A STUDY OF THE PERIODICAL RECEPTION OF THE NOVELS OF THOMAS HARDY, GEORGE GISSING, AND GEORGE MOORE

Thesis for the Degree of Ph. D.
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This is to certify that the

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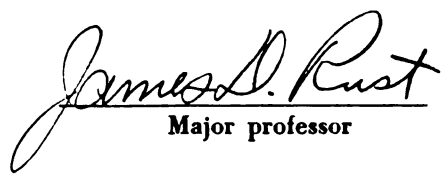

Major professor

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A STUDY OF
THE PERIODICAL RECEPTION OF THE NOVELS OF
THOMAS HARDY, GEORGE GISSING, AND GEORGE MOORE

By

JAMES RAYMOND HODGINS

A THESIS

Submitted to the School for Advanced Graduate Studies
of Michigan State University in partial
fulfillment of the requirements
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****

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A STUDY OF
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AN ABSTRACT

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ABSTRACT

The great novelists of the Victorian era had died before 1870 or else had produced the bulk of their works by that time. While often chafing at the restrictions imposed by the censorship of Mudie's and Smith's libraries, they had, nevertheless, generally fashioned their novels to please the subscribers to the lending-library service. With some notable exceptions, the novelists furnished characters and ideas appealing to the insular morality of nineteenth century England.

They created, for example, modest, demure, reserved, middle-class heroines reflecting their readers' idealization of women. They created bold, ambitious, active, and dutiful heroes whose moral earnestness always prompted right behavior and decisions. Furthermore, their language, both in narrative passages and in the dialogue of their heroines and heroes was edifying; they reserved sub-standard dialogue for villains and lower-class characters. The master novelists also omitted from their narratives scenes describing sexual activity or sex as a motivating force. They emphasized the Victorian belief in optimism by showing their characters triumphing over inner feelings as well as over external circumstance. Finally, to satisfy Mr. Podsnap, they eschewed the continental technique and philosophy of naturalism. The critics of the seventies, eighties, and nineties learned as children to recognize as standard these aspects of the foremost novels.

After 1870, new writers found that they needed to pattern their work after that of the masters or risk critical condemnation.

Thomas Hardy, George Gissing, and George Moore deliberately chose the latter course. Hardy, for example, frequently made his heroines physically attractive, his heroes observant instead of active. He permitted sex to motivate his characters, allowing adultery and infidelity to infiltrate his stories. While his language demonstrated reasonable care, his critics carefully pointed out flaws. Hardy defied, too, the spirit of optimism by writing of despair and suicide and by showing man in the grip of an uncaring environment. Though he denied any belief in naturalism in literature, periodical critics reproached him for his lapses from traditional standards.

Like Hardy, Gissing displeased most reviewers, at least with his early novels. His heroines came from the lower classes; his heroes, pensive and meditative, achieved worldly success only by sacrificing integrity. Careful with language, Gissing escaped the critics' sting. He did, however, write of prostitutes and mistresses, thereby upsetting the widely-held opinion that novels should ignore sex. Also like Hardy, Gissing permitted despair to triumph and avoided happy endings, at least until he acceded to reviewers' demands for romantic narratives. He, too, denied the existence of naturalism.

Moore announced his intention to be a naturalistic writer, but later insisted that he despised naturalism. He had, however, offended his critics by portraying heroines who openly sought or abandoned husbands and by presenting unambitious heroes who refused to act as society wished. He blundered in language, allowed sex to permeate his novels, and emphasized despair and pessimism.

The critics, nurtured as they were on early Victorian standards, used the term naturalism to describe the novels of Hardy, Gissing,

and Moore. These three, however, denying the charge, differed among themselves in all but one of the features so enraging to their reviewers. What they held in common was their belief in man's weakness and his inability to overcome internal or external forces. To nineteenth century reviewers, who did not define their terms, the pessimism and despair illustrated in the novels signified naturalism.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

A striking thing about the last three decades of Queen Victoria's reign is that three novelists as divergent in their attitudes and achievements as Thomas Hardy, George Gissing, and George Moore were each called naturalists by reviewers in contemporary periodicals. To discover the reasons for the reviewers' doing so is the ultimate purpose of this study, but the method used for revealing this will also uncover much information about the author's opinions and techniques as well as the criteria of the reviewers themselves. It will show that the reviewers used the standards of an earlier day for judging the literary merit and the morality of a novel, that the reviewers were, in fact, of a reactionary stripe. Finally, the study will reveal what naturalism meant to the reviewers and how it most offended the tenets of the Victorian middle class.

Almost all the critics discussed the novels from the same aspects, namely, the individual author's presentation of heroines and heroes, emphasis on sex either in or out of marriage, language and style, espousal or denial of pessimism, and adherence to realism if not naturalism itself. The authors also wrote about those topics in letters, diaries, magazine articles, and certain autobiographical materials. By comparing the authors' views and practices with the critics', one will be able to learn to what extent the novelists deliberately defied their judges.

Other novelists besides Hardy, Gissing, and Moore were also berated by the critics, but these three have been selected for special scrutiny because their work must be and is recognized in any discussion of English naturalism. Furthermore, since all were publishing during the eighties and nineties, one can discover if the critics' opinions changed during these decades. The novelists lend themselves well to the study: Hardy because he began his novel-writing career before naturalism or suspected naturalism became the criterion of criticism and ceased writing long prose fiction without conforming to the critics' taste; Gissing because he began his career as a supposed naturalist, changing to more romantic works shortly before his death in 1904; and Moore because he deliberately identified himself with foreign naturalists but later rejected Zolaism, as the critics called naturalism.

By the time Hardy published his first novel, Desperate Remedies, the great Victorian novelists were producing almost nothing. Indeed, Thackeray and the Brontes were dead, Dickens died in 1870, and George Eliot wrote only two more novels. Trollope, having completed the Barsetshire chronicles, made less important contributions, while Meredith was not generally to be appreciated until the nineties.[1] Thus, new writers were needed to replace the literary giants just named.

Most of the novelists of the seventies attempted to duplicate the masters' works and transmitted to a new generation ideas taken from the great masterpieces of fiction. In this, they received encouragement from England's most influential booksellers, Mudie's and Smith's,

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[1]Amy Cruse, After the Victorians (London, 1938), p. 173.

which for many years had distributed only those books they deemed innocuous. Finding no reason to abandon their profitable formula, they aided in perpetuating Victorian literary and moral standards.

To ascertain these standards presents little difficulty. In the first place, a novel had to be didactic. Giving pleasure alone was not enough. While earlier fiction had been didactic, the nineteenth century appropriated the novel for its own purposes, namely, to promote bourgeois ideals and to instruct the young.[2] The Victorian custom of reading aloud within the family circle encouraged novelists to write for listeners of all ages. Thus, all members of a household, including the children, heard the latest chapters of a current serial novel since watchful parents insisted that books and magazines brought into the home edify and never embarrass.

Assuming that the reviewers of the seventies, eighties, and nineties were reared and read to in such family gatherings, as children they learned the qualities of a heroine: she had an abundance of maidenly reserve, was always demure, was never an object of desire. Viola Klein, (a twentieth-century scholar) would add delicacy to the above list of attributes.[3] Ordinarily the heroine was portrayed as neither daring nor witty, neither exuberant nor boisterous. As in real life, she probably had little formal education to prepare her for a career. Indeed, the heroine was not expected to gain her own livelihood since her father and her husband would provide for her. In return she

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[2]Walter Houghton, The Victorian Frame of Mind, 1830-1870 (New Haven, 1957), p. 102.

[3]Viola Klein, "The Emancipation of Women: Its Motives and Achievements," Ideas and Beliefs of the Victorians, ed. Harman Grisewood (London, 1949), p. 265. Hereafter cited as Ideas.

would grace their homes by her presence and her efforts to make their homes sanctuaries. Serving as a foil to her intellectual and more worldly mate, the Victorian heroine lived a placid life once she achieved marriage:

> The typical Victorian novel was a happy-ending wedding-bell stereotype; there was a cult of the home then, and family prayers, family magazines, bowdlerised Shakespeares, the family photograph album, the annual family holiday were standard family equipment.[4]

While learning that a heroine's good and dutiful behavior culminated in a happy marriage, children in a family reading circle also discovered a hero's characteristics. His duties to God, the Queen, and his home he performed with moral earnestness, the source of all his virtue. This quality elevated him above his fellows, helped him financially, and gave him strength in adversity. Most important, it caused him to act decisively and unhesitatingly. He certainly was neither bookish nor contemplative; on the contrary, he was rugged and ambitious. Cheerfully optimistic, he overcame all odds, acquired a fortune, married the heroine, and proved that material success derived from morality.[5]

Both heroine and hero entered matrimony without previous sexual experience, as far as readers knew. Their marriage followed a courtship characterized by platonic love. While the beautiful heroine may have caused him to lose his heart to her, novelists ignored normal sexual desire as a powerful motivating force. Because fictional couples had remained sexually pure, their marriages would never be threatened by infidelity or divorce.

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[4]H. L. Beales, "The Victorian Family," Ideas, p. 347.

[5]Houghton, p. 192.

Victorian children, the future reviewers among them, acquired other ideas from novels. They learned heroes and heroines spoke polished, if not elegant, language while lower class figures expressed themselves in dialect and colloquialisms. Ostensibly, no fictional character knew profanity, strong oaths, or coarse words. Children learned at home, therefore, to model their language on that of the heroes and heroines.

While providing models for self-improvement, most novels encouraged both adults and children to embrace the idea of constant progress. In real life, science promised the world knowledge necessary to overcome obstacles once thought insuperable; fiction showed that a better world lay within the reach of the morally upright. Readers, therefore, enthusiastically observing great technological advances, felt man had discovered the necessary weapons for controlling natural and environmental forces. And in spite of the warnings of some intellectuals, the idea of progress was the most central, the most characteristic idea of the Victorians.[6]

The literature of the great Victorian novelists furnished many examples of the optimistic approach to life. Happy endings catered to the readers' desires. Even in novels dealing with depressing topics or people--Silas Marner, David Copperfield, or The Newcomes, for instance--first-rate authors made happy endings important.

Even more important as a witness to the spirit of optimism, though, was the interior nature of the fictional character. Children learned from novels that a character remaining cheerful before

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[6]John Bowle, "Origin and Development of the Idea of Progress," Ideas, p. 33.

overwhelming odds had real greatness, for despair or pessimism marked weakness. The novel, therefore, provided an excellent means of escape from worrisome reality into a pleasant world; and the gospel of good cheer as interpreted and spread by Mudie's to an ever-growing list of subscribers prevailed.[7]

To be opposed to optimism in life and literature was tantamount to declaring oneself opposed to all good things, and therefore, all things British, for the Mr. Podsnaps of the era looked askance at the doings of other nations. Pleased by his countrymen's novels, the middle class Englishman saw no reason for new trends in literature. What he already had was wholesome, moral, and optimistic; what he might read, if imported novels came his way, would probably differ in these aspects. He especially feared French literature, for his Puritanism had long ago convinced him that France was the devil's home.[8] Literary naturalism as an export of immoral France was, therefore, bound to be accused of traducing British insular morality; and no parent would risk exposing his child to French novels since "French novels meant vice and immorality."[9]

From this brief and general summary of the most common standards of early Victorian novels, we can proceed to outline the pattern which ordinary novelists followed in the last three decades of the nineteenth century and which pleased most reviewers. In the first place, the novelist needed to reward virtue and punish wrong-doing.

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[7]Robert A. Colby, "The Librarian Rules the Roost," Wilson Library Bulletin, XXVI (1952), 625.

[8]Hugh Walpole, "Novelists of the 'Seventies," The Eighteen Seventies, ed. Harley Granville-Barker (New York, 1929), p. 24.

[9]Cruse, p. 56.

Reviewers liked to see poetic justice at work. Secondly, the novelist needed to exalt the well-born and stress the weaknesses of the lower classes. Reviewers wanted novels to substantiate a belief that material wealth resulted from inner strength and devotion to duty while poverty resulted from a lack of these qualities.

Next, the novelist needed to write so that no member of a reading-circle would be embarrassed. Reviewers wanted no offensive language at any time, no matter whether a speaker be good or evil, rich or poor, young or old.

Also, it was best if the novelist drew his heroines and heroes from the upper classes, source of all ennobling practices. Reviewers wanted heroines and heroes who could be emulated for proper behavior at all times. Protagonists like these would instill and perpetuate the public's approval of itself while disparaging the challengers of society's edicts.

The novelist would also prove this an era of optimism and cheerful attitudes. Reviewers would permit him to describe a character dying at the end of the story if he had earlier shown that personage so moral that death merely opened the way to heaven. Reviewers preferred sentimental scenes.

Finally, the ordinary novelist would eschew foreign literary techniques or philosophies. Reviewers feared foreign novels, especially French novels, since these were supposed to lack all moral standards and to have contributed to France's comparative weakness.

Hampered by these restrictions, ordinary novelists plied their trade. Fortunately for the literature of the late Victorian period, certain novelists broke away from the inherited standards. Hardy, Gissing, and Moore were among those declaring themselves opposed

to earlier ideas of fiction and deliberately illustrated in their novels principles and convictions which more timid novelists shunned. What those principles were and how they were presented are the subject of the next chapter.

CHAPTER II

PRINCIPLES AND PRACTICES OF HARDY, GISSING, AND MOORE

One question which immediately poses itself is this: What ideas did Hardy, Gissing, and Moore entertain which violated the standards of literary taste postulated in the preceding chapter? An examination of their comments regarding heroines and heroes, sexual relationships, language, optimism and pessimism, and realism and naturalism will reveal that their beliefs were revolutionary for the nineteenth century. And then by finding in their novels illustrations of their expressed ideas, we shall be able to see how they disregarded conventional novel standards.

While these novelists disagreed with one another on certain aspects of literature, they did agree on two things: the bad taste of the British reading public and the bad judgment of critics. Regarding the first, Hardy blamed the poor quality of English fiction on the public's demand for emasculated literature.[1] Gissing stated that "...the public which reads in any sense of the word worth considering, is very, very small; the public which would feel no lack if all book-printing closed tomorrow, is enormous."[2] Moore maintained that the literature of the people was idiotic stories.[3]

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[1]Thomas Hardy, "Candour in English Fiction," Life and Art, ed. Ernest Brennecke (New York, 1925), p. 76.

[2]George Gissing, Private Papers of Henry Ryecroft, ed. Paul Elmer Moore (New York, 1918), p. 57.

[3]George Moore, Confessions of a Young Man, ed. Floyd Dell (New York, 1917), p. 102.

Their contempt for critics also reveals similar attitudes. Hardy questioned the honesty of one critic who had condemned Tess of the D'Urbervilles:

> A smart and amusing article; but it is easy to be smart and amusing if a man will forego veracity and sincerity....How strange that one may write a book without knowing what one puts into it--or rather the reader reads into it.[4]

To Gissing, critics seemed to be "...unutterable, long-eared asses!"[5] Moore, constantly the recipient of the critics' barbs, wrote, "Being a writer of fiction myself, I am not deceived by those superficial likenesses which are gathered by shallow critics and flung in the face of contemporary writers."[6] If they reveal nothing else, these statements show that the novelists were aware that what they were writing was neither what the critics approved of nor what they wanted to give the public.

One may also wonder in what regard the novelists held each other. Judging from the letters exchanged between Hardy and Gissing, one can conclude that Hardy and Gissing respected the literary efforts of each other. In a letter to Hardy in 1886, Gissing wrote:

> I have not been the least careful of your readers, and in your books I have constantly found refreshment and onward help. That aid is much needed now-a-days by anyone who wishes to pursue literature as distinct from the profession of letters. ...The misery of it is that, writing for English people, one may not be thorough: reticences and superficialities have so often to fill places where one is willing to put in honest work.[7]

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[4]Florence E. Hardy, The Later Years of Thomas Hardy (New York, 1930), p. 6.

[5]George Gissing, Letters of George Gissing to Members of His Family, collected by Algernon and Ellen Gissing (London, 1927), p. 204.

[6]George Moore, Impressions and Opinions (New York, 1891), p. 81.

[7]Florence E. Hardy, The Early Life of Thomas Hardy (New York, 1928), p. 239.

Other letters similarly reveal that Hardy was interested in Gissing.[8] However, neither Moore nor Hardy respected each other. It was Moore who gleefully wrote to Mr. Barrett H. Clark:

> Have I told you my epigram on Hardy? George Eliot's miscarriage![9]

Hardy's notebook referred to George Moore as "that ludicrous blackguard" when the latter had ridiculed a portion of his work.[10] Neither Gissing nor Moore commented on the efforts of the other, but we can assuredly put Gissing in Hardy's camp from the evidence available. Despite the severity of the remarks quoted above, however, the revolutionary zeal of these three novelists serves to join them. And even some of their principles regarding heroines and heroes, sex, language, pessimism, and realism and naturalism place them closer together than Hardy or Moore would have been willing to admit.

Hardy, for example, was to be scorned by certain critics for his presentation of women as active human beings and as objects of desire--a presentation which did not conform to the code of the libraries. Nevertheless, his observations reveal what he thought to be the essential qualities of womanhood, and his observations are realized in the women he created in his works. Hardy once observed to himself that "Every now and then, each woman, however interesting, puts on her battle face," and every reader of Hardy can immediately recall women characters who, discarding the Victorian ideal of duty to someone, chose

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[8]Gissing, Letters, pp. 242-244.

[9]Joseph Hone, The Life of George Moore (London, 1936), p. 376.

[10]Thomas Hardy, Thomas Hardy's Notebooks, ed. Evelyn Hardy (London, 1955), p. 104.

to follow their own wills.[11] One thinks of Elfride in A Pair of Blue Eyes or Sue in Jude the Obscure, who, while dissimilar in other respects, were alike in this.

Just as important, too, was his emphasis on the physical aspects of the women he created. In one of his notebook entries, he described four village girls according to certain marks of beauty: the mere prettiness of one, the red hair of a second, the flaxen curls of another, the rich color and clever dimple-making of still another, the last girl, as his wife suggested, possibly the model for Arabella.[12] The natural attractiveness of these unspoiled girls is contrasted in his own mind with the artificiality of city women whom he observed at a soirée: "But these women! If put into rough wrappers in a turnip field, where would their beauty be?"[13] Observing on another occasion a fashionably-attired woman, he remarked, "...if held up by the hair and slipped out of her clothes, carriage, etc., etc., aforesaid would not be much larger than a skinned rabbit, and of less use."[14] A comparable point of view was reflected in his comments regarding a woman of the upper classes:

> She is one of the few, very few, women of her own rank for whom I would make a sacrifice; a woman too of talent, part of whose talent consists in concealing that she has any.[15]

More interesting to him were some street singers whose faces, seen in a dim light "were what Nature made them, before the smear of

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[11]Hardy, Early Life, p. 239.

[12]Hardy, Early Life, p. 239.

[13]Hardy, Early Life, p. 239.

[14]Hardy, Early Life, p. 239.

[15]Hardy, Early Life, p. 279.

civilization" had sullied their existences.[16] But of the many women characters whom he created, Hardy singled out Sue in Jude the Obscure for special comment: "Sue is a type of woman which has always had an attraction for me, but the difficulty of drawing the type has kept me from attempting it till now."[17]

From these remarks, one can ascertain what Hardy's views on women were. In the first place, he believed that women could make decisions for themselves. Secondly, he found women physically attractive. Thirdly, he was more interested in women of the lower and middle classes than he was in women of high social standing. Furthermore, a reading of his novels indicates that these ideas regarding women are incorporated in his stories, especially when one realizes that he usually selected women from the lower classes to be his heroines. Willful, active, and physically beautiful women play the leading roles in the Hardy novels in direct contradiction of the ordinary Victorian belief that heroines should be dutiful, passive, and rather nondescript women from the upper classes.

Gissing's idea of how a woman should appear in novels differed sharply from Hardy's. He paid little attention to the physical attractiveness of his characters, concentrating rather on their attitudes of heart and intellect. He regarded them generally as held in bondage, slaves to the conventions of Victorian society, with only one opportunity to free themselves. This opportunity could come through education alone, which conferred the ability to earn a living. Thus, in a letter to his brother Algernon, Gissing wrote, " It becomes a woman to have

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[16]Hardy, Early Life, p. 216.

[17]Hardy, Early Life, p. 42.

knowledge of the world, and not to be a helpless puppet."[18] This idea he partially illustrated in The Emancipated and more fully in The Odd Women, where he presented three women whose meager education placed them at the mercy of the world in contrast to those women who were being educated to earn a living. As a writer who equated evil with ignorance, he told his sister:

> If you only could know how much of the wretchedness of humanity is occasioned by the folly, pig-headedness, ignorance and incapacity of women you would rejoice to think of all these new opportunities for mental and moral training. For the cultivation of the mind goes a very long way towards the formation of a good character....I have vast faith in imaginative literature of all kinds. If the choice had to be made, I would rather have a girl well acquainted with Dickens, George Eliot, Shelley and Browning than with all the science in the textbooks.[19]

The kind of informed woman illustrated here appeared in several Gissing novels. The lovely Helen Norman in Workers in the Dawn, his first published novel, was erudite above all else; the intellectual Ada Warren in Isabel Clarendon served as a foil to the society matron, and although she found no wedded bliss, she did have the knowledge and courage to admit to herself that happiness is not inextricably associated with marriage.

In his semi-autobiographical work, The Private Papers of Henry Ryecroft, appearing late in his career, Gissing was inclined to place less emphasis on the intellectual woman in favor of one ruled more by her heart. The latter type he saw in his housekeeper who "... is such an old fashioned person that the mere discharge of what she deems a duty is in itself an end to her, and the work of her hands in itself a

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[18]Gissing, Letters, p. 127.

[19]Gissing, Letters, p. 107.

satisfaction, a pride.[20] In fact, in his last years Gissing objected to the modern career woman because he thought her outside her proper sphere. The unfortunate Alma Rolfe, from one of the last novels, The Whirlpool, was a fine example of what could happen to a woman who strayed from her husband and home because she could not resist the urge to show her accomplishments; and the later perceptive comments in Ryecroft, in which Gissing objected to the lion huntress and her prospective novel containing "the true note of modern vigour," showed his complete scorn for a woman who did not find herself in the traditional role assigned to womankind.[21]

The Gissing women characters, therefore, must be regarded from two points-of-view. The women receiving our admiration (and Gissing's) in the early novels are women of intellect who make decisions unemotionally. Their lot is tragic if they do otherwise. In the later novels, however, the attractive women are those who do indeed act from the heart instead of from intellect. The chapter on the criticism of Gissing's novels will show which type appealed more to the critics during the 'eighties and the 'nineties. The first chapter has already provided us with enough material to make us realize that Gissing's women characters, educated and unemotional, were not typical of the day.

Moore cared little for intellectual women as both his autobiographical works and his novels show. The English girls at the studio in Paris described in his Confessions of a Young Man as "...young

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[20]Gissing, Ryecroft, p. 74.

[21]Gissing, Ryecroft, p. 38.

and...so interesting to the eye--the gowns, the hair lifted, showing the neck; the earrings, the sleeves open at the elbow," appear in his A Modern Lover.[22] When contemplating a story of his cousin's mistress, Moore found her quite acceptable because she was both pretty and kissable.[23] He did not add here that she appealed to him also because she had sinned, sinfulness being most necessary to his heroines. His dislike of Mrs. Kendal, the actress, rested precisely in her respectable devotion to her family, and it is clear from A Mummer's Wife that Kate Ede is a nonentity until she becomes a decadent.[24] Throughout the Moore novels, the women are treated with contempt, with the possible exception of Esther Waters, modeled as she was on a slavey whom Moore had interviewed at length. His interest in all his characters waned, as does ours, whenever he ascribed conventional behavior to them, and this is especially true of the women he portrayed.

Moore's women characters were always unusual in that he removed from them all the veneer that society had bestowed on them. Their animalism in contrast to intellectualism became the subject of his character studies. Even in Evelyn Innes, when the heroine is indoctrinated with Balzacian ideas by Asher, her feminine instincts engage our attention most, for Moore convinces us that the heroine does not really hear what is being said, that she acts as she does because that is the true nature of woman. His portrayal of women was bound to enrage the ordinary novel reader of the day because in a mocking manner,

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[22]Moore, Confessions, p. 14.

[23]George Moore, Hail and Farewell, "Ave" (Leipzig, 1912), p. 30.

[24]Moore, Confessions, p. 142.

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he stripped them of every characteristic which a chivalric code had granted them.

The heroes in the Hardy novels are at their best when they are shown to be from the lower class. The middle class Knight and Smith are almost indistinguishable from each other, but such men as Gabriel Oak, Diggory Venn, and Giles Winterborne are individuals to the very last. Rising a little above their social group, they assume the mantle of the hero because of inner strength. These are not dashing heroes from the typical romance of the era; rather they are passive under most circumstances. Like many peasants, they seem to observe the scene, commenting to advance the narrative. The Hardy male becomes a hero as if to illustrate this entry in the novelist's notes:

> It is not by rushing straight towards fame that men come up with her, but by so adapting the direction of their path to hers that at some point ahead the two must inevitably intersect.[25]

The novelist justified his use of the lower-class man as a center of interest in a story when he refuted the argument of a critic who contended

> ...that novels which depict life in the upper walks of society must, in the nature of things, be better reading than those which exhibit the life of any lower class, for the reason that the subjects of the former represent a higher stage of development than their less fortunate brethren.[26]

Hardy dismissed this idea, widely held by those who sought models in literature, with these words:

> ...the physical condition of the characters rules nothing of itself one way or the other. All persons who have thoughtfully

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[25]Hardy, Early Life, p. 102.

[26]Hardy, Life and Art, p. 72.

> compared class with class--and the wider their experience the more pronounced their opinion--are convinced that education has as yet but little broken or modified the waves of human impulse on which deeds and words depend. So that in the portraiture of scenes in any way emotional or dramatic--the highest province of fiction--the peer and the peasant stand on much the same level.[27]

Here, then, is evidence that Hardy knew what the conventional hero was supposed to be and that he deliberately chose his characters from the lower classes, not merely because they interested him, but because he was sure that the materials for a novel could be found in every stratum of society. By reserving for himself the right to use men from all ranks, he could justifiably create a Jude or a Henchard, a Coggan or a Sergeant Troy, a hero or a villain.

Gissing's writing is so inextricably linked to his personal philosophy that it is an easy task to find out his opinions on the role a man should play in a novel. In the first place, he wanted his characters to know how to sacrifice physical needs to intellectual needs. Gissing was a hero in his own eyes when he recalled that he went without food to buy a book.[28] He was a hero when he replaced a lost sixpence which a destitute child had lost: "I put my hand into my pocket and wrought a sixpennyworth of miracle."[29] He found heroic any man who would use his reason to create happiness for others.[30]

Arthur Golding was the first Gissing hero to illustrate these objectives. Golding, poverty-stricken, intellectual, and self-sacrificing,

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[27]Hardy, Life and Art, p. 73.

[28]Gissing, Ryecroft, p. 30.

[29]Gissing, Ryecroft, p. 9.

[30]Gissing, Ryecroft, p. 28.

devoted much of his time to the poor. Kingcote (in Isabel Clarendon) bookish and reserved, served as the foil to the athletic sons of Mrs. Stratton. "Admirable British youths!" Gissing scornfully called them.[31] Biffen and Reardon are other characters of the heroic type in Gissing's novels. These two writers in New Grub Street sacrificed health and comfort to an ideal while their rival, Jasper Milvain, acceded to the public's demands in fiction, thereby becoming the villainous destroyer of his own moral integrity. Always Gissing's interest lay in such theorists and intellectuals as Godwin Peake (Born in Exile) and Harvey Rolfe (The Whirlpool) who might become villains if they should conform to someone else's standards.

Intellectuality was as desirable for Gissing's males as it was for his females. The two-fisted, rugged man of action, Mutimer in Demos, for instance, suffered a tragic end. In summary one can say that the man true to himself by being true to his mind was Gissing's choice for the role of hero; the man of sentimental and emotional mien suffered defeat.

The key to understanding the male characters Moore created lies in his statement that "...the prejudices of our time [are]...that a man's frailties should not be written about."[32] However, the novelist centered his work around these forbidden frailties. The Moore hero was not given to self-sacrifice whether he was poverty-stricken like Lewis Seymour or a man with twenty-thousand like Owen Asher. What united them was self-indulgence. But Moore's tolerating this

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[31]George Gissing, Selections Autobiographical and Imaginative from the Works of George Gissing, ed. Alfred C. Gissing (New York, 1929), p. 63.

[32]Moore, "Ave," p. 31.

was not what Victorians desired in their novels. Instead of disapproving of selfishness, he upheld a man's right to obey his own wishes:

> ...there is a tendency in us all to look askance at the man who likes to spend his evening alone with his book and his cat, who looks forward to lonely holidays...pleasantly conscious of himself and of the great harmony of which he is a part.[33]

The unsocial behavior condoned here is minor compared to the unsocial activities which Moore permitted elsewhere, in the bohemianism of Mike Fletcher, for instance. However, the novelist insisted always on the right of his men to behave as they pleased without conforming to any dictum of society.

In his Confessions of a Young Man, in which he introduced himself under the guise of the hero, Dayne, Moore stated that his soul had been formed by self-will and an impetuous temperament.[34] His description of his years in Paris, his complete lack of self-discipline, and his boasting about his decadency help to complete the picture of the kind of man Moore gave his public.

Moore insisted that his men be unconventional enough to attract attention, and any uncommon trait could satisfy the author. He believed any man with ten thousand a year could not possibly be a subject of art; therefore, he constantly referred in Evelyn Innes to Asher's income of twenty-thousand.[35] This amount was unusual enough to satisfy Moore, and it could, perhaps, have middle class readers who

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[33]Moore, "Ave," p. 156.

[34]Moore, Confessions, p. 1.

[35]John Freeman, A Portrait of George Moore in a Study of His Work (New York, 1922), p. 106.

admired men of money accept Asher; but the novelist coupled wealth with sensualism, a distasteful combination for readers wanting to believe devotion to duty was rewarded financially.

Finally, Moore created impractical men. The solitary reader has been mentioned above, but there were others. Lewis Seymour was an artist; Dick Lennox was an actor without roots, and, of course, the betting men in Esther Waters were the most impractical of all. Obviously none of these men could satisfy the Victorian desire for a hero to emulate, and at no time did Moore give such a hero to the public. But even worse Moore failed to support conventional viewpoints by pointing a finger of shame at these men.

The three novelists resembled each other in their belief that they should be permitted to employ whatever language best suited their narratives. Hardy defended his presentation of peasant dialect in more than one article, particularly in one provoked by a charge that he was inaccurate in transcribing the speech of his peasants:

> ...if a writer attempts to exhibit on paper the precise accents of a rustic speaker, he disturbs the proper balance of a true representation by unduly insisting upon the grotesque element; thus directing attention to a point of inferior interest and diverting it from the speaker's meaning, which is far the chief concern where the aim is to depict the men and their natures rather than their dialect forms.[36]

A second charge was just the opposite: that he had been so accurate in reproducing dialect that his peasants were unintelligible. This, of course, he denied, and insisted that an examination of his works would exonerate him.[37] By assigning major roles, however, to lower class

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[36]Hardy, Life and Art, p. 113.

[37]Hardy, Life and Art, p. 114.

people, Hardy was unable to answer the Victorian demand for exemplary language and at the same time remain true to his artistic principles which demanded that a character use language suitable to his position.

Gissing was, according to his son, a man who "could revel in a sentence of noble English, whilst remaining oblivious of its still more noble significance," and this perhaps more than anything else accounts for the unreality and stiltedness of some of the dialogue in his novels, especially conversation among the literate.[38] In the scenes containing slum characters, however, the dialogue follows this advice: "But as the world is, an honest and wise man should have a rough tongue. Let him speak and spare not!"[39] This alone will account for the unpolished language of Mutimer in the early pages of Demos and for the conversation between the potato vendor and little Arthur Golding in Workers in the Dawn. Gissing's strongest plea for the right of the novelist to be as realistic as he chooses appeared in The Unclassed when Waymark and Casti discussed their literary plans and the former declared that his novel would be so real in every aspect that it would awaken the British public. About his novel, Gissing wrote to his brother,

> ...my characters must speak as they would actually, and I cannot be responsible for what they say. You tell me I need not have chosen such people; ah, but that is a question of an artist's selection.[40]

In this way Gissing could excuse the violent language of Slimy the slum dweller and the rude language of Mrs. Sprowl. Gissing's characters

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[38]Gissing, Selections, p. 186.

[39]Gissing, Ryecroft, p. 97.

[40]Gissing, Letters, p. 140.

were not recruited from the rural areas but from the city; but like Hardy, he attempted to make the language fit the character.

Moore carried his aestheticism into the realm of language. His liking for Marius the Epicurean led him to say that this book was the first in English prose that gave him genuine pleasure in the language itself.[41] Elsewhere he stated his appreciation of other types of language, however. While visiting a music hall, he was pleased to note that there was

> not any affectation of language, nor that worn-out rhetoric which reminds you of a broken winded barrel-organ playing a che la morte...--but bright quips and cracks fresh from the back-yard of the slum....[42]

He was, then, able to appreciate either the magnificent English of Pater or the rough English of the slums; however, by his own admission reproducing either variety invariably gave him difficulty. He found that his English, "rotten with French idiom," made his style impossible.[43] His continual revisions of his works serve as witnesses to the fact that this was more than an attention-getting statement. But mastering English dialogue caused him more trouble. Of this he said,

> ...for strange as it may seem, it is nevertheless true that the moment we sit down to write dialogue we immediately become changed beings, and the most original [works] are at once possessed by comic relief, and happy endings.[44]

Despite these language problems, Moore succeeded in his language usage. But what worried him was the type of error he might make.

