

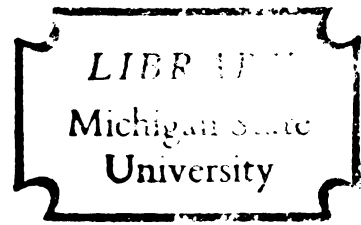
REALISM AND ROMANCE IN THE
LATE VICTORIAN PERIOD:
LITERARY CRITICISM IN
ENGLAND AND AMERICA

Thesis for the Degree of Ph. D.
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John E. McCluskey

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ABSTRACT

REALISM AND ROMANCE IN THE LATE
VICTORIAN PERIOD: LITERARY CRITICISM
IN ENGLAND AND AMERICA

by John E. McCluskey

This thesis, maintaining that the current view of late Victorian literary movements is incomplete and occasionally unsound, reexamines British and American "realism" and "romanticism."

The first part attempts to account for the decline of American romanticism after the achievements of Hawthorne and Melville at mid-century. It proposes that the scientific milieu of the late Victorian period struck at the roots of romance in two ways: (1) scientific positivism, which did not permit a symbolic interpretation of concrete reality, made romance seem to deal with chimeras, and (2) the concept of evolution, which interpreted history as progress, made romance seem to belong to the childhood of the race. Consequently, the romance had collapsed as an independent genre by the end of the nineteenth century.

Howells' theory of realism, discussed as a natural accompaniment to scientific positivism, is seen as an attempt to make both literature and criticism into a science. According to Howells, the novelist

was a photographer rather than a maker, and the novel a scientific study of society rather than a story. Like the scientist, Howells defined truth in terms of the norm, believing that novels should portray characters and events that were representative or near "the middle."

Twentieth century critics, overlooking the point that Howells' theory had no place for characters or action that deviated far from the norm of American experience, have exaggerated the audacity of his realism. A survey of the contemporary reaction to Howells in both England and America shows that he was not generally considered bold or daring. English realists, on the other hand, while opposing the idea that the novelist was a scientist, did link realism with frankness.

The last part of the thesis, after showing that twentieth century critics have praised late nineteenth century realism while disparaging romance, suggests that the contribution of romance to modern literature is generally overlooked. In particular, current criticism is asked to recognize that the "naturalism" of Ambrose Bierce and Frank Norris was not an attempt to build upon or extend Howells' realism, but rather an effort to resuscitate romance.

REALISM AND ROMANCE IN THE LATE
VICTORIAN PERIOD: LITERARY CRITICISM

INTRODUCTION IN ENGLAND AND AMERICA

I. THE FLIGHT OF ROMANCE IN THE LATE
NINETEENTH CENTURY

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The Marquis of ...
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John E. McCluskey
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Twentieth ...

IV. THE ENGLISH ... A THESIS

V. REALISM, ROMANCE ...

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with the realists and have been intent upon confirming and sanctioning the triumph of realism. Accord-

INTRODUCTION

Those critics who have sought to deny the triumph of realism have been called upon to provide evidence. Herbert Howells' article on Henry James in the Century magazine in 1882 until 1903--from William Dean Howells' article on Henry James in the Century magazine until Frank Norris's The Responsibilities of the Novelist--the aesthetic questions raised about the novel were often answered according to a critic's allegiance to "realism" or "romanticism." In both England and America in the late Victorian period, criticism tended to be combative rather than exploratory. Because of this atmosphere of controversy, historians have settled upon the metaphor of a "literary war" to describe the criticism of the period.¹

¹Edwin H. Cady has used the metaphor of "the War" in his two-volume biography of Howells, particularly in the second volume, The Realist at War: The Mature Years 1885-1920 (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1958), and also in The War of the Critics over William Dean Howells, a source book which he edited with David L. Frazier (Evanston: Row, Peterson, 1962). Although I disagree with Professor Cady's choice of "the War" as a metaphor to describe the criticism of the late Victorian Period, I believe that he has more knowledge about Howells and the literary criticism surrounding him than any other critic.

Such a metaphor, however, is an emotionally charged one, and has encouraged histrionic accounts of the "battle" between realism and romanticism. Those twentieth century critics adopting it have sympathized

with the realists and have been intent upon confirming and sanctioning the triumph of realism.² Accord-

²Those critics who have been zealous to ratify the triumph of realism have frequently cited vulnerable evidence. Herbert Edwards in "Howells and the Controversy over Realism in American Fiction," American Literature, III (1931), 248, saw the public's acceptance of Frank Norris's The Pit (1903) as the decisive victory for realism. However, such a stand avoids asking whether the triumph of a literary movement can be measured in terms of sales, and whether The Pit can safely be classified as a realistic novel. Perhaps it headed the best-seller list because of its "romantic" aspects, which were noted by Howells and other critics of the time. In The Critical Period in American Literature (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1951), p. 168, Grant C. Knight wrote: "That McTeague could have been issued at all, that Doubleday should have kept Norris as a reader, that it should have accepted Sister Carrie and printed it upon his advice, was sure indication that effective opposition to the advance of realism was nearing its end in the United States." Knight's case would be stronger if Sister Carrie had not been kept from the public for a dozen years after Doubleday had accepted it in 1900.

ing to them, late nineteenth century realists were dedicated and courageous writers fighting to pierce the complacency of the Victorian Age while romanticists were genteel escapists or commercial hacks. In place of melodramatic criticism, both sides should be presented against a background that encourages a deeper understanding of their respective positions; questions need to be raised about realism and romanticism that go behind the notion of warfare between hostile literary camps.

This dissertation lays aside the metaphor of a

literary war and examines the literary criticism of the late Victorian period in England and America in an effort to disclose new relationships between realism and romance. Part one attempts to show why romanticism and romance declined in America after the achievements of Melville and Hawthorne in the 1850's. The hypothesis advanced is that romance could not withstand the thrust of science in the post Civil War period. It needed the philosophical underpinning which Transcendentalism had provided, and as the latter was replaced by scientific positivism, romance deteriorated. In addition, the scientific theory of evolution undercut romance, because it made romance seem a genre that had belonged to the childhood of the race. ~~dered venturdane by the ant'ropo-mor-~~

~~then~~ Realism, on the other hand, met the challenge of science by appropriating the philosophy and methodology of science to literature. Part two illustrates the way in which the realism of Howells identified itself with science rather than with art, and also attempts to demonstrate that the English realists, while not sharing Howells' view that the novelist was a kind of scientist, were more concerned than their American counterparts with the novelist's freedom to examine transgressions of Victorian morality.

The final section puts forward the hypothesis that the "naturalism" of Ambrose Bierce and Frank Norris should be understood as a resuscitation of romance rather than an extension of Howells' realism. Twentieth century critics have linked Howells with Bierce and Norris as champions of frankness, but an examination of the contemporary reaction to Howells shows that modern critics have exaggerated the audacity of his realism. In addition, because twentieth century critics have had such a low opinion of late nineteenth century romance, they have not taken seriously the fact that Bierce and Norris censured Howells' realism while aligning themselves with romance. When one realizes, however, that Howells' realism was not considered venturesome by his contemporaries, then one is in position to see that Ambrose Bierce and Frank Norris were actually rebelling against the realism of Howells, and doing so in the name of romance.

Age is the Literary History of the United States by Carl H. Claudy, a collaborative work, Willard Thorp, who was one of the editors, entitled "The Defenders of Ideals: A Study of the Writers who continued to work in the late Romantic style of romanticism--W. H. Stoddard, Reginald Denham, Thomas B. Aldrich, and others." The book is a study of the late Romantic style of romanticism, and it is a study of the late Romantic style of romanticism.

Willard Thorp, "The Defenders of Ideality," in the
Literary History of the United States, ed. Robert E.
Spiller et al. (New York: Macmillan, 1908).

CHAPTER I

THE FLIGHT OF ROMANCE IN THE LATE NINETEENTH CENTURY

The Waning of English Romanticism and American Transcendentalism

When giving an account of the literature of America during the last quarter of the nineteenth century, literary historians have confined themselves almost exclusively to the "rise of realism." Typically, they discuss humorists such as Artemus Ward and Josh Billings and regionalists such as Edward Eggleston and Mary Wilkins Freeman, whom they regard as precursors of realism, and then they devote their attention to Howells, Twain, and Henry James, who represent the major achievement of realism. One of the few literary histories that studies imaginative writers outside the realistic movement during the Gilded Age is the Literary History of the United States. In that collaborative work, Willard Thorp has written a chapter entitled "The Defenders of Ideality," discussing those writers who continued to work in the New England tradition of romanticism--R. H. Stoddard, Bayard Taylor, George H. Boker, Thomas Bailey Aldrich, and Edmund Clarence Stedman.¹

¹Willard Thorp, "The Defenders of Ideality," in the Literary History of the United States, ed. Robert E. Spiller et al. (New York: Macmillan, 1948).

Like the literary histories, the standard anthologies treat the period from 1865 to 1914 as belonging exclusively to the realistic movement. One of the most widely used of these anthologies has sections in the post Civil War volume entitled, "The Triumph of Western Comic Realism," "The Regional Realists," and the "Masters of Critical Realism."² There is no section for

²The American Tradition in Literature, ed. Sculley Bradley et al., Vol. II (New York: W. W. Norton, 1962).

non-realistic writers of the period. Hence, writers such as Bayard Taylor, Thomas B. Aldrich, and Lafcadio Hearn are omitted. It is apparent that both the literary histories and the anthologies reflect the opinion that none of the significant literature written between 1865 and 1914 lay beyond the realistic movement.

What is astonishing about this view of post Civil War literature is that only a generation earlier, America's distinguished fiction emanated from romanticism. Hawthorne published The Scarlet Letter in 1850 and Melville published Moby Dick in 1851; together they constituted an important part of a pre-eminent era in American literature, labeled "the American Renaissance" by the celebrated critic, F. O. Matthies-

sen. The Scarlet Letter and Moby Dick continue to be ranked as two of America's greatest works of prose fiction, although neither is classified as a realistic novel. How could it be that two masterpieces were written in the romantic tradition near the middle of the century, and then not a single work of prose fiction in this tradition appeared in the next fifty years worthy of the anthologist's attention? What happened to romanticism in fiction?

Literary historians, occupied with tracing the rise of realism, have not usually addressed themselves to this question. Floyd Stovall wrote a chapter in Transitions in American Literary History called "The Decline of Romantic Idealism 1855-1871," but despite the chapter heading, he focuses upon the beginnings of realism rather than upon the decline of romanticism.³

³Floyd Stovall, "The Decline of Romantic Idealism 1855-1871," in Transitions in American Literary History, ed. Harry Hayden Clark (Durham: Duke University Press, 1953).

However, one aspect of the decline--that showing Mark Twain's adverse reaction to romanticism--has been documented by the Swedish critic, Sten Liljegren. His study of Twain suggested that there was a revolt in American literature against romanticism similar to that which one finds in continental literature--in Zola's rejection of Hugo's romanticism, for example.

Liljegren's evidence consists of Twain's parodies of romantic poetry, his attack upon Scott in Life on the Mississippi, and his satirical critical essays on Cooper.⁴ Vernon L.

⁴Sten B. Liljegren, The Revolt against Romanticism in American Literature as Evidenced in the Works of S. L. Clemens (New York: Haskell House, 1964). This is a reprint of the work published in 1945.

Parrington has also written briefly about the shift from romanticism to realism in American literature. In one of those striking metaphors for which he had such a talent, Parrington said, "Realism in America, so it appears, rose out of the ashes of romantic faith."⁵ The metaphor indi-

⁵Vernon L. Parrington, "The Development of Realism," in The Reinterpretation of American Literature, ed. Norman Foerster (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1928), p. 140.

cates that there was an unwarranted optimism in romanticism which brought about its destruction, and that the romantic tradition terminated after the realistic movement got underway. However, neither of these implications of Parrington's metaphor has been supported in any detail, and in fact, they do not seem to fit the evidence afforded by the criticism of the late Victorian period.

What I propose to do in the first part is to explore more fully the matters which Stovall, Liljgren, and Parrington have touched upon. Specifically, it is with the reasons for romanticism's vitiation, and with the attempts

which some critics made to formulate a rationale for romanticism during the late Victorian period, that I wish to concern myself.

First of all, the aversion to romanticism and the demand for realism appears to have begun earlier in America than is usually recognized. Literary histories emphasize the tardiness with which realism entered American literature when compared with French, and they stress the opposition which the realistic movement faced in this country. Certainly it is true that realism was resisted, as Parrington, Floyd Stovall, Clarence Gohdes, Robert Spiller, Gordon Haight, Herbert Edwards,⁶ and others, have attested;

⁶Vernon L. Parrington, The Beginnings of Critical Realism in America (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1930), p. 237; Floyd Stovall, op. cit.; Clarence Gohdes, "Realism for the Middle Class," in The Literature of the American People, ed. Arthur Hobson Quinn (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1951), p. 661; Robert E. Spiller, "Toward Naturalism in Fiction," in The Literary History of the United States, p. 1016; Gordon Haight, "Realism Defined: William Dean Howells," in The Literary History of the United States, p. 884; Herbert Edwards, "Howells and the Controversy over Realism in American Fiction," American Literature, III (1931), 237-48.

it is also true, however, that romanticism was being opposed in the name of realism even before the Civil War, a point generally overlooked. An enlightening corrective is Allen Hayman's dissertation, Herman Melville's Theory of Prose Fiction in Contrast with Contemporary Theories. He has stated his central idea as follows:

It is too widely believed that the demand for realism in prose fiction did not come into our literature until the work of Howells and his immediate predecessors. Yet my examination of the criticism in periodicals of this earlier period /from 1840-1870/ disclosed that the demand for realism in the handling of character, dialogue, plot, incident, and background was perhaps the major theme in the criticism of prose fiction.⁷

⁷Allan Hayman, Herman Melville's Theory of Prose Fiction in Contrast with Contemporary Theories (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, University of Illinois, 1961), p. 2.

Further on, Hayman writes that "novelists were praised or condemned in accordance with how realistic their fiction was," and he cites, among other articles, one on Balzac by John Lothrop Motley in which the American historian and critic praised the French novelist for being a 'minute, patient, and powerful delineator of scenes and characters in the world before his eyes.'⁸ Hayman points out that

⁸Ibid., p. 92.

"even such writers as Hawthorne and Melville...were commended for their realistic treatment of material,"⁹ and

⁹Ibid., p. 94.

he has put forth the unorthodox hypothesis, which deserves further attention, that the well-known neglect of Melville by contemporary critics resulted from their preference for realism.

William Charvat's study of the critical thought in

America between 1810 and 1835 corroborates the point that critics were ready for some types of realism long before the Civil War. His investigation suggested that Howells' kind of realism would have been acceptable to many critics quite early in the century, and conversely, that they continually discouraged a too fanciful romanticism. According to Charvat, the representative critics preferred novels which dealt with familiar rather than strange or exotic material: they wanted novels "which dealt with society as most of them knew it."¹⁰

¹⁰William Charvat, The Origins of American Critical Thought 1810-1835 (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1936), p. 150.

In addition, his survey disclosed that when writers did deal with material that was distant or strange, the critics asked for a realistic manner of presentation; whenever they encountered the romance, they wanted a realistic treatment of plot, character, and historical incident. Studies such as Hayman's and Charvat's suggest that the critics were pushing romance and romantic fiction, at least of the more fanciful kind, from the literary scene even before the "rise of realism."¹¹

Hawthorne's prefaces reinforce the point that critics disparaged the romance even before the Civil War.¹¹ Aware that critics were urging realistic fic-

¹¹Poe was aware of the call for realism in the 1830's. When reviewing the drama Tortesa, the Usurer (1839) by N. P. Willis, Poe praised the play for a fine ideal elevation or exaggeration throughout--a matter forgotten or avoided by those who, with true Flemish perception of truth, wish to copy her peculiarities in disarray. Mr. Willis has not lost sight of the important consideration that the perfection of dramatic, as well as of plastic skill, is found not in the imitation of Nature, but in the artistical adjustment and amplification of her features.

The Complete Works of Edgar Allen Poe, ed. James A. Harrison (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell, 1902), X, 27.

tion, he adopted an apologetic tone when acknowledging that he wrote romance. Speaking through the narrator in "The Custom House" section of The Scarlet Letter, Hawthorne implied that he turned to the past because he lacked the aptitude to capture the contemporary scene.

The fault was mine. The page of life that was spread before me seemed dull and commonplace, only because I had not fathomed its deeper import. A better book than I shall ever write was there; leaf after leaf presenting itself to me, just as it was written out by the reality of the fleeting hour, and vanishing as fast as written, only because my brain wanted the insight and my hand the cunning to transcribe it.¹²

¹²Nathaniel Hawthorne, "The Custom House," introduction to The Scarlet Letter (1850), reprinted in American Literary Essays, ed. Lewis Leary (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell, 1960), p. 232.

In his preface to The House of the Seven Gables, Hawthorne asked his audience to make allowances for his

departures from the ordinary course of man's experience; on his side, he assured the reader that he would not overdo the fanciful, but would "mingle the Marvelous rather as a slight, delicate, and evanescent flavor, than as any portion of the actual substance of the dish offered to the public."¹³

¹³Nathaniel Hawthorne, Preface to The House of the Seven Gables (1851), reprinted in American Literary Essays, p. 232.

The shift away from romance and toward realism was related to the rise of naturalistic philosophy and its coadjutor, the scientific method. Before the nineteenth century, there were, according to Stow Persons, three ways of apprehending great truths. The first was through revelation in scripture, the second was by direct personal inspiration or intuition, and the third was through observation aided by reason. The nineteenth century virtually discarded the first two approaches to truth, and set up the third--which contains the fundamentals of the scientific method--as a new absolute.¹⁴

¹⁴Stow Persons, American Minds (New York: Henry Holt, 1958), pp. 208-09.

The growing acceptance of naturalistic philosophy and the scientific method during the nineteenth century placed all imaginative literature in a diffi-

cult position. When literature treated non-material images, it seemed to be dealing with phantoms, and when its practitioners worked by "inspiration" or "imagination" rather than by the scientific method, they seemed to be using a method that could hit upon truth only occasionally and accidentally. The ascendancy of naturalistic philosophy and the scientific method undercut the theory of three types of literature in particular: poetry, the historical novel, and the romance--those types which depend more heavily upon imagination than observation.¹⁵

¹⁵M. H. Abrams has noted how the rise of philosophic positivism, which claimed that the natural sciences had a monopoly upon truth, adversely affected poetry. Writing about the opposition between science and poetry that began about the time of Wordsworth, Abrams says:

To some writers, it seemed that poetry and science are not only antithetic, but incompatible, and that if science is true, poetry must be false, or at any rate, trivial....If poetry as a whole is not "true," in the way that science is true, how are we to demonstrate that it is a legitimate use of language, and that it serves any useful purpose in men's lives?

The Mirror and the Lamp (New York: W. W. Norton, 1958), p. 299.

The manner in which naturalistic philosophy subverted the traditional rationale for the historical novel has been shown by Ernest Bernbaum. He believed that the "wide permeation of the presuppositions of naturalistic philosophy" was responsible for the disrepute of the historical novel in the world of criticism beginning in the late nineteenth century. This naturalistic philosophy

assumed, like the man in the street, that you really "know" the phenomena apparently perceptible to the senses, and that you "know" them in a way that you do not know the constructions made by the mind or the images created by the imagination. It also assumed that this "knowing" of ap-

pearances is direct, i. e. without any presupposition of principles, and therefore without any mediation by the mind....It presupposed that the past was an objectively existing reality which scientific historians could copy, that faith and imagination are not rational uses of the mind, and that the positively valuable knowledge is gained by direct observation.

Bernbaum concluded that the insistence upon observation as the sole avenue to truth made it seem that the historical novel gave a spurious view of reality. In his view, however, those critics who adhered to the principles of naturalistic philosophy undervalued the historical novel--"a genre rich in masterpieces." Ernest Bernbaum, "The Views of the Great Critics on the Historical Novel," PMLA, XLI (1926), 428-29.

To some, the scientific method began to seem the only route to truth; all imaginative literature seemed to them a form of lying. In an interview which William Archer had with Mrs. Mary St. Leger Harrison (who wrote under the pseudonym, Lucas Malet), Archer said at one point,

Well, I am inclined to admit that fiction, considered as the art of lying, may probably count on a long lease of life. It is the fiction which aims at telling the truth that seems to me of doubtful longevity. The novel is clearly the best of all mechanisms for saying the thing that is not; but may it not come to be thought rather a clumsy device for portraying the thing that is?¹⁶

¹⁶William Archer, "Real Conversations." Conversation X--with Mrs. Mary St. Leger Harrison ("Lucas Malet"), Critic, XLII (February, 1903), 162.

He continued by saying "that people may one day prefer to take their psychology and sociology 'neat,' so to speak, with no hot water and sugar of sentimental or sensational narrative to help it down."¹⁷ For Archer

¹⁷Archer, "Real Conversations," 162.

fiction was an outmoded way of portraying truth. It had served in a make-shift way before sociology and psychology became sciences, but now it simply made the truths discovered by other disciplines tolerable to the human mind. According to Archer, as men become stronger, they will stop reading novels that attempt to tell the truth, because they will realize that even the most veracious novels adulterate the truth which they could otherwise have in pure form. Even though Archer was himself a literary man, he conceived of literature as a rudimentary science, inexact and therefore untrue.

Howells had similar misgivings that fiction was an imperfect instrument for recording truth.

It is quite imaginable that when the great mass of readers, now sunk in the foolish joys of mere fable, shall be lifted to an interest in the meaning of things through the faithful portrayal of life in fiction, then fiction the most faithful may be superseded by a still more faithful form of contemporaneous history.¹⁸

¹⁸William Dean Howells, "Editor's Study," Harper's Magazine, LXXVI (January, 1888), 320.

It is apparent that Howells, like Archer, sometimes believed that fiction was a defective way of recording reality which would become more accurate only as it became more "scientific."

An essay by Matthew Arnold in 1882 further illustrates the difficulty which literary men had in constructing an adequate defense of imaginative literature, particularly when they assumed that science had a monopoly upon truth. In his essay, "Literature and Science," Arnold began by pointing out that in 1872 he had spoken of the gloomy prospect for letters which had been occasioned by the new authority of science, and he continued, "If the friends of physical science were in the morning sunshine of popular favour even then, they stand now in its meridian radiance."¹⁹ Arnold acknow-

¹⁹Matthew Arnold, "Literature and Science," Nineteenth Century, XII (August, 1882), 216.

ledged that in science, not only is a thing said to be so, but that through experimentation we can see that it is so. "This reality of natural knowledge it is, which makes the friends of physical science contrast it, as a knowledge of things, with the humanist's knowledge, which is, say they, a knowledge of words."²⁰

²⁰Ibid., p. 222.

Arnold did not want to agree to a distinction between science and literature which relegated the latter to the manipulation of mere words, but he did not contest the point that it was from science alone that man acquired knowledge and truth. Arnold was put in the position of claiming for literature a subsidiary function,

that of helping mankind adjust to the truths which science disclosed. "We feel, as we go on learning and knowing, the vast majority of mankind feel the need of relating what we have learnt and known to the sense which we have in us for conduct, to the sense which we have in us for beauty."²¹ In other words, art dealt

²¹Arnold, "Literature and Science," p. 223.

with morality and beauty, but truth belonged to science.

An essay by J. A. Symonds, involving a particular theory of perception, also demonstrates the impasse which imaginative literature faced in the latter part of the century. Symonds assumed that reality was something fixed which existed outside the individual. This reality could never be exactly known by any individual because to be human was to be subjective. If ten people witnessed an accident, for example, each individual would be able to give only his version of the accident; the "real" accident (the reality) would never be known, because in spite of himself, each individual would be the victim of his own subjectivity.²²

²²J. A. Symonds, Essays Speculative and Suggestive, (London: Chapman and Hall, 1890), Vol. II, p. 299.

Such a theory of perception associated truth with science rather than with art. Since reality was an absolute which the human, by the very fact that he

was human, distorted in the act of perceiving, then it was evident that a machine was a more accurate recorder than man--the camera was more exact than the draughtsman.²³

²³Symonds, Essays Speculative and Suggestive, p. 176.

The scientific method came nearer than any other to a truthful representation of reality because science used mechanisms to record whenever possible, and because science attempted to negate or offset human subjectivity through experiments that were rigidly controlled.

Conversely, Symonds' theory of perception had adverse implications for conventional religion, history, and art. Conventional religion was merely an accumulation of errors. Since the individual could not give an accurate report of what he had observed even when he intended to, when there was actually some element present within him conducive to bias, then the errors in his report would be multiplied. In Symonds' words:

When there exists a strong subjective prepossession on the part of the witness, then the event becomes spontaneously idealised in a definite direction. The concurrence of several such subjective prepossessions, colouring the report of an event which is extremely interesting to all the witnesses concerned, results in an ideal which comes to be accepted for the literal fact.²⁴

²⁴Ibid., pp. 299-300.

According to this line of reasoning, miracles were re-

ports where the strong subjective prepossessions of the witnesses had resulted in an "ideal" which was confused with fact. Symonds accounted for the gospels in a similar manner:

The ideal which formed a factor in each separate report obtained substantiality. In this way four main ideal portraits of Christ were produced, which have been subsequently elaborated into one highly idealised conception by the slow continuous process of centuries.²⁵

in England, the Roman...

²⁵Symonds, Essays Speculative and Suggestive, p. 300.

His account of the gospels coincides with his view of history. "We are led to the conclusion," he writes, "that the past can never be known to us except in its broadest, simplest outlines. The crossing, blending, interminglement, and quasi-chemical combination of divers subjectivities which any chapter of history implies, render the attempt to reach pure truth impossible."²⁶

²⁶Ibid., p. 301.

It is apparent from the preceding remarks that in Symonds' view literature could not attain objective reality or truth. Only a machine reported reality accurately; subjectivity prevented man from seeing reality as it was. Hence, the writer, especially the imaginative writer, was "compelled to idealise, because he

could not⁷ seize reality except as a mode of his own sensuous being."²⁷ Imaginative literature, like con-

²⁷Symonds, Essays Speculative and Suggestive, p. 301.

ventional religion and history, was basically a pathetic manifestation of the way men distorted reality.

In the first quarter of the nineteenth century in England, the Romantics had marshalled a much more telling case for imaginative literature, not only in the name of beauty, but also in the name of truth. To begin with, the Romantics started from a different theory of perception than did Symonds. Whereas Symonds thought of a fixed reality existing outside the observer, the Romantics, especially Wordsworth and Coleridge, thought that what existed outside the observer was matter; it was real, of course, but it was merely matter. It became something valuable only when shaped into meaningful form by the poet. When one postulates matter outside the human, as the Romantics did, then the poem can quite naturally be thought of as matter illuminated or matter shaped; the poem is matter made meaningful by the human imagination. When one postulates the external reality outside the human, as naturalistic philosophy did, then literature, especially more imaginative literature, such as

mundane faculties of memory, common sense, and reason

poetry and romance, comes to be thought of as an inaccurate report of the true situation.

In Romantic poetic theory, the imagination was spoken of so much because it was the faculty which permitted man to shape what was outside himself into a meaningful, human form and expression. As G. M. Bowra has written of the Romantics:

So far from thinking that the imagination deals with the non-existent, they insist that it reveals an important kind of truth. They believe that when it is at work it sees things to which the ordinary intelligence is blind and that it is intimately connected with a special insight or perception or intuition. Indeed, imagination and insight are in fact inseparable and form for all practical purposes a single faculty. Insight both awakes the imagination to work and is in turn sharpened by it when it is at work. This is the assumption on which the Romantics wrote poetry.²⁸

²⁸G. M. Bowra, The Romantic Imagination (New York: Oxford University Press, 1961), p. 7.

But after the middle of the century, few British critics continued to speak of the imagination as the Romantics, especially Coleridge, had done. John Ruskin was an exception. He thought of the imagination as the special faculty given to man which most distinguished him from the machine and the animal. It enabled man to make something more than a copy of the world, to make a creation of his own. It operated on three levels, the third being the highest and furthest removed from the mundane faculties of memory, common sense, and reason.

The first level on which the imagination operated was what Ruskin called the "Imagination Associative." With it, the artist selected, omitted, and combined external data in such a way as to create a new whole. The landscape painter invested with the first level of imagination, for example, would not simply paint from sight or memory (for then he would be merely a copyist), but would be able to recombine parts and fragments of the landscape in such a way as to form an original composition. The second level of the imagination included the first, but added the artist's power to project himself into the composition. Ruskin called this the "Imagination Contemplative." The third and highest level of the imagination, called the "Imagination Penetrative," could reach truths that lay beyond the powers of any other faculty. Of the Imagination Penetrative, Ruskin wrote: "There is no reasoning in it; it works not by algebra, nor by integral calculus; it is a piercing pholas-like mind's tongue, that works and tastes into the very rock heart."²⁹

²⁹Ruskin as Literary Critic, ed. A. H. R. Ball (Cambridge, England: at the University Press, 1928), p. 117. Ruskin's remarks on the imagination originally appeared in Modern Painters, Vol. II, Sec. II, ch. iii.

The contrast between Ruskin, carrying forward the theories of the Romantics, and Symonds, starting from the

postulates of naturalistic philosophy, provides an index to the shifting aesthetics in the last half of the nineteenth century. When writing about the highest level of imagination, Ruskin presupposed a kind of truth which simply would not yield to observation. It was a truth which underlay the crust of phenomena and experience, and it was the imagination, and the imagination only, which could break through this crust. Symonds, on the other hand, had no place for a faculty designated imagination, because he presupposed no truths lying underneath the actual. What he assumed was an external reality which could be perfectly known by the senses, that is, if the senses were mechanical,³⁰ if

³⁰Herbert Joseph Muller in *Science and Criticism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1943), p. 241, has put the point concisely. "In the account of the world given by nineteenth-century science, a machine was a much more satisfactory thing than a human being. It obeyed all the laws, it had no 'subjective' nonsense about it, it completely satisfied the definition of 'reality'; the living consciousness of man was simply a nuisance, a constant hazard for truth seekers even after it had been explained away as an illusion."

their reports were not distorted by the individuality of the observer. Ruskin's imagination, "a piercing pholas-like mind's tongue" had become, in Symonds' conceptual framework--the framework of philosophic positivism--nothing but subjectivity, a faculty which prevented man from ever completely laying hold of reality.

Coleridge, more than any other writer, provided romantic art in England with a rationale in the early nineteenth century; in New England before the Civil War, Transcendentalism furnished the philosophical substructure which made possible a viable theory of the romance, especially the romance which inclined toward the symbolic. Transcendentalism, as it was presented by Emerson in Nature (1836), encouraged romance that was symbolic, because, as Emerson once said, "Nature is the symbol of spirit."³¹ Not only did Emerson posit a visible world

³¹Ralph Waldo Emerson, Nature, reprinted in The American Tradition in Literature, Vol. I, p. 1011.

filled with analogies; he also thought that these analogies extended into the invisible realm.

