Part-III
Ellen Glasgow has earned for herself a secure and distinct reputation in the literary world of the South and even beyond through a lifetime of dedication to the craft of writing. Her achievement is incontestable for she, as a woman writer, had to pursue her art under severe cultural and literary constraints as she was born in an age of transition. She was the first realistic writer to dispel the sentimental atmosphere that permeated the Southern literature. Miss Glasgow had depicted a transformation of romance to reality by substituting the men who were always brave, chivalrous and polite and women who were fair, virtuous and self-sacrificing, in the sentimental fiction, with those people who think, speak, act, love, hate, live and die like real people. By blowing the breath of life into the stilted, monotonous and inert literature of the South she had made it realistic without sacrificing its beauty or without curbing its articulateness. She clad the literature becomingly in garments harmonious with the period. She believed that literature should never be anything less or other than an honest portrait of human experience and meaning. In the words of the historian C. Vann Woodward, "when eventually the bold moderns of the South arrested the reading and theatrical world with the tragic intensity of the inner life and social drama of the South, they could find scarcely a theme that Ellen Glasgow had wholly neglected. She had bridged the gap between the old and the new literary revival, between romanticism and realism" (Rubin L.D. Jr., "Introduction" Centennial Essays, 1976; 4).

In her earlier works before Virginia (1913) a depth of Miss Glasgow's original realistic impulse is clear. The focus, naturally fell upon her commitment to a positivistic concern for the objective surfaces of life in the milieu she knew best. She
had dealt with certain dominant sociological, biological and cultural themes: conflict between biology and civilization, issues of freedom and determinism, contentions of environment and heredity and the sham and spuriousness of 'the sheltered life'. But her later works demonstrate a striking change in her attention passing through the mask of surface reality to the other side of the coin of human truth, the invisible core that seems to drive her characters from Gabriella Carr through Roy Timberlake. To explore this other hemisphere Miss Glasgow uses a literary technique of the foil and the double to enable the individual to externalize or objectify materials that are primarily subjective. Of all the characters, she has a special interest in the Southern woman as tradition, training and circumstances shaped her, with Virginia being the taking-off point for the emergence and development of the new woman.

Virginia is the typical Southern lady "on her pedestal" in the fashion of the nineteenth century. But there is a gradual metamorphosis taking place in the stature of woman who began to discard her cloak of gentility and purity to reveal depravity and rebellion. The bent of mind from traditional assumptions to revolutionary attitude is shown through the less violent Gabriella to the more vigorous and vibrant Roy Timberlake.

In *A Certain Measure*, Ellen Glasgow writes, "The chief end of novel as indeed of all literature, I felt, was to increase our understanding of life and heighten our consciousness. To do this, writing must not only render experience, it must interpret and intensify the daily processes of living" (30). To achieve her goal, she intended to endow her fiction with reality as she observed around her. In her *Virginia* she gave a full expression to the romantic image of nineteenth century woman, only to shatter it in her later novels. She wrote to Joseph Hergesheimer: "My *Virginia* is as realistic as any
production of the Middle West – only realism of that period in Virginia was tinctured with romantic illusion. But, I have always looked through a veil of irony even in the days when all fiction wore fancy dress” (Letters ed. Rouse, 1958; 70). Miss Glasgow dealt with the vanishing picture of the nineteenth century woman only to establish strongly the necessity to move along the changing times. As she wrote in her letters (Letters, ed. Rouse, 1958; 14) she tried to illuminate experience as a true realist.

The upper-class southern land owners, who believed themselves to be the descendants of English aristocracy, particularly the Cavaliers of the seventeenth century, kept up the Victorian tendency to idealize home and its guardian, woman. As gallant knights, they tried hard to guard feudalism and the home, the symbol of order. As Kathryn Lee Seidel states,

Southerners were, in their moral ideals, Victorians who reacted strongly against the corruption of their society. To them, the Industrial Revolution appeared to have brought more harm than good: materialism, greed, poverty and prostitution seemed to be undermining human morality. The Victorian counter to the corruption of the materialistic, industrialised world was the home (Seidel, K.L. 1985; 4).

The southern belle was considered as an ideal woman, following the Victorian standards of morality and their image of home as a persistent standard of order and decency. This ideal women was protected from reality and she had few tasks other than to be obedient, to ride, to sew and to learn reading and writing. She was spared from hard toil until marriage. But after marriage she was expected to become a hard-working matron who was a supervisor of the plantation, nurse and mother. For the ideal woman, the domestic pedestal was supposed to offer the highest possible achievement and satisfaction, surely preferable to jobs or any other alternatives championed by the new woman. She would rely upon man as her shield, winning this protection by her grace, modesty and loveliness. She was not supposed to give vent to her passions or emotions.
She was not expected to excel in any walk of life but the domestic. She believed staunchly that it was her pious duty to reform and save her husband from moral fall. Ellen Glasgow pioneered successfully to break this image of the nineteenth century woman. Ellen Glasgow was the forerunner of William Faulkner and other writers like Sarah Haardt, Evelyn Scott, Ruth Cross, Edith Everett Taylor Pope, Isa Glenn and Frances Newman. Miss Glasgow presented a comprehensive portrait of the ideal woman – her psychology, culture and life history in Virginia of *Virginia*. In all her novels where the emerging new woman is the protagonist, this image of traditional woman serves as a foil.

