

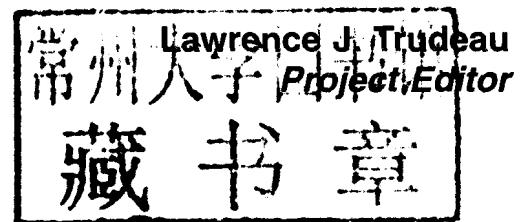
Twentieth-Century
Literary Criticism

TCLC 239

Volume 239

Twentieth-Century Literary Criticism

**Criticism of the
Works of Novelists, Poets, Playwrights,
Short Story Writers, and Other Creative Writers
Who Lived between 1900 and 1999,
from the First Published Critical
Appraisals to Current Evaluations**



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**Twentieth-Century Literary Criticism, Vol.
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Preface

Since its inception *Twentieth-Century Literary Criticism* (TCLC) has been purchased and used by some 10,000 school, public, and college or university libraries. TCLC has covered more than 1000 authors, representing over 60 nationalities and nearly 50,000 titles. No other reference source has surveyed the critical response to twentieth-century authors and literature as thoroughly as TCLC. In the words of one reviewer, “there is nothing comparable available.” TCLC “is a gold mine of information—dates, pseudonyms, biographical information, and criticism from books and periodicals—which many librarians would have difficulty assembling on their own.”

Scope of the Series

TCLC is designed to serve as an introduction to authors who died between 1900 and 1999 and to the most significant interpretations of these author’s works. Volumes published from 1978 through 1999 included authors who died between 1900 and 1960. The great poets, novelists, short story writers, playwrights, and philosophers of the period are frequently studied in high school and college literature courses. In organizing and reprinting the vast amount of critical material written on these authors, TCLC helps students develop valuable insight into literary history, promotes a better understanding of the texts, and sparks ideas for papers and assignments. Each entry in TCLC presents a comprehensive survey on an author’s career or an individual work of literature and provides the user with a multiplicity of interpretations and assessments. Such variety allows students to pursue their own interests; furthermore, it fosters an awareness that literature is dynamic and responsive to many different opinions.

Every fourth volume of TCLC is devoted to literary topics. These topics widen the focus of the series from the individual authors to such broader subjects as literary movements, prominent themes in twentieth-century literature, literary reaction to political and historical events, significant eras in literary history, prominent literary anniversaries, and the literatures of cultures that are often overlooked by English-speaking readers.

TCLC is designed as a companion series to Gale’s *Contemporary Literary Criticism*, (CLC) which reprints commentary on authors who died after 1999. Because of the different time periods under consideration, there is no duplication of material between CLC and TCLC.

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A TCLC entry consists of the following elements:

- The **Author Heading** cites the name under which the author most commonly wrote, followed by birth and death dates. Also located here are any name variations under which an author wrote, including transliterated forms for authors whose native languages use nonroman alphabets. If the author wrote consistently under a pseudonym, the pseudonym is listed in the author heading and the author’s actual name is given in parenthesis on the first line of the biographical and critical information. Uncertain birth or death dates are indicated by question marks. Single-work entries are preceded by a heading that consists of the most common form of the title in English translation (if applicable) and the name of its author.
- The **Introduction** contains background information that introduces the reader to the author, work, or topic that is the subject of the entry.
- The list of **Principal Works** is ordered chronologically by date of first publication and lists the most important works by the author. The genre and publication date of each work is given. In the case of foreign authors whose

works have been translated into English, the English-language version of the title follows in brackets. Unless otherwise indicated, dramas are dated by first performance, not first publication. Lists of **Representative Works** by different authors appear with topic entries.

- Reprinted **Criticism** is arranged chronologically in each entry to provide a useful perspective on changes in critical evaluation over time. The critic's name and the date of composition or publication of the critical work are given at the beginning of each piece of criticism. Unsigned criticism is preceded by the title of the source in which it originally appeared. All titles by the author featured in the text are printed in boldface type. Footnotes are reprinted at the end of each essay or excerpt. In the case of excerpted criticism, only those footnotes that pertain to the excerpted texts are included. Criticism in topic entries is arranged chronologically under a variety of subheadings to facilitate the study of different aspects of the topic.
- A complete **Bibliographical Citation** of the original essay or book precedes each piece of criticism. Source citations in the Literary Criticism Series follow University of Chicago Press style, as outlined in *The Chicago Manual of Style*, 15th ed. (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2003).
- Critical essays are prefaced by brief **Annotations** explicating each piece.
- An annotated bibliography of **Further Reading** appears at the end of each entry and suggests resources for additional study. In some cases, significant essays for which the editors could not obtain reprint rights are included here. Boxed material following the further reading list provides references to other biographical and critical sources on the author in series published by Gale.