Not only resemblances exist in things whose analogy is obvious,...but also in objects wherein there is great superficial unlikeness....The granite is differenced in its laws only by the more or less of heat from the river that wears it away. The river as it flows, resembles the air that flows over it; the air resembles the light which traverses it with more subtle currents; the light resembles the heat which rides with it through Space. Each creature is only a modification of the other; the likeness in them is more than the difference, and their radical law is one and the same. A rule of one art, or a law of one organization, holds true throughout nature. So intimate is this Unity, that, it is easily seen, it lies under the undermost garment of nature, and betrays its source in Universal Spirit.³²

³²Ibid., p. 1020.

In his essay The Poet (1844) Emerson reiterated and amplified these ideas. "Things admit of being used as symbols because nature is a symbol, in the whole, and in every part."³³ Earlier in the same essay he had written: "The

³³Ralph Waldo Emerson, "The Poet," reprinted in American Literary Essays, p. 164.

highest minds of the world have never ceased to explore the double meaning, or shall I say the quadruple or the centuple or much more manifold meaning, of every sensuous fact."³⁴ Emerson's Transcendentalism, in which everything

³⁴Ibid., p. 161.

is transformed into symbol or metaphor, ³⁵ provided a phil-

³⁵Clark Griffith, "'Emersonianism' and 'Poeism': Some Versions of the Romantic Sensibility," Modern Language Quarterly, XXII (June, 1961), 125.

osophical basis for the romances of manifold meaning written by Melville and Hawthorne.

Hawthorne was too skeptical to accept a belief in the close analogy between matter and spirit, after the fashion of Emerson. Nevertheless, in his short stories and romances the visible is frequently linked in a symbolic or metaphorical way to an invisible realm; indeed, his fictional technique rested upon the possibility of extraordinary or marvelous connections between spirit and matter.

These occult relationships included the possibility of divine intervention (the great red letter A which is said to appear in the sky at the end of chapter xii of The Scarlet Letter), the possibility of Satanic intervention (Chillingworth in The Scarlet Letter; the elderly man with the serpent's staff in "Young Goodman Brown"), the possibility that matter did not always behave according to the usual physical laws (the butterfly in "The Artist of the Beautiful"; the snowman in "The Snow-Image").

Throughout Hawthorne's fiction, fact is always turning into symbol. Names, dress, colors, settings--all refuse to remain merely themselves. Arthur Dimmesdale's physical condition is an externalization of his soul just as Hester's changing A is an externalization of hers. In "Young Goodman Brown" the entire narrative can be seen as a projection of the contradictory impulses within Goodman Brown's soul. In Nature Emerson had equated natural fact and spiritual fact; in his fiction Hawthorne depended upon the reader's willingness to believe that facts are basically important as metaphors, and that matter and spirit might be strangely connected.

After Emerson, American thinkers tended to separate natural and spiritual fact, or to omit spiritual fact altogether from philosophical discussion. As in England, the imagination was reduced until it was lit-

tle more than observation. A statement by Isaac Taylor in his Physical Theory of Another Life, quoted by Howells, shows how the imagination was becoming superfluous in the late 1880's.

Plainly it is not the imagination that can render us aid in conceiving of a new and different mode of existence, since this faculty is but the mirror of the world around it, and must draw all its materials from things actually known. It may exalt, refine, ennoble, enrich what it finds, and it may shed over all the splendor of an effulgence such as earth never actually sees; yet it must end where it began, in compounding elements and in recombining forms furnished to its hand; and if ever it goes or seems to go beyond these limits, the product is grotesque or absurd, not beautiful; there is no grace or charm in that which trenches upon the actual forms of nature.³⁶

³⁶William Dean Howells, "Editor's Study," Harper's Magazine, LXXIX (September, 1889), 641.

As the century moved on, Transcendentalism was discarded, and the naturalistic philosophy which replaced it could not support fiction in the tradition of Hawthorne. Naturalistic philosophy, regarding nature as unsymbolic, tends to encourage a realistic fiction that treats things as ends in themselves. In both England and America, the shift from a Romantic philosophy to a scientific one made the defense of a non-imitative kind of fiction a formidable undertaking.

The Theory of Evolution and Romantic Literature

It was not only naturalistic philosophy which abrogated the romance after Hawthorne, for the scien-

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tific theory of evolution also worked against it. The theory of evolution, as typically applied to literary development, made romance seem an archaic species of literature that mankind had outgrown. An article by James Sully, an English literary and social critic whose Pessimism (1877) was widely read, provides an illustration. "If one compares Fielding, for example," wrote Sully,

with Balzac, Thackeray, or one of the great Russian novelists, one sees at once what a simple toy-like structure used to serve art for a human world. A mind versed in life as contemporary fiction depicts it, feels on reading these already-antiquated forms of the eighteenth century that it has to divest itself for the nonce of more than half its equipment of habitual thought and emotion.³⁷

³⁷James Sully, "The Future of Fiction," Forum, IX (August, 1890), 649.

In Sully's sketch of the history of literature, the romance had preceded the novel, and belonged, therefore, to the childhood of the race.

We cannot...divest ourselves of our reflective manhood, and don the light, boyish mood, with its naïf credulity and its insatiable thirst for marvel. The pure romance, which knows nothing of probability, and devotes itself to unfolding a dream of preternatural prowess, of an unattainable glory, is not for us.³⁸

³⁸Ibid., pp. 655-56.

Although Sully did not like some aspects of realism, especially its pessimism, his assumption about the progress of

literature led him to endorse one of the characteristics of realism: the sophisticated representation of character, especially of states of mind. Sully felt that neither the epic nor the drama could match modern fiction in portraying "the inner life of reflective feeling of the civilized man and woman."³⁹ Sully's

³⁹Ibid., p. 648.

belief that the "evolution of art illustrates the growth of the human faculty" made it difficult for him to make an effective case for preserving any elements of the romantic in literature, and yet, he does argue at one point that literature should retain elements of the romance.

We have a right to protest against his [the contemporary novelist's] morbid views of things, to ask him with all his fidelity to fact to conserve for us something of youth's gladsome belief in the beauty of things, in human goodness, and in human happiness. We may reasonably insist that the novel, in growing more observant and more learned, shall not wholly separate itself from its parent stem, but retain a trace of the sweet and gracious complacency of the first romance.⁴⁰

⁴⁰Ibid., p. 656.

However, Sully's plea that literature retain elements of the romantic was logically inconsistent with his general view that literature was a part of evolutionary progress. Sully is an example of one of those critics who preferred romantic literature, but could not defend it convincingly

in an age dominated by science.

Those Americans who favored realism, such as the lawyer Clarence Darrow, were quick to use evolutionary theory against romance. In an article published in the Arena, Darrow charted the history of literature as a movement "from the marvellous and mythical to the natural and true."⁴¹

⁴¹Clarence S. Darrow, "Realism in Literature and Art," Arena, IX (December, 1893), 105.

He postulated a naive audience in order to explain the appeal of the early romance and fairy tales such as Jack and the Beanstalk. "Tales of this sort used once to delight the world, and the readers half believed them true. We give them to children now, and even the least of them view them with a half contempt."⁴² It naturally followed from Darrow's

⁴²Ibid., p. 101.

equation of romance with childishness that the romance was a form that modern man was outgrowing.

The modern man who still reads Walter Scott does not enjoy these ancient myths. He relishes a lie, but it must not be too big;...The modern literary stomach is becoming so healthy that it wants a story at least half true; should the falsehood be too strong, it acts as an emetic instead of food.⁴³

⁴³Ibid.

Howells also argued that romance belonged to an

earlier stage in mankind's evolution.⁴⁴ He believed that

⁴⁴The application of evolutionary theory to literary history has been charted by Rene Wellek, "The Concept of Evolution in Literary History" in Concepts of Criticism (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1963). Professor Wellek says that there was no systematic application of evolutionary thought to literature before the middle of the eighteenth century, but that fifty or sixty years ago the idea of evolution dominated literary history. He thinks the concept a poor guide to literary interpretation: "Darwinian or Spencerian evolutionism is false when applied to literature because there are no fixed genres comparable to biological species which can serve as substrata of evolution. There is no inevitable growth and decay, no transformation of one genre into another, no actual struggle for life among genres (p. 51)."

there was a rather sudden shift from the romantic to the realistic beginning in the 1830's. Up until then, Howells assumed that the romantic completely dominated literature. His view that the 1830's and 1840's constituted a turning point from romanticism to realism led him to see Balzac as an amalgam of the realistic and romantic writer. Characteristically, Howells explained the flaws which he found in Balzac as persistences of the romantic age. For example, he thought that Balzac's The Duchesse de Langeois was untrue and artificial and branded it a "survival of romanticism."⁴⁵ He regarded the novels of Scott and Goethe as

⁴⁵William Dean Howells, "Editor's Study," Harper's Magazine, LXXII (May, 1886), 973.

Howells responded to the charge that fiction involved false notions of life and death by replying that fiction involved false notions of life and death. He responded to the charge that fiction involved false notions of life and death by replying that fiction involved false notions of life and death. He responded to the charge that fiction involved false notions of life and death by replying that fiction involved false notions of life and death.

crude and antiquated, as one might expect, because they belonged to a less-civilized era.

In the "Editor's Study" for September, 1887, Howells equated the reading of romance with "the survival of vestiges of barbarism within us,"⁴⁶ and went on to say that

⁴⁶William Dean Howells, "Editor's Study," Harper's Magazine, LXXV (September, 1887), 638.

even the most civilized have their moments of barbarism.

At these times the lettered and unlettered are alike primitive, and their gratifications are of the same simple sort; the highly cultivated person may then like melodrama, impossible fiction, and the trapeze as sincerely and thoroughly as a boy of thirteen or a barbarian of any age.⁴⁷

⁴⁷Ibid.

In a later "Editor's Study," Howells thought of Romanticism as a development of civilization which had been of service, but believed that its spirit was not appropriate to an "age of hopeful striving." In the same column he warned that people should not revert "to the inspirations of romanticism, which belonged to the childhood and the second-childhood of the world, when people believed in the grotesque creatures of their own imaginations."⁴⁸ Another

⁴⁸William Dean Howells, "Editor's Study," Harper's Magazine, LXXIX (September, 1889), 642.

time Howells responded to the charge made by one E. J. Phelps that fiction conveyed false notions about life:

which plot dominated:

If he [Phelps] had cared to look a little into the history of fiction he would have learned that formerly the novel of the highest grade presented ideals which are now chiefly to be found in the novel of the lowest grade; and that the modern novel of the realistic or intellectual school has for its supreme aim the exact portrayal of the motives as well as the facts of life. It is because the English novelists and their imitators mainly hold by the romantic tradition that they are so mischievous, or when not mischievous, so extremely debilitating. 49

⁴⁹ William Dean Howells, "Editor's Study," Harper's Magazine, LXXX (March, 1890), 643.

There were other critics besides Howells who applied evolutionary theory to literature in such a way that realism seemed a later and higher development than romanticism. The Canadian essayist and novelist Grant Allen wrote that "every literature begins with naive and somewhat childish narration--the myth, the epic, the fairy tale, the saga. As it progresses, it grows deeper, more philosophic, more ethical, more purposive."⁵⁰ The highest kind of novel in

⁵⁰ Grant Allen, "Novels Without a Purpose," North American Review, CLXIII (August, 1896), 231.

in Allen's view was the novel of purpose; he associated the romance with the undeveloped taste of "boys, girls, and casual readers." Cyprian Cope, a like-minded critic, considered the realistic purpose novel (which he called the nature-novel) as a form that had evolved from fiction in which plot dominated:

I am unable to enjoy mere story-telling-fiction, that is, wherein the story is everything--although I gratefully appreciate its value in the nursery....The nature-novel is a recent revelation of potentiality. And in proportion as this higher form of fiction has evolved itself, hard-headed men and women have read novels, and novelists have been advanced in honor among men of letters.⁵¹

⁵¹Cyprian Cope, "Bookmakers' Ethics," The Free Review, III (1895), 486.

To some observers, Cope and Howells among them, the story or the plot, which had traditionally been important in romance, seemed that part of literature most responsible for falsification. Plot, more than any other element of romance, seemed to these critics an undersirable legacy from the past.

Occasionally, a critic who supported romance attempted to give a different version of the way evolutionary theory ought to be applied to the history of literature. The temporary resurgence of popular romance in the 1890's with the stories of Robert Louis Stevenson, Rudyard Kipling, Stanley Weyman, Conan Doyle, Anthony Hope, Gilbert Parker, and others, prompted Stockton Axson to believe that realism had been merely a stage in the evolution of literature. In his view, romance was the higher literary form which was supplanting realism.⁵² However, this modification

⁵²Stockton Axson, "The New Romanticism," The Citizen, I (May, 1895), 60-61.

of the way that evolutionary theory was typically applied to literature was hardly more than a mild counterthrust.

Two principles of late nineteenth century thought undercut the theoretical position of romantic literature. The first was the acceptance of naturalistic philosophy which discouraged the supernatural in favor of the corporeal, and the imagination in favor of observation. The second was the application of the theory of evolution to literature in such a way that the romance seemed to belong to the childhood of civilization. When these two ideas were combined, they suggested flatly that romance was harmful because it falsified the real world.

Attempts to Formulate a Theory of Romantic Fiction

Those who attempted a theoretical defense of romance either had to circumvent such objections or to deal with them. By far the greater number of critics who favored romantic literature limited themselves to attacking realism; there are not many defenses of romanticism from the period, no doubt because the scientific atmosphere was hostile to romance. Some of the defenses that were made were trivial, even foolish. Frances Doughty, for example, upheld the romances of Hans Christian Andersen on the grounds that he preserved sound logic in his stories, "or they would not have kept so firm a hold on generations of

children, for children are natural logicians."⁵³ G. R.

⁵³Frances A. Doughty, "The Need of Sound Logic in Fiction," Critic, XXVI (June 15, 1895), 429.

Carpenter, noting that critics were generally condescending toward the romantic novel, especially toward the historical romance, wrote:

It is...as one of the rights of a citizen, that we hard-working people defend our hearty interest in the historical romance....We, not you /the critics/ are the judges of our own emotions; and by us, in the last resort, must your fine theories be tested....Theory or no theory, mankind cherishes the novel of romantic adventure in a romantic past.⁵⁴

⁵⁴G. R. Carpenter, "The Neo-Romantic Novel," Forum, XXV (March, 1898), 121.

H. Rider Haggard, the English author of romantic adventure stories such as King Solomon's Mines (1885), defended romantic fiction by saying that "a weary public calls continually for books, new books to make them forget, to refresh them, to occupy minds jaded with the toil and emptiness and vexation of our competitive existences." His own rather low opinion of the romantic novel as literature was reflected in his remark that "those...who begin by reading novels may end by reading Milton and Shakespeare."⁵⁵

⁵⁵H. Rider Haggard, "About Fiction," Contemporary Review, LI (February, 1887), 174.

The three brief and shallow defenses of romanticism in fiction show how the romanticists typically reacted to the objection that romance gave a false picture of the real world. All three assess the value of romance in terms of the reader, rather than in terms of the work itself. The common denominator of these defenses is essentially that romance is good because people like it. Apologists for romance in late Victorian period must have instinctively felt that they could not claim truth for the romance, for had they felt, as Hawthorne did in 1851, that the romancer could claim privileges in the management of narrative and atmosphere beyond the usual, and still not "swerve aside from the truth of the human heart,"⁵⁶ they would have

⁵⁶Nathaniel Hawthorne, Preface to The House of the Seven Gables, reprinted in American Literary Essays, p. 232.

said so. By discussing the reaction of the reader rather than the characteristics of the romance itself, they avoided the question of whether the romance was "true" or not. In place of the criterion of truth, they substituted one of pleasure. That substitution was a costly one, however, for it increased the belief that romance was merely light and frivolous reading.

Andrew Lang was among those apologists for romance who avoided the issue of truth by focusing instead on the pleasure which he said the romance provided. Speaking against "tendency" or "purpose" fiction, and in favor of

the romance of adventure in an article in the North American Review, Lang wrote:

There is the good old tendency to love a plain tale of adventure, of honest loves, and fair fighting. We have Gentlemen of France, we have knob-nosed Kaffirs and battles with sacred crocodiles, we have The Prisoner of Zenda, that pleasingly incredible scion of German royalty, we have Micah Clarke, and The White Company, and Mr. Stevenson's Highlanders and Lowlanders. Here is primitive fiction: here is what men and boys have always read for the sheer delight of the fancy. The heroes are stainless and fair, the men are brave and loyal, the villains come to a bad end, and all this is frankly popular.⁵⁷

⁵⁷ Andrew Lang, "'Tendencies' in Fiction," North American Review, CLXI (August, 1895), 160.

Lang acknowledged that none of these writers matched Scott, Dickens, or Fielding, but, he said, "We have honest, up-right romancers, who make us forget our problems and the questions that are so much with us."⁵⁸

⁵⁸ Ibid.

Lang oscillated between praising romance as delightful reading and praising it as an anodyne. He once wrote, "To get into fairy land--that is the aspiration of all of us whom the world oppresses." In the same article he said, "A man wants his novel to be an anodyne," and "Novel-reading, as here understood, is confessed to be a kind of opium-smoking."⁵⁹ But whether Lang talked about romance as enchant-

⁵⁹ Andrew Lang, "Literary Anodynes," New Princeton Review, VI (September, 1888), 147.

ing reading or as a palliative, he was using essentially the same approach: romance put the reader in a better state of mind.

Lang never made a systematic and sustained defense of the romance. When he defended it on grounds other than those of pleasure and popularity, he left his remarks undeveloped. Once, for example, he wrote that "great art deals with what is permanent in human nature, with the passions of Achilles, Oedipous, Hamlet, Macbeth, not with every new, wry-shaped little wrinkle which the wind of the world creates on the waters of time."⁶⁰ The reader could expect from such

⁶⁰ Andrew Lang, "The New Fiction," Illustrated London News, CVII (August 17, 1895), 205.

an opening a discussion of the place of the accidental versus the essential in art, but Lang left the point without further elaboration. Most of the time, he attacked realism and its proponents, or simply gave his own reactions to novels he had enjoyed.⁶¹

⁶¹ In "Andrew Lang and Longman's Magazine, 1882-1905," University of Texas Studies in English, XXXIV (1955), 168, Oscar Maurer has summarized what Lang looked for in a novel. It "should have plenty of action, preferably in a setting remote in time or space or both; a tightly knit narrative, with emphasis on suspense; characters simply conceived, whose motives need no elaborate analysis; and a style which never calls attention to itself as to distract the reader from the story." However, Maurer's summary is somewhat unfair to Lang, because it suggests that he liked only adventure fiction of the simplest kind.

Actually, Lang once praised Howells' A Modern Instance, he was fond of James's Daisy Miller, he read Jane Austen with delight, and he lavished praise upon Mark Twain's Huckleberry Finn.

There are parallels between Lang's defense of the romance and that by F. Marion Crawford, who was perhaps the most popular romantic novelist in the late Victorian period. Crawford shared with both Lang and Rider Haggard an ambivalent attitude toward romance. On the one hand, all three were likely to celebrate the delightful hours of reading which the romance could provide, but on the other, they treated the romance with a certain condescension. Haggard, as was pointed out, recommended novel reading because it might lead to an interest in the classics; Lang compared the reading of romances to opium smoking; Crawford was careful to define a romantic novel as "a marketable commodity, of the class collectively termed 'luxuries,' as not contributing directly to the support of life or the maintenance of health."⁶²

⁶²F. Marion Crawford, The Novel: What it is (New York: Macmillan, 1893), p. 8.

It was a luxury because "it can be of no use to a man when he is at work, but may conduce to peace of mind and delectation during his hours of idleness." Hawthorne, even when apologetic about the merits of romance to enjoy it at his ease, and discount

mance, never conceived of it in such trifling and commercial terms, nor did he ever consider it so removed from the great literature of the past. Crawford's concept of the romance is different enough from Melville's and Hawthorne's so that the single word romance is inadequate to describe both. In view of the patronizing attitude which Lang, Haggard, and Crawford had toward the romance, it was to be expected that the designation romance would become synonymous with the phrase the popular novel--as it often has in twentieth century discussions of the novel and romance.⁶³

⁶³The rise of the popular novel in England and its relationship to romantic fiction is treated by Q. D. Leavis in Fiction and the Reading Public (London: Chatto and Windus, 1939).

Like Lang, Crawford thought that the first object of the novel was to amuse and interest the reader, and like Lang, he was particularly repelled by the purpose-novel. According to Crawford, the purpose-novel deceived the buyer because it was mislabeled merchandise. Consistent with his practice of seeing literature in terms of a business transaction between an author and a reader, Crawford said:

A man buys what purports to be a work of fiction, a romance, a novel, a story of adventure, pays his money, takes his book home, prepares to enjoy it at his ease, and discovers that he

has paid a dollar for somebody's views on socialism, religion, or the divorce laws.⁶⁴

⁶⁴Crawford, The Novel: What it is, p. 13.

Crawford never spoke of the novel as a representation of life, and he never said anything about the relationship of the novel to truth. "We are nothing more than public amusers," said Crawford, and it followed that the romance was nothing more than public amusement.

As previously pointed out, the application of evolutionary theory to literature associated the realistic novel, rather than the romance, with the higher stages of civilization. Those who favored the romance were apparently at a loss to answer that argument, because they seldom dealt with it. Somewhat unusual was an article by Maurice Thompson, himself a successful writer of romantic novels, in which he attempted to establish the superiority of the romance by citing its ancestry. Avoiding the usual analogies between biological and literary evolution, Thompson constructed histories of both the realistic novel and the romance which showed the latter to good advantage.

According to Thompson, the line of romancers could be traced all the way back to the Greeks, and

it included, among others, Chaucer, Shakespeare, and Scott. "Bear in mind," wrote Thompson,

that Scott and Shakspeare [sic] are above all else romancers; they came in the succession of romancers descended from the ancient masters of Greek fiction, the epic-makers, the tragedy-makers, the weavers of comedy. It is from these that are descended the tribe of romancers as contradistinguished from the tribe of realists.⁶⁵

⁶⁵Maurice Thompson, "The Theory of Fiction-Making," Chautauquan, XIV (October, 1891), 47.

He excluded the realists from among the "old families" when he said that "their line of ancestry is much shorter than that of the romancers." Thompson said that the line of realism began with Lyly.

In his [Lyly's] style, bad as it was, can be felt the crude elements of the present analytical method which is the distinctive feature of current realism. He wrote for women and it was women that his works most influenced; and I may remark that the analytical society novels of today have no appreciable value in the estimation of the average man; they are read almost exclusively by women. It was John Lyly who first set the example of making a long, wordy, much-talk novel come to absolutely nothing in the end.⁶⁶

⁶⁶Ibid.

Thompson also included Lodge, Greene, Richardson, Smollet, and Fielding among the realists, finding in this arrangement that "the moral turn was steadily

downward." He thought that Madame La Fayette's La Princesse de Cleves belonged in the realistic tradition, and that ever since her seventeenth-century novel "realism in the novel of society has busied itself very largely with delineating illicit love in one form or another." Thompson's prejudice against women, his preoccupation with ancestry, and his moral squeamishness make his criticism repugnant reading, and his "history" of realism and romance is not so much an exploration of the past as a piece of propaganda in behalf of romance. Thompson, like Crawford, is to be associated with meretricious romance.

The most substantial defense of the romance was made by Robert Louis Stevenson. He, like other apologists for romance, tended to center his defense upon the reader rather than upon the work itself, thus minimizing the question of truth; the emotional involvement of the reader became the primary test of excellence. In "A Gossip on Romance," for example, Stevenson wrote:

In anything fit to be called by the name of reading, the process itself should be absorbing and voluptuous; we should gloat over a book, be rapt clean out of ourselves, and rise from the perusal, our mind filled with the busiest, kaleidoscopic dance of images, incapable of sleep or continuous thought.⁶⁷

⁶⁷Robert Louis Stevenson, "A Gossip on Romance," in Essays by Robert Louis Stevenson (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1918), p. 220.

It was the romance which could involve the reader as no other kind of literature could:

Fiction is to the grown man what play is to the child; it is there that he changes the atmosphere and tenor of his life; and when the game so chimes with his fancy that he can join in it with all his heart, when it pleases him with every turn, when he loves to recall it and dwells upon its recollection with entire delight, fiction is called romance.⁶⁸

⁶⁸Ibid., p. 231.

Conversely, Stevenson was lukewarm toward those novels which were primarily character studies, because he felt they could not involve the reader to the extent that romance did. "In character-studies the pleasure that we take is critical; we watch, we approve, we smile at incongruities,...but the characters are still themselves, they are not us."

In his essay written the following year (1883), titled "A Note on Realism," Stevenson said much less about the reader's involvement in a story, and more about the nature of romance as art. He also challenged the assumption that truth resided in realism, but not in romance. No one put the point so well as

Stevenson:

It is no especial cultus of nature and veracity, but a mere whim of veering fashion, that has made us turn our back upon the larger, more various, and more romantic art of yore. A photographic exactitude in dialogue is now the exclusive fashion; but even in the ablest hands it tells us no more--I think it even tells us less--than Moliere, wielding his artificial medium, has told to us and to all time of Alceste or Orgon, Dorine or Chrysale. The historical novel is forgotten. Yet truth to the conditions of man's nature and the conditions of man's life, the truth of literary art, is free of the ages. It may be told us in a carpet comedy, in a novel of adventure, or a fairy tale. The scene may be pitched in London, on the sea-coast of Bohemia, or away on the mountains of Beulah.⁶⁹

⁶⁹Robert Louis Stevenson, "A Note on Realism," in Essays by Robert Louis Stevenson, p. 248.

It was also in this essay that Stevenson put forth a first principle of fiction which permitted him to make a sensible defense of the romance. The principle was by no means new, but it is surprising how little those who favored romance made use of it during the late Victorian period. It was simply that fiction, which included the romance and even the novel, was not an imitation of life.

What fiction was had to be said metaphorically. Once Stevenson said it was like a proposition of geometry.

A proposition of geometry does not compete with life; and a proposition of geometry is a fair and luminous parallel for a work of art. Both

are reasonable, both untrue to the crude fact; both inhere in nature, neither represents it. The novel, which is a work of art, exists, not by its resemblances to life, which are forced and material, as a shoe must still consist of leather, but by its immeasurable difference from life, which is designed and significant, and is both the method and the meaning of the work.⁷⁰

⁷⁰Robert Louis Stevenson, "A Humble Remonstrance," Longman's Magazine, V (November, 1884), 142.

At another time Stevenson talked about the work of art as if it were the progeny of the artist.

A work of art is first cloudily conceived in the mind; during the period of gestation it stands more clearly forward from these swaddling mists, puts on expressive lineaments, and becomes at length that most faultless, but also, alas! that incommunicable product of the human mind, a perfected design.⁷¹

⁷¹Robert Louis Stevenson, "A Note on Realism," p. 249.

In Stevenson's view, then, the artist did not imitate nature, and observation, except in a general way, played no important part in the process of creation, for the work of art was "conceived from within outward." When the work of art was finished, it was not a close representation of nature, but rather "a simplification of some side or point of life."⁷² Steven-

⁷²Stevenson, "A Humble Remonstrance," p. 146.

son summed up the difference between life and art:
 "Life is monstrous, infinite, illogical, abrupt, and poignant; a work of art, in comparison, is neat, finite, self-contained, rational, flowing, and emasculate."⁷³

⁷³Stevenson, "A Humble Remonstrance," p. 141.

Since the novel was not a transcript of life, it was not to be judged on the basis of its verisimilitude, or put another way, since the novel was analogous to a "perfected design," an important criterion of its merit was form. Hence, in his advice to writers, Stevenson played down the importance of verisimilitude.

Let him /the writer/ not care particularly if he miss the tone of conversation, the pungent material detail of the day's manners, the reproduction of the atmosphere and environment. These elements are not essential: a novel may be excellent, and yet have none of them.⁷⁴

⁷⁴Ibid., p. 146.

On the other hand, Stevenson warned the writer that he must always have his eye upon the main design.

Such facts as, in regard to the main design, subserve a variety of purposes, he /the writer/ will perforce and eagerly retain. And it is the mark of the very highest order of creative art to be woven exclusively of such. There, any fact that is registered is contrived a double or a

treble debt to pay, and is at once an ornament in its place, and pillar in the main design. Nothing would find room in such a picture that did not serve, at once, to complete the composition, to accentuate the scheme of color, to distinguish the planes of distance, and to strike the note of the selected sentiment; nothing would be allowed in such a story that did not, at the same time, expedite the progress of the fable, build up the characters, and strike home the moral or the philosophical design.⁷⁵

⁷⁵Stevenson, "A Note on Realism," p. 251.

The usual question about the truth of a novel was not strictly relevant to Stevenson's system. Given his premise that the novel was not a representation of life, it followed that one could not appropriately ask of a novel, "Is it true to life?" The test of the novel was not truth to life but rather command of design.

From all its chapters, from all its pages, from all its sentences, the well-written novel echoes and re-echoes its one creative and controlling thought; to this must every incident and character contribute; the style must have been pitched in unison with this; and if there is anywhere a word that looks another way, the book would be stronger, clearer, and (I had almost said) fuller without it.⁷⁶

⁷⁶Stevenson, "A Humble Remonstrance," p. 141.

In Stevenson's thinking about the novel and the romance, the question of truth became a matter of log-

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ic or consistency within the work, and was thus subsumed under the matter of form.

Stevenson did not mean that attention to form should entail an emptiness of content, nor was he recommending what is commonly called "escape fiction."⁷⁷ His remarks on what he called the dramatic

⁷⁷Lettice Cooper, Robert Louis Stevenson (London: Home and Van Thal, 1947), p. 40, is mistaken in thinking of Stevenson's theory of fiction as merely a defense of the literature of escape. Edward Wagenknecht in Cavalcade of the English Novel (New York: Henry Holt, 1954), p. 374, effectively combats the idea that Stevenson wrote romance because he lacked the courage to deal with modern life in fiction.

novel, which "deals with the same stuff as the serious theatre, and appeals to our emotional nature and moral judgment," show that his conception of the novel was to be understood as escape fiction only if Shakespeare's dramas are to be so regarded. In the dramatic novel, Stevenson saw an alternative to the realistic novel of Howells, which he had criticized as devoid of emotion.

Howells typically avoided portraying impassioned characters; Stevenson said that in the dramatic novel the characters must be "transfigured and raised out of themselves by passion." Howells seldom constructed tense plots that moved toward a culminating situation; Stevenson believed that the plot of

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the dramatic novel had "to carry the audience from a lower to a higher pitch of interest and emotion."⁷⁸

⁷⁸Stevenson, "A Humble Remonstrance," p. 145.