The Southern Renaissance, chiefly the offspring of the effects of World War I on the United States, specially the Southern states, brought industrialization to the South. The necessity for efficient means of transport gave rise to new railroads and highways. The domination of the new culture signified by the use of radio, movies and the telephone, gave the southerner a new, northern perspective. Yet, these sociological changes were less significant than the intrinsic effects of the War upon the psychology and values of the southerners. The literary atmosphere also underwent a radical change with the adoption of realism by the exponents who turned to their own region for literary material. The little-magazine movement also encouraged the act of rebellion against literary conventions. The success of women's suffrage made the traditional woman confront new concepts of women's roles. With the help of education, she gradually emerged out of the traditional roles of wife, mother, spinster and belle, accepting the more radical role of flapper and career-woman in economic and political areas. The assault of the dazzling materialism on the old order led to a complexity and ambiguity of the vision. To some writers it seemed that the past deserved to be
resurrected, while to others, it needed to be buried. Strangely, those writers who condemned the old order of the South were often more repelled by the present and both groups contemplated a gloomy future. This is true with regards to Ellen Glasgow also, Blair Rouse aptly analyses her obvious attitude:

In the novels which compose her triptych of manners, Ellen Glasgow explored the meaning for her Virginians of a change in moral attitudes. In these novels she showed plainly that she could neither accept nor wholly reject the code of behaviour which had governed polite society or, indeed, all of society in Virginia since colonial times. Earlier she had attacked the features of that code which she found debilitating, or even evil in their effect. Especially had she objected to what she called "evasive idealism". [. . .] Yet, if she attacked the code as faulty, she could not readily accept what was usually offered as its alternative: the abandonment of all rule in human relationships. . . . (1962; 98).

The young new writers such as Glasgow, Porter Davidson and Gordon had a double focus – looking two ways; at the past and present. They felt that the new morality was not necessarily preferable to the old but they showed the old order from a new perspective.

The inadequacy of traditional southern ethics for the southern woman is the theme of these novels. Ironically they show that the virtues Southern tradition has reserved for the belle are actually destructive to her and to others: [. . .] These authors also show that the sheltering of the belle leads to a harmful innocence; she cannot adequately interpret the behaviour of men who do not believe in the code of southern chivalry that respects the purity of women (Seidel, K.L., 1985; 31-32).

Besides presenting new themes, these writers defied the predominant style of fiction. Instead of presenting the sentimental domestic romances or historical plantation novels, they followed the school of realism as exemplified in Sinclarie Lewis’s Main Street. In the writings of Ellen Glasgow, James Branch Cabell, Julia Peterkin, Frances Newman, there is a piercing satirical rendering of the traditional woman. The gradual growth of the new woman passing through different phases, is dealt with deftly in all
her novels. James Southall Wilson showers all his praise on Ellen Glasgow the person and the novelist: "When others have cheapened their manners, their speech, and their style to fit ears accustomed to be flattered by such accommodations, she has prescribed her dignity and her charm without becoming quaint. At a time, when the Southern Lady is reverenced as a tradition or exploded as a myth, Ellen Glasgow, as a novelist no less than as a person, is an authentic example of her at her best-vivid, witty, sharp when necessary and (lovely trait of womanhood!) on occasion, without necessity, tenders" (1939; 124).

Ellen Glasgow, in her autobiography, clearly stated her intention to be a realist, though reality meant a little unpleasantness. As she was successful in presenting life in all its aspects, so was she triumphant in interpreting good and evil with the help of her own inborn sound moral sense. Being a realist, she believed that an honest confrontation of the facts need not invalidate the reality of spirit. Though she rejected her father's religion, she upheld "a few sublime virtues or a few ideas of sublime virtues which are called truth, justice, courage, loyalty, compassion (Reasonable Doubts ed. Raper, 1988, 242). Despite her response as a realist, to the flux of experience, she found that pragmatism is deficient by itself and hence needs the guidance of philosophy. The zeal and fervour with which she lived a solitary life of the spirit, enabled her to illuminate what had happened, mingling it with her rich imagination.

Ellen Glasgow had a Jamesian concentration of purpose and a Dreiserian persistence which remained effectively with her throughout her life and helped her to pull out all the stops. Like that of James, her good work spread over an extended period and it includes a wide variety of subjects— from the vivaciously witty to the profoundly serious. In combining irony with tragic sense, an analytic perceptiveness with
emotional depth, a detached satiric intelligence with pervasive human sympathy, she
reminds us of the art of Henry James which was again followed by her young
successors like Caroline Gordeon, Katherine Anne Porter, Eudora Welty, William
Faulkner and Robert Penn Warren. Like all these writers, whom she foreshadows, she
is interested in depicting with candor and sympathy, “the dignity of greatness and the

Miss Glasgow in her autobiography asserted herself to be a born novelist and
she moulded herself into an artist. As Howard Mumford Jones says, “Miss Glasgow
has refused to consider herself less than an artist. She has not written Virginian life but
of human life in Virginia. She has taken two or three years to perfect a book, not
because she wanted to be sociologically accurate but because she wanted to be
artistically mature, and this sense of pace and dignity, this tacit assumption that the
novel is a major work of art – these are the qualities she has brought to her
interpretation of immediate environment” (Saturday Review, 1943; 20).