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[41]Moore, Confessions, p. 185.

[42]Moore, Confessions, p. 154.

[43]Moore, Confessions, p. 159.

[44]Moore, Impressions, p. 245.

Insisting that he was not a purist, he stated that an error of diction was acceptable if it were not the usual, the commonplace.[45] Even this kind of error, however, was intolerable to the readers who sought in novels good model prose.

Like the other two novelists, Moore was forced by his artistic principles to present sub-standard English when he introduced characters from the lower classes. In Esther Waters, for example, the language of the pub patrons and the bettors attempts to suggest the innate crudity of the characters, even though there is no profanity or slang, either of which the Victorians would have abhorred. And despite his insisting on the literary artist's freedom to write as he pleased, in Esther Waters and his other novels, he avoided offending his readers by carefully omitting coarse language at least.

All three novelists wrote about their beliefs regarding the treatment of love, sex, and marriage in literature. Hardy believed that one of the first glimmers of woman's enfranchisement would arise from her not becoming the chattel and slave of her seducer, an idea developed in Tess.[46] But even more opposed to Victorian standards was his idea, illustrated in Jude, that marriage was abominable under certain circumstances:

> I have already said many times, during the past twenty or thirty years, that I regard Marriage as a union whose terms should be regulated entirely for the happiness of the community, including primarily, that of the parties themselves.
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> ....
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> I can only suppose, in a general way, that a marriage should be

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[45]Moore, Confessions, p. 46.

[46]Hardy, Early Life, p. 204.

> dissolvable at the wish of either party, if that party prove it to be a cruelty to him or her....[47]

This theme of marital unhappiness and the desirability of divorce permeates the Hardy novels and extends from Desperate Remedies to Jude the Obscure. Furthermore, Hardy knew his treatment of marital unhappiness was unusual in novels. In a letter to J. T. Green he wrote:

> You have probably observed that the ending of the story [The Woodlanders]--hinted rather than stated--is that the heroine is doomed to an unhappy life with an inconstant husband. I could not accentuate this strongly in the book, by reason of the conventions of the libraries, etc.[48]

He knew likewise that he was offending his readers as well as the libraries. He pleaded for the reader's understanding in this passage from "Candour in English Fiction":

> Life being a physiological fact, its honest portrayal must be largely concerned with, for one thing, the relations of the sexes, and the substitution for such catastrophes as favour the false colouring best expressed by the regulation finish that 'they married and were happy ever after,' of catastrophes based upon sexual relationship as it is. To this expansion English society opposes a well-nigh insuperable bar.[49]

Hardy's attacks on home and marriage were no more unusual in the novels of the era than was his treatment of love and courtship. He had made his women objects of physical desire, weakening thereby the reader's belief in platonic love. While he did not elaborate on the subject by painting detailed scenes of passionate love, his tales did not insist that his characters marry in a state of virginity. On the contrary,

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[47]Hardy, Life and Art, p. 120.

[48]Hardy, Early Life, p. 289.

[49]Hardy, Life and Art, p. 78.

Tess's and Jude's pre-marital sexual experiences became leading motives for later developments. Apart from the sexual aspects of courtship, Hardy violated in still another way the usual love treatment: he portrayed his young women as falling in love as a result of their own wills, that is, without first obtaining their parents' consent. One of his early novels, A Pair of Blue Eyes, shows Elfride loving two men, marrying a third, and having been indirectly responsible earlier for the death of a fourth. Far from the Madding Crowd and Return of the Native similarly contain plots which show that love was no panacea.

Gissing's treatment of love, sex, and marriage was in some respects similar to Hardy's, but he added a new element: prostitution. In a day when society declined to mention the word prostitute and invented such euphemistic terms as the pretty horsebreaker, Gissing dared to draw sympathetic pictures of shadowy women. Thus, in a slum scene in his early The Unclassed, he presented a dying woman, a prostitute who had taken to the streets when her husband had died and her father had disowned her. This commentary on the social scene automatically disgusted anyone believing that novels should offer only pretty stories.

The novelist certainly disagreed with those who thought love, once found, was a permanent catalytic agent binding together a man and woman for all time. About this he wrote:

> Even love, in the largest and purest sense of the word, is no safeguard against perilous irritation and sensibilities inborn. And what were the durability of love without the powerful alliance of habit?[50]

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[50]Gissing, Ryecroft, p. 76.

Even the home, he found, was not necessarily a sanctuary of love:

> In mansion, as in hovel, the strain of life is perpetually felt--between the married, between parents and children, between relatives to every degree....They debate, they dispute, they wrangle, they explode--then nerves are relieved, and they are ready to begin over again. Quit the home and quarrelling is less obvious, but it goes on all about one.[51]

The ideas here presented were illustrated again and again in Gissing's novels. The bitterness existing between Golding and his wife in Workers in the Dawn provides an early and prime example. A later example, one equally striking, is the marital unhappiness described in The Odd Women, an entire book devoted to showing that even unmarried women could achieve happiness.

Gissing did not subscribe to the ideas of sexual morality then current. He contended that the greatest British vice was self-righteousness in matters of sex:

> The word hypocrisy is perhaps most of all applied to our behaviour in matters of sexual morality....Multitudes of Englishmen have thrown aside the national religious dogma, but very few indeed have abandoned the conviction that the rules of morality publicly upheld in England are the best known in the world. Anyone interested in doing so can but easily demonstrate that English social life is no purer than that of most countries. ...The streets of our great towns nightly present an exhibition the like of which cannot be seen elsewhere in the world. Despite all this, your average Englishman takes for granted his country's moral superiority, and loses no chance of proclaiming it at the expense of other peoples....He may, for his own part, be gross-minded and lax of life; that has nothing to do with the matter; he believes in virtue.[52]

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[51]Gissing, Ryecroft, p. 78.

[52]Gissing, Ryecroft, p. 234.

The novelist, however, contented himself with suggesting sexual relations instead of describing them. One reads in The Unclassed, for example, of a deceived child who frequently cannot sleep in her mother's bed because supposedly the parent is sick; but wiser than the child, the reader knows in reality the bed is the mother's place of business. Lending more horror to this discovery is the information that the mother had fallen from the middle class. Gissing, it can be seen, defied the Victorian code of courtship and marriage in every respect: he minimized love, he portrayed prostitutes sympathetically, he cast doubt on the institution of marriage, and he showed that not all mothers are wells of virtue.

Moore's preoccupation with sex was the talk of all his acquaintances, according to one biographer who reported that the novelist regarded as hypocritical any person unwilling to discuss sex.[53] Moore maintained that everyone was interested in sex:

> I have mixed in the great hurly-burly in England and France, and can vouch for it that, outside of the daily work, the one interest and occupation of men and women is sex. Even the Evangelical is interested in sex, and avails himself and herself of the white slave traffic as a subject of conversation, and many members of the vigilant societies have had to go to gaol for a too indiscriminate enjoyment of sex.[54]

Although he stated this toward the end of his career (1918), there is little doubt that he subscribed to it long before. In his Confessions he hoped that "by looking without shame and accepting with love the flesh," he might elevate it to the position held by the soul.[55]

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[53]George Moore, Letters of George Moore, ed. John Eglinton [pseudonym for William Kirkpatrick Magee] (Bournemouth, England), p. 10.

[54]Moore, Letters, p. 43.

[55]Moore, Confessions, p. 47.

The key words for Moore's treatment of sex are to be found in that passage, especially in the words without shame and with love, for it was thus that he treated sex in his novels. In A Modern Lover, for example, three women became the mistresses of the protagonist; it is doubtful, however, if anyone can discover how the flesh is elevated to a soul-high position here. Grossly sensual is the entire novel; and since the theme is the degradation of the hero, the sexual tone could have seemed to the Victorian neither shameless nor lovely.

Moore's complete rejection of the ideal of home and family is developed elsewhere. Again assuming that mocking superior tone in evidence throughout his reminiscences, Moore described the young physically attractive girl who, instead of giving him pleasure, could offer him only the duty a married man has to his children. Marriage in the eyes of the young man was only bondage; what he needed was a mature woman of thirty for his mistress. This, Moore believed, was the sine qua non for a young, refined man.[56]

Here was the essential idea of Evelyn Innes, although the refined Asher was scarcely young in this novel. However, the book does serve to illustrate the disregard which the novelist had for the middle class ideal of marriage. Even though Asher offered to marry Evelyn when he thought he was about to lose her, the damage had been done. She had surrendered herself to him with a minimum of mental anguish once the couple had arrived in Paris. Evelyn was not the young maiden led astray but a mature woman; and no ordinary reader could have tolerated this defiance of the code of sexual morality.

Moore believed, contrary to Victorian novel standards, that love was possible only before marriage, that marriage destroyed love

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[56]Moore, Confessions, p. 65.

because of constant intimacy.[57] A good illustration of this theory is to be found in A Mummer's Wife, that story of a woman who deserted her husband because she was infatuated with a more exciting man. Eventually marrying him, she found his attraction for her to have been replaced by jealousy; thus her degradation began. The story can be interpreted as an essentially moral one, but a reader who lived in an era when divorce was spoken about, even by adults, in hushed tones would have had to regard the novel as shocking. Furthermore, the book indirectly criticized romantic love.

Young girls and their supposed innocence constantly annoyed Moore. In an extremely bitter attack on middle class life and on the rigid censorship which Victorian mothers hoped to exercise on literature for their marriageable daughters, the novelist pointed out that censorship was in vain, since what mothers thought they were barring from the home actually gained entry:

> Turn your platitude prettily, but write no word that could offend the chaste mind of the young girl who has spent her morning reading the Colin Campbell divorce case; so says the age we live in. The penny paper that may be bought everywhere, that is allowed to lie on every table, prints seven or eight columns of filth, for no reason except that the public likes to read filth; the poet and novelist must emasculate and destroy their work because....Who shall come forward and make answer? Oh, vile, filthy and hypocritical century, I at least scorn you.[58]

A Drama in Muslin portrayed young girls who pretended innocence. In this novel the action of which is played before a backdrop of Ireland's difficulties, the novelist scorned matrons who, disregarding all else,

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[57]Moore, Confessions, p. 99.

[58]Moore, Confessions, p. 183.

spent their time in keeping their daughters in the marriage market. And the young women? With too much modesty, they insisted that all men were obscene animals. The maidens' hypocrisy and prudery were unmasked as would be that of all mothers and daughters so engaged if the novel were to enter the Victorian home.

Moore's question, "I wonder why murder is considered less immoral than fornication in literature?" was never answered to his satisfaction.[59]

The Victorians did not regard highly his efforts to make sex a fitting topic for novels. Indeed, even by acknowledging it as a motivating force, he offended readers who hypocritically insisted that all was well in love, the family, and the home.

The optimism of nineteenth century England to which the middle classes desperately clung received repeated blows from Hardy, Gissing, and Moore. Each of these produced novels in which the happy-ending was absent, in which the protagonists were victims of an intolerable situation or in which a problem remained unsolved. They were not the sole writers who cast doubt on the optimism of the age which was infected with a gnawing fear that everything was not going to be better. But certainly people who believed that a novel should entertain and not disturb could find little basis for an optimistic view of the world in the novels of these three chroniclers of despair.

Hardy's first novels, Desperate Remedies and Under the Greenwood Tree, the former melodramatic and the latter almost idyllic, presented little that can be regarded as an attack on or disbelief in optimism. A Pair of Blue Eyes, however, diminished the reader's belief in

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[59]Moore, Confessions, p. 196.

optimism by its omission of a happy ending. Similarly, Far from the Madding Crowd could leave the reader only with a less than joyful feeling because even though Oak eventually married Bathsheba, it was not the same as if he had won her when he first proposed marriage. Hardy's notebook entry, written after the novel appeared, helps to account for the sombre note: "The sudden disappointment of a hope leaves a scar which the ultimate fulfilment of that hope never entirely removes.[60]

Other Hardy novels also offered tragedies of ordinary individuals instead of romantic characters far above the reader. In 1878, the year of The Return of the Native, Hardy wrote:

> A Plot, or Tragedy, should arise from the gradual closing in of a situation that comes of ordinary human passions, prejudices, and ambitions, by reason of the characters taking no trouble to ward off the disastrous events produced by the said passions, prejudices, and ambitions.[61]

However essential this idea might be to a novelist explaining his art to himself, it was not to the liking of novel readers.[62] In the first place, Eustacia's ambitions and hopes were destroyed. Her every action resulted only in her being worse off than she had been: her marriage produced unhappiness for herself and Clym; her elopement ended in her death and Wildeve's. But though these tragedies seemed at first glance the product of a willful, undisciplined girl, the tragedy did not follow so closely Hardy's formula of tragedy-producing passions and ambitions as one might assume. Rather, Eustacia was the victim of both her own selfish passions and of Egdon Heath, the latter the tyrant representative of all nature. In this lay the depressing aspect of the story: the

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[60]Hardy, Early Life, p. 153.

[61]Hardy, Early Life, p. 157.

[62]Carl J. Weber, Hardy of Wessex (New York, 1940), p. 74.

inability of the girl to overcome her passions and environment. And, of course, succumbing to nature instead of overcoming it was to the Victorian a concession to pessimism.

In 1885 the novelist added the just-mentioned idea to his former definition of tragedy by declaring that it is a "state of things in the life of an individual" which causes catastrophe.[63] No longer did an individual's weakness bring about failure. The new definition of tragedy allowed internal or external nature to initiate destruction.

Several novels written after this date illustrate the theme of a hostile environment making fruitless the attempts of the individual to succeed. The Mayor of Casterbridge affords at least two examples of Hardy's latest theory: the tragedy of price-destroying fair weather occurring just when Henchard was trying to corner the grain market, and then, as if to make Henchard's plight unbearable, the weather turning bad and enriching the enemy. Throughout this novel and others, Tess, for example, uncontrollable forces conspired to thwart the ambitions of both good people and evil people, the Victorian belief in optimism being especially weakened when the righteous were afflicted.

In a romantic novel by a conventional author, the discovery of the name D'Urberville would have foretold major happiness for those who carried the plain name of Durbeyfield. Hardy made this event, however, produce absolute ruin for Tess's vainglorious father as well as for the simple heroine. The entire novel is a series of coincidences conspiring to defeat Tess. Circumstances never permit the heroine to rise, and on the one occasion when she hoped, her confession of her past further defeated her.

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[63]Hardy, Early Life, p. 230.

Jude fared little better. Heredity had given him a good mind and a capacity for love; life gave him a poor environment. Together these forces defeated him at every turn and prevented his rising above his station. Furthermore, his death as a result of nature's unkindness can be regarded only as contributing to the pessimistic idea which permeates the novel.

All of these tragedies showed man a hopeless victim of himself and of his environment and in no way could they be regarded optimistically. Even the reader of the day who might have attempted to demonstrate that the difficulties resulted from immoral behavior would be forced to admit that the misfortunes were the work of either an avenging God or a Malignant Fate, the former already under attack and the latter too horrible to contemplate--and neither conducive to optimism.

The question remains, then, "Was Hardy a pessimist?" He himself said on this subject:

> People call me a pessimist; and if it is pessimism to think with Sophocles that "not to be born is best," then I do not reject the designation. I never could understand why the word "pessimism" should be such a red rag to many worthy people. And I believe, indeed, that a good deal of the robustious, swaggering optimism of recent literature is at bottom cowardly and insincere. I do not see that we are likely to improve the world by asseverating however loudly that black is white or at least that black is but a necessary contrast and foil without which white would be white no longer. That is mere juggling with the metaphor. But my pessimism, if pessimism it be, does not involve the assumption that the world is going to the dogs and that Ahriman is winning all along the line. On the contrary, my philosophy is distinctly meliorist. What are my books but one plea against "man's inhumanity to man"--to woman--and to the lower animals? .... Whatever may be the inherent good or evil of life, it is certain that men make it much worse than it need be. When we have got rid of a thousand remediable ills, it

> will be time enough to determine whether the ill that is irremediable outweighs the good.[64]

Although, as the above quotation suggests, he may have regarded his work as a plea against man's inhumanity to man, one must note that Hardy was fully aware that in the minds of his readers he was a pessimist.

Unlike Hardy's first published novel, Gissing's first, Workers in the Dawn, was full of pessimism; and even though he insisted that one of his aims was to show the world how it could better itself, in this respect he failed miserably.[65] Indeed, he held out little hope, for at the end of the story the principals who had been struggling against economic forces were dead, the hero by his own hand. The school for the poor girls was bound to disband; the workers' societies were already disintegrating. It is a wonder that the public had purchased as many as twenty-nine copies of this novel, within the first three months, since it could have no other than a depressing effect on the reader.[66]

Gissing was an avowed pessimist at the beginning of his career. His brother wrote to him: "I shall ever regard you in error until you change this opinion--that the only reason for existence is that the sum of happiness should exceed the sum of misery."[67] Even an optimist could subscribe to this idea, but Gissing did not permit happiness to outweigh misery. Instead, by picturing a world of misfortune, he indicated that death is preferable to life beset by invincible troubles. In this way, he attacked the Victorian belief that this world exists in order to try mankind. It is apparent from the little-read first novel

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[64]William Archer, "Real Conversations," Academy, LX (March 23, 1901), 240.

[65]Gissing, Letters, p. 83.

[66]Gissing, Letters, p. 89.

[67]Gissing, Letters, p. 49.

that Arthur Golding held Gissing's theory, and after totaling up the sums, found no reason to continue his desperate existence. Suicide commonly occurs in Gissing's early novels.

Despair was illustrated in other ways, too, for Gissing intended to show the unpleasantness of life. In 1887, he wrote in a letter, "...all my work is profoundly pessimistic as far as mood goes."[68] His novels ended with the main characters dying unsentimentally: Helen Norman, Kingcote and Reardon from illness; Mutimer from the action of a mob; and the philanthropic Snowdon from age. Death, of course, was not new in the Victorian novel, but Gissing always treated it unsentimentally. Readers could have concluded only that the dying had never known any joy in living.

Despite Gissing's continual asseverations that his work was bound to be gloomy because of the nature of his material, maturity found him writing in a different vein.[69] The Town Traveller indicated his break with pessimism. Though still appearing, the satiric passages were now less vitriolic. The reasons for this change in attitude are not known. If one can believe that The Private Papers of Henry Ryecroft reflect the author's opinions of his last years as his son, among others, suggested, the following statement may help to account for the change: "The mind which renounces, once and for ever, a futile hope, has its compensation in ever-growing calm."[70] Having seen that his efforts

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[68]Gissing, Letters, p. 193.

[69]As late as 1891 he wrote to his sister, "...my ideas are negative, and on the whole I confine myself to giving pictures of life as it looks to my observation of it. The outlook, certainly, is not very cheerful; impossible for me to see the world in a rosy light." Gissing, Letters, p. 318.

[70]Gissing, Ryecroft, p. 54.

had effected no change in the world he so bitterly detested, he apparently resigned himself to this state of affairs, letting his resignation attest to an internally-felt pessimism.

Gissing's denial of the spirit of optimism was one of his strongest characteristics. His writing does not urge that a greater love between members of the human race will produce happiness for the world. His distrust of democracy (in Demos and in Ryecroft) and his dislike of the people whom he described elsewhere reveal him as one having little faith in the future.

In 1930 George Moore candidly stated, "But then I am a natural pessimist."[71] This statement would not have surprised any of his readers during the period under study, for his books, with the exception of Esther Waters, reveal his anti-optimistic spirit. Before he had written his first work, he wrote of himself, "...thoughts of love and death, and the hopelessness of life, were in active fermentation within me and sought for utterance with a strange unintermittingness of appeal."[72] An early utterance of the hopelessness of life appeared in A Modern Lover. The pessimism here took no strange color. The black of the beginning of the story became only blacker. No attempt was made to show that an external or even an internal force produced the downfall of the characters. The story contained merely a group of characters degenerating.

In the same way Moore treated the story of the degradation of Kate and Dick in A Mummer's Wife. The reasons for their downfall were never explained. The author did not suggest that life could have

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[71]Moore, Letters, p. 86.

[72]Moore, Confessions, p. 25.

been better for them. Kate's abandonment of her husband produced no good for her, providing only a means whereby Moore could show her downfall. The descents into misery presented in these two stories were, if nothing else, matter-of-fact. The novelist made no point of informing his audience that these characters were struggling against forces greater than their own. It was the reader's responsibility to recognize that here were weak people who surrendered easily and did not try to overcome their sexual instincts.

Moore relied on one device to show the hopelessness of existence: suicide. This seemed to him a proper solution for the troubles in Mike Fletcher and in Vain Fortune. In neither case, though, is there the poignancy of the death of Little Father Time (in Jude) nor of Biffen (in New Grub Street). The degradation of his characters Moore merely rounded off with suicidal acts.

One might suspect after reading Impressions and Opinions that Moore would have employed in his novels an idea acquired from Ibsen: "... we learn that though there be no gods to govern us, that nature, vast and unknown, for ever dumb to our appeals, holds us in thrall."[73] His subsequent novels reject this idea, however; in Esther Waters he did not make his heroine suffer at the hands of fate as Hardy made Tess suffer; there were no misplaced letters or confessions to deprive Esther of happiness. In fact, the novel ended on a note of happiness and the tragedies of the earlier period were not duplicated.

Moore did not entirely relinquish his pessimistic ideas with this book, however. Evelyn Innes and Sister Teresa illustrate a different form of pessimism. The beautiful singer, erstwhile mistress of

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[73]Moore, "Note on 'Ghosts,'" Impressions, p. 224.

Sir Owen Asher, left her paramour to enter a convent. To Moore, whose anti-Catholic feelings were as strong as those of Owen, this was a kind of suicide. Baker informs us that "Moore even coquetted with the idea of suicide in the convent pond as a termination."[74] And as the original ending of the story went, Evelyn found no peace of soul because she was neither nun nor mistress, possibly a suggestion of the idea that a suicide finds no resting place; her suicide, of course, was her denial of the inner self.

Obviously Moore held no brief for optimism. His later remarks concerning the evil that Esther Waters did to him--"...here is a case of a thoroughly healthy book having demoralised its author [by supplying him with enough money for luxurious living]"--indicate that the popularity of this novel was due to its ending on a note of hopefulness and optimism.[75] The common trait of the other novels was pessimism.

The views of Hardy, Gissing, and Moore on the subject of literature and the aims of the novel led each one into commenting on realism and naturalism. The first of these novelists denied that naturalism in fiction was a possibility, because, as he pointed out in his essay, "The Science of Fiction,"

> The most devoted apostle of realism, the sheerest naturalist, cannot escape, any more than the withered old gossip over her fire, the exercise of Art in his labour or pleasure of telling a tale. Not until he becomes an automatic reproducer of all impressions whatsoever can he be called purely scientific, or even a manufacturer on scientific principles. If in the exercise of his reason he select or omit,

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[74]Ernest A. Baker, History of the English Novel: The Day Before Yesterday (London, 1938), p. 177.

[75]Moore, "Ave," p. 85.

> with an eye to being more truthful than truth (the just aim of Art), he transforms himself into a technicist at a move.[76]

Obviously, Hardy believed that the mere selection of certain details from all the details in the world prevented any author from becoming a naturalist. Furthermore, Hardy pointed out that even Zola recognized the weakness of his own theory when the French novelist maintained "that the novel should keep as close to reality as it can."[77] Hardy's underscored words here would have permitted him to regard himself as a realist, if he chose, for he saw granted in them the freedom to choose discriminately whatever details he might wish to record; for, as he said in regard to those three underscored words, "if we grant that, we grant all."[78]

The term "realism" greatly disturbed Hardy because of its ambiguity. He objected to its being used by some as a synonym for copyism and by others as a synonym for pruriency, and, of course, Hardy would never admit to his work being an example of either.[79] Nevertheless, he did not deny that he achieved a reality or truth which surpassed that of those writers who would call themselves realists. He insisted that as an artist selecting and distorting observable details, arranging them to suit the purposes of narrative, he could produce by a false thing the effect of a true, an impossible feat for realists whose formulae prevented their tampering with or heightening pictorial detail.[80]

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[76]Hardy, Life and Art, p. 85.

[77]Hardy, Life and Art, p. 86.

[78]Hardy, Life and Art, p. 86.

[79]Hardy, Life and Art, p. 87.

[80]Hardy, Early Life, p. 299.

It is, of course, a major difficulty to discover the details that Hardy tampered with or invented in his attempt to make real the romances, but one may assume that whenever he failed to conceal his art, for example in the obvious coincidences, he was exercising his imagination and insisting on prerogatives of artists. The losing of the earrings in A Pair of Blue Eyes, the misplacing of the letter in Tess of the D'Urbervilles, and in Far from the Madding Crowd Fanny Robin's showing up for her wedding at the wrong church are just three of the many apparent coincidences which may have resulted from the author's conscious treatment of his materials.

These obvious coincidences were not what outraged such readers as the Bishop of Wakefield, burner of Jude the Obscure; he acted because Hardy had presented details which made the book appear pornographic to him. It was not the coincidences in Tess that caused dinner-table fights, but the question of morality and the author's right to relate frankly his tale of adultery and murder.[81] But Hardy's comments regarding the duties of an artist prove him displeased with naturalism and realism as he defined them; his stated goal was to suggest reality by the refining process of art.

In his last years Gissing stated that as a child he had enjoyed black and white prints more than paintings and that during his early manhood he had preferred nature as represented by art to nature itself.[82] It takes little effort to see that it was this black and white of the steel engravings which underlay his pictures of London slum life

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[81]Hardy, Later Years, p. 6.

[82]Gissing, Ryecroft, p. 68.

and the life of the lower middle classes, for here was an artist who strove by remaining as neutral as he could to avoid coloring his work. His statements about his universe are worth noting:

> The world is for me a collection of phenomena which are to be studied and reproduced artistically. In the midst of the most serious complications of life, I find myself suddenly possessed with a great calm, withdrawn as it were from the immediate interests of the moment, and able to regard everything as a picture. ...the afflictions of others are to me materials for observation. ... What has that to do with me, if a fact?[83]

Here was the author's creed for his earliest work, and dominating all else was his belief in the necessity of remaining objective in his descriptions. In his earliest novels his attempts to remain objective and disinterested were only partly successful. Workers, for example, in the gruesome tenement scenes gave details of poverty and atmosphere that were almost unbearably unpleasant. The death of Golding's father Gissing treated with no compassion at all. Not a bit of his own sentiment appeared. But unfortunately for the theory of objectivity, the author could not refrain from commenting on the society which allowed such misery. The Unclassed, written after Gissing had verbalized the creed given above, was still no more objective than Workers in the Dawn.

The novelist fully knew that readers saw in him an English Zola, for after the first novel appeared in 1880, Gissing's good friend Frederic Harrison wrote to him:

> ...I especially hate the so-called realism of Zola. But your painting of dark life seems to me as good as his and to have a better social purpose--at least I hope so.[84]

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[83]Gissing, Letters, p. 128.

[84]Gissing, Letters, p. 77.

Regardless of the social purpose, Gissing continued to write novels following his theory of objectivity as best he could. Although his many letters are interlarded with French phrases and lists of French books read or intended to be read, he did not mention Le Roman Expérimental as a source of his work nor of his technique. New Grub Street contained a passage in which Gissing contrasted his results with Zola's, however:

> Zola writes deliberate tragedies; his vilest figures become heroic from the place they fill in a strongly imagined drama. I want to deal with the essentially unheroic, with the day-to-day life of that vast majority of people who are at the mercy of paltry circumstance.[85]

One doubts if any nineteenth-century reader could have read the successive novels of Gissing without noticing certain changes in his attitudes. In the first place, the reader would have noticed, starting with Isabel Clarendon and Demos, that the slum scenes were de-emphasized. Secondly, he would have noticed that the latter of these novels had plot as well as social purpose. Thirdly, he would have noticed that more and more Gissing entered himself into his work in order to comment on society's weaknesses. Finally, he would be forced to see the naturalistic tendencies give way to more romantic fiction.

The announcement of this last change came in 1895 when Gissing belabored naturalism and the current application of the term realism to all disagreeable novels. He regarded literary naturalism as realism plus science and claimed that it was a protest against conventional literature, which in its revolutionary vigor adopted unpleasant subject

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[85]George Gissing, New Grub Street, p. 150. See also the statement of William Frierson in L'Influence du Naturalisme Français sur les Romanciers Anglais de 1885à 1900: Comme nous avons tenté de le montrer, l'idée que se fait Zola de la brutalité des masses a probablement influencé Gissing dans sa déscription des habitants dès quartiers pauvres...., p. 212.

matter. Besides, Gissing thought, realism had become identified with pessimism to its own disadvantage. The novelist's task, as he saw it now, was to work subjectively with his own ideas of the world and to breathe life into those ideas. There was no science of fiction possible, he insisted, because science concerns itself with demonstrable facts whereas artistry must select only part of the actual and combine the selection with an emotional effect. He continued

> Realism, then, signifies nothing more than artistic sincerity in the portrayal of contemporary life; it merely contrasts with the habit of mind which assumes that a novel is written 'to please people,' that disagreeable facts must always be kept out of sight, that human nature must be systematically flattered, that the book must have a 'plot,' that the story should end on a cheerful note, and all the rest of it.[86]

Thus Gissing, like Hardy, could be a realist in all his works. He could not rightly be called a naturalist, he would have insisted, because artistry does not admit the possibility of combining science and art. Again like Hardy, he could remain a realist if he would but remain sincere and true to artistic principles, selecting any subjects which had an appeal for him and not necessarily those which were by nature depressing. Still a realist by his own definition, Gissing could treat humorous or romantic topics in The Town Traveller or in Veranilda.

Moore's discovery of naturalism came when he was in Paris in his formative years:

> One day...I took up the Voltaire. It contained an article by M. Zola. Naturalisme, la vérité, la science, were repeated some half-a-dozen times. Hardly able to believe my eyes, I read that you should write, with as little imagination as possible, that plot in a novel or in a play was illiterate and puerile....[87]

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[86]Gissing, Selections, p. 220.

[87]Moore, Confessions, p. 72.

The great difficulty for him at the time, however, was that he had written no novels of any sort. But when he returned to England and wrote his first novel, it was as Zolaesque as he knew how to make it. Moore chose a topic which was no more sordid than the topic of Zola's L'Assommoir which had impressed him so deeply. The theme of gradual degradation he developed as thoroughly in his first novel, A Modern Lover, as he did in his second, A Mummer's Wife. Both books he wrote in the style of Zola, that is, with careful, impersonal, and detailed observations. The latter novel, however, added the ingredient of heredity as a determining and invincible force which contributed to Kate's downfall as much as did anything else; the first novel, Moore later explained "was the work of a young man who in a moment of inspiration hit upon an excellent anecdote and, being without skill, devised an uncouth text out of memories of Balzac, Zola and Goncourt...."[88]

A Drama in Muslin showed Moore attempting something new in his naturalism. Here he changed his topic from the depiction of lower class life to a presentation of upper class Irish society with peasant poverty always in the background. The naturalistic tendency of documenting and reporting and describing were still evident, as were the objectivity and impersonality of the novelist; but most striking was Moore's attempt to penetrate the minds of his characters, especially Alice Barton's, by detailing physical surroundings. But he soon announced this was his last naturalistic novel.

The announcement of his break with Zolaism appeared in many forms. His Confessions revealed in many places that a mere dislike

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[88]Freeman, Portrait, p. 80.

of naturalism had turned into a hatred for it. Here are found such scornful phrases as "the putrid mud of naturalism," "the naturalism of a coloured photograph," and in reference to Zola himself, "the simple crude statements of a man of powerful mind, but singularly narrow vision."[89] These statements and others scattered throughout the Confessions did not suffice to convince readers that he had broken with naturalism. To one of his biographers he complained later that people kept associating his name with Zola, even after Esther Waters was published.[90] An alert reader should have differentiated between Esther Waters and any of the previously mentioned novels, one of the most obvious differences being the triumph of Esther over her environment. Besides, the former technique of aloofness had disappeared; it was only the choice of a woman from the servant class and her sordid surroundings that could have suggested a comparison of Kate with Esther, of A Mummer's Wife with Esther Waters.

In still another statement Moore also rejected Zola. In a review of Le Rêve, he pointed out what he regarded as a major weakness of Zola's novel: "M. Zola has never attempted to grapple with mental problems, or to follow the strange and complex mysteries of the mind's mechanism...."[91] But this feat Moore had attempted much earlier in A Drama in Muslin. Obviously, after his first two novels, he was no longer following his supposed master's practices.

Moore insisted that "no man will ever be born who will write more than two, at the most three, naturalistic novels, the naturalistic

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[89]Moore, Confessions, pp. 82, 146, 74.

[90]Hone, George Moore, p. 208.

[91]Moore, Impressions, p. 128.

novel being the essence of a phase of life that the writer has lived in and assimilated...."[92] But despite this statement and the others, and quite possibly because he made constant references to France and French authors, the nineteenth century kept associating him with naturalism and its hated content, sordid realism and pessimism.

The preceding summary of the beliefs and practices of Hardy, Moore, and Gissing permits us to see what their views on women, men, language, the relations between the sexes, pessimism, and naturalism were; by comparing and contrasting their individual views, we shall see to what extent the novelists generally resembled each other in these phases of their novels, the phases which the periodical critics also discussed.

