit his thesis, but again his techniques were inadequate for the achievement of his intentions.

Norris' consistent recognition as a naturalistic writer despite his lack of belief in pessimistic determinism or materialism of all values seems to prove that it would be

¹¹⁵ Walcutt, p. 155.

¹¹⁶ Quoted in Marchand, p. 47.

safer to define literary naturalism in terms of techniques rather than philosophy. His philosophy exhibits much more kinship with that of Hawthorne and Melville and, in certain aspects, Emerson, Thoreau, and Whitman¹¹⁷ than it does with philosophical naturalism. His techniques, however, are a modification of those associated with literary naturalism. Ultimately, Norris is a naturalist only superficially because he adopted only the superficial sensationalism of the naturalistic tradition, not the moral sensationalism central to that tradition. One may look at Norris' career and explain his limitations in terms of the irreconcilable conflict between American moral optimism and amoral naturalistic pessimism; more pertinent, it seems to me, is the fact that Norris never really mastered the essential techniques of naturalism, and the resulting fusion of traditional techniques (melodramatic plot and authorial involvement) with naturalistic techniques (incongruity of character, panoramic structure, interrelationship of character and environment) produced novels with confusing effects. But Norris' unsuccessful attempt to fuse the techniques of two novelistic traditions remains important in American literature: the only way the problem of placing such writers as Anderson, Hemingway, and Faulkner into a literary tradition may be to coin some such incongruous term as romantic naturalism.

¹¹⁷See Richard Chase, The American Novel and Its Tradition (Garden City: Doubleday and Co., Inc., 1957), pp. 198-204, and Warren French, Frank Norris (New York: Twayne Publishers, Inc., 1962).

CONCLUSION

The causes of the coming of literary naturalism to America seem to differ slightly from the causes of its introduction into England. Although Gissing experienced personal disillusionment, he, Moore, and Maugham turned to new fictional techniques from France because of a desire to create a new art form rather than because of any profound disillusionment with English culture. Moore and Maugham especially were more interested in new art than in new ideas. The reaction to the past by American writers appears to be more serious and more widespread than that of the English writers. Underlying the literature of the later local color movement, of the realistic movement, and of the early writers exhibiting naturalistic tendencies is, as Knight suggests, a general disillusionment with the social and moral realities of America. Seeing the American dream of individual perfectability failing of fruition, these writers sought literary forms in which to make their dissatisfaction clear. Eggleston, Howe, and Kirkland introduced the theme of disillusionment; they presented the disparity between dream and reality. Howells presented the same disparity, developing critical realism in America on a

foundation of traditional morality fused with evolutionary optimism and, finally, a program of social action. Garland and Norris developed a belief in evolutionary optimism which was sufficient to restore their faith in the future despite the ugly realities which surrounded them. Only Crane failed to find in some form of the evolutionary hypothesis a means of reconciling the American dream and current realities. The relationship between disillusionment and the belief in the new ideas derived primarily from biology remains complex. Whether these disillusioned men turned to the theory of evolution as a final hope or whether the new ideas contributed to their disillusionment seems impossible to ascertain. The point is that the connection between disillusionment and new scientific ideas--Positivism, Darwinism, Spencerianism--made the struggle for a new art a much more personal and emotional one for the American writers than it was for the writers in England.

One of the basic similarities among the six writers who exhibit naturalistic tendencies is that they were motivated by a desire to find new forms and techniques for fiction. However, perhaps because of the American authors' immediate desire for reform of current conditions, a difference between the American writers' statements on the function of fiction and that of the English writers exists. Gissing, Moore, and Maugham arrived at the common opinion that the