James's novels alluded to strongly wrought emotion, but the dramatic novel as conceived by Stevenson was to show characters when they were strongly moved. In short, Stevenson's dissatisfaction with the realistic novel led him to explore the possibility of reanimating Shakesperian drama in novel form. More than any other British critic of the period favoring romantic literature, Stevenson recognized that the romance could be something more than popular entertainment.

Although the art for art's sake movement was sometimes linked to French realism by the critics of the period,⁷⁹ the theories of art held by the aes-

⁷⁹See Richard Burton, "The Healthful Tone for American Literature," *Forum*, XIX (April, 1895), 250. Burton calls the art-for-art's-sake doctrine a legacy of French naturalism, apparently on the ground that both movements severed art from ethics.

thetes resembled those of the romanticists. Both typically thought of art as being non-mimetic, both disliked art that dealt with social problems, and both tended to think that the contemporary scene did not provide the best material for art. Oscar Wilde, for example, took a position similar to the romanti-

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cists when he said that novels could be written that were so like life that nobody would believe them, that Charles Reade wrote one beautiful book (The Cloister and the Hearth) before wasting his talent on fiction that advocated prison and asylum reform, and that those who were resolved to use modern subject-matter mistook "the common livery of the age for the vesture of the Muses."⁸⁰

⁸⁰Oscar Wilde, "Decay of Lying: A Dialogue," Nineteenth Century, XXV (January, 1889), 42.

Although Wilde was a clever debater, his defense of non-realistic art was not so substantial as Stevenson's. Both Stevenson and Wilde started from a similar postulate about art, namely that art did not imitate nature. However, Wilde did not seem to see that if art did not try to imitate nature, it had no obligation to represent nature truthfully. Failing to see this point, he granted that art was a kind of lying. Having conceded this, he then berated writers, in a typical inversion of bourgeois morality, for not lying audaciously enough. He documented his point by calling Stevenson's The Black Arrow "so inartistic that it does not contain a single anachronism to boast of," and by saying that Rider Haggard, who had had "the makings of a perfectly

magnificent liar," now "feels called upon to verify the marvelous by footnote citations that document the tale as a personal experience." The unfortunate aspect of Wilde's approach was that he did nothing to combat the idea that art, especially non-realistic art, misrepresented the real world.

In addition, Wilde's recommendations were sometimes too ethereal. He felt that factual or realistic art was powerless to transform society, because realism merely gave people a transcript of what they were aware of already, but that a non-imitative art, regarding facts as subordinate or even discreditable, could transform life by altering people's perception of it.⁸¹ If no one attaches any import-

⁸¹Wilde, particularly in the early 1880's, was a social critic in the manner of Ruskin. Wilde thought that the moribund sculpture and drama of the time was a reflection of the commercial spirit in England, and he thought that no great civilization was possible until the people paid attention to beauty and thought of beauty as a necessity of human life. See the lectures which Wilde delivered in America in 1882 in The Complete Works of Oscar Wilde (New York: William H. Wise, 1927), Vol. XI.

ance to facts, said Wilde, "the very aspect of the world will change to our startled eyes."

The hippogriff will stand in our stalls, championing his gilded oats, and over our heads will float the blue bird singing of beautiful and impossible things, of things that are lovely and that never happen, of things that are not and that should be.⁸²

⁸²Wilde, "The Decay of Lying: A Dialogue," p. 54.

Such a plea was so airy that it probably encouraged the idea among late Victorian readers that romance was not to be taken seriously.

The Collapse of the Romance as an Independent Genre

Until the latter part of the nineteenth century the romance was customarily thought to constitute a separate genre, different in kind from the novel. As long as the romance remained an independent genre, writers who departed from ordinary reality had a ready-made defense for their "flights of fancy." However, as the romance lost its status as a separate genre, non-realistic writers were placed on the defensive and were forced to justify their fabrications.

The practice of regarding the novel and the romance as distinct types went back at least to the eighteenth century. In 1785 Clara Reeve had defined the romance as "an heroic fable, which treats of fabulous persons and things," and the novel as "a picture of real life and manners, and of the times in which it is written."⁸³ When Scott came to write his

⁸³Clara Reeve's discussion of the romance and the novel took place in chapter vii, volume I of The Progress of Romance (1785). My quotation comes from the reprint in Miriam Allott, Novelists on the Novel (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1959), p. 47.

"Essay on Romance" in 1824, he modified the distinction which Samuel Johnson had made between the romance and the novel in the eighteenth century. Whereas Johnson, according to Scott, had thought that the novel generally confined itself to the treatment of love, Scott made probability the criterion which distinguished between the two genres. Using the editorial we, Scott wrote:

We would be rather inclined to describe a Romance as "a fictitious narrative in prose or verse; the interest of which turns upon marvellous and uncommon incidents; thus being opposed to the kindred term Novel, which Johnson has described as a "smooth tale, generally of love"; but which we would rather define as "a fictitious narrative, differing from the Romance, because the events are accommodated to the ordinary train of human events, and the modern state of society."⁸⁴

⁸⁴Sir Walter Scott, "Essay on Romance," 1824, as reprinted in Allott, Novelists on the Novel, p. 49.

In America, William Gilmore Simms, concerned that readers might judge his romances by criteria appropriate only to novels, declared that the romance was the modern form of the epic and bore little resemblance to the novel. In his preface to The Yemassee in 1835, he said:

The reader who, reading Ivanhoe, keeps Richardson and Fielding beside him, will be at fault in every step of his progress. The domestic novel - of those writers, confined to the felicitous narration of common and daily occurring events, and

the grouping and delineation of characters in ordinary conditions of society, is altogether a different sort of composition; and if, in a strange doggedness, or simplicity of spirit, such a reader happens to pin his faith to such writers alone, circumscribing the boundless horizon of art to the domestic circle, the Romances of Maturin, Scott, Bulwer, and others of the present day, will be little better than rhapsodical and intolerable nonsense.⁸⁵

⁸⁵William Gilmore Simms, preface to The Yemassee (1835), as reprinted in American Literary Essays, ed. Lewis Leary (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell, 1960), p. 231.

As has been pointed out, Hawthorne, also in an effort to forestall critical misunderstanding of his work, maintained that the romance was different from the novel in his preface to The House of the Seven Gables (1851).

In view of this tradition, and in view of Howells' admiration for Hawthorne, it is not surprising that early in his career, Howells also distinguished between the novel and the romance, and believed that the criteria governing the novel were not strictly applicable to the romance. Taking this position when he reviewed Our Mutual Friend in 1865, Howells excused Dickens from the fidelity to character and events expected of the novelist. At that time Dickens seemed to Howells "the first of living romancers," and Thackeray seemed the foremost living nov-

elist.⁸⁶ Howells never completely abandoned the no-

⁸⁶Howells' review of Our Mutual Friend appeared in the Round Table, December 2, 1865. My quotation is taken from Charles Townsend Miller, "Howells' Theory of the Novel" (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, University of Chicago, 1947), p. 23.

tion that the romance and the novel were two kinds of fiction, shaped by different principles, and requiring different criteria of judgment.

The bent of Howells' criticism, however, was toward measuring all writers and works of prose fiction by realistic standards.⁸⁷ Although Howells con-

⁸⁷Louis J. Budd argues that a "close study of the entire body of his [Howells'] critical essays and reviews shows that he did not reject all fiction which departed from a circumstantial fidelity to life" in "W. D. Howells' Defense of the Romance," PMLA, LXVII (March, 1952), 32-42. Everett Carter agrees: "The fight of Howells, it can be clearly seen, was not a struggle against romance. He understood that there were several roads to literary truth, that one of the best, perhaps, he would occasionally admit, even the best, might be the road that led to the stars--the road of romance; he simply felt that it was his call, and the call of his age, to be earthbound, limited, humble." Howells and the Age of Realism (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott, 1950), p. 49. However, I think that these critics have exaggerated Howells' tolerance for romance.

sistently praised Hawthorne, he simultaneously felt that Hawthorne's romanticism did not constitute a viable approach to fiction in the new age. For example, in the "Editor's Study" of September, 1889, Howells wrote that romanticism "belonged to a dis-

appointed and bewildered age," and that any return to romanticism would be artificial. Howells did not highly value any living writer whom he classified as a romancer, and during the half dozen years that he wrote the "Editor's Study," he praised almost no romances except humanitarian ones such as Edward Bellamy's Looking Backward and satiric ones such as Mark Twain's A Connecticut Yankee at King Arthur's Court. Those writers who were vacillating between realism and romanticism--such as Miss Murfree and Mary Wilkins Freeman--Howells zealously urged toward realism. Writers such as Twain and James he typically prized for their realistic characteristics while overlooking the non-realistic aspects of their work.

One can also see how Howells' appetite for non-realistic fiction diminished by noting the trend of his reviewing. During his Atlantic years he wrote favorable reviews of A Terrible Temptation and Griffith Gaunt by Charles Reade, of the collaborative work titled Foul Play by Reade and Dion Boucicault, and of Hans Christian Andersen's Only a Fiddler;⁸⁸

⁸⁸Howells' review of Griffith Gaunt appeared in the Atlantic Monthly, XVIII (December, 1866), 767-69. His review of A Terrible Temptation was in the Atlantic Monthly, XXVIII (September, 1871), 383-84, and his review of Foul Play was in the Atlantic Monthly, XXII (August, 1868), 254-55. None of these reviews were signed but are identified as belonging to Howells by W. M. Gibson and George Arms, A Bibliography of William Dean Howells (New York, 1948). Howells' re-

view of Andersen's Only a Fiddler appeared in the Atlantic Monthly, XXVI (November, 1870), 632-34, and is also identified by Gibson and Arms.

but when he was writing the "Editor's Study," Howells was not well-disposed toward works of this nature. A dramatic change in Howells' orientation toward romance seems to have occurred early in 1873. In January, 1873, Howells reviewed M. Cherbuliez's Revenge of Joseph Noirel, and although he felt that nearly every point was "put with excess," still Cherbuliez impressed him at times "almost as a man of genius." Howells was willing to mitigate the excesses, because "the book is a romance, not a novel, and it would not be right to judge it by the strict rules of probability applicable to the novel."⁸⁹ A month later, when

⁸⁹Howells' review of Cherbuliez's La Revanche de Joseph Noirel was in the Atlantic Monthly, XXXI (January, 1873), 105. Also identified by Gibson and Arms.

Howells was reviewing Turgenev's Liza / A Nest of Gentlefolk⁷, he contrasted it with The Revenge of Joseph Noirel, saying that Cherbuliez's book "thrills you by its masterly management of the strangest facts and situations," but that reading Liza was like experiencing life itself.⁹⁰ Howells left no doubt about his

⁹⁰Howells' review of Liza appeared in the Atlantic Monthly, XXXI (February, 1873), 239-41. Identified by Gibson and Arms.

preference for Liza over The Revenge of Joseph Noirel, and at the same time, he revealed his inclination to judge all fiction according to its close resemblance to life.

Critics such as Andrew Lang were well aware that Howells and other realists no longer recognized romance as an independent genre, worthy of enlightened critical attention. In an article in the Contemporary Review, Lang, after admitting the merits of The Bostonians, A Modern Instance, and Crime and Punishment, said that "one only begins to object if it is asserted that this genre of fiction is the only permissible genre, that nothing else is of the nature of art."⁹¹ In this country, Ambrose Bierce attacked

⁹¹Andrew Lang, "Realism and Romance," Contemporary Review, LII (November, 1887), 687.

the critics for not recognizing that the romance constituted an independent genre. Bierce noted that Scott and Hugo were being denounced because they violated the probability which critics demanded of the novel, but in Bierce's mind such a charge was irrelevant, because Scott and Hugo wrote romance, "another and superior thing." Bierce concluded the point by declaring that "the singular inability to distinguish between the novel and the romance is one of criti-

cism's capital ineptitudes."⁹² Bierce was correct in

⁹²Ambrose Bierce, The Collected Works of Ambrose Bierce (New York: Neale Publishing Co., 1911), X, p. 237.

his assertion that few critics at the end of the century actually distinguished between the novel and the romance, and he was correct in assuming that the critics' failure to recognize the romance as a different kind of fiction worked to the disadvantage of romancers.⁹³

⁹³Dickens' reputation declined as romance lost its independent status. Whereas romantic critics had praised him for his originality or invention, realist critics deplored what they considered were his distortions and exaggerations. The vicissitudes of Dickens' reputation among English critics has been excellently charted by George H. Ford, Dickens and His Readers (New York: W. W. Norton, 1965). The decline of Dickens' reputation among realist critics is treated in chapter seven.

Howells and other realists abetted the breakdown of the romance as a separate but commensurate genre. However, some romanticists themselves sanctioned the downfall of the romance by failing to distinguish between it and popular fiction. F. Marion Crawford's defense of the romance as popular entertainment in The Novel: What it is, previously examined, provides an illustration. So does an article written in 1900 by Maurice Thompson, entitled "Breezy Books for Summer," in which he said:

What is better summer reading than 'Ivanhoe'? Who can help enjoying the loosely constructed, spacious, breezy romances of Dumas pere? Give me almost any leisurely tale of bygone days with the blue of romantic distance in it, a reasonable amount of heroism thrown in, some genuine love, a trifle of mystery, plenty of well set incidents and a triumphant ending; then a good shade, a brook bubbling near, birds lazily moving and piping, and a slow summer breeze palpitant in the foliage.⁹⁴

⁹⁴Maurice Thompson, "Breezy Books for Summer," Independent, LII (June 7, 1900), 1387.

That Thompson was thinking of these breezy books for summer as a genuine alternative to realism can be seen when he contrasts this "good, fresh and spirited romance" with the "ill-smelling wave of the Flaubert--Maupassant--Zola--Ibsen--Hardy--Tolstoi tide" of a few years back.

An article from the Critic similarly shows how far the conception of the romance in the 80's and 90's had moved from Hawthorne's deeper and more pessimistic idea at mid-century. The writer in the Critic objected to those plots, which in his view, were primarily accounts of the disintegration of the central character. As an alternative to realistic studies of deterioration, he recommended an azure optimism.

We will gladly follow the fortunes of our hero through whatever devious windings, provided we may see him at last basking in the sunshine of some sweet valley or glorious hill-top; but we do not feel paid when at the last we find him

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disfigured, discolored, and disintegrated. We are not over fond of tragedy, unless it be of that kind where virtue, fortitude and honor survive and are crowned, in lieu of the mere persons of the hero and heroine.⁹⁵

⁹⁵"The Plot of the New Novel," Critic, n. s. III (April 4, 1885), 157.

As early as 1882, a writer for the Saturday Review noted the tendency of the romance to become nothing more than popular entertainment. "When the romantic descended to the sensational," he wrote, "and Ouida and Miss Braddon became its high priestesses, little wonder that intelligent readers turned away in disgust."⁹⁶

⁹⁶"The Modern Novel," Saturday Review, LIV (November 11, 1882), 634.

From these articles one can see that during the late Victorian period, critics such as Howells were becoming more reluctant to recognize the romance as a distinct genre and judge it by its own criteria. One can also see how the late nineteenth century romanticists themselves contributed to the expulsion of genuine romance by confusing it with public amusement. By the end of the century, the romance could barely be said to constitute an independent genre; by that time there were realistic and romantic novels, but the latter could not claim the latitude which, by generic definition, had formerly belonged to the romance.

CHAPTER II

HOWELLS AND LITERATURE AS SCIENCE

The romanticist position, then, was vulnerable to the attacks brought against it in the name of science in the late Victorian period. The realists, on the other hand, met the threat to literature which science seemed to pose by beginning to think of themselves as scientists--particularly as social scientists or social psychologists--and of their novels as studies or as scientific pictures of life. They ceased to consider themselves artists or their novels as art in any traditional or conventional sense. Of the realists in England or America, Howells best illustrates this tendency to regard literature as science.

Invention and imagination had traditionally been regarded as the qualities which were most appropriate to the artist, even to the novelist; observation was thought to be the core of the method employed by scientists. Howells, disparaging invention and imagination, placed observation at the very center of the novelist's method. Unless the novelist depended heavily upon observation, he had little hope of

presenting truth. Howells' belief that truth was tightly bound to observation helps explain his complaints against the historical novel and his preference for novels which presented a close and faithful picture of contemporary life.

Howells' statement regarding Harold Frederic's fiction provides an example:

A fresh instance of the fatuity of the historical novel as far as the portrayal of character goes, is Mr. Harold Frederic's story, In the Valley.... The people affect us like persons of our generation made up for the parts; well trained, well costumed, but actors, and almost amateurs.... We make the freer to say these things of Mr. Frederic's historical romance because it gives us the occasion to do grateful homage to his novels of contemporary life.¹

¹William Dean Howells, "Editor's Study," Harper's Magazine, LXXXI (October, 1890), 800. Hereafter cited as ES.

Howells then went on to praise Seth's Brother's Wife and The Lawton Girl. On a previous occasion, he contrasted the historical novel with the novel which presented contemporary life. Reviewing the historical novel, Sigurd Slembe by the Norwegian writer, Bjornstjerne Bjornson, he began by noting a comment which the critic, Georg Brandes, had made:

The great Scandinavian critic Georg Brandes censures the author's /Bjornstjerne Bjornson's/ anachronism in attributing nineteenth-century motives to twelfth-century men, but this is a defect such as inheres in all historic fiction,

whether it feigns the past in paint or print. That is one of the reasons why we think historic fiction ought not to be; but if it must be, we would not have it impoverish itself in the vain endeavor to be strictly true to the past. The main truth in Sigurd Slembe is the truth at all times, and we can afford to let the temporary truth go if we cannot have the higher on any other terms....In the picture of contemporary life we can have both, if the author is wise enough to see and honest enough to tell both.²

²Howells, ES, LXXVIII (February, 1889), 491.

As can be seen, Howells did not rule out the possibility that truth to human nature could reside in historical fiction, but even truth to human nature seemed to be dependent upon the novelist's observation of and experience with the world about him. And since the past could not be observed directly by the novelist, it could never be portrayed accurately. Imagination, if it existed, was helpless to recover truth; observation, the method utilized by scientists, was the better means to truth.

Novelists, then, were to observe the facts of experience; they were not to spend much time studying the books of their predecessors. The novel was a record of the writer's observation rather than an artistic medium requiring a knowledge of convention or a mastery of technique. It was this conception of the novel which lay behind Howells' advice to South-

ern writers: "Do not go to Poe,...but go to life."³

³Howells, ES, LXXV (September, 1887), 641.

Reviewing T. S. Perry's History of Greek Literature, he said of the distinguished figures of Greece's golden age:

These poets, dramatists, orators, philosophers who disastrously became the means of artificializing all subsequent writers, were themselves perfectly natural persons, who had no models but the human life about them, and who wrought by the simplest and readiest means. Their models are indeed still accessible to every artist who will use them, and everyone who achieves anything in literature does use them; but it has hitherto been too largely the business of scholarship to persuade us that it is not life we should imitate, but the men who imitated life.⁴

⁴Howells, ES, LXXXII (April, 1891), 802.

In Howells' well-known contrast between the real and the ideal grasshopper, it was the scientist who looked at the grasshopper as it existed in nature, and who could therefore reproduce a real one. Literary men, content to take their grasshopper from books, consequently produced an "ideal" one, that is, an artificial and false one.⁵ Howells' comments on

⁵Howells, ES, LXXVI (December, 1887), 154.

Harold Frederic, on Bjornson, Poe, and on the Greeks illustrate his belief that novelists were not lite-

rary men in a traditional sense; rather they were scientific investigators who observed phenomena in an effort to attain truth.⁶

⁶The question of whether it was talent or genius that was responsible for a writer's greatness was closely related to the issue of whether the novelist was like an artist or a scientist. The realists, such as Howells, invariably took the position that the novelist was like a scientist who patiently observed and reported, and hence, they understood the novelist's achievement as talent developed through training and industry. Two of Howells' characteristic statements on the point are to be found in the "Editor's Study" for March, 1886, and in "Life and Literature," Harper's Weekly, May 11, 1895. Grant Allen, the Canadian essayist and novelist best known for his bold treatment of sex in The Woman Who Did, joined Howells in reducing genius to talent plus industry or opportunity. Allen's essay, entitled "Genius and Talent," appeared in the Fortnightly Review, L (August, 1888), 240-55. The romanticists, on the other hand, took the position that there was a mystery in the extraordinary accomplishments of some artists that could not be explained in terms of experience, environment, or industry. Lafcadio Hearn was one of the romanticists who attempted to answer Howells and Grant Allen. In the New Orleans Times-Democrat for April 24, 1887, he said that genius was the "capacity for doing what the vast majority of mankind cannot accomplish by any amount of pains." Hearn's essay is reprinted in his Essays on American Literature, ed. Sanki Ichikawa (Tokyo: Hokuseldo Press, 1929), pp. 241-42.

The observation which novelists were to practice was to be scientific in an additional sense: the novelist must be able, ultimately, to detach himself from that which he had observed or experienced. Scientists, novelists believed, got at truth by separating their personal feelings and wishes from the things

or phenomena they were observing, and as novelists approximated scientists, they too must separate self from the thing observed or experienced in order to show reality straight and without bias. Howells was critical of novelists who were not dispassionate and impartial. For example, he thought that Garland failed to disengage himself sufficiently from Rose of Dutcher's Coolly:

The scheme of it has apparently been so dear to the author, the lesson he has wished to convey so important, that he has somewhat sacrificed the free movement of his characters....They act from his hypnotic suggestion.⁷

⁷Howells, "Life and Letters," Harper's Weekly, XL (March 7, 1896), 223.

Similarly, Howells felt Charlotte Bronte too emotionally attached to her personage, Jane Eyre: "The character of Jane Eyre lacks that final projection from the author which is the supreme effect of art, only because she [Charlotte Bronte]⁷ feels it so intensely that she cannot detach it from herself."⁸

⁸Howells, Heroines of Fiction (New York: Harper & Bros., 1901), I, 227.

The Novel as Photography

Another indication that Howells regarded the

novel as science rather than art lies in the plenitude of photographic metaphors or analogies, often implied rather than stated, that pervade his discussions of the novel. For example, Howells, noting that Americans resented the pictures of themselves which Henry James had put in A London Life, said, "He could make himself much more acceptable to his generation if he would treat his negatives a little, and flatter away those hard edges in the process which we believe the photographers call vignetting."⁹

⁹Howells, ES, LXXIX (August, 1889), 478.

In like manner, Howells praised the truth of H. H. Boyesen's The Mammon of Unrighteousness by saying that those who were used to having their negatives "touched" would not find the book to their taste.¹⁰

¹⁰Howells, ES, LXXXIII (July, 1891), 318.

Conversely, Howells criticized the descriptions in Jeannette H. Walworth's Southern Silhouettes because "one feels that the negatives have been touched, and that is always to be regretted."¹¹ When he reviewed

¹¹Howells, ES, LXXVI (January, 1888), 321.

Charles Dudley Warner's A Little Journey in the World, he wrote:

Mr. Warner, who once had his misgivings about the

photographic school in fiction, and then deprecated the novel of purpose as a sort of social science tract, has ended by writing a social science tract illustrated with photographs.¹²

¹²Howells, ES, LXXX (February, 1890), 484.

However, one should not attach too much significance to these scattered metaphors linking the novel with photography. They have a casual quality which suggests that Howells was merely looking for a figure of speech, and the thrust at Warner obviously has a facetious air.

But nonetheless it is important to recognize that the implied analogy between photography and the novel does underlie, in a basic and general way, Howells' theory of the novel, for in his view the novel tended to be a photograph or a facsimile of life. When the photograph or facsimile is nearly perfect, it is almost indistinguishable from the thing itself. When the novel is a nearly perfect facsimile of life, it is, according to Howells, almost like life itself. Painting could not match photography in life-likeness; the romance and romanticism could not match realism in life-likeness. Not only was art giving way to science, but art was adopting the methods and goals of science.

What Howells looked for in a novel was a pho-

tograph, a reproduction, a facsimile of life--or if possible, life itself. It is true that Howells praised certain novels which other critics would not have considered "facsimiles of life," but what he praised in them was their life-likeness. Reviewing The Adventures of Tom Sawyer, for example, Howells wrote:

Mr. Clemens...has taken the boy of the Southwest for the hero of his new book, and has presented him with a fidelity to circumstance which loses no charm by being realistic in the highest degree, and which gives incomparably the best picture of life in that region as yet known to fiction.¹³

¹³/Howells7, "Recent Literature," Atlantic Monthly, XXXVII (May, 1876), 621.

Characteristically, Howells praised those writers whom he most admired for their ability to duplicate life so closely that their novels seemed to be life itself. Of Turgenev's Liza, Howells said, "It is life; nothing more, nothing less; and though life altogether foreign to our own, yet unmistakably real."¹⁴ In paying tribute to Hardy's fidelity to

¹⁴/Howells7, "Recent Literature," Atlantic Monthly, XXXI (February, 1873), 239.

life, Howells said that "his pictures of life are life itself."¹⁵ In Howells' opinion, Tolstoy was the nov-

¹⁵"Mr. Howells on Some Modern Novelists," Critic, XI (July 16, 1887), 32.

elist who could not be surpassed for showing "all things as they are." Speaking specifically of Anna Karenina, Howells said:

As you read on you say, not, "This is like life," but "This is life." It has not only the complexion, the very hue, of life, but its movement, its advances, its strange pauses, its seeming reversions to former conditions, and its perpetual change; its apparent isolations, its essential solidarity.¹⁶

¹⁶Howells, ES, LXXII (April, 1886), 809.

So intent was Howells on reproducing the thing itself in fiction that he recommended that novels duplicate the wayward and eccentric shape of life itself. Whereas the painter traditionally arranged his composition in order to produce or heighten an intended effect, Howells advocated a procedure the scientists used--that of taking the facts as they presented themselves. Although Howells had no high opinion of Goethe as a novelist, he spoke well of the German's practice of allowing characters to appear and disappear in his fiction just as people in real life do. Goethe's one contribution to the novel, according to Howells, was that he taught later novel-

ists that "it was false to good art--which is never anything but the reflection of life--to pursue and round the career of the persons introduced."¹⁷ Of

¹⁷Howells, ES, LXXIII (June, 1886), 154.

Cervantes' Don Quixote, Howells once wrote, "I exulted in the boundless freedom of the design; the open air of that immense scene, where adventure followed adventure with the natural sequence of life."¹⁸

¹⁸Howells, My Literary Passions (New York: Harper & Bros., 1895), p. 22.

Writing in the "Editor's Easy Chair," Howells remarked on the relationship between life and form:

The greatest achievement of fiction, its highest use, is to present a picture of life; and the deeper the sense of something desultory, unfinished, imperfect, it can give, even in the region of conduct, the more admirable it seems. It is in imparting this sense that Russian literary art surpasses all other literary art; precision, definition, roundedness is the defect of faltering art, the throe of weakness, not the issue of strength.¹⁹

¹⁹Howells, "Editor's Easy Chair," Harper's Magazine, CV (November, 1902), 966.

Writing about the later fiction of Henry James, he went even further than usual in equating the form of the novel with life itself:

In the scribbles which we suppose to be imitations

of life, we hold the unhappy author to a logical consistency which we find so rarely in the original; but ought not we rather to praise him where his work confesses itself, as life confesses itself, without a plan? Why should we demand more of the imitator than we get from the creator?²⁰

²⁰Howells, "Mr. Henry James's Later Work," North American Review, CLXXVI (January, 1903), 135.

On the other hand, fiction whose form departed too far from the loose pattern of life was subject to Howells' disapproval, for it violated his belief that a novel should be a facsimile of existence. In this context Howells wrote of Zola, "the imperfection of his realism began with the perfection of his form," and went on to talk about two kinds of form, the symmetrical and the unsymmetrical, the first illustrated by the temple, the second by a tree. Howells faulted Zola for shaping his fiction like a temple, because "life is no more symmetrical than a tree, and the effort of art to give it balance and proportion is to make it as false in effect as a tree clipped and trained to a certain shape."²¹ In these remarks, one

²¹Howells, "Emile Zola," North American Review, CLXXV (November, 1902), 589.

can readily observe the direction of Howells' theorizing about the novel. He was pushing the novel away from art, where the artist was expected to arrange his

materials,²² and toward science, particularly social

²²Oscar Firkins wrote the following concise summary of Howells' view that art ought to take its form from life:

Whatever were the exceptions in his own judgment or practice, Mr. Howells seemed latterly drifting toward a conception of art which should exclude all form except the form preexistent in the matter. His metres aspire to freedom; his style undergoes a form of deliquescence; he praises authors who escape from their first intention; he approves the sauntering essay; he reports with a sympathy that barely stops short of indorsement Mark Twain's adoption in literature of the inconsecutiveness of life; he believes that the American drama will be "more and more a series of sketches, of anecdotes, of suggestions"; he visits irrelevancy and episode with that faint blame that blesses almost as effectually as faint praise damns; he suggests the ultimate displacement of fiction by transcripts of actual reality.

William Dean Howells: A Study (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1924), p. 280.

science, where the investigator was expected to work with phenomena as nature presented them.

The bent of Howells' realistic theory toward science can also be observed in his attitude toward technique and style. Just as science regards technique and style as alien concepts because they denote the shaping and expression of material according to an individual's perception and sensitivity, so Howells was also wary of them. He tended to think of technique as literary charlatanry which kept life-as-it-was from getting into books, and conversely, that writers who were unsophisticated about technique or paid no attention to it, got the most life and truth

into their books. For example, he valued the style of a book written by one Carl Lumholtz about his experiences among the cannibals of Australia, because it was "to the last degree simple and informal."

Howells' association of this kind of style with science was explicit: "He [Mr. Lumholtz] has been content to give his adventures and record his discoveries with the accurate drawing and faithful coloring of a scientific illustration; they have in this way a value that they could have won in no other."²³ For a

²³Howells, ES, LXXX (May, 1890), 966.

similar reason Howells commended the style of the Autobiography of Mark Rutherford and Mark Rutherford's Deliverance: "There never were books in which apparently the writer has cared so little to make literary account of himself, cared so little to shine, to impress, wished so much to speak his heart plain-out to the heart of his reader."²⁴

²⁴Howells, ES, LXXII (February, 1886), 485.

Howells' approval of a "scientific" style was also apparent in his reviews of Grant's Personal Memoirs. Of the first volume, Howells said it was "a great piece of literature, because great literature is nothing more nor less than the clear expression of

minds that have something great in them," and of the second volume, he wrote:

The author's one end and aim is to get the facts out in words. He does not cast about for phrases, but takes the word, whatever it is, that will best give his meaning....There is not a moment wasted in preening and prettifying, after the fashion of literary men; there is no thought of style, and so the style is good as it is in the Book of Chronicles.²⁵

²⁵Howells reviewed the first volume of Grant's Memoirs in ES, LXXII (March, 1886), 649, and the second in ES, LXXIII (August, 1886), 476.