Within the limits of the narrative, Hardy emphasized the physical attractiveness of his female characters. Gissing's women were more inclined to be attractive because of their intellectuality. To him the women who acted from emotion seemed less appealing than those who acted from reason. His later novels, however, reflected a change in his attitude toward their intellectuality, but even then their physical appeal was minimized. Moore's women characters were sensual creatures, their animalism taking precedence over any other characteristic as a motivating force. Only after he abandoned his strict naturalistic formula did he inject spiritual qualities into his female characters. Thus the three novelists with their divergent points of view created women who did not illustrate the ideals of Victorian womanhood.

Similarly they created men who differed from the standard heroes of the day. Hardy and Gissing chose their heroes primarily from the

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[92]Freeman, Portrait, p. 115.

lower classes and endowed them with whatever intellectual and emotional characteristics their stories needed. Selecting a hero from the lower classes was not the best technique for pleasing readers, but keeping the heroes there even at the end of the novel was a real violation of the code for heroes. Furthermore, Gissing made his heroes bookish, learned, and impractical, in constant conflict with their surroundings. Again, however, Gissing changed in his last works. Moore, on the other hand, cared little whether his characters came from the upper or lower, educated or illiterate classes; the important thing was that they be unconventional in one aspect or another.

A close bond between the three novelists appears in their common respect for good, grammatical language. Their letters and diaries show the care with which they recorded their own thoughts. In that era, furthermore, when the asterisk and dash were ubiquitous in every realistic novel, the three novelists were forced to refrain from using language which could offend any reader. Each author, however, protested against the publishers' restrictions and tried to create his realistic language effects within the limits imposed upon him.

Another bond between the three novelists appeared in their hatred of the conventions which denied them their right to speak frankly about the sexual aspects of life. Illegitimacy, prostitution, rape, fornication, and adultery were all presented, but the authors differed in their attitudes toward these. Hardy compassionately tolerated the weaknesses of the individuals involved. Gissing was outraged that society had progressed so little that such things still occurred. And Moore, at least in the early novels, cared little, insisting only that these were frailties of mankind and as such worthy of being written about. These three did not regard marriage as the key to happiness, and they did

not consider the home with its family a bastion protecting its inmates from the world. Divorce was presented as a possible solution to marital difficulties. As for love, Hardy was inclined to make it a dominant force even when he did not romanticize it; Gissing relegated it to a position of minor importance; and Moore ridiculed or denied it, substituting sexual attraction in its place. Their beliefs in the roles of love, sex, and marriage indicated divergent points of view. Not one of the authors, however, treated these subjects to the satisfaction of a reading public which had been led to believe that such topics were unsuitable in novels.

The most unifying feature of their writings and philosophy was their accent on pessimism, or if one prefers, the lack of optimism. All of the novelists employed suicide as a device to emphasize the hopeless plights of their characters. All three showed how dismal the world of their stories was by having their principal characters die in squalid surroundings. Most characters raised above their misery soon found themselves in even more desperate situations. The gloom in Hardy's stories was equalled only by Moore's and surpassed only by Gissing's. These novelists were indeed chroniclers of despair and hence hostile to Victorian thought.

The novelists were less allied in their literary practices, although each claimed that he was a realist. Neither Hardy nor Gissing insisted on their naturalism as did Moore, the latter rejoicing that he had discovered and emulated his master, Zola. We saw, however, that this was only a temporary phase in Moore's career, for he rejected Zola with as much vehemence as he had earlier embraced him. Hardy denied the possibility of naturalism, but he insisted that he was a realist because his artistic ability gave him the power of creating

reality for his public. Like Hardy, Gissing was unable to be objective in his novels but he too insisted that it was his art that made whatever he created seem real to his readers. We may speak of all of them as realists if we limit the term to its meaning of making their stories credible at the time of reading; we may not, however, call them naturalists unless that term is used to signify the revolt against the romantic extravagances which so pleased the Victorians and so annoyed serious novelists, for Hardy and Gissing both denied the possibility of the science of fiction and Moore flatly rejected Zola.

The authors' statements about their work furthermore indicated that they knew they were producing art of a revolutionary nature. They indicated their awareness of their public's limited artistic sense and their publishers' insular taste. The next three chapters will be devoted to an examination of the literary taste of the reviewers in prominent periodicals of the day. From their many criticisms, we shall see what they thought naturalism was and why they classified these three novelists as naturalistic.

CHAPTER III

THOMAS HARDY AND THE PERIODICAL CRITICS

One of the outstanding pieces of Hardy scholarship is the dissertation of Donald Winslow entitled Thomas Hardy's Critics. In this study Professor Winslow traced the reception of Hardy's work not only in England but also in America. While his chapter on the periodical criticism was quite adequate for his purposes, the present study demands many more excerpts and a closer analysis of the reviews themselves. Thus, we shall be able to discover what the critics had to say about Hardy's treatment of women, men, the relations between the sexes, his language, pessimism, and realism and naturalism. By comparing the critics' comments here with those made about Gissing and Moore in the ensuing chapters, we shall have a real insight into the critical mind of the late Victorian era.

In Chapter II, which dealt with the principles and practices of Hardy, Gissing, and Moore, evidence was presented which indicated that Hardy knew that his women characters were not usual for the novels of his time. Furthermore, his remarks revealed that he wanted to emphasize the physical attractiveness of his women and to show that whether of high or low degree, they were inwardly quite similar to one another. His efforts to illustrate these beliefs did not escape the periodical critics at any time. When Desperate Remedies appeared, the Athenaeum critic, unsure of the identity and the sex of the author,

remarked upon the novelist's familiarity with and the careful detailing of the female toilette and suggested the novel was the work of a woman. The critic thought the characters were exceedingly good and almost worthy of George Eliot. The one element which prevented the reviewer from stating flatly that Desperate Remedies was the work of a woman was a certain coarseness which forced him to believe the work could not have "come from the pen of an English lady."[1] The important thing, however, is that Hardy's women were noticed from the very beginning. After A Pair of Blue Eyes appeared, the Athenaeum seemed more sure of itself in speaking of Mr. Hardy and his feminine ideal, which appeared to the critic, at least, as "not lofty, though perilously attractive."[2] Here also was praise for the distinctive character of Elfride Swancourt and the individuality of the other people in the novel. Two things must be remarked from these early Athenaeum criticisms: first, the critic's belief that an English lady was innately incapable of being coarse in any way; and secondly, that Hardy's attitude toward and presentation of women was different enough from the Victorian standard to bring his novels to the attention of reviewers.

Paula Powers in A Laodicean was not regarded sympathetically by the Saturday Review, which found her character insufficiently explained. It found her lukewarm and almost lifeless.[3] But the Saturday Review was generally unenthusiastic about Hardy. For example, the periodical's reviewer of Two on a Tower complained that there was too much incongruity in Hardy's treatment of his characters, that there

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[1]"Desperate Remedies," Athenaeum, LIX (April 1, 1871), 399.

[2]"A Pair of Blue Eyes," Athenaeum, LXIII (June 28, 1873) 820.

[3]"A Laodicean," Saturday Review, LIII (January 14, 1882), 53.

was too little explanation of his characters' motives, and too little reconciling of seeming discrepancies in them. To the reviewer these weaknesses resulted from "...the trick of attempting analytical discussion of mental processes--a trick which is but too apt to lead to dulness."[4] By this method of indicating its displeasure with all of Hardy's characterization, it avoided comment on the physical appearance of the women.

Havelock Ellis was most impressed by the women in Hardy's tales. Commenting on Hardy's "An Indiscretion in the Life of an Heiress," the reviewer had this to say: "Geraldine Allenville, except in the one decisive action of her life, has little of the demonic element that slumbers in most of Mr. Hardy's heroines."[5] Besides revealing this facet of the Hardy heroine, he complimented the novelist for his careful presentation of women, and at the same time denied that George Eliot could have been responsible for the anonymous Far From the Madding Crowd. He wrote as follows:

> The high position which the author of 'Far from the Madding Crowd' holds among contemporary English novelists is now generally recognized.... No woman could have created a series of heroines of so persistently narrow range and such consummate fascination within that range.[6]

Ellis could, however, understand why some people had thought a woman had written the novel: it had shown minute and delicate observation, and while making the matter of love the one important business of life, the author had displayed a "charming reticence in its delineation,"

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[4]"Two on a Tower," Saturday Review, LIV (November 18, 1882), 674.

[5]Havelock Ellis, "Thomas Hardy's Novels," Westminster Review, CXIX (April 1882), 172.

[6]Ellis, p. 194.

a not unusual comment when one considers the era's liking for romantic love stories and the vast number of women engaged in the writing of these.[7] Furthermore, the critic stated that English fiction, unlike French fiction, had in most recent times been most successful when written by women. Nevertheless, Ellis insisted the female characters in Hardy's works had no equals in the writings of any other author, for Hardy had "added a fresh delight to certain aspects of Nature," a compliment, indeed, since we have seen that Hardy wanted to present physically attractive women.[8] Ellis particularly admired Hardy's position in showing that all women, whether of high or low degree, were actually sisters. Their vivacity, practicality, capriciousness, and instinctive self-respect endeared them to the reviewer. He, for one, was not content with the usual role assigned to the Victorian heroine. Comparing the Hardy technique in presenting women with the usual methods used, he stated:

> Mr. Hardy's way of regarding women is peculiar and difficult to define, not because it is not a perfectly defensible way, but because it is in a great degree new. It is, as we have already noted, far removed from a method, adopted by many distinguished novelists, in which women are considered as moral forces, centripetal tendencies providentially adapted to balance the centrifugal tendencies of men; being indeed, almost the polar opposite to that view. It is perhaps unnecessary to say that it is equally removed from the method of those who are concerned to work out Tertullian's view of woman as janua diaboli. Mr. Hardy's women are creatures, always fascinating, made up of love and admiration, who can never help some degree of response when the satisfaction of those instincts lies open to them. They are all untimately that; but with what intelligence, what an innate grace,

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[7]Ellis, p. 164.

[8]Ellis, p. 164.

> at once delicate and frank, these instincts are manifested, any one knows who has followed the history of Elfride Swancourt or Anne Garland. The charm of woman for Mr. Hardy is chiefly physical, but it is a charm which can only be interpreted by subtle observation. Generally, he is only willing to recognize the psychical element in its physical correlative. This dislike to use the subjective method or to deal directly with mental phenomena is a feature in Mr. Hardy's psychology which has left a strong mark on his art.[9]

Obviously Ellis succeeded in discovering that Hardy's women were different from those whom readers were accustomed to find in novels. The motivation of the women, as the reviewer constantly pointed out, is the instincts which are common to all women. Recognizing these instincts as commonplace, Hardy was not obligated to delve into thought processes, spiritual behavior, and intellect-produced actions. To do so would probably have evoked more Saturday Review charges of dullness.

Other reviewers did not appreciate so fully the Hardy heroine and her creator. A reviewer in Spectator, in fact, believed the novelist's attitude toward women, despite other fine artistic qualities such as faithfulness to nature, high imagination, splendid literary workmanship, and excellent description of human emotions, was the author's greatest liability. "It is the low view of women pervading all of Hardy's novels that robs him, and will continue to rob him, of the full sympathy of his readers."[10] Even when Hardy had attempted to draw them as kindly, virtuous, and anxious to do no harm, the reviewer saw drawn around them "... a sense of moral squalor which is often little less than revolting."[11] There followed a bitter, vituperative attack on Hardy's

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[9]Ellis, p. 165.

[10]"Group of Noble Dames," Spectator, LXVII (August 1891), 163.

[11]"Noble Dames," p. 163.

heroines, with only one of the noble dames being tolerated--Marty South. Grace, in The Woodlanders, like Eustacia Vye in The Return of the Native, was regarded by the reviewer as a mere animal, although he conceded she was of a gentle nature. But he denied there could be heroines in any of the novels because "the women have no spark of nobility of feeling, and no faintest touch of heroism."[12] The reviewer pursued the point further by stating that Hardy did recognize the meaning of heroism as the sacrifice to the highest idea of duty, and that he recognized the existence of nobility in human nature, at least as far as men are concerned. But what worried the critic most was this question: Why did Hardy refrain from creating noble women?

> The too obvious answer, but not true one is... he is a cynic who takes a low view of women, and who will not paint what he cannot see. It is far more likely that Mr. Hardy is one of those novelists who find it extremely difficult to realise those inner female characteristics which must be relied on if a novelist is to depict an heroic woman.... It is far easier to draw an Elfrida Swancourt than a female Reddleman, and an artist who felt himself weak in women would soon realise this.[13]

The reviewer here demonstrated that he subscribed to earlier standards which held that a heroine should possess a nobility derived from self-sacrifice and duty. Since Hardy's women acted without these two considerations, it is small wonder that the critic registered a complaint. One should note, though, that it is Hardy's art which receives the blame; for as was shown in the second chapter, Hardy was an innovator in his depiction of women. He did not aim at the conventional standard and miss; he deliberately gave his readers a new type of heroine.

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[12]"Noble Dames," p. 163.

[13]"Noble Dames," p. 164.

Sometimes signed criticisms were less condemnatory than the unsigned article just referred to. A study by Janetta Newton-Robinson appeared in 1892, after the novelist had become well-established. Her study did not uphold the belief that Hardy failed to understand women. On the contrary, she insisted "Mr. Hardy's heroines are no less successful than his humorous bucolic portraits."[14] In reference to A Pair of Blue Eyes, the critic saw also that Hardy truly understood women, who, in his novels, are often led away by passion against their better judgment. (It is noteworthy that where Miss Robinson saw these women as passion-led, Ellis had seen them as instinct-led and that neither saw them as reason-led.) Although a reader scarcely sympathizes with the heroine in The Hand of Ethelberta, here was a critic who believed the novelist excelled in creating Ethelberta. And as for the portrait of Tess and her friends in Tess of the D'Urbervilles, Miss Robinson stated,

> Tess of the D'Urbervilles develops a conception of woman as simple yet general in type as that of Venus or Diana, for though Mr. Hardy's genius is eminently modern, there is, nevertheless, something of the Greek spirit in the large and typical handling of his characters. The chorus of love-lorn dairymaids in this book, is however, rather of the operatic than the Hellenic stage.[15]

Nor would the critic have agreed that Tess failed to do her duty, for the heroine did submit to the demands of her worthless father that she visit the distinguished family; furthermore, she submitted to her husband's will on most occasions. The critic saw no weaknesses in Hardy's portrayal of women; indeed, she had special praise for his art in

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[14]Janetta Newton-Robinson, "Study of Mr. Thomas Hardy," Westminster Review, CXXXVII (February 1892), 154.

[15]Newton-Robinson, p. 162.

presenting such women as Eustacia Vye with her stormy grandeur and Mrs. Yeobright with her sternness and grim tenderness. Obviously, though, Miss Newton-Robinson was not the ordinary unsigned critic who subscribed to the ordinary code of heroines.

Tess did not fare so well at the hands of the anonymous reviewer for Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine. In the first place, the reviewer flatly stated that Hardy was not one of his favorite authors; he saw a real artistic failure in the novelist's attempt at making Tess credible since the heroine, having passed just the Sixth Standard, was full of such great erudition. The critic illustrated this point, and possibly demonstrated his own knowledge of literary affairs, when he referred to Tess's knowledge of the prophecies of Ezekiel and her description of the devil as possessing a three-pronged fork, the devil as he occurs in "the Inferno, but in no more popular reading."[16] However, the reviewer did not doubt Hardy's general understanding of women; only Tess was unsatisfactory. Noteworthy, however, is the fact that the reviewer was condemning Hardy for elevating a woman above her assigned station in life.

Like the Blackwood's reviewer, the critic for the Fortnightly Review believed Hardy had not successfully depicted Tess as a credible woman. She was unbelievable for the same reason: she showed too much erudition for one having had so little formal schooling. Besides, it appeared that the author had injected himself into her philosophical discussions, for example, in giving her reasons for refusing to study history. "Tess, it is true, as Mr. Hardy continually remarks, had passed her Sixth Standard; but even agricultural girls of the Sixth Standard

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[16]"Tess of the D'Urbervilles," Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine, CLI (March 1892), 465.

are scarcely yet credible with a 'criticism of life' of this calibre."[17]

The Quarterly Review also reviewed Tess but did not object to Tess's great learning nor did it complain about Hardy's inability to depict women. What is did object to was Hardy's making Tess physically attractive:

> Poor Tess's sensual qualifications for the part of heroine are paraded over and over again with a persistence like that of a horse-dealer egging on some wavering customer to a deal, or a slave-dealer appraising his wares to some full-blooded pasha.[18]

Again one must notice that Hardy's unusual way of presenting women attracted the unfavorable attention of a reviewer. Hardy's success in creating women was questioned by the reviewer in Harper's New Monthly Magazine. Tess was found unreal and not of the nineteenth century because of the generally quaint and archaic tone of the novel. But most appalling to the reviewer was the discovery that the novel's illustrator had put the milkmaid on the wrong side of the cow. He could conclude only that this was a literary milkmaid or one created for a moral purpose.[19] More than once do we find a reviewer condemning a book without wishing to state why; but possibly because he did not wish to enter into a discussion of the literary efforts of the novelist, the critic attempted to destroy with scorn and ridicule.

The Athenaeum reviewer found Tess a credible, sympathetic creature, an imperfect, nobly planned woman. Indeed, he felt for Tess

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[17]Francis Adams, "Tess of the D'Urbervilles," Fortnightly Review, LVIII (July 1892), 21.

[18]"Tess of the D'Urbervilles," Quarterly Review, CLXXIV (January 1892), 325.

[19]"Tess of the D'Urbervilles," Harper's New Monthly Magazine, LXXXIV (June 1892), 152.

exactly as he had for "the most lovable of Mr. Meredith's women" and found that his interest remained constantly with Tess the woman, not with Tess as a sinner or a victim of a sinner.[20]

The novelist's powers of observation in creating female characters and especially Tess were not at all praised when the Saturday Review commented on this controversial novel. In fact, his too faithful description of Tess's physical qualities brought out this angry comment from the reviewer: "It is these side suggestions that render Mr. Hardy's story so very disagreeable, and Tess is full of them."[21] Here was another reviewer who could not believe literary theory justified the novelist's method of describing women.

Tess of the D'Urbervilles was so popular with the Westminster Review that in the same year two issues carried critical comment on it. In March the periodical praised Hardy because he had given Tess such a beautiful character.[22] In December it praised Hardy because he had so ably described Tess's sleep of exhaustion after she had committed murder.[23]

D. F. Hannigin, the author of this last statement, always supported Hardy. He regarded the Hardy heroine as an ideal or an idealized type rather than as a portrait from real life. He saw her not as "advanced," to use the nineteenth century equivalent of "uninhibited," but as

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[20]"Tess of the D'Urbervilles," Athenaeum, IC (January 9, 1892), 50.

[21]"Tess of the D'Urbervilles," Saturday Review, LXXIII (January 16, 1892), 73.

[22]"Tess of the D'Urbervilles," Westminster Review, CXXXVII (March 1892), 347.

[23]D. F. Hannigin, "The Latest Development of English Fiction," Westminster Review, CXXXVIII (December 1892), 657.

essentially feminine. He considered the novelist a worshipper of the ideal woman, the woman without masculine traits. In fact, if the author erred at all, according to Hannigin, it was because he did not present average or below average women:

> He has shrunk from the portrayal of commonplace women--if we except the case of Arabella in his latest novel [Jude the Obscure]--and the charming creatures around whom the interest of Far From the Madding Crowd, The Trumpet Major, and nearly all his other works, including Tess of the D'Urbervilles, centres, seem like etherealised beings--fays, sirens, who disguise themselves as farmeresses, parson's daughters, unconventional heiresses, bishop's wives, schoolmistresses, or agricultural working girls.[24]

As for Tess herself, Hannigin found her also the exact opposite of commonplace:

> Hers is a rich, voluptuous, daring, downright nature, such as old Babylon might have produced in spite of her prosaic surroundings and her squalid miseries.... The physiognomy of character, which defies external circumstances, has been recognised by Mr. Hardy, and he alone, amongst living English novelists, has fully realised the great truth that Cleopatra may be found toiling on a Wessex farm, that the soul of a Mary Stuart may animate a nineteenth-century middle-class girl.[25]

Without realizing it, Hannigin had uncovered one of the important principles which underlay Hardy's literary theory: the desire to show that women of high and low degree differ only externally.

But not all signed critics regarded Hardy's women characters favorably. Mrs. Oliphant, of whom we shall hear more later, did not

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[24]D. F. Hannigin, "Mr. Hardy's Latest Novel," Westminster Review, CXLI (April 21, 1894), 136.

[25]Hannigin, "Hardy's Latest Novel," p. 137.

at all like Hardy's presentation of women. She even concluded that Hardy's motive in writing Jude the Obscure was to show what ruinous and destructive creatures women really are, especially when they are contrasted with "glorious" Tess.[26] Robert Tyrrell, who, it will be seen, was kind to George Moore, disliked Hardy's Arabella. This character, who seemed to the critic to act without motives, he blamed for the "lapses of dramatic fitness which pervade the book.[27]

After Hardy's last novel had appeared, George Douglas in an article for the Bookman discussed the Hardy heroines. He saw them lacking in only one feature--variety. Granting that only Shakespeare had outdone Hardy in depicting women, he classified them here as young men's women: appealing to the eye, fascinating and enthralling the spirit, maddening by the suspected passion they contain. He pointed out, nevertheless, that little change or development occurs in these women as they grow older; they never learn that maturity should make them able to be affectionate and consoling. Even mother-love was foreign to them; in both Mrs. Yeobright and Mrs. Jethway, what could have been love was primarily selfish possession. One had to content himself, Douglas insisted, with the fact that Hardy typically offered a Dream of Fairest Women.[28]

The reviewers for the several periodicals were not entirely pleased by what Hardy made of his women characters; but they were obviously unusual enough to draw comment. Reviewers unaccustomed

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[26]M. O. W. Oliphant, "The Anti-Marriage League," Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine, CLIX (January 1896), 137.

[27]Robert Tyrrell, "Jude the Obscure," Fortnightly Review, LXV (June 1896), 860.

[28]G. B. S. Douglas, "The Well-Beloved," Bookman, XII (April 1897), 12.

to finding women in novels differing from the standard as outlined in the first chapter of this study were appalled to find a novelist emphasizing the physical attractiveness of young beauties. Furthermore, they saw no reason for denying the distinctions which made women of the upper classes more heroic than those from the lower. They wanted women to balance the forces of evil to be found in man, as was typically done in novels, but this, as Ellis pointed out, was not done in Hardy's works. In short, the reviewers who attempted to understand Hardy's art approved of what he did; those who wished to condemn had only to judge from inherited standards and conclude from these that Hardy's novels were unsuitable.

The men in the novels fare somewhat better than do the women, buffeted about as they were, first by fortune and later by unsympathetic reviewers. Havelock Ellis, who saw Hardy's women as clever, practical, and fascinating, saw different qualities in the Hardy hero; veracity, simplicity, and rectitude. Of the hero he stated, "In general, he is a sensitive being, gentle and pure as a woman, characterized by nothing so much as his receptivity."[29] Although this statement appeared, to be sure, in a review written long before the appearance of Jude the Obscure, the same adjectives would certainly apply to the hero there, except perhaps the word "pure." Ellis found less appealing the secondary characters, for example, Boldwood in Far from the Madding Crowd. In fact, Boldwood's mad, crude, unrealistic, and exaggerated passion for Bathsheba tended to produce a discordant note, the critic believed.[30]

The Spectator reviewer found the Hardy heroes most attractive because they sacrificed themselves to the highest idea of duty.

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[29]Ellis, p. 168.

[30]Ellis, p. 169.

Among the men honored for self-sacrifice were Venn in The Return of the Native, Gabriel Oak in Far from the Madding Crowd, Giles Winterborne in The Woodlanders, and John Loveday in The Trumpet Major. The novelist's artistic sympathy, according to this reviewer, lay with the male roles; with Hardy constantly striving to contrast the heroic nature of the men with the animal nature of the women. Thus, the reviewer could assign the Victorian attribute of duty to heroes alone; and finding it absent in women, he assumed this was the reason for the lack of heroines. He was pleased by the heroes, however, to the point of wishing Hardy would write a book with men as his subject, thereby giving the reading public an antidote to his Group of Noble Dames. Nevertheless, when Hardy wrote a book with a male as the leading character [Jude the Obscure], the Spectator was no happier with the result. But for this early book it did concede that the men were "true knight-errants with no touch of romantic unreality."[31]

The Athenaeum found the male characters quite to its liking in Tess, although it believed Angel Clare to be a thought too perfect and that his name bestowed was a touch of Hardy's satire, especially since neither the author nor Angel himself objected to the latter's activities. There was praise for the description of Alec D'Urberville as "the most boldly designed of villains, the very embodiment of a reckless, passionate 'child of the devil.'"[32] There was praise for Hardy's understanding of the sensual man, as illustrated by the narrative showing Alec's conversion from virtue to vice; and there was especially strong

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[31]"Group of Noble Dames," Spectator, LXVII (August 1891), 164.

[32]"Tess," Athenaeum, p. 49.

praise for Hardy's skill in creating Sir John D'Urbeyfield, Angel Clare's pious Calvinist father, and even the dairyman. The periodical contended that each role was designed to make the poor heroine more understandable, but it saw a great defect in Hardy's depiction of Angel Clare. It could not understand why Angel did not know as much of Tess's background as we know. This lack of knowledge on Angel Clare's part forced the Athenaeum to call it "the one fault of construction in the novel."[33]

The role of Angel Clare in Tess displeased other reviewers, too. The Gentleman's Magazine reviewer found this sometime hero unconvincing, especially in the final scene when he stood "hand-in-hand with his future wife, the sister of the woman who had died for him."[34] One suspects that the fault-finding resulted less from weakness in the portrayal of Angel Clare than from general dissatisfaction with the novel, for the reviewer did not elaborate on the poor presentation of the hero.

Several things about Angel Clare disturbed the Blackwood's reviewer: first, he was appalled that Hardy had created anyone so incongruous as a harp-playing farmer; second, he found the hero's name itself unconvincing and distasteful; third, he found incredible the hero's ignorance of Tess's past since all her activities had occurred within a short distance of the locale of the story. But these objections were as nothing when compared to his dislike of Hardy's sympathy for his agnostic, unforgiving, and pitiless hero. To create an uncompassionate hero was most unusual, but even more unusual, the reviewer

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[33]"Tess," Athenaeum, p. 50.

[34]"Tess of the D'Urbervilles," Gentleman's Magazine, IL (September 1892), 321.

thought, was Hardy's registering no disapproval of Angel Clare. Certainly in Victoria's day God-fearing heroes were best, and that this agnostic hero should escape unscathed the difficulties of life or that Hardy should have attempted such an oxymoron as an agnostic hero could have been nothing if not disturbing.[35]

A review signed by Janetta Newton-Robinson took a position opposite to the one above. She openly admired Hardy's objectivity and attitude toward his creatures since he "does not glow with active benevolence towards his fellow men, but gazes at them with a saddened, compassionate wonder, a tender irony."[36] Furthermore, she unstintingly praised Hardy's ability to create believable men. She admired him for creating in the characters of The Return of the Native the various moods of the heath: the steadfastness as illustrated by Clym; the relief and local color as demonstrated in Grandfer and Christian Cantle. She especially liked Hardy's characters because they were made to be living people, not examples of virtues. Michael Henchard in The Mayor of Casterbridge seemed to this critic especially well done because he was, to illustrate her theory, "a powerful study of a strong and concentrated nature."[37]

The same magazine published in its next issue an anonymous review of Tess. Agreeing only in part with Miss Robinson, the critic stated: "His personages are creatures of flesh and blood like ourselves--not pantins, personifying theories."[38] The earlier critic had, of course,

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[35]"Tess," Blackwood's, p. 472.

[36]Newton-Robinson, p. 157.

[37]Newton-Robinson, p. 164.

[38]"Tess," Westminster, p. 348.

found nature personified in the characters; but the present one believed the credibility of Hardy's heros resulted from the novelist's ingrained sympathetic attitude toward humanity and not from some underlying principle which sought expression in the hero's characterization.

In an attempt to link Hardy's attitude toward his characters with Angel Clare's attitudes toward the other persons in the novel, the critic insisted that Angel Clare's doctrinaire theories forced him to deny his natural pity and natural affection, whereupon his cruelty appeared. The critic contended that since Hardy viewed his characters with sympathy and compassion, he was not acting or writing according to some theory, because "nothing is so cruel as a theory."[39]

The Athenaeum reviewer who discussed a volume of criticism of Hardy's work objected to the Hardy hero. The reviewer found it noteworthy that Lionel Johnson had neglected to discuss the shortcomings of the male protagonists; Johnson had had "nothing to say of the rather monotonous repetition of the faithful lover, of the Giles, Gabriel, and Diggory Venn type throughout Mr. Hardy's works."[40] This is the sole article, however, which commented on this supposed flaw in character portrayal, an indication that most critics expected the hero to be faithful as well as dutiful.

Robert Tyrrell, reviewing for Fortnightly, found Hardy's male characters unconvincing because they were dramatically deficient; for example, the carter in Jude the Obscure was seen to have sentiments properly belonging to a man of culture, not a workman. Jude himself, although endowed by nature for a certain career, lacked the powers and

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[39]"Tess," Westminster, p. 348.

[40]"The Art of Thomas Hardy," Athenaeum, CIV (October 27, 1894), 560.

resolutions which would have helped him achieve his goal. Since Hardy had denied him both of these aids, the reviewer labeled the hero uninteresting. The reviewer found Jude ridiculous as well as uninteresting because he also recited the Nicene Creed in Latin in a public house. Even if Mr. Tyrrell disliked Jude, the carter, and Arabella's publican, whom he dismissed as poorly conceived, one character he did like: "the Oxford Head who gave some very good advice to the priggish young mechanic."[41] One can conclude that this reviewer seemed not to like workingmen and the uneducated in principal roles, especially when these could not rise above their stations.

Jude's attempts to enter the University brought praise, on the other hand, from the Westminster Review. Indeed, the reviewer described the scene as intensely interesting and pathetic, even saying that "Sam Johnson would have found it hard to keep back his tears at this portion."[42] But the praise in this review extends far beyond an individual character. In comparing the novelist to George Meredith, the critic continued,

> Mr. George Meredith's epigrammatic cleverness cannot atone for his poverty of invention, his lack of incident, his fantastic system of misreading human nature, and if the word novelist means a writer of human history, Mr. Hardy is incomparably superior to his supposed rival.[43]

The Spectator, which disliked so intensely Hardy's efforts to reveal women's feelings, did, however, like his ability to portray "with an unerring hand" the male characters.[44] Not so the Athenaeum. This

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[41]Tyrrell, p. 857.

[42]Hannigin, "Latest Novel," p. 138.

[43]Hannigin, p. 139.

[44]"Life's Little Ironies," Spectator, LXXII (April 21, 1894), 538.

periodical attacked Hardy and Jude the Obscure viciously. First of all it maintained the character of Jude prevented any tragedy in the novel: the critic complained that Jude could not arouse sympathy, and that "without the sympathy at least of human fellow feeling, there is no tragedy possible."[45] Besides, the reviewer discovered no individuality in Jude, who was merely a tool to show Hardy's moral, even though the moral was not stated in the review. Like Sue's, Jude's behavior was considered not tragic, but only ludicrous. If the reviewer found anything noteworthy in the creation of the characters, it was only in the depiction of Phillotson and Arabella's father, the latter of whom he called striking. On the whole, though, the critic blamed Hardy for cutting out mere paper marionettes.[46]

Some two years later the periodical became less vituperative in its judgment. Here, at last, it credited the novelist with imagination because it thought he had recorded "a temperament which we believe to be that of the great majority of male human beings--nay of male beings of every species."[47] In no apologetic vein, however, the magazine correctly surmised that this novel, The Well-Beloved, was an earlier work [it was written in 1892 but not published until 1897] and that its publication at this late date would help restore Hardy to the good graces of his readers. But this article did not retract the unkind and harsh comments published about Tess and Jude. One can only wonder if the periodical was passing judgment on itself in its 1899 review of Hardy's Wessex Poems when it averred that Hardy's

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[45]"Jude the Obscure," Athenaeum, CVI (November 23, 1895), 710.

[46]"Jude," Athenaeum, p. 710.

[47]"The Well-Beloved," Athenaeum, CIX (April 10, 1897), 471.

personal utterances, voicing a matured and deliberate judgment on life, gave offense to the narrower minds.[48]

For the most part the Hardy hero received praise from the reviewers, if one excepts the rather vehement criticisms of Mrs. Oliphant and Mr. Tyrrell. These two, completely blind to Hardy's motive in utilizing men of all ranks and completely contemptuous of the things they seemed not to understand, could not tolerate the author's refusing to judge his male characters. Their rage possibly resulted from Hardy's too forceful delineation of his people; but, to Hardy's credit, even these two reviewers were impressed by his innovations. An unusual note crept into the Tyrell criticism of the men in the novels, unusual because of all the reviewers he alone uttered it: a note of snobbishness. Just as Francis Adams had condemned Tess for her nobility of sentiment when her Sixth Standard education was an insufficient base for her loftiness, Tyrrell decried the workingmen, and praised only the headmaster, a minor character indeed. Only Angel Clare and Jude, however, received the full scorn of the reviewers; the others were singled out primarily for some minor fault.

In the following pages devoted to the relations between the sexes, we shall discover the critics' views toward what they would call the morality of Hardy's novels. In chapter two, the novelist's comments were concerned with three aspects of the relations between the sexes, namely, love, marriage and the place of sex within and outside of marriage. Unlike Hardy, the critics rarely separated their ideas about these several aspects of human relations, preferring to make sweeping generalizations about Hardy's treatment of moral questions.