function of the novel is purely aesthetic. The three American writers were more uncertain in their statements on the relationship between the novel with a purpose and the novel as an art form. Garland, whose practice is like that of Gissing in his consistent insertion of his ideals in one form or another, never advocated the idea that the novel should be pure art but believed that the theme should be inherent rather than overt. Norris struggled with the same problem; he asserted that the novel "must (1) tell something, (2) show something, or (3) prove something"¹ and that the best fiction must do all of these things. But he insisted that "The preaching, the moralizing, is the result not of direct appeal by the writer, but is made--should be made--to the reader by the very incidents of the story."² Norris' consistent failure to integrate his purpose or theme with "the story . . . the one great object of attention"³ illustrates that both his ideal and his practice were much like Garland's. Crane's early statements about Maggie illustrate his belief in the novel with a purpose, but his later statements indicate a purely aesthetic goal akin to that of the English writers. Although the gap between theoretical statement and practice is noticeable in

¹Norris, VII, 21.

²Ibid., VII, 23.

³Ibid.

in all six writers, they shared a common reaction against the older moralizing novel and the current romantic escape fiction. Both realists and early naturalists stressed the fact that the novel was a serious art form. Realist and naturalist also believed that the theme should exist in a structured pattern rather than comments by the author.

The writers who exhibited naturalistic tendencies shared many goals with the realists of the time: both naturalist and realist were striving to express truth in fiction; both reacted against the forms and techniques of the novelists who preceded them; both groups were interested in foreign models. One of the purposes of this study is to suggest some of the ways in which naturalistic practice differed from realistic practice. Both the naturalists and the realists took as their basic subject the relationship of the individual to society. A reading of the early novels which are usually discussed in terms of influence from French naturalism shows that most of these novels are built upon a basic fable centered upon the relationship of individual and society. The repeated fable is that of the innocent character or characters, equipped with a set of socially acceptable ideals, setting out to attain self-development within the established society. One of the elements which distinguishes this fable from one often encountered in realistic fiction is that the protagonist never participates

in a meaningful learning process. If learning occurs, it is false learning such as that portrayed in L'Education Sentimentale. The innocent is destroyed or maimed by the combination of his inadequate ideals and the force or forces of society. Gissing used this fable of degradation only in his sub-plots. The pattern is dominant in A Mummer's Wife and Esther Waters. Maugham exhibits it in Liza of Lambeth and Mrs. Craddock.

Among the American writers the same pattern is visible. The story of Jason Edwards, which finally exists only as sub-plot, is in this tradition. Equipped with the social ideal of success and adhering to the American dream of the West, Jason is destroyed by the economic forces of society, aided by impersonal nature. Maggie Johnson and George Kelcey, equipped with romantic ideals of social accomplishments, are destroyed or hopelessly maimed by, in one case, the ideal of respectability in Rum Alley society and, in the other, the lack of meaningful values in society. Henry Fleming, struggling to learn the nature of manhood in the destructive environment of battle, achieves his ideals, but these ideals are shown to be perverse and meaningless. Vandover and McTeague, both guilty of inherent evil but both social innocents in the beginning, are unable to find any meaningful pattern of life in modern society; their final destruction, however, seems to be caused by something

other than social forces. Magnus Derrick, Dyke, and the Hoovens seek economic goals sanctioned by society but are destroyed by the manipulator of the economy, the railroad, and by the moral wilderness which society represents. Annixter, Vanamee, Presley, and Curtis Jadwin are transformed through a meaningful learning process which has no analogue in any naturalistic novel written during the Nineteenth Century.

Closely related to the fable of degradation was the goal of new subject matter--a study of characters who are economically repressed, socially excluded, morally degraded. Although this new source for fictional characters was first demonstrated by the French naturalists and was one of the primary elements of French influence, its adoption by English and American writers did not make these writers naturalistic. Gissing and Garland's use of the new subject matter, important to the growth of the naturalistic tradition in their respective countries, does not place them in the naturalistic tradition. The use of new subject matter had a powerful influence in broadening the possibilities of the English and American novel.