Indexes

A **Cumulative Author Index** lists all of the authors that appear in a wide variety of reference sources published by Gale, including *TCLC*. A complete list of these sources is found facing the first page of the Author Index. The index also includes birth and death dates and cross references between pseudonyms and actual names.

A **Cumulative Topic Index** lists the literary themes and topics treated in *TCLC* as well as other Literature Criticism series.

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An alphabetical **Title Index** accompanies each volume of *TCLC*. Listings of titles by authors covered in the given volume are followed by the author's name and the corresponding page numbers where the titles are discussed. English translations of foreign titles and variations of titles are cross-referenced to the title under which a work was originally published. Titles of novels, dramas, nonfiction books, and poetry, short story, or essay collections are printed in italics, while individual poems, short stories, and essays are printed in roman type within quotation marks.

In response to numerous suggestions from librarians, Gale also produces a paperbound edition of the *TCLC* cumulative title index. This annual cumulation, which alphabetically lists all titles reviewed in the series, is available to all customers. Additional copies of this index are available upon request. Librarians and patrons will welcome this separate index; it saves shelf space, is easy to use, and is recyclable upon receipt of the next edition.

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When citing criticism reprinted in the Literary Criticism Series, students should provide complete bibliographic information so that the cited essay can be located in the original print or electronic source. Students who quote directly from reprinted criticism may use any accepted bibliographic format, such as University of Chicago Press style or Modern Language Association (MLA) style. Both the MLA and the University of Chicago formats are acceptable and recognized as being the current standards for citations. It is important, however, to choose one format for all citations; do not mix the two formats within a list of citations.

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Kuester, Martin. "Myth and Postmodernist Turn in Canadian Short Fiction: Sheila Watson, 'Antigone' (1959)." In *The Canadian Short Story: Interpretations*, edited by Reginald M. Nischik, pp. 163-74. Rochester, N.Y.: Camden House, 2007. Reprinted in *Twentieth-Century Literary Criticism*. Vol. 206, edited by Thomas J. Schoenberg and Lawrence J. Trudeau, 227-32. Detroit: Gale, 2008.

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Ellen Glasgow

1873-1945

(Full name Ellen Anderson Gholson Glasgow) American novelist, short story writer, poet, essayist, and autobiographer.

The following entry provides an overview of Glasgow's life and works. For additional information on her career, see *TCLC*, Volumes 2 and 7.

INTRODUCTION

Glasgow is considered one of the forerunners of the Southern Renaissance and an influential writer who helped rejuvenate and modernize Southern literature during the early decades of the twentieth century. At a time when many of her contemporaries were producing romanticized depictions of life in the pre-Civil War South, Glasgow rebelled against the nostalgic and unrealistic portrayal of the region's culture, and in such novels as *Virginia* (1913), *The Sheltered Life* (1932), and *Vein of Iron* (1935) she satirized the idealization of the South's past and exposed the hypocrisies and limitations within its conventional social system.

Throughout her literary career Glasgow attempted to relate the South to the rest of world, particularly tracing the shifting attitudes and expectations that she observed within Virginian culture during the early twentieth century. In her fiction she explored a variety of themes, including the decadence of the Southern aristocracy, the challenges related to the industrialization of the New South following the Civil War, the role of women in society, and the conflicting values and concerns of the lower and upper classes, as well as the emerging middle class. Deeply influenced by the tenets of late-nineteenth-century realism, Glasgow emphasized the complex realities of human existence, recognized heredity and environment as shaping factors of individual character, and acknowledged the ambiguous nature of all moral and philosophical questions.

Although not as well known as other writers of her generation, Glasgow is recognized as an important transitional figure of American letters, whose insights and observations influenced the trajectory of Southern literature in the twentieth century. She is particularly appreciated among feminist scholars for challenging conventional expectations and attitudes regarding woman's position in society, as well as for presenting female

characters whose lives extend beyond the confines of their prescribed roles. As critic Jamie Marchant has observed, "Glasgow's novels are not merely comedies of manners or stories of stoic perseverance; they are powerful critiques of women's lives and of literary conventions mandating the proper ending for a woman's story."

BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION

Glasgow was born April 22, 1873, in Richmond, Virginia. Her mother, Anne Jane Gholson Glasgow, was descended from the aristocratic settlers of Tidewater, Virginia, while her father, Francis Thomas Glasgow, was an industrialist who traced his origins to the Scotch-Irish farmers of Virginia's Shenandoah Valley. The contrast between what Glasgow perceived to be her father's strict Calvinist temperament and her mother's cultivated and gracious heritage deeply influenced her outlook on life, and it shaped the fortunes of her characters throughout her literary career. Physically frail and emotionally sensitive, Glasgow experienced a secluded childhood. She was privately tutored, and much of her education was derived from the classic literature in her father's library, which included works by Plato, David Hume, Henry Fielding, Jane Austen, Leo Tolstoy, and Thomas Hardy.