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[48]"Wessex Poems and Other Verses," Athenaeum, CXIII (January 14, 1899), 41.

It has been necessary, therefore, to leave much of the criticism intact, lest a separation of the integral parts destroy the total effect of a given review. It will be obvious also, since these relationships involve the heroines and heroes just discussed, that another aspect of their characterization was being subjected to the critics' scrutiny.

Much of the criticism directed at Hardy resulted from his daring to treat love and sex as dominant forces; in fact, many of the reviewers' judged the novels according to their opinions concerning a novelist's license to write about sex, unconventional love affairs, or dissolved marriages.

When early reviewers thought that "Thomas Hardy" was the pen-name of a woman writer because the early novels treated love as the one business of life, an article in the Westminster Review refused to consider Hardy a woman, even though it did not deny that love was the dominant theme. Instead, it preferred to believe that it was the admirable treatment of the love theme that would rank him with the other great novelists who had previously illustrated it, namely Jane Austen, Charlotte Brontë, and George Eliot.[49] Havelock Ellis, the author of the article, praised Hardy unstintingly:

> There is something very fresh and delightful, turning from the writers with whom love is only interesting from the moral problems it may involve, or is at most the history of a passion, to find a writer of such distinct genius who has little or nothing to say about either morals or passion, and yet thinks love is the chief business of life, and can devote himself as frankly to the rendering of its devious ways.[50]

There was one flaw, however, which Ellis called to the attention of his readers: the repetitious situation in each of the novels in which

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[49]Ellis, p. 164.

[50]Ellis, p. 174.

a woman is in love with two men, both of whom she accepts in spite of the consequences. Ellis, however, was not passing moral judgment on the novels but indicting the author for relying constantly on the same theme.[51]

The anonymous reviewer in the Athenaeum had noticed an unusual quality in the Hardy treatment of love almost a decade before Ellis wrote, however. When he reviewed A Pair of Blue Eyes, the unknown critic saw Elfride Swancourt, the charming heroine, subject to an "impulsiveness in all that concerns the tender passion," the latter a precious euphemism, indeed.[52] Later when it reviewed Two on a Tower, the critic found even more unusual Hardy's presentation of love:

> The courtship of a mere lad by a woman some years his senior is not a familiar theme in English fiction, nor by any means an easy one to develope, least of all when the heroine is already a married woman. But Mr. Hardy passes, it must be admitted, with a very skilful tread over the hazardous ground he has selected.[53]

Love was not banned in the novels of Victoria's day, but one can easily see why Hardy's treatment of it occasioned comment. First, he allowed his heroines to fall in love without proper parental guidance; and secondly, he allowed the heroine to do the courting, an action properly reserved for the hero.

Ellis was not the sole player in the game of discovering the love-affair formula of the early Hardy novels. The Saturday Review described its action in A Laodicean: "It is a peculiarity of Mr. Hardy's heroines never to accept a lover at once, and Paula, the Laodicean who

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[51]Ellis, p. 176.

[52]"A Pair of Blue Eyes," Athenaeum, LXIII (June 28, 1873), 820.

[53]"Two on a Tower," Athenaeum, LXXX (November 18, 1882), 658.

is neither cold nor hot, certainly seems somewhat cold in the permission which she gives Somerset to love her, and in her refusal to give him any further assurance."[54] Paula Powers was, readers will recall, one of the Hardy women who apparently could not make up her mind about love.

J. M. Barrie was another critic who played the game of discovering the love-affair formula. Carefully analyzing Hardy's novels, he discussed them primarily on the basis of success or failure in character presentations, concluding that the men and women were equally irresolute in matters of love and marriage. Elaborating on this thesis, Barrie wrote:

> Mr. Hardy's maidens, "husband-high," are persons who think marriage a terrible thing to contemplate, engagements not quite so fearful, and arrangements to get engaged presently comparatively safe.... They think they would like to marry, but are not sure when they arrive at the altar. They hesitate about becoming engaged lest they should then cease to love; they marry in secret, get engaged in secret, and even ask the gentleman whom they engage to get engaged to by-and-by to keep it to himself. They are seldom sure of their own love unless there is ground for believing that it is not returned, and the only tolerably safe thing to predict of them is, that first they will have two lovers and marry a third. After marriage, we may suppose, they become more conventional.[55]

One should note that even at this late date some critics adhered to the earlier Victorian theory that marriage with its stabilizing influence solved all problems.

The reviewers of the nineties could never have assumed Hardy's characters would find happiness in marriage, for during this decade

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[54]"A Laodicean," Saturday Review, LIII (January 14, 1882), 53.

[55]J. M. Barrie, "Thomas Hardy; the Historian of Wessex," Contemporary Review, LVI (July 1889), 64.

two novels appeared which treated marriage most unconventionally. The first of these, Tess of the D'Urbervilles, aroused the reviewers, to be sure, but the sexual license so enraged them they usually overlooked the marriage question.

Jude the Obscure they regarded, in some cases at least, as a polemic against marriage. Mrs. Oliphant was one who believed Hardy was attacking marriage because the entire novel showed it was that institution which kept Jude from accomplishing his ends.[56]

Equally apprehensive about Hardy's aim in writing a story which seemingly attacked the institution of marriage was Robert Tyrrell. Regarding Sue's refusal to marry Jude, the reviewer asked

> If Marriage is no better than a 'license to be loved on the premises,' as she calls it, does the absence of the license mitigate the coarseness of the connection? She has no sense of the dignity of womanhood and motherhood, and so all her relations with the other sex become impure in her morbid imagination.[57]

Thus the critic accounted for Sue's occasional frigidity toward Jude, but even more important for this study is Tyrrell's stubborn insistence on the Victorian ideal of womanhood and motherhood.

While the Athenaeum did not deny the permanence of the marriage tie was an appropriate subject for a novel, it saw Jude the Obscure as a farce instead of a tragedy. The double remarriage made the novel ridiculous, it believed, just as the behavior of Sue and Jude made it ludicrous.[58] It insisted, furthermore, if Hardy were going to use the subject of marriage for a novel, it was his duty to dignify it; hence,

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[56]Oliphant, p. 141.

[57]Tyrrell, p. 860.

[58]"Jude," Athenaeum, p. 709.

the liberality of its opinion that a novelist should be free to select marriage as a topic was denied by its prescribing how it should be treated.

The foregoing reviews of Jude the Obscure show no essential difference existing between the attitudes of the reviewers in the nineties and the attitudes of the earlier Victorians as outlined in chapter one. The reader will recall society had held that marriage provided haven for men and women alike, that its effect on the married couple was ameliorative, and that its dissolution was an occasion for scandal. The reviewers in the nineties revealed their thinking to be identical with that of an earlier day.

Not only Jude the Obscure made the reviewers believe Hardy catered to the morally lax. The earlier novels, it has been pointed out, contained women who were physically attractive as more than one reviewer noticed; but Hardy's reputation as a writer of prurient novels was firmly established with the publication of Tess of the D'Urbervilles.

Of this novel, Blackwood's stated: "We prefer cleanly lives, and honest sentiment, and a world which is round and contains everything, not 'the relations between the sexes' alone."[59]

The Quarterly Review writer also found fault with Hardy's emphasis on sex. He even ascribed to Hardy the theory that the relations between the sexes must be the basis for all imaginative literature. Outraged by Tess, the reviewer asked, "Does everybody then think and feel that seduction, adultery, and murder have their basis in the heart of things, that they are the essential laws of Nature?"[60]

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[59]"Tess," Blackwood's, p. 465.

[60]"Tess," Quarterly Review, p. 174.

He could see only that the novel, a clumsy, sordid tale of brutality and lust was "...such as no clean-minded reader can get through without disgust."[61]

The Athenaeum adopted a more cautious tone in its appraisal of Tess's relationships with men. It suspected Hardy was probably challenging criticism needlessly by labeling Tess a "pure" woman:

> His business was rather to fashion (as he has done) a being of flesh and blood than to propose the suffering woman's view of a controversy which only the dabbler in sexual ethics can enjoy. Why should a novelist embroil himself in moral technicalities? As it is, one half suspects Mr. Hardy of a desire to argue out the justice of the comparative punishments meted to man and to woman for sexual aberrations.[62]

The Hardy treatment of the relationship between the sexes was not to pass unnoticed by Mrs. Oliphant, the critic who, as we have seen, regarded Jude the Obscure as an attack on marriage. Commenting on the sexual aspects of the novel, she wrote,

> ...nothing so coarsely indecent as the whole history of Jude in his relations with his wife Arabella has ever been put in English print--that is to say, from the hands of a Master. There may be books more disgusting, more impious as regards human nature, more foul in detail, in those dark corners where the amateurs of filth find garbage to their taste; but not, we repeat from any Master's hand.[63]

One should note at this point the undertone of nationalism in Mrs. Oliphant's criticism. And despite her referring to Hardy as a master, there remains her contention that no decent Englishman would write frankly of sexual matters.

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[61]"Tess," Quarterly Review, p. 343.

[62]"Tess," Athenaeum, p. 50.

[63]Oliphant, "Anti-Marriage," p. 138.

In contrast to this position, D. F. Hannigin took a more liberal attitude regarding the morality of Jude the Obscure. Recognizing that the novel had been condemned by "certain critics of the didactic school ...on the ground of its outspokenness and its flagrant disregard of Mrs. Grundy's tender feelings" [his reference here is specifically to Hannigin's enemies, Andrew Lang and James Payn "who worship Scott and prefer romance to realism"], he insisted on the right of the novelist to deal fearlessly with all the facts of life.[64] He praised Hardy for writing candidly and not sacrificing his art, as Sir Walter Besant did, by writing merely for the edification of the young. Indeed, he found Hardy, better than any other contemporary English author, was capable of exhibiting the mysterious fascination of woman on man. Unlike Mrs. Oliphant, who believed the novel would appeal only to the lover of filth, Hannigin believed those who called the relationship between Jude and Sue impure were readers with brutish minds. Were it not "for the miserable priggery of this tail-end of the nineteenth century," the critic complained, even the first part of the novel would receive the critic's acclaim.[65] Unable to find anything prurient in the novel, Hannigin labeled it human, intense, and artistic. And completely disagreeing with Mrs. Oliphant in her high regard for books which would uphold the British standards of morality, Hannigin insisted Jude the Obscure was sufficiently great to merit for Hardy a place beside such writers as Balzac, Flaubert, Turgenev, Dostoievsky from the continent and George Eliot and Fielding from England itself.

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[64]Hannigin, "Latest Novel," p. 136.

[65]Hannigin, "Latest Novel," p. 136.

Richard LeGallienne agreed with Hannigin and scolded Mrs. Oliphant for her attitude. Her attack he called exceedingly pointless and clumsy, and LeGallienne even suggested she had deliberately distorted the purpose of the novel:

> Her insinuation--to put it mildly--that Mr. Hardy has deliberately catered for unclean appetites, and that he published an expurgated edition of his story first in Harper's, just to whet such appetites for the complete book, (when as everyone knows, that first truncated publication was a condition of the magazine editors which cause Mr. Hardy no little pain and worry), is either very malignant or very mistaken, and should certainly be libellous. There is no need further to allude to the pitiful spleen of 'M. O. W. O.' except to warn the reader against it, and all such outbursts of grandmotherly prejudice. No doubt Jude
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> 'is not meat
> For little people or for fools,'
>
> it is as Mr. Kipling said of Mowgli's marriage, 'a story for grown-ups,' and it will only be the childish or second-childish among these whom it can possibly offend. It handles delicate problems and situations with infinite delicacy and tenderness, and if in depicting certain aspects of country life, Mr. Hardy's realism is a little 'coarse,' well, country life is coarse, so what would you have?[66]

Robert Tyrrell saw Jude as a treatise on sexual pathology and as a scientifically inaccurate one at that, inasmuch as Hardy drew the data from imagination. On this thesis he stated,

> If we consider broadly and without prejudice the tone and scope of the book, we cannot but class it with the fiction of Sex and New Woman, so rife of late. It differs in no wise from the "hill-top" novels, save in the note of distinction and the power of touch which must discriminate Mr. Hardy at his worst from the Grant Allens and Iotas at their best. In method, indeed, The Woman Who Did is superior to Jude, inasmuch as it deals far more sincerely with free love as a practical institution. Mr. Hardy's work cannot but emit occasional sparks, which

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[66]Richard LeGallienne, "Jude the Obscure," Idler, IX (February 1896), 115.

> sometimes glow into sustained splendor; but even an enchanted palace would be vitiated by a whiff from the atmosphere of the Pot-Bouille or Germinal, and the airs from the "hill-top" would infect the Delectable Mountains themselves. Mr. Hardy is here and there as picturesque and delightful as ever, but (to parody a well-known couplet)--
>
> 'You may paint, you may perfume the scene
> as you will:
> But the stench from the 'hill-top' will hang
> round it still.'[67]

The Saturday Review did not object to the Hardy treatment of the sexual affairs of men and women. It suggested even that the reviews which attacked Hardy's novels did so because the pendulum was swinging away from "New Woman" fiction and other novels which had depended upon sexuality for their interest. It saw a reading public now in the process of rejecting books wholely and solely for their recognition of sex, however incidental that recognition might be. Thus, complained the magazine, reviewers whose function it is to provide acceptable reading for their editors' public, have had to change from "a chorus praising 'outspoken purity' to a band of public informers against indecorum."[68] This being the case, continued the magazine, no novelist could assume himself safe against the charge of morbidity and unhealthiness; it saw, especially in the other periodicals, evidence of a struggle to find suggestions of decadence in all novels:

> One scarcely dares leave a man and woman together within the same corners for fear of their scandal; one dares scarcely whisper of reality. And at the very climax of this silliness, Mr. Hardy, with an admirable calm, has put forth a book in which a secondary, but very important, interest is a frank

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[67]Tyrrell, "Jude," p. 858.

[68]"Jude the Obscure," Saturday Review, LXXXI (February 8, 1896), 153.

> treatment of the destructive influence of a vein of sensuality upon an ambitious working man.... Only as a modifying cause does the man's sexuality come in, just as much as and no more than, it comes into the life of any serious but healthy man.[69]

The theme of Jude according to the Saturday Review was not, then, sexual immorality but rather an exposition of the working of a sensual streak upon a character. And since Jude was no better off at the end of the story than at the beginning, the periodical insisted the novel was essentially moral rather than immoral.[70]

The Bookman also regarded Hardy as a champion of orthodox morality in his novels. It believed Tess especially supported and enforced the idea that the woman must pay eventually for any defiance of the sexual code. It did, in fact, agree with Hardy that the novel was a story of a pure woman, adding that the book would provide nothing for the lax and prurient since at no time did it "seek to deny the reality or the terror of the inevitableness of the transgressor's penalty."[71]

The preceding selections from the critical reviews of Hardy's works certainly indicate the nineteenth century periodicals were aware of the role of sex in the novelist's characterizations. It was his emphasis on sex which disturbed many critics, some of whom saw it as the sole basis for his writings. From these came the charge of immorality. Other critics regarded Hardy's treatment of sex as a mere adjunct to the central plots while still others contended Hardy's use of sex and the punishment meted out to violators of the Victorian sex code helped

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[69]"Jude," Saturday Review, p. 153.

[70]"Jude," Saturday Review, p. 153.

[71]"Tess of the D'Urbervilles," Bookman, I (February 1892), 179.

substantiate commonly-held beliefs.

Although many reviewers commented on Hardy's treatment of sexual relations, several merely contented themselves with appraising his work on less controversial issues. Few could resist commenting on the novelist's language. The Athenaeum review of Desperate Remedies, although somewhat disturbed by the possibility an English lady novelist could have written a novel which contained what it termed coarseness of expression, nevertheless complimented the then-unknown author for the reproduction of west-country dialect, which seemed to it not at all caricatured. The review found only a few faults of style and grammar, which, as with the coarseness, it could "hardly particularize."[72] It was relieved, too, to find this coarseness only in expressions and not in the behavior of the principal characters of the tale, who, as we have seen, were to represent the highest British ideals of the day. The reviewer's advice to the author was as follows:

> If the author will purge himself of this [coarseness], though even this is better than prurient sentimentality with which we are so often nauseated, we see no reason why he should not write novels only a little, if at all, inferior to the best of the present generation.[73]

Some three years later the magazine again reproached the novelist for the coarseness it believed still disfigured his work and repelled the reader. While conceding Hardy was a shrewd observer of the speech and habits of the Somersetshire rustics, the reviewer felt jarred by some of the expressions, e.g., "Passably well put," which "...we simply cannot believe possible from the illiterate clods whom he

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[72]"Desperate Remedies," Athenaeum, p. 399.

[73]"Desperate Remedies," Athenaeum, p. 399.

describes."[74] In addition to this supposed fault, the reviewer found distressing what he called Hardy's monstrous periphrases, e.g., "a fair product of Nature in a feminine direction," to the reviewer a disgusting sample of the "worst penny-a-liner's language."[75] Nevertheless, he felt in his language Hardy occasionally showed touches of genius, ill-regulated though they might be.

The Saturday Review also praised Hardy for his ability to record the speech of rustics, but it objected to what it called the stilted language of the narrator. The reviewer became indignant also about Hardy's use of "...the odious mongrel word double-entendre where he evidently means arrière-pensée."[76] It would seem almost impossible for any writer to escape condemnation in the face of such minute and exact criticism, but the reviews were not above belaboring such errors.

In its discussion of the same novel, A Laodicean, the Academy protested for art's sake against the realistic language which Hardy ascribed to the farmers. Preferring artificiality of language to the actual sort Hardy attempted to suggest or even record, it stated,

> It is very likely that coarse and vulgar natures would discuss the matrimonial and domestic arrangements of a great heiress in the language reproduced by the author, but it is surely no part of the functions of art to make use of such dialogue.[77]

Havelock Ellis found much to praise in all of the early Hardy novels, but like other reviewers, he found when Hardy spoke in his own person, there was an evident want of strength and precision. But in

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[74]"Far from the Madding Crowd," Athenaeum, LXVI (December 5, 1874), 747.

[75]"Madding Crowd," Athenaeum, p. 747.

[76]"A Laodicean," Saturday Review, p. 54.

[77]"A Laodicean," The Academy, XXI (January 7, 1882), 5.

the dialogue, Ellis enjoyed the succinct, delightful, and even epigrammatic expressions.[78]

There was no pleasing all of the reviewers. The Spectator, indeed, disliked the far-fetched and unpleasant similes in The Mayor of Casterbridge; it upbraided the novelist for his inability to reproduce dialect exactly. As a remedy for this fault it prescribed putting the peasants' language into "Educated English" and thereby improving the work.[79] One should note at this point that a later objection to Tess was the heroine's too polished language and philosophy, an objection registered by Blackwood's.[80]

Some six years later the Athenaeum complimented Hardy on his suave and supple style. Nevertheless, without giving specific examples, it complained of an excessive use of scientific and ecclesiastical terminology.[81]

Among the many objections which the Saturday Review had to Tess was Hardy's grammar or lack of it. The reviewer was impatient both with the novel and the confusion which resulted from Hardy's failure to place his modifying clauses in their proper positions within a sentence. His terse summary of this complaint must be recorded: "These things ought not to be."[82]

The Quarterly Review could not refrain from upbraiding Hardy for a certain pomposity of language ascribed to such characters as

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[78]Ellis, p. 176.

[79]"Mayor of Casterbridge," Spectator, LVI (May 29, 1886), 711.

[80]"Tess," Blackwood's, p. 467.

[81]"Tess," Athenaeum, p. 50.

[82]"Tess," Saturday Review, p. 74.

Angel Clare. About the language from the scene in which Tess begs Angel to forgive her and is asked, "How can forgiveness meet such a grotesque prestidigitation as that?" the magazine stated, "Considering all the circumstances of the scene, we take this to be one of the most unconsciously comical sentences ever read in print."[83] Not coarseness in language, then, disturbed this reviewer but rather over-refinement:

> Coarse, it is not, in the sense of employing coarse words; indeed he is too apt to affect a certain preciosity of phrase which has a somewhat incongruous effect in a tale of rustic life; he is too fond--and the practice has been growing on him through all his later books--of writing like a man'who has been at a great feast of language and stolen the scraps,' or in plain English, of making experiments in a form of language which he does not seem clearly to understand, and in a style for which he was assuredly not born.[84]

The same issue in its book review section accused Hardy of producing a work crammed with inartistic blunders and improprieties, disfigured by a grotesque jargon.[85] Both sections of the periodical thus found Hardy guilty of using language which did not contribute to the Victorian desire of finding in fiction model prose to emulate. Too much polish and elegance seemed just as distasteful to the Quarterly Review as too little.

The Spectator also disliked Hardy's style. Specifically it objected to what it called pedantic phraseology in various parts of Tess. This style reminded the reviewer of "George Eliot in her scientific mood," but it found nothing coarse in the language itself.[86]

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[83]"Tess," Quarterly Review, p. 320.

[84]"Tess," Quarterly Review, p. 325.

[85]"Culture and Anarchy," Quarterly Review, CLXXIV (January 1892), 343.

[86]"Tess," Spectator, p. 122.

Andrew Lang, never a great advocate of Hardy, believed Hardy's style was pellucid enough, but he could not resist pointing out that the language contained an odd mixture of science and literature.[87] Hardy's reliance upon his earlier readings in science and, of course, his training as an architect must certainly have provided him with a language and a style different enough to attract the attention of his reviewers; obviously, however, the critics did not want this.

Some reviewers, however, found little wrong with Hardy's language. The Bookman, invariably friendly to the novelist, described his style as sweet, various, and noble.[88] Janetta Newton-Robinson also praised the novelist for his picturesque and precise language. She insisted it was "terse and even epigrammatic without loss of lucidity and fulness of suggestion."[89] She believed that Hardy's choice of words brought to life the mists, meads, and streams of the valley of the Froom with a kind of latter-day pantheism, admitting all the while, though, to being startled by rather strong metaphors, like the famous "the sun was resting on the hill like a drop of blood on an eyelid."[90] She found his sentences aglow with inner fire and rejoiced that his technique called neither for amplitude of phrase nor reproduction of elaborate detail. But most of all she admired his ability to record rustic methods of expression, especially since he avoided a phonetic spelling of the Wessex dialect and because he used characteristic words and idioms common to the dialect. Indeed, she contended Hardy's language had greatly

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[87]Andrew Lang, "Literature," New Review, VI (February 1892), 248.

[88]"Tess," Bookman, p. 179.

[89]Newton-Robinson, p. 153.

[90]Newton-Robinson, p. 155 ff.

improved since the publication of Desperate Remedies (1871) with its faulty style and comparatively few beautiful sentences.[91]

Just what would have pleased all the critics in regard to the reproduction of dialect cannot be ascertained. While the preceding criticism praises Hardy for his efforts, the criticism of Francis Adams condemns Hardy's dialectal inconsistencies. To illustrate, he pointed out that while the Durbeyfields at home spoke with too great polish, the other peasants in the novel usually talked a rather strong dialect. But Adams nobly assumed for himself and other critics of the era some of the blame for this artistic blemish and others because their earlier criticism had been faulty in praising Hardy for bad work and not making him face genuine criticism and a genuinely critical public.[92]

In contrast to its earlier complaint of too much elegance, the Spectator praised Hardy's language in its review of Life's Little Ironies:

> ...but whatever he writes, Mr. Hardy's control of the English language must always arouse genuine admiration. Polished, terse, keen, and flexible, where every word tells, his style is like a smooth, well-tempered steel blade in the hands of an accomplished swordsman.[93]

The appearance of Jude provoked less criticism of Hardy's language, probably because the peasant occupied less space in the novel and because it was, after all, the peasant who was most frequently singled out for comment in the preceding novels. However, the Athenaeum, differentiating between the earlier, feebly bad books and this "titanically bad" book, objected to the too cultured dialogue, which

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[91]Newton-Robinson, p. 155 ff.

[92]Adams, "Tess," p. 20.

[93]"Ironies," Spectator, p. 539.

it saw contributing to the exceedingly ridiculous nature of the characters.[94]

The Fortnightly Review, too, also saw indistinctly-conceived characters resulting from bad reproduction of dialogue. Jude himself was accused of talking like Gibbon or Johnson, but more often like Herbert Spencer; Sue was condemned for sounding at times like George Eliot under the influence of science and at other times like a maid of all work. (It is interesting to note that the objection to an attempted mixture of science and literature had been made at least once before by the Spectator,[95] substantiating the Victorian belief that the two--one material, the other spiritual--could not be combined.) More specifically, though, the periodical protested Hardy's penny-a-lining style in which he erroneously wrote "predicate" instead of "predict," "evince" instead of "show," and "during a lengthened period" instead of "for a long time." To the reviewer this journalese suggested Marie Corelli at her worst. The reviewer further objected to what he regarded as affectation of scholarship, the introduction of Greek words ["wrongly transliterated," the reviewer insisted] and the coining of the name Tetuphenay for the Oxford Head. On the whole, the periodical found Hardy's language not only unattractive but also irritating, for it believed Hardy had written a novel as though it were a scientific treatise.[96]

Almost in summary, the charges against the author's language appeared some three years later in the Athenaeum review of Wessex Poems where they were repeated for the poetry as well: needlessly

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[94]"Jude," Athenaeum, p. 709.

[95]Cf. p. 84.

[96]"Jude," Fortnightly Review, p. 862.

inflated diction, improper dialogue, and a minimum of dialect. Only the poet's vigorous and unworn provincialisms received praise.[97]

Few reviewers, indeed, accepted Hardy as a master of language. While they did not accuse him of employing coarse or foul words, they nevertheless could not regard him as a writer of model sentences or as a prose stylist. They were only too anxious to discover minor violations which they could use to illustrate their own vast knowledge of linguistic niceties. And throughout the reviews there is an underlying objection to the novelist's employing scientific terminology in literary works. While Hardy was at times praised for his dialect, at other times he was condemned for permitting unsavoury characters to speak standard English, which in the Victorian tradition was to be assigned to people of obvious virtue.

While the periodical criticism of Hardy's language is quite specific, the general attitude of the reviewers toward the basic philosophy of pessimism is less so. One frequently suspects the reviewer of questioning Hardy's philosophy but of directing the criticism at a more or less obvious weakness in construction, possibly in order to avoid philosophical arguments in the pages of magazines devoted to other topics.

In illustration, the early Athenaeum review of Desperate Remedies found the novel disagreeable and unpleasant because it is full of crimes. It did not ask why there are crimes, whether the crimes are related for some sensational value, nor whether the author's attitude suggests the crime is justifiable only when desperate remedies are called for. Nor did it debate the issue of whether crime is a suitable topic for literature.

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[97]"Wessex Poems and Other Verses," CXIII Athenaeum, (January 14, 1899), 42.

It contented itself with stating the story was powerful but disagreeable.[98] To a modern reader of the novel, this criticism seems inappropriate for the time at which it was written because Desperate Remedies does have the traditional happy ending for the heroine; but a closer examination reveals that the refusal of all the characters to reform before the narrative ends could leave the Victorian reader with the idea the tale is pessimistic and therefore disagreeable.

More than a decade later the Westminster Review excused Hardy for publishing the sensational, pessimistic Desperate Remedies because of his youth and immaturity. Tracing further Hardy's development as a writer, Havelock Ellis detected in A Pair of Blue Eyes a kind of tragic irony which appeared in the form of "a series of impossible coincidences and situations, connected sometimes with a pointless cynicism."[99] But like other reviewers, Ellis did not inquire into the cynicism nor into why Hardy used these impossible coincidences, if they were, indeed, that. Nor did he investigate the Hardy attitude toward the role of the forces which shape men's lives nor the inability of the characters to overcome these forces--the true basis of Hardy's pessimism. He admitted to being puzzled by Hardy's view of life, calling it "singularly hard to analyze," all the while realizing Hardy's work was disconcerting.[100] In regard to The Return of the Native, Ellis pointed out that the approaching catastrophic storm was hinted at by the toad, the spider, the dog, and the sheep, and that only man was incapable of recognizing imminent disaster. But instead of pursuing this suggestion

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[98]"Desperate Remedies," Athenaeum, p. 399.

[99]Ellis, p. 166.

[100]Ellis, p. 171.

of pessimism, of mankind's comparative weakness, he stated Hardy was actually a kind of nature-worshiper since he "...is never more reverent, more exact, than when he is speaking of forest-trees."[101]

The Athenaeum review of Tess, more thoroughly than any other, sought to find the philosophy the novelist was illustrating. In Hardy's theory, it saw a kind of fatalism based on the accident of birth and the untowardness of circumstances which constantly conspired to defeat or deflect the protagonist. It saw the emphasis invariably placed on the unhappiness in life, since immanent misfortune threatened the heroine at every turn. It concluded that the Wessex people not immediately involved in an episode had apparently learned already the lesson Tess was constantly being taught by an unsympathetic teacher--the lesson that all human endeavor is to little avail--and that it was thus the peasants could say fatalistically, "It was to be. There lay the pity of it."[102] But unlike the reviews which condemned the author for writing a novel illustrating this attitude toward life, the Athenaeum, while not upholding the theory, felt itself forced to praise the author for his successful presentation of this anti-Victorian, depressing philosophy.[103]

According to the Saturday Review, the tale was only depressing and dreary. Had it not been for the cows and the dairy farm, the reviewer believed, there would have been no sunshine anywhere in the book. The novel was dismissed as an unpleasant story told in an unpleasant way. The periodical did not attempt to inquire into the reasons for this sunshine scene, did not ask if the cows were content because

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[101]Ellis, p. 177.

[102]"Tess," Athenaeum, p. 49.

[103]"Tess," Athenaeum, p. 49.

they did not oppose the dictates of uncontrollable forces, nor did it suggest a bovine existence was not suitable for mankind; it merely found the novel cheerless and depressing. Its only words of praise were directed at Hardy's ability to deal "with scenes taken direct from nature...."[104]

Several of the reviewers sought to relate the pessimism they found in Hardy to traditional theology. Among these was the writer for the Bookman. He stated that in Tess Hardy had attempted to explore the questions of theology and philosophy, but he did not attempt to list the results of Hardy's explorations beyond saying the aim of the novel was not the affirmation nor the denial of any theological system. In fact, the Bookman believed the novel to be quite conventional because poetic justice was meted out to violators of laws. Furthermore, the reviewer found the novel to be reflecting contemporary attitudes because Hardy was subscribing to the-woman-pays, double standard of morality.[105] To anyone who could entertain this idea, the book must have appeared as a case for optimism, but overshadowing all was the hanging of an unrepentant murderess, certainly not a desirable fate for a Victorian heroine.

The Spectator also discussed Tess in terms of theology. It believed Hardy had failed miserably in achieving his goal of writing a novel to illustrate his thesis that "there is no Power who guides and guards those who are faithful to their best lights"; instead, like the Bookman, it found Hardy actually illustrating conventional morality by showing that the transgressor must be held responsible for his actions.[106]

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[104]"Tess," Saturday Review, p. 73.

[105]"Tess," Bookman, p. 178.

[106]"Tess," Spectator, p. 121.

Furthermore, while conceding that the novel was of unrivalled power because of the descriptive passages and peerless insight into character, the reviewer found the novel could be read only with difficulty because "the mind shrinks from an untrue universe so blank and godless."[107] In an era when faith was being attacked from all sides, its denial in a novel was bound to be noted; and here was a reviewer attempting to discredit the essential pessimism of the novel by searching for anything which would uphold conventional beliefs.

The lengthy Newton-Robinson study did not agree Hardy was an apostle of pessimism; rather it regarded him as an author who looked upon life non-committally but who saw his characters needing the sympathetic and compassionate feeling he held for them. And yet, despite this compassion which Mrs. Newton-Robinson saw everywhere evident, she observed that Hardy's basic idea was that "...every human being has been more or less dwarfed by circumstance, that our natural price of life has been hindered in its blooming by our necessities."[108] She believed, in fact, one of the novelist's great powers rose from his being able to show how familiar events of life in Wessex could have their proper value as tragic arbiters of human fate; but she was unwilling to concede that pessimism was inherent in Hardy's novels.

Blackwood's saw Hardy as a pessimist and a confused atheist who disclaimed the existence of God, meanwhile railing against Him:

> Mr. Hardy's indignant anti-religion becomes occasionally very droll, if not amusing. Against whom is he so angry? Against "the divinities," who are so immoral--who punish the vices of the fathers on the children? Against God--who does not ask us whether we wish to be created; who gives us but

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[107]"Tess," Spectator, p. 121.

[108]Newton-Robinson, p. 159.

> one chance, etc. But then, if there is no God? Why, in that case should Mr. Hardy be angry?[109]

It also found him opposed to the idea that reconstruction and progress constantly occur in both the moral and material world.

So enraged was the Quarterly Review with Hardy's view of life that it recommended he be read only as a representative producer of unimportant literature in an era when most literature was of little importance. Specifically, it objected to Hardy's embracing the idea that Nature is unconscious of laws framed as social expedients by humanity, which, the magazine maintained, have their basis in the heart of things just as much as do seduction, adultery, and murder. Like the periodicals which saw despair triumphing over religious faith, the Quarterly objected to Hardy's despairing over the laws instituted by British society. In either case, pessimism was the feature most obvious to the reviewers.

Sylvanus Urban, (the name which the Gentleman's Magazine had long used for its book critic), disliked the unhappy ending of Tess. While wishing that Hardy had stuck to his former English style and had preserved the heroine, Sylvanus Urban found the ending a failure in its bid for sympathy, at least as far as Angel and Tess's sister were concerned. Admittedly, the critic stated a more romantic appeal to the emotions would have afforded him greater pleasure. It is interesting to note the word "English" in the above criticism; one must conclude especially since the critic had already referred to what French novelists were producing, that a spirit of nationalism prompted him to believe that Hardy's pessimism was un-English.[110]

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[109]"Tess," Blackwood's, p. 474.

