THE MAJOR WOMEN CHARACTERS IN ELLEN GLASGOW'S NOVELS: THE SOUTHERN BELLE AND THE "NEW WOMAN"

A Thesis

Presented to

the Faculty of the Department of English

University of Houston

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Arts

by

Joyce Ray Pledger Riker

August 1968

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this thesis is to study the major women characters, the Southern belle and ideal Southern lady, and the "new woman," in the novels of Ellen Glasgow. A Southern author, Ellen Glasgow is an important and influential figure in American literature because she was among the first novelists to break from the "moonlight and magnolias" tradition and to write realistically of the South. She was particularly interested in presenting a perceptive view of Southern women. In order to present her area with verisimilitude, Miss Glasgow chose as her subject matter the part of Virginia and its people that she knew intimately. More importantly, Miss Glasgow used herself and her own experiences as models for her characters. The women characters in Miss Glasgow's novels are directly based upon her own life and attitudes, her relatives and family acquaintances, and upon stories of people she had heard in her youth. In her women characters, Ellen Glasgow presents the Southern women of Virginia as they were before the Civil War, during the Reconstruction, and at the turn of the century through the nineteen twenties.

From the beginning of her career, Miss Glasgow concentrated upon the forms and lives of Southern aristocratic womanhood and upon the forces which created the belle, the ideal lady, and the "new woman." Contrasts between the Southern belle and the "new woman" may be seen in their attitudes toward tradition, in their views on marriage and love, in their needs for self-expression and developing of personality,

and in their changing positions because of the economic and social transition of the New South.

An analysis of Ellen Glasgow's major women characters, generally acclaimed as her most artistic achievement, reveals her secure place in American literature as one of the first fiction writers to break from the romantic tradition and to present the South realistically. Her novels represent a turning point in modern Southern literature leading to such authors as Thomas Wolfe, William Faulkner, and Tennessee Williams.

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CHAPTER I

ELLEN GLASGOW'S CONCEPT OF FICTION AND ITS INFLUENCE ON HER CREATION OF WOMEN CHARACTERS

A Southern author who wrote significant novels and short stories about her native Virginia, Ellen Glasgow is an important and influential figure in American literature because she was among the first fiction writers to break from the tradition of "moonlight and magnolias" and to write realistically of the South. She was particularly interested in presenting a broader view of Southern women. Her novels represent a turning point in Southern literature leading to such authors as Thomas Wolfe, William Faulkner, and Tennessee Williams. Late in her life, Miss Glasgow looked over her work and wrote, "I was in my humble way, beginning a solitary revolt against the formal, the false, the affected, the sentimental, and the pretentious in Southern writing." She said that the South needed "blood and irony"—"Blood," as she explained, "because Southern culture had strained too far away from its roots in the earth . . . irony . . . as the safest antidote to sentimental decay."[1] Consequently, she decided at the beginning of her career to break from the old romantic tradition in fiction and to present the South as it was, especially during the transition period after the Civil War. Ellen Glasgow in A Certain Measure described her plan as she remembered it:

> I began a history of manners that would embrace those aspects of Southern life with which I was acquainted. I intended to treat the state and customs of the country as

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[1]Ellen Glasgow, A Certain Measure: An Interpretation of Prose Fiction (New York, 1943), pp. 8, 28, her "literary autobiography," hereinafter referred to in the text as A Certain Measure.

> well as the changing provincial fashions of the small towns and cities. Moreover, I planned to portray the different social orders and especially, for this would constitute the major theme of my chronicle, the rise of the middle class as a dominant force in Southern Literature. (p. 4)

Ellen Glasgow was a versatile and exacting author who took writing seriously. A conscientious craftsman, she commented that she was born a novelist and formed herself into an artist.[2] Miss Glasgow believed that the chief end of a novel was "to increase our understanding of life and to heighten our consciousness. To do this, writing must not only render experience, it must interpret and intensify the true and only purpose of living" (A Certain Measure, p. 30). Also, she wrote that the true and only purpose of fiction is the communication of ideas, of feeling, and of vital experience. The writer of fiction should endow reality with expression which communicates its meaning to the reader. Disturbed about being considered primarily a Southern novelist and a local color writer, Ellen Glasgow wrote to Allen Tate that she was not solely concerned with the code of Virginia, but with the conventions of "the world we call civilized."[3] Miss Glasgow liked the statement of Howard Mumford Jones that "she has not written of Virginian life, but of human life in Virginia."[4]

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[2]Ellen Glasgow, The Woman Within (New York, 1954), p. 41, her "spiritual autobiography," hereinafter referred to in the text as The Woman Within.

[3]Ellen Glasgow, Letters of Ellen Glasgow, compiled and edited by Blair Rouse (New York, 1958), p. 124.

[4]Blair Rouse, Ellen Glasgow (New York, 1962), p. 32.

Because Miss Glasgow broke from the romantic tradition of Southern writing and began to present the true picture of the South, she may be classified as a realist. "The true realist," she wrote, "must illuminate experience, not merely transcribe it."[5] Ellen Glasgow believed that the art of fiction is the most accurate mirror of different stages in the pilgrimage of humanity and that the purpose of the novel is to create life and to reflect the movement and time of its age.

Labeling herself as a "verist," a term borrowed from Hamlin Garland to describe an artist motivated by the passion for truth and individual experience, Miss Glasgow strove to write realistically.[6] She explained to Blair Rouse that she did not write from notes or from direct observation, although she took notes of words and phrases she wished to remember. Ellen Glasgow felt that in writing of Virginia she was interpreting a region which she intimately knew. Commenting on her work, she described the purpose of her art:

> I would write, I resolved, as no Southerner had ever written, of universal chords beneath superficial variations of scene and character. I would write of all the harsher realities beneath manners, beneath social customs, beneath poetry of the past, and the romantic nostalgia of the present. (A Certain Measure, p. 98)

Mainly, Miss Glasgow wished to avoid sentimentality and "evasive idealism," which she explained as the preference for a beautiful way of life instead of the truth. Miss Glasgow defined the philosophy of "evasive idealism"

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[5]Letters, p. 14.

[6]Frederick McDowell, Ellen Glasgow and the Ironic Art of Fiction (Madison, Wisconsin, 1960), p. 20.

in the South as one of "heroic defeat," "fortitude that had degenerated into a condition of moral inertia" (A Certain Measure, p. 155). She felt that "one must encounter reality" or accept the doctrine of "evasive idealism" (p. 16). Ellen Glasgow resented any implication that she was a romantic.

Ellen Glasgow was, according to Frederick McDowell, "the first self-conscious and consistent realist in the 'New South.'"[7] In the opening pages of her first novel, The Descendant (1897), she presented the squalid life of the rural "poor-white" farmers realistically and she mentioned illegitimacy and free love. McDowell feels that in this novel she revealed her youthful eclecticism in presenting the story of political and social outcasts with undertones of Nietzschean and Ibsenian rebellion, of Spencerian optimism, and paradoxically of Darwinian and Zolaesque determinism.[8] She had resisted the current literary fashion in the South which with sentimentality exalted ante-bellum life and the survival of its influence after the Civil War. Two typical writers of the "New South" were Thomas Nelson Page, who in Red Rock (1889) attempted to portray the hardships of an upper class Virginia family during the Reconstruction, and Francis Hopkinson Smith, who in Colonel Carter of Cartersville (1891) also glorified the Old South.

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[7]McDowell, p. 20. See also C. Vann Woodward, Origins of the New South, 1877-1913, who describes Ellen Glasgow as "the forerunner of the new age." The term "New South" refers to the former Confederate South after 1877. In the years following 1877, transition in the South from a predominantly agricultural society to a partially industrialized economy was accelerated and the South experienced political, economical, and social changes.

[8]McDowell, p. 18.

McDowell thinks that Ellen Glasgow may have received some hints for her own realistic approach from other writers of the "New South," such as Richard Malcolm Johnston's and Joel Chandler Harris's sketches of the Georgia poor-white farmers and Mary N. Murfree's somewhat similar treatment of Tennessee mountain folk, Thomas Nelson Page's pictures of the fallen glory of the planter caste after the war, and George W. Cable's psychological perceptiveness and sense of social milieu in his Creole stories and the moral courage he later displayed in his forthright social criticism of the South.[9] Miss Glasgow was not influenced by such Northern commentators of the Southern scene as Constance Fenimore Woolson, Albion W. Tourge, and John William Deforest, whose faithful transcriptions of experience anticipated her own more sustained interpretation of Southern life and manners.

Of early American writers Ellen Glasgow admired Nathaniel Hawthorne, Henry James, and William Dean Howells. She considered Howells a great realist and approved of his attacks on romance and his emphasis on character rather than plot. She admired James's technique of the novel and was greatly interested in his temporal and spacial organization of material, his ironic method, his control of point of view, and his flexible, imaginative realism. In a discussion of American writers in 1916, Miss Glasgow praised other American realists such as Katherine Fullerton Gerould, Mary E. Wilkins, and Sarah Orne Jewett because she recognized that some of their attitudes and principles were similar to her own. Strangely, Ellen Glasgow was uninfluenced by Theodore Dreiser,

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[9]McDowell, p. 17.

the most powerful of her contemporaries. Her prefaces in the 1930's show that Miss Glasgow's deepest affinities were with Hamlin Garland and Frank Norris, whose realism reflected a deterministic concept of man and life. Along with Garland, Norris, and James, Ellen Glasgow demonstrated the search for truth and the moral idealism underlying efforts to depict man and his society as they actually were.

Commenting upon literary models for her realistic approach to fiction, Ellen Glasgow wrote that as a young girl she was ripe for the invigorating influence of the nineteenth-century French novelists whose books were beginning to be read in America (A Certain Measure, p. 28). Having read widely in the English novelists, she was unsatisfied and turned to the French masters, Balzac, Flaubert, and Maupassant, whom she felt had a more honest approach to experience. Balzac's treatment of character, environmental detail, and social history appealed to her. In addition, she read the Russian writers Chekov, Tolstoy, and Dostoevsky. Among the English novelists, she favored Thomas Hardy for his modified naturalism, for his concept of forces of fatality, and for his theme that character is fate. She also liked Joseph Conrad. Although Ellen Glasgow was in various ways influenced by all of these French, Russian, and English writers, her main ideas and conception of her realistic approach to Southern literature are her own.

McDowell states that in her combination of irony with a tragic sense, analytic perceptiveness with emotional depth, detached satiric intelligence with pervasive human sympathy, Miss Glasgow looks back to Henry James and forward to such Southern writers as Katherine Ann Porter,

William Faulkner, and Robert Penn Warren.[10] Ellen Glasgow revolted against the sentimental tendency of the South to obscure social actuality and to avoid the moral implication of evasion. She analyzed with honesty the inadequacies of Virginia life in the present and the immediate past. A transitional figure in the development of Southern literature, Miss Glasgow's position, according to McDowell, is between the romanticism of the local color writers and the genteel realism of Howells, and the revolutionary naturalism of Dreiser and the psychological immediacy of Faulkner.

In order to present her area and its problems with the verisimilitude she admired in certain American, French, Russian, and English novelists, Ellen Glasgow chose as her subject matter the part of Virginia and its people that she knew intimately. Thus, her own native Richmond area, both as it was when she knew it and as she had heard about it in her childhood, is her most characteristic setting. Miss Glasgow created Queensborough, the fictional essence of all Virginia towns at this period, to depict the culture and traditions of the area. She peoples this area with fictional characters solidly based on actual people of all social classes and types. More importantly, Miss Glasgow used herself and her own experiences as models for her best and most impressive characters. She becomes deeply involved in her heroines; their struggles for emancipation from the past and against the restrictions of the

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[10]McDowell, p. 229.

present reflect her own struggles. For example, Dorinda Oakley in Barren Ground (1925),[11] one of Miss Glasgow's most memorable heroines, approximates Ellen Glasgow's own life and attitudes, her fortitude, her triumph over forces surrounding her, and her inner strength. Barren Ground, written after Ellen Glasgow's tragic love affair with Harold S.,[12] contains much of her own bitterness toward sex and men and

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[11]Hereinafter, citations in the text refer to these novels in the Virginia Edition (1938): I. Barren Ground, II. Miller of Old Church, III. Vein of Iron, IV. The Sheltered Life, V. The Romantic Comedians, VI. They Stooped to Folly, VII. The Battle Ground, VIII. The Deliverance, IX. Virginia, X. The Voice of the People, XI. Romance of a Plain Man, XII. Life and Gabriella.

Dates following titles in the text refer to original publication dates. Other novels—those not included in the Virginia Edition—are referred to as first editions.

[12]According to Blair Rouse in Ellen Glasgow, p. 23, Harold S. was Harold Watkins Anderson, an éminent Richmond lawyer. Of their friendship and love Miss Glasgow wrote at length in The Woman Within as a woman who had loved affectionately and who had been deeply hurt. She met Anderson in 1915, became engaged to him in 1917, and broke the engagement in 1919. In her cutting narrative of her affair, Miss Glasgow implies that her engagement was broken and the friendship ended; however, the companionship endured and he was frequently a dinner guest and they continued to correspond. Yet the novelist could never forgive him for the hurt she had experienced, and in The Woman Within he is made to appear foolish, pompous, and a completely self-centered status seeker. Curiously mingled with these impressions are evidences that he was also a man of intelligence, energy, perspicacity, and integrity.

Ellen Glasgow's experience with Harold S. had other direct bearing upon her works. In The Builders (1919) the hero David Blackburn is a self-made man of ability who aspired to political leadership.

One Man in His Time (1922) depicts a self-made governor of Virginia who has risen from obscure origins and an éminent lawyer who is the political opponent of Governor Vetch.

By 1922, when she began work on Barren Ground, Ellen Glasgow had partly recovered from her "tragic" experience with Harold S. She drew upon her emotional experience, and much of the woman that Ellen Glasgow had become went into the portrayal of Dorinda Oakley.

In The Romantic Comedians Miss Glasgow sounds her scornful laughter at the foolish aspirations of an elderly Judge who yearns for a young bride.

her reliance on inner strength to face life. Miss Glasgow felt that this emotional experience had enriched and strengthened her. Similarly, Dorinda, loved and forsaken, overcomes her disappointment in love and builds a new life for herself. However, all of her accomplishments do not compensate for unfulfilled love.

Other women characters reflect certain of Ellen Glasgow's attitudes and ideas. Gabriella Carr in Life and Gabriella (1916) demonstrates that a woman must have fortitude to break with tradition and to shape her own life. Gabriella shocks her family and community by becoming a salesgirl in a millinery shop and by breaking her engagement to the conventional gentleman Arthur Peyton. The same inner strength that enables Gabriella to defy tradition and to go to work to help support her mother later enables her to face reality and to make a life for herself after her husband Oliver deserts her.

In addition to herself as a model, Miss Glasgow said that she based many of her women characters on her mother, Anne Jane Gholson. Ellen Glasgow described her mother as patient, enduring, and self-sacrificing, especially as she had lived through the difficult Reconstruction period and had reared eight children. Virginia Pendleton in Virginia (1913) is directly patterned after Mrs. Glasgow and possesses goodness, patience, and the instinct of a lady. Virginia has the same cornflower blue eyes, black hair, and wistful smile that Mrs. Glasgow had. Also, Mrs. Glasgow suffered from a nervous condition, and characters like Mrs. Oakley in Barren Ground suffer from tension, hallucinations, and insomnia. As Blair Rouse, her main biographer, has shown, the "sickly" women reflect

Ellen Glasgow's preoccupation with her own uncertain health and deafness.[13] Perhaps she used these characters as therapy to demonstrate the effects of surrendering to illness. Such women as Mrs. Oakley and her prototype Marthy Burr in The Voice of the People (1900) refuse to give into illness and through determination keep working away at their daily tasks. In contrast, Angela Gay in Miller of Old Church (1911) and Lavinia Timberland in In This Our Life (1941) use their "frail" health as an instrument of tyranny over their families to achieve their selfish wishes.

Characters in Ellen Glasgow's fiction who portray the Southern belle and the ideal Southern lady are also based partially on Miss Glasgow's own life, her mother and relatives, and stories she had heard about famous belles in her youth. Using herself as a model, Ellen Glasgow describes her own girlhood education in the proper manners of a young lady of the period in presenting the character of Virginia Pendleton. Also, Ellen Glasgow's mother was the basis of the ever-gracious and composed lady. Characters such as Eva Birdsong in The Sheltered Life (1932) and Mrs. Blake in The Deliverance (1904) are modeled on stories of famous belles.

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[13]Rouse, p. 20.

According to Blair Rouse, Ellen Glasgow's romances with Gerald B.[14] and Harold S. are reflected in her women characters' ideas and attitudes toward men and love.[15] Many of Ellen Glasgow's heroines fall madly in love, are abandoned or experience fading love, and then proceed to make meaningful and independent lives for themselves. According to Miss

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[14]Blair Rouse, Ellen Glasgow p. 22, says that the full identity of Gerald B. has never been established. In her mid-twenties Ellen Glasgow fell in love with the man whom she called Gerald B. in her autobiography. Her love for him was ecstatically passionate, but about the precise nature of their relationship and about the identity of her lover she remained ambiguous. She wrote of him as an older man with a wife and children, as a "Wall Street" man, as one whom she knew in New York and Europe. Evidence other than her autobiography suggests that her lover was a physician rather than a businessman. In The Woman Within she writes of her deep love for Gerald B. and explains how it changed her life and made her more aware of the world and of great happiness. When he died after seven years of close companionship, she was very much upset.

Her love revealed itself in her work, and her novels written during her emotional involvement with Gerald B. reflect richness, maturity, and self-confidence. The Voice of the People, Battle Ground, and The Deliverance suggest that she was discovering a new source of emotion and insight into human relations. When he died, her grief and the ensuing disturbance of her emotions and imagination probably account for the fact that The Wheel of Life and The Ancient Law are inferior to these novels which had preceded them. She later admitted that The Wheel of Life was directly autobiographical.

Ellen Glasgow later experienced other serious attachments to men. One was a man of another social stratum whom she knew, liked, and respected when she lived in New York. He became the model for Ben O'Hara, the Irish businessman in Life and Gabriella.

When Miss Glasgow spent the summer in California in 1915, she experienced a passing infatuation for a man she met there. A third affair was with the man to whom she became engaged for a short time following her love for Gerald B.

[15]Rouse, p. 22.

Glasgow's philosophy, the most a woman can expect from love is the opportunity to develop her character by facing with fortitude inevitable abandonment.[16] In order to dramatize this devastating effect of rejection and abandonment, Ellen Glasgow presents young girls in love who experience bitter disappointment. Like Ellen Glasgow herself, these women afterwards depend on inner strength to solve personal problems and to make meaningful lives for themselves.

Ellen Glasgow's Southern spinster ladies are reflections of her relatives and family friends or are based on stories of unmarried women she heard about in her childhood. Miss Priscilla Battes, who runs the Dinwiddie Academy for Young Ladies in Virginia, is patterned after Miss Glasgow's own school mistress, and Miss Willy Whitlow, the seamstress in the same novel, is based upon two women who sewed for the Glasgows (A Certain Measure, p. 83). Louisa Goddard in They Stooped to Folly (1929) is based on an acquaintance of Ellen Glasgow. Spinsters like Aunt Agatha in They Stooped to Folly are derived from true stories of ladies who made a mistake in their youth and quietly retired from society.

Appearing in every Ellen Glasgow novel, these spinster ladies are minor characters, but they are clearly depicted character types and are used as contrasts to the belle and the "new woman." In The Stereotype of the Single Woman in American Novels Dorothy Deegan comments that Miss Glasgow introduced the single woman more often than did any other novelist in the survey.[17] According to the Dickinson list of "best

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[16]Louis Auchincloss, Ellen Glasgow (Minneapolis, 1964), p. 15.

[17]Dorothy Deegan, The Stereotype of the Single Woman in American Novels (New York, 1951), p. 82.

books" as used in the study, a single woman is defined as "thirty years or older . . . whose possibility of marriage is so slight that she has had to adjust herself consciously, if not unconsciously to the idea of remaining unwed."[18] In a given list of characters who met the requirements of the definition, twenty-two single women characters from eleven novels of Miss Glasgow are represented.

The spinster ladies are products of the old Southern tradition. By remaining single, the maiden-lady has violated the "great tradition." The general attitude toward spinsters in the South is best expressed by Mrs. Blake in The Deliverance: "I have very little patience with an unmarried woman . . . though I do know they are sometimes found useful in the dairy or spinning room" (pp. 117-118).

Even though Miss Glasgow uses her own experiences and those of her family and relatives as models for her fictional characters, her work is not merely autobiography, biography, or history. The women in the novels are products of her own imaginative blending of real-life situations and actual character traits as subjected to the artistic demands of fiction. Ellen Glasgow believed that the novelist's task is the creation of memorable characters. Commenting upon her own technique of characterization, she wrote:

> Characters appear first and slowly and gradually build up their own world, and spin situation and atmosphere out of themselves. The horizon of this real or visionary world is limited by impressions or recollections of my early childhood. (A Certain Measure, p. 194)

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[18]Deegan, p. 27.

Many of Miss Glasgow's women characters are stronger than her men characters. She believed that the growth of women into stronger characters was implicit in the nature of persons and situations as well as in subjects of novels.