In 1891 Glasgow destroyed her first novel, which she titled "Sharp Realities," after an unpleasant encounter with an agent in New York City. Two years later her mother died, and the author suffered severe depression and a partial loss of her hearing, which greatly hampered her independence. During the early 1890s Glasgow began reading the leading philosophers, scientists, and novelists of the late nineteenth century, including Friedrich Nietzsche, Karl Marx, Immanuel Kant, and Charles Darwin, the last of whom particularly influenced her work. Although she had sworn to give up her literary aspirations following her experience with "Sharp Realities," Glasgow considered writing therapeutic, and she began working on another novel to help deal with her mother's death. This process resulted in *The Descendant*, which was finished in 1895 and published anonymously in 1897. Her second published work, *Phases of an Inferior Planet* (1898), was the first to appear under the author's name.

Inspired by the French and English realists, as well as Anton Chekhov and Leo Tolstoy, Glasgow began writing novels about the people, culture, customs, and his-

tory of her native Virginia. The first of these works, *The Voice of the People*, was published in 1900 and was followed by *The Battle-Ground* (1902) and *The Deliverance* (1904), which cemented the author's reputation as an important new voice in American fiction. During this time Glasgow was involved in an affair with a married man, whom she referred to only as "Gerald" in her later autobiographical work, *The Woman Within* (1954). The relationship ended in 1905, presumably as a result of Gerald's death. Glasgow's next two novels, *The Wheel of Life* (1906) and *The Ancient Law* (1908), according to some critics, suffer in quality as a result of this emotional turmoil in her life.

During the first two decades of the twentieth century Glasgow experienced several personal traumas in addition to the loss of Gerald, including the death of two of her closest siblings and an unsatisfying relationship with the Reverend Frank Ilsley Paradise, to whom she was briefly engaged in 1907. Glasgow dealt with the pain of these experiences by continuing to write, and in 1911 she published *The Miller of Old Church*, a novel that blends comedy and tragedy, irony and satire, in a manner similar to her more mature writings. For this reason many critics consider it important as a transitional work in her canon. Two years later Glasgow produced *Virginia*, which scholars generally regard as her first masterpiece and one of her greatest works of fiction. In 1917 Glasgow once again became engaged, this time to a lawyer and public figure named Henry Watkins Anderson. Like Glasgow's previous engagements, this one, too, ended unsatisfactorily, when Anderson, who was stationed as an officer in the Balkans during World War I, became romantically involved with Queen Marie of Romania. In fact, rumors of the couple's mutual attraction and supposed relationship so distressed Glasgow that she attempted suicide in July of 1918. Though the engagement was mutually broken off in 1920, Glasgow and Anderson remained close friends for years afterward.

Despite her personal difficulties Glasgow produced several novels during this time, including *The Builders* (1919) and *One Man in His Time* (1922), as well as a collection of short stories, *The Shadowy Third, and Other Stories* (1923), which was reissued the following year as *Dare's Gift, and Other Stories*. During the mid-1920s Glasgow began to write what are now regarded as the most important works of her literary career, namely *Barren Ground* (1925), *The Romantic Comedians* (1926), *They Stooped to Folly* (1929), and *The Sheltered Life*, as well as *Vein of Iron* and *In This Our Life* (1941), the last of her novels published during her lifetime.

From the 1920s to the end of her life Glasgow developed close friendships with some of America's leading writers, scholars, and critics, including Van Wyck

Brooks, Hugh Walpole, H. L. Mencken, Allen Tate, James Branch Cabell, and Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings. During the late 1920s Glasgow received numerous awards and achieved some degree of financial security. Her health deteriorated significantly during the 1930s, however, and by the 1940s she had developed a serious heart condition. In 1942 Glasgow was awarded the Pulitzer Prize for *In This Our Life*. Despite her worsening health, she continued to write, completing her last works under extreme duress. After enduring several heart attacks during the 1940s Glasgow died on November 21, 1945, at her home in Richmond, Virginia. Her autobiographical work, *The Woman Within*, as well as her last novel, *Beyond Defeat: An Epilogue to an Era* (1966), were published posthumously.

MAJOR WORKS

In her first published literary work, *The Descendant*, Glasgow introduced several themes to which she would return in her later writings, including the idea of female independence and the tragedy associated with wasted human potential. The novel depicts the rise and fall of its self-destructive protagonist, Michael Akershem, whose life disintegrates after he leaves his faithful and emancipated lover, Rachel Gavin. Although scholars argue that the novel is overwritten and at times melodramatic, many have acknowledged that it nevertheless demonstrates Glasgow's expert handling of narrative structure, even at this early juncture of her career.