“The most carefully perceived and wrought of her characters are her women,
acting as they do under the stress of their social and biological condition” (Thiebaux,
1982; 189). While sympathizing with those women (like Virginia) who remains victims
of the tradition, she, with a positive view on how things ought to be ordered in actual
life, encourages the women (like Gabriella) to determine their course of life.
Sometimes her vision is so intense that some women (like Dorinda Oakley), though
they achieve success with their radical competence, are not certain of their happiness.
A certain others are strongly pragmatic and possess a grasp of facts (as in the case of
Ada Fincastle). This practical sense engenders a gospel of fortitude which is essentially
a provisional philosophy imposed by the moral obligation to exist without a more
dynamic faith and to endure the worst. Yet a few more women (like Roy Timberlake) strive to maintain a sense of equanimity, even though their personal universe may crumble. Ellen Glasgow had written her novels partly out of the Anglo-Saxon ethical tradition with its emphasis upon the active powers in Man's moral nature. Ellen Glasgow is undoubtedly opulent in the creation of her women characters of wide variety, from all classes - aristocratic women to Negro slaves. She herself being a privileged Southern woman, used all her skill while delineating her ideal woman who contradicted the feminine ideal of the traditional Virginia society. For the ideal Southern woman, any breach in conduct threatened family honour or position or resulted in virginity or ostracism. Women like Mrs. Pendleton and Mrs. Carr remained as pale shadows being subservient to the tradition. These sanctified mothers and wives try to provide stability for their less complacent daughters, the willful modern women -- Mariana Musin, Rachel Gavin, Virginia Pendleton, Gabriella Carr. They would advise these heroines about what is expected of them. Though these rebellions daughters are supported by Miss Glasgow, she allows these traditional women the reader's sympathy. Miss Glasgow is interested in the ambitious and unconventional heroines who resemble their creator. She creates them audacious, winsome, free-thinking, distinctive without being beautiful, passionate, defiant and ambitious. These heroines, from Rachel Gavin to Betty Ambler to Dorinda Oakley to Roy Timberlake, are different from the other women who most of the times function as foils. They either love too well or refuse to love. They may not be intellectuals but they are inquisitive. This questioning spirit sometimes causes their personal catastrophes but keeps them from accepting the conventional role. Besides these heroines, there are tyrannical mothers -- Mrs. Peyton, Mrs. Blake and Mrs. Gay -- and hypochondriac wives - Angelica and Lavinia. The
Negro women characters, like Fluvanna, Miss Polly, often help the protagonists or remain faithful servants. Louis Auchincloss rightly says, "Like Edith Warton, she (Ellen Glasgow) will be remembered for her women" (1965, 88).

The aristocrats in Ellen Glasgow's novels represent those who held social, political, and professional leadership by heritage and ability. They are not glorified or glamorized, neither are they despised. Instead, the upper classes are shown much more clearly in the light of actuality than in most stories of the South. Notable in Miss Glasgow's presentation of aristocrats is the pervasive meaning of custom and tradition, the persistent adherence to a code of manners which is veritably a code of life, shaping lives for evil and good.

Miss Glasow's Negro characters are almost invariably individuals who play important roles in the human dramas in which they are involved. Rarely are they simply background or chorus figures. She was aware of the distinctions among Negroes with respect to class and personal attainment, and she showed clearly what it meant to be an ex-slave, a "free" Negro, and a "new" Negro, with all the hopes, fears, and frustrations these lives contained.

Although Ellen Glasgow sought to show the importance of a sense of inherited values and the significance of adherence to beliefs and loyalties having deep spiritual meanings for the individual, she was often more evidently concerned with the evils of a blind worship of tradition. She condemned, therefore, any orthodoxy which had stiffened into a set of relatively meaningless shibboleths. Class distinctions founded in leadership and ability she did not despise, nor would she deny that men of lower social status could -- and did -- rise to political, commercial, or professional distinction and eventually to social acceptance. She saw the irony in these changes in social
stratification, but this irony is rarely at the expense of the “plain” man. One may smile at the episode in *The Sheltered Life* in which a young carpenter’s marriage to a girl of “good family” leads to his “translation” to the Episcopal Church and to the transformation of his family from “plain” to “quiet,” but one’s smile is not at the expense of the carpenter.

Miss Glasgow displays a sharp critical acuity which distinguishes illusion from reality. With a keen sense of humour, she exposes the perversities which tend to govern the individuals’ existence and the absurdities present even in a cosmos governed by natural laws. With these two intellectual qualities, she is convinced that an absolute pessimism is too pretentious to provide a balanced interpretation of experience.