From the beginning of her career, Ellen Glasgow studied the Southern woman and early evinced special interest in the concept of the lady. She concentrated upon the forms and lives of Southern aristocratic womanhood and upon the forces which created the belle, the ideal lady, and the "new woman." The major women characters to be discussed in this study are the Southern belle and the ideal lady, and the "new woman." The tradition-bound Southern maiden ladies will be discussed in contrast to the belle and the modern woman.

CHAPTER II

THE SOUTHERN BELLE AND IDEAL SOUTHERN LADY

Following her plan of presenting a social history of Virginia, Miss Glasgow wrote authentically of the Southern aristocracy, of the leisurely life and "code of beautiful behavior" of the Virginia gentlemen and their ladies prior to the Civil War. The Southern lady held a supreme place in the ante-bellum society and the Southern Victorian gentlewomen existed well into the twentieth century. In various novels of Ellen Glasgow the exalted position of the Southern lady is demonstrated. In Battle Ground (1902) the men, before they depart for the war, drink a toast to "Virginia, the home of brave men and angels" (p. 76). In Virginia (1913) the Rev. Pendleton tells his son-in-law that he "refused to admit the true Southern lady has a failing" (p. 191). General Bolingbroke in The Voice of the People (1900) exclaims, "Did you ever hear of a Virginia lady who wasn't content to be what the Lord and men intended her?" (p. 171). When Gabriella Carr in Life and Gabriella (1916) accepts a position in a millinery shop, her fiance, Arthur Peyton, considers her working not only an affront to his ideal of Gabriella, "but to the peculiar veneration for women which he always spoke and thought of as 'Southern.' His ideal woman was gentle, clinging, so perfectly a lady" (p. 29). The Southern gentlemen built up a legend around the beauty and virtues of their ladies. Wilbur J. Cash in The Mind of the South explains that the Southern chivalry, romantic battle-spirit after defeat and the bitter times of the Reconstruction, and the

longing for the old days kept alive the nostalgic concept of the Old South and its lovely ladies, and developed them into legend.[1]

Literature and legend have worked changes upon the theme of the Southern belle. The belle has become a tradition, a folk symbol as indigenous to her region as Brer Rabbit and mint julep. The persistence of the myth is shown in a recent popular magazine article which says that the role of the Southern belle was essentially passive: to excite admiration, to create an illusion of fragility, and to sustain an atmosphere of gentle gaiety; and she existed to please men and to make them feel safe and gallant.[2] She asked nothing but homage and gave nothing but beauty and charm. In Virginia the belle was an institution, and the Virginia lady was all the more highly honored if she were beautiful and charming.[3] The longing for the glorious Old South and for the leisurely life has preserved the legend of the belle. She is usually pictured as a lovely girl, all purity and passion, who wears a magnolia in her hair and who dances to the tune of a banjo on a wide veranda while a dozen eligible suitors place themselves in her servitude. The belle has been presented variously in American literature as the docile belles of Swallow Barn (1853), the vivacious and cunning Scarlett O'Hara in Gone With the Wind (1936), and in quite a different manner the macabre Miss Emily in Faulkner's "A Rose for Emily" (1931).

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[1]Wilbur J. Cash, The Mind of the South (New York, 1941), p. 85.

[2]Frances Gray Patton, "The Southern Belle," Holiday, XXVI (November, 1959), p. 76.

[3]Jay Hubbell, Southern Life in Fiction (Athens, Georgia, 1960), p. 55.

Miss Glasgow, aware of a kernel of truth in the Southern belle myth, writes realistically of the Virginia belle, acknowledging her virtues and criticizing her artificial "code of beautiful behavior." Dorthea Mann asserts that Miss Glasgow "pricked with deadly accuracy every part of the old romantic sentimental gallant-gentlemen and lovely lady tradition of the South."[4] As the center of ante-bellum society, the Southern belle reigned as the ideal of beauty and charm until past the turn of the century. In her novels Ellen Glasgow describes the Southern belle in her prime before the Civil War such as Virginia Ambler in The Battle Ground (1902), in her position during the Reconstruction as demonstrated by Mrs. Blake in The Deliverance (1904), and in her influence at the beginning of the twentieth century as portrayed by Eva Birdsong in The Sheltered Life (1932). The ideal Southern lady, the perfect wife and mother, possesses the qualities of sweetness, goodness, and lovely manners. Miss Glasgow shows the ideal lady as tradition, training, and circumstances had shaped her before and after the Civil War. Love, marriage, and motherhood define the limits of her existence and she strictly follows the code of genteel behavior. In the character of Virginia Pendleton in Virginia Miss Glasgow presents the embodiment of the ideal lady. By contrast she points out the adverse effect of the code of genteel behavior in the character of the selfish Mrs. Gay in The Miller of Old Church (1911).

In Ellen Glasgow's novel of the Civil War, Battle Ground (1902), appear her first belles, Virginia and Betty Ambler, daughters of the

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[4] Dorthea Mann, Ellen Glasgow and Critical Essays (New York, 1928), p. 10.

Governor, one of the aristocratic landowners of Virginia. Virginia Ambler is the perfection of the ante-bellum beauty; whereas Betty represents the strong and capable heroine who personifies the South's patient resolve to recover and to rebuild its fortunes. Betty Ambler exemplifies the "new woman" to be discussed in the next chapter.

Both girls are the products of education for young ladies and the role of genteel ladies in the Old South. They are taught the arts of sewing, needlework, preserving, gardening, and lovely manners. Virginia adapts herself to this tradition, but Betty rebels and cries when forced to sit inside and hem tablecloths when she prefers to be outdoors taking long walks with her dogs or riding her horse. Virginia is the pretty, prim little girl who carries her prayer book and who wears Swiss muslin frocks in the evening. She always does as she is told and says the "sweetest thing at the sweetest time." Dark-haired and very feminine, she is the beauty of the family and is constantly sought after by beaus who ask her to dance while Betty remains seated. Virginia is sweet and ineffectual. She is described by an old beau, Dan Montjoy, as "a pretty little simpleton in a pink dress" (Battle Ground, p. 125). Marriage changes her little, though she loses her coquetry. When Dan meets her again in Richmond during the war he describes her: "As she stood there in her delicate lace cap and soft grey silk, the resemblance to her mother was marked, and looking into the future, Dan seemed to see her beauty ripen and expand with her growing womanhood. Shaped after the same pure and formal pattern" (p. 267). In the midst of the attack on Richmond, Virginia searches for her husband among the wounded. She

becomes ill, and she and the child she carries both die. Virginia represents the soft quality of the old life of the South. Unable to cope with the war and the changes it brings in her life, Virginia personifies the passing gracious Southern tradition.

The more legendary picture of the Southern belle in Battle Ground is the abiding presence of Great Aunt Emmeline, the beauty and belle of two continents who had been immortalized in a portrait. Painted in amber brocade as Venus with an apple in her hand, Aunt Emmeline symbolizes the gracious beauty and grandeur of a past age. She is the perfect belle described as possessing great charm, beauty, wit, and spirit. Admired and worshipped in her youth as a reigning belle, she is still praised as a portrait, and the girls of the younger generation try to pattern themselves after her.

In The Woman Within Miss Glasgow comments that Mrs. Ambler, the mistress of the plantation, is modeled after her mother, Anne Jane Gholson, who suffered extreme hardships during the war and who reared eight children during the difficult period of the Reconstruction (p. 64). In a letter to Bessie Zalan Jones, 1942, Miss Glasgow wrote that "the eight children drained the vitality of my adorable mother, and the Reconstruction acts combined with the struggle to rebuild a devastated region wore her to a beautiful shadow."[5] Mrs. Ambler is the perfect Virginian lady trained in all the virtues and genteel art of housekeeping. She always sits gentle and upright in her chair, her silk dress rustling as she crosses her feet, and her beautiful, white hands

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[5]Ellen Glasgow, Letters of Ellen Glasgow, compiled and edited by Blair Rouse (New York, 1958), p. 303.

are always hemstitching a tablecloth. Although the Southern women were often well read, they did not wish to be regarded as intellectual,[6] and Mrs. Ambler tells Betty that women do not need as much sense as men. Of all the people on the great plantation, the mistress alone never rested from her labors. Under the heavy load of domestic labors the ladies were to present an appearance of leisure and radiance. They wore little white cotton gloves while they worked and they washed their hands in rosewater and cornmeal bran so that their hands would appear lovely and unused to hard work.[7] Though the master was concerned only with his morning rides over the fields, hunting, the well-stocked wine cellar, and entertaining, the mistress cared for her home and children, entertained guests, assumed the care and the religious instruction of the slaves, and supervised the flower and vegetable garden. The mistress was the keystone of the whole domestic establishment and her big basket of keys was the symbol of her authority.[8] Just as Ellen Glasgow had seen her own mother "ill, nervous, worn, despairing" (The Woman Within, p. 13), Betty describes Mrs. Ambler at the end of a busy day with her "worn and fragile figure and her soft, slow step. The cares she had met with such serenity had been too heavy for her strength; they had driven the bloom from her cheeks and the luster from her eyes" (Battle Ground, p. 20). Mrs. Ambler could not adjust to the many changes of the war, the approaching poverty, and the death of her husband, the Governor. For her and her daughter Virginia, the world they had known was destroyed and they could not survive.

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[6]Hubbell, p. 54.

[7]Patton, p. 120.

[8]Hubbell, p. 56.

Aunt Lydia is the embodiment of the tradition-bound Southern spinster. The maiden aunt of Mrs. Ambler, Aunt Lydia is an unobtrusive member of the household and performs what small services she can, such as teaching catechism to the small slaves. Her great love is her garden flowers and vegetables, and she cultivates exquisite roses. Aunt Lydia, "since her gentle girlhood, . . . had tended her beautiful gardens, and dreamed her virgin dreams in the purity of the box-trimmed walks . . . she regarded heaven with something of the respectful fervor with which she regarded the world . . . the great world she had never seen; for she would say with her conventional primness that the 'proper place for a spinster is her father's house'" (p. 41). Described as tall and delicate and bent with the weight of potential sanctity, Aunt Lydia wears a thread lace cap on her silvery head and sits quietly with her hands folded in her lap. In true humility, she believes a spinster has no right to dress as well as a married woman, and when Mrs. Ambler orders a bonnet with flowers from New York for Aunt Lydia, she believes her plain black one is fine and gives the new one to a poor neighbor who does not have one to wear to church. Fond of apple toddy, she pretends at the Christmas party that she regards the taste as indelicate and not for ladies. She enjoys romances and reads Shakespeare and Scott, and commenting upon their heroes, she says that "men are very wicked I fear, but they are very-a-engaging too" (p. 42). McDowell writes that Miss Lydia's attitudes and behavior are representative of the hypocrisy which the age demanded from its women in the form of a naive "sheltered life" of artificial ignorance. Through curiosity and ignorance, a pure

woman like Lydia could be charmed by what she condemned.[9] Aunt Lydia is a genteel spinster who is dependent upon her relatives and who knows that her place is in the background.

One of Miss Glasgow's best characterizations is Mrs. Blake, the Southern matriarch in The Deliverance (1904). A symbol of the departed gracious South, Mrs. Blake, an elderly and genteel lady, lived on after the Civil War, ignorant of its outcome and protected from such disastrous knowledge by her children at a great cost to themselves in order that she, unaware of how her world had changed, could still cling to ceremonial tradition. Blake Hall had been for two hundred years the one great house in the area, a perpetual reminder of the hereditary greatness of the Blakes. The Blakes had always been people of great wealth, but within five years after the close of the war they had been reduced to such poverty that they were living in the overseer's house. Mrs. Blake, blind and partially paralyzed, is sustained in her belief in a departed gentility through the make-believe of her family. Her physical blindness, Rouse asserts, is a symbol of the attitude of the intellectual and spiritual evasion in the South, of what Miss Glasgow calls "evasive idealism."[10] In so presenting Mrs. Blake, Miss Glasgow criticizes the delusion, emotional bewilderment, false sentiment, and the barrier to admitting the existence of evil that existed in the Old South.

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[9]Frederick McDowell, Ellen Glasgow and the Ironic Art of Fiction (Madison, Wisconsin, 1960), p. 41.

[10]Blair Rouse, Ellen Glasgow (New York, 1962), p. 58.

In A Certain Measure Ellen Glasgow explains that the story of Mrs. Blake was related to her with many details by a romantic elderly lady of her acquaintance (p. 26). The real woman lived but a short time in her changed surroundings, though Miss Glasgow allows Mrs. Blake to survive for twenty years after the war. In Ellen Glasgow's childhood the Southern belle and beauty was still considered an ornament to society, and as an emblem she followed closely the mid-Victorian ideal. Miss Glasgow says that the image of Mrs. Blake gathered symbolic substance and power, and that "I saw in her, not one old woman groping blind and nourished by illusions, through a memorable epoch in history, but Virginia and the entire South, unaware of the changes about them, clinging with passionate fidelity, to the ceremonial forms of tradition" (A Certain Measure, p. 27). Mrs. Blake appears more as general state of mind than as a character; she personifies the lost illusions of the Southern heart (p. 35). So profound had been her former sense of security and permanence, so unquestioning her belief in a personal Providence, so complete her veneration for religious and social taboos, so invulnerable her pride of name and estate, that even had her eyes been suddenly opened, in all likelihood she would have looked on her fallen fortunes merely as sort of an inopportune masquerade (p. 35). When her children exalt her into an idol of sacrifice, they are conforming to the manner of a past way of living, and other daughters of other elderly women in the South were also slowly dragging out a family martyrdom without faith.

A stately old lady, sitting blind and paralyzed in her massive Elizabethan chair, Mrs. Blake is a fascinating symbol. A reigning

belle of her day, she still shows faint traces of a proud though almost vanished beauty. Still conscious of her appearance, she wears dresses of rich brocade, and piles her snow-white hair over a high cushion and covers it with a lace cap. Following the custom of her youth, she always sits straight and still in her chair. Admired and praised for her beauty and charm, Mrs. Blake as the young Lucy Corbin had reached the height of her reign when she appeared at a fancy ball as Diana. At the ball she met and fell in love with her husband. Married for forty years, she had remained in love with her husband and she tells her children that "to have had one emotion bigger than you or your universe is to have had life" (The Deliverance, p. 76).

Mrs. Blake was the mistress of the plantation and was responsible for over three hundred slaves. She had reared three children, Christopher, Cynthia, and Lila, and lost six. Hanging on the wall is the customary portrait of Mrs. Blake as a young girl in brocade under rose garlands held by smiling Loves. Guy Carroway, the lawyer visiting the Blakes, discovers that Mrs. Blake possesses an incisive wit and a ready tongue and could pass from subject to subject with delightful audacity. Remembering the past, she speaks of her youth, of historic flirtations, of great beaus she had known, and of famous recipes that had been handed down for generations. She possesses a "wonderful keenness of perception and an intuitive understanding of men and manners which had kept her the reigning belle among younger rivals" (The Deliverance, p. 54).

Secure in the "intricate tissue of lies woven about her chair" (p. 55), Mrs. Blake has no knowledge of the present eclipse of the

aristocratic South and thinks the Confederacy still remains. Her family keeps her in ignorance of misfortune and supports her in the lavish scale to which she has been accustomed. While she enjoys her young spring chicken and port wine, her family eats common bacon and corn. As she sits in her chair stroking her favorite cat, her children toil like common laborers. Her daughter Cynthia explains to the brother that the truth would be the death of their mother: "Tell her that Fletcher owns the Hall, and that for fifteen years she has lived, blind and paralyzed, in the overseer's house! Why, even if her eyes were opened, she wouldn't believe it" (p. 37). Her not believing the changes possible made the long deception easy. When the Blakes lose the Hall to Fletcher, the former overseerer, they transfer their mother from the Hall to the small house by telling her she is going for an airing. When they must have cash for back taxes, Cynthia removes the large diamond solitaire from Mrs. Blake's wedding band and replaces it with a purple setting from the servant Dorcia's gold band so that Mrs. Blake can still caress the ring.

Sheltered from the harsh facts of reality for twenty years, Mrs. Blake is finally told the truth by Fletcher, and because of the shock she becomes unconscious. She regains consciousness for a brief time, and still under the impression that she is the mistress of the Hall, she pathetically calls together the family and house servants to tell them good-bye. The faithful servants who remained with the family and aided in the deception gather around her bed, and she, believing slavery still exists, thanks them for their service and gives the elderly butler Boaz his freedom. Her long life of deception over, Mrs. Blake falls

back on the pillows with her arch smile frozen upon her face. She had circumvented distasteful reality by indomitable strength of character, stoic will, and magnificent patience. Recalling his mother's life, Christopher summarizes her seventy years: "She's had her life. She's been a beauty, a belle, a sweetheart, a wife and a mother—to say nothing of a very spoiled old woman" (p. 221).

Mrs. Blake is a symbol of what Miss Glasgow labels the "evasive idealism" of the South, the preference for a beautiful way of life, false though it was, instead of the truth. Miss Glasgow felt that "one must either encounter reality" or accept the doctrine of "evasive idealism." Mrs. Blake's physical blindness is the blindness of the South to reality and to the changes taking place. When faced with the truth, Mrs. Blake and the old way of life die. The gracious South with its plantations and belles was disappearing and a New South was developing.

Mrs. Blake's eldest daughter Cynthia, a spinster, was a product of the same age of restricted views and manners for women as was her mother. Motivated by hereditary loyalty and devotion to tradition, Cynthia sacrifices her youth and her beauty to sustain the deception that they are still aristocratic landowners. Although Cynthia has prematurely aged and her features have coarsened with hard work, she still carries herself like a lady and her voice is deep and musical. Her great pride in her family heritage and devotion to her mother prevents Cynthia from marrying beneath her station and keeps her from consenting to her younger sister Lila's marriage to a poor farmer. Cynthia sacrifices her youth so that Lila may remain a lady and stay lovely to make a

suitable marriage. Although Cynthia does her duty heroically, she experiences brief moments of regret that she has no happy memories to fill her days. When Mrs. Blake dies, Cynthia is released from her patient drudgery, but she cannot adjust to her freedom and to the fact that deception was no longer necessary. She had pretended so long that she missed the pleasant lies she created to tell her mother about the house, the garden, and the Confederacy. She explains, "It's all so dull when you have to stop pretending and begin to face things just as they are" (p. 356). Cynthia represents another phase of "evasive idealism"; she knows the truth but refuses to accept it wholly. She cannot adjust to the changes of the Reconstruction. Finally after twelve years of waiting, Lila is allowed to marry her farmer, and Cynthia begins to reconcile herself to the new environment of the rising middle class, though she will never fully understand or accept it.

Another example of an impoverished, aristocratic lady still clinging to the old tradition is Mrs. Dudley Webb in The Voice of the People (1900), an overpoweringly great lady who never surrenders her role: "her pride was never lowered and her crepe was never laid aside" (p. 112). Mrs. Webb remains devoted to the Confederate cause; she dresses in black and wears a button from her husband's uniform tunic sewn to her dress, and she displays his sword and the Confederate colors on the wall. Married to a dashing Cavalry officer who fell in battle, she did not weep when informed of his death, and she moved from the old family home just as haughtily and proudly as she had come as a bride. When financially forced to take in student boarders, she regarded them as "so many beneficiaries upon her bounty," and when General Bolingbroke assures her that

he will see to her son's education, she accepts with "a reluctance of reserve." Still adhering to the genteel code of the planter aristocracy, Mrs. Webb resents her son's being in the same class at school as Nicolas Burr, a poor-white boy also sponsored by the General.

In The Voice of the People Miss Glasgow presents two contrasting portraits of the Southern spinster in the characters of Aunt Griselda Grigsby and Aunt Chris Battle. Twenty years before, Aunt Griselda had written from the home of her sister to say that she would stop over at Battle Hall on her way to Richmond. When Aunt Griselda had arrived, she had gone to the best chamber and unpacked her trunks, hung her bombazine skirts in the closet, ordered green tea and toast, and settled herself for the remainder of her days. Because it was the custom for the right of the guest to determine the length of stay, Aunt Griselda had been treated as a "guest" for twenty years. A spoiled girl, she is very sensitive to trivial things and has become more sour and eccentric with age. In her youth she had had her romance; she had been engaged to a young man but they had quarreled and had broken the engagement. As the years passed no new suitors came, and Aunt Griselda spent her time gathering flowers, teaching catechism to the small slaves, and making stiff old-fashioned samplers. The petted daughter of her father's house, she was stranded upon her sister's hospitality when her parents died and the family home changed hands. An elderly lady, Aunt Griselda stays in her room and relives her youth by rereading her love letters. Twice every year her dresses are aired, but she remains in her room and reads the faded letters which she keeps tied in blue ribbons in her cedar chest.

Old, ill-tempered, and bitter of speech, she is unliked and disregarded by the family. A product of the old tradition, Aunt Griselda is the example of the embittered spinster who was completely dependent upon her relatives.