After reviewing the second volume of the Memoirs, Howells turned to Lieutenant Greely's Three Years of Arctic Service and found there the "straight-forward arrival and midday clearness" which he found in Grant's prose. Both writers, said Howells, were interested in "the presentation of the facts without regard to the effects. In this way their work has the advantage over literary writing that scientific writing must always have: they are both possessed of their subject rather than possessed of their manner."²⁶

²⁶Howells, ES, LXXIII (August, 1886), 476.

In such comments one can see Howells' tendency to think of literature as science,²⁷ where style in any

²⁷Howells' attitude toward dialect in the novel was consistent with his view of fiction as a kind of

photography or scientific record. He wanted dialect in literature that accurately reflected the way people actually talked. Romanticists such as F. Marion Crawford and Maurice Thompson opposed dialect, because it seemed to them to conflict with literature's universal and timeless qualities.

aesthetic sense is to be considered either superfluous or astigmatic.

Literature as a Scientific Study of Society

Howells subordinated story or plot, traditionally considered indispensable to an intense literary experience, to more scientific concerns--the study of character or of society. Howells had several objections to novels which had too much "story" in them, one of his frequent objections being that emphasis upon plot prevented serious study of character. His contrast of The Autobiography of Mark Rutherford and Balzac's Le Pere Goriot is illuminating, because it shows the dichotomy which Howells believed to exist between a character study and plot, and his overwhelming preference for the former. Of Le Pere Goriot, Howells said that "the author fills the scene with figures jerked about by the exaggerated passions and motives of the stage," and "such a plot had no business to be; and while actions so unnatural are imagined, no mastery can save fiction from contempt with those who really think about it."²⁸ On the

²⁸Howells, ES, LXXII (January, 1886), 325.

other hand, Howells paid tribute to The Autobiography Of Mark Rutherford: "There is no 'incident' in the story; there is neither more 'plot' nor less than there is in the experience of God's creatures generally," and he went on to equate the lack of incident with the portrayal of "the inner life" of men and women.²⁹ On another occasion Howells even more point-

²⁹Howells, ES, LXXII (February, 1886), 485-86.

edly expressed his view that the novel ought to be primarily a study of character. While manifesting his admiration for Turgenev's Dimitri Roudine, Howells noted that it was

mainly the study of one man's character, but a character so complex that there is little to ask of the author in the way of a story. In fact, Dimitri Roudine is himself sufficient plot.³⁰

³⁰Howells, "Recent Literature," Atlantic Monthly, XXXII (September, 1873), 369.

According to Howells, Henry James also thought of the novel as "an analytic study rather than a story."³¹ When reviewing James's The Tragic Muse,

³¹Howells, "Henry James, Jr.," Century, XXV (November, 1882), 28.

Howells went as far as anyone could in accepting the novel as a study of character almost completely severed from story or plot. He said that

the fatuity of the story as a story is something that must early impress the story-teller who does not live in the stone age of fiction and criticism....To such a mind as his [James's] the story could never have value except as a means; it could not exist for him as an end; it could be used only illustratively; it could be the frame, not possibly the picture.³²

³²Howells, ES, LXXXI (September, 1890), 639-40.

Howells' remarks on objectivity further illustrate the point that he was inclined to think of literature as science. To Howells, objectivity meant reporting reality accurately and without bias, as a scientist did. Subjectivity, regarded by the early nineteenth century Romanticists as the heart of the artistic approach to the world, Howells considered a liability; as far as he was concerned, subjectivity, particularly when accompanied by intense feeling, falsified reality.³³

³³One might also note that Howells approached the relationship between character and action in a way that was essentially scientific. Science in the late nineteenth century "explained" an event by placing it in a system of relationships; basically, science thought of an event as an effect of one or more causes. Howells followed suit when he made event or action the result of character. By viewing action as that which was determined by character, Howells placed it within a closed system of cause and effect which

made it "understandable." Thomas Hardy broke up this system when he placed event in a more eccentric relationship to character than Howells had; in Hardy's novels, event is reintroduced as a "mystery"--as fate, coincidence, or chance.

In the novel, then, which Howells so often considered as a scientific study or picture of life, the personality of the author must be suppressed. In fact, Howells set up a ratio: the degree to which the author was present was inversely proportional to the amount of pure or unadulterated reality which could get into the book. In the 1870's Howells extolled Turgenev because the Russian novelist did not falsify the picture with his own presence; reviewing Liza, he said of its characters: "He pets none of them; he upbraids none; you like them or hate them for what they are."³⁴ On the other hand, Howells censured Balzac's

³⁴Howells, "Recent Literature," Atlantic Monthly, XXXI (February, 1873), 239.

intrusion of himself in Cesar Birotteau: "He permitted himself to 'sympathize' with certain of his people, and to point out others for the abhorrence of his readers."³⁵ To some extent, then, Howells' devotion

³⁵Howells, ES, LXXIII (June, 1886), 157.

to the principle of objectivity stemmed from his desire to view mankind as a scientist. Zola had writ-

ten that the naturalist novel was impersonal: "The novelist is only a stenographer who forbids himself to judge or to draw conclusions." Zola also said that if the novelist intervened, then the material was mixed up with the emotion of the author and was no longer trustworthy.³⁶ The fact that Howells had

³⁶Emile Zola, "Naturalism in the Theatre," as reprinted in George J. Becker, Documents of Modern Literary Realism (Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1963), p. 208.

once spoken of the novelist as a "colorless medium" who let his material pass directly to the reader suggests that his view of objectivity was similar to Zola's.

Objectivity in the novel has been so associated with realism that one is caught off guard when he reads F. Marion Crawford's defense of romanticism in "The Novel: What it is," and finds Crawford recommending objectivity. In his view the novel was similar to the play. "A novel is, after all, a play, and perhaps it is nothing but a substitute for the real play with live characters, scene-shifting, and footlights."³⁷ He judged the purpose-novel to be an infer-

³⁷F. Marion Crawford, The Novel: What it is (New York: Macmillan, 1893), p. 27.

ior kind of novel partly because it contained the

author's views on a social problem and was therefore unlike straight drama. "A novel is excellent according to the degree in which it produces the illusion of a good play,"³⁸ wrote Crawford, and it was appar-

³⁸Crawford, The Novel: What it is, p. 50.

ent that he felt that the novelist, like the dramatist, should remain hidden behind the work. Although realistic technique has been said to have its "foundation stone in the tenet of objectivity,"³⁹ some-

³⁹Becker, Documents of Modern Literary Realism, p. 28.

times romanticists also advocated objectivity. They wanted the illusion that characters and events were being directly portrayed; they disliked an author's coming between the story and the reader, especially to analyze the emotions of characters.⁴⁰ However,

⁴⁰Occasionally, critics who were against the realism of Howells and James said it was too subjective. H. D. Traill, for example, thought that Howells and James thrust themselves between the action and the reader by their frequent analyses of character. They were like a chorus on stage for longer periods of time than the actors themselves. Traill's view is in "The Novel of Manners," Nineteenth Century, XVIII (October, 1885), 564. Hamilton Wright Mabie also thought Howells' realism subjective because it focused on inner psychological states. He liked the art of Homer, Dante, Shakespeare, and Goethe because they portrayed life in action rather than in thought or motive. "They are very largely objective; they portray events, conditions, and deeds which have passed beyond the stage of thought and have involved the

thinker in the actual historical world of vital relationships and dramatic sequence." Mabie's preference for the objectivity of earlier writers is in his Books and Culture (Nashville, Tenn.: Bigham & Smith, 1896), p. 240.

romanticists and realists recommended objectivity for different reasons. In general, romanticists such as Crawford defended it as an artistic strategy. The realist Howells defended it as a scientific mode of perceiving reality.

Just as the proper pursuit of science was truth, so truth became, in Howells' thinking, the primary aim of the novel. Romanticists, on the other hand, associating the novel with the more traditional aims of art, saw fiction as an addition to the sum of pleasure rather than to the sum of knowledge.⁴¹ They were likely to believe that the nov-

⁴¹Agnes Repplier in Points of View (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin, 1893), p. 140, described pleasure as the goal of art, knowledge as the goal of science.

el ought to be judged according to its ability to stir the emotions, whereas Howells valued a novel according to its appeal to the reader's understanding or intellect. Thus Pierre Loti, the French author of the exotic Pêcheur d'Islande (1886), thought that a reader ought to judge a work spontaneously, by the intensity of the emotion it provoked,⁴² while How-

⁴²Pierre Loti, "The Literature of the Future," Forum, XIV (October, 1892), 181.

ells, on the other hand, typically praised those novels and novelists who helped the reader "to a clearer vision of life."⁴³ Instead of believing that a novel

⁴³Howells, ES, LXXVIII (May, 1889), 984.

ought to enthrall us, as Robert Louis Stevenson once wrote,⁴⁴ Howells implied that fiction's purpose was

⁴⁴Robert Louis Stevenson, Essays (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1918), p. 220.

to make us perceive and reflect.⁴⁵ When Howells re-

⁴⁵Howells, ES, LXXXI (September, 1890), 640.

viewed H. H. Boyesen's The Mammon of Unrighteousness, he acclaimed its realism, saying that "the rudest endeavor at verity is better than the most finished pretence that there is something better than verity."⁴⁶

⁴⁶Howells, ES, LXXXIII (July, 1891), 317.

He once speculated that future readers would learn of American life near the end of the nineteenth century from the realistic novels of the period,⁴⁷ and he

⁴⁷Howells, ES, LXXIII (November, 1886), 964.

said that the stories of Miss Constance Fenimore Woolson were necessary "to anyone who would understand the whole meaning of Americanism."⁴⁸ He wrote

⁴⁸Howells, ES, LXXIV (February, 1887), 482.

that Zola's La Terre was a book "not to be avoided by the student of civilization, but rather to be sought and seriously considered."⁴⁹ He equated the realistic

⁴⁹Howells, ES, LXXVI (March, 1888), 641-42.

school with the intellectual school on at least one occasion,⁵⁰ and on another suggested that the crucial

⁵⁰Howells, ES, LXXX (March, 1890), 643.

responsibility of the novel was to help the reader understand human nature and the contemporary social structure.⁵¹ In these characteristic statements,

⁵¹Howells, ES, LXXIV (April, 1887), 825.

Howells was assuming that fiction had the same objectives that non-fiction had--that is, fiction was to appeal to the intellect rather than to the emotions, to be a truthful report rather than an aesthetic construction, and to increase knowledge and understanding rather than provide pleasure alone.

Howells' concept of the novel was further re-

lated to science rather than to the traditional view of fiction in that he thought the novel ultimately concerned with action rather than contemplation. In his "Editor's Study" for December, 1888, Howells tied realism closely to literature of social protest. After making the general statement that "the old heathenish axiom of art for art's sake is as dead as great Pan himself, and the best art now tends to be art for humanity's sake," Howells spoke about the responsibility of literature to meliorate the condition of the impoverished, concluding that "art...is beginning to find out that if it does not make friends with Need it must perish."⁵² When he reviewed Tol-

⁵²Howells, ES, LXXVIII (December, 1888), 159.

stoy's Power of Darkness, Howells stressed literature's relationship to human improvement in an astonishing way: he said that we "should feel more hopeful of the good to be done among the muzhiks by the play if we felt sure that they would recognize it as a true picture."⁵³ Howells also felt that realism reflected a

⁵³Howells, ES, LXXVI (March, 1888), 642.

democratic society while simultaneously helping to bring about its perfection; romance, on the other hand, was not only a reflection of an aristocratic

society, but also a deterrent to its replacement.⁵⁴

⁵⁴Howells, ES, LXXVII (July, 1888), 314-18.

In Howells' view, one of the functions of realism was to spread and improve democracy, both as a political arrangement and as a social ideal. Howells made his most eloquent statement on literature as a way to a better world in his "Editor's Study" for September, 1889.

Romanticism belonged to a disappointed and bewildered age, which turned its face from the future, and dreamed out a faery realm in the past; and we cannot have its spirit back because this is the age of hopeful striving, when we have really a glimpse of what the earth may be when Christianity becomes a life in the equality and fraternity of the race, and when the recognition of all the facts in the honest daylight about us is the service which humanity demands of the humanities, in order that what is crooked may be made straight, and that what is wrong may be set right. The humanities are working through realism to this end, not consciously, for that is not the way of art, but instinctively.⁵⁵

⁵⁵Howells, ES, LXXIX (September, 1889), 641.

Howells thought of literature, then, less as an aesthetic object than as a means to the betterment of the human condition. Literature, like science, was to be an ameliorative instrument.

The Novelist as Social Scientist
Rather Than Journalist

Although Howells considered it reprehensible for novelists to report what they thought they ought to have seen rather than what they actually did see, he did not believe that they should report everything they saw.⁵⁶ Critics in the 1920's and 1930's,

⁵⁶Howells, ES, LXXXIII (July, 1891), 317.

epitomized by H. L. Mencken and C. Hartley Grattan, castigated Howells for not writing truthfully about the relationship between the sexes or about the seamy side of America generally, saying that he did not live up to the demands of his realist creed. What these critics overlooked is that Howells' theory of realism committed him to write about the norm of human, especially of American, experience. Although his theories may have been rationalizations of his psychological neuroses,⁵⁷ one should realize that

⁵⁷In "The Neuroticism of William Dean Howells," PMLA, LXI (March, 1946), 229-38, Edwin H. Cady has documented the theory that "Howells never truly faced the violent and sordid facets of reality," because the sexual neuroses which he had acquired in childhood prevented him.

Howells was not departing from his articulated theory when he refused to write about the darker and more irregular areas of human experience. In other words,

the novelist, in Howells' view, was not a journalist who reported the particular events which he witnessed regardless of their typicality; the novelist was more like a social scientist whose task was to concern himself with behavior which illustrated general truths, and with characters and institutions which reflected the operation of general laws in a society.

Howells' advice to American novelists, so often quoted against him by twentieth century critics, "to concern themselves with the more smiling aspects of life which are the more American," is an illustration of this point that the novelist was a kind of social scientist who attempted to generalize the nation. Just prior to his advice about "the smiling aspects of life," Howells had been reviewing Dostoevsky's Crime and Punishment, and although he admired the book, he said:

It is one of the reflections suggested by Dostoevsky's book that whoever struck a note so profoundly tragic in American fiction would do a false and mistaken thing--as false and as mistaken in its way as dealing in American fiction with certain nudities which the Latin peoples seem to find edifying.⁵⁸

⁵⁸Howells, ES, LXXIII (September, 1886), 641.

Similarly, when he defended the Anglo-Saxon novel against the charge that it was prudish, he did so on

the grounds that the writer was concerned with representativeness. According to Howells, the Anglo-Saxon novel might exonerate itself by claiming that

it was all the more faithfully representative of the tone of modern life in dealing with love that was chaste, and with passion so honest that it could be openly spoken of before the tenderest bud at dinner. It might say that the guilty intrigue, the betrayal, the extreme flirtation even, was the exceptional thing in life, and unless the scheme of the story necessarily involved it, that it would be bad art to lug it in, and as bad taste as to introduce such topics in a mixed company.⁵⁹

⁵⁹Howells, ES, LXXIX (June, 1889), 151.

Near the end of the nineteenth century Howells noted that the New Woman was appearing in fiction, and he thought that she was more conspicuous in fiction than in life. He observed that in some recent English novels she had been shown smoking, and smoking a great deal. Howells said that there was no moral issue involved, that "the question is whether English girls do smoke, or do not smoke in real life." Howells' answer to this question was clearly implied when he reported that he himself had seen only two women smoking in society.⁶⁰

⁶⁰Howells, "Life and Letters," Harper's Weekly, XXXIX (May 4, 1895), 417.

Howells' tendency to regard the novelist as a social scientist removed the uncommon and the exceptional from the province of literature. In Howells' view, the novelist, like the social scientist, studied representative phenomena; fiction dealt with the commonplace. For this reason Howells was critical of including events in fiction which were uncommon in life. Although he reviewed Hardy's Mayor of Casterbridge favorably, he wrote that he wished the event which started the action--Henchard's sale of his wife--would have been one that fell more commonly within the range of human experience.⁶¹ Similarly,

⁶¹Howells, ES, LXXIII (November, 1886), 961.

when he reviewed Miss Murfree's In The Clouds, Howells suggested that Alethea's insanity after the death of the hero was not as typical as it might be. He said that "young girls involved in such tragical coils do sometimes really go mad, though more commonly they marry after a time, and bring up families of children."⁶²

⁶²Howells, ES, LXXIV (April, 1887), 827.

Characters as well as the events of fiction were to be ordinary and representative. Howells objected to the portrayal of "heroes," because they were merely

fabrications of literature and old-fashioned history. Reviewing J. K. Hosmer's Life of Young Sir Henry Vane, he wrote: "The important fact is that he [Hosmer] shows Vane in his defects as well as his virtues, and does not try to make him appear one of those monsters of perfection which history as well as fiction has so long foisted upon us."⁶³ Howells thought that "sci-

⁶³Howells, ES, LXXVIII (March, 1889), 659.

entific" studies disproved the existence of "heroes," showing them to be essentially ordinary men. Hence, he spoke of Grant and Lincoln on one occasion as "the fulfilment of the average potentiality,"⁶⁴ and of

⁶⁴Howells, ES, LXXVII (July, 1888), 318.

Lincoln on another: "Lincoln was so like all other men, was so essentially human, that if any honest man conceives clearly of himself he cannot altogether misconceive Lincoln."⁶⁵ He liked the way that Henry

⁶⁵Howells, ES, LXXXII (February, 1891), 481.

Cabot Lodge's biography of Washington toned down the "Weems conception of Washington as saint and hero," and added, "There is a large and growing minority who find comfort and profit in imagining him [Washington] a man of like material if not like make with them-

selves."⁶⁶ In sum, Howells thought that heroes were

⁶⁶Howells, ES, LXXIX (October, 1889), 800.

imaginary beings, reflecting the time when literature was conceived of as make-believe, but that they, like demons and goblins, had no place in the literature of truthful reporting. Real people, even those who seemed to stand out, were all made of the same substance, and were more alike than different.

Criticism as Science

In his essays Zola contended that both the novel and literary criticism were becoming more scientific; he believed that there was no longer a wide separation between the artist and the critic. Both tended to rely upon observation and analysis rather than upon imagination, both worked from profuse notes, and both thought that individual action had to be understood in the wider context of environment. "When M. Taine studies Balzac," wrote Zola, "he does exactly what Balzac himself did when he studied, for example, the character of Pere Grandet."⁶⁷ Although

⁶⁷Emile Zola, The Experimental Novel and Other Essays, trans. Belle M. Sherman (New York: Cassell Publishing, 1893), p. 226.

Zola felt that criticism had been unscientific until about the middle of the nineteenth century, consist-

ing merely of the personal reactions of critics, by 1875 he was convinced that criticism had become a science--a body of systematized knowledge, compiled from observation and classification. Among contemporary critics, Zola nominated Taine as the foremost practitioner of the new scientific criticism, saying that "he reduced to rules the method which Sainte-Beuve employed as a virtuoso." Zola and Taine, among others, considered criticism an objective branch of study, more concerned with general principles than subjective evaluations.

Howells agreed with Zola that novelists and critics were no longer artistic virtuosos, but were, rather, emerging scientists. In 1887 Howells said of the critic, "It is really his business to classify and analyze the fruits of the human mind as the naturalist classifies the objects of his study, rather than to praise or blame them."⁶⁸ Howells berated

⁶⁸Howells, ES, LXXV (June, 1887), 156.

the English kind of unscientific criticism, writing that "it would be a pity to continue in that old personal, arrogant, egotistical tradition." Howells frequently complained that the older, unscientific criticism had been harmful:

Criticism has condemned whatever was, from time to time, fresh and vital in literature; it has

always fought the new good thing in behalf of the good old thing; it has invariably fostered and encouraged the tame, the trite, the negative.⁶⁹

⁶⁹Howells, ES, LXXXI (August, 1890), 476.

T. S. Perry was the American critic who, in Howells' mind, was bringing the scientific spirit into criticism. When he reviewed Perry's English Literature in the Eighteenth Century (1890), Howells said that it was a work

which in learning, insight, and a breadth and depth of critical science is of a sort simply impossible to the crude conceptions of earlier criticism--as far beyond that as antiseptic surgery is beyond the old methods.⁷⁰

⁷⁰Howells, ES, LXXX (March, 1890), 647.

Earlier, in 1886, Howells said that Perry represented "a new voice, a new temper" in literary criticism.⁷¹

⁷¹Howells, ES, LXXIV (December, 1886), 162.

Although both Howells and Taine advocated scientific criticism, Howells did not highly esteem the Frenchman's work. He questioned both Taine's judgments and his theory that the work of art was a product of an author's race, time, and place. When Howells was on the staff of the Atlantic Monthly, he

wrote reviews of Taine's books as they were translated into English. In 1868 he was complimentary of Taine's historical studies and travel sketches of Italy,⁷² but he was not favorably impressed with Art in

⁷²/Howells7, "Recent Literature," Atlantic Monthly, XXII (July, 1868), 124-26.

the Netherlands, writing that there was "no great original value" in Taine's historical view of the subject, and that his "considerations of race were" not new nor striking."⁷³ Howells advised the reader

⁷³/Howells7, "Recent Literature," Atlantic Monthly, XXVII (March, 1871), 396.

to be cautious, for "M. Taine does not fail to indulge his love of generalization." When Howells reviewed Taine's Notes on England, he reintroduced the idea that Taine could not be fully trusted. "You feel that Taine is looking at England through a colored glass, which imparts a fantastic and erroneous hue to all he sees."⁷⁴ Taine captured and re-

⁷⁴/Howells7, "Recent Literature," Atlantic Monthly, XXX (August, 1872), 240.

ported accurately only the physical aspects of English life. When Howells discussed Taine's History of English Literature, he again cautioned the reader that "that ingenious gentleman" had made capacious

errors in his interpretation and evaluation of Dickens and Thackeray. In this review Howells explicitly criticized Taine's method:

The reader will do well to guard himself against the author's too inflexible and exclusive application of his theory. Stated in rather an extreme form, it is this: given the time and climate of a people, their art can be accurately deduced therefrom, without reference to their artistic productions--just as Agassiz can sketch you off a portrait of our affectionate forefathers the ichthyosaurus or the pterodactyl, after glancing at their fossilized foot-tracks. M. Taine's method does not take into sufficient account the element of individuality in the artist.⁷⁵

⁷⁵Howells7, "Recent Literature," Atlantic Monthly, XXIX (February, 1872), 241.

When one couples these tepid remarks with the fact that there is no record of Howells' having discussed Taine's criticism or his method after 1872, one conjectures that Howells did not believe that his own approach to criticism was indebted to Taine's or even that his own approach resembled Taine's. And yet, Howells frequently interpreted and evaluated a particular book by relating it, as Taine believed it should be, to an author's time, place, or race.⁷⁶ Of

⁷⁶Taine's most succinct statement of his critical method appeared as the introduction to his History of English Literature (1865), trans. H. Van Laun (New York: Holt & Williams, 1871). Harry Hayden Clark, in his foreward to Clarence A. Brown's The Achievement of American Criticism (New York: Ronald Press, 1954), says that the historical critic tries to explain how

a given book came into being. He can do this in one of three ways: by exploring the author's life, by exploring the author's intention, or by focusing upon the author's time, place, or race. When he emphasizes the latter method, he is following the critical approach of Taine.

these three factors, the time when the work was written was that which Howells considered the most important. For example, after discussing Balzac's faults as a novelist, Howells wrote: "This is not so bad in him as it would be in a novelist of our day. It is simply primitive and inevitable, and he is not to be judged by it."⁷⁷ Similarly, Howells said that Scott

⁷⁷Howells, ES, LXXIII (June, 1886), 157.

was tiresomely descriptive, that his characters seldom talked as real men and women talked, and that he was analytical where the modern novelist is dramatic, but he tempered these judgments by relating them to Scott's era. "The generation which he wrote for was duller than this," said Howells, "and he is not to blame as if he were one of our contemporaries."⁷⁸

⁷⁸Howells, ES, LXXVIII (May, 1889), 983.

Even the romantic movement was to be understood as a natural and appropriate outgrowth of an earlier era:

Romanticism was the expression of a world mood; it was not merely literary and voluntary; it grew naturally out of the political, social, and even economical conditions at the close of the eight-

eenth century. It was a development of civilization, and not simply a revulsion from the classicistic literary fashions which it replaced, or it could not have gone so deep in the lives of men ⁷⁹ as it did. In its day it was noble and beautiful.

⁷⁹Howells, ES, LXXIX (September, 1889), 641.

Sometimes Howells understood literature as the product of a race or milieu, or a combination of the two. Thus, he thought that a "Latin frankness" permeated Spanish fiction, accounting for the boldness of such novels as Valdes' Maximina, ⁸⁰ he associated

⁸⁰Howells, ES, LXXVI (January, 1888), 320.

England's romantic literature with its aristocratic social structure, ⁸¹ he believed that the American

⁸¹Howells, ES, LXXV (October, 1887), 803; Howells, ES, LXXVIII (May, 1889), 984.

democratic ideal fostered a realism which focused upon the common man and common virtues, ⁸² he said that

⁸²Howells, ES, LXXXIV (January, 1892), 320.

French literature would become more decent only when French life changed, ⁸³ and he regarded American humor

⁸³Howells, ES, LXXIX (September, 1889), 641.

as a manifestation of the extravagant American spirit.⁸⁴ In these examples, one sees Howells' belief,

⁸⁴Howells, ES, LXXVIII (February, 1889), 492.

reminiscent of Taine, that "literature...is a plant which springs from the nature of a people."⁸⁵

⁸⁵Howells, ES, LXXXI (August, 1890), 480.

Although Howells was apparently neither strongly nor directly influenced by Taine's scientifically-oriented critical theory, Howells, like the French critic, thought that an author or a work could be interpreted and evaluated only when placed against the larger background of society. While non-scientific critics, such as Oscar Wilde, tended to regard an artist as an isolated instance of genius, scientific critics treated the artist as the result of forces which issued from a particular people, in a particular place and time.⁸⁶ Howells did not realize it,

⁸⁶In "Decay of Lying: A Dialogue," *Nineteenth Century*, XXV (January, 1889), 55, Oscar Wilde expressed his opposition to Taine by saying that "to pass from the art of a time to the time itself is the great fallacy of all historians." Another critic who was against the attempt to apply scientific methodology to literary criticism was James Lane Allen. He wrote a cogent criticism of Howells' method entitled "Caterpillar Critics," in the *Forum*, IV (November, 1887), 332-41.

but his critical stance was similar to Taine's because

both were attempting to make criticism a scientific discipline.

CHAPTER III

HOWELLS AND HIS CRITICS

Literary historians have generally written that Howells' realism met two radically different kinds of opposition: one, concentrated in the eighties and coming from the genteel critics; the other, beginning in the nineties and coming from the new realists or naturalists. According to this view, the the critics of the eighties found Howells' realism too unpleasant, too ready to expose the hypocrisies of the Gilded Age; the critics of the nineties, on the other hand, new realists or naturalists like Ambrose Bierce and Frank Norris, suddenly found Howells' realism too timid, too willing to blink the harsher truths about human nature and late nineteenth century America. Almost without exception, twentieth century critics have held this view of the two kinds of criticism which Howells' realism encountered.

Parrington, for example, wrote in The Beginnings of Critical Realism in America, "It was not his [Howells'] fault that the ways of one generation are not those of another, and it is well to remember that

if his realism seems wanting to a generation bred up on Theodore Dreiser, it seemed a debasement of the fine art of literature to a generation bred up on Thomas Bailey Aldrich."¹ Other critics who have taken

¹Vernon L. Parrington, The Beginnings of Critical Realism in America (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1930), p. 242.

a similar point of view include Alfred Kazin: "Where the opponents of realism had once barked at it as immoral, they now patronized it and called it dull."²

²Alfred Kazin, On Native Grounds (New York: Reynal and Hitchcock, 1942), p. 13.

Charles Glicksberg: Howells "defended American realism skillfully and consistently, though he did not go far enough in his recommendations as a critic nor in his practice as a novelist to satisfy a later, more rebellious generation....Ironically enough, he was later condemned by the younger critics as an exponent of the genteel tradition."³ Gordon Haight, while

³Charles I. Glicksberg, American Literary Criticism 1900-1950 (New York: Hendricks House, 1951), pp. 8-9.

noting that "the genteel atmosphere of Boston has been unfairly blamed for Howells' extraordinary prudishness," still went on to rebuke the Sinclair Lewis generation for its lack of perspective: "The realism

for which two romantic generations had abused him [Howells] was already being ridiculed as timid by new realists whose art owed more to Howells than they cared to admit."⁴ And Robert Falk: "Hamilton

⁴Gordon Haight, "Realism Defined: William Dean Howells," in the Literary History of the United States, Robert E. Spiller et al., eds. (New York: Macmillan, 1948), pp. 893, 898.

Wright Mabie, reviewing The Rise of Silas Lapham under the title 'A Typical Novel' attacked realism and Howells as 'cold,' 'analytical,' 'skeptical,' and his methods as 'practical atheism applied to art.' Mencken, three decades later, found 'The Dean' shallow, uninspired, full of Ladies Home Journal morality and amateur psychology--'an Agnes Repplier in pantaloons' with a 'college-town Weltanschauung.'"⁵

⁵Robert P. Falk, The Victorian Mode in American Fiction 1865-1885 (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 1965), p. 126.

George Bennett and Everett Carter are two critics who go even further in maintaining that when Howells is judged according to the standards of the eighties, no apology for his frankness, or lack of it, is necessary. Bennett writes that

The Lady of the Armistock suffers today from the revolution in mores that has occurred since its writing. It requires an act of the historical imagination to accept seriously the breach of

decorum constituting the central situation of the plot....but in its own day...the novel came dangerously close to sensationalism, and reviewers did not hesitate to comment on its lapses of taste.⁶

⁶George N. Bennett, William Dean Howells: the Development of a Novelist (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1959), pp. 69-70.

Of Howells' criticism in the "Editor's Study" of Harper's Magazine advocating realism, Bennett says, "His ideas were soon vehemently attacked. Magazines all over the country were to blossom out with articles defending the romantic and the idealistic."⁷

⁷Ibid., p. 127.

Overall, Bennett makes the following generalization about Howells' fiction and criticism:

There is evidence that he can be charged with excessive timidity only in modern terms. It has been shown that, granted the rigid limits of taste and propriety imposed by the reading public of his own time, Howells was actually outspoken and honest.⁸

⁸Ibid., p. 212.

Carter outdoes Bennett in defending Howells against the charges of prudishness. He lists those who have attacked Howells for his "eschewing of the

sofa and ignoring of the boudoir," beginning with Ambrose Bierce and continuing through Sinclair Lewis, but he concludes:

It should have occurred to modern critics, however, that authors of other days may have been as outspoken as our own writers--relative, that is, to their audience's capacity to absorb such frankness. For it is demonstrable that the major American men of letters of the end of the nineteenth century were working frankly and fully within the range of the taste and the tolerance of their readers.⁹

⁹Everett S. Carter, "The Palpitating Divan," College English, XI (May, 1950), 423.