[110]Sylvanus Urban, "Tess of the D'Urbervilles," Gentleman's Magazine, IL (September 1892), 321.

The reviews of Life's Little Ironies in 1894 might have led some to think subscribing to a doctrine of pessimism was no longer objectionable. The Athenaeum, for example, while finding the Hardy philosophy unpleasant, could only praise him for remaining "faithful to his mission of unmasking Providence."[111] It agreed the virtues of honor, love, self-sacrifice, pride of birth, etc. could not subdue the ironical swing of circumstance which, according to what it saw as Hardy's thesis, man could not control. Despite an aversion to this thesis, the reviewer generously praised Hardy's ability to convey the tragic aspect of life.[112]

Similarly, the Spectator review of the same work explained Hardy's thesis as one in which his characters are victims of their own passions and desires, which cannot be resisted or overcome and which lead to terrible and unforeseen catastrophes. The reviewer, though depressed by the feeling that nothing can stop the controlling power of circumstance, lauded Hardy for stern, impersonal directness. Unlike the Athenaeum reviewer discussed above, the Spectator reviewer did not request from the author a humorous instead of a morbid book.[113]

This little lull in the storm of protest was followed by new outcries against Hardy's pessimism. The Athenaeum, among the first to speak against Jude the Obscure, labeled the novel and its underlying philosophy completely intolerable. The novel, the reviewer complained, was impossible because the author's theory of the universe was impossible, a theory that fate is "not a mere blind force that happens at times to upset men's calculations and to turn their strength into

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[111]"Ironies," Athenaeum, p. 367.

[112]"Ironies," Athenaeum, p. 367.

[113]"Ironies," Spectator, p. 538.

weakness, but rather a spiteful Providence, whose special delight it is to scare off men, and whose proceedings make anything but absolute quietism an absurdity."[114] This same theory had earlier prompted the Athenaeum to praise Life's Little Ironies; but in this review of Jude, it labeled the theory "primitive," "grotesque," and "inappropriate."[115]

Robert Tyrrell seemed determined to aid in the battle against Jude and at the same time destroy Hardy by refusing to take the author and his works seriously. He saw Hardy as a slave to a fixed idea, and maintained this thraldom made the novelist appear so very angry. Besides, he insisted the novelist merely pretended to be at odds with the universe and that a novel written to illustrate the tragedy of unfulfilled aims could only result in triteness.[116]

Others, too, refused to take Hardy seriously. An unsigned article reprinted from Temple Bar in the Eclectic Magazine told of a visit the critic had made to Wessex and of some interviews he had had with certain Wessex inhabitants who knew the novelist. While not belittling Hardy as a craftsman, these residents doubted Hardy really held the ideas presented in the novels and therefore could only question his sincerity.[117]

Hardy was not, however, completely without sympathizers. As we have seen, Janetta Newton-Robinson attempted to exonerate him from the charge of pessimism by stating he looked upon life either compassionately or non-committally. Francis Adams, while objecting

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[114]"Jude," Athenaeum, p. 709.

[115]"Jude," Athenaeum, p. 709.

[116]Tyrrell, "Jude," p. 893.

[117]"In Thomas Hardy's Country," The Eclectic Magazine, CXXVI (June 1896), 776.

to certain supposed weaknesses in the author's work (dialectal inconsistencies and conventional style, for example) had no quarrel with Hardy's motives in writing Tess. Instead he praised the treatment of human beings as the natural reflection of their surroundings and admired Hardy's ability to show these people in a vain struggle against unjust fatality.[118] D. F. Hannigin was also sympathetic to the Hardy point of view. He regarded Tess as a high point in English fiction, as a novel presenting truth on each page. In comparing it with Adam Bede, he found Tess a much more impressive narrative of crushing facts.[119]

Richard LeGallienne was among the critics who supported Jude as a statement of Hardy's pessimism. He considered the novel an English statement of Les Miserables, one in which Jude, like Valjean, was cursed with bad luck from beginning to end. To Le Gallienne the novel seemed to be a reaction to the older optimistic novel in which a reader could hope for and find a happy ending. He saw the story as an attempt to show a malignant fate pursued Jude and Sue at all times, even when they acted according to wisdom and not according to passion. For him, this was the tragedy of the novel, and while conceding the events led the reader into the realm of unreality, he carefully pointed out that here was an isolated instance of fate in a destructive mood and that the reader should not regard the entire human race as the sport of a malevolent force, despite the fact there may be those individuals whose lives seem to be primarily a series of unrelieved misfortunes. Disagreeing with Mrs. Oliphant who, as we have seen, believed Hardy was indicting man-made marriage laws, Le Gallienne saw Jude as an

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[118]"Tess," Fortnightly Review, p. 21.

[119]Hannigin, "Tess," p. 657.

indictment of the laws of the universe which in this instance made Jude and Sue miserable because of their character weaknesses.[120]

The Saturday Review also upheld Mr. Hardy, but it could not see that the story sought to indict the universe. It championed the novelist because he had shown society to be at fault in its treatment of the working-man, and it rejoiced because someone had dared to show how desperate life can be for the poorer classes:

> For the first time in English literature, the almost intolerable difficulties that beset an ambitious man of the working class--the snares, the obstacles, the countless rejections and humiliations by which our society eludes the services of these volunteers--receive adequate treatment.[121]

Of all the reviews, this one alone thought Jude a novel of the proletariat, a novel dealing with a class instead of an individual member of that class. And although the essentially pessimistic theme of the novel did not escape the reviewer, he regarded as beneficial its publication.

It is obvious the critics of the works of Thomas Hardy were dissatisfied with his attempts to point out the evils which beset mankind during the nineteenth century and that they found his novels depressing if not actually pessimistic. Only those critics, of course, who could support him on any controversial issue justified the many unhappy endings in his novels. Other critics objected to Hardy's presenting such grim pictures of life. And underlying all these objections was the critics' fear the novelist was attacking the Victorian optimistic idea of progress in all matters.

For many reasons the reviewers regarded Hardy as a naturalist. Recognizing here an author who was accomplishing much that was not

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[120]Le Gallienne, "Jude," p. 114.

[121]"Jude," Saturday Review, p. 154.

in the British tradition, they sought to ally him with Continental authors who were also outside the revered, conventional, romantic tradition. To them, it will be seen, the words realistic and naturalistic were synonymous.

One of the first British critics to notice a sharp divergence between Hardy's novels and the traditional novel was Havelock Ellis. In his lengthy study of Hardy, he recognized the novelist's reliance on activities motivated by instinct alone: this feature led Ellis to believe no other author created such fascinating characters. He remarked, at least as far as the women were concerned, "What we see in them then, is the individual and egoistic instincts in a reaction with circumstances which is only faintly colored by an altruistic consciousness. Morals, observe, do not come in."[122] Although Ellis did not at any time use the word naturalistic in his serious study of the works, at least he recognized the Hardy technique differed from the more familiar one in which will, and not instinct, motivated the protagonists. In fact, still discussing characterization, Ellis wrote of "...a yielding to circumstance that is limited by the play of instinct,"[123] Thus, in this early critic we find suggestions of those features which later caused reviewers to become most angry: the author's respecting both instinct-produced and will-produced actions; the author's allowing circumstance to triumph over planned events; and, of course, the author's refusing to condemn immoral activity.

One reason why the Spectator was so enraged with Tess was that it saw Hardy attempting to illustrate the idea "that impulse is the law

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[122]Ellis, p. 165.

[123]Ellis, p. 165.

of the universe, and that will, properly so-called, is a non-existent fiction."[124] This, the magazine held, resulted from Hardy's pantheistic conception of the universe and could be accounted for in no other way.

Still avoiding the term naturalistic, Francis Adams attempted in his review of the same novel to show the characters were just as much a part of nature as were the cattle and the landscapes. Furthermore, he complimented the novelist for his success in making his people one with his places and for allowing his novels to present a "single harmonious growth of spiritual and natural circumstances."[125] Comparable to Adams' theory was that of Janetta Newton-Robinson, who also admired Hardy for his ability to relate the animate of his characters to the inanimate of nature. This, she maintained, produced the poetical atmosphere of the novels and gave them superior strength.[126]

One of the first critics, however, to link Hardy's name and work with the hated French naturalists was Mrs. Oliphant whose belief that Hardy purveyed filth we saw in the discussion of sexual relationships.[127] She prefaced her remarks on the subject with these words:

> The present writer does not pretend to a knowledge of the works of Zola....[128]

Her naming the French novelist can suggest the only idea she entertained concerning naturalism--the idea that naturalism concerns itself with sexual activity. Obviously she cared little for the philosophical basis for naturalism, hoping wistfully no decent English author would subscribe to it.

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[124]"Tess," Spectator, p. 131.

[125]Adams, "Tess," p. 21.

[126]Newton-Robinson, p. 164.

[127]Cf. p. 94.

[128]Oliphant, p. 138.

Hannigin, on the other hand, upheld Hardy's right to deal with any subject. But like Mrs. Oliphant, this British critic did not discuss any principles of naturalistic literature, merely advising his readers that the publication of Jude the Obscure had merited for its author a position comparable to those held by England's and Europe's best novelists. And daringly enough, he mentioned by name two French novelists, Balzac and Flaubert.[129]

As shown in the discussion of Hardy's treatment of sex, other critics too thought this topic provided the link between Hardy and Continental novelists. Robert Tyrrell pointed out the relationship in his admonition that Jude was most suggestive of Zola's Pot-Bouille and Germinal.[130] It was Tyrrell, after all, who found the novels of Zola disgusting rather than alluring and who said

> Mr. Hardy has long been creeping nearer and nearer to the fruit which has been so profitable to the French novelist, but which till quite recently his English fellow-craftsman has been forbidden to touch. The Woodlanders, A Pair of Blue Eyes, and above all, Tess, have shown Mr. Hardy's eminent skill in going as near French lubricité as a writer can venture without awakening the non-conformist conscience in our strangely constituted society, in fact hoodwinking the not very perspicacious Mr. Podsnap and Mrs. Grundy.[131]

Few, indeed, were the critics who discussed Hardy objectively. J. M. Barrie, however, saw Hardy as the only realist worthy of consideration among the novelists of the era. His justification for discussing Hardy, while objecting to others whom the public considered realists, lay in his approval of Hardy's choosing as settings the

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[129]Hannigin, "Latest Novel," p. 136.

[130]Cf. p. 97.

[131]Tyrrell, "Jude," p. 858.

provincial towns and villages and aiming at nothing more than being true to life, even though obligated to show that in real life, comedy often has a tragic end. Discussing the other realists' failures, Barrie stated,

> The professional realists of these times, who wear a giant's robe and stumble in it, see only the seamy side of life, reproducing it with merciless detail, holding the mirror up to the unnatural instead of to nature, and photographing by the light of a policeman's lantern.[132]

But despite the apparent high regard which Barrie held for Hardy, no tenet of naturalism appealed to him; he merely liked Hardy's picture of the Wessex countryside and villages. To Barrie this meant realism, especially if comedy turned into tragedy.

The last nineteenth-century Spectator criticism of Hardy's prose still dwelt on what it called the gruesomeness and repulsiveness of his work. No longer connecting him with the French naturalists, Zola and Flaubert, as it had done earlier, the magazine now saw him as an Ibsenite, one who chose "the kind of subjects which almost tempt one to think that the imagination can beat the passions in multiplying the horrors of life."[133] Because it believed Hardy was competing with Ibsen and other writers in promoting and stressing the horrible, the Spectator advised F.E.H.M. Henniker, with whom Hardy had collaborated, to seek a more judicious literary counselor.[134]

What they thought of as the naturalism of Thomas Hardy was never well-defined by any of the periodical critics. They were quick to point out any lapses or supposed lapses from British morality in order to

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[132]Barrie, "Historian of Wessex," p. 59.

[133]"In Scarlet and Grey," Spectator, LXXVII (October 31, 1896), 593.

[134]"Scarlet and Grey," Spectator, p. 593.

associate Hardy with the French naturalistic school, but at all times they avoided saying that any given feature of the novels was strictly naturalistic. They chose not to discuss the objectivity of naturalism, the animalism of naturalistic characters, the documentation of events, so integral a part of the naturalistic technique, nor the philosophy of naturalism. Instead, they merely labeled naturalistic any unattractive features of the Hardy novels.

In 1897 there appeared in book form an earlier novel, The Well-Beloved. Now the bitter criticism which Tess and Jude had inspired became tempered. No longer did danger to English morality lurk in the pages of Hardy's works, for the guardians of this morality had not only uncovered all attacks upon it but had additionally condemned the novelist so mercilessly he chose never to write another novel. The Athenaeum, however, could not refrain from reminding its readers that The Well-Beloved had been written by the same author who had given Tess and Jude to the world, even though it admitted there was little of an offensive nature here. Furthermore, the review denied instinct prompted man to good or evil action. It was rather "not instinct--or temperament if you like to call it so--but hard reason, aided in certain cases by the policeman, [which] alone can persuade the normal man to monogamy."[135] It dismissed all of Hardy's novels by saying they merely resulted from the fact that in each of his characters, duty and inclination never point the same way.

At the beginning of the new century George Douglas examined in retrospect the Wessex novels and his conclusions are worth noting since they seem to indicate a change in the British book-reviewers' attitudes.

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[135]"The Well-Beloved," Athenaeum, p. 471.

Believing Hardy was a conscientious laborer and a finished artist in the best traditions of the English language, he cited the author as a master of English prose for these reasons: 1) his exhibiting the contrast between the power of circumstance and event, with the impassive permanence of Nature, and the fleeting ineffectual character of the suffering race of mortals; 2) his presenting essential truth and vitality in his characters; 3) his powerful dealing with adult character, passion, and tragedy; 4) his creating "a company of girls and women probably the truest to womanhood and the most irresistible to manhood...since Shakespeare";[136] 5) his having written the "finest novel in the English language--The Return of the Native";[137] 6) his describing arch and piquant scenes. Douglas was aware of certain flaws, too, flaws such as the inadequate motivation in Under the Greenwood Tree, the artificiality of the drawing-room characters in A Laodicean, and Hardy's refusal to take his own plot seriously in Desperate Remedies. But to a novelist who had been so severely criticized during most of his career, these objections must have appeared minor when measured against Douglas's elaborate praise.

CHAPTER SUMMARY

As the opening pages of this chapter pointed out, Thomas Hardy was aware his female characters were unconventional. The critical discussions of almost every novel refer to Hardy's great talent for bringing his women to life. The early novel, Desperate Remedies, at a time when the novelist's sex was unknown, was attributed to a woman.

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[136]G. B. S. Douglas, "Wessex Novels," Bookman, XVII (January 1900), p. 110.

[137]Douglas, "Wessex Novels," Bookman, p. 110.

A principal reason given for this conjecture was that the novelist had paid so much attention to the details of the feminine mind and the feminine toilette that it would have seemed strange, indeed, if a man had been able to write such a story. As for A Pair of Blue Eyes, the doubt about the author's sex still persisted, but the praise for his creating the distinctive character of Elfride Swancourt, impulsive and tenderly passionate, was unreserved. Even in the reviews of A Laodicean, scarcely well-received by the critics, it is around the heroine, Paula Powers, the criticism revolves. The lack of the usual Hardy heroine's demonic element disturbed Ellis in his discussion of Geraldine Allenville; but Ellis contended no other novelist had created such delightful female characters. In fact, Hardy's depiction of Elfride, Eustacia, and the other female roles served as the basis for many ideas which Ellis later discussed. J. M. Barrie, too, was impressed by the women, so impressed he was able to work out a plot formula for Hardy's novels on the theory that all the women would have two lovers but marry a third.

Not liking the roles to which Hardy assigned his women and objecting to the author's refusal to enter the female mind, another reviewer anonymously attacked the artist. But these objections could remain of little value after the Newton-Robinson insistence that the women were passion-led, elemental, and heroic. When Tess of the D'Urbervilles appeared, the heroine was not attacked for being stuporous or languid; on the contrary, it was her being portrayed as such a lively and active woman, so active she constituted a danger to public morality and the institution of marriage, which provoked the wrath and enmity of many reviewers. Had she appeared a lifeless creature, a mere type rather than an individual, the reviewers would not have worried her creator to

the degree they did. The vast amount of criticism the novel evoked was in reality a tribute to the author's art in giving to the world Tess the woman.

The same comments can be made regarding the criticism of Jude. Here, in a novel which purports to chronicle the desperate attempts of a working-class man to rise above his condition, the scorn of many reviewers turned on two women, Sue and Arabella. Sue was not just one of the so-called "new-women," but was a reasoning, semi-intellectual person. Arabella was her foil. Together these two individuals prompted such critics' phrases as ruinous and destructive, coarse, and insensitive to the dignity of womanhood and motherhood. Like Hardy readers of today, the critics of the late nineteenth century remember his women characters by name, their activities fading into unimportance because Hardy assigned actions to them primarily to help the reader understand better the individual's character. Thus, the importance he placed on the role of women in his novels became a focal point for many of the critical discussions of contemporary periodical reviewers. The reviewers were astonished to find heroines among lower-class women and amazed to discover that these women, led by instincts and passions, were allowed to move, unchecked by society's dictates, through the novels. The Hardy women truly disturbed the reviewers.

Similarly, they were disturbed to find that the most successful of Hardy's males also came from the lower classes. The heroes were rarely of the swashbuckling type; rather, in defiance of the Victorian and romantic tradition, they were inclined to be pensive onlookers. Exceptions exist, of course; but even such a man as Michael Henchard was only a part-time hero, his villainous deeds overshadowing any

good ones. With few exceptions, the male role was secondary in the Hardy novels. But the men were individuals rather than representatives of a type. One does not regard Jude as a typical worker, nor Henchard as a typical mayor. As with the women, the change of circumstance and event brought the character to life, the actions diminishing in interest as the characters' inner nature became revealed.

Generally speaking, the critics praised Hardy's heroes as illustrative of veracious, uncomplicated, and direct men, although this very directness might have led to actions which would displease a morally righteous reviewer. Thus, while the hero was regarded as credible, the novelist was blamed for refusing to pass judgment on a particular deed. So arose many of the complaints against the morality of the novels.

Another aspect of the novels which prompted the reviewers to criticize was Hardy's language. They liked the reality resulting from the everyday, earthy speech of his farmers, complaining only when they thought he had forgotten to reproduce the dialect of the Wessex peasants exactly. They objected to his making his heroic people, when they came from the lower classes, talk as if they were well educated. They disliked the formality and the pretentiousness in the speech of his drawing-room characters; but most of all the critics disliked the rhinestone style of the narrative sections when the author spoke for himself. More than one critic reprimanded the novelist for artificiality of expression as well as for improprieties of grammar and vocabulary. What the Victorian critic hoped to find in a novel was a model for speech and for writing, but Hardy disappointed them for the most part.

It may at first seem strange so many critics saw Hardy as a promoter of sin. The relations between the sexes do serve as a theme in the novels and the love element is omnipresent. But for all this, a

twentieth-century reader could scarcely classify the tales as pornographic or erotic. Nothing in Hardy can be compared to Maugham's Lize of Lambeth (to select a British novel of Tess's era) and its descriptions of the heroine's lapses from chastity; nor does Hardy contain such descriptions of sexual activity as one finds in Zola, the naturalistic author to whom he was most compared. What disturbed the critics most was Hardy's permitting his young women to choose their prospective mates without proper guidance or to wonder about the desirability of choosing any husband at all.

Many of the critics who condemned Hardy did so because he permitted adulterous relationships. They saw the Henchard-Mrs. Henchard-Newson affair, the Eustacia-Clym-Wildeve affair, the Alec-Tess-Angel affair, and the Jude-Sue-Arabella affair as attacks on the institution of marriage and the family, so idealized by the novel-reader of the day. That this was all Hardy could write about was Blackwood's contention as it was also the opinion of Mrs. Oliphant. It remained for Hannigin, Le Gallienne, and The Bookman to show how the novels illustrated great morality since the wrong-doers were always punished in accordance with the principles of poetic justice. But most of the critics believed the mere inclusion of such adulterous affairs in a novel was scandalous.

The impossibility for a character to overcome his fate disturbed many reviewers, and even those who did not analyze the stories to see where the actual conflicts lay reported the Hardy novels were depressing. Throughout the novels recurs the theme that man is no match for circumstance, that his will to act is puny when set against the forces of nature and society. Any occasional success was temporary at best; circumstance and coincidence were only waiting to beat him down and shape him to

their own liking. Thus, the Victorian belief in progress and a consequent optimism regarding the future was not to be found in Hardy. On the contrary, the novels served as chronicles of despair from first to last. In A Pair of Blue Eyes, the death of the heroine, who had never known the joys of home and family, was bound to be depressing. The hanging of Tess, the suicide of Jude's child, and, of course, the death of Jude himself could have pleased no reader who expected novels to offer repentant souls and bright, happy endings. Nowhere in the novels does Hardy encourage those Victorians who saw their religious beliefs undermined; on the contrary, Hardy never showed faith or belief to be efficacious in the struggle of man against circumstance. His only concession to traditional belief came in the form of poetic justice--punishment for the wrongdoers--and even these were usually the leading characters in the books.

Because he was so completely outside the pale of the traditional romantic novel, critics regarded him as a naturalistic writer. Mrs. Oliphant was one who found him much like Zola, even when she proudly boasted she had not read the works of the French naturalist. Tyrrell insisted Hardy was an English Zola, striving to bring indecency to English literature. Hannigin, also finding Hardy a disciple of Zola and de Maupassant, rejoiced because England too had a naturalistic novelist. Sylvanus Urban (pseud.) also saw naturalistic ideas and thought the English novelist had bettered the French naturalists in that he had presented truth while avoiding coarseness and nastiness of detail. Other critics chose not to mention naturalism or were unaware of it as a literary force in the closing years of the century. But strangely enough, even those strongest in their accusations did not attempt to define literary naturalism. They merely selected some detail which was

displeasing to them and labeled it naturalistic, a term held in constant readiness for imported French novels.

That Hardy's novels were considered controversial for a lengthy period is evident; the great praise he received for his depiction of natural phenomena was countered by the criticism he received for his pessimism; the praise for dialectal reproduction was countered by the criticism of his stilted dialogues and narrative tone; the occasional admiration for his skill in creating physically beautiful women was diminished by objections to his unheroic heroines who were at times immoral; favorable comment on his ability to depict village life realistically was countered by unfavorable comment on his supposed naturalism. Hardy was not, however, the sole writer to be treated so harshly by the periodical press as will be seen in the next chapter.

CHAPTER IV

GEORGE GISSING AND THE PERIODICAL CRITICS

George Gissing, like his contemporary, Thomas Hardy, was also attacked by reviewers who objected to what they called his naturalism. Gissing, regarded during his lifetime as a writer of promise rather than of achievement, seemed deliberately to antagonize his reviewers by announcing his revolutionary ideas and then by illustrating them in his novels. Furthermore, it is doubtful the anonymous reviewers would accept kindly the replies Gissing made to them in the novels themselves. In New Grub Street, for instance, the depressing story of a writer of promise, who, like Gissing, refused to bow to the critics' taste (one editor insists that the protagonist was actually Gissing[1]), Reardon is made to say, "Curse the reviews," when the heroine was worrying about the reception a forthcoming novel would have.

Even more harmful to his reputation than his continual war on his reviewers was his rejection of current and popular ideals. In Workers in the Dawn, his first published novel, "he came before the public as a constructive and informed critic of contemporary life, assuming a role which was to be his throughout his career and giving us, at the same time, the indispensable key to his whole development."[2] A disciple of Dickens, he presented the reading public with his views on current

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[1]George Gissing, New Grub Street, ed. Harry Hansen (New York, 1926), p. x.

[2]George Gissing, Workers in the Dawn, ed. Robert Shafer (New York, 1935), p. xxii. Hereafter cited as Workers.

problems; a rebel and innovator, he refused to romanticize or soften these views merely to please his readers. "Villainy does not prosper; but neither is the heroine finally crowned with happiness; nor the hero, who struggles and endures only to see life turning to ashes, emptied of all meaning and worth."[3]

In other ways, too, he violated the Victorian code; he rebelled against religious faith; he doubted the idea of progress; he wrote his novels "not...for women and children, but for thinking and struggling men."[4] With as much realism and candor as were permitted to him, he set out to present to the novel readers of his day the world as he saw it; but they did not like it nor his daring to show it to them. The excerpts from the reviews will show this conclusively.

It is sometimes forgotten Gissing was a scholar who read widely the literature of several languages. The uninitiate, knowing him for possibly one or two productions, are inclined to picture him as a poverty-stricken author who wrote only autobiographical material. While it is true his early career was one of hardship, his later life was one of ease if not luxury, a life wherein he could pursue scholarly interests and produce his critical study of Dickens. But even though he was acquainted with the literature of the continent, "...he was never seriously tempted to become an English Balzac or an English Zola...."[5] Nevertheless, the reviewers who were displeased with Gissing's novels and their indictments of nineteenth-century society allied him with the naturalistic school.

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[3]Gissing, Workers, p. xxxviii.

[4]Gissing, Workers, p. xx.

[5]Gissing, Workers, p. xl.

Workers in the Dawn appeared in 1880, and in its review of this novel, the Athenaeum discussed most of the points which we traced in the study of the Hardy periodical criticism; it omitted only a discussion of naturalism. It pointed out, however, how Gissing defied the taste of the British in this and later novels. In the first place, the review objected to the heroine, who, although she possessed a serious and sweet nature, was an ideal Comtist and an intellectual, both repugnant to novel-readers who could not reconcile intellectuality with ideal femininity. Secondly, the review objected to the hero, who attacked established political and social institutions, deserted his wife, and committed suicide. Thus, Gissing demolished the theory that heroes must be capable of overcoming all odds and get along well within the framework established by society. Thirdly, the review objected to marriage being regarded as a source of unhappiness and to a principal character's indulging in an illicit romance. Next, the review saw the author as a pessimistic realist devoted to "sparing no graphic detail of the miseries of the vicious and the poor," a phrase suggestive of the smug complacency of the era.[6] And finally, the review saw Workers in the Dawn as a novel something less than ennobling in its language and style.

The same periodical reviewed The Unclassed, a Gissing novel of 1884. It questioned the right of a novelist to use disagreeable material as subject matter and at the same time objected to the women in the story, who were "shadowy" creatures living in a dim moral atmosphere.[7] It stated that Gissing was quite unable to analyze a woman's character.

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[6]"Workers in the Dawn," Athenaeum, LXXV (June 12, 1880), 758.

[7]"The Unclassed," Athenaeum, LXXXIV (June 28, 1884), 820.

More likely, however, the review was passing judgment on an author who recognized the existence of prostitutes, and even more, a prostitute who could be the close, platonic friend of the hero. This was the era, one must remember, when prostitution was called the social evil; and the introduction in a novel of a virtuous prostitute was too great a contradiction for either reviewer or reader.

The Spectator review of the same novel also objected to novels dealing with social problems and thereby minimized all of Gissing's efforts. As for Ida, the heroine who inherited a vast sum of money, reformed, and became noted for her sweetness and charity, the reviewer contended the role she assumed as a means "of wiping out her degraded past is almost absurdly fanciful."[8] Victorian convention was not opposed to a woman's demonstrating her sweetness through visits to the sick and parties for poor children, but Ida in this novel was usurping the prerogatives of the Victorian young lady who had never strayed from righteous behavior.

When Isabel Clarendon appeared, the reviewers still thought Gissing's works showed promise, even though they blamed him for presenting unconventional women. Isabel herself evoked no criticism, for she was decidedly the model of feminine propriety: modest, self-sacrificing, dutiful, erring only in her devotion to the innocent pleasures of high society. No reviewer found anything amiss in Gissing's creation of this woman. Isabel Clarendon's ward, however, displeased the critics. Shocking all by announcing publicly "I am an atheist," she became the object of the critic's venom.[9] The unfavorable reception accorded this novel may be partly ascribed to the heroine's atheism,

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[8]"The Unclassed," Spectator, LVIII (July 10, 1886), 58.

[9]"Isabel Clarendon," Saturday Review, LXII (July 10, 1886), 58.

but her independence, her intellectuality, and her refusal to enter herself in the marriage market made one reviewer at least wish Gissing "would adhere more closely to natural types and models."[10] The anonymous reviewer in the Academy, found Ada Warren, the ward, appealing. Indeed, he called her "an imaginative triumph" in a book which he could recommend " to that cultivated class of readers who seek in fiction what Mr. Matthew Arnold says is to be found in good poetry--a 'criticism of life.'"[11] Here, then, after six years Gissing received some acclaim for his work, although he defied conventional standards in his depiction of a young girl.

Also appearing in 1886, though anonymously, was Gissing's novel Demos. Only two periodicals, the Saturday Review and the Athenaeum noticed it, and neither commented on the heroine. Readers will recall that the heroine is conventional, that she married in accordance with her mother's wishes, that she was a dutiful wife, that she finally found love when she was beside her husband after he had been mortally wounded by an enraged mob of workers. Nothing in the actions of this young woman could have offended a reader. The critics had to accept even the lesser female characters: the husband's mother, who knew her proper place; the husband's sister, who foolishly tried to buy respectability, and the husband's former betrothed who relinquished all claim to him when he married for position. There was nothing offensive about any of the women in the novel.

When Thyrza appeared in 1887, the Athenaeum reviewed it sympathetically. It liked Thyrza for her "thoroughly natural feelings"

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[10]"Isabel Clarendon," Athenaeum, LXXXVII (June 19, 1886), 809.

[11]"Isabel Clarendon," Academy, XXX (July 10, 1886), 24.

and admired her for her stoicism when circumstances in the narrow streets of Lambeth succeeded in keeping her down.[12] Similarly, the Spectator liked Totty Nancarrow, the girl of the laboring classes, because she remained, in spite of unpleasant surroundings, self-reliant and "always self-respectful."[13] One can only conjecture about what the reviewers would have said of this novel if these two girls had attempted to raise themselves above their station. But accepting their misfortunes uncomplainingly, they were not a disturbing element.

For several years the reviews of Gissing's ensuing novels said little or nothing about his women characters, probably because the stories featured men. It is rather surprising, however, that Amy Reardon of New Grub Street received so little attention from the reviewers since she was portrayed as a woman who could not live with poverty, ennobling as it might have been in Thyrza. Denzil Quarrier and Born in Exile also gave women secondary roles. Even The Odd Women reviews devoted no space to a discussion of Gissing's presentation of women.

Sleeping Fires (1896) was met with a general indifference, although the Saturday Review hoped the novel indicated a change of attitude on Gissing's part, since the widowed heroine in the novel eventually discovered happiness.[14] This was not, indeed, a typical Gissing denouement; but as the later novels indicate, there was to follow a change in their generally depressing tone. The Victorian desire for novels in which the heroine became satisfied and pleased with her future would soon be gratified.

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[12]"Thyrza," Athenaeum, LXXXIX (May 7, 1887), 605.

[13]"Thyrza," Spectator, LX (June 25, 1887), 868.

[14]"Sleeping Fires," Saturday Review, LXXXI (January 11, 1896), 48.

When Dolman's lengthy article on Gissing was published, the novelist's presentation of women received much attention. Dolman remarked that Gissing made lower-class women the heroines of his novels, an unusual feature in the ordinary novels of the era. Dolman pointed out that instead of ascribing heroic activities only to women of the upper classes, Gissing saw heroic strength in the efforts of his unfortunate girls merely to survive, let alone attempting to rise above circumstances. The critic admired Thyrza in particular,

> ...the story of that rare figure in fiction--a heroine of the London working-class. A mere factory "hand," with little or no education, Thyrza Trent is nevertheless a girl whom Gissing succeeds in making very real and interesting to us. With much natural refinement, uniting an imaginative temperament and a personal beauty of the spiritual rather than the sensual type, the development of her life and character amid the squalid surroundings of a back street in Lambeth becomes in Mr. Gissing's hands a narrative in which the interest, though absorbing, is more psychological than dramatic.[15]

The Spectator in the same year reviewed The Whirlpool and complained because Gissing invariably omitted the element of nobility. Citing the heroine as an example of this defect, the review objected to her impulsiveness and her trivial ambitions. The sole redeeming feature of the novel, it maintained, came at the end, because there Alma Rolfe was punished for her over-ambitious nature. The demand for poetic justice was thus satisfied, even though the heroine was not acceptable.[16]

When The Crown of Life appeared in the last year of the century, the Bookman seemed almost indifferent to the novel, but reflected a change

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[15]Frederick Dolman, "George Gissing's Novels," National Review, XXX (October 1897), 201.

[16]"The Whirlpool," Spectator, LXXVIII (April 24, 1897), 596.

in attitude toward the popular heroine of the era. Perhaps because the 'nineties had seen such exciting creatures as Tess in Hardy's novel and Liza in Maugham's, the reviewer disapproved of Gissing's heroine, "a nice, clever, serious-minded girl whom we like--outside a book."[17]

In general, the reviewers disliked Gissing's female characters: they found them too intellectual, too independent, and too lifeless. Furthermore, they too frequently were drawn from the lower classes where women of great virtue and distinction were assumed not to be found. These were not women to be emulated, unless like Thyrza Trent they were to serve as models for the proper poor.