The author garnered further attention and critical recognition with the publication of *The Voice of the People*, the first of her novels to focus on the traditions, society, and culture of her native Virginia. Set in the late 1800s, following the Civil War, the novel examines the conflict between the classes in Kingsborough, a fictional rendering of Williamsburg, Virginia. The protagonist, Nicholas Burr, is a self-made man, born of the lower class, who eventually becomes the governor of Virginia. Another central character in the work, Eugenia Battle, is well-born and refuses to marry Nicholas, despite his success, on unfounded moral grounds. The tragic waste of human promise is the predominant theme of the novel, which is reinforced at the end of the story with the assassination of Nicholas, who dies while trying to subdue a lynch mob.

In her next novel, *The Battle-Ground*, Glasgow focused on the life of Virginia's aristocracy preceding the Civil War and the devastation that ensued. The work particularly emphasizes the tendency of the upper classes to ignore the harsh realities of life, especially the injustices of slavery, and illustrates the ways in which the war inevitably forces them to confront the inadequacies and moral shortcomings of their aristocratic culture.

Glasgow continued to explore these themes in *The Deliverance*, one of the most successful of her early novels. The work features a male protagonist, Christopher Blake, who reclaims a small part of his farm after the Civil War forces him into bankruptcy, and seeks revenge on a man that cheated him out of his other property. *The Deliverance* also touches on themes related to the role of women in society. Through the depiction of an assortment of tertiary characters, the novel comments on the persistent ideals of the Southern belle and female passivity, as well as the inherent flaws and hypocrisies associated with the Victorian moral code that dominated the South.

The Miller of Old Church, another respected work among Glasgow's early novels, contrasts the decadent lives of the aristocratic class with those who work the land. Set during the early 1900s, the novel treats class conflict and class mobility, and features a protagonist named Abel Revercomb. Revercomb is a dignified, persevering, and morally upstanding individual, who is ultimately able to make a better life for himself as a result of his virtue.

In the most celebrated of her early works, *Virginia*, Glasgow dealt more directly with the Victorian ideal of womanhood and examined a transitional period of Southern culture, when the forces of tradition and progress were in direct conflict. The titular protagonist of the work, Virginia, exemplifies the Victorian ideal of femininity, who sacrifices her potential and vital energy to live up to the expectations placed on her by family and religion to be the perfect daughter, wife, and mother. Once a vibrant individual, by middle age Virginia has been abandoned by her husband and worn down by her responsibilities, and has lost her sense of purpose. Virginia's friend, Susan Treadwell, is drawn in sharp contrast to the protagonist, as an independent "new woman." While some critics have described Virginia as a weak character, others, in agreement with Glasgow's assessment of her protagonist, have identified her as a vibrant individual, whose potential is tragically diverted by her sense of duty and overpowering identification with her culture's codes of femininity and romantic love.

For many scholars *Barren Ground* signals the beginning of Glasgow's mature, and most successful, literary period. Such themes as revenge and female strength and resilience, as well as the importance of the land, are given prominence in the novel. Critics have particularly praised the author's balanced portrait of the book's protagonist, Dorinda Oakley, a determined woman who is motivated to succeed after she becomes pregnant and is betrayed by her lover, Jason Greylock. Set in the broom-sedge waste of rural Virginia, the novel depicts Dorinda's struggle to overcome society's negative opinion of her by becoming a successful farmer. Although origi-

nally motivated by vengeance, Dorinda eventually develops a sense of compassion for those around her and experiences personal renewal by working the land.

During the late 1920s and early 1930s Glasgow published three novels written in the style of the comedy of manners, *The Romantic Comedians*, *They Stooped to Folly*, and *The Sheltered Life*, which many critics consider to be among her greatest achievements. These works present an ironic portrait of the aristocratic and professional classes during the 1920s in Queenborough, a city modeled after Richmond. *The Romantic Comedians*, often noted for its wit and economy, focuses on the "December-May" relationship between Judge Gamaliel Bland Honeywell and his young bride, Annabel Upchurch. The relationship ends in failure, as Annabel, who only married the Judge for his money, refuses to have physical contact with him and ultimately leaves him for a younger man. The novel also offers portraits of several other important female characters, including Cordelia, the Judge's late first wife, whose presence continues to loom over the household; Amanda Lightfoot, a rival for the Judge's affections; Annabel's manipulative mother; and Edmonia Bredalbane, the Judge's hedonistic and uninhibited twin sister. The foolishness of men is the primary theme of the work, which is reinforced in the closing scenes when the Judge, who is on his deathbed, finds himself attracted to the young nurse caring for him.