The generalization that Howells was working "frankly and freely within the range of the taste and the tolerance" of his audience, plausible as it seems, should be questioned, because critics of his own time did charge Howells with excessive timidity. It has too often been assumed that opposition to him came merely from "genteel" critics--that is, from critics who longed for a more idyllic past, who wished to believe the myth of American innocence, or who wanted a refined literature, devoid of substance. However, when one examines the contemporary critical reaction to Howells, he discovers that from at least the 1880's on, there was a steady stream of criticism coming from both sides of the Atlantic which urged him to be less moralistic in his novels, to present evil more

convincingly, and to explore more powerful and tragic human relationships. In addition, those novels of Howells, such as A Modern Instance, The Rise of Silas Lapham, and A Hazard of New Fortunes, considered his most significant and forceful works, were reviewed favorably by the critics of his time.

The British Critics

British critics took particular notice of American fiction after Howells' article in 1882 in the Century, praising Henry James as the leader of a new school of American fiction. The article caused a stir partly because it had a chauvinistic motif: Howells implied that literary leadership in the novel had passed from England to America, and that England's illustrious novelists of the past, such as Scott, Dickens, and Thackeray, were now archaic. In a sense, however, Howells' assault upon the older English novelists was less nationalistic than simply a by-product of his concept of what a novel ought to be. In his view, the earlier English novelists, Dickens especially, had emphasized a complicated plot which combined fortuitous occurrences with situations and behavior which were decidedly out of the ordinary. By contrast, the new novelists were abandoning the plot of intrigue; the new novel was to be "an analytic study rather than a story." It was to study "human

nature much more in its wonted aspects," and to find "its ethical and dramatic examples in the operation of lighter but not really less vital motives."¹⁰

¹⁰William Dean Howells, "Henry James, Jr." Century, XXV (November, 1882), 25.

Howells said that one could speak of the new novel as character-painting rather than story-telling.

Howells' subordination of the narrative element in fiction meant that he was cutting the novel loose from its moorings in the epic or the romance; the new novel's kinship was apparently with the character study. The new novel was not to be linked with Zola; Howells said that "it is the realism of Daudet rather than the realism of Zola that prevails with it, and it has a soul of its own which is above the business of recording the rather brutish pursuit of a woman by a man, which seems to be the chief end of the French novelist."¹¹ Arthur Tilley accurately

¹¹Ibid.

listed the three chief characteristics of the new fiction which Howells was describing:

1. It abjures plot and narrative interest.
2. It substitutes for these an elaborate analysis of character.
3. It studies human nature mainly in its wonted aspects.¹²

¹²Arthur Tilley, "The New School of Fiction," National Review, I (April, 1883), 259.

It was the Howells-James emphasis upon the portrayal of character through a close examination of motive rather than through the unfolding of an involved plot that led British critics to think of the American novel in the eighties as the analytical novel or the novel of analysis. It is with this concept of Howells' realism in mind that the reaction of the British critics should be considered.

Both Blackwood's Magazine and the Quarterly Review responded to Howells' Century article, and although both contained philippic which was not relevant to the new American fiction at all, both ultimately attempted to make serious criticisms of Howells' fiction. The anonymous writer in Blackwood's (identified as Titus Munson Coan by Edwin Cady¹³)

¹³Edwin H. Cady, The Road to Realism: The Early Years, 1837-1885, of William Dean Howells, p. 219.

noted with approval that A Modern Instance was more powerful than any of Howells' previous works. He found no fault with the book for dealing with the disintegration of a marriage or the dissolution of Bartley Hubbard--criticisms that a genteel reviewer might make. What Coan did criticize was Howells'

puritanism, which in his opinion interfered with the artistic presentation of character; for example, Howells was too indignant in his references to Bartley's drinking, and failed to realize how odious a character Ben Halleck really was.

A desire to kick him /Ben Halleck/ is the warm impulse in our mind at his every appearance. Why should so limp and boneless a being stand as the representative of the best kind of American? Give us, then, the worst, we cry with effusion--the miner in all his savagery, the wild logger in the woods, even the smart editor.¹⁴

¹⁴/Titus Munson Coan/, "American Literature in England," Blackwood's Magazine, CXXXIII (January, 1883), 161.

Near the end of the essay Coan had a sentence of advice which urged Howells toward a realism that was less didactic: "If he will illustrate frankly, without any polemical intention, the society he knows, there is no telling how far he may go."

The writer in the Quarterly Review, well aware of the distance between Zola's realism and the new American novel, made the Howells-James "wholesomeness" into an occasion for a thrust against them. "Dull unspeakably dull, they may be; but they are never improper." In another passage he said that all the reader would get from Howells and James was "philosophic instruction and dawdling sentimentality."¹⁵

¹⁵"American Novels," Quarterly Review, CLV (January, 1883), 213.

This critic introduced a theme into the criticism of Howells and James which later became more prominent--the theme that their writing was out of touch with the more plebeian and masculine aspects of America. "Any one who desires to understand something about the American people--as distinguished from dubious examples of New York dandies and Boston young ladies--will do well to make himself acquainted with works like that of Mr. Eggleston."¹⁶

¹⁶Ibid., p. 227.

Another British critic found the new American novel overly dominated by the moral point of view, contending that Howells wanted "to be objective, but the moralist soon gets the better of the artist." He chided Howells for being too moralistic toward Bartley Hubbard, and went on to write that

only a remnant of puritanism can...explain how a writer of the taste and talent of Mr. W. D. Howells, who besides does not lack a keen sense of humour, has been able to create a comical figure like that of Ben Halleck, without as much as an inkling of the comicality of it.¹⁷

¹⁷Karl Hillebrand, "About Old and New Novels," Contemporary Review, XLV (March, 1884), 401.

J. M. Robertson, one of the more sympathetic and yet judicious British critics who interpreted and appraised Howells' work in the early eighties, approved of the ending of A Chance Acquaintance, although he recognized that it would disappoint some readers. "We have here," he wrote, "the mark of the modern critical development--the implication that a good fictionist is not simply to concoct for us a story with an agreeable ending, but is to impress us with a sense of his faithfulness to an actual life which is full of broken threads and pathetic failures."¹⁸ Robertson was also quite willing for the

¹⁸J. M. Robertson, "Mr. Howells' Novels," Westminster Review, CXXII (October, 1884), 350.

novelist to abandon "thrilling" plots; he noted that in Howells' novels "there are no mysterious crimes; no studies in circumstantial evidence; no staggering surprises; few rescues, and these quite ordinary." This absence of the sensational he found refreshing, and he thought that by reading Howells' stories "even the amateur of deep-laid plots may learn...to relish better things." However, when Robertson found fault with Howells' novels, he did so on the grounds that

they were neither substantial nor deep enough:

The gist of the critical finding against Mr. Howells is, firstly, that after promising to give us sound realistic work, embodying both observation and meditation on life, he has descended to the function of producing lollipops; and, secondly, that when he has sought since to present the desirable realistic and conscientious work, he has exhibited a lack of the necessary width and depth of thought--in short, deficient philosophic capacity.¹⁹

¹⁹Ibid., p. 351.

Another British critic acknowledged that Howells and James were widely read in England, and that their work "has trained English readers to take pleasure in more delicate and minute modes of presentation, in finer and soberer shades of thought than the average English novelist knows how to reach."²⁰

²⁰"Recent Fiction in England and France," Macmillan's Magazine, L (August, 1884), 253.

Nevertheless, this anonymous British critic echoed the others in finding American work not full-bodied enough. He thought that the English mind was "scarcely likely to subdue itself to the exclusions and restrictions and reserves in which the American school finds its strength," and he advised the American novelists: "Be a little violent and take us by force: otherwise all your charm, all your distinction, all your exquisite

workmanship, will have but small effect upon the future of the English novel."²¹

²¹Ibid., p. 254.

H. D. Traill, editor of the English edition of Literature, was among those British critics who found the work of Howells and James too insubstantial. He said that Howells and James were descended from the analytical tradition of Richardson, opposed to the dramatic tradition of Fielding which he himself favored. In Traill's view, the analytical novel tended to produce shadowy and vague characterization:

We have nowadays an increasing school of novelists, who are so afraid of being suspected of confining themselves to the delineation of the mere externals of character, that they will hardly give us any externals of character at all. Their men and women are almost disembodied emotions, which the reader is invited to study, not as they objectify themselves in incident or action--for of incident and action there is almost none--but subjectively and from the inside.²²

²²H. D. Traill, "The Novel of Manners," Nineteenth Century, XVIII (October, 1885), 563.

Six years later, in 1891, Traill expressed his displeasure with analytic novelists more acutely:

The apostles of the New Realism in fiction are still apparently disposed to rest on the convincing demonstration which they submitted to the world some few years ago, that "Romance was dead," that "all the stories had been told," and

that nothing was left for the novelist but to treat minute changes in the human consciousness as "events" and to recount them with the same elaboration of detail as the romance-writers of the past were accustomed to bestow upon the thrilling incidents, the crowded action, and stormy passions with which they habitually dealt.²³

²³H. D. Traill, "Romance Realisticised," Contemporary Review, LIX (February, 1891), 200.

Traill then wrote at some length, showing how he believed the American realists might treat Othello, Romeo and Juliet, or the Odyssey, saying somewhat facetiously of the latter:

Even so ancient a legend as that of the "Odyssey" will be seen to afford an excellent subject to the Realistic novelist who is acute enough to perceive that the most promising possibilities of that famous story are to be discovered, not in the adventures of Odysseus, but in the contemporaneous emotions and reflections of Penelope, the diurnal weavings and nocturnal unravellings of whose celebrated web may indeed be regarded as picturesquely allegorising the method of the Realistic School.²⁴

²⁴Ibid., pp. 206-07.

In such a passage as the one just quoted, it is not difficult to detect Traill's belief that the novels of Howells and James had an overly feminine interest and atmosphere.

H. Rider Haggard, the British author of King

Solomon's Mines (1885) and other popular, action-packed "thrillers," was among the first to suggest that Howells and James wrote effeminate novels.

Their heroines /the heroines of Howells and James⁷ are things of silk and cambric, who soliloquize and dissect their petty feelings, and elaborately review the feeble promptings which serve them for passions. Their men--well, they are emasculated specimens of an overwrought age, and, with culture on their lips, and emptiness in their hearts, they dangle round the heroines till their three-volumed fate is accomplished. About their work is an atmosphere like that of the boudoir of a luxurious woman, faint and delicate, and suggesting the essence of white rose.²⁵

²⁵H. Rider Haggard, "About Fiction," Contemporary Review, LI (February, 1887), 175.

American realism bore so little resemblance to more brutal French realism, as far as Haggard was concerned, that he counterpoised Howells and James with Zola:

Here /In Zola's fiction⁷ things are all the other way....Here are no silks and satins to impede our vision of the flesh and blood beneath, and here the scent is patchouli....Whatever there is brutal in humanity--and God knows there is plenty--whatever there is that is carnal and filthy, is here brought into prominence, and thrust before the reader's eyes.²⁶

²⁶Ibid., p. 176.

Haggard's assault upon Howells and James illustrates

two interesting points: (1) a romancer was not necessarily scandalized by American realism, and (2) Howells' realism was vulnerable, not so much to charges of being animalistic or immoral or pessimistic or harsh, as to the charge of being effeminate.

The minor romantic poet William Watson, while entertaining a concept of fiction very different from Haggard's, made a similar accusation against the fiction of James and Howells in the National Review. Although Watson deplored novels that had been written in response to a "vulgar clamour for 'movement' of any sort, no matter how spasmodic, and 'action' at any cost," and although he was ready to defend George Eliot against the criticism that in her novels action was subordinated to reflection and analysis substituted for direct delineation, still, he felt that James and Howells overdid the analysis of the trivial. "Who that has read the novels of Mr. James and Mr. Howells can fail to observe how attenuation and depletion are becoming features of modern literature?"²⁷

²⁷William Watson, "Fiction--Plethoric and Anaemic," National Review, XIV (October, 1889), 169.

Hall Caine, author of the best-seller, The Manxman (1894), was another romanticist who reproached American realists for their timidity, speaking deris-

ively of their "teacup Realism." Caine had asked where realism was triumphing in 1890 and had answered in a rhetorical question:

What, in America, where the sturdy romance of the soil is pushing from its stool the teacup Realism of the last twenty years, and even the first champions of such Realism, who have said that there is sufficient incident in "the lifting up of a chair," and that "all the stories are told," are themselves turning their backs on their own manifesto, and coming as near to Romanticism as their genius will let them?²⁸

²⁸Hall Caine, "The New Watchwords of Fiction," Contemporary Review, LVII (April, 1890), 487.

The "teacup Realists"--Caine undoubtedly had in mind Howells and James--were those who, portraying feminine feelings ignored masculine passions, and concentrating on decorum and etiquette neglected morality. In sum, Caine felt that they evaded the decisive situations and basic passions of human nature, presenting instead the superficial chatter of the upper-class drawing room.

An anonymous writer in the Edinburgh Review added his voice to the swelling chorus.

In his [Howells'] hands Americans seem to have lost the virility of the race. Flabby characters, painted in carefully subdued tints, actors in whom the author himself does not pretend to be interested, drift aimlessly, without faiths, hopes, passions or aspirations, through stories which are never concluded, each turned out with the neatness, grace, and precision of an ac-

complished modiste.²⁹

²⁹"American Fiction," Edinburgh Review, CLXXIII, (January, 1891), 57.

Seven years later, in 1898, the Edinburgh Review contained another article on American fiction, part of which may serve as a summary of the trans-Atlantic opposition to Howells. The writer stated that "the pages of Mr. Howells suggest no possibility of sexual irregularities; they even suggest strongly that with the great American race no such thing is conceivable." The same writer, after praising Harold Frederic's Damnation of Theron Ware as "the strongest American novel of recent years and the most fully representative," went on to say that

it was not to be expected that the novel of pure analysis would go on forever being the drawing-room production to which Mr. Howells had accustomed us. Men and women naturally demanded some stronger meat than his elaboration of fine-spun quarrels over a look or an intonation.³⁰

³⁰"Novels of American Life," Edinburgh Review, CLXXXVII (April, 1898), 406.

Although many British critics deplored the "researches in the latrine and brothel"³¹ carried out by

³¹The phrase is from W. S. Lilly, "The New Naturalism," Fortnightly Review, XLIV (August, 1885), 250. Lilly, a contributor to several reviews of the day,

was the epitome of that kind of critic who objected to realism and naturalism on moral grounds.

French realists, they made no such objection to American realism. They did not consider it brutal, foul, nor sordid. In fact, Howells' novels seemed to them so different from Zola's that some British critics placed the two "realists" at opposite ends of a literary spectrum. In general, they endorsed wholeheartedly neither what seemed to them the lewdness of Zola nor the emaciated fiction of Howells.

Nineteenth-Century American Critics

Turning to Howells' American critics, one finds that they were not so faint-hearted nor so easily shocked as twentieth century historians have assumed. Less abusive than the British, they nevertheless shared the idea that Howells' novels were too slight, his characterizations too pale, and his omissions too large. Even critics from the late Victorian period who have been written off as "romantic" or "genteel" seldom saw anything scandalous in Howells' realism.

Among the first American critics to pinpoint the mildness of Howells' fiction was W. C. Brownell, author of several volumes of criticism including Victorian Prose Masters (1901) and American Prose

Masters (1909), whose reputation has suffered because he is dismissed as an exponent of the genteel tradition or as a lesser member of the New Humanists.³²

³²In the introduction to a reprint of Brownell's American Prose Masters (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1963), Howard Mumford Jones says that since Santayana's The Genteel Tradition at Bay (1933), it has been difficult for moderns to understand and evaluate the work of Brownell. Jones also has a good word for Edmund Clarence Stedman, George Edward Woodberry, Hamilton Wright Mabie, and Richard Watson Gilder, making him one of the very few modern critics who has seen any profit in the "genteel" critics. More typical of modern criticism is the castigation of Bayard Taylor, Richard Henry Stoddard, Edmund Clarence Stedman, and Thomas Bailey Aldrich by Richard Cary in The Genteel Circle: Bayard Taylor and His New York Friends (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1952).

In an article appearing in 1880, Brownell, suggesting that Howells' fiction should be read as light entertainment, said that after the diet of meat and wine which the provenders of fiction had customarily served, "the tea which Mr. Howells dispenses is of a delicious fragrance and refreshing to jaded palates."³³ Although he thought that Howells' effort

³³W. C. Brownell, "The Novels of Mr. Howells," Nation, XXXI (July 15, 1880), 50.

to avoid theatricality hampered his natural force, he was content to enjoy Howells' fiction as romans de societe, a counterpart to vers de societe.

The reaction of Lafcadio Hearn to Howells pro-

vides evidence that a romanticist need not have been shocked by the latter's realism. Although Hearn is best known for his novels Chita (1889) and Youma (1890), he wrote considerable criticism, especially from 1877 to 1887, while living in New Orleans. Several of his critical articles indicate that he was less bound than Howells by Victorian moral conventions. When Howells, for example, attacked the "sensuality" of Wilhelm Meister and even the morality of Goethe's personal life, Hearn, in an article in the New Orleans Times-Democrat, defended Goethe and extenuated the "sins of genius."³⁴ Howells once com-

³⁴Howells, "Editor's Study," LXXIII (June, 1886), 154-56. Hearn's article originally appeared in the New Orleans Times-Democrat, June 6, 1886. It is reprinted in Lafcadio Hearn, Essays on American Literature, ed. Sanki Ichikawa (Tokyo: Hokuseido Press, 1929), pp. 191-93.

plained that French literature "possessed itself of the good name of Realism to befoul it." Hearn, on the other hand, praised French writers because only they understood, as the Greeks had, that passion is the essence of life.³⁵ Finally, Howells continually

³⁵Howells, "Editor's Study," LXXII (April, 1886), 812. Hearn's "The Sexual Idea in French Literature" appeared in the New Orleans Item, June 17, 1881. It is reprinted in Editorials by Lafcadio Hearn, ed. Charles Woodward Hutson (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1926), pp. 142-45.

advocated bowdlerization of translations, whereas Hearn reproached the Puritan spirit that was responsible for "nearly all American translations from the various Latin tongues being shamefully emasculated."³⁶

³⁶The quotation is from Hearn's "American Art Tastes," New Orleans Item, September 30, 1881, as reprinted in Editorials by Lafcadio Hearn, p. 163.

In addition, there is evidence that Hearn thought the range of Howells' realism too narrow. In an article appearing in 1881 entitled "Recent American Novels," he scored American fiction for confining itself to the life of the drawing-room--a reproach that undoubtedly included Howells. Hearn thought American novelists too conventional and limited, their intellectual and emotional horizons being "confined within the narrow circle of a certain preconceived Boston sentiment." He called upon them to capture the variegated quality of American life, and in particular, to deal with lower strata of American society.

What is wanted now is something distinct and unique and truthful, which cannot be found in the factitious life of drawing-rooms, but in the workshops and factories, among the toilers on river and rail, in villages fringing the sea line or hidden among the wrinkles of the hills, in mining districts and frontier towns, in the suburbs of vast industrial centers, in old-fashioned communities about which quaint traditions

cling, among men who, without culture, have made themselves representatives of an enormous financial force, and among those who, in spite of culture, have remained unable to rise above the condition of want, in the office of the merchant, and the residence of the clerk, and the home of the servant, and the rented rooms of the laborer.³⁷

³⁷Hearn's article, "Recent American Novels," appeared in the New Orleans Item, June 18, 1881. My quotations are from Editorials by Lafcadio Hearn, pp. 148-49.

Hearn's charge to American novelists is particularly illuminating because it shows a romanticist calling for a broader, more masculine, even a more proletarian fiction, and it thus provides a precedent for Frank Norris's strictures upon Howells' realism, also made in the name of romanticism.

While Hearn was calling for a larger and more vigorous fiction, other American critics were sanctioning Howells' experiments with bolder themes. Although both George Bennett and Everett Carter have proposed that there was a general critical reaction against A Modern Instance because it dealt honestly with an unpleasant theme,³⁸ there is also evidence

³⁸Bennett, William Dean Howells: The Development of a Novelist, p. 113. Carter, "The Palpitating Divan," 424.

that some critics, even those commonly labeled "gen-

teel," were actually pleased with the stronger and bolder subject matter of A Modern Instance. The Century did not find A Modern Instance "revolting," as Carter has implied, even though R. W. Gilder, editor of the Century from 1881 to 1909 who is frequently cited as a "genteel" critic, wrote the review. It is true that Gilder was concerned whether A Modern Instance would reform the bad and comfort the good, and in such a remark, he is the epitome of the genteel critic. Nevertheless, Gilder's overall judgment of the novel was favorable; he thought that Howells' talent for observing manners and customs was excellent, and he valued the power of A Modern Instance.

Mr. Howells chief rise in the present work is in the touches of deeper passion, of which there are more and better specimens in "A Modern Instance" than in any of his previous work. He has warmed up to the value of contiguous and deep-seated forces in human action.³⁹

³⁹ R. W. Gilder⁷, Review of A Modern Instance, Century, XXV (January, 1883), 463.

In such a passage, Gilder seems to be quite willing to appreciate fiction which broke through the veneer of polite American society.

Another critic who is frequently tagged with the genteel label, Horace E. Scudder, reviewed A

Modern Instance for the Atlantic Monthly; it is true that some of his statements do represent the genteel mind. For example, Scudder said, "It is a dull imagination which needs all the details which Mr. Howells has given of cheap boarding-houses and restaurants," and he suggested that if the novel had been published as a book rather than as a serial, some readers "might have carried away the impression that the author was unnecessarily at pains in portraying the features of people whom one does not care to number among his intimate associates." But not everything which Scudder said about the novel was merely a reflection of his literary gentility; in spite of his reservations, his respect for the book was clear. In particular, he commended bringing back into fiction the powerful element of jealousy, and he called the novel Howells' greatest achievement in ethical apprehension. Like Gilder, Scudder valued the new depth and force which he recognized in Howells: "A Modern Instance shows a distinct advance in the author's conception of the life which lies behind the novel, and the foundations are laid deeper in the heart of things."⁴⁰

⁴⁰/H. E. Scudder⁷, Review of A Modern Instance, Atlantic Monthly, L (November, 1882), 710.

three years later, he returned to A Modern Instance in order to make a comparison between the two books. He said that both had a similar defect: in the earlier the reader was not "sufficiently impressed with the enormity of Bartley Hubbard's guilt," and in the current work, "Silas Lapham, a man of coarse grain and excessive egotism, is, in the crucial scenes, treated as a man of subtlety of thought and feeling."⁴¹ Here Scudder was certainly not genteel, for

⁴¹ H. E. Scudder, Review of The Rise of Silas Lapham, Atlantic Monthly, LVI (October, 1885), 555.

he was urging Howells to avoid false elevation of character and to portray coarseness as coarseness. In this same review, Scudder was pleased that Howells did not make Silas wealthy as a reward for his integrity, and he was pleased that "the whole history of the rise was unadorned by any decoration of sentiment."

The anonymous reviewer of A Modern Instance in Lippincott's Magazine noted the increasing strength and seriousness which was apparent in Howells' work from The Wedding Journey to A Modern Instance. This reviewer said: "We would have Mr. Howells continue strong and serious, but we would not have him forget to be charming." That would seem to be rather clear advice to Howells not to deal urgently with the con-

temporary world in his fiction, but even this reviewer announced his respect for A Modern Instance.

Mr. Howells has written no novel which covers so wide a field as "A Modern Instance,"--none in which the interest is so absorbing. Indeed, no other work of fiction by an American writer combines in the same degree the chief essentials of a good novel,--fidelity to life and a climacteric interest in the story.⁴²

⁴²"The Earlier and Later Work of Mr. Howells," Lippincott's Magazine, XXX (December, 1882), 607-08.

In addition to R. W. Gilder and Horace E. Scudder, another critic who is the butt of twentieth century contempt for his genteel qualities is Hamilton Wright Mabie. He is particularly remembered for his judgment against realism in his review of The Rise of Silas Lapham, cited earlier, as "practical atheism applied to art." In that review Mabie made statements about Zola and about realism's focusing upon commonplace people which would strike the modern reader as overly moralistic and snobbish, but even so his particular objections to Howells are worth examining. His review of The Rise of Silas Lapham was not entirely derogatory, but he thought that Howells, while calling himself a realist, did not understand genuine realism, as practiced by Balzac, for example. Whereas the French novelist studied the facts of life

with a patient eye in order to "discover the general law," Howells did not see the necessity of transforming the outwardly perceptible into the universally meaningful, and as a result The Rise of Silas Lapham was relatively "external" and "superficial." Mable was not calling for escapist or sentimental fiction, and even the phrase about "practical atheism," examined in its context, seems to have been nothing more dreadful than a plea for literature which went behind and beyond the world that can be observed. In Howells' The Rise of Silas Lapham, Mable missed the power and intensity of the great realistic works.

In Turgenieff and Bjornson, masters of the art of realism, and yet always superior to it, the repression and restraint are charged with power; one feels behind them an intensity of thought and feeling that is at times absolutely painful. No such sensation overtakes one in reading "The Rise of Silas Lapham" or "The Bostonians;" there is no throb of life here; the pulse of feeling, if it beats at all, is imperceptible.⁴³

⁴³Hamilton Wright Mable, "A Typical Novel," Anderson Review, IV (November, 1885), 422.

In another paragraph Mable complained:

There are passages in Mr. Howells's stories in reading which one cannot repress a feeling of honest indignation at what is nothing more nor less than a refined parody of genuine feeling, sometimes of the most pathetic experience. Is Mr. Howells ashamed of life in its outcries of pain and regret? Does he shrink from these unpremeditated and unconventional revelations of

character as vulgar, provincial, inartistic; or does he fail to comprehend them?

Such a passage is not easily distinguished from the charge that Howells lacked a sense of tragedy, which non-genteel twentieth century critics frequently level at his work.⁴⁴ At the very least, Mabie's

⁴⁴It is amusing, for example, to find Warner Berthoff in The Ferment of Realism (New York: The Free Press, 1965), poking fun at the "old-guard" criticism of Hamilton Wright Mabie, and then going on to make a criticism of Howells that closely resembles Mabie's. Berthoff says of The Rise of Silas Lapham that Howells did "what he was never able to keep from doing; he has dodged off the potential dramatic life of his chronicle by refusing to allow his characters to respond adequately to its developed pressures." (p. 53). Is not that a modern paraphrase of Mabie's complaint that Howells was ashamed of life in its outcries of pain and regret?

complaint can hardly be construed as a request for the novelist to evade the painful aspects of life.

There were critics who asserted that Howells' realism focused too exclusively upon the disagreeable aspects of American civilization, who wanted Howells' pictures of contemporary society "touched," and the blemishes removed. Edward H Hall, writing in the Unitarian Review, was one such critic. He preferred Howells' earlier works to The Rise of Silas Lapham, because those books, even "if somewhat light, had much that was delightful in them, both of scenery and of incident." The Rise of Silas Lapham,

on the other hand, was "aggressively and defiantly realistic," and was "contemptuous...of sentiment or poetry, or even the development of character or thought."⁴⁵ The kind of glossy portrait of Silas

⁴⁵Edward H. Hall, "Certain Tendencies of American Fiction," Unitarian Review, XXV (1886), 34.

which Hall wanted is indicated by his remark that "had Mr. Howells brought out for us the real dignity or nobleness hidden in the social ranks, or elicited by the social struggles, there would be nothing to say."⁴⁶ Hall was also displeased with Howells' ac-

⁴⁶Ibid., p. 39.

count of Mrs. Lapham's reaction when she learned that Silas had hired an attractive secretary. Although her reaction was natural, said Hall, "and precisely what a narrow-minded, ill-bred woman might do and say under such circumstances, it is not at all what one cares to read." Hall also objected to the dialogue, which seemed to him merely the conversation of commonplace people. His concept of fiction did not permit much verisimilitude:

I believe that one purpose of literature at least is to elevate. It is to task our intellectual faculties, to set us to thinking, to appeal to our finer tastes or feeling, to reveal the hidden workings of character or thought or passion, to

give us some stimulus or some joy which our daily life does not.⁴⁷

⁴⁷Ibid., p. 45.

But Hall's review of The Rise of Silas Lapham was an exception, not only because he found very little to praise about the book, but also because his criticisms of it suggested that the novelist had to emboss and ennoble whatever he depicted. He was also one of the few critics, apparently, who thought Howells' earlier, lighter work, superior to The Rise of Silas Lapham. Had the critical objections to Howells consisted predominantly of the kind Hall made, then literary historians would be accurate in seeing an about-face in critical attitudes toward Howells between the eighties and the turn of the century.

Henry James was among those urging Howells to increase the range and intensity of his realism. In 1871, in a letter to Charles Eliot Norton, James considered Howells a clever writer, but one lacking the "really grasping imagination."⁴⁸ In 1884, in a

⁴⁸The Letters of Henry James, ed. Percy Lubbock, Vol. I (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1920), p. 30.

letter to Howells himself, James called him "the

great American naturalist" in the tradition of Zola, but qualified the praise by adding, "I don't think you go far enough, and you are haunted with romantic phantoms and a tendency to factitious glosses; but you are in the right path."⁴⁹ In 1886, in his essay

⁴⁹Ibid., p. 105.

in Harper's Weekly, James criticized Howells for (1) excluding the rare and strange, and (2) lacking a perception of evil.

Preoccupied with the middle range of human behavior, Howells' realism, according to James, ignored much that was part of life. As James said:

He adores the real, the natural, the colloquial, the moderate, the optimistic, the domestic, and the democratic; looking askance at exceptions and perversities and superiorities, at surprising and incongruous phenomena in general. One must have seen a great deal before one concludes; the world is very large, and life a mixture of many things; she by no means eschews the strange, and often risks combinations and effects that make one rub one's eyes.⁵⁰

⁵⁰Henry James, "William Dean Howells," Harper's Weekly, XXX (June 19, 1886), 394.

For his own part, James thought that exceptional characters, such as Isabel Archer, and unusual circumstances, such as those underlying The Wings of the Dove, also belonged in fiction. Summing up his case

against the "every day" atmosphere of Howells' realism, James wrote:

He has observed that heroic emotion and brilliant opportunity are not particularly interwoven with our days, and indeed, in the way of omission, he has often practised in his pages a very considerable boldness.⁵¹

⁵¹Ibid.