From the beginning, Gissing's portrayal of male characters caused the reviewers to comment, for, as we have seen in his treatment of women, the novelist implied that any class could furnish heroic behavior. Workers in the Dawn, for example, had a working-man hero who devoted himself to the alleviation of poverty and social ills. But, as Walter Houghton pointed out, the typical Victorian held that "nobility of purpose and self-sacrifice to an ideal is the property of the noble and well-born."[18] Golding was neither of these, nor was he acceptable to the Athenaeum.[19] He came from the slums, associated with radicals, and worked against established institutions.

The Unclassed had a different type of hero. No outspoken advocate of democracy, he contented himself with righting wrongs in his own circle of acquaintances. Furthermore, he had been born the son of a businessman, was the charge of a well-to-do landlord, and served as a

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[17]"The Crown of Life," Bookman, XVII (December 1899), 89.

[18]Houghton, Victorian Frame of Mind, p. 283.

[19]"Workers," Athenaeum, p. 758.

schoolteacher. Given this background of respectability, Waymark could easily take to heart the miseries of the unfortunate without defying convention. Thus the Athenaeum could state that Gissing's "analysis of masculine character reveals considerable grasp and penetration."[20] As for Slimy (the drunkard whom the review erroneously referred to as Smiley), the Spectator could not refrain from calling him "exceptionally well-drawn. He is realistic without being revolting."[21] The appreciation of this character, however, rested in his illustrating the Victorian belief that bad conduct could lead only to a horrible end and in his doing no permanent harm to the hero.

The same periodical found Kingcote, the hero of Isabel Clarendon, unbearable because he did not live up to the era's criteria for heroes. In the magazine's words, "His hero [is] ... a dreaming, morbid book-hunter who cannot discover his true position in the economy of things. ..."[22] On the other hand, the innocuous clergyman, Mr. Vissian, also a book-hunter and harvester of literary trifles, received the reviewer's praise. One can assume the review was ignorant of the double standard it was establishing or else that the amiable, optimistic clergyman illustrated theVictorian belief in good cheer and so preserved his acceptability to the reviewer.

Another reviewer was baffled by Kingcote. While admitting Gissing had studied his characters diligently and laboriously, he was not sure he could understand the nature of this Gissing hero. "...whose capacity for self-torment seems to have in it a touch of insanity."[23]

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[20]"Unclassed," Athenaeum, p. 821.

[21]"Unclassed," Spectator, p. 158.

[22]"Isabel Clarendon," Spectator, LIX (October 23, 1886), 1420.

[23]"Isabel Clarendon," Academy, p. 24.

Nothing could appear more incongruous to the Victorian than an insane hero.

Demos was well enough received by the two periodicals choosing to review it. This novel, one will recall, also had a working-class hero, who like the hero in Workers in the Dawn, fought for workers' rights. But in Demos, the hero was a victim of the mob he had tried to help; and as an exponent of radical ideas, he satisfied the Athenaeum with his death.[24] In fact, the periodical praised the unknown novelist for destroying the hero and the vicious ideas simultaneously. The other review of Demos similarly saw the author as the possessor of a judicial mind and thought him incapable of misdirected enthusiasm.[25]

The Victorians liked heroes they could understand. Just as it had objected to Kingcote, introspective hero of Isabel Clarendon, the Spectator praised Gilbert Grail of Thyrza because his character was uncomplicated.[26] Grail pleased the Athenaeum also because he was "an enthusiastic man attempting for himself and others to work out the higher life under unfavourable circumstances...."[27] Although Grail was not a dashing hero of romantic fiction, he was a decided contrast to his counterpart, Egremont, whose "nobility of nature is rendered ineffective by a latent element of weakness."[28] For these two periodicals, at least, heroes needed to be simple and persevering, always unwavering in pursuit of their goals.

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[24]"Demos," Athenaeum, LXXXVI (April 10, 1886), 485.

[25]"Demos," Saturday Review, LXII (August 21, 1886), 261.

[26]"Thyrza," Spectator, p. 868.

[27]"Thyrza," Athenaeum, p. 605.

[28]"Thyrza," Athenaeum, p. 605.

The hero's lack of strength aroused the Athenaeum critic of The Emancipated, the novel which centered itself around women who had thrown aside the shackles of obedience. The reviewer, however, instead of objecting to the emancipation of women, placed the blame for such flaunting of male superiority and authority on Reuben Elgar, the husband of an emancipated woman. It objected specifically to his allowing her to dominate him and to his acting according to his emotions.[29] Another review dismissed the Gissing characters in this novel by stating "...they are as it were for ever feeling their own pulse."[30] In order to satisfy these reviewers, a hero could not be addicted to acting emotionally nor to examining his own motives. He needed rather to be direct, strong, and firm with those around him.

Gissing's characters made the reviewers unhappy with New Grub Street. Jasper Milvain, whom Gissing treated unsympathetically, was the author who found a public. Milvain, of course, was never heroic but was invariably successful. The idealistic Reardon, however, could never please the public with his works and was bound to be regarded as a failure. This situation upset reviewers promoting Victorian ideals, for even at the novel's end, nothing indicated right behavior to be better than bad behavior.[31] Nor did the reviewer like the males. It referred to Reardon as "sensitive, imaginative, low in vitality," most certainly undesirable characteristics for a leading man.[32]

Born in Exile had no better reception than New Grub Street although five periodicals noticed it. In common, each condemned the

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[29]"The Emancipated," Athenaeum, XCV (April 12, 1890), 466.

[30]"The Emancipated," Westminster Review, CXXXIV (September 1890), 333.

[31]"New Grub Street," Spectator, LXVI (May 30, 1891), 764.

[32]"New Grub Street," Athenaeum, XCVII (May 9, 1891), 601.

book because the hero, Godwin Peak, became a clergyman only because he hoped thereby to gain station and respectability. The Saturday Review called him "the most unlovable creation that ever appealed to the misdirected sympathies of a reader," and later objected to his ignoring "his poor old widowed mother, who has pinched herself to pay for his schooling...."[33] The Athenaeum, too, thought him "scarcely a hero over whom one can become very enthusiastic."[34] The Spectator obviously disliked Peak when it stated:

> With all his intellectual vivacity, Peak is a depressing companion, and the whole book...is one of those presentations of life which are thoroughly depressing, because utterly devoid of any feeling for the simple human hopes and enthusiasms and affections which give to life its interest and charm.[35]

The Academy, the least critical of the hero, merely called him "unsatisfactory."[36] The Westminster Review best explained its condemnation in terms of the ideas of the era:

> His hero is utterly unsympathetic from first to least. No generous impulse, no warm-hearted, unselfish emotion is ever recorded of him. His resolute and persevering efforts to rise in the world are in themselves worthy of all respect, for they aim not solely, nor even chiefly, at the acquisition of wealth, but at self-culture and admission to the society of refined and educated people. But they are so mixed up with what is base and unworthy, with such malevolent feelings both for those above him and those below him in the social scale; he advances towards his ends by such tortuous ways, that his honourably ambitious struggles assume the aspect of sordid machinations, and the reader has no feeling for him but hostility.[37]

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[33]"Born in Exile," Saturday Review, LXXIII (June 11, 1892), 688.

[34]"Born in Exile," Athenaeum, IC (May 28, 1892), 693.

[35]"Born in Exile," Spectator, LXVIII (June 25, 1892), 883.

[36]"Born in Exile," Academy, XLII (July 23, 1892), 67.

[37]"Born in Exile," Westminster Review, CXXXVIII (November 1892), 571.

Several years elapsed before the critics again discussed the Gissing hero. Denzil Quarrier, after all, presented a hero who reformed; The Odd Women and The Emancipated had few men at all. However, In The Year of Jubilee introduced three males of displeasing mien. One, according to the Spectator, was given to dissipation on account of a dull brain and not on account of strong passion; the second was "an accumulating machine which makes money and makes love with the same revolution of the wheels"; the third was a dull, sententious fool.[38] As we have noted above, these qualities were not conducive to making a critic admire a Gissing character or book, a viewpoint supported by the derogatory tone of the entire review. Only the Bookman, rarely given to adverse criticism, could find the hero admirable and an artistic success.[39] The Athenaeum found no hero at all.[40] In Eve's Ransom, the first of the Gissing novels to receive favorable comments from the Spectator, the periodical found a hero who behaved rightly and even nobly. While it objected to Hilliard's spending money to gratify his senses, it excused this moral weakness because Gissing had not chosen, after all, to present the highest type of humanity; Hilliard was not a man from the upper class.[41] The periodical seemed to despair of ever finding in Gissing a hero meeting all the critic's standards. Moreover, in reviewing The Whirlpool, it resignedly insisted that "He [Gissing] will have none of the glamour of romance, and never portrays a character which inspires anything approaching to unqualified romance."[42]

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[38]"In the Year of Jubilee," Spectator, LXXIV (February 9, 1895), 205.

[39]"In the Year of Jubilee," Bookman, VIII (May 1895), 54.

[40]"In the Year of Jubilee," Athenaeum, CV (January 12, 1895), 45.

[41]"Eve's Ransom," Spectator, LXXV (September 14, 1895), 345.

[42]"Whirlpool," Spectator, p. 596.

H. G. Wells, Gissing's strongest advocate, greatly admired the novelist's men, especially Rolfe in The Whirlpool. He called the hero "singularly inert" and saw him "unchanging in a world of change."[43] What Wells appreciated most, however, in direct contrast to the unsigned critics, was Gissing's creating such a critic of contemporary society: "He reflects, he does not react. He has, in fact, all the distinctive inhumanities of what one might call the 'exponent of character,' the superior commentary."[44]

It is almost as if Wells' criticism signaled a change in the critics' attitudes toward Gissing's men, as if for the first time Gissing's portrayal of lower middle class personages was regarded as artistically acceptable. For example, the Spectator, instead of condemning The Town Traveller, found the men actually quite proper, even though it had not changed its own point of view regarding the qualifications for heroes. The reviewer's statement that "Gissing has relentlessly insisted on the middle-class world, [and]... has illustrated their [his men's] opportunities and capacity for enjoying themselves" might well have been written years earlier, for the Victorian insistence upon a man's recognizing his proper station receives support in both the novel and the periodical's criticism of the novel.[45] There is, indeed, no Moses-type leader in The Town Traveller; Gissing's earlier works had contained these, much to the discomfort of the reviewers.

In a similar vein, the periodical reviewed The Crown of Life, again bestowing praise on Gissing for his character study of Piers Otway. It liked the novel because "...we are called on to witness the gradual

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[43]H. G. Wells, "The Novels of George Gissing," Contemporary Review, LXXII (August 1897), 197.

[44]Wells, p. 197.

[45]"The Town Traveller," Spectator, LXXXI (September 3, 1898), 312.

upbuilding of Piers's self-respect, the slow but final victory of spirit over flesh, the motive-power all along being the hero's hopeless attachment for a pure and good woman."[46] Nothing could have afforded a Victorian reader greater pleasure than a hero saved from himself, especially when perseverance accomplished that end.

This discussion of the reviewers' ideas concerning the Gissing male has indicated clearly the general displeasure of the critics. They did not like novels containing men given to meditation rather than to action, men who married for position instead of for love, men who had friendships among members of the lower classes, and ignobly born men who attempted to lead others to encroach upon the prerogatives of the high-born. Only when the novelist ceased rebelling against the spirit of the era and created men of a more traditional stripe did the reviewers admire them.

Also contributing to the general disfavor with which Gissing's work was received was the novelist's upholding sexual relations as suitable content for a novel, and in connection with this aspect the critics condemned some of the women mentioned earlier. But even apart from the dislike of Ida and other women of easy virtue, they discussed furtively the Gissing emphasis on sex either in or outside of marriage.

The earliest published novel, Workers in the Dawn, had only one woman whose sexual activities Gissing wrote about: the wife of the hero who deserted her husband and became a prostitute. But since she died in poverty and thus released her unfortunate husband, the Athenaeum review appeared satisfied with the outcome of this episode.[47]

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[46]"Crown of Life," Spectator, LXXXIII (November 4, 1899), 661.

[47]"Workers," Athenaeum, p. 758.

The Unclassed, however, was a novel filled with ideas of sexual immorality. It contained both a prostitute heroine and a woman who left her husband in order to associate with lower class people. This novel appeared in an era when the introduction in a novel of a virtuous prostitute was too great a contradiction in terms for either a reviewer or a reader. Besides, this prostitute was a platonic friend of the hero, and such a friendship could never be tolerated. Any woman who left her husband, no matter what the circumstances, was certainly to be condemned by Victorian standards, especially when she resisted all his efforts to redeem her.

This novel, The Unclassed, reviewed by the Academy, caused the periodical to mention that Gissing was attempting here to satisfy the cravers for dirty fiction and that the book was designed to shock many readers. While admitting the book had power and vigor, the review, nevertheless, hoped future novels from the author "--or rather authoress [as the periodical insisted]," would omit such sordidness.[48]

The same novel caused some pain for the Spectator. Acknowledging the fact Gissing was treating here a serious social problem, the review seemed to equate the moral law of the era with sexual behavior alone. Displeased with writers who are either rebels against the moral law or "know not what the moral law means," the review wanted novelists to leave social problems for discussion elsewhere than in fiction.[49]

Even by the time The Unclassed appeared, Gissing had been acquiring a reputation for salaciousness. Punch upbraided the novelist thus:

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[48]"Unclassed," Academy, XXV (June 28, 1884), 454.

[49]"Unclassed," Spectator, p. 158.

> O ye demigods and little GISSINGS, did anyone ever hear the like of this [Gissing's charge that Thackeray had sold his soul to Mrs. Grundy's taste]? Not all the waters of Gissingen can do much for anybody who openly prays that the public taste may "come round" again to the open coarseness of Tom Jones; the vice of an age as much as our age has its own, which THACKERAY, one of the cleanest-minded writers who ever lived, points out in that same preface to be happily out of date. All the world knows what that preface meant, save and except GISSING, who thinks that THACKERAY's artistic conscience suggested Dirt, and his art demanded it, but that he was afraid of losing money by it!! Had he been but true to his conscience and his tastes, his receipts would have gone up in time, for GISSING would have bought his books. But THACKERAY betrayed his trust (ye gods! THACKERAY!) by being sweet and pure, though it is a "hard thing to say." It should have been not only hard but impossible, GISSING. As for our living novelists, they are disgusting GISSING by "doing the same every day." Well, they are, GISSING; and speaking with some knowledge of them, we do not altogether regret it. We regret that GISSING cannot get the reading he likes, except by going back to more conscientious days; and we do not wholly like Mrs. GRUNDY. But we like her taste in books better than GISSING's. We will do all we can to help you to your desired celebrity, GISSING, though we care not to be gissing who can have brought you up. Praised be the gods for thy foulness, GISSING! but also that, as we findly hope, there are not very many like thee.[50]

The capitals in the repeated references to Gissing in the above article must certainly have attracted attention to the novelist's works, because after this time his novels were usually reviewed by several periodicals, even though less mention was made of Gissing's treatment of sex.

Isabel Clarendon, of course, did not violate the sex code, except, possibly, in the introduction of an illegitimate girl whom the Spectator called cold and eccentric--"a study in human oddity."[51] But by making

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[50]"Gissing the Rod," Punch, LXXXVIII (January 3, 1885), 1.

[51]"Isabel Clarendon," Spectator, p. 1420.

her thus and omitting any scenes of sexual activity, Gissing escaped the wrath of Mrs. Grundy everywhere.

The anonymous Demos and the subsequent Thyrza were written with no references to the sexual question. The Emancipated, however, opposed the double standard in sexual affairs. The Westminster Review rejected Gissing's daring to oppose traditional morality and believed he was either not to be taken seriously or that he had been, in fact, taken in by "such phrases as 'the modern ideal of life,' 'the altered relation of the sexes,' 'the complex modern woman,'...."[52]

The Emancipated was Gissing's first real attempt to reveal life as it existed for people emancipated from formerly-held ideas regarding religion, morality, and sex. The novel was generally well-received in spite of certain threats to Victorian standards, because the emancipated women deem their newly-achieved positions unrestful and so seek (and find) contentment in marriage. As the Athenaeum put it,

> To tell the truth, the former classes [the emancipated women] are a good deal nicer than the latter [the unemancipated]; though when they enter the bonds of matrimony after one emancipation, they are generally the nicest of all.[53]

Similarly, the Westminster Review regarded the heroine Miriam Baske, who, after liberation from the Puritanism of her family, accepted a new yoke in the form of love. The resulting submission to her masterful husband was the antidote to her former freedom and concurred with the Victorian convention. Her new course mollified this reviewer who worried lest Gissing's expounding on the emancipation of women might harm an unprepared reader.[54]

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[52]"Emancipated," Westminster Review, p. 333.

[53]"Emancipated," Athenaeum, p. 466.

[54]"Emancipated," Westminster Review, p. 333.

The Emancipated was eventually reviewed by the Spectator, which disapproved of the heroine's traveling around with a man until he should marry her. Furthermore, the review disagreed with her that she was entitled to "an equal freedom to exercise all her powers, to enrich her life with experiences of joy" if denied "natural solace," Gissing's euphemistic term for matrimony.[55]

These three reviews of the same novel emphasize the stress critics laid on marriage as a panacea for all of woman's ills; additionally, a new reason for criticizing Gissing arose from his sympathy for the so-called new woman.

The Bookman was displeased by Denzil Quarrier because Gissing did not make a clandestine union and its immorality answer for the hero's downfall but instead wrote so "catastrophe is brought about by external and all but incredible villainy."[56] The reviewer thought a commonplace moral resulted and that the book failed because the incompatibility in the unsanctioned liaison did not induce disaster.

Whether Gissing wrote about the married or the unmarried, he could not satisfy his critics. The Odd Women, one will recall, contained the tale of a young and vivacious girl who married an elderly gentleman in order to obtain material comforts. Ignoring love, she sought to escape her miserable, wretched surroundings and the pitiful fate of her unmarried sisters. One periodical approved the accuracy and truthfulness of Gissing's description of the courtship and the ensuing wedded life of the lovely Monica and the jealous Widdowson, but would have preferred

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[55]"Emancipated," Spectator, LXXIII (August 11, 1894), 183.

[56]"Denzil Quarrier," Bookman, I (March 1892), 215.

a more romantic story, since the author's truthfulness left "a vague feeling of dissatisfaction."[57]

As far as the unmarried were concerned, the unfriendly Saturday Review objected not so much to scenes of seduction as to the introduction of such scenes when the novelist had neglected to prepare the reader for them. To illustrate, its reviewer of In the Year of Jubilee wrote about Tarrant's seducing Nancy:

> No doubt Nancy would have yielded herself to such a fellow easily enough, and perhaps the inevitable asterisks which conceal the inevitable seduction in the inevitable sylvan retreat have a right to be printed after she has exchanged a few words with him on half a dozen occasions; it is possible that Tarrant might have married her next day, all very handsomely, in real life, though Mr. Gissing does not make this convincing.[58]

But even more remarkable for the era, the reviewer justified the above-mentioned seduction. He stated:

> It is natural enough that a girl like the heroine, out of such a household as Mr. Gissing shows us, should be ready to fall a victim to the first touch of passion, the first show of a state and culture superior to those around her.[59]

One can assume from this that seductive scenes were to be tolerated provided the seduced be from the lower classes. The Spectator, however, would have none of this and made the novel the source of its bitterest attack. Specifically it hated the women Gissing portrayed:

> Among the not numerous prominent characters are a divorced woman; two girl victims of seduction, --if indeed the phrase be not misapplied to lapses from virtue which have hardly waited for temptation.[60]

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[57]"Odd Women," Spectator, LXX (May 27, 1892), 708.

[58]"In the Year of Jubilee," Saturday Review, LXXIX (January 19, 1895), 100.

[59]"In the Year of Jubilee," Saturday Review, p. 100.

[60]In the Year of Jubilee," Spectator, p. 205.

With such characters as these, it is little wonder the reviewer despised the novel; thus we have evidence that even the nineties hesitated to accept sex or sex violations as suitable material for fiction.

Only the Saturday Review tolerated a woman's lapse from virtuous conduct. In its review of Eve's Ransom, also a novel of the 'nineties, it excused a situation ordinarily repugnant to it by virtue of the characterization of the woman herself:

> Eve Madeley is a real and credible woman, fundamentally mean as is the way of women, with a sweet, intellectual face and an inherent refinement and seriousness that extort our respect, and with just one dash of sordid romance with a married man to vary her dull life of work and parsimony.[61]

A real change in attitude is obvious here, the excusing of an extra-marital affair. The other reviews, nevertheless, were not at all lenient or tolerant of Eve. One thought Gissing held a low opinion of women, because in the novel he had the heroine marry for security.[62] This kind of marriage, secretly desired by Victorian parents and openly opposed by the readers of romantic novels, was exactly the element which had disturbed the Spectator reviewer of The Odd Women.[63]

H. G. Wells, who, we have seen, supported Gissing for what he regarded as excellent male characterization, again demonstrated his affection for the problem novelist when he reviewed the novels from the standpoint of literary merit, disregarding completely the morality or immorality of the stories. The critic was not at all displeased with the novel (The Unclassed) which dealt with the so-called "daughters of joy,"

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[61]"The Depressed School," Saturday Review Supplement, LXXIX (April 27, 1895), 531. A review of Eve's Ransom.

[62]"Eve's Ransom," Spectator, p. 183.

[63]Cf. p. 128.

but felt such a novel was a necessary reaction to the Victorian insistence on woman's morality. What he did object to was Gissing's "pathetic endeavour to prove that these poor girls are--young ladies."[64] (This statement reminds one of the attacks on Hardy as a result of his calling Tess a "pure" woman. The difference between the stories, however, lies in the fact that Tess was an unwilling victim of masculine attention.)

When Dolman wrote in 1897 about all the Gissing novels, he devoted much space to the novelist's treatment of sexual relations. Unlike most of the anonymous reviewers who discussed In the Year of Jubilee, The Emancipated, and Eve's Ransom, Dolman insisted the constant Gissing theme was the problem of sex and not the problems of lower middle class society, that Gissing was perhaps only following the fashion of the time in catering to the public's demand for sensational literature:

> ...in what was, I believe, Mr. Gissing's first novel [the critic erroneously believed that the first novel was The Unclassed instead of Workers in the Dawn] much was anticipated of that which has since been said in fiction respecting the relations of the sexes. These other novels, too, have been written with considerable independence of thought and originality of view. With a daring in idea which has hardly been equalled in any of the novels of "sexual interest," to use the phrase of their hostile critics, that have since become popular, and a delicacy of treatment which has certainly not been excelled, Mr. Gissing made the heroine of The Unclassed a courtezan...whilst at the same time claiming for her the fullest sympathy and admiration of his readers.[65]

While admitting it is hard to tell exactly how Gissing viewed sex, the critic was inclined to believe the novelist disassociated sex from morality. He believed instead the novels constantly reiterated the idea that

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[64]Wells, p. 197.

[65]Dolman, p. 263.

"...truly immoral man...is still in the bondage of formulae, and his sin consists in the conscious violation of principles which in his heart he believes ought to guide him."[66]

Agreeing with the Gissing implication that a woman's surrender is not necessarily fatal to her moral character, he saw the novelist countenancing the idea that an ideal union between a man and a woman may be one of freedom. To substantiate this idea, he quoted Rhode Nunn in The Odd Women:

> In real life, how many men and women fall in love? Not one in every 10,000 I am convinced. Not one married pair in 10,000 have felt for each other as one or two couples do in every novel. There is the sexual instinct, of course, but that is quite a different thing; the novelists daren't talk about that. The paltry creatures daren't tell the one truth that would be profitable. The result is that women imagine themselves noble and glorious when they are most near animals.[67]

It does not surprise us, therefore, that Gissing's contemporaries, and particularly his reviewers, should have been so fearful of a writer who upset their traditional, conventional ideas of sex and morality.

The preceding survey of the reviewers' comments regarding Gissing's treatment of the relations between the sexes indicates his was an unconventional attitude for the novels of his era. In the first place, romantic love was not the subject of his novels, according to most critics. Besides, certain critics objected to what they regarded as a cheapening of love in the story of a hero's platonic love for a prostitute. Secondly, Gissing did not show marriage as a panacea for all of a woman's difficulties: he sometimes put women in unbearable marital situations

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[66]Dolman, p. 263.

[67]Dolman, p. 263.

and attempted to whitewash their adulterous activities; he even indicated that desertion could solve the problem of an unhappy marriage. And finally, his portrayal of illegitimacy, the seduction of poor girls, and the ability of some women to find happiness outside of marriage made critics question the propriety of including the unpleasant subject of sex in any novel.

While many of the novels escaped condemnation because the reviewers ignored or were unaware of the sexual overtones apparent to Dolman, another aspect of the novels produced cries of rage from the very beginning. Like Hardy, Gissing was accused of promoting pessimism in an era of popular optimism. The unhappy ending of Workers in the Dawn caused the Athenaeum to review the novel unfavorably.[68] Its review of The Unclassed was also unfavorable because Gissing had dared to write about a depressing subject: life in the London slums.[69] The Spectator too found the book unpleasant and said Christian hope would eliminate the problems Gissing had raised, even predicting Gissing could become a success only if he would avoid problem novels or else write about Christian tenderness.[70]

The Westminster Review saw a pessimistic attitude promoted by The Emancipated when it stated

> ...the moral suggested by his book is that, if advancing civilisation implied the indefinite multiplication of such unrestful and tormented beings as most of those who figure in his pages, one would, to use Professor Huxley's forcible words, "hail the advent of some kindly comet which would sweep the whole affair away."[71]

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[68]"Workers in the Dawn," Athenaeum, p. 758.

[69]"Unclassed," Athenaeum, p. 820.

[70]"Unclassed," Spectator, p. 158.

[71]"Emancipated," Westminster Review, p. 324.

Readers of New Grub Street were warned they might not enjoy this novel in which "...Mr. Gissing holds a brief for pessimism." Conceding the story was vigorous, the Spectator review continued to describe it as "depressing," "full of unrelieved melancholy and an atmosphere of sordid misery." all of which have their "effect in lowering the spirits of the reader."[72]

The Athenaeum advised prospective readers thus:

> The lower walk of "letters" may, not, perhaps, smile on the reader, nor be the path he would wish to follow--it is dreary, a little grimy even.... Life in "New Grub Street" may be sad enough, with few redeeming features--many go under, few rise above the surface--there is privation, disappointment, meanness; still, day by day more plunge into it. It has its fascinating time, its hours of glamour; but of these Mr. Gissing shows few or none.[73]

The pessimism of Born in Exile led another periodical to blame Gissing's attitudes for his failure to please his readers. The review thought it saw with each successive novel a greater emphasis on Gissing's belief in pessimism,

> ...a pessimism which robs the moral atmosphere of all its invigorating ozone. It is a little curious--or rather it would be curious were it not so easily explainable--that the value and glory of life are most depreciated by those who might be expected to exalt and celebrate them, the men and women who, doubtful or despairing of any guarantee of an existence beyond, should surely feel with special intensity the worth and interest of the narrow span of being that lies between the cradle and the grave.... [Gissing] offers instead no quickened appreciation of the joy of life, but rather makes it a thing that is dull and chill and grey.[74]

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[72]"New Grub Street," Spectator, p. 764.

[73]"New Grub Street," Athenaeum, p. 601.

[74]"Born in Exile," Spectator, p. 883.

The Academy, too, regarded the novel as a brief for pessimism and doubt; and while admitting Gissing had written well about intellectual scepticism, it found that "the whole result is unsatisfactory" and that "the story is almost necessarily a melancholy one."[75]

The Odd Women produced divergent views on Gissing's pessimism. One found the novel something less than enchanting but still possessing " an element of hope, a something that encourages the idea that with time and effort the baffling problem of the odd women may be successfully solved."[76] Another view, presented by the Spectator, contended the whole novel was "coloured by his pessimism" and that " it is a good novel to get away from."[77]

This periodical did not change its attitude toward Gissing's pessimism when In the Year of Jubilee was published, although the Athenaeum and the Saturday Review were resigning themselves to the idea the novelist would continue to emphasize the hopeless aspects of life. The first-mentioned periodical questioned the need for books which treated the sordid aspects of life and concluded, "...his treatment may be challenged on purely artistic grounds by critics who would treat its fatalistic pessimism as an indifferent thing for which they have neither approval nor condemnation."[78] The Athenaeum, on the other hand, admired "his usual uncompromising fashion" in describing a life that "...is generally unlovely and often hideous" but which "...rises at times to a genuinely tragic level."[79] Besides, it saw certain aspects of optimism

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[75]"Born in Exile," Academy, p. 67.

[76]"Odd Women," Athenaeum, CI (May 27, 1893), 667.

[77]"Odd Women," Spectator, p. 708.

[78]"In the Year of Jubilee," Spectator, p. 206.

[79]"In the Year of Jubilee, Athenaeum, p. 45.

in the novel, especially in those parts where the heroine seemed about to obtain happiness. Similarly, the Saturday Review found a quiet humor making the book bearable, since "Mr. Gissing indulges in no splashes of bright colour, gives us no crime, little mere blackness: all is grey and brown and sombre, and the stamp of convincing unexaggerated truth is over the whole. It is as horrible and impressive a presentment of sordid unlovely life as we have ever had."[80]

> Almost contradicting itself, the periodical asked of Eve's Ransom:
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> Is this harsh greyness really representative of the life of the lower middle class? Or is it that Mr. Gissing is colour-blind...?[81]

Besides, the review contended, the novelist fell short of artistry because he failed to interweave any flash of joy or humor into life's gloomiest tragedies.[82]

By the time Sleeping Fires was published, the Saturday Review was so inured to the Gissing pessimism that his change of attitude in this short novel puzzled the reviewer. He believed the novelist guilty of an artistic lapse because the book was so different from the earlier ones.[83] The Athenaeum, which had attempted to find in the earlier novels some elements of optimism, seemed not to notice anything unusual about the lack of pessimism here, insisting it liked the book because Gissing had allowed old-fashioned morality to prevail.[84] Unfortunately, the Spectator ignored the novel, so one cannot know if it enjoyed the absence of pessimism.

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[80]"In the Year of Jubilee," Saturday Review, p. 100.

[81]"The Depressed School," Saturday Review Supplement, p. 531.

[82]"The Depressed School," Saturday Review Supplement, p. 531.

[83]"Sleeping Fires," Saturday Review, p. 48.

[84]"Sleeping Fires," Athenaeum, CVII (January25, 1896), 116.

It also ignored the light, humorous Paying Guest. When it once again reviewed a Gissing novel, one in which Fate stalked the heroine, it resumed its attack on pessimism:

> That he should not have achieved a popularity in proportion to his great ability need excite no surprise. He is too uncompromising a delineator of human nature, too relentless in his exposure of the skeletons that are concealed in the most reputable of cupboards. What is more, Mr. Gissing concerns himself almost entirely with the tragedies and the tragic-comedies of middle-class life, and it is for this reason...that he is never likely to become a fashionable writer.[85]

H. G. Wells, however, was not displeased by Gissing's pessimism any more than he had been by Gissing's treatment of sex. In his appraisal of several of the novels, he wrote:

> At the outset we encounter an attitude of mind essentially idealistic, hedonistic, and polite, a mind coming from culture to the study of life, trying life, which is so terrible, so brutal, so sad and so tenderly beautiful, by the clear methodical measurements of an artificial refinement, and expressing even in its earliest utterance a note of disappointment.[86]

Dolman, too, realized Gissing's pessimism was actually spawned by idealism: his philosophy "...may be briefly summed up as impatience with the present competitive phase of society, with its mad striving for wealth on the one side and its painful struggle for subsistence on the other."[87] Though cognizant of the author's point of view, he charged pessimism was Gissing's besetting sin:

> The pessimism is almost morbid. In other hands, the scenes between the poverty-stricken literary men [specifically in New Grub Street] ...would have been full of humour, grim,

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[85]"Whirlpool," Spectator, p. 596.

[86]Wells, Contemporary Review, p. 197.

[87]Dolman, National Review, p. 266.

> no doubt, but genuine for all that; as it is, only one or two poor gleams of wit relieve the gloom of their distress. In none of Mr. Gissing's books are we more conscious of that deficiency in the sense of humour which, with their pessimism, has hitherto made their other fine qualities so unacceptable to men in the street.[88]

Only once did the critic know of Gissing's shedding a pessimistic attitude, namely in The Odd Women, when "Mr. Gissing puts off his pessimism and becomes the enthusiast in face of the principle of equality between husband and wife,"[89]

Even for his short stories Gissing was regarded as a pessimist. His Human Odds and Ends led the Academy reviewer to state: "Mr. Gissing is as remorseless, as deliberate, as logical a pessimist as ever. His indictment of things is as brave and as comprehensive."[90] Even here, whenever he permitted some touches of humor, he immediately counteracted them with irony. The result did not please the critics.

The Spectator finally joined the admirers of Gissing when The Town Traveller appeared, stating quite frankly that the pessimism of the earlier novels had alienated it:

> We had long ago given up Mr. George Gissing as an incorrigible pessimist, but the unexpected has happened, and in The Town Traveller he has not only given us a story with a happy ending, but one which is in the main suffused with cheerfulness and occasionally mounts to the plane of positive hilarity. Into the causes of this momentous deviation we do not propose to enter, beyond hazarding the surmise that Mr. Gissing's recent sympathetic study of Dickens may have contributed to his conversion.[91]

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[88]Dolman, p. 262.

[89]Dolman, p. 264.

[90]"Human Odds and Ends," Academy, LII (December 18, 1897), 125.

[91]"Town Traveller," Spectator, p. 312.