When Miss Glasgow’s inner spirit was active, animated by an inexorable external reality, she achieved the full perfection of *Virginia* and *The Sheltered Life*. The same inner power made her accomplish the delicacy and ironic strength of *They Stooped to Folly* and *The Romantic Comedians* and the bitter intensity and serene detachment of the best parts of *The Deliverance, Barren Ground, In This Our Life* and *The Miller of Old Church*. Ellen Glasgow was successful in these novels in fusing her artist’s fastidious vision with appropriate outer realities and in reconciling the ‘truth of fiction’ with the ‘truth of life.’

Ellen Glasgow displayed a command on her craft in the novels where she had achieved a full identification of scene with agent. As in *Virginia*, the conditions which surround the characters merge with them and reach full fruition in this interplay. As a transitional figure, she stands between the romantic fiction of Howells or Mary Wilkins Freeman on one side and the revolutionary naturalism of Theodore Dreiser and the psychological immediacy of Faulkner on the other side. Though she lacks James’s
exactness of perception and command of self, she is at her best when she explored as deeply as James the subtle relationships existing between personality and environment.

Her novels are not simply a “necessary bridge” between the literature of Thomas Nelson Page’s generation and that of William Faulkner, but rather are a terminal where she describes, mixes and evaluates the cultural values of the Old South and the New (Seidel, 1985; 74).

Ms. Seidel also states that the women in Miss Glasgow’s earlier fiction are victims of tradition while in her later novels they are victims, not of external forces but of their own internal desires, “This relationship between society and self is Glasgow’s fundamental preoccupation.” In her earlier fiction, she presented the external world as she observed. But as she matured as a novelist, her focus is more on the internal world where the character’s fate is decided by her character. She professed a life of values which felt is over and above tradition and the distracting present. An ideal harmonization of the Old and New and a high premium placed on spiritual poise is the achievement of Ellen Glasgow as a thinker and artist.

The extensive exploration or an intense search for truth, made by Ellen Glasgow throughout her career which extended for nearly half a century does not seem to have ended satisfactorily. Through Asa Timberlake of In This Our Life, she passes her comment upon her intellectual life and her career as writer: “In seeking and in finding there is not ever an end, nor is there an end in seeking and in not finding.” Her last two novels and her collection of prefaces, A Certain Measure reveal her ever dissatisfied spirit which still continued the search for truth and this led her to write her autobiography, The Woman Within which provided an outlet to her anguish.

Just as Ellen Glasgow drew inspiration from the life well known to her, she chose the setting of her novels also from the familiar Virginian scene of her childhood. Her Queenborough is nothing but Richmond and Dinwiddie of Virginia is Peterburg –
both the places were not beyond the ken of Virginians. In his book on *Ellen Glasgow*, Blair Rouse refers to his interview with Miss Glasgow on December 19, 1941 in which she emphasized ‘the importance of her childhood memories – especially these summers she had spent at “Jerdone’s Castle” in Louisa county. She spoke of the broomsedge that grew there and of its varied beauty in the changing seasons’ (1962; 34-35). This broomsedge is given a realistic and symbolic picture in her most successful novel, *Barren Ground*.

In *A Certain Measure*, Ellen Glasgow wrote about her choice of subject, theme and character. Whenever she ‘tried to invent, rather than subconsciously create, a theme or a character, invariably the effort [...] resulted in failure. [...] Invariably the characters appear first and slowly and gradually build up their own world and spin the situation and atmosphere out of themselves. Strangely enough, the horizon of this real or visionary world was limited by the impressions or recollections of her early childhood.’ She felt that “characters select their own names, or are born with them and absolutely refuse to progress except on their own terms.” Once when she tried to change Roy’s name to Rhoda “she immediately went into a trance”.

Ellen Glasgow’s characters come from all classes of society. Though she moulded them on the basis of people known to her, she tried ‘to portray not Southern “types” alone, but whole human beings, and to touch, or at least to feel for, the universal chords beneath regional variations of character [...]. I had learned that there are many facets of human nature and that the aspect we call the regional is only the universal surveyed from a shifted angle of vision.’ Her women characters proved stronger than men. Their strength depended upon their innate nature, the situations and the subjects of the novels which allowed them to grow and change. In her interview with Blair
Rouse, she stated that the art of fiction demands the necessity of ‘giving life to characters in a novel and the necessity that fictional characters live’ (1962; 39).

Of all the characters, she had a special love for her civilized persons. She always dreamt of a society, full of such people. In her collection of prefaces, she wrote: “This rare pattern of mankind has always attracted me as a novelist. I like to imagine how the world would appear if human beings were really civilized, not by machinery alone, but through that nobler organ which has been called the heart in the intellect”. She made an apt comment on Asa Timberslake of *In This Our Life*: “I was depicting, not a failure in life, but a man in whom character, not success, was an end in itself”. As a student of Darwin, she had staunch faith in evolutionary philosophy and believed in the importance of heredity and environment in the shaping of character. In such characters as Christopher Blake and Ben O’Hara, she proved that ‘environment more than inheritance determines character. What it does not determine is the tendency of native impulse nurtured by tradition and legend, unless tradition and legend may be considered a part of environment’ (Glasgow, 1943; 34).