In contrast, Aunt Chris, although she too is dependent upon her brother's hospitality, took over as mistress of the plantation when his wife died, and the children, Eugenia and Bernard, and the servants do not dispute her authority. A beauty in her day, Aunt Chris had had a lover who died before they were to be married. Although it broke her heart, it did not destroy her happiness and she had been happy for forty years taking care of her brother. She never had time to marry because she was always needed somewhere to help. When she came to the Hall, she brought with her innumerable reminiscences of her childhood, which she told in her musical voice. Now past middle age and very plump, her life revolves around her brother's family. A kind pleasant person, Aunt Chris never uttered a harsh word about anybody. When the General dies, she puts aside her sorrow and devotes herself to the management of the house. Although she dislikes Nick Burr, of the "poor-white" class, she soon recognizes his good qualities and supports him in the courtship of Eugenia. Aunt Chris is a happy spinster who is alive and involved with her family and who has made a contented, useful life for herself within the restrictions of the old code.

In contrast to Mrs. Blake and Mrs. Webb, Angela Gay in The Miller of Old Church (1911) is an example of the new aristocrats in Virginia after the War. Descendants of prewar aristocracy, they become absentee holders of their land as the result of the Reconstruction and social

transition. In the novel Miss Glasgow presents the question of whether or not the aristocracy would be enriched or depleted by the intermingling of social classes. Mrs. Gay, a belle in a small town, lives, rules, and destroys her family with the "code of beautiful behavior."

Mrs. Gay is everything that old Virginia wanted a woman to be—lovely, helpless, indolent, and ignorant—and men view her as a saint, an angel, delicate and clinging. But she is unscrupulous, neurotically vigorous, and obstinate, and behind her genteel manners Mrs. Gay possesses a force that enchains and destroys all those around her for two generations: her brother-in-law, his mistress, her sister Kesiah, and her own son. Molly Merryweather remarks, "Isn't it terrible that such a saintly person should have caused so much sin" (The Miller of Old Church, p. 134). After her husband's death, the young Mrs. Gay had gone to Jordon's Journey, the estate of her brother-in-law, where she had firmly established herself as mistress and began her subtle and devastating rule. Taking advantage of her devious nature and physical frailty, she triumphs through indirection. Because she is kept from the knowledge of tragedies she is actually responsible for, Mrs. Gay is confirmed in the rightness of her principles. She constantly proclaims that some act or decision is "the Christian thing to do." The preacher praises her religious attitude and proclaims that her presence in the parish and her occasional attendance at church when she is well enough to come are great assets to the community.

Mrs. Gay refuses to admit the presence of any unpleasant fact which might violate her private comfort and she is sheltered because of her

delicate health and feelings. Dominating not by force but by sentiment, she surrenders in fights with others in order to grasp all privileges. Her whole delicate appearance, fair hair, and innocent blue eyes, appeal to the emotions. She seems to say, "Oh, be careful, I am so sensitive. Remember that I am a frail creature, and do not hurt me. Let me remain still in my charmed circle where I have always lived, and where no unpleasant reality has ever entered" (p. 59). Mrs. Gay believes that if she treats anything disturbing as non-existent, it is deprived of its power for evil. By the application of this principle, she had extinguished her brother-in-law's passion for Janet Merryweather, and she hopes that it will prove equally effective in blighting her son's fancy for Molly Merryweather. Unknown to Mrs. Gay, Jonathan has secretly married Blossom Revercomb because he feared that telling his mother would bring on one of her "attacks." Also suffering under Mrs. Gay's domination is her unattractive spinster sister, Aunt Kesiah, who remains in the background and who constantly waits upon Mrs. Gay's every whim. Ironically, in the last chapter after the catastrophe of Johathan's murder, the characters praise Mrs. Gay's fortitude and her saintly resignation to what she feels is the will of God. Mrs. Gay's selfishness and prejudices have caused the tragedy. Just as she had been the main factor in the death of her brother-in-law when she kept him from marrying the betrayed Janet, she had caused the death of her son by making him afraid of upsetting her by revealing his marriage to Blossom. Also, she had tried to prevent any aid to Janet's child, Molly, because she would have had to acknowledge an unpleasant fact. The community is fooled by her delicate, angelic appearance. Mrs. Gay portrays the adverse

effects of the "code of beautiful behavior" and the "evasive idealism" that prevailed in the Old South.

Miss Kesiah Blunt is the Southern maiden-lady who did not possess beauty, money, or sufficient force of personality to break with tradition. In A Certain Measure Miss Glasgow wrote that "Mrs. Gay, who bore sorrow so nobly, and her sister Miss Kesiah, who bore ugliness so submissively, are the genuine products of the 'code of beautiful behavior'" (p. 128). A homely girl who could not anticipate marriage as an escape, Kesiah's life is spent serving her "delicate" sister Angela. Ignored or tolerated by those around her, Kesiah is trapped by tradition and circumstances to a life of boredom in her sister's home.

One of the unfortunate women of a past generation who did not have beauty or charm, Kesiah is described as being "cut out for an old maid." In her youth she had rebelled against Nature and the fundamental injustice that divided her sister's lot from her own. Mrs. Gay had so completely effaced her sister that people regarded Kesiah as a person whom it was scarcely worth one's time to consider. The lawyer, Mr. Chamberlayne, feels that her ugliness is a positive affront to him and feels as bitterly toward her as if she had purposely designed her appearance to annoy him, and while he talks to her he never looks her in the face.

Kesiah had a natural talent for drawing and wished to be an artist. In her youth a famous portrait painter saw one of her sketches and suggested that she go to Paris to study. But because the old tradition forbade a Virginia lady going to Europe by herself to paint nude people, Kesiah realized that rebellion against the established code was

futile and gave up her hopes of being an artist. Kesiah remained with her invalid mother until her death and then went to live with Mrs. Gay, who comments that "She is the best creature in the world . . . but is very eccentric in some ways" (p. 57), and that she is not allowed to go off the lawn by herself. Kesiah serves her sister's every whim, mixing her egg and sherry, lighting her fire, and drying her sheets. Those about Kesiah forget her existence except when she is needed to render some service. A sensitive person who enjoys art and literature, Kesiah reads a new life of Lord Byron. When Molly Merryweather comes to live with the Gays, she and Kesiah become close friends: "I've grown to love Kesiah, and I believe I'm the only person who sees just how fine she is" (p. 285).

Aunt Kesiah was rooted in tradition: "Neither in the new fiction or in the old was there a place for the unhappy woman who desired to charm but could not. She remained what she had always been, a tragic perversion of nature, which romance and realism alike conspired to ignore" (p. 60). Aunt Kesiah was a good woman who felt that she had done her duty. Possessing a "fund of common sense," she realized that making pickles was more useful work than the regretting of possibilities.

Another tradition-bound maiden-lady is Aunt Agatha Littlepage. One of the three "fallen women" depicted in They Stooped to Folly (1929), Aunt Agatha is a spinster who made a mistake in her youth and who was condemned by the precepts of "beautiful behavior" to retire politely from society and to live a life of seclusion in a back bedroom of her nephew's home. In A Certain Measure Miss Glasgow wrote, "During my early youth Aunt Agatha still lingered on as a living specimen of her

variable, though permanent species. Occasionally, as a child, I would pass the sombre house in which she lived immured; and though I had been warned that it was improper to speculate upon the nature of her affliction, I shared with my playmates the vague impression that it was something catching" (p. 242).

"A carefully guarded ruin," Aunt Agatha is the Aunt of Virginus Littlepage and has been immured for more than forty years in the third story back bedroom coming down to family meals only when there were no important guests. Succumbing to the life of an invalid, "poor Aunt Agatha," when asked how she is every morning, always replies, "A very good night, thank you." As a young girl her life was wrecked by an unfortunate love affair from which she never recovered. Her family immediately secluded her and gave the child away and explained that she was slightly deranged, for "whenever the desperate passion of love visited the curving bosom of a Southern lady, desire was transformed into mental affliction" (<u>They Stooped to Folly</u>, p. 73). Aunt Agatha was never left alone with a man or allowed to go out by herself. Betrayed by a Southern gentleman who moved in the best circles and was already married, Aunt Agatha, adherring to some unwritten etiquette of seduction, refused to divulge the name of her seducer. Only inference and analogy had attributed her ruin to Colonel Bletheram, who had had three wives and had never missed a Christmas cotillion since he had ruined Aunt Agatha. The pressure of tradition in the 1880's had changed Aunt Agatha from a spirited girl into an elderly Magdalen. She has a second blooming during World War I, helping sew pajamas for the Red Cross, and she enjoys banana splits and movies. Mr. Littlepage

reflects that Aunt Agatha was the victim of Victorian psychology and Puritan public opinion. Aunt Agatha is the "classic example of antique betrayal" (p. 93), and the victim of the "code of beautiful behavior."

Two other thwarted belles like Mrs. Gay who use their delicate appearance and health as instruments of tyranny over their families are Angelica Blackburn in The Builders (1919) and Lavinia Timberlake in In This Our Life (1941). Angelica Blackburn is a portrait of a bitter, ailing martyr and a cold, neurotic belle. Her name is ironic because the lovely manners and appearance shield a venomous soul. To Caroline Meade, who enters the Blackburn household as nurse to the child Letty, Angelica has the "appeal of an innocent and beautiful creature who is unhappy" (The Builders, p. 47), but Caroline soon discovers her real personality. Angelica wins her way by cold-hearted maneuvering amid conventions of virtue and skillfully completes each move before anyone can foresee her intent. She ruins her sister-in-law's engagement, her husband's political chances, and casts Caroline out of her home as a conniver for her husband's affections. Her illness, delicate beauty, and unhappy marriage give her superior status in Richmond society which still favors the belle. Angelica leaves her seriously ill daughter to play the lead in a tableaux and gives the impression that her husband had kept her in ignorance of the child's condition because he wished to see her as the star in the tableaux. Never overstepping conventional propriety, Angelica under the disguise of an ill-treated, virtuous wife, "destroys everything human and natural" as she "lies and cheats for advantage" (p. 259).

Lavinia Timberlake in In This Our Life is another frail, virtuous lady who brings unhappiness to those around her. Lavinia is a product of the old tradition and her death represents the end of the era of ceremonial tradition as her daughter Roy, in her breaking from the old pattern, represents the new era of the modern woman of the 1920's. "The plain daughter of one of the best and meanest families in Queensborough" (p. 16), Lavinia suffered in her youth because of her lack of beauty and charm and was shunned by her father and brother. After a disappointing courtship and marriage, Lavinia enjoys taking her revenge out on her husband Asa. A hypochondriac and petted invalid, she uses her illnesses as an escape from reality. She identifies herself with her vivacious daughter Stanley who embodies all that she had longed to be and was not, and ignores her other two children. When Asa finally leaves her after thirty years of troubled marriage, Lavinia enjoys her role as the deserted wife. A rich uncle leaves her a sizable income so that she can live the role of the Southern aristocratic lady. Selfish and caring only for conventional propriety, she refuses to allow her daughter Roy with her illegitimate son to live in her house. After a life of disillusionment, Lavinia dies, and Asa and Roy try to find some happiness in modern Queensborough.

A spinster who was a belle in her youth and who spends her life being faithful to the role of a genteel lady and to her early love is Miss Amanda Lightfoot in The Romantic Comedians (1926). In A Certain Measure Miss Glasgow writes that among her acquaintances in Richmond there was the general impression that Amanda had been "snatched bodily from our social circle." She denied ever "borrowing wholly from life,"

but said because the "attitude was general as well as commendable" she would "be easily recognized by all those women who survived the severe discipline of the Great Tradition." Existing as a "pattern of pure womanhood," Amanda represents the "submission to the awful pattern of the governed era" (p. 217-218).

Amanda, the crowned belle and beauty of Queensborough, had been engaged to Judge Honeywell and they were to be married. Being what Honeywell had always admired and what he thought he wanted in a woman, Amanda, a belle of the eighties, had all the traditional feminine virtues: patience, sweetness, serenity, and reserve. After a "lover's quarrel," she had left for Europe hoping that he would follow her. Several months later the Judge left for Europe, but on the boat trip he met and married Cordelia. Heartbroken, Amanda remained abroad for a year and then returned to settle in Queensborough. Devoting herself to her nieces and nephews and to her canaries, to visiting the sick, and to various charities, Amanda cherishes a hopeless passion for the Judge while many men seek her hand. Before the birth of his first child, the Judge, still in love with Amanda, begged her to run away with him, but she refused. Like Virginia Pendleton in Virginia, the changing times elude Amanda and she remains true to the "code of beautiful behavior" and to the love of her girlhood. She continues to wear blue and lavender, the colors of the Judge's youthful preference, unaware that he now prefers bold reds and greens. When the Judge's wife dies, Amanda hopes that he will ask her to marry him, but he refuses a suitable marriage with her in favor of the young, vivacious Annabel. Although he considers Amanda "too old," the Judge reflects that "they do

not make women like Amanda now," as he turns his attentions to Annabel, one of those young modern girls "without corsets or conversation." When Annabel leaves the Judge for a man her own age, Amanda hopes that he might ask her to marry him, but he bypasses her in favor of his young nurse. Disappointed again, Amanda continues to live the role of the perfect lady. The embodiment of the belle, Amanda is "lovely, grave, stately, self-possessed, confirmed in queenliness, wrapped in her Victorian reserve as in a veil of mystery . . . women of her generation had known how to suffer in silence" (The Romantic Comedians, pp. 40-41). Because she patterned herself after an ideal and could never be herself, her happiness is "a mixture of fortitude and hypocrisy" (p. 210), for the "virtue of perfect behavior lies not in its rightness, but its impenetrability" (p. 105). McDowell writes that Amanda is "a woman completely formed by tradition . . . a martyr to the concepts of virtue and moral responsibility which now have lost the universal respect of her contemporaries.[11] Amanda's life is devoted to the "code of beautiful behavior."

Another example of the Southern beauty is Eva Birdsong in The Sheltered Life (1941). Forced to live continually the "code of beautiful behavior," Eva is crushed by the demands of the role of the ever lovely and gracious lady. Miss Glasgow describes the effect of the code on the contemporary belle at the turn of the century when the belle was becoming an obsolete emblem. Mr. Compson in Faulkner's Absalom,

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[11]McDowell, p. 169.

Absalom! describes the fate of the Southern gentlewoman in Eva's era: "Years ago we in the South made our women into ladies. Then the War came and made our women into ghosts."[12] Eva is a haunting figure in a world which has no place for her. The Birdsongs and the Archbalds represent old aristocratic country families who were transformed from opulent planters into eminent citizens of Queensborough. Just as the new industry brings the decline of the old luxurious life, modern times bring the end of the era of the belle.

To old General Archbald, Eva represents all that his era had idealized in women: beauty, spirit, mystery, legendary glamor, and personality.[13] A queenly woman of rare beauty and grace, Eva is the eternal feminine ideal. To the General, Eva conveys the indomitable quality of the South which allowed it to survive defeat, "a strong soul, still undefeated by life." Pride comes to mean more to Eva than love and life and becomes a stoical force that enables her to keep up the "code of beautiful behavior." As young Eva Howard, Eva was a famous belle in the 1890's and was admired and praised wherever she went. Even as late as 1906 people still gather to see her as she walks down the street. She has already passed into legend, and romantic stories are told of her girlhood when her beauty delayed a wedding procession and a funeral. Tall, slender, and regal in carriage, Eva has bronze hair and blue eyes,

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[12]William Faulkner, Absalom, Absalom! Modern Library Edition (New York, 1951), p. 12.

[13]Frederick McDowell, "Theme and Artistry in Ellen Glasgow's The Sheltered Life," Texas Studies in Literature and Language, I (Winter, 1960), 502.

and is endowed with a lovely singing voice. Eva had tossed her triumphs aside and eloped with handsome George Birdsong, the least eligible of her suitors and least worthy of her. After twelve years of a childless marriage to George, a struggling attorney, Eva had only her "code of beautiful behavior" to enable her to face life. She had risen above poverty and the resignation of a singing career, but she could not overcome George's unfaithfulness. As beautiful as she was, no one could ever come really close to her, and she never revealed her regrets or secrets.

Eva is a sacrificial victim to the inflexible ideals of the Old South. She grasps the disastrous implication of the code yet is blindly committed to it, and her consciously contrived artifice is made necessary by the life of pretense she has led for so long. Thinking herself alone in the street, she relaxes for a moment, but she senses the gaze of onlookers and her tired features become transfigured by her arch and vivacious smile. Also, her preference for hot-house orchids and gardenias to garden flowers is an indication of the artificial conventionality which tradition had bred in her.

As vibrant as she is, a hint of sterility surrounds Eva in her not wanting a child. Her life is composed of her love for George and she explains "when two people love each other they ought to be sufficient to themselves. Nothing else ought to come between, nothing else ought to matter. A great love doesn't leave room for anything else in a woman's life" (The Sheltered Life, p. 45). After a quarrel, Eva tells George that even if he kills her she would love him. Ironically George kills Eva in spirit. Eva loves George too possessively and demands a fidelity impossible to his nature. In turn, George demands of Eva the ideal she

represents to him. He fell in love with her because she was an ideal, and she is determined to remain his conception of her. Eva's code prevents her from breaking down and admitting to anyone her knowledge of George's infidelity. Only her cousin Welch, the doctor who lives with them, asserts "her illness may be a wounded spirit since she has never known a natural moment in her marriage" (p. 199). Eva's patient smile and heroic pretenses began to give way under shattered nerves when she becomes ill. When Eva in her distraught illness finds General Archbald's young niece Jenny in her husband's embrace, she allows a primitive jealousy to possess her, and with an energy born of desperation and of disordered nerves, she brings an end to their long life of pretense by shooting him with his hunting rifle. McDowell points out that the freshly killed ducks which George has just brought home from a hunting trip are a symbolic extension of Eva.[14] Just as the ducks are natural objects of beauty destroyed by human ruthlessness, Eva's beauty and vitality have been undermined by the persistence of her husband's moral weakness. After Eva shoots George, she sits erect and gazes with her fixed smile into the twilight. The General and his family say the shooting was an accident, and under the code no one will ever reveal that Eva murdered George.

Eva's devotion to the "code of beautiful behavior" destroys her. When her health begins to fail, the strain of maintaining perfection becomes too great, and she pitifully exclaims, "I'm worn out

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[14]McDowell, "Theme and Artistry in Ellen Glasgow's The Sheltered Life," p. 502.

with being somebody else—with being somebody's ideal. I want to turn around and be myself for a little while before it is too late, before it is all over" (p. 285). Because her beauty and ideal of beauty were her soul's sustenance, she becomes emotionally and mentally upset when she realizes that she will never fully recover her health. Eva is too weak and too ill to face reality. All that she was or would be had been dedicated to something that never really existed. Similarly, Jenny is also a product of the code which forced her to lead a "sheltered life" where no unpleasant fact is acknowledged. She is thus unable to form any moral perceptions and does not sense that her infatuation with George could lead to such devastating results. After the tragedy, all that Jenny can say is "I didn't mean anything" (p. 292). Both Eva and Jenny are puppets of the "sheltered life" which was becoming obsolete in modern Queensborough.

Two spinster sisters are contrasted in The Sheltered Life, the tradition-bound Etta and the "new woman" Isabella Archbald. A product of the old tradition which made outcasts of women who lacked beauty and charm, Etta is condemned to a life of loneliness and defeat by homely features and a sickly constitution, and indulges frustration with hypochondria and petty malice. Homely and eccentric, Etta, "who came into the world as a mistake of nature and who was defeated before she was born" (p. 17), spends her time reading French novels in yellow covers, suffering from imagined illnesses, and devotedly admiring Eva Birdsong, the embodiment of all she dreams. Suffering from genteel nymphomania, Etta, a soured and bitter spinster, in a twisted expression of herself, drives away her women friends by over attention and even bites the arm

of a friend who is more fortunate in securing masculine attention. She has fallen into the habit of imagined infatuations and her latest victim is her doctor. Etta had lost faith in men and had found it difficult to be romantic about God, and she had lost interest in the church because the Rector had fallen in love with a young girl of the congregation. As a young girl, Etta was escorted to dances and parties by her grandfather and was always provided a corsage by the family. Etta cries because she feels that no one loves her, and in her whining voice tells her sister-in-law, "At least you've had love, even if you've lost it. It's all I want. It's the only thing in the world I want" (p. 63). Etta is an example of the unattractive, frustrated, eccentric spinster who is dependent upon her family.

Virginia Pendleton in Virginia (1913) is the best and most fully developed portrait of the ideal Southern lady. The perfect lady possessed grace, beauty, a vital essence, and shimmering radiance which made her the ornament of the era and which enabled her to pass immortalized into legend. "The embodiment of a forsaken ideal," the lady was passing into legend as Miss Glasgow was writing about her. In A Certain Measure Miss Glasgow wrote that Virginia, which reproduces the period from 1884 to 1910 as a history of manners, was intended to be the candid portrait of a lady, but Miss Glasgow realized that the lady had become almost as extinct as the dodo (p. 77). She had known and admired many of the ladies of the decorative era and wished to interpret the vanished lady in the character of Virginia. Having been educated to the requirements of the ideal, the perfect lady found herself

the victim of the world in which "even man, who had created her out of his own desire, had grown weary of the dream image he had made," Miss Glasgow says (p. 82). Virginia, like Eva Birdsong, is a beautiful woman born out of her time, whose grace and beauty are wasted upon the remnant of an earlier "grand society," and the cultural attitudes of the town of Dinwiddie serve more to hamper than to enhance the heroine's career. Miss Glasgow commented that she had intended to deal ironically with both the Southern lady and Victorian traditions, but the character of Virginia became a mixture of irony and sympathetic compassion, and the simple goodness of Virginia's nature turned the comedy of manners into a tragedy of human fate (p. 79).