The critics' respect for the Dickens tradition was apparent in still another review which believed Gissing introduced a lighter touch as a result of the recent monograph.[92] Only the Academy found the book "revolting" because of its "remorseless delineation of sordid miseries."[93]

The last Gissing novel of the century found the Spectator completely on the side of the novelist. The change, however, was not so much the periodical's as it was the author's, for here the protagonist, beaten down by parentage and environment, rebuilt his life and self-respect. Thus, the Spectator stated its position on optimism versus pessimism in novels: "We welcome Mr. Gissing's tardy adhesion to the ranks of mitigated optimists...."[94]

That Gissing was regarded as a pessimist during most of his career and that this pessimism was not to the liking of periodicals in an era of optimism is most apparent. While some realized the Gissing novels featured a pessimistic theme to be read as social criticism, the Gissing attacks on society were not welcomed. The Spectator, indeed, held back its praise from the author until he wrote optimistically. And even the Bookman, often less given to carping criticism than other periodicals, rejoiced when it believed Gissing would henceforth present an optimistic, more Dickensian point of view. The romantic tradition of the happy ending still persisted as a desideratum of Gissing's age.

We have noted that Hardy's language plus his pessimism and gloom, unromantic heroes and heroines, and outspoken comment regarding sex

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[92]"Town Traveller," Bookman, XV (October 1898), 19.

[93]"Town Traveller," Academy, LIV (September 10, 1898), 245.

[94]"Crown of Life," Spectator, p. 661.

caused him to be suspected of naturalistic tendencies. Gissing, on the other hand, received only one unfavorable comment concerning his language. Without giving examples, without stating its objections specifically, the Athenaeum saw him as "not quite a master of...the Queen's English."[95] Although Denzil Quarrier spoke roughly, his language abuses, though noticed by the Bookman, did not compel the periodical to condemn the entire novel.[96]

Praise for the dialogue appeared in a review of The Odd Women. It was called " of the right sort--natural and to the purpose."[97] But the novel presented no characters whose speech could possibly offend; no character needed to be rough-spoken during any episode.

More praise came for the language of In the Year of Jubilee. As one reviewer said,

> He has caught the lower middle-class dialect in dialogue in an exceedingly clever way, while, when he is speaking in his own person, one reads without noticing the words--which is always a sign of good writing.[98]

Even the usually unfriendly Spectator commented favorably on Gissing's language:

> He deals neither in purple patches, superlatives, padding, nor flaming rhetoric. He has got rid of a certain trace of literary artifice noticeable in his earlier work, and his style is now admirably terse, expressive, and adapted to the matter in hand.[99]

Only one other review remarked on the language in the novels. The Academy review of The Town Traveller praised Gissing for

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[95]"Workers in the Dawn," Athenaeum, p. 758.

[96]"Denzil Quarrier," Bookman, I (March 1892), 215.

[97]"Odd Women," Athenaeum, p. 667.

[98]"In the Year of Jubilee," Saturday Review, p. 100.

[99]"Whirlpool," Spectator, p. 596.

recording accurately the speech of his characters.[100] Obviously, then, Gissing's language did not enrage his critics; as a matter of fact, with the one exception noted above, they agreed about his skill as a writer and inventor of prose models. No room for condemnation existed on this score.

To see why Gissing was received unfavorably and why he was regarded as a naturalist, one must examine other portions of the periodical criticism. This study has shown that his pessimism, in defiance of prevailing taste, angered certain critics. More angering, however, were his descriptions of London low-life, regarded by critics as the essence of naturalism, and the implication that a complacent society was somehow at fault. His judges, therefore, he provoked into calling him a naturalist, or equally damaging, into associating him with continental philosophers and writers. As a result, Gissing's aims, methods, and conclusions were always suspect.

The Athenaeum was disturbed from the very beginning. Throughout its review of Gissing's first novel ran the names of Schopenhauer, Comte, and "foreign authors," the first two being accused of strongly influencing the novelist to scorn religion and to rouse the passions of the poor, the last group of "foreign authors" prevailing on the heroine to do likewise.[101] The periodical apologized half-heartedly for Gissing on the grounds of his social inexperience, but it could not excuse his "making the horns and tail of his bête noire so very grotesque as to take from the seriousness of the contest."[102] A modern reader of the novel will recall the scenes

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[100]"Town Traveller," Academy, p. 245.

[101]"Workers," Athenaeum, p. 758.

[102]"Workers," Athenaeum, p. 758.

of inhuman cruelty and poverty at the beginning of the story and will certainly disagree with the Athenaeum's verdict regarding the seriousness and realism of the novel. However, the possibility exists the periodical preferred to regard the London slums in an ostrich-like fashion.

Its opinion of The Unclassed was no higher; it even went so far as to suggest disagreeable subjects be omitted from literature and recommend that Chapter III of the third volume [a particularly sordid description of slum life] be excluded. This led it to condemn the book on the supposed grounds that it had no central narrative, was badly arranged, and did not illustrate the virtue of self-repression.[103]

The Academy review saw a connection between Gissing and Zola which reflected the English attitude toward the French advocate of naturalism:

> The author--or rather authoress, for the work plainly shows a female hand--of The Unclassed has written a tale of lower middle-class life in London in the manner of M. Zola and his disciples. We say in the manner, for the manner of the naturalist school is to give sufficient prominence to the shadows of life to produce a picture of powerful effect. The spirit of the modern French realists differs in no way from that of generations of French writers in every branch of literature. ... The spirit of The Unclassed is not the spirit of Zola, as the book is not prurient; but the manner of the book is realistic to a degree which will shock many readers. For the rest, the author has not sufficient control over her imagination to bring her characters and incidents into thorough harmony with nature. The story abounds with situations in which verisimilitude is sacrificed for effect.[104]

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[103]"Unclassed," Athenaeum, p. 820.

[104]"Unclassed," Academy, p. 454.

Some of the same defects struck the reviewer of the innocuous Isabel Clarendon and led him to call Gissing "advanced, agnostic, anti-optimist, and antagonistic to social conventions," any of which epithets, like the word "realist," were suggestive of, if not synonymous with, the word "naturalist."[105]

The same harmless novel spurred the Spectator on to a discussion of English naturalism and to a patriotic defense of its countrymen:

> Certainly Mr. Gissing, although we should say that he has rather a liking for the discussion of social and even sexual questions, cannot be accused as M. Zola, is accused by Mr. Stevenson, of "dwelling complacently in foulness." Such complaint as we have to make against Mr. Gissing is, as we have said, on the score not of realism, but of unreality.[106]

(Later the periodical would so classify Zola himself.) It would have been strange, however, if ordinary readers of reviews had not begun to associate the names of Gissing and Zola in spite of the periodicals' insisting the two novelists differed greatly. Why, one might wonder, did the name of Zola appear so frequently in Gissing reviews if no relationship existed?

Zola was not the sole contemporary European author with whose name or ideas Gissing was associated. The Bookman believed Denzil Quarrier had several flaws in it, which, it felt, were produced by Ibsenism: "Perhaps we have Ibsenism on the brain, and, unreasonably jumping to the conclusion that Mr. Gissing has the same, proceed to interpret his foreshadowings of fate in an Ibsenish spirit."[107] What displeased the reviewer most, however, subsequent statements revealed, was his discovering "a tragedy of circumstance, not a tragedy of

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[105]"Isabel Clarendon," Saturday Review, p. 58.

[106]"Isabel Clarendon," Spectator, p. 1420.

[107]"Denzil Quarrier," Bookman, p. 215.

character."[108] This, of course, was in the best naturalist tradition and was the basis for much Hardy criticism; and because this philosophy of a relentless fate ran counter to the Victorian belief that man can triumph over all adversity, it is no wonder the critic was displeased with Gissing's so-called Ibsenism.

Again calling Gissing an idealist and again linking his name to Zola's, the Spectator reviewer of In the Year of Jubilee discussed literary method and philosophy:

> There is no error more frequent in contemporary appraisements of art than the common assumption that any vivid presentation of the ugliness of life must needs be realistic. The difference between idealism and realism is not a difference of effects but of methods; the realist endeavours to present all the facts, and to preserve their true proportionate values; while the idealist, consciously or instinctively, selects the facts, and confers upon them a value of his own for the sake of achieving a certain effect or impression. Generally, no doubt, the idealist will strive after an effect of beauty, simply because to the majority beauty is more admirable than ugliness; but this choice is not inevitable. A distinguished critic has shown that M. Zola, often spoken of as the most relentless of realists, is, as a matter of fact, a typical idealist. ...in his most characteristic novels M. Zola deliberately selects social features that are specially ugly, in order to combine them in a picture of ideal ugliness. The ends of the two artists are opposite, but the means they employ are identical; and this identity of methods proclaims them members of one artistic family.
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> Mr. George Gissing must therefore be regarded not as a realist but as an idealist of the new school. What is supposed to be his realism inheres only in his rendering of detail which is certainly characterised by remarkable knowledge and skill. ... but just as we know that there never was a living man or woman so physically perfect as the Apollo Belvedere or the Venus de Milo, so do we know that there never was a civilised community in which

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[108]"Denzil Quarrier," Bookman, p. 215.

> human nature was so largely denuded of its attractive elements as is the human nature of the community depicted in Mr. Gissing's latest story.[109]

The explanation of Zola's naturalism as a form of idealism instead of realism is possibly an attempt to exonerate Gissing from the charges leveled at him by other critics; one should note, however, that the reviewer here saw Zola and Gissing employing the same methods whether or not they were striving for the same goal.

Other reviewers also contended Gissing failed as a realist. Among these was the reviewer who insisted the novelist's method of reporting objectively and photographically resulted in his being color-blind, seeing, that is, only the grayness in middle-class life. "The true Realism, we hold, looks both on the happy and the unhappy."[110] Thus, still admitting that the results of the novels were unsatisfactory, the reviewers sought to make an idealist of Gissing and thereby make him more acceptable to readers.

In the following year the periodical again commented on the novelist's technique, saw him allied to Moore, and wistfully hoped he would "appeal to readers as much as he does to critics."[111] The review seemed to have forgotten its previous remarks about realism and spoke of the application of a police-court reporter's method to the details of everyday life "in order that we may get an enhanced impression of reality."[112]

The critics were at last coming to accept Gissing. No longer was the suggestion of realism and naturalism or the objectivity of these anathema to them. On the contrary, "the mere fact of a digression

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[109]"In the Year of Jubilee," Spectator, p. 206.

[110]"The Depressed School," Saturday Review Supplement, p. 531.

[111]"The Paying Guest," Saturday Review, LXXXI (April 18, 1896), 405.

[112]"The Paying Guest," Saturday Review, p. 405.

[on the author's part] condemns a novel to many a young critic."[113] One of these displeased critics wrote of the novelist's introduction of an analysis of human character and insisted it should have been omitted. "...Mr. Gissing is always ready to drag in irrelevant side-studies."[114]

However, another young critic, H. G. Wells, could only praise him for writing about a group of characters struggling against a social force. This accomplishment, Wells insisted, served to put Gissing in a category with Victor Hugo, Zola, Tolstoi, and Turgenev.[115] In an earlier day, that classification would have ruined Gissing's reputation; but now, since he had written a few happy-ending novels and had won over to himself a steadfast objector like the Spectator, this compliment from Wells must have cheered him, indeed.

Never again during his lifetime was Gissing to be complimented so warmly; nor did his critics again attack him so vehemently. He did not disavow pessimism, it is true, but the later works contained elements of humor, almost in answer to the expressed wishes of early critics. Even his last complete novel, Our Friend the Charlatan, based as it was on a French sociological study, brought forth no bitterness from the critics.

Only after his death did critics again link him with the French naturalist. One of these regretted London had practically ignored Gissing since "The Englishman does not like to be told too much about the naked truth of things."[116] That Gissing had been so ignored seemed shameful

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[113]"The Paying Guest," Saturday Review, p. 406.

[114]"Whirlpool;" Athenaeum, CIX (April 24, 1897), 536.

[115]Wells, p. 193.

[116]Arthur Waugh, "George Gissing," Fortnightly Review, LXXXI (February 1, 1904), 244.

to Waugh, for during Gissing's most productive years, "The young French enthusiasts were hailing him as 'le jeune maître,' and comparing him with Zola."[117] However, the critic believed he could see an important difference between the approaches of the two novelists: Zola concerned himself with art to promulgate a thesis while Gissing desired only to picture life.

The last word on Gissing and the naturalists came in a sort of eulogy in the Athenaeum. Here, among such adjectives as sincere and forcible, the critic maintained "...that Gissing and Zola looked at life in the same spirit is a coincidence and the result of the time-spirit," and thereby cast doubt on any idea that Zola influenced Gissing.[118] In summary, the periodical spoke thus of Gissing's career:

> The special characteristic of Gissing is that by a natural development his art went on improving, until, towards the end, it came to be a remarkable, and for our country almost unique, example of real realism and natural naturalism working in their own surroundings, and drawing from legitimate sources.[119]

CHAPTER SUMMARY

The many excerpts from the reviews of Gissing's novels show the author was at first unpopular with critics. While it is true some finally accepted him, it is equally true this acceptance did not occur until after he started to follow some of their injunctions.

From his earliest work to his last, he criticized society. An important difference exists, however, between his social criticism in 1880

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[117]Waugh, p. 244.

[118]"George Gissing," Athenaeum, I (January 16, 1904), 82.

[119]"George Gissing," Athenaeum, p. 82.

and that offered in 1904. The former criticized and gave the reader no chance to envision a better world; the latter still criticized but suggested a way to improve social conditions. Thus, the pessimism which so displeased the reviewers was no longer apparent and could be discounted in his last works.

The female roles in Gissing's work were not attractive to reviewers because the novelist presented atypical women. They did not fulfill the Victorian ideal of sweet, demure, protected women. They read widely even in the works of foreign authors. They found employment outside the home. They refused to marry without love. They became prostitutes or mistresses. They injected themselves into the sacred precincts of a man's world. The lower class women even attempted to assume for themselves the prerogatives of the upper classes. All of these things brought adverse comment from the unsigned reviewers, at least until The Whirlpool (1897) when one of these bold, but fascinating, women was punished for her misdeeds.

The men, too, fell short of the Victorian ideal. Ambitious on occasion, they were complimented. Defeated or depressed, they cast doubt on society and were condemned. Even though they might adhere to high ideals, if success did not attend their efforts, they were dismissed as being improperly drawn. Not until The Whirlpool, in which Gissing presented a man who longed for the good things of the past, did his men receive unqualified compliments.

The relations between the sexes, as presented in the novels, also disturbed the critics. While some of the critics chose to ignore the sexual undertones in the books, possibly because they did not understand them or probably because they regarded them as foul, others bravely commented. Some wished Gissing would omit references to sex and to

unblessed marriages inasmuch as neither contributed to public morality or artistic achievement. Other critics, namely Dolman and Wells, believed that here lay the key to understanding Gissing's work. However, after The Whirlpool sex was played down in all the Gissing novels, and no critic spoke of it again.

While the admission of the existence of sex may have added greatly to Gissing's unpopularity, all the critical reviews discussed his pessimism, a principal Gissing theme. An essential difference, however, exists between the pessimism of the first novel and that of the last. The former, Workers in the Dawn, has no humor and offers no hope; the last completed novel, Our Friend the Charlatan, presents both. The pessimism of Gissing's books produced the greatest amount of unfavorable criticism during his lifetime; because of this, one can assume the Victorian belief in optimism needed to be illustrated in novels if they were to receive favorable reviews.

Whether or not Gissing was actually a naturalist is not the question here: many critics thought him one. Their disapproval of his depiction of sex and slum life goaded some into attacking him as if he were a naturalist. Other critics regarded him as a "pure" naturalist, one who did not deliberately strive to present prurient literature. Still others, seeing some link between him and Zola or other continental writers, tried to excuse him by mentioning his social inexperience, his idealism instead of realism, or his merely following the objectivity of a reporter. It remained for Wells to turn these condemnatory remarks into praise and to boast, even, that England had a writer who could be ranked alongside of Zola, Tolstoi, and Turgenev. The eulogies for Gissing followed Wells' lead.

As was stated in the opening paragraphs of this chapter, Gissing was generally regarded during his lifetime as a writer of promise rather

than as a writer of actual filfillment. His emancipating himself from conventional restrictions attracted the attention of the reviewers; his acceding to their demands late in his career served only to make his last novels mediocre and now scarcely read at all. Even had he continued to write bitter, pessimistic criticism, one doubts he would be widely accepted today: the social evils he attacked have at last received some attention; sex, free love, and women's rights have served as subjects of more than one novel; and pessimism is not the stranger it once was. His importance, then, lies in the fact that he treated these subjects in novels at a time when it was fatal to his popularity to do so.

CHAPTER V

GEORGE MOORE AND THE PERIODICAL CRITICS

No one should be surprised that the novels of George Moore antagonized the critics and led them to term him "naturalist," for his nineteenth century novels offended in exactly the same ways as had Hardy's and Gissing's. He made heroines of lower class women, he made heroes of vulgar and decadent men, he justified illicit and adulterous sex relationships while decrying the institution of marriage, he held a brief for pessimism, and he included in his novels scenes and techniques favored by continental writers. Furthermore, in two ways he deliberately established himself as an English naturalist in the mind of his public: he openly admired naturalism in his reviews of foreign literature and openly admitted he was influenced by Zola and Flaubert. In a review of Zola's La Débacle, which Moore obviously enjoyed, he stated

> War, M. Zola says, is necessary. War is salutary. Devour or thou shalt be devoured is a law from which life can no more escape than animal life. I accept this reading of life without reservation, but M. Zola adds a corollary [unacceptable to Moore because Zola held that war should be accepted gravely and not, as Moore would have it, gaily].[1]

Agreeing with Zola on even one thing was not conducive, we have seen in earlier chapters, to the wooing of Victorian readers. But one

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[1]George Moore, "La Débacle," Fortnightly Review, LVIII (August 1, 1892), 209.

biographer reported that Moore, on hearing of Zola's death, was supposed to have said, "That man was the beginning of me."[2]

In other ways, too, did Moore identify himself with naturalism or to the English, the equivalent, salaciousness. He had supported Vizetelly in that cause célébre; and he also wrote Literature at Nurse, a pamphlet which bitterly attacked the circulating libraries for their censorship.

Long before the end of the century Moore disavowed his earlier naturalistic leanings, but not until his name had become, even more than Hardy's or Gissing's, the one to be most closely identified with naturalism.[3] Not until after several of their works appeared were Hardy and Gissing called naturalists; Moore's first novel gave him that distinction; and one of the reasons behind this was that he had presented women who could never have been heroines of poetry or romance in the "days of Yeast and Westward Ho," for then there were "women of a higher type than any novelist who is not to be contented with mere success would now venture to draw."[4] The two principal women in Moore's first novel were thus noticed by the periodical because they fell short of an ideal established by earlier fiction.

Another periodical conceded Moore had drawn a very powerful character study of a woman in A Mummer's Wife, but it objected to his showing the degradation of a lower middle class woman and to his making a heroine out of her, a criticism identical to those directed at both Hardy and Gissing.[5] The Saturday Review even more vehemently

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[2]Hone, The Life of George Moore, p. 144.

[3]Hone, The Life of George Moore, p. 130.

[4]"A Modern Lover," Spectator, LVI (August 18, 1883), 1069.

[5]"A Mummer's Wife," Athenaeum, LXXXIV (December 13, 1884), 767.

denounced Moore's choice of "a pitiful drab," as a heroine.[6] Both of these periodicals seemed to believe the best heroines should come from the best classes.

The latter magazine reached a strange conclusion in its review of A Drama in Muslin: it suspected Moore, as Hardy and Gissing had been on occasion, of not being a man. And as in the case of Hardy, for the same reason: the author seemed to have too intimate an acquaintance with "the thoughts and feelings of young women and their conversation when no men are present. It is by no means uncomplimentary to 'George Moore' to suggest that he is not a man."[7] Whether this be praise for a male who had so carefully depicted women or condemnation for a female who revealed women's secrets (and thereby aided in exploding an ideal) is a mystery, but the sarcastic tone of the article left no doubt about its dislike of an author who belittled the ideal Victorian woman.

Neither Mike Fletcher nor Vain Fortune produced striking comments regarding Moore's presentation of women. Esther Waters, centered as it was around a woman, produced many; and surprisingly enough, most of the periodicals received the work favorably even though the novelist made a working-class girl the heroine. Although the Athenaeum disapproved of the novel, it was not because Esther was without heroic efforts but because Moore seemed to the reviewer to be so calculating and dispassionate that Esther never became a living person.[8] The Bookman found Esther truly heroic and did not object to her squalid

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[6]"A Mummer's Wife," Saturday Review, LIX (February 14, 1885), 214.

[7]"A Drama in Muslin," Saturday Review, LXII (July 24, 1886), 131.

[8]"Esther Waters," Athenaeum, CV (April 28, 1894), 537.

background. The Spectator, indeed, based its entire approval of the novel on the heroic element present in the love of the daughter for her mother and in the love of the mother for her son, plus "a true nobility of sentiment" with which the author endowed his heroine.[9] In fact, the review admired "the strong, bull-necked servant-girl whose simple, honest, wholesome and yet passionate nature, carries her through the furnace of life."[10] Even though earlier a novelist was not permitted to show a heroic lower-class girl, Moore, who let Esther use the streets only for walking, kept her in her proper station. This, evidently, satisfied the critics of the era.

Celibates, which should be classified more accurately as a collection of three short stories and not as a novel, displeased the Athenaeum reviewer. He objected to what he labeled the vulgar character of the women as illustrated by their sordidness in talk and action. Furthermore, after objecting to the descriptions of the clothing these women wore, he admonished, "It may be well to warn the patrons of circulating libraries that the book is not 'pour les jeunes filles.'"[11] This is the sole criticism against costume in any one of the reviews of the period under scrutiny and illustrates perfectly the fact that critics who were anxious to condemn did not hesitate to justify their condemnation by inserting criticism of the most insignificant sort.

None of Moore's novels paid more attention to the heroine's dress than did Evelyn Innes; still, not one critic commented on it. Rather, each spoke of the author's ability or lack of ability to make Evelyn a living being. The Athenaeum called Evelyn "the most living and successful of

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[9]"Esther Waters," Spectator, LXXII (June 2, 1894), 757.

[10]"Esther Waters," Spectator, p. 757.

[11]"Celibates," Athenaeum, CVI (July 13, 1895), 64.

his characters" and admired the novel because all the reader's attention was focused on the heroine.[12] On the other hand, the Bookman was displeased because "she is a blur to one careful reader at least."[13] After stating this, however, the reviewer continued to describe Evelyn in such great detail that it seems to give the lie to the charge of obscurity. The critic reviewed her shabby life, her early lack of ambition, her awareness of her great voice, her reception of Sir Owen's rationalistic instruction, and her immense achievement as a singer in almost as much detail as had Moore when he wrote the book. One must conclude the reviewer disliked Evelyn not because she was carelessly presented but for some other reason; and any one of the details just listed could have spoiled the Victorian idealization of a heroine. Heroines were not supposed to be shabby drudges, but neither were they supposed to be complacent, conceited, unsentimental creatures; nor, above all else, were they supposed to be flashy and successful theatrical personages. Nevertheless, here was a heroine who was all of these, but whom the reviewer objected to ostensibly because she was not carefully presented.

Quiller-Couch spoke in favor of the novel and its heroine whom he called "a woman keenly alive to responsibility," "a true women," and "a captivating and amiable woman."[14] Thus, a signed reviewer, comparable in at least one way to Hardy's Ellis and Gissing's Wells, ignored the ordinary criteria for judging heroines and admired Evelyn.

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[12]"Evelyn Innes," Athenaeum, CXII (July 2, 1898), 31.

[13]"Evelyn Innes," Bookman, XIV (July 1898), 103.

[14]Arthur Quiller-Couch, "Evelyn Innes," Academy, LIV (July 16, 1898), 69.

The men in Moore's novels also displeased the critics. Just as it longed for the type of women presented in earlier Victorian novels, the Spectator in its review of A Modern Lover wished Lewis Seymour, the self-engrossed hero, could have been given some of the "muscularity and mauliness" of bygone days.[15] Seymour, of course, was the exact opposite of the ideal hero: he was weak, never given to self-sacrifice, penniless, affected, and conceited. Like Gissing's Kingcote in Isabel Clarendon, he was introspective, and introspection was not the stuff of which the ideal Victorian hero was made.

While conceding the strolling player in A Mummer's Wife was powerfully drawn, the Athenaeum said nothing at all about its like or dislike of a man without roots, an unexpected oversight on the part of the periodical.[16]

When Mike Fletcher made its appearance some six years later, no doubt remained about what the Spectator thought of such an unstable man. The critic's inveighing against the novel must be attributed to the character of the hero:

> ...a tedious sort of psychological study of a more or less crazy individual, who excites no sympathy at any point of his career, and causes not the smallest regret when finally, by committing suicide, he gives effect to the opinion of the desirability of the extinction of the human race, --as to which, were all its members like him, there could not be a doubt. An Irish peasant by birth, vain, lying, cheating at cards, grossly material and disreputable, he is an unmitigated cad and blackguard, deserving to have been kicked out of any decent society.[17]

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[15]"A Modern Lover," Spectator, p. 1069.

[16]"A Mummer's Wife," Athenaeum, LXXXIV (December 13, 1884), 767.

[17]"Mike Fletcher," Spectator, LXIV (February 8, 1890), 210.

Mike epitomizes, as can be seen from the above quotation, all the evils which Victorian--here called decent--society condemned. In no way did this hero satisfy the reviewer. Low-born, Mike went through his wasted life without honor, ambition, or nobility.

Moore attributed many of the same characteristics to the men in Vain Fortune. While Hubert Price is somewhat more gracious at times, the Athenaeum saw him lacking in constancy and courage, both necessary qualities for a hero.[18] Never again did Moore put such characters in his novels, however. The men in Esther Waters, though coarse and selfish, were scarcely designed for emulation; in fact, their many vices could only serve to perpetuate the Victorian admonishments against gambling and loose living.

The decadent appeared in Evelyn Innes in the person of Sir Owen, although some of the earlier novels had suggested, at least, that decadent men existed. However, none of the reviews commented on Sir Owen. Two answers to the question of why there were no criticisms of him immediately present themselves: first, he was not the hero but rather the villain who led the heroine astray, and secondly, the heroine's rejection of her paramour seconded the Victorian's belief that thus any hedonist should be treated.

Moore presented to his critics, then, a type of hero unsatisfactory to the era. The heroes were not men of action who succeeded in achieving wealth through physical strength and nobility of conduct. On the contrary, they were either poverty-stricken and dissolute or wealthy and dissolute, men whose selfish aims always destroyed any suggestions of personal integrity. Therefore, the males created for his novels brought severe criticism to the author.

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[18]"Vain Fortune," Athenaeum, XCVIII (November 7, 1891), 614.

Also contributing to the belief that Moore's influence was malign was his daring to write about sexual relations. Like Hardy and Gissing who had been received unfavorably because they wrote of men and women violating the code of approved sexual behavior, Moore also presented lascivious males and fallen females, but in a manner and to a degree which the other two did not approach. The depiction of the wily Lewis Seymour in A Modern Lover indicated Moore's disavowal of narratives in which love called for discussion rather than for action. The first episode in the novel, the one "with which the story opens, that of the first woman who sacrifices herself to save the penniless artist," must have disturbed those accustomed to reading novels ignoring the sexual aspects of life.[19] Another periodical, upset because a novelist treated sex as a common denominator, insisted, however, that "For a man who has evidently read a great many French novels...Mr. Moore is not at all shocking."[20] This statement indicates the topic of sex was assumed at least by one critic to be the special province of French novels and to be incompatible with the ideal British novel.

A Mummer's Wife evoked further criticism on Moore's conception of sex as a dominant force. Said the Saturday Review:

> It is, we know, a foolish thing to wash one's foul linen in public. How much more foolish is it to spread out and sort one's foul linen in public, not to wash it, but merely to demonstrate how foul it is![21]

This accusation that Moore wrote about sex only for its sensational effect was echoed in the Athenaeum's evaluation of the novel, when,

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[19]"A Modern Lover," Spectator, p. 1069.

[20]"A Modern Lover," Athenaeum, LXXI (July 7, 1883), 13.

[21]"A Mummer's Wife," Saturday Review, p. 215.

after using such euphemistic phrases as "the faithful delineation of filth," and "the element of uncleanness," it stated: "If the aim of the novelist is to please, Mr. Moore has not succeeded."[22]

The Academy, more specific in its terminology, called A Drama in Muslin "realism of the...decolletage order," and regarded Captain Hibbert, "before whose gentlemanly gaze 'skirts seem to fall,'" as particularly lewd.[23] Its entire attitude toward Moore and sex is best summarized in its own words:

> But if it is a compliment to Mr. Moore to say that it is daringly and disgustingly suggestive, and descriptive of what ordinary writers leave undescribed, he is welcome to it. It is full of 'sensual contemplation' and asterisks and blank spaces, and coarse scandal and girls' bedroom talk, and faux pas. One wonders if this sort of thing has a market.[24]

The Athenaeum, sure that "this sort of thing" did have a market, believed Moore's unsavory taste had made his books attract more than their just share of attention. This periodical took the content of the book as a weapon with which to attack the author himself: "He is on the lookout to detect the baser impulses, and even in the outside view of things a nasty detail has for him an irresistible attraction."[25] As for the novel itself, the reviewer called it unfit for the drawing room until it should be translated into French.[26] This is not the first suggestion we have had that French literature was regarded as a repository of immorality and lewdness, and it will be even more evident when the reviews charging

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[22]"A Mummer's Wife," Athenaeum, p. 767.

[23]"A Drama in Muslin," Academy, XXX (July 17, 1886), 40.

[24]"A Drama in Muslin," Academy, p. 40.

[25]"A Drama in Muslin," Athenaeum, LXXXVI (July 24, 1886), 110.

[26]"A Drama in Muslin," Athenaeum, p. 110.

naturalism are discussed that this was a commonly-held idea.

Most dangerous, in the opinion of another critic, was a young girl's attack on the institution of marriage. Her ravings, thought the reviewer, "would be thoroughly disgusting if she knew what she was talking about and are in any case unbecoming in the mouth of a young lady."[27] Again it charged the excessive coarseness in Moore's work was only an embellishment to compensate for a reader's lack of interest in the story itself.

Mike Fletcher repelled critics because Moore made a hero of a rascal, but Mike was repulsive, too, because of his sensuality and immorality. To the Spectator he appeared to have no redeeming qualities but was always "purely animal" in his pursuits.[28] This animalism again received attention in a review of Vain Fortune, when a critic stated

> One looks on at the love-contest waged amid the luxurious surroundings of Ashwood as at the strife of a sackful of rats in a sunshiny pit; but in point of courage and constancy these so-called human beings would have to yield the palm to the despised vermin of our simile.[29]

Esther Waters had rather favorable reviews, probably because "In spite of the squalid and degraded setting of his book, Mr. Moore does not forget that man is a noble animal. Esther Waters is made to prove it strongly and convincingly, for she acts instinctively...."[30] If Moore could convince his readers that good conduct was natural and instinctive and bad conduct was unnatural and contrary to instincts, he was bound to

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[27]"A Drama in Muslin," Saturday Review, p. 131.

[28]"Mike Fletcher," Spectator, p. 210.

[29]"Vain Fortune," Athenaeum, p. 614.

[30]"Esther Waters," Spectator, p. 758.

appeal to his contemporaries; and this he successfully did in Esther Waters. Even the scene in which Esther remains unmoved when her lover tells her he has always led a pure life did not offend the reviewer. He dismissed the scene as threadbare and scarcely worth noting, for he doubted Esther would have liked the lover in any event. The reviewer did not completely exonerate Moore from the guilt of having introduced offensive scenes, however; assuming the role of arbiter of literary taste and guardian of public morals, he stated:

> One word more on the question of the fitness of Esther Waters for the general reading by the young person. There is nothing in the book which could exert a demoralising influence on any one, rather the reverse. At the same time, there are one or two passages which must be called exceedingly coarse; and the sensational, and in a certain sense exaggerated, description of the scene in Queen Charlotte's Hospital is hardly the thing to be put into a girl's hands.[31] [This was the scene depicting Esther's confinement.]

By now, Moore's works were considered morally respectable, and no longer would he offend his critics by introducing illicit sexual affairs which concluded happily for all concerned. In fact, starting with Esther Waters, some reviewers began to regard him as a writer of moral literature.

Quiller-Couch, for one, regarded Evelyn Innes as a book contributing to both moral beauty and salvation. Though disturbed by Evelyn's lack of all instinct to be chaste, he stated, "She has the accusing conscience afterward--and a plenty of it."[32] The St. James Gazette also upheld its inherent morality:

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[31]"Esther Waters," Spectator, p. 758.

[32]Quiller-Couch, Academy, p. 69.

> There are people who think that any book--except the Bible and Shakespeare--in which an immoral act is mentioned is immoral therefor. In so far as Evelyn Innes has any significance for morals, however, it is a moral book, since the end is the triumph of conscience over pleasure in the heroine's heart.[33]

Walter Sichel alone was dissatisfied with Evelyn Innes but not exactly because of its immorality. He was glad Evelyn abandoned her life of sin as Sir Owen's mistress but questioned her motives at every point:

> Evelyn, a scholar musician's daughter, is made to go astray in order to perfect her voice abroad, a supposition unjustly degrading to an honourable profession. She leads a life of wanton luxury as prima donna without one compunction or aspiration. But she was bred a Romanist and at the last this prodigal daughter, more from satiety, it would seem, than remorse, returns to her retreat which had sheltered her in better days.[34]

Thus, though regarding Evelyn as ignoble because of her actions, he did not charge Moore with presenting a case for unchastity.