Ellen Glasgow achieved a great success in mastering form, structure and point of view in fiction. She imparted this form to the novel through an appropriate point of view as seen in *Barren Ground*. Dorinda Oakley controls both form and point of view. In *Vein of Iron*, by shifting the point of view from John Fincastle to his daughter Ada and to his mother, Miss Glasgow provides a penetrating look into their inner world.

Of all the artistic devices, Miss Glasgow showed great concern for the problem of style. She had perfected her style through long, strenuous apprenticeship. She wrote in *A Certain Measure* her opinion about style: “[. . .] I felt that the style I needed must have something more than mere facility. It must be elastic and adaptable and equal, on
occasion, to the more or less serious emergencies of fiction [. . .]. It should be recognized as a natural part of the organism, not as extraneous decoration which may be forcibly peeled off without impairing the whole structure" (175-76). She understood that she lacked mastery over her material and method, after the publication of her first novel. In an attempt to acquire them, she made a deep study of Balzac, Flaubert and Maupassant. She found in Balzac a sentimental quality which she did not like. Flaubert was too obvious to be followed. In her autobiography she elaborately described her apprenticeship to learn and master her style. She wrote about Flaubert’s style: "{[. . .] The hand of the master was too evident; his fingerprints were too visible on every paragraph [. . .] Life [. . .] is not modeled in clay; it is not even dough, to be twisted and pinched into an artificial perfection. The twisting may be there in the novel, but it must not be visible; it must remain always below the surface of art.” Maupassant’s perfection of art impressed her to a large extent. But she could not imitate his style because she felt that the novel should be a form of art – but art was not enough. It must contain not only the perfection of art, but the imperfection of nature.’ Her extensive reading led her to the conviction that ‘truth to art becomes in the end simple fidelity to one’s own inner vision.’ But she gratefully acknowledged that she had learned from Maupassant ‘the value of the precious word, of the swift phrase, of cool and scrupulous observation’ (Glasgow, 1954; 126,127). Stuart Sherman holds a high opinion about Miss Glasgow’s style: “Her style is firm, lucid and [. . .] it has a masculine rhythm. It has wit and beauty. At its best it has a proud and impressive reserve, and goes over depths with the tension and moving stillness of deep rivers” (Critical Woodcuts, 1926, 79-80).

Ellen Glasgow took meticulous care in shaping her work into a remarkable piece of art. Her punctiliousness in evoking tone, atmosphere, space and time, is at once
striking. She is very careful in her selection of accurate images to set the tone and atmosphere of the novel. In *Virginia*, she suggests the caged and imperfect life of Virginia with the help of a bud, and an imperfect bud, and her sad, dull life is indicated by the delicate shadows of the leaves. This passage occurs just before the entrance of Susan and Virginia, in the novel:

> Beyond the wire cage, in which the *Canary* spent his involuntarily celibate life, an ancient microphylla rose-bush, with a single *imperfect bud* blooming ahead of summer amid its glossy foliage, clambered over a green lattice to the gabled pediment of the porch, while the *delicate shadows of the leaves* rippled like lace-work on the gravel below (Glasgow, 1913; 4) (italics mine).

Interest in tradition and its meaning in human lives meant, inevitably for a sensitive novelist, interest in the meanings of time for men and women. Although concerned with historical time, involving a climate of beliefs, customs, and changes, Ellen Glasgow was even more interested in time as an active force in life, in time enriching and fulfilling lives, or in time as an eroding and corroding force, wearing away the spirit and destroying the soul.

Concerned for the ingredients of civilization or the lack of them in America. Ellen Glasgow could also turn a darker, less amusing irony upon the possibilities for a civilized life in what was perhaps an uncivilized world. If Ellen Glasgow rejected a facile optimism, she did not slip into the blind pessimism with its negation of all values and hopes so often symptomatic of much twentieth-century fiction. She possessed an idealism which refused to hide behind pretensions or to deny harsh truths, yet which found value in those lives strengthened and supported by a steadfast courage. Hers may have been a large measure of disillusionment, but hers was not the trap of deluded cynicism. In *A Certain Measure*, she wrote about her use of Time and Space which, she was afraid, was missed by most of the readers of *Barren Ground*.
What no one has perceived is that the elements of Time and Space are the dominant powers. From the beginning, I tried to evoke a background of unlimited space, [...] that unconquerable vastness in which nothing is everything.

The sense of time is more difficult to achieve, and since it cannot be forced, it remains, I think, the most important problem that confronts the writer of fiction [...] this movement of time cannot be arranged; it must flow inevitably from the theme of the story, which continues to obey the laws of an imaginary universe. (Glasgow, 1943, 158-59).

Even in the novel *Vein of Iron*, she made the same effective use of time and space.

In *A Certain Measure* she related how she had achieved the art of adjusting her style in accordance with the subject matter. Writing about *The Sheltered Life* which had the ‘theme of age and youth, of the past and the present,’ she revealed her problem of style and structure of the novel.