In a letter to Allen Tate, 1933, Miss Glasgow reflected about her novel:

> Virginia is my favorite. She is the evocation of an ideal and is always associated with my mother and the women of her period. I describe Virginia in the beginning exactly as I was told my mother looked when she was a girl, a perfect flower of the Tidewater.
>
> The theme of the book is concerned with the fate of perfection in an imperfect world. Virginia is the incarnation of an ideal, and the irony is directed not at her, but at human nature which creates an ideal only to abandon it when that ideal comes to flower. She was not a weak character, but her vision was that of the heart. Her strength was the strength of selfless devotion.[15]

Carl Van Doren asserts that "Virginia is at once the most thorough and most pathetic picture of the American woman as Victorianism

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[15] Letters, p. 131-134.

conceived, shaped, and misfitted her."[16] A reviewer in the Atlantic Monthly, 1913, described Virginia as "an extreme example of the saintly, self-sacrificing woman. While she is frankly presented as a type, however, the author has drawn her with such strong appreciation, combined with such a fury of conviction as to the advantages of this utter self-abnegation both for a woman's family and for herself, that the selflessness of Virginia takes very real shape before our eye."[17]

Virginia is a symbol of the South, a product of its tradition. McDowell asserts that her beauty and bright future suggests the South before the war, and her qualities of service, loyalty, and sacrifice actuate the South in its unequal struggle with the North.[18] In her defeat by life and her sustaining of spirit, she suggests both the declining prestige and pride of the South. Like the South, Virginia is unable to adapt to the new situations because of inherited inhibitions.

Miss Glasgow wrote that the theme of Virginia was contained in a phrase, "How lovely she must once have been," used to describe a woman of later middle age who looked at Miss Glasgow and her friend with "eyes of faded blue" and with a "wistful smile" as she walked past them on a street in an older aristocratic town in Virginia (A Certain

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[16]Carl Van Doren, Contemporary American Novelists 1900-1920 (New York, 1922), p. 134.

[17]"Recent Reflections of a Novel Reader," Atlantic Monthly, CXII (November, 1913), 690.

[18]McDowell, p. 117.

Measure, p. 78). The phrase eventually developed into the character and story of Virginia, and commenting on the development of the character of Virginia, Miss Glasgow explained: "I saw her first as she came to Miss Priscilla Batte, on that May afternoon in the year 1884, clothed in an innocence which saddened the old teacher, who gazed, prophetically into the future. 'Would life,' she asked herself, 'yield nothing more to that radiant girl than it had yielded to her or to the other women she had known?' And then, vaguely frightened, 'But if ever a girl looked as if she were cut out for happiness!" (p. 79). Virginia, with her dark hair wound in a wreath of braids around her head, blue eyes, and dress of white lawn with the close fitting sleeves and narrow waist of the period, became a real person to Miss Glasgow. Miss Glasgow created the small Virginian town of Dinwiddie and many of the characters from her own personal experiences.

Ellen Glasgow developed the characterization of Virginia from the memories of her mother, especially with respect to her sweetness, her enduring trouble, her self-sacrifice for her children, and her appearance.[19] Her mother had been described in her youth "as if she were cut out for happiness," and as having the lovely manners and instinct of a lady (A Certain Measure, p. 90). Virginia also exemplifies the education and training of a young girl during Mrs. Glasgow's youth. Virginia, like her mother Mrs. Pendleton, is the perfect flower of Southern culture, and is educated according to the simple theory that the less a girl knew about life, the better she could contend with it. The chief object

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[19]Rouse, p. 79.

of her upbringing, like that of every other well-bred and well-born Southern woman of her day, was to paralyze her reasoning faculties and to shape her into the inherited emotional patterns of a perfect wife and mother. Virginia and Mrs. Pendleton embody the ideal of Southern womanhood, who in youth look toward a future in marriage and motherhood as the limit of their existence. Such women lived by formulas instead of by reason, and everything was decided for them "by the feelings of a lady and the Episcopal Church" (A Certain Measure, p. 83). Virginia is spared from hard work and anything unpleasant in order that she might remain lovely, innocent, and desirable for marriage. Reaching womanhood during the mid-1890's, Virginia is a product of the "evasive idealism" and illusions that produced only a trained, vacant, dreamlike stare in the face of any unpleasantness or cruelty. Just as Mrs. Pendleton as a young girl could view the slave auction block without thinking about human lives being sold, Virginia learns to overlook any unpleasant reality. Miss Glasgow uses her own girlhood training in the genteel manners of a lady for the basis of Virginia's education at Miss Priscilla Batte's Academy for Young Ladies. The book is an expression, Rouse asserts, of Ellen Glasgow's rejection of the older definitions of the lady's role, as she had observed them, and her pitying scorn for their stultifying effects.[20]

Trained to be a perfect wife and mother, and adherring to a strict sense of duty and code of refined conduct, Virginia cannot adjust to the changing times and is destroyed by the old tradition. Incapable of

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[20]Rouse, p. 79.

altering the design of her life, she remains as naive as she was in her youth, never deviating from the pattern of the perfect lady. Her beauty and attractiveness eventually disappear because the beauty is the bloom of girlhood and the mind has not been fully cultivated. As Oliver struggles to secure a position in the literary field, Virginia devotes her life to domestic duties and her children and never offers Oliver intellectual companionship, and thus loses him.

Virginia vaguely realizes that life is moving past her. She sacrifices her whole existence for others; she gives, but never demands. Only once does Virginia act from personal desire. In an attempt to combat a neighborhood rumor concerning Oliver and the flirtatious Abby, Virginia consents to accompany them on a fox-hunt. Much to the delight of Oliver, Virginia rides superbly and wins the foxtail. But as Virginia victoriously rides home from the hunt, she feels only remorse: "She had neglected her children, she had risked her life, and all for the sake of wrestling a bit of dead fur from Abby's grasp" (Virginia, p. 329). When Oliver goes to New York for two weeks for the opening of one of his plays, Virginia remains with her children. A new element for which neither her training nor her experience had prepared her enters into her life; she realizes that Oliver has changed and is growing away from her. Again Oliver leaves her at home with the children. As she nurses her young son through diphtheria, Virginia begins to comprehend the emptiness of her life, and in those three days while she mentally lives and dies many times, she changes her outlook on life from that of a young girl into that of a woman. With growing success Oliver gets better looking, while Virginia's delicate beauty fades and in her devotion to

her children she ceases to consider whether or not her clothes are becoming. When she learns that she may be losing her husband's love, she extravagantly purchases some blue material which she had admired. Time wears away her loveliness, innocence, flushed expectancy and her belief in life, and she becomes prematurely old and dowdy. Her children to whom she has sacrificed her whole existence grow beyond her and criticize her ways and the little curls of her youth; and Oliver, now a successful playwright, turns to the attractive actress Margaret Oldcastle for companionship. Virginia had not changed with the times; and with "her sweetness, humility, old-fashioned courtesy and consideration for others, she belonged still in the honey-scented twilight of the 1880's" (p. 361). Even when she loses her husband and children, Virginia still sustains her goodness, patience, and habits of a lady. But Virginia also possesses an inner strength demonstrated both in her subsistence of spirit and her unbendable and unadaptable nature. In one final attempt to regain Oliver, Virginia confronts her husband's mistress: "Then, because it was impossible to say these things she had come to say, because even in the supreme crisis of her life she could not lay down the manner of a lady, she smiled the grave smile with which her mother had walked through a ruined country, and taking up her muff, which she had laid on the table, passed out into the hall" (p. 489).

Virginia is the perfect example of the Southern lady as tradition, training, and circumstances had shaped her. As the years destroy the life of Virginia, so they destroy the feminine ideal of the ages and end the tradition of the great lady; for the pattern of the lady had embodied for centuries the thwarted human longing for the beautiful and the good (A Certain Measure, p. 96).

Another spinster that is a product of the "code of beautiful behavior" is Miss Priscilla Batte, the school mistress in Virginia. Miss Batte's Academy was patterned after Ellen Glasgow's own early training as a genteel lady of the South. In A Certain Measure she wrote that we were "taught reading, penmanship ('up to the right, down to the left, my dear'), arithmetic, geography, history, deportment, and the fine arts" (p. 83). In a letter to Signe Toksvig, 1944, Miss Glasgow wrote, "As a small child, I went to school in a large house, and was taught by a Miss Mumford, who was still a great lady. The house has a romantic tradition. It was run by four sisters who were girls in the Civil War, of one of the great Virginian families, but after the war they were completely impoverished. Like other women in the South who had neither an aptitude nor an income, nor any special strain of intelligence, they turned to teaching as a means of livelihood. I have described this in my Virginia."[21]

With the majority of maiden-ladies left destitute in Dinwiddie after the war, Miss Batte had turned naturally to teaching as the only nice and respectable occupation which required neither preparation of mind nor a large amount of money. Being the single surviving child of a gallant Confederate general, Miss Batte was supported by the community in her establishing the Dinwiddie Academy for Young Ladies. Clinging to the habits of her ancestors of Virginia, she was "the embodiment of the spirit of her race and stood firmly rooted in all that was static, in

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[21] Letters, p. 864.

all that was obsolete and outgrown, in the Virginia of the eighties" (p. 15).

"Capable of dying for an idea, but not of conceiving one" (p. 16), Miss Batte was the cultural arbiter of Dinwiddie. The community believed that no girl, after leaving the Academy with a diploma for good conduct, could possibly go wrong because the moral education was firmly rooted in the superiority of man and the aristocratic supremacy of the Episcopal Church. What knowledge a young woman acquired was unimportant so long as she assimilated the right attitudes. Miss Batte considered Virginia a docile pupil because she submitted her opinions to others, but she was suspicious of Susan Treadwell because she had an active, intelligent mind. When Miss Batte looked at Virginia she saw herself standing flushed and expectant before the road of the future. Her childlike confidence and innocence had survived both the fugitive joys and the perennial disillusionment of her life. Middle-aged, obese, and encumbered with trivial cares, she had her dream of love, and she wondered what the future would unfold for the lovely Virginia. When Virginia returns to Dinwiddie after Oliver has left her, Miss Batte is still the same person she was when Virginia left Dinwiddie as a young bride. Miss Batte still sits on the front porch of the Academy and feeds her canaries.

Another spinster who has no relatives to depend upon is Miss Willy Whitlow, the dressmaker in Virginia. In A Certain Measure Miss Glasgow wrote that Miss Willy was patterned after two spinster sisters that sewed for the Glasgow family by the day (p. 72). Miss Willy lives alone and supports herself by sewing for the community. Everyone likes her and all sewing work must be given to her even if she is not quite

certain of the latest styles. Miss Batte comments that Miss Willy could not "go out sewing by the day if she didn't have her religious convictions" (Virginia, p. 19). Baffling her friends as to how she can be so happy on so little, Miss Willy has been seen to skip just because it was spring, and Virginia wonders if it is work that has made her happy: "I wonder if it is work that keeps her so young and brisk. She's never had anything in her life, and yet she is so much happier than some people who have everything" (p. 158). Miss Willy had filled her life with an inextinguishable curiosity and interest in other people that had overcome disillusionment and time. She is one of the few spinsters who finds happiness and contentment under the traditional code.

The Southern belle and ideal Southern lady were the products of the tradition and culture of the Old South, and they immortalize all that the aristocratic South wished its women to be: lovely, gracious, charming, and docile. Though Miss Glasgow presents in brief other examples of the ideal Southern lady, Virginia Pendleton remains her most fully developed picture of the perfect lady. Like the gracious life of the antebellum South, the belle and the ideal lady passed from the scene, and with the coming of the Reconstruction and the changes in the social order came the "new woman" who defied the restrictions of the old tradition and who made a life for herself in the New South.

CHAPTER III

THE "NEW WOMAN"

In contrast to the Southern belle and the old tradition of the South, is the "new woman" in Ellen Glasgow's novels. Emerging from the economic and social changes of the Reconstruction, the emancipated woman reflects the weakening of the tradition of the Southern lady, a more dramatic change than that resulting from the feminist movement elsewhere in the United States. In Miss Glasgow's fiction, the new Southern woman is able to break from the old code and to establish a meaningful life for herself and to experience a sense of personal achievement outside the limits of marriage and motherhood. In The Woman Within Miss Glasgow wrote, "I think women have lost something precious, but have gained immeasurably, by the passing of the old order" (p. 163). In reviewing Barren Ground, Miss Glasgow's best novel exemplifying the "new woman," Carl Van Doren noted: "She has been the realist, the one important realist of the new dominion. In particular she has distanced her rivals in the portraits of Southern women, who with her assistance, have escaped from the sweet shadows thrown over them by chivalry, and have been permitted to amount to something in their own right."[1] Miss Glasgow believed that women must have some inner resources, something other than love and marriage for which to live. Dorthea Mann commented that in pricking the old romantic tradition of the South, Miss Glasgow "had delivered women from the tyranny

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[1]Carl Van Doren, "Barren Ground," New Republic, XLII (April, 1925), 271.

of love by showing them how silly it is that they should ask so much less of life than men and give so much more."[2] In freeing women from the romantic view of marriage and preparing them adequately for the practical demands of life, Miss Glasgow, according to N. Elizabeth Monroe, "puts her finger on the truth when she describes woman as tied to a single emotion, the impermanence of which is apt to play havoc with her life."[3]

The "new woman" is based on Ellen Glasgow's own personal breaking with tradition and shaping her life as a novelist. Miss Glasgow had to overcome tradition and her family's disapproval of her desire to be a writer. Isolated by deafness and physical frailness, she remained unmarried. After two unhappy love affairs, she attached great importance to her work and dedicated herself to the furtherance of her literary reputation.

Ellen Glasgow was deeply involved with her heroines as they emerge into selfhood and achieve purpose in life. The "new woman" embodies strong character, common sense, and the "vein of iron" will to endure and to overcome obstacles. In a letter to Stark Young, 1935, Ellen Glasgow wrote that "character that is fortitude," the "vein of iron," is what "enables human beings to endure life on earth."[4] Able to face

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[2]Dorthea Mann, Ellen Glasgow and Critical Essays (New York, 1928), p. 70.

[3]N. Elizabeth Monroe, The Novel and Society (Chapel Hill, 1941), p. 159.

[4]Ellen Glasgow, Letters of Ellen Glasgow, compiled and edited by Blair Rouse (New York, 1958), p. 190.

reality and to adapt to the changing times, the emancipated woman can make a successful life for herself. Miss Glasgow endows her heroines with an invincible spirit that allows them to live "beyond defeat." In Life and Gabriella (1938) Miss Polly Hatch asks Gabriella what she has gotten out of life, and Gabriella answers, "What do any of us get out of life, except the joy of triumphing. It's overcoming that really matters" (p. 282). Certain themes repeatedly occur in Ellen Glasgow's characterizations of the "new woman." The women must break with the pattern of the Old South if they are to survive, and they gain individual triumph by defying tradition. Also, they gain strength through disillusionment with love, and often learn to live without love or men. The "new women" are all "dark ladies" endowed with spiritual and intellectual qualities, and the brave brunettes are contrasted with delicate, insipid blondes. Josephine Jessup asserts that the basic design of Miss Glasgow's later novels is the contrast of two women, "one intelligent, courageous, and consistently ill served, the other flighty and brainless, yet able to gain her way."[5] The "new women" all achieve some kind of personal satisfaction and triumph over men. Rachel Gavin in The Descendant (1897) rebounds from an unhappy love affair to receive recognition as a famous artist. Dorinda Oakley in Barren Ground (1925) overcomes her bitter disappointment in love by dedicating herself to the land and by converting the old farm into a thriving modern dairy farm. In Life and Gabriella (1916) Gabriella Carr divorces her worthless husband and gains prominence

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[5]Josephine Jessup, The Faith of Our Feminists: A Study in the Novels of Edith Wharton, Ellen Glasgow, Willa Cather (New York, 1950), pp. 43-50.

as a fashion designer and later finds love with Ben O'Hara. Ada Fincastle in The Vein of Iron (1935) depends upon her Scotch-Irish heritage to face life in the 1920's and the Depression years. Roy Timberlake, the heroine of In This Our Life (1941) and its sequel Beyond Defeat (1966), represents the modern woman of the 1920's who breaks with tradition and creates a whole new life for herself.

The first of Miss Glasgow's portraits of the "new woman" is Rachel Gavin in The Descendant (1897), a Southern girl who goes to New York to establish a career in art. "Miss Gavin was emancipated, or believed herself to be" (p. 82); she lived her views and was dedicated to her career in painting. Rachel represents the desire of woman to realize the liberation of her personality, her self-expression. But love interrupts her career and destroys her creative spirit. Rachel loves, renounces love, then renewed by sacrifice turns her energies to art. Miss Glasgow's assumption that love can only ruin a woman's creative talent is consistent with much of her later work and her biography. As a pattern for future emancipated women, Rachel is strengthened by renounciation of love and triumphs over the weak male.

Establishing herself in a small studio in New York, Rachel, a spirited brunette, soon develops a reputation in the art circles because of her independence and talent. She meets Michael Akershem, a radical social reformer, in a small cafe and sketches him as John the Baptist. Rachel is associated with her portrait of Magdalen, and the imagery drawn from Christian tradition helps define the character's personality. Frederick McDowell asserts that when Rachel destroys the sketch of

Michael as John the Baptist, this signifies his failure as a prophet of the new order and that Rachel's Magdalen becomes the symbol of the fallen and redeemed woman.[6] The friendship between Rachel and Michael develops into love and Rachel allows emotion to interfere with her career. Realizing the effect on her work, Rachel is determined to keep before her easel: "Only let me live for my work. I ask so little. I only ask to work—work—work—Steal my heart, make me cruel, hideous, wicked—anything—but leave me my work" (p. 115). Marriage is against Michael's free-thinking principles, and he persuades Rachel to be his mistress. In giving herself to Michael, Rachel joined the long procession of women for whom her painting, the Magdalen, is regarded as a symbol. Rachel abandons her painting and endures all kinds of opprobrium for his sake. Ultimately Michael tires of Rachel and becomes uncomfortable at her disregard of convention, which he had prompted in her. He meets and becomes attracted to Anna Allard, who becomes a symbol of respectability and who has for him all those womanly qualities which he now finds missing in Rachel. After sacrificing her career and reputation for him, Rachel realizes that Michael is withdrawing from her. He muses "would a good woman have loved him as Rachel loved him" (p. 192). Pretending a change of heart, Rachel gives him up so he can be free. Involved in an argument over politics and social reform, Michael impulsively shoots an associate and is sentenced to eight years in prison. Released from his prison term early because he has tuberculosis, Michael encounters Rachel, now a well-known artist, and she takes care of him until his death.

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[6]Frederick McDowell, Ellen Glasgow and the Ironic Art of Fiction (Madison, Wisconsin, 1960), p. 62.

Rachel's inner powers allow her to transcend her frustrations as an artist, her loss of social reputation, and her desertion by Michael. She is regenerated into an artist and a strong woman. When Michael leaves her, Rachel returns to her work and completes her portrait of Magdalen. Shown as the work of an anonymous painter, the portrait is hailed as a masterpiece and the critics guess that Rachel is the artist because the work possesses her strength and beauty. The Magdalen is described as possessing eyes which show "every emotion of which the human heart is capable—every emotion except remorse" (p. 264).

In presenting her first "new woman," Miss Glasgow portrays the desire of woman to express herself. Just as Miss Glasgow became a well-known novelist, Rachel achieves fame as an artist. In her treatment of the unconventional love affair between Rachel and Michael, Ellen Glasgow is criticizing woman's position as the victim of male chivalry by which the male creates in his own mind an ideal of womanhood, an ideal which he seeks for a wife, but which seldom satisfies his deepest sex instincts. Rachel is the victim of the double standard. While Michael loses nothing, she suffers exile from society. When Rachel's painting achieves fame, Mrs. Van Doren, a distant relative of Rachel, is outspoken in her disapproval because to her Rachel's success and brilliant reappearance after having "got under a cloud" was only adding "an impertinence to infamy" (p. 256). At first Rachel was all that Michael wanted, but then he decides he wants honor and respect and the stability of Anna Allard. Rachel Gavin, Miss Glasgow's first emancipated woman, anticipates certain themes, situations, values, and character types of future "new women."

Another early example of the "new woman" is Betty Ambler in Battle Ground (1902). In A Certain Measure Miss Glasgow describes Betty "as the spirit that fought with gallantry and gaiety and in defeat remained undefeated" (p. 5). Betty, with her red hair and freckles and high spirits, adjusts to the hardships of the war and survives to help build the New South. Always in the background while the lovely Virginia is praised, the capable Betty helps her mother run the plantation. It is Betty who supervises the parties and tastes the plum pudding, who walks three miles in the snow to carry gifts for the free Negro, Levi, and who stays up all night filling Christmas stockings for the slaves. When their neighbor Mrs. Lightfoot is ill, it is Betty whom she asks to stay with her and to run her household. Weaker Virginia depends upon Betty for everything. Self-conscious of her red hair and freckles which were not considered in vogue for the Southern beauty, Betty tries to conjure her hair dark and attempts to dye it in walnut juice, and she devotedly uses buttermilk on her face to bleach out her freckles. Betty is self-reliant, and when she is happy she works in her garden, and when she is hurt, she shuts her bedroom door and rearranges her clothes. In love with Dan Montjoy since her teens, she patiently waits through his infatuation with Virginia and then through the war years for him to return her love. Betty bravely keeps the family and the plantation together during the war and even wards off a deserted soldier from her bedroom with a gun. After the war, Betty and Dan are reunited and begin a new life in the reconstructed South. With her courage and faith in the future, Betty hopefully tells Dan, "We will begin together" (p. 287).