They Stooped to Folly expands the scope to include the impact of World War I on Queenborough's society and tradition. The novel is told from the perspective of Virginius Littlepage, a lawyer, and his wife, Victoria, a kind-hearted woman with a strict moral code, and highlights the evolving attitudes and standards regarding personal behavior by comparing the lives of three "fallen" women of consecutive generations. Virginius becomes enamored with one of the women, Amy Dalrymple, who fled scandal and eventually redeemed her reputation by serving with the American Red Cross during the war. After Victoria dies at the end of the novel, Virginius realizes the value of his marriage and love for his wife, and finally abandons his fantasy of having an affair.

For many scholars *The Sheltered Life* is the finest of Glasgow's comedies. The novel is divided into three parts, the first of which, "The Age of Make-Believe," is told from the perspective of nine-year-old Jenny Blair Archbald and introduces key characters, including Eva Birdsong, Queenborough's ideal Victorian woman, and her philandering husband, George. The second section, "The Deep Past," is written from the perspective of General David Archbald, Jenny's eighty-three-year-old grandfather, while the third section, "The Illusion," takes place several years later and alternates between both Jenny's and the General's perspectives. The novel

is primarily concerned with the themes of jealousy, self-sacrifice, and the hypocrisies of Victorian society, and hinges on the relationship between Jenny and George and Eva Birdsong. Eva spends her life trying to embody the Victorian ideal of the perfect woman, ignoring her husband's infidelities to maintain the illusion of domestic harmony. When she finds Jenny and George together, however, her veneer is finally shattered, and she reacts violently by shooting her husband.

Written after Glasgow's trilogy of comedies, *Vein of Iron* returns to the themes of *Barren Ground*, particularly with regard to female endurance and the conflict between the individual and society. Ada Fincastle, the female protagonist of the work, finds her strength tested when she loses her lover, Ralph McBride, and is forced to raise their child alone. She is eventually able to marry Ralph but discovers that she has carried a false conception of romantic love. Despite Ralph's depression and infidelity, they decide to remain together for the sake of their descendants. Glasgow also explores the theme of sacrificing love through her portrait of Ada's father, John Fincastle, a former minister who becomes an agnostic philosopher. Always concerned with the welfare of others, John spends the last days of his life traveling back to the family manse so that he will not be a burden to his loved ones. Once there, he dies alone of starvation.

In This Our Life, Glasgow's next novel, follows the disappointments and struggles of the Timberlake family, headed by Asa and Lavinia Timberlake. Lavinia embodies the repressive morals and attitudes of Victorian culture, focusing on decorum rather than real kindness or love as she struggles to uphold her virtues. Asa Timberlake, the family's patriarch, suffers as a result of Lavinia's inflexibility and is victimized, as well, by his self-centered and impulsive daughters, Roy and Stanley. While Stanley is motivated solely by her own desires, and subsequently destroys the lives of those around her, Roy is merely impetuous and, unlike her sister, has genuine love for her father. In addition to the hypocrisies inherent to Victorian tradition, the novel exposes the cruelty and injustice that result from spiritual dishonesty and evasive idealism, while questioning the social codes that limit and deform women's lives.

Beyond Defeat, Glasgow's short sequel to *In This Our Life*, traces the further development of Asa and Roy Timberlake. In this work, Asa, seeking freedom and tranquility, leaves Lavinia to live on a farm with a woman named Kate Oliver, who embodies goodness. Meanwhile, Roy develops and strengthens in moral character as she struggles to raise an illegitimate son, Timothy. Though Lavinia dies she remains a repressive figure in the lives of Asa and Roy, until father and daughter decide to focus on the future, represented by Timothy, and put the past behind them.

CRITICAL RECEPTION

Glasgow's critical reputation and popularity with readers grew steadily throughout her early career as a writer. While her first novel, *The Descendant*, which was anonymously published, was generally praised by critics as a compelling and unique work, it wasn't until she conceived her social history of Virginia, beginning with the novel *The Voice of the People* in 1900, that she received wider recognition from the literary establishment in America and increased book sales. Glasgow's tenth novel, *Virginia*, published in 1913, is largely considered a turning point in her career. Although it was not as successful as her previous novels when it was initially published, over time commentators began to perceive its importance in her development as a writer, and began calling it a masterpiece and the first of her mature works of fiction.