Concomitant with the choice of lower class characters was the choice of a new setting in which these characters acted. Since the basic fable was the destruction of the character by society, the society had to be represented

as a concrete force. Society was usually equated with environment--a combination of a few simple moral characteristics and a realistic description of place. Complications of society in the broader sense--distinctions of class and problems of manners--were usually excluded in the purest naturalistic novels. The naturalistic setting was a distant world in which the middle class reader could believe that economic deprivation, sex, alcohol, and brutality were the dominant forces. Thus the new subject matter of the novel was not only an end in itself but a necessary means of simplifying one pole of the central struggle--society.

Despite Gissing, Moore, and Maugham's insistence upon purely artistic goals, inherent in the choice of the fable of the destruction of the individual by social forces and codes and the choice of ugly environments is the theme of protest against the destructiveness and ugliness of the environment. Thus protest--the novel with a purpose--was a consistent trait of nineteenth-century naturalism from Flaubert, the Goncourts, and Zola through their English and American imitators. But the protest--the theme--must be inherent; the novelist, according to Zola, must be objective. The new techniques with which to present the theme of protest with the effect of authorial objectivity are the primary distinctive features of early English and American naturalism.

One of the requirements of the fable of degradation was to show change of character--not simply a change in social position but a basic change of personality. The development of incongruity of character not only made possible an effect of greater realism but also presented character change under the influence of social forces. The story of decline rather than growth necessitated an interrelationship of character and environment in which character change would seem inevitable--determined--rather than a product of choice.⁴ Unlike the realists who were also developing the technique of presenting the character incongruously, the naturalists had to find some device to show the effect of environment on character. I have traced the struggle of the early writers to find such a device which would explain how environment determines character. It is significant that in this trait the early experimenters with naturalistic techniques failed more often than they succeeded.

One of the elements necessary to create the effect of change of character was the author's development of impartiality toward character. This step toward objectivity was a reaction against the old hero-centered novel. Again the transition from the old to the new was accomplished by Moore, Maugham, and Crane, but Gissing, Garland, and Norris

⁴Of course, determinism as a philosophy played a part in the adaptation of this interrelationship of character and environment, but my approach here is in terms of technique.

never consistently achieved this effect. Norris, however, in his first two novels abandoned the traditional hero-heroine pattern to make his protagonists much like the villains of older fiction.

Impartiality toward characters was only one device for achieving a larger ideal--objectivity toward all values--the apparent scientific objectivity favored by Zola. This was a technique which would allow the attainment of the goal of authorial withdrawal, thus completing the reaction to the older moralistic novel. It made possible that ideal of both naturalist and realist--rendering rather than telling. This objectivity was not intended to create and did not have the effect of creating a novel without a theme. It simply made the intended theme inherent in the structure.

These techniques of impartiality toward characters and objectivity toward values combined with the central fable of degradation made possible the effect which I find to be distinctive in the naturalistic tradition--the effect of moral shock which culminates in a theme attacking current values. Sensationalism has been noted as a favorite device of the naturalist since the distinction between naturalist and realist was first made. The more obvious kind of sensationalism springs from the naturalist's choice of new subject matter and his desire to tell the whole truth--ugly as it may be. This simple sensationalism consists of that action

or description which shocks the reader's sensibilities but raises no real moral issues. Every author whom I have discussed exhibits this kind of sensationalism. The more important and more elusive sensationalism is one of complex irony. It is first an irony of situation in which the reader's sympathy for the protagonist and the reader's sense of morality are attacked by the protagonist's participation in an immoral action. Of these early writers, only Crane achieved a method showing the discrepancy between motive and action through an objective tone which can be compared to the success of Flaubert in Madame Bovary. The second element of this complex irony depends upon the abandonment of any system of moral rewards and punishments so that the ironic attack upon current values is presented in terms of the action.