My task was the simple one of extracting from the situation every thread of significance, every quiver of vitality, every glimmer of understanding. The contours were moulded. I could see the articulation of the parts, as well as the shape of the structure. I could see, too the fragile surface of a style that I must strive, however unsuccessfully, to make delicate yet unbreakable (1943; 104).

Depending on the type of her novel she modulated her style. A novel of different kind, *Vein of Iron* needed a different style. In one of her letters she expressed her satisfaction over her achievement in style:

I hope you will bring out the peculiar quality of the writing. I have tried to fit every sentence into the whole pattern, and I have used different rhythms for retrospection and for narrative or dialogue. For example, you noticed, of course, that in those five different reflections (or streams of consciousness), when my five characters were seated before the fire in the manse. I used varying cadences, from the long slow rhythm of age (I am very proud of that passage when Grandmother is dropping asleep) to the aimless stacca to thinking of the child. I flatter myself that only a mature art could have dared do this and I hope you will bring it out in its subtle distinctions (*Letters* ed. Rouse, 1958; 191).

Miss Glasgow tried and achieved ‘a way of writing that was strong, terse, without extraneous adornment and impeccably true to reality’ (Glasgow, 1943; 183). Joseph 239
Collins credited her with his compliment that '[...] In style she has no superior and few peers amongst (six) the fiction writers of the day in this country. [...] She has the gift of character delineation and she has learned how to give value to perspective' (1924; 68).

Ellen Glasgow's subtle wit and delicate humour deserve high praise. In her article "I Believe", she asserts, "I believe too, that benign laughter is the best tonic for life" (Reasonable Doubts, ed. Raper, 1988, 244). No wonder that she excelled in her comedies but even in her works with serious themes there is a clever admixture of humour with pathos. The description of education imparted to Dinwiddie young women and the scene of Dorinda getting ready for the funeral of Nathan Pedlar bubble with humour. Louise Maunsell Field commended her 'quiet humour spiced with delicate irony, humour of insight and character more closely akin to Jane Austen's than to that of any other writer' (1923; 10).

As a craftsman her talents are multi-dimensional: an ability to envision living characters, a sharp sense of the psychological impact of various individualities upon each other, a skill of fusing her characters with scene, a stark and energetic concentration in her climatic episodes, an animistic sensitivity toward nature, a superb wit and an accurate word or phrase, an economy of characterization and a feeling for structure and narrative pace in the novel. Above all, her creation of a believable universe from out the Virginia past in her best novels, their undeniable insight into the human heart and their pervasive spiritual light and grace, give them a permanent place in American literature. In these novels, she has Ellen Glasgow has manifested with ironic lucidity the qualities which she most sought to express as a writer: "Humanity and distinction, reality and art" (Letters: ed. Roussie, 1958; 240).
Unique in her own way, Ellen Glasgow is undeniably one among the few illustrious American women writers who have carved out for themselves an enviable niche in American letters. Ellen Glasgow’s fiction, as is evident from the works taken up for study, is replete with examples of protagonists endowed with perseverance, courage, industry, strength – qualities which enable them to overcome obstacles in their way and attain success. She cherishes the past for its tradition and lasting values and voices regret that the rampant materialism pervading American life has resulted in loss of values and commercialization. It is evident that Ellen Glasgow does not totally repudiate the empty slogans and rituals of the past nor does she condemn the present. Through many of her characters she promotes the understanding that the ability to retain the best in the past and, at the same time to adapt to the best in the present makes for happy and contented lives. Keenly alive to the realities of a patriarchial society which extolled a woman’s role in the domestic sphere, denying any kind of personal freedom in life, Ellen Glasgow became a forceful exponent of free and independent womanhood. Through her women characters, she advocates self-sufficiency as a pre-requisite for personal fulfilment. She resembles Edith Wharton and Willa Cather in her creation of strong, independent, and unconventional women.

Maxwell Geismar rightly comments on her superiority: “Ellen Glasgow was a literary rebel in the first half of her career, a literary ancestor in the second half, but her work has never had the full recognition it deserves. One of our top three women writers, she has been eclipsed by the glow of Willa Cather’s lovely fairy tales and by the cool glitter of Edith Wharton’s social snobbery. Yet as a literary figure Miss
Glasgow was superior to these ladies in many respects, and her best novels are of equal interest and importance with theirs" (*Nation*, 1954; 425).