In the mid-1920s, with the publication of *Barren Ground*, Glasgow entered her most significant literary phase, which extended to the early 1930s. This novel, which the author considered to be her best work, elicited enthusiastic responses from reviewers and cemented her reputation as an important American author. Glasgow achieved further critical and popular success with the publication of her comedies, *The Romantic Comedians*, *They Stood to Folly*, and *The Sheltered Life*, the last of which represents, for many scholars, the pinnacle of her career as a novelist. While some detractors complained of Glasgow's harsh wit and cynicism, as well as her over-written and sometimes melodramatic plots, her supporters lauded her modern perspective, formal style, and fresh observations of the tensions in the post-Civil War South. Dorothea Lawrance Mann, writing in 1928, described Glasgow as "one of the three or four most important woman novelists" of her time, and the "one authentic voice of the South." During the 1930s and early 1940s, the author received several honors, including the Pulitzer Prize in 1942, in recognition of her achievements.

Throughout her literary career Glasgow objected to being labeled a "regionalist" writer, and some evidence suggests that she campaigned among the prominent literary critics of her time in an effort to elevate the status of her work and have it taken more seriously. Despite her efforts and the awards and literary accolades she won late in her career, Glasgow's reputation waned in the decades following her death. A number of scholars, especially those associated with the New Criticism movement in America, continued to relegate her work the category of "local color" and omit her from the greater Southern literary tradition, which included such authors as William Faulkner, Katherine Anne Porter, Tennessee Williams, Eudora Welty, and Robert Penn Warren.

Some commentators, however, most notably C. Hugh Holman, attempted to reassess the author's efforts and reestablish her importance to the Southern literary movement. Writing in 1957, Holman argued that along with other significant Southern writers, Glasgow has "a home in the tradition of Southern literary art," a tradition that he described as "neither elegiac nor sentimental." In recent decades other critics, such as Josephine Lurie Jessup, Monique Parent Frazee, Linda W. Wagner, and Judith Gatlin, have also revisited Glasgow's fiction in an effort to connect her work to the feminist literary tradition. These and other scholars have observed the methods by which the author was able to reveal the inconsistencies of the Victorian moral code as it applies to a woman's role in society, while promoting, in the words of Frazee, the "emancipation of woman's intelligence, spirit, self-accomplishment, [and] self-responsibility."

Although Glasgow's work is still frequently excluded from the greater canon of American literature, according to her supporters she is a pivotal and influential figure, one who eschewed stereotypes and inadequate literary conventions in an effort to present a more realistic portrait of the American South. Mary Weak-Baxter has acknowledged the importance of Glasgow's achievements, asserting that she had a "sweeping influence" on Southern writers of her own time and of subsequent generations. She concludes that Glasgow "left southern women writers a legacy that reconstructs the framework assigned to women—a southern landscape not limited to the southern belle but expanded to include the new possibilities of southern womanhood."

PRINCIPAL WORKS

The Descendant (novel) 1897
Phases of an Inferior Planet (novel) 1898
The Voice of the People (novel) 1900
The Battle-Ground (novel) 1902
The Freeman, and Other Poems (poetry) 1902
The Deliverance (novel) 1904
The Wheel of Life (novel) 1906
The Ancient Law (novel) 1908
The Romance of a Plain Man (novel) 1909
The Miller of Old Church (novel) 1911
Virginia (novel) 1913
Life and Gabriella (novel) 1916
The Builders (novel) 1919
One Man in His Time (novel) 1922
The Shadowy Third, and Other Stories (short stories) 1923; also published as *Dare's Gift, and Other Stories*, 1924
Barren Ground (novel) 1925

The Romantic Comedians (novel) 1926
They Stooped to Folly (novel) 1929
The Sheltered Life (novel) 1932
Vein of Iron (novel) 1935
In This Our Life (novel) 1941
A Certain Measure (essays) 1943
The Woman Within (autobiography) 1954
Letters of Ellen Glasgow (letters) 1958
The Collected Stories (short stories) 1963
Beyond Defeat: An Epilogue to an Era (novel) 1966
Ellen Glasgow's Reasonable Doubts: A Collection of Her Writings (essays and short story) 1988

CRITICISM

Edwin Mims (essay date March 1926)

SOURCE: Mims, Edwin. "The Social Philosophy of Ellen Glasgow." *Social Forces* 4, no. 3 (March 1926): 495-503.

[In the following essay, Mims emphasizes the treatment of democracy and the "forces of reaction and progress" in Glasgow's fiction, asserting that the author is "one of the wisest thinkers" of her time, particularly with regard to "Southern life, past and present."]

Critics agree that Miss Glasgow knows how to tell a story and how to portray character; that she has the gift of humor and a style that is at once distinguished and beautiful. She is not only a great writer; she is also one of the wisest thinkers of our time, and more particularly in all that relates to Southern life, past and present. The pity is that so many readers of her novels are apt to overlook her criticism of life, her interpretations of characters and scenes, and that, on the other hand, social reformers and historians pay little heed to fiction of any kind. No one has written with more penetration and discrimination about the forces of reaction and progress that have been for a half century contending for supremacy in the South. She has written, artistically to be sure, about social life and customs, politics, science, religion, education, material progress, and all other major concerns. There is not a single progressive movement in the South today that may not find enlightenment and inspiration in some one of her novels. Critics have done her an injustice in singling out *Barren Ground* as a departure from her previous work; there is a singular unity of purpose and method in them all.