I have already noted how few of the English novels of the period achieved this effect of moral shock. With the exception of the works of Crane, this effect remains vague in the works of American writers before 1900. Garland's early novels are both traditional in structure and overtly moral in theme. Only in the handling of Jason Edwards, the good man maimed by outside forces, does Garland approach the technique of moral shock, and even in this novel the final effect is that of protest against current economic conditions, not moral norms. Norris sacrificed any meaningful moral

shock in Vandover and McTeague by his failure to show impartiality toward characters, thus preventing the reader's experiencing any sympathy for the protagonists. His primary effects are those of simple shock. Only the stories of Magnus Derrick, Dyke, and the Hoovens exhibit this effect in The Octopus. Only Crane achieved this effect to any full extent, partially in Maggie and fully in The Red Badge of Courage: in the former the theme is a protest against respectability in a vicious environment, and in the latter it is a protest against the moral ideals of man. A Mummer's Wife, Liza of Lambeth, and The Red Badge of Courage, of all the novels discussed in this study, are the only ones in which the technique of moral shock is effective. This small number of novels exhibiting all of the techniques of naturalism simply proves that in both England and America before 1900 naturalism was a tendency, a sign of a struggle toward an ill-defined goal rather than the triumph of a foreign influence.

These are the similarities uniting the early naturalistic writers in England and the United States: all experimented with a new subject matter, attempted to achieve complexity of characterization, and exhibited to some extent the objective methods which led to the development of a complex moral irony. Gissing and Garland experimented tentatively with the techniques of naturalism, but they remained

within the realistic tradition, neither ever finding a tradition which was fully adequate for the achievement of his artistic ideals. Moore and Norris, both conscious imitators of Zola, attempted to broaden the subject matter inherited from the French naturalists to include the more complex world of middle class respectability, but neither had much success in this effort. A Mummer's Wife, Esther Waters, and McTeague, studies of the nether world, are still identified as their most naturalistic works. Maugham and Crane showed the possibility of creating the effect of reality of environment with economy. Only Moore, Maugham, and Crane succeeded in creating an ironic criticism of currently accepted values, a theme central to the naturalistic tradition.

The question of significant differences between the three English writers and the three American writers remains. One of the most obvious of these differences is the greater reticence of the Americans in the treatment of sexual motives. Garland's use of this motivation makes even Gissing seem brave by comparison. Despite Crane's use of sexuality as a major force in *Rum Alley*, his treatment is vague in comparison to that of Moore in A Mummer's Wife or Esther Waters. In Maggie prostitution is an abstract social problem rather than a fictionally realized fact. Only Norris went beyond hints of sexual motivation to use seduction, venereal disease, sadism, and masochism as major elements in Vandover and

McTeague. Norris, however, is like Garland and Crane and unlike Mocre and Maugham in his portrayal of sexual passion as a degrading motive; absent from the American writers' works is the idea that sexual passion should be reevaluated, should be considered not illicit but a healthy aspect of reality. Rose of Dutcher's Coolly and The Pit, both of which contain portrayals of the new, freed woman, present sexual passion as a trap to be avoided, not a fulfillment for these women. Both Norris and Garland equate love in the traditional ideal sense with that which is good. Thus the American works exhibit more conservative presentation and more conservative moral attitudes concerning sex than their English counterparts.

This conservatism goes beyond attitudes toward sex to include traditional attitudes toward morality. Garland, Crane, and Norris, despite their belief in new scientific ideas, seldom exhibit any belief in new scientific values equivalent to the values inherent in A Mummer's Wife, Liza of Lambeth, or, more obviously, The Hero. Garland opposed economic and political repression on traditional moral grounds. In Maggie Crane attacked the norm of respectability and, by implication, the Christian ethic, but his theme is limited to an attack upon these values within an environment which by its nature makes the exercise of these values an act of hypocrisy. The positive values, presented ironically,

are based not upon the new science but upon a basic humanitarianism. In George's Mother the theme of inevitable evolution of values is barely perceptible, but rather than a suggestion that a new set of values will develop, the book contains a symbolic picture of the future as moral chaos. Traditional values are again portrayed as futile in The Red Badge of Courage, and although an admiration of humanitarianism is one of the results of reading the novel, man is presented as incapable of adhering to this humanitarianism. Norris' writing career exhibits a struggle to reconcile the concept of evolution with traditional good and evil. The view of man becomes dual: he must strive to be good in the traditional sense, but if he fails, it does not make much difference because evolutionary force is leading to good regardless of what man does. Only Crane developed ideas and techniques adequate to protest against current moral norms, and failing to develop any new standards for man, he despaired of man's capability to be moral.