Betty possesses the "new woman" qualities of "vein of iron" endurance and fortitude that enables her to overcome the disappointments and hardships of the war and the Reconstruction and to build a new life with Dan.

In The Romance of a Plain Man (1909) Miss Matoaca presents a "pathetic contraction as she worked for the liberation of women, while she was the slave of an ancestry of men who oppresses women" (p. 163). With a Bland for a father and a Fairfax for a mother, Miss Matoaca is upheld by family pride and is very upset that her niece Sally Mickleborough could develop an interest in Benn Starr. Once engaged to General Bolingbroke, Miss Matoaca had broken the engagement because she had learned of his involvement with another woman and she refused to accept the double standard. Miss Matoaca takes an active interest in women's rights and she enjoys reading articles on the "emancipation of women" in the newspapers, but does not have the courage to buy them without stating that there was no man available to purchase them for her. Aunt Matoaca dies of a heart attack while marching in a parade to urge the extension of suffrage to women. A transitional spinster figure, Aunt Matoaca represents the "great tradition" in her "principles," but anticipates the "emancipated woman" in her views on women's rights.

In contrast to Virginia Pendleton, the ideal Southern lady in Virginia (1913), is her friend Susan Treadwell. Also a product of Miss Batte's Dinwiddie Academy for Young Ladies, Susan is born with an inquiring mind and natural intelligence which overcomes the defects of her education. Susan expresses a desire to go to college, but her father believes her place is in the home. After many years of serving her invalid mother,

Susan finally marries John Henry, the man she has loved since her youth, and raises a fine family. In contrast to the delicate Virginia, Susan retains her healthful, attractive appearance and keeps up with the new styles. When Virginia returns to Dinwiddie after Oliver has left her, it is the strong and capable Susan who comforts her. Possessing strength of will and common sense, Susan adjusts to the changing times and thus achieves a life of meaning and happiness.

Another spinster who rebels against custom is Isabella Archbald in The Sheltered Life (1932). Instead of weeping or piously retiring after inadvertently acquiring the appearance of improper conduct, Isabella elopes with the family carpenter. The complete opposite of her sister Etta, Isabella is handsome, robust, warm-hearted, and dashing in the latest styles. Isabella was engaged to Thomas Lunsford, but went riding with another man and stayed out until almost dawn. When Thomas reprimanded her, high-spirited Isabella offered to release him, and he broke the engagement. Blameless in thought and act, but tarnished in reputation, Isabella was urged by the family to go to bed until the scandal blew over, but she refused to immure herself. When Thomas and the other young men ceased to call, Isabella soothed her injured pride by playing her piano and turned her attentions to the carpenter, Joseph Crocker. Although Thomas wished to renew the engagement, Isabella refused him and eloped with Joseph because "life is too short not to have the right man for your first husband at least" (p. 98). The family is greatly upset that she has married out of her class and traces the family history of the Crockers to find that they are "good people," but unfortunately are

Baptist and not Episcopalians. While the other characters have their problems, Isabella is happily married and the mother of three children. Though she dared to defy tradition, Isabella finds happiness, while Eva Birdsong and Jenny Archbald are crushed by the "sheltered life."

After her full-length study of woman as an ideal conforming to the Victorian tradition in Virginia, Miss Glasgow wished to write a companion study "concerned with woman not as an ideal, but as a reality, and with the completed and final departure from that 'Great Tradition'" (A Certain Measure, p. 97). She created Gabriella Carr in Life and Gabriella (1916), "a character of native energy and independence, blessed with a dynamic philosophy and quick relish for the immediate, a symbol of the economic order" (p. 97). Gabriella is a victor over the Southern tradition and circumstance. Rather than resign herself to genteel poverty and dependence upon relatives, she goes to work and builds a meaningful life: "I'd rather die than be dependent all my life and I'm going to earn my living if I have to break rocks to do it" (Life and Gabriella, p. 23). Miss Glasgow has great sympathy for Gabriella as she battles the enveloping twin powers of decay and inertia in the Richmond of 1890. In the character of Gabriella, Miss Glasgow traces the rise of the new spirit in the South in terms of emergence of independence and new opportunities for women. As Gabriella establishes a life for herself, she grows "farther and farther from tradition, from accepted opinions, from the dogmas and ideals of the ages" (p. 307), and advances with modern times. Although an emancipated woman, Gabriella remains a "lady" and preserves the qualities of honor, duty, and responsibility.

Brought up in the same atmosphere of "evasive idealism" cultivated by her long-suffering and helpless widowed mother and her martyr sister Jane, Gabriella revolts against Richmond tradition by accepting a job at the drygoods store to help support her family and by breaking her engagement to Arthur Peyton, the perfect ineffectual gentlemen. Young, attractive Gabriella falls in love with and marries George Fowler, a handsome New Yorker, who proves to be lazy, selfish, disloyal, and a heavy drinker. Unable to earn a living or to provide a real home, George is entirely dependent upon his wealthy parents with whom the couple go to live in New York. After only a few months marriage, George comes home late at night inebriated. Repulsed and repelled, Gabriella, who had waited up to tell him of their expected child, stops loving him that night, although they live together for several years and have another child. When Mrs. Fowler tells Gabriella that George has run away with Florrie Spenser, once Gabriella's friend in Richmond, Gabriella is not really hurt because she had stopped loving him long ago. She had seen the sordid and ugly sides of sex, and she felt now a disgust for the emotion which drew men and women together. At twenty-seven Gabriella felt that love for men is over and that there must be something else that is truer, profounder, than love. When Mrs. Fowler tells Gabriella that she is too hard, she answers, "I suppose I am hard and I am going to stay so. There is safety in hardness" (p. 180). Gabriella's father-in-law goes broke, and because of his financial problems and his son's behavior, he has a heart attack and dies. Mrs. Fowler returns to her home in Virginia, and Gabriella decides to go to work. Further breaking from tradition,

Gabriella obtains a divorce from the worthless George. The "vein of iron" fortitude enables Gabriella to face reality and to endeavor to make a new life for herself and her two children.

Because she has a natural talent for designing, Gabriella applies for a job at Madame Dinnard's Shop, an exclusive dress shop in New York. She asks Miss Polly Hatch, an old-maid friend from Richmond, to help with the children. Determined to succeed, Gabriella develops a large clientele and eventually buys the shop. Gabriella represents the "new woman" in business competition with men and tradition. For an interim of fifteen years she never makes friends, never sees the city, and cuts herself off from all interests and emotions. Although Gabriella achieves success, her life seems empty. She feels that her success ought to have been so much more vital, so much more satisfying and complete. At the rooming house where she and the children live she meets Ben O'Hara, a robust self-made man, who at first repulses her, but upon whom she learns to depend. Blair Rouse asserts that the model for Ben O'Hara, the Irish businessman, is a man whom Miss Glasgow knew, liked and respected, when she lived in New York, although he was of another social stratum.[7] During the years, George has been reduced to poverty and has become an alcoholic. Old and dissipated, George comes to Gabriella for help, and like Rachel Gavin and Michael in The Descendant, she nurses him until his death. In her disillusionment with love, Gabriella retains the romantic dream of Arthur Peyton. She returns to Richmond to visit her

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[7]Blair Rouse, Ellen Glasgow (New York, 1962), p. 22.

family and Arthur. Smartly dressed and up with the times, Gabriella, who has retained her youth and attractiveness, finds her family still hiding behind its "evasive idealism" and Arthur, old, ineffectual, and tradition-bound. Returning to New York, Gabriella realizes the good qualities of Ben O'Hara and decides to marry him. Unlike Miss Glasgow's other "new women," Gabriella is allowed to recover from a disastrous marriage and to find true love.

An emancipated woman, Gabriella retains the qualities of a lady but realizes the need to change with the times and to face life. Possessing the "vein of iron" fortitude, she triumphs over adverse conditions and finds meaning in life in endeavor, enterprise, and courage. She proves that a Southern girl can create a worthwhile life and achieve happiness and that she need not be a victim of circumstances and the code of gentility. Rouse comments that the image of Gabriella is blurred because Ellen Glasgow introduced into her character too much of herself, and at times Gabriella may have become the woman whom the novelist liked to believe herself to be.[8]

Most critics believe that the best liked of all Miss Glasgow's heroines and one of her most memorable and impressive characters is Dorinda Oakley in Barren Ground (1925). Dorinda Oakley, more than any other character, represents Ellen Glasgow's personal life and attitudes, her fortitude, her triumph over obstacles, and her source of strength within herself. In The Woman Within Miss Glasgow wrote that "Barren Ground had been gathered up as a harvest from the whole of her life.

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[8]Rouse, p. 82.

When I began Barren Ground I knew I had found a code of living that was sufficient for life or for death" (pp. 270-271). The book was written after Miss Glasgow had passed courageously and victoriously but with deep pain through one of the major crises of her life; she had experienced an unhappy love affair with Harold S. and was through with personal emotion of a romantic sort. Of her writing at this time, she commented in The Woman Within that "after those intolerable years my best work was to come. They gave me, when they had passed, a deeper source of creation, a more penetrating insight into experience, a truer knowledge of what the human heart can endure without breaking. Beneath dead and dying illusions, Barren Ground was taking form and sustenance in my imagination." (p. 241).

"Dorinda," Miss Glasgow explains, "exists wherever a human being has learned to live without joy, wherever the spirit of fortitude has triumphed over the sense of futility. The book is hers, and all the minor themes, episodes, and impressions are blended with the dominant meaning that character is fate. The philosophy may be summed up in a phrase: 'One may learn to live, one may even learn to live gallantly without delight'" (A Certain Measure, p. 154). The quality of "vein of iron" endurance becomes more dependable than a capacity for joy.

In the character of Dorinda, Miss Glasgow decided "that for once, in Southern fiction the betrayed woman would become the victor instead of the victim" (A Certain Measure, p. 160). The heroine would triumph through the deep instinct for survival and hardened by adversity and possessing a vital affirmation of life would overcome circumstances.

The novel includes certain reappearing themes: the betrayal theme, the stoicism in face of disappointment and of withdrawal from the sphere of emotion, and victory of life without joy. Dorinda, as the "new woman," breaks with tradition by placing herself in competition with the men farmers and succeeding in converting the old run-down farm into a thriving modern dairy farm. After disillusionment in love, Dorinda dedicates herself to the land and turns the "barren ground" into fruitfulness and finds a satisfaction in hard work and endurance that transcends happiness. Dorinda symbolizes the revolt of human futility against an exhausted soil and the ultimate barrenness of a life in which fortitude has outlived love.

Commenting upon the inception and development of the character of Dorinda, Miss Glasgow wrote: "I saw her leaning against the white-washed wall of the almshouse. I saw her vivid in the windless blue of an October day, and I felt that the place had a meaning or she would not have chosen it. Fate had linked her with the almshouse, and that one revealing incident was the origin of the novel. Just as she brought with her her own name, the inevitable title of the book, so she gave me in a single phrase the clue to her past: 'Those summer evenings thirty years ago, and this autumn day beside the wall of the poor house.'" (A Certain Measure, pp. 159-160). Ten years passed before Ellen Glasgow began the novel, but she explains that the character of Dorinda had grown since she had first seen her in a fleeting glimpse, and then lost her, and that Dorinda had grown more substantial and more human. Miss Glasgow felt that she and Dorinda had changed and developed together.

Dorinda is the daughter of the "good people" of Virginia in contrast with the "good families" of the Virginian aristocracy, or the "poor-whites." The Oakleys are small independent farmers and possess a large area of useless land covered by scrub pine and broomsedge. Mrs. Oakley was the daughter of a Scotch-Presbyterian missionary who had acquired the land that composed Old Farm, and Mr. Oakley was a member of the "poor-white" class who worked futilely to build up the land. From the differences in background of her parents, Dorinda inherited her personal conflict. At twenty, Dorinda, a tall, attractive brunette, falls madly in love with Jason Greylock, a doctor and one of the decadent aristocratic landowners in the community. When he tells her she should get a blue dress to match her blue eyes, Dorinda takes money that she had been saving to buy the family a cow and buys the dress material. Mrs. Oakley warns Dorinda against making too much of love and marriage: "Marriage is the Lord's own institution, and I s'pose it's a good thing as far as it goes. Only it will never go as far as most women try to make it. You'll be all right married, daughter, if you first make up your mind that what ever happens, you ain't going to let any man spoil your life" (Barren Ground, p. 89). Dorinda's resolution that no man would spoil her life is part of her "vein of iron" fortitude. Although Jason promises to marry Dorinda and she is planning her wedding, he is convinced by his father that he should marry Geneva Ellgood of one of the better families in the area. Abandoned and pregnant, Dorinda attempts to shoot Jason, but fails. Dorinda is determined that she will not let Jason ruin her life, that the "vein of iron" in her nature

would never bend. She flees to New York where she steps in front of a buggy, the accident resulting in the loss of the expected child. The kindly doctor who attends her asks her to be the governess for his children and for two years she stays in New York. Dorinda dates a young doctor, but when he asks to see her again, she exclaims, "I've finished with all that sort of thing" (p. 202). After her disillusionment in love, Dorinda feels revulsion to the physical aspect of love. The thought of love and the reminder of its potency filled her with aversion and she searches for something in life besides love. When her father dies she returns to Old Farm to try to rework the land and to start a dairy farm.

Dorinda realized without despair that the general aspect of her life would be one of unbroken monotony, that nothing would last through to the end except courage. She was through with love, and echoing Ellen Glasgow's sentiments exclaims, "Oh, if the women who wanted love could only know the infinite relief of having love over!" (p. 262). After her return Dorinda encounters Jason face to face and feels no emotion toward him. When he tells her she has become hard, she answers, "Yes I am through with soft things" (p. 260), and turns her back on him and walks away. As the years pass, Dorinda, even though she has removed Jason from her thoughts, still continues to see him in her dreams in the form of thistles which bear his face. Although she is successfully building up the farm, at times Dorinda feels that life has cheated her and she longs for something indestructibly desirable and satisfying. Dorinda works hard and by adapting modern farm methods triumphs over

the barren land. A hard worker and friendly employer, Dorinda commands the respect of the Negroes who enjoy working for her, although they would not work for the other farmers in the area. Eventually, to help with the farm, Dorinda enters into a marriage of convenience with Nathan Pedlar, a widower and long-time friend, with the understanding that the marriage will never be consummated. With Nathan's help, Dorinda is able to purchase Five Oaks from Jason Greylock and gain control over a large area. She feels partly avenged for the heartbreak Jason had caused her. Nathan dies a hero rescuing people from a terrible train wreck and a monument is erected in his honor. Ironically, Dorinda admires and appreciates him more in death than while he was alive. Dorinda is left to spend her later years with her faithful Negro cook and trusted friend, Fluvanna.

The years pass and with them the old bitterness. She outlived both love and hatred. She had missed love, but where the love for a human being had failed her, the devotion to the land had satisfied. To the land she had given her mind and heart with the abandonment that she had found disastrous in any human relation. The "vein of iron" had supported her through adversity; the strong impulses which had once wrecked her happiness were the forces that had enabled her to rebuild her life out of the ruins, and the reckless courage that had started her on the dubious enterprise of her life had hardened into the fortitude with which she had triumphed.

While Dorinda becomes a prominent landowner, her betrayer, Jason Greylock, degenerates into a drunken pauper and loses his medical practice. His delicate blond wife Geneva, unhappy because of a loveless

and childless marriage, becomes deranged and drowns herself. Jason—weak, broken, and dying—suffers because of his failure to work the land, "For it is not sin that was punished in this world or the next; it was failure" (p. 314). A defeated man reduced to living in poverty in an old shack, Jason is symbolically identified with the thistle. Dorinda goes to the poorhouse to get him and bring him back to Old Farm where she can take care of him until he dies. The girl by the almshouse, as Miss Glasgow explained, was the original situation of the novel. As Dorinda stands outside the shack where Jason has been living, she reflects on what has happened to Jason: "If only she had known! If only she could have looked ahead to this moment! Those summer evenings thirty years ago, and the autumn day beside the wall of the poorhouse" (p. 428). She realizes that even if she had stood still, if she had not lifted a finger to help, time would have avenged her. Dorinda nurses Jason until he dies. Standing at his grave she reminisces: "More than thirty years of effort and self-sacrifice—for what? She had no control over her memories. Memories that had outlived emotions. She felt no sorrow for Jason. He was nothing to her; yet her lost youth was everything. What she mourned was not love that she had had and lost, but the love that she had never known in her life" (pp. 444-445). After Jason's funeral, Dorinda spends a tormented night dreaming of her lost youth and the emptiness of never having love. In the morning she wakes up fresh, the storm over outside and within herself. She goes out into the clear flame of the sunrise where:

> . . . the land which she had forgotten was waiting to take her back to its heart. Endurance. Fortitude. The spirit of the land was flowing into her, and her own spirit,

> strengthened and refreshed, was flowing out again toward life. This was the permanent self, she knew. This was what remained to her after the years had taken their bloom. She would find happiness again. Not the happiness for which she had once longed, but the serenity of mind which is above the conflict of frustrated desires. 'Put your heart in the land,' old Matthew had said to her. 'The land is the only thing that will stay by you.' Yes, the land would stay by her. Her eyes wandered from far horizon to horizon. Again she felt the quickening of that sympathy which was deeper than all other emotions of her heart—the living communion with the earth under her feet. While the soil endured, while the seasons bloomed and dropped, while the ancient, beneficient ritual of sowing and reaping moved in the fields, she knew that she could never despair of contentment. (p. 449)

Dorinda renounces human love and puts her faith in the land. Defeated in the temporary personal demands of love, she abandons them for the concept of deeper fulfillment, inner satisfaction, and stoicism, the basic human qualities symbolized by the land. The permanency of things of the land fortifies individual courage in the face of life.

Significant throughout the novel is the imagery of the broomsedge, the flower of desolation that covers the "barren ground." The austerity and barrenness of Dorinda's life is emphasized by the sense of sterility and the oppressive atmosphere of the enveloping broomsedge. Old Matthew Fairlamb tells Dorinda, "You've got to conquer the land in the beginning or it'll conquer you before you're through with it. Broomsedge ain't just wild stuff. It's a kind of fate" (p. 14). McDowell points out that most of the crucial scenes of the novel—Dorinda's betrayal, her departure to New York, her marriage to Nathan, and Jason's death—take place against the broomsedge in the autumn and establish an autumn mood of melancholy.[9] At times the broomsedge seems to engulf

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[9]McDowell, p. 152.

life and to be impenetrable, but Dorinda fights and conquers the wild freedom of the broomsedge. Joan Santas comments that to Dorinda's people, fighting the broomsedge was "like fighting the wild, free principle in nature."[10] The broomsedge was the "one growth in the landscape" that thrived on "barrenness; the solitary life that possessed within itself an inexhaustible source of vitality" (Barren Ground, p. 124). Both Dorinda and Miss Glasgow subdue "all that was wild and free in the spirit" (Barren Ground, p. 125), and live a solitary life based on endurance and fortitude and strength within. Also significant is the heart-shaped pine which is the dominant symbol of Section II. Deep in Dorinda runs the "vein of iron" that enables her to endure. Like the tall pine tree that reaches far down into the rich earth for its sustenance, she too can draw upon her indomitable will and unconquerable courage for strength and energy.

Many of Ellen Glasgow's personal attitudes are evident in Dorinda Oakley's love for animals, her capacity for friendship with some men, her kindness to Nathan's children, and her firm justice with the Negroes. Dorinda, like Miss Glasgow, feels hostility toward other men and aversion to physical love. Ellen Glasgow's life was saddened by illness, an increasing deafness that turned her even further in upon herself, and personal disappointment that convinced her that she would never find happiness. Miss Glasgow ultimately turned to reliance on personal fortitude, and her experiences lead her to believe that all things eventually fade and that only individual will endures.

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[10]Joan Foster Santas, Ellen Glasgow's American Dream (Charlottesville, Virginia, 1965), p. 158.

Rouse feels that neither Dorinda nor her creator were clear about the final assessment of Dorinda's life. He asserts that Ellen Glasgow would like to believe that Dorinda had triumphed through hard work and fortitude. Yet the closing pages of the novel show that Dorinda, looking back over her years, seems uncertain and tries to convince herself of her own victory, that she needed to believe that she had learned to live without love, that fortitude and the power of beauty were enough; yet, she was not sure.[11]

Dorinda is a very impressive character as she develops from a young girl into a strong, magnificent woman. Dorinda embodies the qualities of the "new woman" in her ability to break with tradition, to face life realistically, and to build a life for herself amidst heartbreak and disappointment. Dorinda Oakley, a very memorable heroine, reflects more of Miss Glasgow than do any of her other characters.