Secondly, James felt that Howells was unaware of evil beneath the surface of society. Consequently, Howells' portrayals of America were distortions in the sense that they depicted an America more innocent than it actually was. In Howell' novels, James said, "The only immoralities are aberrations of thought, like that of Silas Lapham, or excesses of beer, like that of Bartley Hubbard."⁵² In sum, James was among

⁵²The article by Henry James on Howells prompted the romanticist James Lane Allen, in some remarks on realism and romance, to make a joke at the expense of the tameness of American realism. "Think," wrote Allen, "of one of the two great realists of the country telling the other that the only immoralities his books contain are little aberrations of thought and excesses of beer, and calling his strongest worst people ineffectual sinners!" Allen's remarks were originally published in *The Evening Post*, New York, July 31, 1886. The article, called "Realism and Romance," is reprinted in *The Heritage of American Literature*, ed. Lyon N. Richardson et al. (Boston: Ginn and Company, 1951), p. 283.

those critics who declared that Howells could neither

imagine nor portray evil convincingly.

Also in 1886, Horace E. Scudder, reviewing James's The Bostonians, F. Marion Crawford's A Tale of a Lonely Parish, and Howells' Indian Summer, said of Howells, "What we continue to admire is the fidelity with which he portrays the life which does interest him, and the unfailing charm which lies in his lightness of touch." Scudder, who had approved when Howells intensified his conception of realism in A Modern Instance and The Rise of Silas Lapham, was still aware, however, that the stronger stuff of fiction was frequently absent from his work. Speaking metaphorically, Scudder noted that Howells' range was limited to sparrows, orioles, and wrens, "all engaging little creatures," but he suggested that Howells was missing the "strong-winged wild geese overhead or some hawks poising in upper air for a downward swoop."⁵³

⁵³Horace E. Scudder, "James, Crawford, and Howells," Atlantic Monthly, LVII (June, 1886), 855.

According to the accepted interpretation of late nineteenth century American literary history, the realists were those who advocated a new frankness and outspokenness in American literature. Certainly there is evidence for that view. However, in light

of the reservations which some of the genteel critics of the time expressed concerning the strength of Howells' fiction, it is worth remarking that at least two writers and critics customarily associated with the realistic movement, H. H. Boyesen and Hamlin Garland, generally thought that Howells' fiction was sufficiently bold and vital. In an article written in 1886, Boyesen decried the lack of frankness in American literature, and suggested that the reading public, especially the young American girl, presented an obstacle to a bolder literature. "He /the novelist knows, in a general way, what young ladies like, and as the success of his work depends upon his hitting their taste, he makes a series of small concessions to it, which, in the end, determines the character of his book."⁵⁴ The novelist,

⁵⁴Hjalmar Hjorth Boyesen, Literary and Social Silhouettes (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1894), p. 45. The remarks occur in the chapter called "The American Novelist and his Public," dated 1886.

Boyesen continued, was likely to avoid anything requiring thought, because, "rightly or wrongly, thought is not supposed to be the ladies' forte."⁵⁵

⁵⁵Howells held the view that the young girl should not read that literature which dealt with the more sordid aspects of life. See Leonard Lutwack, "The Iron Madonna and American Criticism in the Genteel Era," Modern Language Quarterly, XV (December, 1954),

343-48. The only American critic I know of who took the position that permitting young ladies to read the bolder fiction was the only way of getting rid of the "iron-madonna" was George Parsons Lathrop in "Audacity in Women Novelists," North American Review, CL (May, 1890), 609-17.

As a result, novelists were silent about the important aspects of contemporary life.

This silence concerning all the vital things of life, and the elaborate attention paid to things of small consequence, I believe to be the most serious defect in the present American fiction. The strong forces which are visibly and invisibly at work in our society, fashioning our destinies as a nation, are to a great extent ignored by our novelists.⁵⁶

⁵⁶Boyesen, Literary and Social Silhouettes, p. 46.

However, what is rather unexpected in view of the charges of nugatory work brought against Howells by other critics, even "genteel" ones, is that Boyesen specifically excluded Howells from his indictment, saying that Howells was "sufficiently outspoken in his convictions."⁵⁷

⁵⁷Ibid., p. 52.

In 1888 Boyesen again touched upon Howells' treatment of vital human issues in his fiction. This time Boyesen did have reservations about Howells.

"He is apt to emphasize trivialities...to the exclu-

sion of the nobler qualities of the human soul." Boyesen continued, "I believe him capable of delving deeper into human nature than he has hitherto done by illustrating the larger problems of human society."⁵⁸ That statement turned out to be prophe-

⁵⁸H. H. Boyesen, "The Romantic and the Realistic Novel," Chautauquan, IX (November, 1888), 97.

tic of A Hazard of New Fortunes (1890), and in 1892, Boyesen again expressed satisfaction with the depth and scope of Howells' portrayals of contemporary life, crediting Howells with being responsible, more than any other person, for the ultimate triumph of realism in American fiction, which was "growing every year more virile, independent, and significant."⁵⁹

⁵⁹H. H. Boyesen, Literary and Social Silhouettes, p. 78. The remarks occur in the chapter called "The Progressive Realism of American Fiction," dated 1892.

Hamlin Garland was among those who temporarily, at least, thought of Howells' fiction as being concerned with trifles. In a notebook entry dated March 3, 1886, Garland wrote:

Realism as advocated /by Spielhagen/ means a study of the manners and customs of the present age and as such has a very great meaning but as carried out by the writers above-mentioned /Howells and James/ is an absurd characterization of very weak work. Those men chronicle conventional trifles mainly. They no more give a real idea of this life of ours than a painter gives an idea of

the landscape by painting the grasses with pains-taking care.⁶⁰

⁶⁰Quoted from Lars Ahnebrink, "The Beginnings of Naturalism in American Fiction, 1891-1903," Essays and Studies on American Language and Literature, IX (Uppsala, 1950), p. 138.

In 1890, however, after Howells had written A Hazard of New Fortunes, Garland's praise for the strength and breadth of Howells' realism knew almost no bounds.

I confess myself an almost unqualified admirer of this great book /A Hazard of New Fortunes/; for in the variety and fidelity of its types, the vast social problems involved, its perfect modernness, its freedom from "effectism," its comprehensive-ness and its keenness of insight, it certainly stands among the great novels of the world.⁶¹

⁶¹Hamlin Garland, "Mr. Howells's Latest Novels," New England Magazine, VIII (May, 1890), 248.

In contrast to what one may have been led to believe about the rejection of Howells' ventures into a larger and deeper realism, as illustrated by A Hazard of New Fortunes, both the public and the important critics welcomed that novel.⁶² The reviewer for

⁶²The argument that the reading public prevented Howells from venturing into a broader and stronger realism receives a damaging blow when it is pointed out that A Hazard of New Fortunes, three years after its publication, had sold twice as many copies as any of Howells' other novels. The statistic comes from Howells himself, and is in "A Dialogue Between William Dean Howells and Hjalmar Hjorth Boyesen," McClure's Magazine, I (June, 1893), 11.

the Nation noted that Howells always tried to depict life as he saw it, but in A Hazard of New Fortunes, life was "shown in a wider outlook, a deeper insight, an expansion of sympathy, and especially in a sensitiveness to emotional tragedy the actuality of which he has hitherto almost denied." The Nation reviewer compared the novel to James's Princess Casamassima, noting that both books produced "a faithful and vivid picture" of the many-sided life of huge cities. The reviewer regretted that Howells, in a number of his earlier novels, had "devoted so much time to the inconsequent prattle and finished irony of ladies and gentlemen from Boston."⁶³ The journalist and liter-

⁶³"Mr. Howells's Latest Novel," Nation, L (June 5, 1890), 454.

ary critic, George Pellew, author of the impartial biography, Life of John Jay (1890), admired A Hazard of New Fortunes for its "vivid realism and genuine sympathy,"⁶⁴ and Horace E. Scudder, continuing

⁶⁴George Pellew, "Ten Years of American Literature," Critic, XVIII (January 17, 1891), 30.

his practice of endorsing Howells' forceful novels, praised the book, saying it represented a "growth in literary power." Moved by the novel's concern for humanity, Scudder reported that "one cannot stop his

ears to that torrent of New York humanity in which they [Lindau and Conrad] were drowned."⁶⁵

⁶⁵Horace E. Scudder, "New York in Recent Fiction," Atlantic Monthly, LXV (April, 1890), 566.

The idea that Howells' novels were considered "daring" and "depraved" by the majority of his American contemporaries persists,⁶⁶ but two general

⁶⁶Robert Lee Hough, "William Dean Howells: The Rise of Silas Lapham," in The American Novel, ed. Wallace Stegner (New York: Basic Books, 1965), p. 73, says that The Rise of Silas Lapham was considered daring by some reviewers and depraved by others.

points indicate that it is largely untrue. First, even so-called "genteel" critics, such as R. W. Gilder, W. C. Brownell, and especially Horace E. Scudder, were likely to regard Howells' novels as decent but slight, rather than daring and depraved. Second, Howells' bolder novels--A Modern Instance, The Rise of Silas Lapham, A Hazard of New Fortunes--were welcomed, not only by realist reviewers, such as Hamlin Garland and H. H. Boyesen, but by important "genteel" reviewers as well.

Twentieth Century American Critics

The reader of Howells' own criticism becomes aware that he was not persistently attempting to open up subjects or themes forbidden to the novelist,

nor was he attempting to treat situations or to use language previously excluded by religious or sexual taboos.⁶⁷ Howells endorsed Zola, for example, but

⁶⁷George J. Becker and Monroe Beardsley, "Realism," Dictionary of World Literature, ed. Joseph T. Shipley (New York: Philosophical Library, 1953). Becker and Beardsley write that "the most vital, and perhaps most lasting achievement of realism is its persistent seeking out of new subject-matter for literature, especially situations and language that have previously been excluded by religious or sexual taboos."

always in spite of his physiological audacity, never for it, believing that Zola would have been a greater writer had he been more decent. So it was with other continental writers whom Howells recommended. He praised Valdes's Marta y Maria, but regretted that Valdes painted Marta's passion in such vivid colors, because that indiscretion seemed a "sacrifice to the ugly French fetich which has possessed itself of the good name of Realism to befoul it."⁶⁸ He reviewed

⁶⁸Howells, "Editor's Study," LXXII (April, 1886), 812.

Don Juan Valera's novel Pepita Ximenez favorably, but said, "We must not fail to add that the book is one for those who have come to the knowledge of good and evil, and to confess our regret that it is so."⁶⁹

⁶⁹Howells, "Editor's Study," LXXIII (November, 1886), 963.

Examples could be multiplied, but need not be; Leonard Lutwack has provided more in an article that shows how Howells and other critics of the Genteel Era tended to think that novels should be written with one's unmarried daughter in mind as the principal reader.⁷⁰

⁷⁰Leonard Lutwack, "The Iron Madonna and American Criticism in the Genteel Era."

It is a commonplace of criticism that Howells, compared with twentieth century writers, was cautious and reticent. What needs to be recognized, however, is that in Howells' mind reticence was perfectly compatible with realism. Critics who have accused Howells of not going as far as his theory demanded have not recognized that a certain restraint was built into the foundation of Howells' theory of realism; he was committed to the description of life that was typical or in between the extremes. Garland understood this aspect of Howells' realism very clearly. He pointed out that when authors, like Zola, wrote about "abnormally criminal and vicious characters," they were practicing a form of romanticism, so far

as Howells was concerned.⁷¹ Howells' realism con-

⁷¹Hamlin Garland, "Howells," in American Writers on American Literature, ed. John Macy (New York: Horace Liveright, 1931), p. 292.

finied itself, for the most part, to "the common feelings of commonplace people." His kind of realism even attempted, as in The Rise of Silas Lapham, to "express on canvas a man fulfilling the duties of a good citizen."⁷²

⁷²William Dean Howells, The Rise of Silas Lapham (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1928), pp. 284-85. Although the two quotations are from the dialog of Bromfield Corey, I believe that they reflect the fictional intentions of Howells himself.

Twentieth century critics, departing from Howells' concept of realism, have frequently equated realism with literature which is masculine, pessimistic, and shocking. George J. Becker, for example, associated realism with the "forthrightness" and "brutality" of such American novels as From Here to Eternity and The Naked and the Dead.⁷³ Maxwell Geismar

⁷³George J. Becker, Documents of Modern Literary Realism (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1963), p. 16.

has also associated realism and brutality; writing of the love affair in Norris' McTeague between McTeague and Trina, he said:

So opened one of the famous love affairs in American literature at the turn of the century. It marked the advent of a new literature of realism (more concretely, unequivocally than Crane's work) and perhaps even, with these undertones of power and conquest, a new epoch of violence in human relations. It was a far cry from the innocent romances of William Dean Howells.⁷⁴

⁷⁴Maxwell Geismar, Rebels and Ancestors (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1953), p. 15.

Geismar shifted the definition of realism so much toward the portrayal of passion and violence that under its terms Howells cannot be acknowledged as a realist at all, but a writer of "innocent romances."

Twentieth century critics, looking for nineteenth century realists, tend to select those whose subject matter was daring or whose treatment of it was bold. If an author presented "forthright pictures" of war, or if he exposed political corruption, or if he portrayed scheming women, or had taken a pessimistic view of man, he was a candidate for the label "realist."⁷⁵ No doubt Dreiser's essays

⁷⁵These criteria for selecting realists come from The Heritage of American Literature, ed. Lyon N. Richardson et al. (Boston: Ginn & Co., 1951), p. 121.

(such as "Neurotic America and the Sex Impulse") did much to make later critics associate realism with the

bursting of repressive puritan dogma and mores. After reading Gertrude Atherton, H. L. Mencken, V. F. Calverton, Thomas Beer, John Macy, V. L. Parrington, and Malcolm Cowley, to name a few, it is difficult to remember that realism ever meant anything else but lifting taboos or breaking conventions.⁷⁶

⁷⁶I have in mind Gertrude Atherton's "Why is American Literature Bourgeois?" North American Review, CLXXVIII (May, 1904); Mencken's A Book of Prefaces (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1917); Calverton's Sex Expression in Literature (New York: Boni and Liveright, 1926); Macy's The Spirit of American Literature (Garden City, New York: Doubleday, Page, 1913); Parrington's The Beginnings of Critical Realism in America, and Malcolm Cowley's After the Genteel Tradition (Carbondale, Ill.: Southern Illinois University Press, 1964). Cowley's book was first published in 1937.

But realism did mean something else to Howells: it frequently meant a novel or a story in the manner of Jane Austen or Turgenev--where the emphasis was upon character rather than plot, where all was probable and every day, where the author removed himself in order that the story would seem more life-like, and where decorum reigned.

This shift in the meaning of realism is significant, because it helps explain why twentieth century critics have persisted in thinking that Howells' realism was more concerned with audacity than it actually was.⁷⁷ They have apparently assumed not only

⁷⁷ Another realist who was concerned, at least in his statements about fiction, that the novelist not cross the line of what was proper was Joseph Kirkland. See his "Realism Versus Other Isms," Dial, XIV (February 16, 1893), 99-101.

that realism and audacity are synonymous, but that they were synonymous in the third quarter of the nineteenth century. The reasoning of twentieth century critics has led them to believe that since Howells was a realist, he must have been far bolder than most of his contemporaries. As a result, twentieth century critics, among them Parrington, Alfred Kazin, Charles Glicksberg, Gordon Haight, Robert Falk, George Bennett, and Everett Carter, have postulated an opposition to Howells which considered him unpleasantly audacious. But by and large, this kind of opposition to Howells is simply not borne out by an examination of the literary judgments which his contemporaries made of him.

CHAPTER IV

THE ENGLISH REALISTS

The opposition with which English authors and critics met continental realism is well-known and has been fully documented. Among those who have stressed the reluctance of the English to accept realism, especially French realism, is William C. Frierson. He reported that until 1885 the English almost completely ignored the works of French realists, but as the translations of French works increased, so did the resistance of hostile English critics. According to Frierson, "While the tide of popular indignation against Zola and his English publisher was rising, even up to 1893, little criticism favorable to the French realists was published."¹ One form which the

¹William C. Frierson, "The English Controversy over Realism in Fiction, 1885-1895," PMLA, XLIII (June, 1928), 542.

opposition to Zola took was the legal action which the National Vigilance Association brought against the Vizetelly firm, which was translating and pub-

lishing Zola's works. Vizetelly himself was tried, and eventually sentenced to three months in jail. By 1890 a softer attitude toward French realism developed, and a turning-point occurred in 1893, for by that time "a reading public sympathetic to an analytic examination of contemporary society"² had been es-

²Ibid., p. 545.

tablished. However, Frierson says that it would be "an exaggeration" to think that the realists had won the battle by 1894, even though a larger body of criticism favorable to the French realists was being printed. Frierson concluded that French realism became acceptable to the English in the mid nineties, but that "undiluted naturalism has never been congenial to the Anglo-Saxon temperament."³

³Ibid., p. 549.

Although Frierson's article was published in 1928, George J. Becker took substantially the same view of British resistance to French realism in the introduction to his Documents of Modern Literary Realism, published in 1963. Citing the tardiness of the English in recognizing Flaubert, he describes the action taken against Vizetelly for translating and publishing Zola, and concluded that the battle for

realism in England has never yet been completely fought out.⁴

⁴George J. Becker, Documents of Modern Literary Realism (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1963), pp. 16, 350.

The most thorough account of the English reaction to continental realism is Clarence R. Decker's, in The Victorian Conscience.⁵ He writes detailed ac-

⁵Clarence Raymond Decker, The Victorian Conscience (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1952). Decker's book is the culmination of his research on the English reaction to continental realism dating back to the 1930's.

counts of the controversies surrounding Balzac, Baudelaire, Zola, and Ibsen as these writers were introduced to English readers, and charts the general enthusiasm with which the English greeted the Russian realists. Like Frierson, he notes that the English response to the French realists was initially adverse, and gradually became more receptive. Unlike Frierson, however, Decker suggests that some of the resistance came from intelligent and open-minded critics on philosophical and aesthetic, rather than moral, grounds; not all adversaries of realism in England were disciples of Mrs. Grundy.

Decker's conclusion is a fruitful one. First of all, it counteracts the tendency of American cri-

ties to view all turn-of-the-century opposition to realism as simply a manifestation of the genteel mind. In addition, it uncovers the anomalous situation existing in late Victorian England in which none of the critics or writers now known as realists or naturalists were in sympathy with the theory of the realists; that is, none of the writers of the time, with the possible exception of George Moore, believed that writers were scientists or that novels were becoming more like works of science--as did Zola in France and Howells in America. In general, they did not tend to view the novel as a reproduction of life in any exact sense, nor did they believe the objectivity of the novelist possible or even desirable.

George Gissing, for example, sometimes sounded like a romanticist on the question of the novelist's objectivity. In 1892 he wrote:

To talk about being "objective" is all very well for those who swear by words. No novelist was ever objective, or ever will be. His work is a bit of life as seen by him. It is his business to make us feel a distinct pleasure in seeing the world with his eye.⁶

⁶Gissing originally published these remarks in the Pall Mall Gazette in an article called "Why I Don't Write Plays," September 10, 1892. My quotation is taken from Mabel Collins Donnelly, George Gissing, Grave Comedian (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University

Press, 1954), pp. 207-08.

In 1895, Gissing reiterated the point:

The novelist works, and must work, subjectively. A demand for objectivity in fiction is worse than meaningless, for apart from the personality of the workman no literary art can exist. The cry arose, of course, in protest against the imperfect method of certain novelists, who came forward in their own pages, and spoke as showmen; but what can be more absurd than to talk about the "objectivity" of such an author as Flaubert, who triumphs by his extraordinary power of presenting life as he, and no other man, beheld it. There is no science of fiction.⁷

⁷Gissing's discussion of objectivity appeared in an article called "Realism in Fiction," in the Humanitarian, July, 1895. My quotation is again taken from Donnelly, George Gissing, Grave Comedian, p. 209.

In 1892 in a letter to Eduard Bertz, Gissing did speculate that authorial detachment might be advantageous, but he rejected the method for his own use.

Yes, I am inclined to think that the purely impersonal method of narrative has its advantages. Of course it approximates to the dramatic. No English writer that I know (unless it be George Moore) has yet succeeded in adopting this method. Still, I shall never try (and you do not wish me) to suppress my own spirit. To do that, it seems to me, would be to renounce the specific character of the novelist. Better, in that case, to write plays.⁸

⁸The Letters of George Gissing to Eduard Bertz 1887-1903, ed. Arthur C. Young (London: Constable & Co., 1961), p. 149.

As Jacob Korg has observed, Gissing did not hold the scientific view of truth where "nothing short of objective reporting could qualify as realism"; rather he believed that truth was "the honest expression of the writer's reactions."⁹ According to such a cri-

⁹Jacob Korg, George Gissing: A Critical Biography (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1963), p. 264.

terion, George Eliot, Dickens, and even Scott were classified as truthful writers by Gissing. He distrusted attempts to make the aims and methods of science equivalent to those of fiction.

George Moore may have embraced the theory of realism temporarily, but by 1888 he had withdrawn his allegiance to its theoretical principles.¹⁰

¹⁰Malcolm J. Brown, George Moore: A Reconsideration (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1955), pp. 86-103. Brown believes that Moore never did fully understand and accept Zola's theory, and that by 1888 Moore not only criticized Zola's theory of fiction, but had also toned down his praise of Zola's novels.

Moore described his reaction, after he first encountered an article by Zola, in ecstatic terms:

Naturalisme, la verite, la science, were repeated some half-a-dozen times. Hardly able to believe my eyes, I read that one should write with as little imagination as possible, that plot in a novel or in a play was illiterate and puerile, and that the art of M. Scribe was an art of strings and wires, etc. I rose up from breakfast, order-

ed my coffee, and stirred the sugar, a little dizzy, like one who has received a violent blow on the head.¹¹

¹¹George Moore, Confessions of a Young Man (New York: Boni & Liveright, 1923), Vol. IX, pp. 360-61.

Moore then went on, showing a keener understanding of the nature of Zola's creed:

The idea of a new art based upon science, in opposition to the art of the old world that was based on imagination, an art that should explain all things and embrace modern life in its entirety, in its endless ramifications, be, as it were, a new creed in a new civilization filled me with wonder, and I stood dumb before the vastness of the conception, and the towering height of the ambition.¹²

¹²Ibid., p. 362.

However, Moore's admiration for Zola's works seems to have been based upon the romantic aspects of his novels. For example, it was the grandeur and form of L' Assommoir which appealed to Moore; he showed no interest in Zola's attempt to portray characters controlled by heredity and environment.

I had read the "Assommoir," and had been much impressed by its pyramid size, strength, height, and decorative grandeur, and also by the immense harmonic development of the idea; and the fugal treatment of the different scenes had seemed to me astonishingly new.¹³

¹³Moore, Confessions of a Young Man, p. 364.

Moore himself then commented that it was the romantic qualities of Zola which most interested him; it was the Victor Hugo in Zola to which he responded:

Nor did I then even roughly suspect that the very qualities which set my admiration in a blaze wilder than wildfire, being precisely those that had won the victory for the romantic school forty years before, were very antagonistic to those claimed for the new art.¹⁴

¹⁴Ibid., p. 365.

In the Confessions Moore also denied that art tried to reproduce nature or to give nature back in its original form. He commended Whistler for not painting a model in a characteristic pose, but for painting the idea rather than the model, agreeing with Whistler that "art is not nature. Art is nature digested. Zola and Goncourt cannot, or will not understand that the artistic stomach must be allowed to do its work in its own mysterious fashion."¹⁵

¹⁵Ibid., p. 386.

As Moore's disaffection with realistic theory became more apparent, his judgment of other writers underwent some change. He believed that he had rated

Flaubert too high in his early criticism. "Year after year I believed Madame Bovary and L' Education Sentimentale to be great works." Moore came to feel that Madame Bovary was a rigid and immobile book, lacking animated plot and style. He complained of "the stiff, paralysed narrative, the short sentence trussed like a fowl, with the inevitable adjective, in the middle of every one." He was especially dissatisfied with the narrative: "It will be enough for me to say that the business of a narrator is to narrate, and that Flaubert had little or nothing to narrate."¹⁶

¹⁶George Moore, Avowals (New York: Boni & Liveright, 1926), pp. 256-57. Avowals was first published in 1919.

Moore always admired Zola, but as a romancer rather than a realist. In an essay on Zola's Le Reve, Moore wrote:

By no stretching of the meaning of the word "realistic" can we include as such any of M. Zola's novels--no, not even the Assommoir. The observation on which it is based is far too general, far too subjective.¹⁷

¹⁷George Moore, Impressions and Opinions (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1891), p. 123.

He further classified Zola as a romanticist with the following amusing passage: "Midnight is dark outside,

and the sleepers do not yet know that it is M. Zola who knocks at their doors with the lamp of Romance. Will Mr. Lang awake and let him in?"¹⁸ Moore's re-

¹⁸Moore, Impressions and Opinions, p. 129.

view of Zola's La Debacle in 1892 throws an additional light on his attitude toward Zola and toward realism. He felt that La Debacle did not match Zola's best work primarily because in the book his theories of fiction interfered with the natural bent of his genius. Moore felt that Zola's failure to distinguish between life and art was responsible for an increasing diffuseness; it was apparent to him that Zola had "ceased to practice the art of omission." Moore further believed that Zola's tendency to equate life and fiction kept him from reducing a scene to its final essence; in other words, Zola's theory of fiction encouraged him to leave the reader with a mass of unrelated details rather than a completed picture. Since La Debacle was based upon history, Moore felt that Zola was trapped by his belief that history and fiction were the nearest of kin, forcing him to follow the historical record when he should have been viewing the material as an artist. Moore's own belief in the separation between fact and art or between history and the novel is abundantly clear:

"The essential quality of the historical novel and the historical picture is that it should contain no history, and from this rule the great masters have never deviated." Zola's La Debacle miscarried, then, because it allowed Zola to work from historical record. As far as Moore was concerned, Zola's realistic theories were a remora upon his genius: "M. Zola's genius is as ill at ease in history as in direct observation of life. He is neither a historian nor a reporter. He is essentially an imaginative writer." 19

¹⁹George Moore, "La Debacle," Fortnightly Review, LVIII (August, 1892), 208.

Moore admired both Turgenev and Balzac, who are frequently considered realists, but he seldom viewed them as a typical realist critic should have. There is considerable difference, for example, between Howells' and Moore's conception of these two writers. What made Turgenev's fiction seem like life itself to Howells was Turgenev's ability to keep himself out of the story. Moore, however, believed that objectivity in a general sense was impossible:

The impersonality of the artist is the vainest of delusions; Flaubert dreamed of it all his life, but Madame Bovary, with the little pessimistic flip at the end of every paragraph, is the most personal of books. Turgeneff attained absolute impersonality of diction; but that which had in-

fluenced his life he put prominently in his books.²⁰

²⁰Moore, Impressions and Opinions, p. 92.

Nor did Moore believe that objectivity was always desirable--"Whether the writer should intrude his idea on the reader, or hide it away and leave it latent in his work, is a question of method; and all methods are good."²¹ What Moore looked for in Turgenev's fiction,

²¹Ibid., p. 68.

then, and did not always find, was something that Howells was seldom concerned with--a sense of balance and unity. Moore liked the formal arrangement of Vanity Fair where the "sets of lines are placed in such juxtaposition with each other that the picture balances just as the parts of an elaborate decoration balance and unite." Moore continued: "This is what the different parts of Peres et Enfants do not do, and we remember little of the book except Bazaroff."²²

²²Ibid., pp. 83-84.

The realist critic, such as Howells, tended to view balance and unity as artificial aspects of form, and preferred a looser arrangement which seemed to be

dictated by life itself.

In general, the realist critic in America emphasized the importance of observation to a novelist, but Moore discounted it. When discussing Balzac, he acknowledged that many would wonder how Balzac had the time to write so prolifically, and at the same time experience and observe the life he was writing about. Moore's answer illustrates how little he adopted the realist principle of observation. "The vulgar do not know," he wrote, "that the artist makes but little use of his empirical knowledge of life, and that he relies almost entirely upon his inner consciousness of the truth."²³ Moore's view that

²³ Moore, Impressions and Opinions, p. 9.

romanticism aided Balzac was also very different from Howells'. Instead of believing that living in the midst of romanticism subverted Balzac's writing (as Howells believed), Moore thought that the peculiar combination of realism and romanticism in Balzac made him the great writer that he was:

Balzac lived in the midst of the romantic movement, and had his genius not been infinitely high and durable it would have succumbed and been lost in that great current which bore all away but him. But the realistic and critical method, of which he was inventor and creator, lived too strongly in him, and the romance which swept about him only tended to purify and ventilate the abundance of his genius: it was the romantic movement

that saved him from drifting among the mud-banks and shallow shores of Naturalism.²⁴

²⁴Moore, Impressions and Opinions, p. 58.

While many of the realists--Howells, Zola, Tolstoy--believed that one of the functions of literature was to reform and regenerate society, Moore did not. Howells came to revere Tolstoy above all writers because he united humanism and literature; Moore, on the other hand, preferred Turgenev to Tolstoy because the latter looked upon art too much as a means of communicating ideas.²⁵ Howells' notion that litera-

²⁵Moore, Avowals, p. 159.

ture ought to win its most vital and honest response from the common people was completely at odds with Moore's aristocratic view of art, for he claimed that art was the direct antithesis to democracy and that "the mass can only appreciate ample and naive emotions, puerile prettiness, above all conventionalities."²⁶

²⁶Moore, Confessions of a Young Man, p. 383.

If Howells' theory of fiction represents "realism," then Moore was a "romantic." On the basic issues--the relationship between life and art, form and

art, and art and society--Moore and Howells took opposite sides.

Even Thomas Hardy disagreed with the basic assumptions and principles of realistic theory as announced by Zola and Howells. In the first place, he thought that science and art were separate activities, and that scientific methods could not be applied to art. In an essay written in 1891 called "The Science of Fiction," Hardy declared:

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, with an eye to being more truthful than truth (the just aim of Art), he transforms himself into a technician at a move.²⁷

²⁷Thomas Hardy's essay, "The Science of Fiction," first appeared in The New Review, April, 1891. My quotation is taken from the reprint in Thomas Hardy, Life and Art (New York: Greenberg, 1925), pp. 85-86.

Zola's claim to be writing scientific fiction was untrue, he thought, and Zola's practice simply did not coincide with his theory. The writer of fiction should not attempt to be scientific; that is, he should not attempt to reproduce phenomena in an automatic way. Of the realists, Hardy said:

They forget in their insistence on life, and nothing but life, in a plain slice, that a story must be worth the telling, that a good deal of life is not worth any such thing, and that they must not occupy a reader's time with what he can get at first hand anywhere around him.²⁸

²⁸Florence Emily Hardy, The Later Years of Thomas Hardy, 1892-1928 (New York: Macmillan, 1930), p. 158. Hardy made the statement in 1913.