Just as Ellen Glasgow, Edith Wharton also had the penetrating and analytical eye which examined American society thoroughly and exposed its hidden hypocrisies and hideous deficiencies. Her heroines are defiant and they fight the evils of excessive materialism and an obsessive evasion of pain which retard the growth of the society. While battling with these foes, they develop their own positive moral qualities such as compassion, tolerance, a willingness to risk pain in order to embrace life and a sense of independence from the social milieu. This type of rebellious heroines who resemble Miss Glasgow's fighting protagonists, can be seen specially in her major novels - Lily Bart in *The House of Mirth*, Undine Spragg in *The Custom of the Country* and Ellen Olenska in *The Age of Innocence* -- and they challenge the accepted verities of American life. These characters rebel and struggle against the limits of convention to attain their own autonomy. Edith Wharton moulds her women protagonists as social critics and bearers of positive values. The qualities that are the focus of her criticism are materialism, repression, intolerance and the refusal to face unpleasant reality or pain. Similarly, she embodies the values in which she believes, in her protagonists: compassion, the open and spontaneous expression of emotion, the courage to face reality, a receptivity to whatever life offers and a sense of self that is not solely defined by the social milieu. Lily Bart's experiences illuminate her own flaws which lead to her social fall but which help her to achieve steady moral growth. Edith Wharton, like Ellen Glasgow condemns the traditional double standard of morality which created one rule for single women and another for married ones. Lily's redemption is indicated by excluding her from the mercenary New York. Such virtues as decency, compassion and
humanity grow in Lily only when she is away from the world of wealth. Undine Spragg, the heroine of *The Custom of the Country* climbs to the top of the social world by exploiting the same elements which destroyed Lily -- the materialism which turns women as ornaments and enemies of one another and which dehumanizes the people. Edith Wharton satirizes bitterly the human folly and a serious lack of moral qualities. While exposing Undine's inhuman pursuit of wealthy men, she also lays bare the hypocrisy of the rich men who invite such a hard and graceless woman, into their lives. In choosing Undine, those men debase the values they supposedly live by and demean themselves. Though Undine lacks the moral standards of Lily Bart, she reveals the tawdriness of her men's desires and the essential cheapness of the world they inhabit. Both Lily and Undine, by bringing out positive values and by illuminating hidden vice respectively, present two halves of one picture, a composite vision of a world dedicated to the spurious and the superficial and a world where great wealth is the only virtue that matters. Through Ellen Olenska, the protagonist of *The Age of Innocence*, Edith Wharton like Miss Glasgow, criticizes the infantile quality of the New York world, its dangerous and destructive innocence, most apparent in the women of that society. Archer represents the old New York which was caught in the grip of the fear of the truth and evasion of the unpleasant. This lack of frank, open communication locks each person into the loneliness of his own fearful self, unable to find solace in sharing fear or pain with another. The only grown-up woman in that society Ellen tries to open his eyes to a larger world. But the timid, repressive society cannot accept such a courageous, decent, generous woman of spirit and vitality and expells her. Edith Warton describes a society that is inferior to the woman it rejects. The society prefers a
sheltered life, protected by elaborate taboos and remains a sanctuary for those who will never grow up.

Edith Warton’s defiant heroines resembles Miss Glasgow’s rebellious protagonists in their courage, endurance and willingness to struggle but they differ in their ultimate end. Mrs. Glasgow’s heroines are mostly victorious in their lives whereas Edith Warton’s women often lose their battle on the surface level.

Like Miss Glasgow, Willa Cather also started her literary career in protest against and flight from the world around her. But unlike Glasgow, Miss Cather retreats to the past with a nostalgic fervour. Nevertheless, she has created strong and courageous women characters as are seen in Miss Glasgow’s novels. Her Antonia Shemerda of *My Antonia* and Alexandra Bergson of *O Pioneers!* and the a Kronborg of *The Song of the Last* are remarkable for their fortitude, courage and endurance and had successful lives. Anthonia, in her untiring struggle with the prairie’s stubborn soil reminds Dorinda Oakley struggling against broomsedge but with a different goal. In her long struggle, she never despairs but takes man’s place behind the plough after her father’s death, she relies on her hidden resources. Alexandra Bergson, the heroine of *O Pioneers!* in her twenties, becomes the head of a family of three brothers, after the death of her parents, she lives a fruitful life succeeding over the high, dry and primitive prairie patch of land. Thea Kronborg bears autobiographical element. *The Song of the Lack* (1915) is the story of a gifted child in a suffocatingly crowded and brutally inept family and learns music with great struggle. The end of Thea’s story explores both the splendors and penalties of success.
Besides the strong women characters, these writers hold similarity with Ellen Glasgow in their hard achieved craftsmanship. Alfred Kazin commends the artistry of Ellen Glasgow along with Willa Cather’s.

Willa Cather and Ellen Glasgow stood out as examples of serious craftsmanship; and it is strange how easy it has always been to forget how much more brilliant a stylist Ellen Glasgow is than most of the younger writers, and how much more deeply imaginative an artist Willa Cather proved than Hemingway” (Willa Cather, ed. Harold Bloom, 1985; 125).

Although, Willa Cather was associated with Ellen Glasgow by critics like Alfred Kazin and Henry Seidel Canby in both theme and craftsmanship, she estranged herself from the realistic school of Ellen Glasgow. David Daiches in his estimate of Willa Cather relates how her pursuit of art led to ‘a discovery of those picturesque areas of history where sensitivity and heroism could exist together. It led her, too, more and more away from her generation and away from the new and lively influences that were coming into literature after the First World War” (1951; 184). Willa Cather’s use of the past was very different from that of Ellen Glasgow who rebelled against the Virginia tradition of ‘evasive idealism’. Edith Wharton also resembles Miss Glasgow only to some extent. Her picture of New York society can be compared to Miss Glasgow’s use of the Virginia aristocracy but this too must be differentiated. In Edith Wharton’s works, she reiterated the story of the innocents destroyed by the social pattern but the heroines of Miss Glasgow’s serious novels emerge victoriously defying tradition. Like Miss Glasgow she criticized vehemently the many deficiencies of the society, specially the aristocrats and suggested as an antidote those “values for which she could find no place.” “Mrs. Wharton’s vision of life has its severe limitations. She knew only too well how experience can grind men into hopelessness, how it can leave them persuaded that the need for choice contains
within itself the seeds of tragedy and the impossibility of choice the sources of pain” (Howe, “Introduction”, 1962, 15 & 17).