Though Miss Glasgow did not again match Dorinda Oakley, she continued to study the "new woman" in other novels. For example, Ada Fincastle in Vein of Iron (1935) also represents the "new woman" who will not be defeated by frustration and disappointment. Ada carries her Scotch-Irish Presbyterian "vein of iron" heritage into the alien modern world and adapts to discouraging situations of World War I and the Depression.

In a letter to Miss Forbes, 1935, Miss Glasgow wrote that "in Vein of Iron I was torn up by the roots from the experience and observation

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[11]Rouse, p. 95.

and reflections of a lifetime. My father's ancestors had helped to conquer and to settle the Valley of Virginia."[12] In a letter to John Chamberlain, 1935, she wrote that "what I tried to do was to look through human nature and human behavior, and to discover the motives or qualities of endurance, that have enabled mankind to survive in any order. I have tried to trace the hidden motive, this 'vein of iron,' the unbreakable will to live that we call fortitude."[13]

Ada's family descended from the early Scotch-Irish pioneers who settled the Southern part of the Great Valley of Virginia when it was Indian country. Similarly, Ellen Glasgow's father's ancestors were early Scottish settlers in the Valley, and her Aunt Rebecca, who is partly the model for Aunt Meggie Fincastle, used to sing Scottish ballads and tell the stories of the Waverly novels.[14] Ada's father is a Presbyterian minister who is deprived of his charge because of his unorthodox beliefs and his philosophical writing. He retires to the village of Ironside to become a contemplative philosopher and teacher. Her mother, Mary Evelyn, gentle, lovely and sensitive, was bred in the "Tidewater tradition" and is representative of the genteel life that is passing.

Reared in the small village of Ironside, Ada matures, guided by a strong heritage. She falls in love with and becomes engaged to Ralph McBride. Happily preparing her trousseau, Ada tells her friend Janet of the plans for the wedding. Shallow and selfish, Janet plots to take

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[12] Letters, p. 202.

[13] Letters, p. 201.

[14] Rouse, p. 116.

Ralph away from Ada, and after a party, Janet entices Ralph to come to her room to look at a photograph, then pretends to see a mouse and screams. Her father rushes in, sees the two together, and forces Ralph to marry Janet, who was already pregnant. Janet lies about Ralph's being the father of her child and the tradition-bound community compels him to marry her. Although Ralph loves Ada and is innocent, he does not rebel against the community or his fanatically religious mother. This episode begins the series of disappointments and hardships that Ada subsequently faces.

Ada remains with her family and turns down future offers of marriage because of her love for Ralph. When her mother dies, Ralph returns to Ironside for the funeral and tells Ada that he still loves her and that he will soon be free because Janet is seeking a divorce so that she can marry a wealthy man. Ralph is going into the army and has only three days before he leaves for France. They decide to go off together to a lodge in the mountains; together again after six years of being apart, they make plans to marry when Ralph returns. Later, when Ada realizes that she is pregnant, she does not write Ralph because she does not want to worry him and bears the disgrace alone. Because Grandmother Fincastle is distressed about the situation, Ada isolates herself in her mother's old room until the birth of the baby. But when Ada has the baby, it is the strong, reliant Grandmother who aids her in childbirth. Although Ralph loves Ada and they are married when he returns, she senses something is missing. But Ada feels that it is not merely loving that matters; it is belonging together, and she hopes for better times and happiness with him and the child.

Ralph, a disappointed romantic, gives up his plans to be a lawyer and takes a job as a car salesman. When he takes the flirtatious neighbor girl, Minna, for a ride in a demonstrator car, they have a wreck and his legs are paralyzed. Adapting to modern times, Ada bobs her hair in the latest style and goes to work at Shadwell's Department Store selling and mending gloves, feeling that as long as Ralph depended upon her she could face anything. When the Depression comes, Ada's salary is cut and she is eventually laid off from work. After her father's death, she and Ralph decide to return to the old homeplace in the valley in hopes that they can make a living at Ironside. In a letter to John Chamberlain, 1935, Miss Glasgow explained that Ralph and Ada did not return to the farm to symbolize the agricultural life, but that they return to a simpler way of living.[15] As they return to the small village where they fell in love, Ada reminisces that they have had a poor life, but they have been happy together, and she is content with the thought that Ralph depends upon her. Like Dorinda Oakley, she reflects upon the youthful ideas of happiness and the realized satisfaction of maturity: "He depended upon her. 'Never, not even when we were young,' she thought, with a sudden glow of surprise, 'was it so perfect as this'" (Vein of Iron, p. 395).

Ada is the "new woman" who possesses the "vein of iron" temperament which enables her to break with tradition and face the modern world. Ada, like Dorinda Oakley, is scarred by disappointment and hardship, but her fortitude resists evil and difficulty as she struggles to support her

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[15] Letters, p. 201.

child and unsuccessful husband. The old tradition almost ruined the lives of Ada and Ralph, but Ada's courage enables her to bear her misery, while Ralph suffers from his fear of softness and from his hostility to life. Ada dares to love and to bear a child out of wedlock, and she rejects the community of Ironside once she feels it has cast her out. When the difficulties of the Depression come, Ada gets a job and supports her family. At the end of the novel, it is Ada who is willing to return to the old farm and to try to make a living from what they have. Ada is always able to look on the bright side and make the best of whatever situation faces her. Like Dorinda Oakley, she anticipates the fulfillment of her dreams of love and happiness only to experience the shattering of her hopes. But also like Dorinda, she possesses the strong moral fiber and spiritual resources that enable her to bear suffering and to seek contentment in new or revised plans. Ada represents the capable "new woman" who overcomes obstacles and can shape a successful life.

Roy Timberlake, the "new woman" of In This Our Life (1941) and its sequel Beyond Defeat (1966), is the emancipated woman of the 1920's who is passionately in search of "something good." In a letter to Van Wyck Brooks, 1941, Miss Glasgow writes that the theme of the book was Roy's search for something to give life meaning, that "through her confusion and blind groping she was moving toward that search for 'something good,' and all through the book, I was writing with that cry in my mind."[16] Failure, Miss Glasgow believed, lies not in defeat but in surrender to

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[16] Letters, p. 283.

life. In a letter to Bessie Zabian Jones, 1942, Miss Glasgow explains that "the major theme of In This Our Life was the conflicts of human beings with human nature. In Asa and his daughter Roy, I probed into this. What is the essence, what is the spiritual quality, that will hold a man together after he has lost everything else?"[17] Rouse comments that Roy represents Ellen Glasgow's vision of a member of the younger generation who may find salvation when others are lost.[18] Roy demonstrates the rewards of hope and the triumph of character over circumstances and tribulations that will bend her down to the point of breaking. Roy triumphs over life and resolves to go on "beyond defeat."

In A Certain Measure Miss Glasgow wrote that Roy was the first character of the book to come into her mind: "As she appeared she was saying over and over: 'I want something to hold by. I want something good!'" (p. 255). Miss Glasgow explains that Roy "is that special aspect of youth, that youth of the adventurous heart, of the everlasting search for perfection, of the brave impulse to hazard everything upon the first, or upon the last, chance of happiness. Roy was a part of life. She was not ever on the outside, waiting for something to happen" (p. 235). The use of the name Roy, short for Lavinia Fitzroy, was after the familiar practice in Virginia of calling girls by family names.

Asa Timberlake and his daughter Roy are the two realistic and sensitive members of the family in contrast to Lavinia, the selfish, hypochondriac mother, and Stanley, the beautiful, spoiled, and destructive force

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[17] Letters, p. 301.

[18] Rouse, p. 126.

in all their lives. Roy is Asa's favorite daughter and the only one to whom he can express himself, for "she is the embodiment of his longing for release and escape. Her mockery was a tonic, for she mocked openly at all the images which he feared and obeyed in his conscious mind" (In This Our Life, p. 21). He realizes that she is "stronger than any of us and finer in many ways" (p. 148). He describes her as being "strong and self-reliant and having an unyielding hard fine grain of integrity," and "possessing all the qualities that men have missed and wanted in women: courage, truthfulness, a tolerant sense of humor, and loyalty to impersonal ends" (p. 21).

At the beginning of the novel, Roy is married to Peter, a young surgeon, and they are living with her parents while he finishes medical school. As emancipated woman in the twenties, Roy has a job as an interior decorator. Her lovely, vivacious sister Stanley is engaged to Craig Fleming, a lawyer. All her life Roy had to play the second role to Stanley who had always wanted what Roy had, and as a child used to cry for Roy's dolls. Suddenly a few days before her marriage to Craig, Stanley runs away with Peter. Heartbroken but proud, Roy arranges for a divorce and attempts to go on as though nothing had happened. She had always said that Peter knew he was free, and that both of them were perfectly free to change if they wished. Defiantly and pathetically, Roy purchases a red hat in order to show herself, Joan Santas points out, that she does not intend to allow her emotions to become a martyr to her principles, like Virginia Pendleton's and Dorinda Oakley's surrender to temptations to purchase blue dress material.[19] Determined to face reality

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[19]Santas, p. 217.

her way, Roy tells her father, "I won't go soft. If I let myself go soft, I'm done for. I have to face things my own way. Nobody can help me. I don't want help. I don't want pity. My life isn't ruined. Nobody could ruin my life" (p. 147). Convincing herself that her life was her own and that she would not let it be spoiled, Roy works as an interior decorator and hides her sorrow at night. Searching for an abiding love, Roy turns to Craig for comfort and their friendship develops into love. In the meantime, Stanley has driven Peter to suicide and returns home the "grieving widow." In a short time Stanley takes Craig away from Roy. While driving her new car Stanley runs down a child and is protected by her family until Asa forces her to tell the truth. A victim of Stanley's selfishness and self-indulgence, Roy must rely on her inner strength to face the frustration of losing the two men in her life. Only her father gives Roy a sense that life may be meaningful despite all disillusion, but he cannot give her the complete assurance for which she is seeking.

Realizing that she has lost love again, Roy rushes out into the rainy night to forget all those whose love had failed her and to shatter the pattern of her life. She encounters a lonely English soldier whom she feels needs love more than she does and who is leaving for the war and they go to a house of his friend. In the morning Roy leaves without even knowing his name. Walking home in the windless dawn, Roy feels she has overtaken time and can begin again. Returning home she gathers her clothes and tells Asa good-bye, "I want something to hold by. I want something good!" (p. 466).

In A Certain Measure Miss Glasgow writes that the final incident with the stranger in the strange house was actually the beginning of the

book and an illumination of the major theme (p. 256). "For Roy," she writes, "this meeting with this stranger who needed love more than she needed it, and was less likely to find it, served as a flare of light in the darkness of her own mind" (p. 256). When Roy went out after the storm was over, she felt as if she were walking into another world, and when she told her father good-bye she was in search of "something good." Miss Glasgow imagined the book to close in the stern accents of "our unconquerable hope."

Beyond Defeat continues the story of Roy. In a letter to Frank Morley, 1943, Miss Glasgow wrote that the sequel deals with the major figures in the earlier novel and the scene is placed three years after the close of In This Our Life.[20] After having been deserted by Peter for her sister who drives him to suicide, abandoned by Craig, bearing an illegitimate child by the unknown English soldier, and suffering loneliness and illness in a distant city, Roy returns to Queensborough bearing the scars of defeat and despair. After having borne the child alone in a strange city, Roy developed pneumonia and then tuberculosis. Threatened with losing her son Tim to strangers, she returns home in hopes of finding comfort and help. Having lost most of her dash and vigor, Roy now has momentary tendencies to self-pity and asks herself, "Do we always return to the place where we have suffered most?" (p. 5). Because of her adherance to tradition and her own selfishness, Lavinia refuses to allow Roy and her son to live in her house. Roy refuses to give up Timothy because he "belongs to the endless becoming, which was the unknown, the future" (p. 20). After thirty years of troubled marriage, Asa has left Lavinia

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[20] Letters, p. 340.

to help manage Kate Oliver's farm. Meanwhile, Stanley has left Craig and married a rich man in California. Craig realizes that he needs and still loves Roy. As the book ends, Roy and Craig are to be married and Asa and Kate are going to take care of Tim while Roy undergoes treatment for tuberculosis. In a letter to Frank Morley, 1943, Miss Glasgow explains that Lavinia embodies the dying or dead past, so deeply planted in tradition and in a declining social order, that she is unable to adjust to a changing world, or to accept the unknown future, of which Roy's child by an unknown father is the living symbol.[21] A "new woman" of the 1920's, Roy had "fought on 'beyond defeat' and had won the kind of peace that is victory" (p. 18). She had triumphed over life and had found her "something good," in the form of her child Tim and in her love for Craig.

Another "new woman" of the 1920's is "thoroughly modern" Milly Burden, one of the three fallen women depicted by They Stooped to Folly. "With Milly Burden," who had discovered that "being ruined is a state of mind," Miss Glasgow commented in A Certain Measure, "we encounter immoderate youth in revolt" (p. 243). In the 1920's Milly feels no compunction for having loved a man outside of marriage. McDowell asserts that Milly represents the newer generation who feel indifference to inherited standards and who find quaintly ridiculous the enforced retirement formerly visited upon the lady who fell from virtue.[22] Women had forgotten their

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[21] Letters, p. 340.

[22] McDowell, p. 171.

modesty even in Queensborough, where modesty, though artfully preserved, was by no means invulnerable. Whereas "poor Aunt Agatha" and Mrs. Dalrymple repented for their sins, Milly treats the feminine sense of sin with the casual modern touch; she mourns the loss of her lover, not her virtue.

The character of Milly is presented through the eyes of her benevolent employer and her mother. Mrs. Burden's narrow evangelical piety had driven Milly to secret meetings with Martin Welding. When Milly realized she was pregnant, Martin had already left for Europe and she was left to bear the denouncements of her mother alone. A "new woman" relying on herself, Milly gets a job as secretary with Mr. Littlepage, who comprehends that being ruined is a state of mind and therefore does not consider Milly disgraced. Never acknowledging her pregnancy to Martin, Milly writes him cheerful letters. The child dies at birth and Milly continues to work for Mr. Littlepage. Determined to live her own life, to find her own happiness, and to make her own mistakes, Milly tells her employer, "I have a right to my own happiness as long as I play the game fairly. My life is my own. I haven't hurt anybody but myself" (p. 22). Milly had given herself to Martin because she loved him, and when he left for Europe she wanted him back. When Mr. Littlepage's daughter Mary Victoria goes to Europe to work with the Red Cross, he asks her to find Martin. She does, and she marries him unaware of Milly and the situation. When the couple return from Europe, Mary Victoria discovers the truth about Martin and Milly and asks her father to speak to Martin. Eventually Martin leaves Mary

Victoria and Milly. Milly realizes she does not love him or want him any more and she lets him go. Still searching for "something worth loving," she is glad to be leaving Queensborough and "to be free to begin everything over again" (p. 303).

Described as not pretty, but vital, human and exciting, Milly is the young emancipated woman of the 1920's determined to live her own life as she pleases. Because of her independence, Milly frees herself from the tyranny of male chivalry and completely breaks with the old tradition.

A modern spinster who makes a life for herself is Louisa Goddard, the "perfect clubwoman" in They Stooped to Folly. In love with Virginius Littlepage for thirty-one years, Louisa has buried her love for him beneath "beautiful behavior." Louisa is the best friend of his wife Victoria and takes an affectionate interest in the affairs of the Littlepage family. In A Certain Measure Miss Glasgow writes that "Louisa is the perfect clubwoman, whose friendship for Victoria rises, I think to the highest point of my narrative. It is seldom in modern fiction that a friendship between two women, especially a pure and unselfish friendship, with both women loving the same man has assumed a prominent place" (p. 244).

Tall and majestic with silver hair, Louisa has become more attractive with age, and throughout the years has received proposals of marriage from Virginius's brother Marmaduke. It is Louisa who tells Mr. Littlepage of his daughter's marriage to Martin, and when Victoria dies, it is Louisa to whom she entrusts the care of her daughter and Virginius. Wealthy by inheritance, Louisa takes great interest in public and social

problems and lectures on social reform.

Reared under the "code of beautiful behavior," Louisa follows its precepts, but in her advanced opinions and independent spirit she is the "new woman." She is confined to the limitations and proscriptions imposed by the Great Tradition, but silently rebels. Like Ellen Glasgow, she conforms in her actions to a tradition against which she is in intellectual revolt. When Mary Victoria chases after Martin who has deserted both her and Milly, Louisa reflects upon woman's situation in the Victorian past and now in the liberal twenties:

> This was the kind of thing no woman, at least no woman who was a Southern lady, could have done in the last century. Never, could Louisa have run after a man. The women of her age had waited silently for what they had wanted, spinning their intricate webs with the eternal patience of nature; and when what they wanted did not come because he was caught elsewhere, they continued to wait and to spin as long as the gossamer threads held together. 'I wonder which way is best?' Is it better to cling to modesty until you lose everything else, or to waste it like rose leaves in the long pursuit of delight? 'But what is love, after all?' she asked, 'and who has ever found it by seeking?'
>
> An old torment, the torment of hope and of long waiting shuddered back from her heart to her nerves. 'I could never go through it now. No woman of today could go through it and live.' Being a woman, she knew what she could never bring herself to tell him, that the modesty of the past was a false, not a true, deity, and delighted in sacrifice. No, it wasn't worth it. Nothing was worth all the deceit, all the anguish, all the futile hope and uneffectual endeavour, all the pretense and parade, all the artificial glamour and empty posturing, of the great Victorian tradition. So relentless was the clutch of the past. She knew what it had all meant to women. She had lived through the ages of waiting, knew every throb, ache, pang, quiver. She had lived through it all. For her heart had cracked and broken as quietly as the hearts of all perfect Southern ladies broke beneath the enamel surface of beautiful behavior. And now, cool, composed, indulgent, self-contained, and easily amused, she watched with sympathy the liberal manners of the new century. (pp. 286-287)

Caroline Meade in The Builders (1919) is also a career woman who depends upon her inner strength. A trained nurse, she is the main support of her widowed mother and unmarried younger sister. Having been disappointed in love when her fiance deserted her for a shallow blonde, she does not allow herself to be defeated by the situation and is determined "to make something out of nothing" and "to build with courage." Caroline establishes a useful life for herself as a nurse, rebuilding her life upon service and intellectual interests. Commenting to her mother, she says, "There must be something one can live on beside love or half the world would be famished" (p. 7). When Caroline goes to work for the Blackburns as the nurse for the child Letty, she and David Blackburn fall in love. He comes to depend upon her as an intellectual companion and they share a contented relationship of mutual need and friendship.

In summary, the "new woman" embodies more of the personal attitudes of Miss Glasgow than any of her other characters. Ellen Glasgow herself broke with tradition and achieved fame as a novelist. Hindered by deafness and physical frailty, she depended upon inner strength to triumph over life. Having experienced two unhappy love affairs, Ellen Glasgow wrote, "If falling in love could be bliss, I discovered that falling out of love could be blissful tranquility" (The Woman Within, p. 241). She felt that love and marriage were given too much emphasis and that there must be something else for women outside the limits of marriage and motherhood. Most of her "new women" characters experience the same type of feeling. All are disappointed in love, but survive their defeat and become stronger women; all avow that they are through with "soft things."

The "new woman" with her fortitude and courage and with her spirit to venture into new fields can adjust to the changing times and can achieve happiness. Miss Glasgow felt that the only triumph over life lies in the refusal to accept defeat. The title page of Vein of Iron expresses the thought in two lines taken from Wordsworth's Prelude:

> Effort and expectation and desire
> And something evermore about to be.

Miss Glasgow and her "new women" characters, Dorinda Oakley, Gabriella Carr, and Ada Fincastle, personify the break with the old tradition and the emergence of the emancipated woman who was instrumental in the building of the New South. Rouse comments that Miss Glasgow was greatly concerned with the "new woman," and in her first novel, The Descendant, appear many didactic passages describing the "new woman," Rachel Gavin, who departs from Virginia in a spirit of rebellion to carve a career in art in New York.[23] Rouse also points to Miss Glasgow's development of Gabriella Carr, the "new lady," living at the turn of the century, who exemplifies the emancipated female gradually winning freedom.[24] Katherine Heinimann in "The Death of the Chivalrous Tradition" asserts that Miss Glasgow was deeply involved in her "new women" heroines and their freedom to develop character, personality, and integrity. In Miss Glasgow's novels the soft helpless woman of the "chivalrous tradition" becomes more self-sufficient and demands the right to develop herself. Katherine

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[23]Rouse, p. 45.

[24]Rouse, p. 82.

Heinimann emphasizes that the two prime virtues of the "new woman" are strength and courage.[25] Robert Spiller comments that Miss Glasgow "rejected chivalry both as the pattern of society in the Old South and as a code of masculine superiority, and that the 'new woman' and the New South were integral parts of her revolt."[26] "In presenting the impact of modernism upon Virginia social tradition," McDowell comments, "Miss Glasgow's sympathies lay with the 'modern' Gabriella Carr as she battles tradition in the Richmond of the 1890's."[27] In The American Dream Joan Santas asserts that "Ellen Glasgow concentrated on novels dramatizing the awakening of Southern womanhood and the 'fighting spirit in transition' between the Old South and the New South."[28]

Ellen Glasgow traces the Southern women of Virginia from the gracious ante-bellum days, through the Reconstruction, the turn of the century, and into the modern twenties. The "new woman" developed from the changing times, and with her strength and courage helped build a new society.