Another difference between the early English naturalists and near-naturalists and the American writers working within the same tradition is perhaps the most important. The English writers restricted the conflict within their novels to that between the individual and the social world. In A Drama in Muslin and Mike Fletcher Moore included hints of a cosmic force approximately equivalent to that which

Shaw was to call life force, but in both books the idea seems tentative, experimental, without fictional and intellectual force. The more usual limited conflict between the individual and society had been borrowed from the French writers, especially Zola; despite the symbolism of Germinal and La Terre, the destructive forces are social, not cosmic. As noted above, the English writers created urban settings or, more infrequently, socially structured rural settings. In contrast, the three American writers introduce natural forces having no relationship to social patterns: the destructive storm in Jason Edwards, the question of the relationship between man and the universe in The Red Badge of Courage, and the theory of cosmic force in all of Norris' work. Nature becomes a complicating force in the works of each of the American writers. In the works of Crane and Norris, nature is not simply an external fact which man must adjust to but an impersonal cosmic force which shifts the conflict of the novel from that of individual-society to that of individual-natural force. Although this new conflict does not replace that between individual and society in the novels of these two writers, this new conflict is outside the central naturalistic tradition as I have tried to outline it. It is the conflict present in Hardy's works rather than those of the French and English naturalists.

This introduction of a new force by the American

writers assumes additional importance if placed within the context of the generalization that comedy deals with man's relationship to social law and tragedy with man's relationship to natural law. That Gissing, Moore, and Maugham included elements of social satire in their novels indicates how easily the comic pattern became a part of the fable in which they were working. When Crane in The Red Badge of Courage and Norris in his four less romantic novels posit cosmic forces and question man's relationship to these forces, they are moving toward tragic questions and tragic patterns. The protagonist is changed from the type of the pitiful inverted hero toward the man who is larger than life because he is facing forces greater than those which the reader is conscious of facing. Henry Fleming is not a tragic hero, but Magnus Derrick and Curtis Jadwin are heroic, not simply pathetic. Perhaps the strength of the naturalistic tradition in twentieth-century America as opposed to its relative weakness in England is due to this early fusion of naturalistic techniques with a non-naturalistic theme which makes the moral question not a relative one but one of the relationship to absolute good and evil.

Naturalistic techniques, emanating from France to England and America, interested a few writers who considered the current techniques of the novel in their own countries outmoded. Young radicals like Moore and Maugham were able

to fuse these borrowed techniques with native materials. Gissing and Garland experimented lightly with the new techniques. Crane and Norris, adopting many of the naturalistic techniques, borrowed what they wanted from naturalism but never became "pure" naturalists. Crane borrowed the objectivity central to the tradition, but Norris remained satisfied with the superficial sensationalism of the tradition.

The use of naturalistic techniques produced few first-rate novels during this early period in England and America--only one, in fact, The Red Badge of Courage. However, the production of one masterpiece and at least six novels which, although containing serious flaws, nevertheless retain artistic power at the present time is not a bad record for a tradition which had to struggle not only against older fictional traditions but also active public denunciation. Early naturalism is more important than the number of good naturalistic novels produced. The introduction of the new subject matter broadened the possibilities of the novel. The technique of objectivity, leading to complex ironic effects, offered later writers a major technical device with which to experiment. Frank Norris' recommendation that Doubleday, Page and Company publish Sister Carrie is symbolic of early naturalism in both England and America. The older generation had almost won the battle for freedom of subject,

had gropingly transformed a foreign tradition into a native one, and had demonstrated the possibilities of moral shock as a means to artistic achievement. These early writers made possible much of the valuable artistic investigation of moral norms which is central to the modern novel.

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