Hardy, in contrast to Howells, tended to discount the importance of extremely accurate observation to the novelist, and as a corollary, to minimize the significance of vraisemblance. He wrote that "a sight for the finer qualities of existence, an ear for the 'still sad music of humanity,' are not to be acquired by the outer senses alone, close as their powers in photography may be."²⁹ He even went so

²⁹Hardy, Life and Art, p. 89.

far as to suggest that an eye for externals was inversely related to an eye for "the more ethereal characteristics of humanity." On more than one occasion Hardy warned that fidelity to the surface appearance of life could be overrated. He spoke of characters in novels who

lift their tea cups or fan themselves to date. But what of it, after our first sense of its photographic curiousness is past? In aiming at the trivial and the ephemeral they have almost surely missed better things.³⁰

³⁰Thomas Hardy, "The Profitable Reading of Fiction," Forum, V (March, 1888), 64-65.

Again, fiction should not pay "a great regard to adventitious externals to the neglect of vital qualities," nor should it be content with "a precision about the outside of the platter and an obtuseness to the contents."³¹ To be sure, a realist such as How-

³¹Hardy, Life and Art, p. 89.

ells did not want fiction to neglect the inner characteristics of humanity either, but Howells considered vraisemblance a more significant part of the total truth than Hardy did.

Instead of thinking of art as a reproduction of life as the realists were wont to do, Hardy consistently thought of art as transformation of life into an aesthetic framework. He found fault with that kind of criticism that regarded the novel as a thing rather than a view of a thing. Such criticism, according to Hardy

forgets that the characters, however they may differ, express mainly the author, his largeness of heart or otherwise, his culture, his insight, and very little of any other living person, except in such an inferior kind of procedure as might occasionally be applied to dialogue, and would take the narrative out of the category of fiction; i. e., verbatim reporting without selective judgment.³²

³²Hardy, "The Profitable Reading of Fiction," 69.

Hardy's attitude toward dialect was consistent with his view that the artist had to modify, not transcribe. He did not attempt "to exhibit on paper," he said, "the precise accents of a rustic speaker," feeling that such transcription interfered with the novelist's chief intention, which was "to depict the men and their natures rather than their dialect forms."³³ Hardy's belief that the artist modified,

³³Hardy, Life and Art, p. 113.

rather than transcribed, underlay his view of form in the novel. The novel did not approximate the rambling quality of life; the novel was an organism, and although the general reader was not aware of it, "to a masterpiece in story there appertains a beauty of shape, no less than to a masterpiece in pictorial or plastic art, capable of giving to the trained mind an equal pleasure."³⁴ Finally, Hardy's conviction that

³⁴Hardy, "The Profitable Reading of Fiction," 66.

art transformed life instead of reproducing it went hand in hand with his approval of idealization in art. In superior art, the artist had to omit part of what was present in nature, and had to complete that which

was merely suggested:

No real gladiator ever died in such perfect harmony with normal nature as is represented in the well-known Capitoline marble. There was always a jar somewhere, a jot or tittle of something foreign in the real death-scene, which did not essentially appertain to the situation, and tended toward neutralizing its pathos; but this the sculptor omitted, and so consecrated his theme. In drama likewise....No dozen persons who were capable of being animated by the profound reasons and truths thrown broadcast over "Hamlet" or "Othello," of feeling the pulse of life so accurately, ever met together in one place in this world to shape and end. And, to come to fiction, nobody ever met an Uncle Toby who was Uncle Toby all round; no historian's Queen Elizabeth was ever so perfectly a woman as the fictitious Elizabeth of "Kenilworth." What is called the idealization of character is, in truth, the making of them too real to be possible.³⁵

³⁵Hardy, "The Profitable Reading of Fiction," 63.

In such a passage, Hardy, looking to Elizabethan art and to drama and sculpture for his guidelines, takes it for granted that all art, including the novel, must "improve" upon nature. The typical realist, on the other hand, looked askance at "improving" upon nature, and generally found his guidelines in science rather than in Roman sculpture or Shakespeare. Hardy did not believe, as the realists in America did, that art was a close imitation of nature.³⁶

³⁶In contrast to the majority of critics, Morton D.

Zabel has said that Hardy should not be classified with the naturalists, and has placed him in a line of novelists which included Melville, Emily Bronte, and Hawthorne in the nineteenth century, and Joyce, Proust, Gide, and Kafka in the twentieth. Zabel's classification, stressing Hardy's connection with romancers, is in Craft and Character (New York: Viking, 1957), pp. 78, 94.

When one investigates what the English writers who are often classified as realists or naturalists said about the novel, he discovers that their theories were at variance with the central principles of realism and naturalism; that is, they almost never thought of novels as scientific studies or as accurate reproductions of life, nor did they usually advocate objectivity as the novelist's shibboleth. What the English realists did generally have in common, rather than any scientific realistic theory, was a desire to cast off the heavy Victorian conventions which weighed down the novel; theirs was "the exaggerated cry of an honest reaction from the false."³⁷

³⁷Hardy, Life and Art, p. 88.

Gissing, for example, wanted to "show the hideous injustice of our whole system of society."³⁸ He

³⁸Letters of George Gissing to Members of his Family, Collected by Algernon and Ellen Gissing (London: Constable & Co., 1927), p. 83.

advocated artistic sincerity in fiction, and let it

be known that he would not write for the mob in the manner of H. Rider Haggard in order to increase the sale of his books.³⁹ As has been indicated, George

³⁹Ibid., p. 196.

Moore did not share Gissing's concern for social justice; however, Moore's revolt against falsity led him to contend for franker treatment of sex. When Moore published A Mummer's Wife in 1885, the circulating libraries rejected it, and Moore responded with Literature at Nurse, or Circulating Morals, in which he claimed that the circulating libraries, not being able to tell the difference between pruriency and literature, circulated pruriency and banned literature.⁴⁰

⁴⁰Malcolm Brown, in his George Moore: A Reconsideration, p. 98, says that Moore's Literature at Nurse made it possible for novelists to write without Mudie's blessing.

Moore's ardor for frank and unconventional literature persisted after his break with naturalism. In 1889 he wrote an article on the English drama occasioned by Arthur Pinero's The Profligate, remarking that had Pinero the courage to let his hero remain a profligate, the play would have been the best since The School for Scandal--but Pinero's hero ceased to be a profligate at the end of the first act. This

transformation of the hero caused Moore to say: "The conversion of bad men into good men is the besetting sin of modern art," and he went on to draw a parallel between disingenuousness in the drama and in the late Victorian period itself:

Many will detect in this literature a likeness to the age; and will recognise it as being the literature of an age of smug respectability--an age interested especially in the preservation of villas and silk hats; an age most anxious for peace so long as peace does not disturb the money market--war would be preferable to any serious decrease in the price of money; a lie-a-bed age, disgustingly absorbed in comfort; an age loathsomely anxious to live in a fool's paradise, and close its ears to the sound of danger; an age selfish beyond all preceding ages, and whose one maxim is "Patch it up so that it will last my time."⁴¹

⁴¹George Moore, "Our Dramatists and Their Literature," Fortnightly Review, LII (November, 1889), 631.

A final example of Moore's struggle against those whose strait-laced morality would debilitate literature was his article in the Century Magazine in 1919, in which he reviewed his experiences with the so-called guardians of decency in the eighties and again struck at unwarranted censorship.⁴²

⁴²George Moore, "Literature and Morals," Century Magazine, XCVIII (May, 1919), 124-34.

Hardy was less flamboyant than Moore, but his struggle for a more candid fiction is well-known.

He fought back at the genteel critics of Tess in his preface to the fifth edition in July, 1892. His most extended plea for a fiction that would capture the attention of thoughtful readers was published in The New Review in 1890. In that article he lamented the false treatment of the relationship between the sexes common to novels, reminding his readers that the honest portrayal of life must remember that life is a physiological fact.⁴³

⁴³Hardy's article, entitled "Candour in English Fiction," was published in The New Review, January, 1890. My paraphrase is taken from Life and Art, pp. 76-82.

Among critics who joined these novelists in advocating a more adult fiction were D. F. Hannigan, literary critic for the Westminster Review, and the more widely known writer and critic, Edmund Gosse. More than most English critics, Hannigan was comfortable with the principles of realistic theory. On one occasion, he made a prediction about the novel. "In the twentieth century," he wrote, "the term 'work of fiction' will be a misdescription, for the keynote of every novel worthy of the name will be reality: its essence will be conscientious adherence to fact."⁴⁴ On another occasion, Hannigan said that "a

⁴⁴D. F. Hannigan, "Prospective Transformation of the Novel," Westminster Review, CXL (September, 1893), 260.

marked feature of contemporary literature is the growing antipathy to the unreal, and the desire to depict life as it is, without illusion and without exaggeration."⁴⁵ Such statements placed too much

⁴⁵D. F. Hannigan, "The Decline of Romance," Westminster Review, CXLI (January, 1894), 33.

emphasis upon a close imitation of actuality to be congenial to Gissing, Moore, or Hardy.⁴⁶

⁴⁶Hannigan, like Howells, was a severe judge of Dickens because the English novelist "found a pleasure in distorting facts, and treated probability with contempt." D. F. Hannigan, "The Artificiality of English Novels," Westminster Review, CXXXIII (March, 1890), 259-60. Gissing, putting much less stress upon probability than realists usually did, admired Dickens greatly.

Hannigan, however, agreed with Gissing, Moore, and Hardy that English fiction should be more bold. In 1890 he complained that even in the best English novels

there is a singular tendency to suppress some of the most important facts of life....Adultery must never be called by its real name; and, if it is introduced, owing to the exigencies of fiction, it must be hidden behind a veil of cumbrous circumlocutions.⁴⁷

⁴⁷D. F. Hannigan, "The Artificiality of English Novels," 254.

In 1892 he attacked Lang for the latter's criticism

of Tess:

If the novel is to be a faithful picture of actual life, and not a mere romantic narrative intended mainly to amuse young persons in their hours of leisure, the hackneyed moralisings of such critics as Mr. Andrew Lang must be disregarded as utterly beside the question.⁴⁸

⁴⁸D. F. Hannigan, "The Latest Development of English Fiction," Westminster Review, CXXXVIII (December, 1892), 655.

In 1895 Hannigan praised Hardy and George Moore for not ignoring sex in their novels, and said that "if a novel is to be a true picture of life, then the novelist should not give us an emasculated view of human nature."⁴⁹

⁴⁹D. F. Hannigan, "Sex in Fiction," Westminster Review, CXLIII (December, 1895), 624.

Edmund Gosse, writing an appraisal of the realistic movement in 1890, thought that the defects in realistic theory could be detected in the realistic novels themselves. According to Gosse, the first principle of the realist school was the exact reproduction of life. He felt that this principle could not be attained, and that works produced according to it, such as Zola's La Joie de Vivre and Henry James's The Bostonians, ultimately left on the mind "a sense of a strained reflection, of images blurred or mal-

formed by a convexity of the mirror." He was not certain why nearly every realistic novel left this impression of a distorted reflexion, but he said that

perhaps it can in a measure be accounted for by the inherent disproportion which exists between the small flat surface of a book and the vast arch of life which it undertakes to mirror.⁵⁰

⁵⁰Edmund Gosse, "The Limits of Realism in Fiction," Forum, IX (June, 1890), 396-97.

Gosse thought that the second tenet of the realists--the disinterested attitude of the narrator--was a "snare in practice," and that in place of the neutrality which they advocated, the realists had substituted cynicism and pessimism. Lest it be thought that Gosse was merely a genteel critic who could not stomach the unpalatable truths which the realists disclosed, let it be noted that he had no sympathy with those who saw nothing but filth and crime in the work of the realists. In 1892 Gosse made a plea for novelists to "enlarge their borders, and take in more of life." In particular, he was vexed that novelists so often wrote about young love for the young reader. "Why should there not be novels written for middle-aged persons?"⁵¹ He compli-

⁵¹Edmund Gosse, "The Tyranny of the Novel," National Review, XIX (April, 1892), 171.

mented Zola for his "large, competent, and profound view of the movement of life," and urged English novelists to consider such figures as the speculator on the Stock Exchange or the foreman of a colliery for their central characters.

In general, the English realists of the latter part of the nineteenth century had reservations about the theoretical aspects of realism. Frequently, their insistence that art transforms rather than imitates placed them with the romantics on that aesthetic issue. However, the English realists all fought for a franker and more adult fiction. The point emerges that there was no intrinsic connection between realism as a theory of the novel, and the desire to lift taboos which had settled upon the novel in the nineteenth century. In fact, the English "realists," holding a somewhat romantic philosophy of fiction, pressed harder for candid literature than did Howells, whose theory was squarely realistic.

CHAPTER V

REALISM, ROMANCE, AND THE CRITICS

Henry James and Open-Minded Criticism

The historians of American literature have generally contended that Henry James joined Howells to help bring about the change from romanticism to realism in American fiction. Typical of this view is Gordon Haight's statement in the Literary History of the United States that as Howells fought for the acceptance of realism in this country, he had "a strong ally in Henry James."¹ Twentieth century critics have

¹Gordon Haight, "Realism Defined: William Dean Howells," in the Literary History of the United States, Robert E. Spiller et al., eds. (New York: Macmillan, 1948), p. 885.

frequently regarded James and Howells as early realists whose credos were intensified by Garland, Crane, and Frank Norris.² One critic has spoken of James's

²Lars Ahnebrink, The Beginnings of Naturalism in American Fiction. Essays and Studies on American Language and Literature, IX (Uppsala, Sweden: A. B. Lundequistska, 1950), pp. 127-28.

development as a movement "out of the shallows of weak romance into the strong currents and depths of his mature realism."³ Lyon Richardson, while acknowledging

³Robert C. LeClair, Young Henry James 1843-1870 (New York: Bookman Associates, 1955), pp. 376-77.

that James "accepted and used some of the liberties and services of Romanticism," believed that James was to be classified as a realist.

Philosophically James belonged to the school of Realism; he was convinced that the novel was the best form of art to represent the whole truth in life. His criticism and his own fiction place him there. He observed that Flaubert stemmed from Balzac, and Zola from Flaubert; and he himself was touched by all three.⁴

⁴Henry James, ed. Lyon N. Richardson (New York: American Book Co., 1941), Introduction, xxxiii.

Nevertheless, the critics, including Richardson, have frequently specified that James is to be labeled as a realist only with caution. Louis Wann, for example, said that

when we speak of Mark Twain, William Dean Howells, and Henry James as realists, we must do so with the consciousness that for Twain the badge seems inappropriate on a man who hated classifications, and that the larger significance of Howells and James lies in their transcending the limits of any artistic creed, however much both may have dedicated their services to making that creed known and practiced in the world of letters.⁵

⁵The Rise of Realism: American Literature from 1860-1900, ed. Louis Wann (New York: Macmillan, 1949), p. 4.

Walter Blair associates James with the realists and naturalists, because James "thought that fiction should reproduce reality." However, Blair goes on to point out that James believed reality as fiction dealt with it twice translated, both through the author's "peculiar experiencing of it," and through his "depicting of it."⁶ When one grants these reservations about the

⁶Walter Blair, "American Literature," Encyclopaedia Britannica (1965), 771.

reality presented by fiction, one can legitimately wonder what distinguishes this kind of realist from a romanticist.

Those who have studied James's criticism are also reluctant to speak of James as a realist. Morris Roberts, for example, sums up the contradictory tendencies in James's criticism that make him "the despair of an attentive reader."

He slips through the net, and one feels that scarcely any net but his own would be fine enough to hold him. The unity of his mind is the great fact, but it is a unity difficult to seize. He is, for example, in a sense the most intellectual of critics, and yet the least interested of all in general ideas. He puts art above life, yet no critic has urged the claims of conduct more eloquently or insisted more upon the bareness of an art for art doctrine. No one surely has ever had

so strong a passion for literature together with so limited an appetite for books. His bias in criticism, like his style, is his own; he cannot be fitted into any category. He rejects standards, rules, classes, and types; he has his own standards, best of all his own taste, and he is not an impressionist, like Pater, for example. It is not the adventures of his soul that he records, but the visible, objective qualities of the thing before him; he is the analyst always, never merely the sensitive soul. If to be philosophical is to relate literature at many points to the greater interest of mankind, James is not a philosophical critic, yet no critic has ever gone more deeply into the philosophy of art.⁷

⁷Morris Roberts, Henry James's Criticism (New York: Haskell House, 1965), p. 120. This is a reprint of the 1929 publication.

Roberts' chagrin at being unable to classify James's criticism is shared by Clarence Gohdes, who remarked of James's essay, "The Art of Fiction":

The chief feature of the essay is the wariness with which its author shunned establishing doctrines for fiction. He was willing to affirm that the novel should attempt to represent life, but, wisely asserted that "the measure of reality is very difficult to fix"....All efforts to distinguish between types of fiction--for example, the novel as distinguished from the romance, or the novel of character as differing from the novel of incident--he denounced. And he reminded his readers that Dumas and Dickens, as well as Jane Austen and Flaubert, had "worked in this field with equal glory"....As for morality and fiction, he dodged the issue by assuming that "questions of art were questions of execution" and moral problems "quite another affair"; but he agrees with the prevailing view that, since "young people" were largely concerned as readers, the novel in English should be "rather shy."⁸

⁸Clarence Gohdes, "Escape from the Commonplace," in The Literature of the American People, ed. Arthur Hobson Quinn (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1951), pp. 698-99.

In his study of James's criticism, Rene Wellek also admits the difficulty of classifying James. "He is neither a 'realist,' the label pinned on him in most histories of literature," wrote Wellek, "nor a 'formalist,' a devotee of art for art's sake for which he is often dismissed."⁹ Wellek himself declined to label

⁹Rene Wellek, "Henry James's Literary Theory and Criticism," American Literature, XXX (November, 1958), 299.

James's literary theory or criticism.

James's literary criticism cannot readily be classified as realist or formalist or romanticist, because he admired both writers who were realists and writers who were romanticists. Whereas Howells praised, as a general rule, only those who were realists, and whereas Lang, for example, rather consistently reserved his applause for romanticists, James devoted his attention to writers from both schools. He thought highly of Flaubert but he also honored Stevenson, Gissing but also Pierre Loti, Balzac but also Kipling, Ibsen but also Rostand. James agreed with Matthew Arnold that the business of criticism

"is to urge the claims of all things to be understood." What James disliked in a critic was a rigid adherence to a dogma or a system.

Hence, James had severe reservations about Taine, largely because Taine was "a man with a method, the apostle of a theory." James's contrast between Taine and Sainte-Beuve is especially revealing.

Now Sainte-Beuve is, to our sense, the better apostle of the two. In purpose the least doctrinal of critics, it was by his very horror of dogmas, moulds, and formulas, that he so effectively contributed to the science of literary interpretation. The truly devout patience with which he kept his final conclusion in abeyance until after an exhaustive survey of the facts, after perpetual returns and ever-deferred farewells to them, is his living testimony to the importance of the facts. Just as he could never reconcile himself to saying his last word on book or author, so he never pretended to have devised a method which should be a key to truth. The truth for M. Taine lies stored up, as one may say, in great lumps and blocks, to be released and detached by a few lively hammer-blows.¹⁰

¹⁰Henry James, Literary Reviews and Essays, ed. Albert Mordell (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1957), pp. 63-4. James's review of Taine's History of English Literature originally appeared in the Atlantic Monthly, April, 1872.

James was similarly disturbed by the narrowness which he detected in the criticism of Howells. In September, 1887, Howells had written in the "Editor's Study" that "each one of Mr. Henry James's books is as broad as any one of Balzac's," and he went on to single out

The Princess Casamassima for its scope and variety; William James called Henry's attention to Howells' tribute, and Henry replied in October:

I hadn't seen the latter's "tribute" in the September Harper's, but I have looked it up. It gives me pleasure, but doesn't make me cease to deplore the figure that Howells makes every month in his critical department of Harper's. He seems to me as little as possible of a critic and expresses himself so that I wish he would "quit," and content himself with writing the novel as he thinks it should be, and not talking about it: he does the one so much better than the other. He talks from too small a point of view, and his examples...are smaller still. There is, it seems to me, far too much talk around and about the novel in proportion to what is done. Any genre is good which has life.¹¹

¹¹Henry James's letter to William James, October, 1887, is reprinted in Ralph Barton Perry's The Thought and Character of William James (Boston: Little, Brown, 1935), I, p. 399.

In 1913 James again assailed Howells' critical narrowness, this time in a letter to T. S. Perry. After alluding to Howells' perennial innocence and optimism, James found fault with him for having read only one book of Meredith's and none of Stevenson's. What was astonishing to James was that Howells, "with all his Harperring on the Novel etc. in all the years,"¹² had

¹²James's comment about Howells is from a letter which James wrote to T. S. Perry, September 17, 1913. An excerpt from the letter is reprinted in Virginia Harlow's Thomas Sergeant Perry: A Biography (Durham, N. C.: Duke University Press, 1950), p. 342.

such intentional blindspots.

The doctrinaire critic distressed James. Conversely, James thought it important that critics allow novelists to experiment, for "every experiment in aesthetics is interesting."¹³ James's main objection to

¹³Henry James, "Edmond Rostand," as reprinted in Henry James, The Scenic Art. Notes on Acting and the Drama: 1872-1901. Ed. Allan Wade (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1948), p. 319.

Walter Besant's essay on fiction was the latter's attempt to lay down principles or rules that every novel should adhere to. James said of Besant:

He seems to me to mistake in attempting to say so definitely beforehand what sort of an affair the good novel will be. To indicate the danger of such an error as that has been the purpose of these pages; to suggest that certain traditions on the subject, applied a priori, have already had much to answer for, and that the good health of an art which undertakes so immediately to reproduce life must demand that it be perfectly free. It lives upon exercise, and the very meaning of exercise is freedom. The only obligation to which in advance we may hold a novel, without incurring the accusation of being arbitrary, is that it be interesting....The ways in which it is at liberty to accomplish this result (of interesting us) strike me as innumerable, and such as can only suffer from being marked out or fenced in by prescription.¹⁴

¹⁴Henry James, "The Art of Fiction," as reprinted in Partial Portraits (New York: Macmillan, 1888), pp. 383-84.

James's essay, "The Art of Fiction," was not primarily a plea for the realistic novel; it was, as James later wrote to Stevenson, chiefly "a plea for liberty,"¹⁵

¹⁵Henry James and Robert Louis Stevenson: A Record of Friendship and Criticism, ed. Janet Adams Smith (London: Rupert Hart-Davis, 1948), p. 102. James wrote the letter to Stevenson December 5, 1884.

for the artist to be free to render his impression of life. "We must grant the artist his subject, his idea, his donnee: our criticism is applied only to what he makes of it."¹⁶ In his essay on De Maupassant in 1888,

¹⁶Henry James, "The Art of Fiction," 394-95.

James again took up the point that there was no single approach to fiction which all novelists were obliged to follow.

In that essay James approved of the critic who asks or says--"Make me something fine in the form that shall suit you best, according to your temperament."

James then comments:

This seems to me to put into a nutshell the whole question of the different classes of fiction, concerning which there has recently been so much discourse. There are simply as many different kinds as there are persons practicing the art,

for if a picture, a tale, or a novel is a direct impression of life (and that surely constitutes its interest and value), the impression will vary according to the plate that takes it, the particular structure and mixture of the recipient.¹⁷

¹⁷Henry James, "Guy De Maupassant," Fortnightly Review, XLIX (January, 1888), 365.

James was certain that it was "absurd to say that there is, for the novelist's use, only one reality of things."¹⁸ The ideal critic, then, was to be

¹⁸Ibid.

hospitable to a variety of aesthetic experiments. This meant that James as a critic not only approved Flaubert's realistic experiment in Madame Bovary, a work which has "fixed itself in the memory of most readers as a revelation of what the imagination may accomplish under a powerful impulse to mirror the unmitigated realities of life,"¹⁹ but

¹⁹James, Literary Reviews and Essays, ed. Morrell, p. 146.

that he also sanctioned Edmund Rostand's excursions into "the pays bleu, the purple island," where he "sails and sails with never an accident."²⁰

²⁰James, The Scenic Art, ed. Wade, p. 312.

Even as a young reviewer James's mind had been open to the productions of both realistic and romantic writers. In 1866 he esteemed the work of George Eliot, while recognizing that her achievements arose from her powers of observation rather than imagination.²¹ In the previous year he commended Dickens

²¹Henry James, Views and Reviews, ed. Le Roy Phillips (Boston: Ball Publishing, 1908), p. 36.

for his fanciful achievements. "In all Mr. Dickens's works the fantastic has been his great resource; and while his fancy was lively and vigorous it accomplished great things."²² James not only wrote favor-

²²Ibid., p. 154.

able reviews of Turgenev and Howells,²³ but also of

²³James reviewed Turgenev's Virgin Soil in the Nation, April 26, 1877, and he reviewed Howells' A Foregone Conclusion in the North American Review, January, 1875.

Scott and Alexandre Dumas.²⁴ When he discussed George

²⁴James thought that posterity would love Scott in spite of his defects. His comments on Scott appeared in the North American Review, October, 1864. James's favorable review of Alexandre Dumas' Affaire Clemen-ceau: Memoire de l'Accuse appeared in the Nation, October 11, 1866.

Eliot's The Spanish Gypsy, he was perfectly willing to

judge it as a romance.

In reading and criticising The Spanish Gypsy we must not cease to bear in mind, the fact that the work is emphatically a romance. We may contest its being a poem, but we must admit that it is a romance in the fullest sense of the word. Whether the term may be absolutely defined I know not; but we may say of it, comparing it with the novel, that it carries much farther that compromise with reality which is the basis of all imaginative writing. In the romance this principle of compromise pervades the superstructure as well as the basis. The most that we exact is that the fable be consistent with itself.²⁵

²⁵James, Views and Reviews, ed. Le Roy Phillips, p. 123.

James approached Julian Hawthorne's Idolatry with the same large-mindedness. He noted that some would point out to Hawthorne that "such people, such places, and such doings are preposterously impossible," but James insisted that such remarks were no valid criticism of the book. He continued in the same vein:

Mr. Hawthorne's story is purely imaginative, and this fact, which by some readers may be made its reproach, is, to our sense, its chief recommendation. An author, if he feels it in him, has a perfect right to write a fairy-tale. Of course he is bound to make it entertaining, and if he can also make it mean something more than it seems to mean on the surface, he doubly justifies himself.²⁶

²⁶James, Literary Reviews and Essays, ed. Albert Mordell, pp. 250-51.

James concluded that "one will find no fault with a romance for being frankly romantic, and only demand of it, as one does of any other book, that it be good of its kind."

By 1884, when James wrote "The Art of Fiction," he had decided that one could not really make a meaningful distinction between the romance and the novel. By then he had decided that there were as many kinds of fiction as there were writers of fiction, but he was no less receptive to works that were usually considered romances than he had previously been. The romance which James singled out for his commendation in "The Art of Fiction" was of course Stevenson's Treasure Island, which he called delightful because it succeeded in what it had attempted.²⁷ James continued to admire Stevenson as

²⁷James, "The Art of Fiction," p. 403.

he continued to admire realistic writers--once, in fact, writing to his brother William in 1887 that Stevenson and Howells "are the only English imaginative writers today whom I can look at."²⁸ Few

²⁸The quotation is taken from Ralph Barton Perry's The Thought and Character of William James, I, 399.

critics linked Stevenson and Howells with such

amiability.

Romanticists continued to merit James's attention around the turn of the century. He was attracted to the work of Pierre Loti of whom he once wrote: "I have nothing more responsible to say of Loti than that I adore him."²⁹ Kipling, whom How-

²⁹Henry James, Notes on Novelists With Some Other Notes (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1914), p. 445.

ells scornfully classed with Rider Haggard,³⁰ be-

³⁰Howells, "Editor's Study," LXXXI (October, 1890), 801.

witched James with his "diabolically great" talent.³¹

³¹The Letters of Henry James, ed. Percy Lubbock (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1920), I, 341.

Rostand, "factitious from the crown of his head to the sole of his foot" as far as Howells was concerned,³² was the object of a comprehensive critical

³²Howells, "Diversions of the Higher Journalist: The Apotheosis of M. Rostand," Harper's Weekly, XLVII (July 4, 1903), 1112.

study by Henry James. That study is interesting because James acknowledged that of recent writers, only Robert Louis Stevenson produced first-rate romantic literature, but he did not think romantic literature

a primitive form that must disappear in a sophisticated civilization--as Howells had thought. The lustre of romance could be restored, and Rostand was showing the way; he spoke of Rostand's "free use of that restorative gold-leaf of which our store seems to have run short," and then continued:

He lays it on thick, and gives it a splendid polish; the work he has hitherto done shines and twinkles with it in his clear morning of youth. We are infinitely amused, we are well-nigh dazzled, by the show.³³

³³James, The Scenic Art, ed. Wade, p. 309.

As a critic James cannot be labeled as a realist or as a romanticist, because he thought that the ideal critic was receptive to excellent work whether it was realistic, romantic, or belonged to an unnamed category marked only by the author's individual vision and style. James can be, and has been, discussed as a critic who acclaimed realistic writers; however, it is also true that James gave support to romance, and applauded the achievements of certain romantic writers. For the most part, twentieth century critics have had so little regard for what is termed romance that this aspect of James's criticism has been minimized or overlooked altogether.

Romanticism and Twentieth Century Critics

Twentieth century American critics have been nearly unanimous in viewing late nineteenth century romanticism (which they customarily label "The Genteel Tradition") as a vitiated and overrefined descendant of an earlier, more vigorous romanticism centered in New England. They do not so often speak of romance as a genre, that is, as a basic fictional mode which treats reality non-representationally and symbolically, in the manner of Hawthorne, but rather follow the practice begun late in the nineteenth century of equating romance with popular fiction.

The majority of American critics in the twentieth century have elaborated upon Howells' conviction that most romance is Puss in Boots and Jack the Giant-Killer done up in such a way that it pleases adults.³⁴ In 1907 Frederic Taber Cooper, an enthu-

³⁴Howells, "Editor's Study," LXXII (April, 1886), 810.

siastic defender of Frank Norris's fiction, wrote an article detailing the conventions which the romance was bound to observe. He said that there had to be a logical beginning, a happy ending, a heroine who was superlatively beautiful, a hero who was splen-

didly brave and clever, and a villain who was incredibly base.³⁵ It is apparent that when Cooper thought

³⁵Frederic Taber Cooper, "The Convention of Romance and Some Recent Books," Bookman, XXVI (November, 1907), 266.

of romance, at least of romance at the beginning of the twentieth century, he identified it with popular fiction, written according to formula. In 1916, Wilson Follett charged the writer of romance with an evasive fiddling in the face of human catastrophe. "The romancer's irresponsible creativeness," he wrote, "once a gift from the skies, seems more and more, after two years of the shedding of human blood, a pose of stupid insensibility,"³⁶ and he went on to com-

³⁶Wilson Follett, "Sentimentalist, Satirist, Realist," Atlantic Monthly, CXVIII (October, 1916), 495.

mend realism. Of the critics who attacked romance and romanticism before 1920, H. L. Mencken was the most severe. While Mencken had little admiration for Howells' realism, he had even less for romanticism. Mencken, in fact, berated romanticism not only in its post Civil War form, but as it expressed itself even in the 1830's. He believed that American literature from the 1830's to 1900 "was almost completely disassociated from life as men were living

it." He made fun of Cooper's "half-fabulous Indians," said that "Irving told tales about the forgotten Knickerbockers," and that Hawthorne "turned backward to the Puritans of Plymouth Rock." Longfellow and Emerson "took flight from earth altogether," and Mark Twain, "after 'The Gilded Age,' slipped back into romanticism tempered by Philistinism, and was presently in the era before the Civil War, and finally in the Middle Ages, and even beyond."³⁷ Mencken concluded that "romance, in Amer-

³⁷H. L. Mencken, "Puritanism as a Literary Force," in A Book of Prefaces (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1917), pp. 214-17.

ican fiction, still means only a somewhat childish amorousness and sentimentality--the love affairs of Paul and Virginia, or the pale adulteries of their elders."³⁸

³⁸Ibid., p. 275.