If there had been any doubt about the point of view implicit in her novels, it was removed by an address delivered in Richmond in 1921, and afterwards printed in

The Reviewer. With admirable candor and courage she spoke directly to her fellow Virginians in words that ought to be heard in all parts of the South today:

Because I am a Virginian in every drop of my blood and pulse of my heart, I may speak the truth as I understand it. . . . No Virginia man can love and revere the past more than I do. . . . To me Virginia's past is like a hall hung with rare and wonderful tapestries. . . . or like a cathedral illumined by the gold and wine-color of stained-glass windows. . . . It is a place to which we should go for inspiration and worship; it is a place from which we should come with renewed strength and courage; but it is not a place in which we should live and brood until we become like that ancient people whose "struggle was to sit still."

Recalling the great men whom Virginians have always revered, she insists that they all broke away from tradition "when tradition endangered natural development."

There is not one whom we revere simply because he held fast by the old habit, the old form, the old custom. Washington would not desist from his bold adventure when conservatives remonstrated with him. The greatness of Jefferson was in his stand for freedom of conscience and speech; his name should never be used as an anchor to keep us moored for generations in the backwaters of history. . . . If Lee had clung to tradition, to crumbling theories of right, would he have left the old army and the old standards, and have passed on into the new army to fight under the new flag? . . . He spoke the language of the future.

With a prophecy of the future she closes:

We can be as great as we were in the past only when we open the flood gates of thought and the river of the past flows through us and from us onward into the future. . . . We are most like Washington, not when we drop in the chains of tradition, but when we stride fearlessly toward the future. We are most like Jefferson, not when we repeat parrot-like the principles he enunciated, but when we apply those great principles to everchanging conditions. We are most like Lee, not when we hold back, but when we leave the haven of the past and go forward with that courage

"Which neither shape of danger can dismay

Nor thought of tender happiness betray."

In this spirit and with such conviction she has written a series of novels that now approach a certain epic proportion by reason of their presentation of a well defined period of history that reaches from the Civil War to the Great War. While her books may seem at first glance to deal with the same types and many of the same situations, a more careful reading shows that she has so discriminated between periods and types as to reveal a gallery of diverse personalities all the more interesting by the fact that they shade into each other, and a variety of scenes and situations that enable one to visualize the Virginia of yesterday and today.

Her first important novel, *The Battleground*, seems at first like a conventional southern story of the Civil War: there are majors, colonels and governors, old-time uncles and mammies, and typical women and girls. But there is a difference between the novel and the short stories of Thomas Nelson Page, dealing with the same material. The author's mind is at work on her material. Side by side with the negroes of the conventional type is the free negro—a tragic figure on the outskirts of life—"an honest-eyed, grizzled old negro, who wrung his meagre living from a blacksmith's trade, bearing alike the scornful pity of his white neighbors and the withering contempt of his black ones." For twenty years he had moved from spot to spot along the turnpike, and he had lived "in the dignity of loneliness, since the day upon which his master had won for himself the freedom of Eternity, leaving to his servant the labor of his own hands." The pathos of Harris' "Free Joe" attaches to him.

Major Ambler, a former governor of the state, is in striking contrast with the more impetuous Major Lightfoot—the reckless, devil-may-care, hot-blooded Southerner who at any cost would maintain his traditions and standards. He emancipated his slaves though he had to buy some now and then to keep them from being sold further South. He says in a public address that if Virginia has to choose between slavery and the Union she would hold on to the flag; and for this wise and temperate speech he is called to account by the impetuous Major Lightfoot, who says: "The man who sits up in my presence and questions my right to own my slaves is a damn black abolitionist," and adds: "We made the Union, and we'll unmake it when we please. We didn't make slavery; but if Virginia wants slaves, by God, she shall have slaves." Governor Ambler goes into the War when Virginia decides to leave the Union. He threw all his strength against the tide, yet, when it rushed on in spite of him, he knew where his duty guided him. He always felt that he was fighting for a hopeless cause, and "he loved it the more for very pity of its weakness."