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[25]Katherine Heinimann, "The Death of the Chivalrous Tradition," Forum, V (Fall, 1966), pp. 37, 41.

[26]Robert E. Spiller, The Cycle of American Literature: An Essay in Historical Criticism (New York, 1955), p. 224.

[27]McDowell, p. 127.

[28]Santas, p. 118.

CHAPTER IV

CONTRASTS BETWEEN THE BELLE AND THE "NEW WOMAN"

In portraying the tradition-bound Southern belle and the emancipated "new woman" in her novels, Ellen Glasgow used her own experiences, for the Virginia in which Miss Glasgow grew to womanhood was a changing world as the South moved away from the old tradition. Although Miss Glasgow was reared in that tradition, she rebelled intellectually against the pattern, and in shaping her life as a novelist she personified the "new woman." In The Faith of Our Feminists Josephine Jessup comments that Ellen Glasgow was interested in woman's struggle against traditional oppression and the plight of woman in a man's world.[1]

The Virginia of Miss Glasgow's youth was undergoing transition as industrialism replaced agriculture, government by an oligarchy of caste changed to rural democracy, and the aristocracy dissolved into the rising middle class. Louis Rubin states that the dissolution brought about by the Civil War produced a fragmented society with few rules and codes, and the aristocratic tradition proved inadequate when confronted with the demands of modernity.[2] Although deeply rooted in the gracious tradition of the Old South, Miss Glasgow was born during the emergence of the South into the new era of industrial expansion and broader

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[1]Josephine Jessup, The Faith of Our Feminists: A Study in the Novels of Edith Wharton, Ellen Glasgow, Willa Cather (New York, 1950), p. 34.

[2]Louis D. Rubin, No Place on Earth: Ellen Glasgow, James Branch Cabell, and Richmond-in-Virginia, Supplement to University of Texas Quarterly, II, No. 3 (Austin, 1959), p. 44.

democratic principles in government. The South was emerging into a new way of life based on hard work, courage, and the ability to endure in the face of discouragement and disaster.

Ellen Glasgow's mother represented the gracious and charming lady of the prewar aristocracy, whereas her father, who managed the Tredegar Iron Works in Richmond, symbolized the new spirit that was invading the South and rapidly changing its life and manners. Her mother is presented as the ideal Southern lady possessing beauty, graciousness, the manners of a lady, and the quality of self-sacrifice. Miss Glasgow, herself, is the "new woman" who breaks with the old tradition and makes a life for herself in a changing society.

In A Certain Measure Miss Glasgow wrote of breaking with the old tradition, both in her personal life and her literary work:

> Although I had broken with tradition, I had not escaped entirely from the influence of its emotional patterns. In order to understand the tradition and the way of life in which I had been born and from which I had broken away, it is necessary to glance back over the Southern scene and the Southern literary convention. (pp. 129-130)

> After the war, pursued by the dark furies of Reconstruction, the mind of the South was afflicted with bitter nostalgia. The romantic memories of the South ripened, mellowed, and at last began to decay. To defend the lost became the solitary purpose of the Southern novelist. This writing failed to survive because, though faithful to a moment in history, it was false to human behavior. (pp. 138-139)

> Ideas, forms, were changing, the familiar order going, the beliefs, and certainties. The shelter for men's lives, of religion, convention, social prejudice, was at the crumbling point. (p. 130)

> I was on my way to complete freedom [with the Miller of Old Church]; but it was not until I began to write Barren Ground that I was able to orient myself anew and to respond to a fresh, different creative impulse. (p. 130)

The Southern belle and ideal Southern lady were the products of the tradition of the Old South. They were man's ideal, and for the sake of becoming a romantic legend, the belle sacrificed the right to a rational life outside the emotions and the right to a complete personality. Elizabeth Monroe comments that "in the upper classes, the masculine idea of sex was imposed on women through the tradition of gallantry, in the middle classes through force of will and Calvinistic background."[3]

The era of the belle and ideal lady was governed by the "code of beautiful behavior" and "evasive idealism." McDowell asserts that "the 'evasive idealism' characteristic of the Victorian age in England and in America reached its possible apogee in the South where the legend of a glorious past reinforced an instinctive aversion to unpalatable truths. Nowhere, did this Victorianism, with its false feeling, its excessive nicety, its will to the denial of the ugly, find more sympathetic acceptance than in the South."[4] The women maintained unrealistic optimism and concentrated upon the romantic and the pleasant. McDowell describes the sanctified qualities of the "ideal" woman of the South: "Moral passivity, emotional reticence, the uncomplaining endurance of disappointment, a cheerful recognition of masculine superiority, a joyful acceptance of one's enslavement to the comfort of the family, an unreal existence

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[3]N. Elizabeth Monroe, The Novel and Society (Chapel Hill, 1941), p. 155.

[4]Frederick McDowell, Ellen Glasgow and the Ironic Art of Fiction (Madison, Wisconsin, 1960), p. 114.

among the conventions, of distrust of originality, a reliance upon the emotions rather than the intellect, a pragmatic adoption of the 'short view' rather than the unsettling 'long view.'"[5]

Adhering to an elaborate code of honor, the Southern gentlewoman was all purity and fidelity, and the men paid homage to the beauty and innocence of their ladies. Following the same pattern of their mothers before them, the Southern gentlewomen never thought of rebelling against tradition. In The Romance of a Plain Man Miss Mitty states, "I am perfectly content to think as my grandmother and my great-grandmother before me. It seems almost disrespectful to differ from them" (p. 135).

But Miss Glasgow was fully aware of the hypocrisy of the "code of beautiful behavior" and "evasive idealism" and the contrast between the surfaces of polite life and the substantial realities it evaded. McDowell points out that Mrs. Blake in The Deliverance is characteristic of the hypocrisy inherent in the values of her society.[6] She thus endorses without question a double-standard morality: "Oh, the family was all right, my dear. I never heard a breath against the women" (p. 202). The well-bred woman must conform with exactitude to a propriety from which there is no appeal, and she must exert herself to acquire fine manners rather than a discriminating moral sense. Sitting upright in her massive Elizabethan chair, the elderly, blind and paralyzed Mrs. Blake tells her daughter, "I have never slouched in my life. When my

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[5]McDowell, p. 116.

[6]McDowell, p. 80.

last hour comes, I hope at least to meet my God in the attitude becoming a lady; and in my day it would have been considered the height of impropriety to loll in a chair or even to rock in the presence of gentlemen" (p. 5).

In the character of Virginia Pendleton in Virginia Miss Glasgow also presents the hypocrisy of the code and "evasive idealism" In a letter to Joseph Hergesheimer, 1924, Miss Glasgow wrote that, "My Virginia is as realistic as any production of the Middle West, only realism of that period in Virginia was tinctured with romantic illusion. But I have always looked through a veil of irony even in the days when all fiction wore fancy dress."[7] Rubin comments that Virginia is a novel involving problems of social transition, the efficacy of genteel education in an increasingly commercialized society.[8] The traditional standards of conduct in Richmond were becoming more and more inadequate in the changing South. In describing Virginia as the ideal lady, Miss Glasgow also describes the people of the South at that time:

> Courage, humor, an adherence to conviction which is wedded to the inability to respect any opinion except one's own; loyalty which has sprung from a principle into a passion; a fortifying trust, less in the Power that rules the universe than in the peculiar virtues of the Episcopal prayer book. A capacity for self-sacrifice which made the South a nation of political martyrs; complacency; exaltation, narrowness of vision, and uncompromising devotion to an ideal: —these were the qualities which had passed from the race into the individual and through the individual again back into the very blood and fiber of the race. (Virginia, 1938, p. 101)

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[7]Ellen Glasgow, Letters of Ellen Glasgow, compiled and edited by Blair Rouse, (New York, 1958), p. 70.

[8]Rubin, No Place on Earth, p. 23.

Ellen Glasgow was aware of the defects in the position of the lady of the Old South. Southern gentlewomen had been victims of an evasively idealistic civilization and had not been allowed to develop their own self-expression and personality. Miss Glasgow felt that women must have inner resources, something other than love and marriage for which to live. In her novels, Miss Glasgow presents the "new woman" breaking with tradition and shaping her life through "vein of iron" fortitude. She was greatly interested in self-realization for women.

In her first novel, The Descendant, Miss Glasgow speaks of the "new woman" emerging with the changing times: "For women will have turned upon her real foe, and have rent the mask apart, and lo! She will have looked into the face and seen her own" (p. 83). In an article on "feminism" in Good Housekeeping, 1914, Miss Glasgow commented that, "Feminism is a revolt from the pretense of being—it is at its best and worst a struggle for the liberation of personality."[9]

Although Miss Glasgow was especially concerned with the position of Southern women, she was aware of the feminist movement elsewhere in the United States which resulted in agitation for progress, equality, universal education, and the emancipation of women and women's rights. However, Miss Glasgow's "new women" emerge as the result of special forces and circumstances in the post-war South which were more dramatic than in other sections of the Nation.

The "new woman" emerged with the changing conditions in the New South: the lessening of class consciousness; progress—material and

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[9]"What is Feminism," Good Housekeeping, LXII (May, 1914), 683.

spiritual and cultural; economic and social conditions; and political temper. Tha hardships experienced by women in the South during the Civil War and the Reconstruction paradoxically lead to their enlarged freedom and to their direct agitation for increased rights. Developing with the new era, the emancipated woman wished to establish a good life which was her own and not the ready-made set of reactions and inhibitions of the old pattern.

Of her own courage to break with tradition and to face life, Miss Glasgow wrote in The Woman Within: "Always I have had to learn for myself from within. Always I have persevered in the face of immense disadvantage—in the face of illness, or partial deafness, which came later, to blaze my own trail through the wilderness that was ignorance. To lead one's self is to be forced to live twice. Yet, no doubt it is true, as my friends assure me, that when one hews out from a rock a personality or an understanding it stays fast in the mind. Only a hunger and thirst for knowledge can bring perseverance" (p. 41).

Gabriella Carr in Life and Gabriella (1916) was Miss Glasgow's first "new woman" character to break with tradition by establishing a life for herself outside the restriction of marriage after she divorced her worthless husband. In A Certain Measure Miss Glasgow wrote that "although Gabriella lived only a decade later than Virginia, a whole era of change and action, one of the memorable epochs in history, separated the two women" (p. 97). In the eighties the past as "a state of mind" lingered on, and the value of the Southern woman still lay "in sentiment," or in her ability to ornament "civilization," combined with her legendary

powers to subdue if not to obliterate the male nature. Gabriella rejects the stifling restrictions of the old tradition by obtaining a divorce from her worthless husband and by achieving success in the business world on equal terms with male competition.

Miss Glasgow was greatly concerned that women develop their own personalities and self-expression. Just as she defied tradition in becoming a novelist, her "new women" achieve personal satisfaction in expanding themselves outside the limits of marriage and motherhood. Although she possesses talent, the Southern maiden-lady, Kesiah Blount, is thwarted in her desire to be an artist because it was considered improper for a young Richmond girl to go to Europe to study art. Eva Birdsong abandons her hopes for a career in opera to marry the unworthy George Birdsong and devotes her life to the role of the belle and to her "great love" for George. But the "new woman" Rachel Gavin breaks with tradition and goes to New York to establish herself as an artist. Achieving a career in the business world, Gabriella Carr becomes the owner of an exclusive New York dress shop, and likewise, Caroline Meade becomes a nurse, devoting her life to service for others.

The importance of education for women is demonstrated in the contrast between the belle and the emancipated woman. While the belle was content to remain in the home, the "new woman" demanded education and the opportunity to develop herself. Conforming to the ideal established by men, the Southern belle was to be docile and unconcerned with men's affairs. McDowell asserts that even in spite of high-minded enthusiasm and magnanimity, the post-Reconstructed South had become sterile because of its

resistance to contemporary thought. Most of the advanced ideas in the late nineteenth century ran counter to a feminized culture and were bitterly opposed by the average Southerner who regarded them fearfully as Yankee influences.[10] The tradition-bound Aunt Mitty echoes her father's opinion that all a woman needs to read is the Bible and a cookbook. Mrs. Ambler tells Betty that if the Lord had meant her to be clever, He would have made her a man. According to the old tradition, the best preparation for life was to know nothing about it. The women were trained in unintelligent devotion and they offered no understanding or mental companionship to their husbands. Crushed by her education and training as a genteel lady, Virginia Pendleton cannot adjust to the changing times and thus loses her husband and children to the modern world. The "delicate" Angela Gay is a product of the "evasive idealism" and "never faces an unpleasant fact until it is thrust on her notice." A transitional "new woman," Susan Treadwell possesses an intelligent mind and expresses a desire to attend college, but her father believes a woman's place is in the home. Eugenia Battle is criticized by her intellectually inferior husband for reading Plato.

In contrast to the tradition-bound belles and ideal ladies, the emancipated woman demands an education and the right to develop and to improve herself. Caroline Meade studies to be a nurse, and Louisa Goddard gives lectures on social reform. Milly Burden is a secretary, and Roy Timberlake is an interior decorator. In order to support her

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[10]McDowell, p. 113.

child and unsuccessful husband, Ada Fincastle goes to work in a department store, and Gabriella Carr learns the millinery trade at Madame Dinnard's Dress Shop. From the domestic duties that encompassed the life of Virginia Pendleton, the "new woman" advances to self-expression and self-development through education and careers.

Miss Glasgow felt that there was something more to life for a woman than marriage and motherhood. She was greatly concerned with the women who cannot find expression in their environment, who are superior to it, or who have learned through suffering that love is not all of life. For the belle and ideal lady, love, marriage, and motherhood defined the limit of her existence. The Southern belle existed only to be lovely, gracious, and charming, and concerned herself only with her domestic duties. She was the perfect wife and mother, devoting herself to her husband and children. As the Southern gentlemen's romantic ideal, the Southern woman was forced by a code of honor to be pure and faithful and to accept the double standard, the complete dependence upon man, and the restrictions placed upon the opportunities for women to make a living. In the Victorian tradition, there existed an exaggerated sense of duty and a belief in the submission to the husband. In The Miller of Old Church Mr. Mullen, the local preacher, preached on the text that "the womanly woman remain an Incentive, an Ideal, an Inspiration." Miss Glasgow once remarked that she believed it "almost impossible to overestimate the part that religion, in one form or another, had played in the lives of Southern women. Nothing else could have kept them in their place for so many years and could have made them accept with meekness

the wing of the chicken and the double standards of morals."[11]

Many of the tradition-bound ladies echo Miss Glasgow's feeling that love is not as important as the romantic tradition held it to be. In The Sheltered Life Cora Archbald tells Aunt Etta that "love isn't everything," and "all women who haven't had love overestimate it" (p. 63). In The Romantic Comedians Mrs. Bredalbane states that "the trouble with women who have never married is that you don't realize how little there is in it until you've tried it at least once or twice" (p. 26). Although she was happily married for over forty years, the caustic Mrs. Blake exclaims that even though her husband loved her, she would have been afraid to give him the choice of either her or his dinner. Ironically, one of the ideal ladies, Victoria Littlepage, is grateful that she married a man "who did not have that other side to his nature," and yet she finds something missing in her marriage and regrets his lack of ardor when they were first married. Perhaps the best comment on love and marriage by a Southern woman of the old tradition is made by Virginia Pendleton in Virginia, who in a brief moment of insight realizes that Oliver is growing away from her, and she forces herself to reflect that, "If every woman told the truth to herself, would she say there is something in her that love has never reached" (p. 237).

On the other hand, the "new woman" refuses the shams of the romantic illusion and often learns to live without men or love. In Barren Ground Dorinda Oakley echoes Miss Glasgow's sentiment as she states with infinite

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[11]Sara Haardt, "Ellen Glasgow and the South," Bookman, LXVI (April, 1929), 135.

relief that she is "finished with all that." Rubin points out that it is noteworthy that whenever Miss Glasgow treats sex seriously, from The Descendant (1897) to In This Our Life (1941), it is made into something ugly and ruinous for all concerned.[12] Most of the "new women" experience disappointment in love and later develop an aversion toward physical love. Rachel Gavin does not like kissing, and Molly Merryweather in The Miller of Old Church says, "I suppose most girls like that kind of thing, but I don't" (p. 100). In several of her novels about "new women" Miss Glasgow treats love out of wedlock. Dorinda Oakley, pregnant by Jason Greylock, is abandoned when he marries Geneva Ellsworth. Dorinda flees to New York where she is involved in a traffic accident and loses the baby. Later she returns to the old farm and converts it into a thriving dairy farm. Ada Fincastle bears a child out of wedlock, but marries the father. Milly Burden bears an illegitimate child who dies at childbirth without the father Martin even knowing that she is pregnant. Another "new woman" character, Roy Timberlake, bears the child of an unknown English soldier with whom she slept one night. Whenever sex is involved, it is disastrous for the emancipated woman.

The "new women" are often disappointed in love and proceed to lead a single life. They defy the old tradition of love and marriage. Gabriella Carr defies tradition by obtaining a divorce from her worthless husband and establishes a successful life for herself, while her martyr sister Jane clings to the old pattern and continues to live with

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[12]Rubin, No Place on Earth, p. 40.

an unfaithful husband because the "code" feared scandal. Virginia Pendleton's mother tells Virginia that "a scandal, even when one is innocent, is so terrible, a woman—a true woman would endure death rather than be talked about" (p. 241). Everyone in Queensborough knows that Eva Birdsong has shot her unfaithful husband George, but according to the code, no one will acknowledge the murder, and the Archbalds "ignored facts, defended family honor, shielded a murderer for the sake of saving a name." All the "new women" defy tradition and scandal in their attempts to shape their own lives and to achieve a meaningful life, often as single women.

The emancipated woman is unwilling to be overshadowed by the male and demands the right to develop a personality of her own. Molly Merryweather in The Miller of Old Church feels that marriage is "a sense of bondage; on his part, the man's effort to dominate; on hers, the woman's struggle for the integrity of personality" (p. 199). In contrast to the tradition-bound belle, the "new woman" does not depend upon marriage for meaning in life. Caroline Meade finds satisfaction in her intellectual companionship with David Blackburn, and other emancipated women like Rachel Gavin are content with their careers.

The "new woman" emerged from the economic and social changes in the South brought about by the Reconstruction. With the breakdown of the aristocracy, the rising middle class, and the new industrialism, the women of the New South were able to break with the restraints of the old pattern. Miss Glasgow describes Gabriella Carr as a symbol of the new economic order and as possessing the "true American spirit"—

"optimism springing out of a struggle," "unquenchable youth," "gallantry," and "self-reliance." In her novels presenting the "new woman," Miss Glasgow traces the Southern economic and social life of Virginia, the emergence of an optimistic and bustling New South from "the terrible lethargy which had immediately succeeded the war." In the New South, "the air was already full of promise of the industrial awakening, the constructive impulse, the recovered energy that was to be" (The Romance of a Plain Man, p. 71). In the evolution of the New South, the independent woman developed, the modern woman who rejected the past as insufficient, the emancipated woman who was determined to rise above the social pattern of her class into the life of reason and intellect, one who relied entirely upon the strength of her own will. In the characters of the "new woman," Miss Glasgow satirizes the inconsistences and the inadequacies of the old Southern tradition and the hypocrisies inherent in the conventional social morality of the nineteenth century. Demanding the freedom to shape and to live her own life, the "new woman" breaks with the old tradition. She is a personality in her own right and possesses the "vein of iron" fortitude and the ability to adapt to the changing times.

Blair Rouse writes that the novels involving "new women," Vein of Iron, In This Our Life, Barren Ground, and The Sheltered Life, emphasize growth and decay in a changing social order, a transition in social and moral values or an actual loss of values, and the role of manners in an increasingly unmannered civilization.[13]

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[13]Blair Rouse, Ellen Glasgow (New York, 1962), p. 115.

In a letter to Signe Toksvig, 1944, Miss Glasgow wrote that "the two books of mine I like best are Barren Ground and The Sheltered Life. They are very different, but equally true to experience. For sheer craftsmanship, for swiftness of vision, and for penetration into the hidden truth of life, I value the section of The Sheltered Life called "The Deep Past." But that whole book interprets a dying age and the slowly disintegrating world of tradition."[14]

The major women characters in Miss Glasgow's novels are the Southern belle and ideal Southern lady, and the "new woman." In these women characters, Miss Glasgow traces the emergence of the Southern gentlewoman of the New South. Although Miss Glasgow was reared in the old tradition and adhered to its precepts, she intellectually revolted from the pattern. In her rebellion and in shaping her life as a novelist, Miss Glasgow emerged as the "new woman" of Virginia. Though she favors the "new woman," she presents vividly the Southern belle as being part of the Old South which helped determine the New South.

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[14]Letters, p. 342.