Finally, a thorough study of Ellen Glasgow’s fiction reaffirms the essential elements of her art: her flair for lively, fast-placed, smooth flowing narration, her evocation of picturesque scenes with telling images, her uncommon verbal felicity to match and keep pace with her fertile imagination; her dexterity in enlivening her narrative by raising her themes to a universal level. Her words are chosen, her delivery simple and her sensitivity delicate. Whatever she said, she said it clearly, unambiguously and enchantingly. She proved herself to be a born novelist who struggled to make herself an artist, despite the many odds in her life. Like Dorinda Oakley she would only say:

After all, it was not religion; it was not philosophy; it was nothing outside her own being which had delivered her from evil. The vein of iron which had supported her through adversity was merely the instinct older than herself, stronger than circumstances, deeper than the shifting surface of emotion.

(ii)

Right from the beginning of her career, Ellen Glasgow, being seriously devoted to her art, sought a discriminating class of reader, but quite ironically she gained a popular following. Her works were on the Best Seller lists five times: 1904, The Deliverance; 1906, The Wheel of Life; 1916, Life and Gabriella, 1932, The Sheltered Life; 1935, Vein of Iron. Few writers have been accorded such recognition over a thirty-one year span. It is obvious that she received a healthy amount of critical analysis even in those early days in a period not especially noted for great criticism in America. Besides, she survived the changing of literary guard several times, from the era of moral earnestness, through the sophisticates, the Marxists, and finally into the feminist
consciousness. Though her fame is a late recognition, there is in fact, no need to apologize for her or to ‘place her’; she carved out a subtle and interesting world of her own and she has made a place for herself, at once secure.

Ellen Glasgow and her work have been viewed from a variety of critical perspectives, she seems to elude the biographer who would treat her succinctly or comprehensively. That she was a willful ego in conflict with her culture can be documented; that she appears to become an apologist for that culture is also demonstrable. Though later critics censure her for not measuring up in every respect to post-modernist criteria, Glasgow seems to smile at the readers from a number of appealing photographs, and every one is a different woman.

In the growth of her mind, in her dedication “to endow ‘every tree’ with a name of its own and a special identity”, in her life long attempt to transform human experience into words that would hold the ephemeral moment for attentive analysis, in the desire to “know”, Ellen Glasgow is a phenomenon in American letters. Like an Emily Dickinson or a Virginia Woolf, she used all of herself, all her experience of life, and her distillation holds value for those who seek meaning in life. A gentle if tough-minded skeptic, Ellen Glasgow saw literature as “experience illuminated”, and though agnostic held to her hard-won belief “that the true value of life can be measured only, as it borrows meaning, from the things that are valued above and beyond life.”

An absorbing interest in Glasgow’s work is justified as Glasgow herself continued to inspirit the readers: “I believe that there are two equal and enduring satisfactions in life: the association with one’s fellow beings in friendship, in love, or in a community of interest, and the faithful pursuit of an art, a profession, or an aesthetic enjoyment, not for outward advantage, but in obedience to a permanent and self-
reviewing inner compulsion”. A generous appreciation is accorded to her gentle irony: “I believe in social justice, as I believe in peace on earth, goodwill toward men, an ideal to be pursued, though scarcely to be attained this side of paradise.” To the readers in the bouts of depression, her fortitude speaks: “I believe in the challenging mind, in the unreconciled heart, and in the will toward perfection.” In that spirit this study is a dedication to her scholarship.

With her inherent conservatism of the spirit behind her professed liberalism of thought, Ellen Glasgow advocated a philosophy of change and a relaxation of moral restraints. But she became dissatisfied whenever a doctrinaire liberalism, a materialistic progress or a crudely naturalistic art threatened the spiritual autonomy of the individual or implied that life had only a surface meaning. She appreciated man’s ability to maintain his integrity against all odds hurled by deadening customs or by forces antagonistic to the living values in tradition. Her early work is a protest against the hold of past upon the South. In her later work, though she continued her criticism of the lifeless aspects of Southern culture, she showed an increasing distrust of the levelling tendencies, she saw in contemporary democracy. A democratic liberalism and an aristocratic conservatism each fostered noble qualities, Miss Glasgow reasoned, but could each become tyrannical. Only in the solitary life of the spirit – superior both to tradition and to the distracting present – could one find equanimity – this harmonizing of extremes and this high valuation of spiritual poise is, in essence, the indulging principle of Miss Glasgow’s career as thinker and artist. In her autobiography Ellen Glasgow wrote that he who bargains for the future must play a long hazard. She played that long hazard and left behind a significant volume of materials of inestimable value.

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