Academic critics, beginning with Carl Van Doren in 1921, also discounted the worth of romance, particularly as it existed in fiction near the end of the century. In his chapter on "The Later Novel" in the Cambridge History of American Literature, Van Doren wrote that

the romance of the school of Cooper was not only falling into disuse at the time of his death /1851/ but was rapidly descending into the hands of fertile hacks who for fifty years were to hold an immense audience without more than barely deserving a history.³⁹

³⁹Carl Van Doren, "The Later Novel," in the Cambridge History of American Literature, ed. W. P. Trent et al. (New York: G. P. Putnam's, 1921), III, p. 66.

In The American Novel, also published in 1921, Van Doren devoted considerable attention to the historical romances which appeared between 1896 and 1902, noting that

one formula furnishes something like half the notable plots: an honest American gentleman, mortally opposed to a villain who is generally British, courts a beautiful American girl through acute vicissitudes and wins her only in the bitter end just before or after killing his wicked rival in a duel.⁴⁰

⁴⁰Carl Van Doren, The American Novel (New York: Macmillan, 1921), p. 253.

Van Doren implied that the historical romance was not intrinsically doomed to produce inferior literature.

"Had the romancers...been more deeply grounded in reality and less sentimental, or had the national mood lasted for a longer time, some eminent masterpiece might have emerged," but he left no doubt that

this "rococo romance," as he called it, was sterile and conventional.

In the same year, 1921, Fred L. Pattee contrasted realism and romanticism in the following terms:

The exploiting of new and strange regions, with their rough manners, their coarse humor, and their uncouth dialects, brought to the front the new hard-fought, and hard-defended literary method called realism....No two seemed perfectly to agree what the term /realism/ really meant, or what writers were to be classed as realists and what as romanticists. It is becoming clearer now: it was simply the new, young, vigorous tide which had set in against the decadent, dreamy softness that had ruled the mid years of the century.⁴¹

⁴¹Fred L. Pattee, A History of American Literature Since 1870 (New York: Century Co., 1921), p. 17.

The idea found in Pattee--that romanticism turns away from the harsh facts of actual life out of an unmanly weakness--is one that recurs in twentieth century criticism.

Although romance and romanticism are likely to have varied meanings in Parrington's criticism,⁴² he

⁴²Lionel Trilling has untangled the various meanings which Parrington gave romance and romanticism in "Reality in America," an essay in The Liberal Imagination (Garden City, New York: Doubleday Anchor Books, 1954), pp. 17-18.

often thought of romanticism as an evasion of reality.

In 1930 he wrote that "romance springs from the longings of a baffled and thwarted will, creating a world as we should like it wherein to find refuge."⁴³ Two

⁴³Parrington, The Beginnings of Critical Realism in America, p. 324.

years previously Parrington wrote a highly compelling metaphorical passage describing romanticism in American literature:

Between 1818 and 1870, romanticism, economic even more than literary, had been the national religion. It had written a golden creed in terms of material expansion, of a buoyant and pervasive optimism, to which every child of the Zeitgeist loyally subscribed. It had dreamed vast dreams, and the hopes of its Beriah Sellerses had been sustained by a childlike faith in the pot of gold at the base of the rainbow....So long as the siren song of progress was in men's ears, America would worship at the gaudy romantic altars and turn away from a skeptical realism that proposed to examine national ideals in the cold light of fact.⁴⁴

⁴⁴Vernon L. Parrington, "The Development of Realism," in The Reinterpretation of American Literature, ed. Norman Foerster (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1928), pp. 139-40.

There are several meanings in such a passage, but uppermost, however, is the idea that romanticism is out of touch with truth and reality because it answers to men's emotions rather than to their intellects.

At the same time that Parrington was writing,

John M. Matthews and Edith Rickert made a negative assessment of turn-of-the-century romance.

While the dominant trend of novel-writing during the last generation has been in the direction of realism, there has been a steady and sometimes marked countercurrent of romance of a more or less specious nature. The first and most noteworthy expression of the spirit of romance was the outburst of historical novel-writing in the decade from 1895 to 1905. Inspired by the examples of Stevenson in Kidnapped (1886) and Rider Haggard in She (1887) and King Solomon's Mines, and stimulated further by the wide popularity of Anthony Hope's The Prisoner of Zenda and Rupert of Hertzan, the American fictionists turned to their task with a zest and industry that in many instances were abundantly rewarded.⁴⁵

⁴⁵John M. Manly and Edith Rickert, Contemporary American Literature: Bibliographies and Study Outlines (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1929), p. 23.

They list the novel of primitive adventure as the second form which the romance took. In it, "adventure begins before breakfast," and culminates in a terrific fight between the hero and the villain. The third form which romance took was the sentimental novel. Manly and Rickert give Gene Stratton Porter's Freckles (1903) as an example of the sentimental novel, which with "its frank appeal to tearful feminine readers has won its authors some of the most colossal successes in the history of the novel."⁴⁶

⁴⁶Ibid., p. 24.

In his study of Frank Norris, Ernest Marchand continued the twentieth century trend of reviling turn-of-the-century romance. Although he felt that both realists and romanticists prior to Norris ignored poverty, dirt, squalor, disease, futility, defeat, and despair, he accused romanticists, even more than realists, of wishing to blink these uglier aspects of American life. In Marchand's view, late Victorian romanticism existed to distract Americans from the ruthlessness of their enterprises. "In a middle-class society engaged in the business of exploitation of both human and natural resources, and where the endless reiteration of a fatuous optimism is looked upon as a necessity, the most congenial theory of literature is that propounded by F. Marion Crawford."⁴⁷

⁴⁷Ernest Marchand, Frank Norris: A Study (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1942), p. 15.

In the late 1940's Willard Thorp, Robert Spiller, and George Snell joined the group speaking against late nineteenth century romance. Thorp's chapter in the Literary History of the United States, "The Defenders of Ideality," disparages those idealists or romanticists who resisted the realism associated with Howells. They included R. H. Stoddard,

Bayard Taylor, George H. Boker, Thomas Bailey Aldrich, Edmund Clarence Stedman, R. W. Gilder, Richard Grant White, Louise Chandler Moulton, and somewhat later, George E. Woodberry, Barrett Wendell, Henry Van Dyke, and Hamilton Wright Mabie. Thorp implies that the idealism or romanticism of this group was a verbal fortification which they erected because they were not strong enough to confront the world as it was. They thought of the poet "as the creator of an ideal world which men desperately need as an anodyne to soothe the pain caused by Huxley, Tweed, and Zola."⁴⁸ Thorp singles out Aldrich in particular as

⁴⁸Willard Thorp, "Defenders of Ideality," in the Literary History of the United States, p. 814.

one who ran away from a world which he did not have the courage to face. Of Aldrich's leaving New York in 1865, Thorp comments: "The act was symbolic: he would be withdrawing the rest of his life--from the editorship of the Atlantic, from Boston, even, to the Maine seacoast and the indolence of travel." Of the group in general, Thorp concluded, "They did not suspect how completely this literary asceticism had devitalized their imaginative powers and cut them off from the modern world."⁴⁹

⁴⁹Ibid., p. 825.

Robert Spiller and George Snell not only attacked late Victorian romanticism as meretricious, but implied that romanticism was an element in literature which was always pernicious. In their evaluations, romanticism became an absolute, a unit of impurity, that weakened a novel and kept it from being a work of "pure" realism or "straight" naturalism. Spiller, discussing the work of Frank Norris, noted that nearly all his novels contained strains of realism and romanticism. Whatever he considered praiseworthy in Norris, he attributed to realism; imperfections he assigned to romanticism. In his view, McTeague would have been a greater work without its strain of romanticism, while the philosophical contradictions of The Octopus stemmed from the "romantic foginess" of Norris's mind.⁵⁰

⁵⁰Robert E. Spiller, "Toward Naturalism in Fiction," in the Literary History of the United States, pp. 1031-33.

George Snell, in his The Shapers of American Fiction, 1798-1947, attempted to chart the progress of American fiction "from its weak, imitative beginnings to its present eminence and originality."⁵¹

⁵¹George Snell, The Shapers of American Fiction, 1798-1947 (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1947), p. 11.

The progress which Snell had in mind was largely a shift from romanticism to realism. "The dominant line taken by American fiction in the twentieth century has certainly been that of realism."⁵² Although

⁵²Ibid., p. 198.

Snell left open the possibility that romance could attain to artistic eminence, he generally branded romance an inferior mode of fiction.

By and large...romantic fiction in America has been fanciful, extravagant and unreal; it appeals to our love of the chimerical; it is the stuff of which Hollywood fables are made. And until our mass culture arrives at a condition of greater enlightenment, there is no doubt but that novels filled with surprising incident, adventure and a set of imposed idealizations will constitute the principal fare of the "average reader."⁵³

⁵³Ibid., p. 31.

In Snell's analysis, romance was largely escape fiction, permitting the people to look beyond the mundane life which surrounded them.

This pervasive disparagement of romance prompted Henry Seidel Canby to respond in 1947.

Romance, we are told, has now become a commodity, ripped off by the yard, and written by what Mary Colum calls the tradesmen of literature. Romance makes money, but not a reputation. "Fancy," "invention," are the words used for it, fancy with a stiffening of history, and spiced with enough

that is bawdy to suit the taste of the times.
 "Imagination" is a word little heard nowadays.⁵⁴

⁵⁴Henry Seidel Canby, "An Open Letter to the Realists," Saturday Review of Literature, XXX (May 3, 1947), 20.

Canby, for his part, thought that romance could constitute a valid and fruitful approach to fiction.

"Romance, which is one way, and has sometimes been the best way, of stating reality, has lain fallow dangerously long. It will come back."

Ten years after Canby's article and Snell's book, Richard V. Chase wrote The American Novel and its Tradition (1957), which can be regarded as an attempt to refute Snell's history of fiction. Whereas Snell had assigned romance a negligible role in the history of American literature, Chase believes that our major writers such as Hawthorne, Melville, James, Mark Twain, Frank Norris, Faulkner, and Hemingway "have found that romance offers certain qualities of thought and imagination which the American fiction writer needs but which are outside the province of the novel proper."⁵⁵ While most twentieth century

⁵⁵Richard V. Chase, The American Novel and its Tradition (Garden City, N. Y.: Doubleday, 1957), p. 20.

literary historians have considered Howells as a realistic writer whose theory and practice were necessary steps toward a more masculine realism or naturalism, Chase regarded Howells as a "middlebrow" writer whose approach to fiction contributed nothing really vital to American literature.

All the evidence shows that wherever American literature has pursued the middle way it has tended by a kind of native fatality not to reconcile but merely to deny or ignore the polarities of our culture. Our middlebrow literature--for example, the novels of Howells--has generally been dull and mediocre.⁵⁶

⁵⁶Ibid., pp. 9-10.

In Chase's estimate, Howells' realism did not lead to Norris's naturalism, but merely found its echoes in such novelists of manners as Ellen Glasgow, John O'Hara, J. P. Marquand, and Sinclair Lewis.⁵⁷

⁵⁷Ibid., p. 158.

Chase's argument that romance is responsible for what is remarkable in American literature rests upon two propositions. The first is that those writers who are often classified as realists--James, Twain, Frank Norris, Faulkner, and Hemingway--are writers who actually found that the romance rather than the novel was responsive to their attempts to adapt form to ex-

perience. The second is that there are two kinds of romance, one of which is genuine and the other spurious. The genuine romancers "have followed Hawthorne both in thinking the imagination of romance necessary and in knowing that it must not 'swerve aside from the truth of the human heart.'" According to Chase,

The other stream of romance, justly condemned by Mark Twain and James, is one which also descends from Scott, and includes John Esten Cooke's Surry of Eagle's Nest (1886), Lew Wallace's Ben Hur (1880), Charles Major's When Knighthood Was in Flower (1899), and later books like Gone With the Wind and the historical tales of Kenneth Roberts.⁵⁸

⁵⁸Chase, The American Novel and its Tradition, p. 20.

What Chase attempted to do was to disassociate romance from popular fiction, thus to reestablish romance as a genre or a mode of fiction worthy of serious critical regard.

In the same year (1957) Northrop Frye called upon critics to distinguish between the novel and the romance, and in particular, to recognize the romance as a separate genre of prose fiction. He said that the characteristics of such writers as Defoe, Fielding, Austen, and James made them central to the tradition of the novel, while the characteristics of such writers as Burrow, Peacock, Melville, and Emily

Bronte made them peripheral. "This is not an estimate of merit: we may think Moby Dick 'greater' than The Egoist and yet feel that Meredith's book is closer to being a typical novel." Frye suggested that the key difference between novel and romance lay in characterization. "The romancer does not attempt to create 'real people' so much as stylized figures which expand into psychological archetypes." After making a distinction between novel and romance, Frye asked why it was important to make the distinction and then answered his own question:

The reason is that a great romancer should be examined in terms of the conventions he chose. William Morris should not be left on the sidelines of prose fiction merely because the critic has not learned to take the romance form seriously....If Scott has any claims to be a romancer, it is not good criticism to deal only with his defects as a novelist.⁵⁹

⁵⁹Northrop Frye, Anatomy of Criticism (Princeton, N. J.: Princeton University Press, 1957), pp. 304-05.

Wayne Booth has also recommended that critics reestablish the notion of genre as an aid to more precise critical judgments in The Rhetoric of Fiction (1961). He observes that there has been a general trend to abandon the concept of genre in criticism since the Neoclassic period; until the Romantic period critics expected to find one or two charact-

eristics in all literature, but in their judgments they also referred to "the peculiar demands of a more or less precisely defined genre." The tendency in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, according to Booth, has been to look for certain qualities, certain absolutes, such as objectivity, or sincerity, or irony, in all works regardless of genre. When critics quit the idea that genres were helpful to the critical act, they invited a new chaos.

Unassisted by established critical traditions, faced with chaotic diversity among the things called novels, critics of fiction have been driven to invent order of some kind, even at the expense of being dogmatic. 'Great traditions' of innumerable shapes and sizes, based on widely divergent universal qualities, have in consequence been discovered and abandoned with appalling rapidity.⁶⁰

⁶⁰Wayne C. Booth, The Rhetoric of Fiction (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1961), pp. 34-36.

Daniel G. Hoffman agrees with Chase, Frye, and Booth in believing that the romance is sufficiently different from the novel or the realistic novel that it should be judged according to different criteria. In his Form and Fable in American Fiction (1961), he has attempted to describe the romance and then to interpret certain works, such as Melville's The Confidence Man, as romances rather than as novels.⁶¹ Not

⁶¹Daniel G. Hoffman, Form and Fable in American Fiction (New York: Oxford University Press, 1961), p. 285.

all critics are now agreed, however, that the romance has been the characteristic and animating form of American fiction, or that the romance ought to be perceived as a distinct kind of prose fiction, having little in common with the realistic novel.

Martin B. Green, for example, has flatly disagreed with Richard Chase's theory that the romance has given strength to American fiction. In a detailed presentation, Green uses Moby Dick to show that where it is most successful, it is not a romance, but an epic. The descriptions of the whales and the sea, everything that makes the ship and the voyage representative, belong to the epic genre. The action surrounding Ahab, on the other hand, belongs to romance; it includes Ahab's monologues, his address to the whale's head, the oath and the "toast" drunk from the sockets of the harpoons, the smashing of the quadrant, the mysterious figures that appear and disappear on the Pequod, and the late appearance of Ahab. In general, Green feels that Chase and Marius Bewley have taken the melodramatic elements in American fiction too seriously, and that "the romance

tradition, so far from being strong in America, was in fact feebler there than in other literatures."⁶²

⁶²Martin B. Green, Re-Appraisals: Some Commonsense Readings in American Literature (New York: W. W. Norton, 1965), p. 105.

Nor are all critics hospitable to the notion that romance ought to be regarded as a distinct genre. Ian Watt lays aside the term "romance," saying that it is no longer possible to distinguish between the romance and the novel. He then uses the term "novel" to mean "realistic novel," the romance being, in his view, the non-realistic genre supplanted by realism in the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. In this way, all the achievements in prose fiction since the eighteenth century belong to the novel--belong, that is, to realism rather than romance.⁶³ David L. Stevenson, while theoretically

⁶³Ian Watt, The Rise of the Novel: Studies in Defoe, Richardson and Fielding (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1957), pp. 12, 291. Also Ian Watt, "Novel," Encyclopaedia Britannica, 1965 edition.

recognizing the romance as a separate genre, placed nearly all works which are currently valued highly by critics into the realistic category:

Examples of the novel as a serious imitation of reality would include the novel of manners as written by Jane Austen, the novel of high serious-

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ness as written by George Eliot and by Thomas Hardy, the novel of high artistic purpose as written by Henry James and Virginia Woolf.

What he puts in the category of romantic fiction does not constitute a genre of even approximately equal literary merit; he classifies as romantic several novels which verge upon popular fiction:

Examples of the romantic novel since the Renaissance would include the sixteenth and seventeenth century pastoral romances of Sir Philip Sidney and of Honore d'Urfe, the eighteenth century Gothic romance of Horace Walpole, the nineteenth century historical romance of Sir Walter Scott and of James Fenimore Cooper, and such twentieth century varieties as the romance of crime and the detective story.⁶⁴

⁶⁴David L. Stevenson, "Novel," Encyclopedia Americana, 1960 edition.

Mary McCarthy provides a final example of a writer and critic who has recently assumed that the romance, at least in modern times, is not worth bothering about. She excludes the romance by defining the novel so broadly that there is little left to consider as romance. "If a criterion is wanted for telling a novel from a fable or a tale or a romance (or a drama), a simple rule-of-thumb would be the absence of the supernatural."⁶⁵ When the presence of

⁶⁵Mary McCarthy, "The Fact in Fiction," Partisan Review, XVII (Summer, 1960), 440.

the supernatural is required before one has a romance, few modern works can qualify. Miss McCarthy even considers The Scarlet Letter a novel, because she feels that the devil is only present in spirit rather than in fact in that work. She maintains that "the staple ingredient present in all novels in various mixtures and proportions but always in fairly heavy dosage is fact." She interprets fact broadly to include Balzac's disquisition on paper making in Les Illusions Perdues, Hemingway's training as a newspaper reporter, Dickens' habit of visiting prisons, and novelists' tendency to write travel-books as well as novels. In her arrangement, writers such as Victor Hugo and Dickens and Balzac, who were thought of as romanticists by Howells, are reclassified as novelists. What is more, their achievement as novelists is made dependent upon their attention to fact. In Miss McCarthy's view, all or nearly all of the great prose fiction writers of the nineteenth century were novelists--not romancers--and their strength lay in their "passion for fact"--not in their ability to translate experience into form.⁶⁶

⁶⁶Ibid., p. 445.

With the exception of Richard Chase and Daniel Hoffman, twentieth century American critics set

at naught the contribution of romantic fiction to American literature after Hawthorne. In addition, many of them repudiate non-realistic fiction by not recognizing the romance as a separate genre with its own criteria of excellence. Their negative attitude toward late Victorian romance makes it easier for certain ideas about that period to go unchallenged, one of these being that Ambrose Bierce and Frank Norris belong solidly in the realistic tradition.

Ambrose Bierce, Frank Norris, and Romance

Both Ambrose Bierce and Frank Norris belittled realism while extolling romance. Neither, of course, believed that romance was what Maurice Thompson or F. Marion Crawford thought it was, and no one seriously considers categorizing Bierce and Norris as "genteel" romanticists. At the same time, it is erroneous to classify Bierce and Norris with the realists in view of what they said about realism, and in particular, it is hazardous to place them in Howells' company because of the sharp attacks both made on his realism.

Bierce's advocacy of romance went hand in hand with his censure of Howells' realism. He railed against Howells' idea of probability:

Amongst the laws which Cato Howells has given his

little senate, and which his little senators would impose upon the rest of us, is an inhibitory statute against a breach of this "probability"--and to them nothing is probable outside the narrow domain of the commonplace man's most commonplace experience.⁶⁷

⁶⁷ Ambrose Bierce, The Collected Works of Ambrose Bierce (New York and Washington: The Neale Publishing Co., 1909-12), The Opinionator, X, 243.

At the same time, he praised romance because it could disregard probability:

Fiction has nothing to say to probability; the capable writer gives it not a moment's attention, except to make what is related seem probable in the reading--seem true. Suppose he relates the impossible; what then? Why, he has but passed over the line into the realm of romance, the kingdom of Scott, Defoe, Hawthorne, Beckford and the authors of the Arabian Nights--the land of the poets, the home of all that is good and lasting in the literature of the imagination.⁶⁸

⁶⁸ Ibid., pp. 247-48.

He thought Howells' fiction trivial because it arose from mundane observation:

He /Howells/ can tell nothing but something like what he has seen or heard, and in his personal progress through the rectangular streets and between the trim hedges of Philistia, with the lettered old maids of his acquaintance curtsying from the doorways, he has seen and heard nothing worth telling.⁶⁹

⁶⁹ Ibid., p. 240.

He ridiculed what he considered the petty details in Howells' novels:

Are we given dialogue? It is not enough to report what was said, but the record must be authenticated by enumeration of the inanimate objects--commonly articles of furniture--which were privileged to be present at the conversation,⁷⁰

⁷⁰Ibid., pp. 242-43.

and preferred romance because it was not bound to the immediate experience of either the author or the reader:

The romancist has not to encounter at a disadvantage the formidable competition of his reader's personal experience. He can represent life, not as it is, but as it might be; character, not as he finds it, but as he wants it. His plot knows no law but that of its own artistic development; his incidents do not require the authenticating hand and seal of any censorship but that of taste. The vitality of his art is eternal; it is perpetually young. He taps the great permanent mother-lode of human interest.⁷¹

⁷¹Ibid., p. 22.

Bierce summed up his case against Howells' realism with a plea, frequently made by the romanticists, to ignore the commonplace and to embrace the unusual. "He to whom life is not picturesque, enchanting, astonishing, terrible, is denied the gift and faculty

divine, and being no poet can write no prose."⁷²

⁷²The Collected Works of Ambrose Bierce, p. 243.

Norris's denunciation of Howells' realism followed a similar line. Like Bierce, Norris said that realism was confined to what it could see, and what it could see was usually trivial:

Realism is very excellent so far as it goes, but it goes no further than the Realist himself can actually see, or actually hear. Realism is minute; it is the drama of a broken teacup, the tragedy of a walk down the block, the excitement of an afternoon call, the adventure of an invitation to dinner. It is the visit to my neighbor's house, a formal visit, from which I may draw no conclusions. I see my neighbour and his friends--very, oh, such very! probable people--and that is all. Realism bows upon the doormat and goes away and says to me, as we link arms on the sidewalk: "That is life." And I say it is not. It is not, as you would very well see if you took Romance with you to call upon your neighbour.⁷³

⁷³The Literary Criticism of Frank Norris, ed. Donald Pizer (Austin, Texas: University of Texas Press, 1964), p. 76.

Norris was perfectly aware that romance connoted "cut-and-thrust stories" to many people, but he insisted that romance need not be "merely a conjurer's trick-box." Could not we see in romance, he asked, an "instrument with which we may go straight through the clothes and tissues and wrapping of flesh down deep

into the red, living heart of things?" He persisted in believing that romance was not too fragile and feminine to portray the wretched living conditions of the slums--"the vicious ruffians...of Allen Street and Mulberry Bend," and even reversed the customary missions of realism and romance. He said that romance should teach, and that the amusement of the public could be left to realism:

Let Realism do the entertaining with its meticulous presentation of teacups, rag carpets, wallpaper and haircloth sofas, stopping with these, going no deeper than it sees, choosing the ordinary, the untroubled, the commonplace.⁷⁴

⁷⁴Ibid., p. 78.

Like Bierce, Norris assailed Howells' realism because it was fettered to the typical and the average. "We ourselves are Mr. Howells' characters, so long as we are well-behaved and ordinary and bourgeois, so long as we are not adventurous or not rich or not unconventional."⁷⁵

⁷⁵Ibid., p. 71.

Twentieth century critics have frequently been puzzled by the Bierce-Norris outbursts against Howells' realism, and by the fact that both Bierce and Norris championed romance. According to the critics'

reasoning, Bierce and Norris as ultra-realists should have berated romance while viewing Howells' realism as a step in the right direction. Even Howells up-braided romance, and he is considered by many twentieth century critics as a half-way realist. Why, then, did not full-fledged realists such as Bierce and Norris castigate romance instead of advocating it?

One way out of this dilemma for twentieth century critics has been to assume that Norris (they have not paid much attention to what Bierce said about realism and romance⁷⁶) did not fully understand

⁷⁶A recent appraisal of Bierce's literary criticism is that by Howard W. Bahr, "Ambrose Bierce and Realism," Southern Quarterly, I (July, 1963), 309-31. Although Professor Bahr ultimately refuses to classify Bierce, he notes on page 310 that "Bierce did not consider himself a realistic writer."

the terminology he was using. Robert Spiller, for example, after noting the "striking fact" that Norris aligned himself with romance rather than with realism, went on to suggest that Norris's critical terms were not "carefully weighed" and his "logic not always perfect."⁷⁷ Ernest Marchand seems to have

⁷⁷Spiller, Literary History of the United States, p. 1027.

taken a similar tack when he wrote that

Norris did very little theorizing on the subject of literature till after he had written nearly all the fiction that he was to live to write, and till after he had secured something of a reputation for himself. His observations then, as so often happens, were frequently rationalizations of what he had already done, rather than carefully wrought theories to be put subsequently to the test.⁷⁸

⁷⁸Marchand, Frank Norris: A Study, p. 8. Bernard Smith in Forces in American Criticism (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1939), p. 181, is another critic who has not thought that Norris's remarks on realism and romance made sense as they stood.

An article in 1889 by Albion Tourgee, the author of A Fool's Errand and other novels pointing out the evils of the Reconstruction Era in the South, clarifies the late nineteenth century view of realism and naturalism and provides a framework in which to consider the criticism of Bierce and Norris. "Our literary 'realism,' so-called," wrote Tourgee, "has set up a false standard of the truth. Only the average, every-day, common-place happenings, it says, are true." He then developed his remarks by contrasting the realist and the naturalist.

The "realist" keeps to what he deems a middle course. He paints neither the highest good nor the worst evil. He keeps the middle of the street and never sees what is in the gutter. This, he says, is true--this is real life and everything else is false. The naturalist, on the other hand, believes in high lights and deep shadows. He is sometimes in the palace and anon in the gutter. Truth, he says, does not lie midway between extremes, but embraces the antipodes.

The absence of vice or virtue is not life, but the union and contrast of them. So what the "realist" so carefully avoids, the "naturalist" paints with unflagging zeal. Nothing is too high or too low, too fair or too foul, for him. He paints vice in the nude and virtue in its loveliest colors. M. Zola is the type of the "naturalist"; Mr. Howells the head of the "realists."⁷⁹

⁷⁹Albion W. Tourgee, "The Claim of 'Realism,'" North American Review, CXLVIII (March, 1889), 386.

Tourgee's article corroborates a point that Norris made--generally overlooked by twentieth century critics--namely, that romance and naturalism in the late nineteenth century were more closely related than realism and naturalism.⁸⁰ In addition,

⁸⁰Jacques Barzun in Classic, Romantic and Modern (Boston: Little, Brown, 1961) is the only critic I know of who aligns naturalism with romanticism. On page 220 he writes, "It is more usual to call Naturalism an offshoot of Realism than to class it with Symbolism as a Neo-romanticism. Nevertheless, the latter is the true designation."

Tourgee's essay suggests that Bierce and Norris were not merely confused when they wrote about realism and romance. They rejected Howells' realism in order to escape the restrictions of his concept of the typical, the average, and the probable. In order to portray the truth that lay at the antipodes, they therefore embraced romance.

Once one realizes how Howells' realism ap-

peared to a sizeable group of his contemporaries, it is not difficult to see why Bierce and Norris preferred romance. Although they are usually said to have extended Howells' realism by working within the movement which he had begun, it seems more sensible to regard them as writers who attempted to revivify romance in an effort to combat what they deemed to be the repressive and stultifying aspects of Howells' realism. The philosophies of fiction held by Bierce and Norris represented a departure from--not an extension of--the postulates of Howells' realism.

CONCLUSION

Realism and romance were the two main forms that literature took during the late Victorian period. In an era dominated by science, romance had the more difficult task of defending its right to be. Widespread acceptance of philosophic positivism and the application of evolutionary theory to literature made romance seem to be either childish or calumnious. In America, realism, directed by Howells, responded to the scientific milieu by taking the methods and ends of science for its own. In England, realism lacked philosophic focus. What the English writers who are designated realists had in common was a desire to tear away the restrictions which had fastened themselves onto the Victorian novel.

In summary, I have questioned three closely related suppositions that are generally held about American literature. The first is that American realism, as sponsored by Howells, was audacious when placed against its nineteenth century background. This assumption does not sufficiently consider the point that (1) Howells' contemporaries often remarked

his timidity, and that (2) a "middle-way" compromise was built into his theory of fiction. The second supposition is that romance in late nineteenth century America had to be "genteel." The belief continues in force because (1) twentieth century critics have generally had a low opinion of romance, and because (2) they do not take seriously the statements which Bierce, Norris, and Tourgee made about romance. The third supposition is that American naturalism is an extension of Howells' realism. It persists because (1) twentieth century critics, tending to disregard the particular characteristics of each movement, think of realism and naturalism as congruent except for the increasing boldness of latter, and because (2) twentieth century critics have placed Bierce and Norris in the tradition of Howells' realism, in spite of what both said about Howells and his concept of fiction.

The literary criticism which I have examined has led me to reject these three suppositions and to conclude that Howells' realism was not generally considered audacious, even in the 1880's, that romance in the late Victorian period was not always "genteel," and that Bierce and Norris were attempting to revitalize romance, not build upon Howells' realism.

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