What is more important than any one character is that the novel suggests the dissolution of the whole antebellum social system. The seeds of its own destruction had already been sown. The Lightfoot family is decaying by reason of gambling, improvidence, and a fiery passion that breaks out in fury with any infringement of the ancient code. Betty Ambler has the individuality, the wit, the spirit of adventure that takes her from childhood clean beyond the confines of conventional standards and ideals; she finds paths on the mountains that other people have not found, and this is but symbolic of her revolt against the limitations of her life. Dan Lightfoot, after the violent words of his grandfather, goes forth into the world to find a job, which turns out to be that of a stage-driver for an inn-keeper who belongs to

a lower order. He rejoices in his freedom. He violates all the traditions of a Virginia gentleman by remaining a private throughout the War. His most cherished companion in the camps is Pinetop, who came down out of the mountains to fight for "he knew not what." Near the end Dan finds his comrade studying the first reader in his tent by the light of a pineknot. For the first time in his life he was brought face to face with "the tragedy of hopeless ignorance for an inquiring mind, and the shock stunned him, at the moment, past the power of speech. . . . Until he knew Pinetop he had, in the lofty isolation of his class, regarded the plebeian in the light of an alien to the soil, "not as a victim to the kindly society in which he himself had moved—a society produced by that free labour which had degraded the white workman to the level of the serf." Even the spectre of slavery, against which he had rebelled in his boyhood days, faded abruptly before the very majesty of the problem that faced him now—the undeveloped life of the common people:

"Look here, old man, you haven't been quite fair to me," said Dan after a long silence, "why didn't you ask me to help you with this stuff?"

"Well, I thought you'd joke," replied Pinetop blushing, "and I knew yo' nigger would."

Dan becomes his teacher on many evenings after that, and is the forerunner of those who for a generation have been teaching the Pinetops of the South. The new era has already started in the South with Dan a stagedriver, Levi a free man, Pinetop on his way to an education, and Betty, now the wife of Dan, the forerunner of a self-reliant, radiant line of women. The author recognizes the inevitable result of the war and rejoices in it, unlike the conventional historians of the Lost Cause.

Here, then, as in all her later novels, she portrays the struggle between conservative and progressive forces, and there is never any doubt as to where her sympathy lies. When one reads Page's *In Ole Virginia*, he sees the curtain fall at the end of the story as if the end of the world had come; there is no outlook, no promise of a life that is superior to that of the Old South, or even equal to it. In Miss Glasgow's novels we witness the transition to something different, and, despite the crudeness and the confusion, to something better. She is a realist in the sense that she shows us 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.

Her greatest heroes are those who find in politics, in agriculture, in business, a challenge to what is largest in their natures, a call to expend themselves to the uttermost to break through the shell of tradition. Such men have the courage to defy social prejudice, faith in de-

mocracy despite its crudities, and the vision that was characteristic of an earlier period in the history of Virginia. Some who oppose them are comic in their ignorance and prejudice, and some are as tragic as any of those protagonists of drama who have fought against the stars in their courses.

This conflict between progress and reaction is essentially the conflict between democracy and aristocracy. Miss Glasgow has a faith in democracy as real and as vital as that of Thomas Jefferson or Walter Page. She knows its crudities, its imperfections, but it is like life, not something already finished. "It is raw stuff. It isn't a word or a phrase out of a book, or a formula. It is warm and fluid, and it is teeming with living forms. It is as much alive as the earth or air or water, and it can be used to develop as many varying energies." Democracy, restless, disorderly, and strewn with the wreckage of finer things, has in it vast possibilities. The very paradoxes of democracy make it interesting—and helpful: "ugly facts and fine ideals, crooked deeds and straight feeling, little codes and large adventures, puny lives and heroic deaths, the smoky present and the clear future."

To the making of a more democratic state of society in the South both the descendants of the best families and certain elemental men who spring directly from the soil make their contributions. It is the aristocratic Tucker Blake in the *Deliverance* who has through suffering and in the light of his humor and common sense come to see that "Love is worth more than big titles or fine clothes, or even than dead grandfathers," and that "our levels aren't any bigger than chalk lines in the eyes of God Almighty." Judge Page in *One Man of His Time*, who played a conspicuous part in the Virginia of the past and who attained a certain wide outlook by travel abroad, says: "If we are going to exist at all outside the archaeological museum, we must learn to accept men like Vetch; we must let in new blood; Vetch may be the vital element we need. We must live up to our epitaphs."

Stephen Culpepper in the same novel, inheritor of all that is best in the wealth and culture of the old order, is torn by a conflict between inherited traditions and standards and the impulses of new forces. The struggle is between his love for Margaret Blair, the distilled essence of all that was fine in breeding and culture, and a growing love for Patty Vetch, who sprang from unknown parents and from the crudest circumstances and is yet groping for something in the way of culture and beauty. At the same time he is influenced, now by Benham, a typical successful politician who has emotions but no convictions and who indulges in "sonorous rhetoric and gorgeous purple periods of classic oratory," and now by Gideon Vetch, a big elemental man like Lincoln, who is an embodiment of the liberal spirit in poli-