CHAPTER V

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF ELLEN GLASGOW'S MAJOR WOMEN CHARACTERS

Most of the critics agree that Miss Glasgow excels in her "gallery of female characters," that the women characters dominate her novels, and that the position of the Southern woman provides the central themes of all her works. In reviewing the first four editions of Ellen Glasgow's novels to be included in the Old Dominion Edition (1929-1933), James Branch Cabell summarized what appeared to him to be the central theme of her work:

> What we have here, to my thinking, seems a complete and natural history of the Southern gentlewoman, with every attendant feature of her hair and general habitat most accurately rendered. For the actual theme of Ellen Glasgow, I take to be The Tragedy of Everywoman, as it was lately enacted in the Southern states of America.

Cabell also comments that after reading Miss Glasgow's novels:

> What remains in memory is the depiction of one or another woman whose life was controlled and distorted, if not actually wrecked by the amenities and the higher ideals of Southern civilization. From the first, Ellen Glasgow has depicted woman, and in some sort all women, as the predestined victims of male chivalry.

Cabell continues to explain the problem of Southern women, and presents the question of whether it is best to conform to the lofty notions entertained by romantic males at the cost of a minimal existence based on domestic tasks, or to ignore these notions at the cost of a futile spinsterhood, or to rebel against the romantic ideals at the cost of discomfort and futility. Such is the problem, which he feels, Miss Glasgow has decreed to be "The Tragedy of Everywoman."[1]

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[1] James Branch Cabell, "Two Sides of the Shielded," New York Herald Tribune Books, VI (April 20, 1930), 1, 6.

"It is in her portraits of adult women that Miss Glasgow excels," writes Howard Mumford Jones, "and I venture to say that her gallery of female characters surpasses in richness and variety almost any group of similar portraits in American fiction. The young wife, the matron, the deserted girl, the lady of damaged repute, the female sentimentalist, the old maid, Victorian and belated—she has seen and studied these women with ironic patience and a sympathetic pen."[2]

In discussing Miss Glasgow's delineation of women and her portrayal of their place, work, and development, Edward Mims says, "Not since George Elliot has anyone entered more profoundly into the souls of women characters or drawn with greater skill and detail their deterioration or growth, their right to live their own lives with a certain individuality and fullness, of the necessity to find expression for their inmost souls outside the relation of sex or marriage, of their ability to profit by the advance of modern life and thought."[3]

Miss Glasgow's women characters are on the whole better drawn than her men characters. This observation applies particularly to her major women characters, the Southern belle and ideal lady, and the "new woman." Many of her novels revolve around central women characters: Eva Birdsong, the embodiment of the Southern belle and beauty who is crushed by that role in The Sheltered Life; Virginia Pendleton, the ideal lady of the old tradition who cannot adjust to the changing times in Virginia; and

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[2]Howard Mumford Jones, "The Virginia Edition of the Works of Ellen Glasgow," New York Herald Tribune Books, XIV (July 24, 1938), 1.

[3]Edward Mims, "The Social Philosophy of Ellen Glasgow," Social Forces, IV (March, 1926), 500.

Gabriella Carr in Life and Gabriella and Dorinda Oakley in Barren Ground, the "new women" who possess the "vein of iron" fortitude that enables them to build a successful life for themselves. Memorable belles of the old tradition are the Southern matriarch Mrs. Blake, the genteel maiden-lady school mistress Miss Priscilla Batte, the belle of yesterday Miss Amanda Lightfoot, and the "delicate" ladies who connive through their "helplessness," Angela Gay and Lavinia Timberlake. Memorable "new women" are Ada Fincastle who faces the hardships and disappointments of the Depression, Roy Timberlake who searches for "something good," and Louisa Goddard, "the perfect clubwoman," who sees the hypocrisy of the Victorian tradition to which she has adhered to all of her life.

In an interview with Blair Rouse, Miss Glasgow did not deny that many of her women characters are stronger than her men. But she did deny that she had consciously designed them as stronger figures. Rather, she thought that the growth of her women into stronger characters was implicit in the nature of the persons and the situations as well as in the subjects of the novels. She emphasized the necessity of growth and change for giving life to characters in a novel and the necessity that fictional characters live.[4] Rouse notes that one of her favorite character patterns was that of the "civilized person" who tries to live by his convictions in a world which forces conformity. "This rare pattern of mankind," Miss Glasgow said, "has always attracted me as a novelist. I like to imagine how the world would appear if human beings were really civilized, not by machinery alone, but through that nobler

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[4]Blair Rouse, Ellen Glasgow (New York, 1962), p. 39.

organ which has been called the heart in the intellect" (A Certain Measure, p. 39). Asa Timberlake and his daughter Roy in In This Our Life are "civilized persons" in whom character and the right to find happiness are more important than conventional proprieties. Rouse believes that Ellen Glasgow's interest in evolutionary philosophy is reflected in her concern with the relation of heredity and environment to character.[5] In A Certain Measure she wrote that, "My own theory had inclined to the belief that environment, more than inheritance, determines character. What it does determine is the tendency of native impulse nurtured by tradition and legend, unless tradition and legend may be considered a part of environment" (p. 34). It may be emphasized that Miss Glasgow believed environment more powerful than heredity, particularly in the "new woman" such as Dorinda Oakley.

Of her ability to create characters, Miss Glasgow wrote in A Certain Measure:

> I have never wanted for subjects; but on several occasions when, because of illness or from external compulsion, I have tried to invent rather than subconsciously create a theme or character, invariably the effort has resulted in failure. (p. 194)
>
> Invariably the characters appear first, and slowly and gradually build up their own world and spin the situation and atmosphere out of themselves. (p. 197)
>
> One of the most curious facts in the making of fiction is the way characters select their own names, or are born with them, and absolutely refuse to progress except on their own terms. (p. 258)

The character development of Dorinda Oakley in Barren Ground, discussed in Chapter III, reveals much about Miss Glasgow's creation of characters.

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[5]Rouse, p. 39.

Miss Glasgow merged her personal feelings and attitudes into the character of Dorinda. She explains how Dorinda expanded from the glimpse of a young girl standing by an almshouse on an October day into the strong, determined woman who devotes her life to the "barren ground."

Through her women characters, Miss Glasgow expresses her feelings toward love, marriage, the "vein of iron" will to endure, the shaping of one's life through courage, and woman's position in relation to men. She uses her own experiences in describing the education of a genteel lady, her ill-fated romances, her breaking with tradition, and her courage to overcome her delicate health and partial deafness. Always present is her sensitivity to nature and her love for animals. In her novels, Ellen Glasgow employed her experiences as a young girl growing up in the changing Richmond, Virginia, and her impression of her immediate family and friends, and the people of Virginia. Rouse maintains that Ellen Glasgow's sympathies were with her mother, whose tastes and attitudes were far more attractive to her; yet, her father's character and that of his people, in so far as it meant fortitude and stern determination, attracted her more than she realized and found its way into her work almost instinctively.[6] Her mother is the pattern for the ever-lovely and gracious lady who is patient, gentle, and self-sacrificing. To Ellen Glasgow, her mother represented the gracious way of life of the ante-bellum South, and her father represented the changing way of life in the New South.

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[6]Ellen Glasgow, Letters of Ellen Glasgow, "Introduction," compiled by Blair Rouse (New York, 1958), p. 12.

Miss Glasgow used the people and scenes of Virginia, the inner meanings of lives, and from them extracted universal meanings in the form of novels. In a reply to a woman inquiring about her art, Miss Glasgow wrote in December, 1935: "Knowledge, like experience, is valid in fiction only after it has dissolved and filtered down through the imagination into reality."[7] These realities—these universal meanings—are set forth in regional terms of character, scene, and action in her novels.

Ellen Glasgow was greatly concerned with her career as a novelist and she studied and worked hard to achieve literary fame. In A Certain Measure, her literary autobiography, Miss Glasgow brought together the critical essays originally written as prefaces to the twelve novels selected for the Virginia Edition of her works. She rewrote all the essays and added another one about her last published novel, In This Our Life. In The Woman Within, written several years before her death in 1945, but not published until almost a decade later, she set forth her spiritual autobiography. Her letters, compiled and edited by Blair Rouse and published in 1958, also illuminate her view on her novels and her career. Especially valuable are the forty-one letters written to her literary agent, Paul Revere Reynolds, now in the Barrett Collection at the University of Virginia, because they reveal her thoughts during the early ambitious years of her career.[8] They help to date the various

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[7]Letters, "Introduction," p. 14.

[8]James B. Colvert, "Agent and Author: Ellen Glasgow's Letters to Paul Revere Reynolds," Studies in Bibliography, ed. Fredson Bowers, XIV, Papers of the Bibliographical Society of the University of Virginia (Charlottesville, Virginia, 1961), 177-178.

stages of composition of some of her early novels, reveal something of her attitude toward them and the novel in general, and show how carefully, even jealously, she guarded her conception of herself as a writer. Although the letters cover a period of thirty-two years (1897-1930), more than half were written in the crucial years before 1901, when she was carefully laying the groundwork for her career. She shows that she had no intention of allowing her aesthetic goal to be compromised by carelessness in bringing her work before the public; she reveals that she knew from the beginning precisely what she thought about her talent, the medium best suited to it, and the kind of audience she wanted for it. It was her consideration for the right kind of audience, in fact, which seemed to govern a number of her opinions and decisions. She wanted none of her work to appear in second-rate magazines until she was established well enough to command top prices, but even then the standing of the magazine was a major consideration. Miss Glasgow believed that England could afford a more discriminating audience than America, and the English publication of her novels was a matter of special concern. Miss Glasgow desired a favorable reputation in England and wanted an English publisher and a wholly distinctive English edition of her works. Her novels were published in England and were well received. Miss Glasgow visited in England several times, forming friendships with Thomas Hardy and Joseph Conrad, whom she admired.

Of importance in evaluating Miss Glasgow's novels is a letter written to Miss Patterson, 1936, in which Miss Glasgow in answer to the question of which of her novels she would suggest for study, lists six

that she considered her best. Miss Glasgow apparently liked these books and considered them the most representative of her work. Miss Glasgow wrote only two novels after this letter was written, In This Our Life (1941) and its sequel Beyond Defeat, published posthumously in 1966. In the first group of books, she lists the "Novels of Character," Vein of Iron, Barren Ground, and Virginia. "These three novels," she says, "are concerned with the place and tragedy of the individual in the universal scheme. They treat of the perpetual conflict of character with fate, of the will with the world, of the dream with reality." In the second group of books, she lists the "Tragicomedy of Manners," The Romantic Comedians, They Stooped to Folly, and The Sheltered Life. Miss Glasgow comments, "These depict the place and tragicomedy of the individual in an established society. They illustrate the struggle of personality against tradition and the social background."[9]

When Ellen Glasgow began to write, she resolved that she would not join the ranks of the Southern novelists who had been content to celebrate a dying culture; that she would "avoid the romantic delusion that the South was inhabited exclusively by aristocrats and picturesque Negroes, who afforded what used to be called 'comic relief' in the novel" (A Certain Measure, p. 167); that she would never write sentimentally of the South as a conquered province (p. 152); and that she would not succumb to prevailing nostalgia with which the Southern scene was commemorated.

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[9]Letters, p. 206.

Among the first to break with the tradition of "moonlight and magnolias," Miss Glasgow wrote realistically of the South. Particularly interested in presenting a more representative perspective of Southern women, Miss Glasgow presents the Southern gentlewomen of Virginia as they were before the Civil War, during the Reconstruction, and at the turn of the century through the twenties. In her novels, Miss Glasgow portrays the Southern belle at her height in the gracious ante-bellum South and her anachronistic position at the beginning of the twentieth century, and she presents the "new woman" of the South as she emerges from the changes brought about by the Reconstruction. A product herself of the old tradition, Miss Glasgow realized the hypocrisy of the "code of beautiful behavior" and "evasive idealism" that dominated the women of the South. In her novels, she realistically portrays the Southern gentlewomen and satirizes the conventional proprieties of the old tradition.

In The Advancing South Edwin Mims, one of Miss Glasgow's earliest and most steadfast admirers, states that he finds her work admirably designed to express the firm-minded, forward-looking realism he advocated for the South. "She is a realist," he writes, "in the sense that she shows life as it is, life shorn of its romance and illusions, but she has also the hope, the courage, the patience and the faith of the chastened romantic and the tempered idealist." For Mims, Miss Glasgow had "a faith in democracy," and "there is not a single progressive movement in the South today," he wrote in 1926, "that may not find

enlightment and inspiration in some one of her novels."[10]

Commenting upon Miss Glasgow as a realist, Stuart Pratt Sherman writes that, "She was a realist when some of our popular exponents of realism were in the cradle. Her democratic fighting realism was already incarnate in The Voice of the People (1900). Realism crossed the Potomac twenty-five years ago, going North."[11]

Wilbur J. Cash in The Saturday Review, 1940, asserts that Miss Glasgow's Barren Ground (1925) is "What I judge to be the first real novel as opposed to the romances the South had brought forth; certainly the first wholly genuine picture of the people who make up and always have made up the body of the South."[12]

On the cover to his biography of Ellen Glasgow, Rouse comments that, "Amid the sentimentality and frivolity that prevailed in American fiction on the one hand, and the documentary didacticism on the other, Ellen Glasgow injected a spirit of truth-telling and an astringent irony of style and thought. She pioneered in writing truthfully of the American South and its people."[13]

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[10]Edwin Mims, The Advancing South (New York, 1926), pp. 215-218.

[11]Stuart Pratt Sherman, "Ellen Glasgow: The Fighting Edge of Romance," New York Herald Tribune Books, I (April 19, 1925), 1.

[12]Wilbur J. Cash, "Literature and the South," Saturday Review of Literature, XXIII (December, 1940), 4.

[13]Rouse, Ellen Glasgow, cover.

In discussing the three modes of modern Southern fiction of Ellen Glasgow, Faulkner, and Wolfe, C. Hugh Holman asserts that, "The first of our twentieth-century major Southern novelists, Ellen Glasgow, took as her subjects the social world of the Tidewater and took as her theme the restrictions placed upon character through the pressures of a decaying, traditional, formal society. In presenting this world Miss Glasgow has used the well-made realistic novels of manners. Miss Glasgow can be viewed as a realist, and her approach toward Southern society as ironic."[14]

Douglas Freeman states that, "Miss Glasgow's personal idealism makes her literary realism distinctive in contemporary American literature. The sense in which I apply the term 'realist' to Miss Glasgow is that of unflinching fidelity to those aspects of life which her interests, her taste, and her uprearing lead her to describe. Her realism reflects her background, her personal ideas and her theory that the novel must be a form of art."[15]

Van Wyck Brooks comments that, "Miss Glasgow was one of the first novelists to picture the true Southern life,"[16] and James Wilson states

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[14]C. Hugh Holman, Three Modes of Modern Southern Fiction: Ellen Glasgow, William Faulkner, Thomas Wolfe (Athens, Georgia, 1966), pp. 80, 81.

[15]Douglas Freeman, "Ellen Glasgow, Idealist," Saturday Review of Literature, XII (August, 1935), 12.

[16]Van Wyck Brooks, The Confident Years 1885-1915 (New York, 1952), p. 352.

that, "Miss Glasgow sought an honest realism."[17] Barbara Giles asserts that "Miss Glasgow revolted against the 'evasive idealism' that she regarded as the source of all hypocrisy, cruelty, and sentimentality that she found in the South."[18] Alfred Kazin explains that Ellen Glasgow began as the most girlish of Southern romantics and later proved the most biting critic of Southern romanticism; she was at once the most traditional in loyalty to Virginia and its most powerful satirist; the most sympathetic historian of the Southern mind in modern times and a consistent satirist of the mind."[19]

The historian C. Vann Woodward describes Ellen Glasgow as "the forerunner of the new age." He states, "When eventually the bold moderns of the South arrested the reading and theatrical world with the tragic intensity of the inner life and social drama of the South, they could find scarcely a theme that Ellen Glasgow had wholly neglected. She had bridged the gap between the old and the new literary revival, between romanticism and realism."[20]

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[17]James S. Wilson, "Ellen Glasgow's Novels," Virginia Quarterly Review, IX (October, 1933), 597.

[18]Barbara Giles, "Characters and Fate: The Novels of Ellen Glasgow," Mainstream, IX (September, 1956), 20.

[19]Alfred Kazin, On Native Ground (New York, 1942), p. 258.

[20]C. Vann Woodward, Origins of the New South, 1877-1913. A History of the South, IX, eds. Wendell Holmes Stephenson and E. Merton Coulter, (Baton Rouge, 1951), pp. 434, 436.

In discussing Ellen Glasgow's place in Southern literature Louis Rubin explains her importance:

> Miss Glasgow's place in the development of Southern literature in the twentieth-century is midway between the old romance and the latter-day realism. She occupies a position midway between those writers of the South's long Victorian twilight from whose aesthetic she revolted, the Thomas Nelson Pages and James Lane Allens, and the post World War I novelists, Wolfe, Warren, and Faulkner.
>
> She staked her ultimate reputation in American history on her attainments as social historian, chronicler in fiction of the state of Virginia in transition from society in change, the old giving way to the new, the rise of the middle class, the decline of the planter aristocracy.[21]

In Pioneers and Caretakers Louis Auchincloss states that, "Miss Glasgow reproduced the South as it was," that she turned away from "the sterile romantic tradition" toward a presentation of the South in a realistic manner. He feels that "her picture of the South emerging from defeat and reconstruction with all its old legends intact and all its old energy preserved and managing to adapt itself, almost without admitting to the industrial exigencies of a new age, is one that has passed into our sense of American history." Auchincloss asserts that, "Miss Glasgow is the bridge between the world of Thomas Nelson Page of the romantic school of Southern fiction, and the modern world of Faulkner, Katherine Anne Porter, Eudora Welty, and Tennessee Williams."[22]

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[21]Rubin, No Place on Earth: Ellen Glasgow, James Branch Cabell, and Richmond-in-Virginia, Supplement to University of Texas Quarterly, II, No. 3 (Austin, 1959), p. 44.

[22]Louis Auchincloss, Pioneers and Caretakers: A Study of Nine American Women Novelists (Minneapolis, 1965), pp. 51, 91.

In discussing Ellen Glasgow's importance in the literature of the South, Allen Becker explains her contribution:

> In seeking to understand the nature of the transformation of the Southern literary tradition we can find an explanation in the fiction of Ellen Glasgow, for the course taken by Southern literature in our time is epitomized in her work. Her early novels throw into relief the nineteenth-century tradition; her later fiction beginning with Barren Ground (1925), highlights the means by which she and other major Southern writers have understood the plight of Western man in our time.
>
> She was to record in her fiction the downfall of the old social order and the rise of the new.
>
> Miss Glasgow continued her revolt against a literary tradition and, thereby, brought to Southern letters the first conscious literary realism. As a doctrine her realism rejected the convention of idealizing the past and romanticizing the present. The novels of Ellen Glasgow occupy a unique place in the development of Southern fiction, for in them can be seen the last seventy-five years. Her early revolt illuminates the characteristics and the inadequacies of the romance convention, which served Southern novelists throughout the nineteenth-century. She introduced a theory of realism and a radically new attitude toward her cultural heritage.[23]

Writing in The New York Times Book Review in 1955, J. Donald Adams comments on Ellen Glasgow ten years after her death:

> While I do not place Ellen Glasgow among the world's greatest novelists, I do rank her among the best we in America have produced. She is the wittiest novelist in our history and one of the best stylists.
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> She was a woman of great courage (the human quality she once described as 'the only lasting virtue') but for which she more often used the word fortitude which connotes endurance.

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[23]Allen W. Becker, "Ellen Glasgow and the Southern Literary Tradition," Modern Fiction Studies, V (Winter, 1959-60), 295, 303.

> It is a quality with which she more frequently endowed the women about whom she wrote, than the men. This was because the quality was the just realization of a very feminine woman who happened to possess some of the attributes of the masculine mind, that her own sex is the one consistently schooled in fortitude and for women it has been a part of daily living.
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> Too much, perhaps, has been made of her role as a satirical critic of the Southern society into which she was born; that was one of her important functions as an American novelist—her exposure of the South's romantic tradition; but it is my belief that she will be remembered longer for her deeply considered reading of the human heart, for her understanding of the age-old conflict between youth and age, and of the never-ending battle between the sexes.[24]

Miss Glasgow's major women characters, the Southern belle and ideal lady, and the "new woman," are significant in the literature of the South, because Miss Glasgow was one of the first fiction writers to break from the romantic tradition and to present the South realistically. Most of the critics agree that the position of the Southern woman provides the central themes for all of Miss Glasgow's works and that she excels in her "gallery of female characters." In her novels, Miss Glasgow traces the position of the Southern gentlewoman from the ante-bellum belle to the modern Southern woman. A transitional figure in Southern literature, Miss Glasgow occupies a position midway between the earlier romantic literature of the South and the later realistic and psychological approach of William Faulkner and Tennessee Williams. At the beginning of her career as a Southern novelist, Miss Glasgow resolved that she would avoid the "evasive idealism" and sentimentality in Southern literature; that she would present the South in a realistic

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[24] J. Donald Adams, "Speaking of Books," The New York Times Book Review (October 30, 1955), 2.

manner and analyze with honesty the inadequacies of Virginia life in the present and in the immediate past. Ellen Glasgow, the gentlewoman from Virginia, is an important figure in American literature because of the vivid picture she presents of the South in transition.

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