A remarkable thing about the reviews of Moore's works is that they do not blame the males contributing to the heroine's lack of chastity. Lewis Seymour in A Modern Lover was certainly not regarded highly nor was Mike Fletcher in the novel bearing his name; but other character traits were considered just as destructive to their reputations as was sexual looseness. Sir Owen, Evelyn Innes' paramour, was not once mentioned as a roué nor censured for leading the heroine astray. The only conclusion possible is that the critics adhered to a double standard of sexual behavior, reproaching the woman in each affair.

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[33]Quoted from St. James Gazette in "Book Reviews Reviewed," Academy, LIV (July 16, 1898), 69.

[34]Walter Sichel, "Romanism in Fiction," Fortnightly Review, LXXI (April 1, 1899), 621.

Some reviewers who did not choose to condemn Moore for his attitudes on sexual morality and others who wished to condemn him completely discussed his language. An early critic described his sentences as "haphazard" and "wanting in accuracy," but even more damaging to his reputation was the statement that "He passes too abruptly from English into French," implying French was a language for concealing indecency.[35] The same periodical which suggested that an entire novel be translated into French for this purpose also maintained the author blundered in syntax and formed hybrid adjectives.[36]

The close connection in a critic's mind between an unpleasing style and the inclusion of disagreeable subject matter can be seen in the following excerpt, which makes one wonder if any language could make a novel palatable:

> In writing, he is apt to be careless about connecting links, and narrates in a disagreeable, jerky, disjointed manner which is not always easy to follow. And though some of his pictures are vigorous, yet vigour of delineation is but a questionable merit in a painter whose gallery contains only what is repulsive and in bad taste, and who evinces no consciousness of those defects or wish to amend them.[37]

Arthur Symons, on the other hand, could dissociate style from content. Symons called A Mummer's Wife a masterpiece, yet of Moore he wrote as follows:

> He has a passionate delight in the beauty of good prose, he has an ear for the magic of phrases, his words catch at times a troubled, expressive charm. Yet he has never attained ease

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[35]"A Modern Lover," Spectator, p. 1069.

[36]"A Drama in Muslin," Athenaeum, p. 110.

[37]"Mike Fletcher," Spectator, p. 210.

> in writing, and he is capable of astounding incorrectnesses, the incorrectness of a man who knows better, who is not careless, and yet who cannot help himself.[38]

A reviewer of Vain Fortune quoted a few samples of what he called "Mr. Moore's maltreatment of his native tongue":

> In the lucid idleness of his bed his thoughts grew darker; the plausive and wilful sweetness of life possessed him; his words seeming to drop from the thick obsession of his dream; in a moment the blonde calm of the Saxon had dropped from him.... If this kind of thing is literature, the great writers of English fiction have lived and worked in vain. But it is not; and when the current craze for unsavoury subjects clumsily presented has worn itself out, it is to be hoped that the reading public will once more find its pleasure in the saner themes and subtler craftsmanship of Thackeray, Dickens, and George Eliot.[39]

The longing for both the masters' styles and the masters' novels still exercised a powerful influence on the critics although each of the novelists named had by now been dead for several years and seemingly no writer had appeared to replace them.

The unreality of the heroine's character, not the style of the novel, disappointed the Athenaeum reviewer of Esther Waters. As a matter of fact, regarding this "eminently moral" book, the reviewer wrote of "exquisite art ... in the illustrative conversations," "the achievement of an almost faultless craftsman," and the absence of "purple patches."[40] Several conclusions as to why Moore's writing had become acceptable to the Athenaeum after a mere lapse of four years suggest themselves: Possibly Moore's writing ability had improved, possibly the critics' taste had changed, but probably subject matter and not language had accounted for the earlier rejection.

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[38]"Impressions and Opinions," Academy, XXXIX (March 21, 1891), 274.

[39]"Vain Fortune," Athenaeum, p. 614.

[40]"Esther Waters," Athenaeum, p. 537.

The Bookman, too, commented upon Moore's language at this time. It spoke of his "very plain diction" and was pleased there was "nothing grandiloquent either in sentiment or expression."[41]

The Academy review of Evelyn Innes devoted an entire paragraph to the author's language, giving an example of grammatical incorrectness:

> Verbal melody he generally misses, grammatical correctness sometimes. "There is no place in Paris," he will tell you, "where you get a better petite marmite than the Ambassadeurs." His sentences are frequently stiff and frequently jerky, too short or too overloaded with coordination, but, and it is a big but, he has learned to paint, to visualise, to call up an image not of the outlines merely but of the atmosphere, of a room, of a garden, of an environment.[42]

The final remarks concerning Moore's language during the period under consideration came from Robert Tyrrell, the same critic who had belabored Hardy so. Tyrrell liked Moore for not attempting to write in an Irish dialect although he admitted it was odd for a day-laborer to say, "I shall be reaping tomorrow" or for a colleen to ask, "Are they not beautiful?" when I'll and ain't would serve better to lend an air of realism.[43]

Instead of showing that Moore chose to write in vulgar or strong language which has come to be considered as a hallmark of naturalism in the twentieth century, the excerpts above indicate his style caused critical comment because it was too elegant or too unmelodious or too

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[41]"Esther Waters," Bookman, VI (May 1894), 53.

[42]"Evelyn Innes," Academy Supplement, LIII (June 25, 1898), 683.

[43]Robert Y. Tyrrell, "Mr. George Moore and Ireland's Vocation," Macmillan's, LXXXVIII (July 1903), 209.

incorrect grammatically. His dialogue was likewise objectionable because of being overly precise and dialectically unrealistic. Thus, he did not please the critics who remarked on his language.

To a lesser degree than either Hardy or Gissing, Moore was accused of pessimism and morbidity from the beginning of his career. He was accused of illustrating his cynicism by ignoring the elements of romance in A Modern Lover, a novel illustrating a downfall of a character through unprincipled selfishness and not as a result of a Hardyesque catastrophe.[44] "Dreadfully futile" was the way the Saturday Review described Moore's second novel.[45] Mike Fletcher himself illustrated the objectionable pessimism in his quoting of Schopenhauer, in his rather grim and sardonic humor, and especially in his committing suicide.[46] The despair noted in these reviews Moore further illustrated in Vain Fortune, about which a reviewer said:

> No spark of genuine pity, no ray of real love, illumines its dreary pages: all is flat and cold and grey, like a third-rate picture at the Salon, the cheerless outcome of a morbid pessimism, whose beginning is satiety, and whose end is self-murder.[47]

Moore's next novel, Esther Waters, did not promote pessimism even though it contained scenes of abject despair. Critics, however, did not emphasize these scenes because the heroine always extricated herself from defeating circumstances. Esther's ability to adjust to

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[44]"A Modern Lover," Spectator, p. 1069.

[45]"A Mummer's Wife," Saturday Review, p. 214.

[46]"Mike Fletcher," Spectator, p. 210.

[47]"Vain Fortune," Athenaeum, p. 613.

the sordidness of London slum life instead of falling before it induced the Bookman to say:

> Well, Esther Waters is not an idyll exactly. But plunging boldly into the harsh, unclean, tawdry, cruel life of London squalor, he [Moore] has drawn up the essential reality, and behold, there is nothing in it alien to heroism, of sturdy growth and purity that is inherent. Honesty, courage, and wholesome sweetness are hardy blossoms that stand and endure, then blooms in poison air.[48]

Sichel accused Moore of upholding the doctrine of pessimism in Evelyn Innes which seemed "to hunt after the sordid even when it is immaterial to the treatment. Mr. Moore appears to air the twang and tawdriness of Ouida without her redeeming tenderness and poetry."[49] The Bookman, too, having berated Moore for omitting sentimentality, continued, "It is all very subtle, tired, melancholy, passionate pessimism."[50] However, the other periodicals ignored this aspect of the novel if, indeed, they saw any pessimism or morbidity present.

While Moore certainly avoided in his novels, at least in most of them during the eighties and nineties, any catering to a romantic, happy-ending taste, his emphasis on pessimism was uneven. The early novels showed his principal characters to be victims of themselves, of their surroundings, and of other characters. However, Esther Waters, Moore's greatest popular success, presented a character who overcame her misfortunes and illustrated the fact that Moore was quite capable of writing optimistic stories. Earlier, though, he deliberately had set out to defy popular taste as evidenced by a letter to his mother. To her he

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[48]"Esther Waters," Bookman, p. 52.

[49]Walter Sichel, Fortnightly Review, p. 621.

[50]"The Cloister and the Stage," Bookman, XX (August 1901), 149.

wrote: "I have been working at my book (A Mummer's Wife) and am satisfied. I think I shall this time knock l'école sentimentale head over heels."[51] And his biographer believed he was, indeed, successful:

> ...A Mummer's Wife ... was a genuine and successful attempt to apply French Naturalistic method to a description of English life. And in fact Moore was the first real adventurer on this ground, for the other English writers who sought assistance from the Methods of the Naturalists shrank from carrying them out to their logical conclusion. Gissing would never have written of Kate Ede vomiting over her dress and the red velvet seat of the four-wheeler. Courage was needed for this in the high Victorian period.[52]

Hone, of course, is a modern biographer regarding the period in retrospect. Moore's contemporary critics, however, unable to see the author in perspective, associated him with Hardy and Gissing among his compatriots and with the offensive Zola as well. And, indeed, two wrote of his naturalism even before he wrote A Mummer's Wife. The Athenaeum critic was the first to comment about Moore's following a foreign trend: "For a man who has evidently read a great many French novels, and who has an inclination towards naturalist literature and impressionist art, Mr. Moore is not at all shocking," a rather mild condemnation, but still one which could cast suspicion on Moore's accomplishment by means of the terms "French novels" and "naturalist literature."[53] The second critic, writing in the Spectator, attempted to dissuade the author from writing any more novels in a naturalistic vein:

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[51]Hone, Life of George Moore, p. 102.

[52]Hone, Life of George Moore, p. 102.

[53]"A Modern Lover," Athenaeum, p. 13.

> ...[the] realism which, while it is not coarse, and, unlike the tone of the "naturalistic" writers (for whom we suspect Mr. Moore of an admiration much to be deplored), does not offend, takes the gilt off the gingerbread of sentiment, and ignores romance in a more thorough style than we are accustomed to, except in the utterances of professed cynics.
>
> The naturalism that Mr. Moore occasionally affects does not come to him by nature. Certain passages of his novel make us aware that he admires and would fain imitate Zola and his odious school; but we venture to predict that he will never succeed in doing this. He has to combat two powerful obstacles to an achievement so much to be regretted; they are the faith of a Christian and the instincts of a gentleman. If M. Zola, or any of the hogs of his sty could write such an episode as that with which the story opens, ...we should have as much hope for them as we have confidence in Mr. Moore's future work;[54]

The above quotations show several ideas these critics and other held. First, they indicate realism was not necessarily offensive; secondly, they indicate Moore's flirting with naturalistic literature would prove unpopular; and thirdly, they indicate the contempt reviewers had for Zola and his followers.

Thus, when A Mummer's Wife appeared, the critics were ready with their attack. Labeling Moore a Zolaphyte, the Saturday Review charged,

> Him, too, the "human document" delights; and for him likewise, that only is precious which is written on the dirtiest of paper. In A Mummer's Wife he attempts to be as offensive as the master himself. ... But Zola is Zola, and Mr. Moore is Mr. Moore; and Mr. Moore is only curious and disgusting.[55]

Still another periodical, believing it saw a difference between Moore and his master, attempted to excuse the British novelist although

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[54]"A Modern Lover," Spectator, p. 1069.

[55]"A Mummer's Wife," Saturday Review, p. 214.

merely mentioning their names together sufficed to show that Moore was presumed to be Zola's disciple:

> It is different in tone from current English fiction, but it would hardly be fair to call it an experiment after the manner of M. Zola, for, considering that realism has come to mean chiefly the faithful delineation of filth, it is on the whole remarkably free from the element of uncleanness.[56]

Only one periodical named Zola in the reviews of Moore's next novel, A Drama in Muslin, but it also emphasized its displeasure when it said, "...it is more of an imitation of M. Zola than anything Mr. Moore has yet published.... But if it is a compliment to Mr. Moore to say that it is daringly and disgustingly suggestive, and descriptive of what ordinary writers of fiction commonly leave undescribed, he is welcome to it."[57]

Arthur Symons attempted to dispel the belief that Moore and Zola were one in a review of Impressions and Opinions, a collection of Moore's essays. Symons appreciated the essays as well as the novels which had thus far appeared but insisted Moore was not the English Zola and that the notoriety he had received derived from his attack on the circulating libraries and, of course, from his having written for adults. But if Moore had intended to introduce and maintain the canons of continental literature, Symons insisted, he had not succeeded.[58] However, as in the case of the other novelists so far considered in this study, once a reviewer had hinted at the possibility of naturalism in Moore's works, any stigma attached to this term remained to plague

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[56]"A Mummer's Wife," Athenaeum, p. 767.

[57]"A Drama in Muslin," Academy, p. 40.

[58]Arthur Symons, "Impressions and Opinions," Academy, XXXIX (March 21, 1891), 274.

him forever. As an illustration of this, Moore wrote about an interview with Turgueneff during which the two novelists discussed the naturalism of L'Assommoir. They agreed the method was "vicious" and that it made little difference whether Gervaise sweated under the arms or in the middle of her back.[59] From this, one may conclude that neither was sympathetic to the Zola method of accumulating details which serve no purpose except as details; and yet Moore could not convince his critics he was not a great admirer of the experimental novel, even though his biographer insists that long before this, Moore had resigned all allegiance to naturalism.[60]

Still the relationship of Moore to Zola continued to serve as the basis for reviews. In 1891 a reviewer wrote as follows:

> If Mr. George Moore's most recent work is in certain respects less crudely Zolaesque than some of its predecessors, it is none the less unpleasant and unwholesome. Its characters exhibit that peculiar soullessness, that almost total lack of moral sense, with which M. Zola's monstrous heroes and heroines have made us painfully familiar.[61]

The Spectator omitted from its review of Esther Waters any mention of Moore and Zola together until it started to point out weaknesses, especially the weakness of a too elaborate description of London streets:

> A great deal of it is the mere common form of realism--trivial details and semi-improper suggestions.... Before realism went out of fashion in Paris, M. Zola and his imitators, when in doubt for copy, invariable played this sort of description of Paris.[62]

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[59]George Moore, "Turgueneff," Fortnightly Review, IL (February 1, 1888), 238.

[60]Hone, Life of George Moore, p. 130.

[61]"Vain Fortune," Athenaeum, p. 613.

[62]"Esther Waters," Spectator, p. 758.

The Bookman regarded this novel as one which indicated Moore's break with naturalism, "not that he has forsworn all his former methods or his former self, but these are made to subserve the impulsive, dominating force of the new spirit."[63] This new spirit, it believed, restored art to a position where it could ignore the photographic description and documentary detail formerly forced upon it by science. This review,alone however, admitted to seeing Moore's rejection of his earlier method and aims.

A year later Mr. Hugh E. M. Stutfield wrote at length on degenerate literature and blamed the novelist for his role in writing literature of this sort, although Stutfield apparently ignored the essential morality of Esther Waters. Using the term realism instead of naturalism, he worried about the future of the British nation:

> Decadentism is an exotic growth unsuited to British soil, and it may be hoped that it will never take permanent root here. Still the popularity of debased and morbid literature, especially among women is not an agreeable or healthy feature. It may be that it is only a passing fancy, a cloud on our social horizon that will soon blow over; but the enormous sale of hysterical and disgusting books is a sign of the times which ought not to be ignored.[64]

Of course, Moore had not yet introduced his "decadent" Sir Owen, but that did not free him from Stutfield's charge that Moore, like Zola, was most offensive:

> That morbid and nasty books are written is nothing; their popularity is what is disgusting. I have no wish to pose as a moralist. A book may be shameless without being precisely immoral--like the fetid realism of Zola and Mr. George Moore--and the novels I allude to are at any rate thoroughly unhealthy.[65]

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[63]"Esther Waters," Bookman, p. 52.

[64]Hugh E. M. Stutfield, "Tommyrotics," Blackwood's, CLVII (June 1895), 834.

[65]Stutfield, p. 836.

Moralist or no, Stutfield in his self-appointed position as protector of British women against the invasion of foreign, and hence unworthy, ideas, continued the custom of making Moore and Zola associates in evil. By stating expressly that British women avidly read such harmful novels and condemning them for doing so, he suggested men might read the same novels with greater impunity.

The Athenaeum never allowed its readers to forget Moore had at one time been closely identified with Zola. Even in its review of Evelyn Innes, a novel written at least ten years after Moore disavowed the naturalistic technique, the periodical compared him to the French writer:

> Mt. Moore is crammed full of facts; one may imagine him, like Zola, studying for his novels from every available source. ...but, unlike Zola, he has not acquired the faculty of discarding unnecessary facts. The Frenchman knows, as all Frenchmen do, that one of the first elements of art is to know when to be silent.... This is the reason why some reviewers cry out against "disgusting" passages in Mr. Moore's books. Now in this one there are some details which certainly could not be qualified as disgusting, but which are absolutely unnecessary, and which one would prefer not to have mentioned unless there were some very strong dramatic reason for doing so, which there is not. They are annoying here chiefly because they are so gratuitously unnecessary, just as some of his long and inappropriate descriptions of scenes are tiresome; they are only worse than the latter because they concern matters on which it is better to be reticent, but their real fault is essentially the same, that of irrelevance.[66]

It was unlikely all the reviewers would ignore the disquisition on Balzac in Evelyn Innes; and the Bookman, regarding Sir Owen as the spokesman for Moore (who "admires many French things and has learnt some part of his craft in a French school"), eagerly informed

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[66]"Evelyn Innes," Athenaeum, p. 32.

its readers that since Moore could imitate only Balzac's weaknesses--formlessness, monotony, "longueurs"--they must not expect the French master had done anything but "provide the shelter and encouragement of a great name" to Moore's innate deficient talent.[67] The review continued its tirade on Moore's manner and method as "the abnegations of all art," indicated he should be judged as a mere photographer, and suggested Flaubert would be a better guide than Balzac.[68] The tone of the article in no way suggests the periodical's capitulation to foreign writers, who were as suspect as ever.

> Indeed, some three years later the Bookman stated of Moore,
>
> He is excessively, provokingly, un-English. The movement to which he belongs, but in an original way of his own, winds hither and thither from the Goncourts to Tolstoi, but always outside our conventions. .... Even Sir Owen Asher would put in his claim to a niche among the creations of Balzac, and all the others [characters in Evelyn Innes and Sister Teresa] are Wagnerian, old musical Italian, Celt, or Catholic. What will the average Briton make of them who knows as much (that is to say, as little) of lyric drama as of mystic theology?[69]

This review, like the Stutfield review earlier, pointed to the insularity of English taste. And Moore, whether regarded as a cut above or a cut below the foreign naturalists, was destined to carry any stigma attached to the title throughout the entire period under discussion.

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[67]"Evelyn Innes," Bookman, p. 103.

[68]"Evelyn Innes," Bookman, p. 103.

[69]"The Cloister and the Stage," Bookman, p. 149.

CHAPTER SUMMARY

The reasons for this burden are obvious. First of all, he selected women of low economic and social status to be his heroines. Drab, pitiful, and unlovely, they wandered through the pages of his early novels, inspiring no one to admire or copy them. They possessed none of the characteristics the Englishman wanted in fiction or real life, for that matter. Not until Esther Waters appeared did Moore uphold motherhood as the goal of all Victorian womankind. A woman's dutiful conduct had been ignored or decried in the novels published earlier and in Evelyn Innes as well. Moore gained no friends among the anonymous reviewers for portraying his women characters as selfish, crude, and disreputable creatures.

His heroes were received no better. From the introspective Lewis Seymour to the dissolute Mike Fletcher to the decadent Sir Owen Asher, Moore omitted heroic qualities in depicting his men. The Victorians liked their heroes to be men of action, one will recall, so Seymour was an undesirable person; they liked persevering, cheerful, diligent seekers after position, so Fletcher became the epitome of a villain; they wanted men who assumed the responsibility of home, family, and country, so the decadent Sir Owen was no more popular than the others. Critics could not accept Moore's concept of heroes and heroism.

Besides substituting unsavory characters for the usual heroes in fiction, Moore offended in still a third way. He allowed his characters to become involved in illicit romances. Although he shunned the Zolaesque manner of reporting sexual activity, he did not conceal from his reviewers (or his readers) behind-the asterisks licentiousness; and Moore left on his reviewers the lasting impression that he wrote

salacious novels. Only Esther Waters completely escaped this classification, and then only because the author insisted on her innate moral goodness and consequent reform although she had been led astray. Unfortunately for Moore's reputation, the critics could not agree Evelyn Innes had sufficient motivation for ceasing to be Sir Owen's mistress. The absence of the novelist's condemnation of promiscuity and his permitting his main characters to live together out of wedlock antagonized most of the critics since the era recognized sex only within the bond of marriage.

The pessimism of Moore's novels also depressed the reviewers in this age of optimism. Most of the novels, in fact, even Esther Waters, leave one today as they must have then, feeling any improvement in the lot of the characters can be only temporary. And the presentation of the streets and slums of London became in Moore's novels a kind of oppressive and invincible force waiting to inflict misery upon passersby. More than one reviewer, noting such scenes, remarked upon the gray and cheerless effect such descriptions afforded. The novels lacked happy endings with scenes where justice or heroic behavior triumphed. Complete surrender to opposing forces or, on other occasions, suicide added to the general, omnipresent feeling of despair. A search for light humor or Dickensian sentiment must always prove fruitless in the novels; therefore, it is not at all surprising that violations of the code calling for a belief in progress made Moore's novels unacceptable to the reviewers.

From the time his first novel was published, Moore was accused of writing unsuitable language. In the beginning, complaints about his language were registered in order to condemn his works completely.

Toward the end, his too elegant style served the same purpose. Only Arthur Symons saw Moore's language contributing to the artistic qualities of his work.

Moore was always accused of employing naturalistic techniques and materials. His later reviewers, like his earlier, thought his excessive detail and documented evidence peculiarly naturalistic. Furthermore, because like Zola he handled unconventional subject matter--drab and degraded characters, sordid love affairs, and overwhelming forces--critics equated him with Zola, indicated how he had surpassed the French novelist, or tried to excuse him for his sins against literary propriety. In most criticisms, the reviewers mentioned neither novelist without referring to the other. Names of other authors, too, were associated with Moore's--Balzac's, the Goncourts', Flaubert's, Tolstoi's--all foreign names which were regarded with suspicion in a country which complacently believed that Thackeray, Dickens, and George Eliot had provided all the acceptable masterpieces. The important thing, however, is that Moore was believed permanently subject to the alien, and hence unhealthy, influence of Zolaesque naturalism. From this charge he could never escape.

The many excerpts from the reviews indicate Moore was not a favorite with the periodicals of the day and that at no time did he receive unqualified praise for his efforts. He persisted in his aim to write realistically, and despite changes in his methods and material, he was unable or unwilling to satisfy his critics. His early associations with foreign naturalists and his attempts to demolish the ordinary standards of fiction prevented the reviewers from ever accepting him wholeheartedly.

CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSIONS

The information in the preceding pages provides us with a real insight into the thinking of the reviewers during the last days of Queen Victoria. It would be convenient, but inaccurate, to say those who signed their names appreciated and praised the work of Hardy, Gissing, and Moore and that the anonymous reviewers hid behind the mastheads of their journals. The fearless Mrs. Oliphant spoke as violently against Hardy as Mrs. Newton-Robinson spoke in his behalf; the same Mr. Tyrrell who objected so strongly to Hardy's Jude the Obscure had only praise for the work of George Moore. Unfortunately, no evidence is available to show the same anonymous reviewer commented on more than one book or author. All we can learn from interior evidence is that occasionally the reviewer has read or heard enough of one of the other authors to draw superficial likenesses, as Moore called them.

Similarly it would be convenient to be able to say one periodical was receptive to the innovations of the authors and another soundly rejected them. But again, the evidence does not bear this out. The Bookman, for example, usually admired George Moore and appreciated Gissing's efforts, but as with the other periodicals there are enough exceptions in the Bookman to show the novelists on occasion were treated indifferently if not actually excoriated.

The opening chapter of this study discussed the reasons why the earlier Victorians liked or disliked novels. They preferred, it was

pointed out, heroines who were modest, demure, coy, and dutiful, pretty if need be, but virtuous always. Writing later in the era, Hardy insisted on their beauty, Gissing on their intellectuality, and Moore on their being unusual enough to attract attention. The critics, of course, did not always agree with each other, but many noticed the women characters. Reviewers who ordinarily condemned the women scarcely concealed the fact they regarded them as immoral. On the other hand, critics we can identify as men of science or literature, for example Havelock Ellis or Quiller Couch, admired the efforts of the novelists to present attractive, lively, and spirited women.

As for the fictional hero, the Victorians, the study has shown, liked them active, decisive, ambitious, and successful--possessing more intellect than women, but never pensive nor bookish. Great intellect was not presumed to be a heroic characteristic in Victorian novels. The male role demanded duty to God, to the Queen, and to womanhood in general. Our novelists, however, refused to concede these characteristics made men worthy of a place in a story. Hardy, like Gissing and Moore, utilized characters with none or few of these qualities. Hardy's men could be wise, Gissing's were at their best when pensive, and Moore's sooner or later rebelled magnificently against every conventional standard. And what was the verdict of the critics? They judged on the basis of inherited moral criteria except for those few judges more interested in the art of the novel than in the effect the novel might have on British society. Only when Gissing acceded to the critics' demands were his men accepted, partial evidence that the critics still judged by earlier standards. Moore's and Hardy's men never won general acclaim.

The Victorians demanded elevating works of fiction, and one thing they insisted on was language which would inspire readers.

It could have a certain snob value, of course, if an author exercised the proper care and put dialectal or ungrammatical language in the mouths of his lower class characters. For the other characters, the most careful language was demanded no matter what the circumstances. Like a theatrical convention, the language revealed the nature of the individual. Hardy, Gissing, and Moore also appreciated and respected so-called proper English as evidenced by their comments on the subject as well as by their own roles as narrators. Although they chafed at contemporary restrictions denying them the right to transcribe all speech, they were artistic enough to counterfeit reality without profanity and vulgarity. Despite their efforts here, each author was belabored by more than one critic for using a wrong pronoun, a wrong word, or a jarring simile. The impression such criticism leaves with us is that reviewers, reluctant to condemn or discuss a book for literary merit or narrative technique, chose this method to destroy what they could not comprehend.

The twentieth century generally regards the Victorian era as more preoccupied with sex than was good for it. Certainly Victorian novels suggest this if only by their avoiding the sexual aspects of life so scrupulously. An aura of shame surrounded any mention of sex, and novelists were denied the right to make sex a motivating force in their books. To the Victorian, immorality and sexual looseness seemed synonymous. Thus, prostitution, illegitimacy, rape, adultery, and all mention of fornication were immoral and therefore forbidden in novels, which had, after all, didacticism as a major reason for their existence. Whenever the novel was charged with immorality, some violation of the Victorian sex code was responsible. At any time during the last decades of the century, a novel of Gissing or Moore was likely to be

presumed immoral because both began their careers by writing narratives in which "immoral" acts were at least suggested. Hardy escaped the charge on a few occasions, for example with Desperate Remedies; but Tess of the D'Urbervilles and Jude the Obscure angered almost all anonymous reviewers and many known critics as well.

An unconventional treatment of love as physical attraction instead of as a romantic phenomenon further distressed critics of Hardy, Gissing, and Moore. These novelists did not insist love's fulfillment await marriage nor that marriage preserve love. Moore, in fact, believed marriage killed love. Gissing insisted characters who married for love destroyed themselves. Hardy dared to show a heroine who refused to marry the father of her children, even though she came as near to loving Jude as she could. Such attacks on the Victorian ideal of home and family generally infuriated periodical critics.

Even more upsetting to the reviewers than sexual looseness and immorality was a pessimistic spirit pervading novels of these so-called naturalists. This spirit evinced itself in numerous offensive ways but most of all in the protagonist's inability to overcome either his inner nature or his environment. The novelists thus frightened Victorians who sought in novels reassurance the world was constantly progressing and who could not accept a story which proved otherwise. Hardy, Gissing, and Moore, however, emphasizing always the theme of degeneration, not regeneration, came to be regarded as pessimistic authors and chroniclers of despair. While their fictional characters frequently acted before a backdrop of poverty, the novelists showed their readers despair was not the special province of the poor. They allowed despair to penetrate the lives of the wealthy or the successful as well. They defied all convention by portraying suicide, the real epitome of despair;

they pictured death in an unsentimental manner; they avoided happy endings and closed their books with calamity prevailing.

The literary techniques of the authors differed so greatly that if one were to call Moore a naturalist because he at first tried to suggest reality by presenting every visible detail, one would have to regard Hardy as a romantic who shaped by his imagination because pictorial details play a much less significant role in his Wessex novels. If Moore's objectivity is ascribed to a naturalistic technique, one would have to deny Gissing's naturalism because of his own presence in his works. All three authors were dissimilar in their methods, yet the reviewers' term "naturalist" joined them.

The evidence presented in the chapters on the novelists themselves reveals much about the critics' practices and their ideas of naturalism. In the first place, not one attempted to define naturalism or Zolaism, the more popular epithet. We have no reason to believe anyone who condemned the authors for naturalism had even read Le Roman Expérimental to learn what Zola's precepts were. And yet the term was used to libel the three authors. What the critics meant by naturalism can be deduced not from definition but only from their critical practices.

We have seen some critics apply the term naturalism to novels merely different from traditional fiction. Critics whose reading taste the masters and their disciples had formed were obliged to concede that from the pens of Hardy, Gissing, and Moore novels of a different cast kept appearing. Novelty annoyed critics who insisted familiar standards of fiction were best; and certainly one of the ways in which the novelists under consideration promulgated the unfamiliar was in their treatment of the role of fictional women. But because in this aspect they differed

so greatly among themselves, as was shown earlier, it was not for their unusual women characters that critics called their narratives naturalistic.

Secondly, the male characters differed from those who had become the standard for fiction, but again the novelists had divergent views regarding the necessary attributes and characteristics of the men. It was not, then, a certain type of man who evoked the cry of naturalism.

Thirdly, while the novelists insisted freedom in language should be theirs and complained because it wasn't, they were forced to write as their predecessors had, that is, without the liberty of reproducing actual or overheard speech. Thus, whether the authors approved or disapproved, the language in their novels did not vary enough from the traditional to be considered revolutionary. If kind of language were the underlying principle of what critics called naturalism, in making comparisons, the critics would certainly have had to refer to the master novelists as naturalists because the novelists of the last three decades had to rely on similar if not identical language techniques.

When an examination is made of the novelists' unconventional and candid presentation of sex, one finds the authors were on more common ground. They treated sex asa motivating force for characters either in or out of wedlock. Their characters were unlike those of an earlier day in that once having discovered the sexual relation, they succumbed to its power despite any disastrous effect it might have on love, home, or family. Its possession of the individual was the feature the authors stressed, although we find it less in Hardy's and Gissing's works than in Moore's.

It is but a short step from this emphasis on the overwhelming force of sex to the pessimism of the novels. Here the authors were most closely related. They showed their characters at the mercy of insuperable forces--sex, nature, economics, the conscience, or any of a thousand others. Their characters were unable to win over the odds against them, try as they might. A temporary respite may have been granted occasionally, but readers soon learned a permanent victory over an inimical force was impossible.

Having remarked earlier the vastly different literary techniques of the three novelists and their sincere and emphatic disavowals of the "science of fiction" (in Moore's case a disavowal of Zola himself), we can now see what underlay the charge of naturalism which periodical critics applied to Hardy, Gissing, and Moore. The authors differed among themselves on the types of roles of heroines and heroes; they were forced by custom to conform to standard language; they rejected Zolaism and the science of fiction. What they had in common was a belief that man was a victim of life, a helpless pawn moved about by uncontrollable forces. In the critics' mind, this denial of optimism, or conversely, the embracing of pessimism, was the reason for the charge of naturalism--not technique nor bad language nor unconventional heroes and heroines nor descriptions of sexual promiscuity. If critics had examined their own reviews and those of their colleagues, they would have reached a definition like this:

> A naturalistic novel is one in revolt against former conventional, moral standards, one that presents pessimism; hence, immoral.

Amy Cruse based her studies of the literature of the Victorian era on comments readers made. Her evidence the young readers of the nineties found Hardy's message "not only terrible but stultifying"

because they saw all hopes and aspirations dashed by a superior Fate is certainly substantiated by the present study.[1] The extensive survey of the critical opinions of reviewers during those and earlier years indicates the spirit of optimism still prevailed and demanded respect. Like the ordinary reader of the time, the reviewers still preferred stories of man triumphant.

Walter Houghton's study of the Victorian mind before the last three decades of the century provided valuable material for establishing the standards of literary taste given in this study. It is hoped the study will in turn furnish him with useful material for a comparable study of the final decades should he ever attempt one.

Bibliographers and especially scholars interested in Hardy, Gissing, or Moore may find the attached bibliography of great time-saving benefit should they have occasion to use the major literary periodicals of the era. While there always exists the possibility that some reviews have been overlooked or discarded because they were not pertinent to this study, any future scholar of Hardy, Gissing, and Moore should be able to find in those poorly-indexed magazines the reviews he needs and which have lain dormant for many years.

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[1]Amy Cruse, After the Victorians, p. 180.

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