Part-II
Right from infancy, Ellen Glasgow, being a delicate child, grew up as a sensitive and sympathetic girl. Her mother Anne Glasgow had taken special care of Ellen, as and when she fell sick. The blue-eyed Anne was the 'sun' of Ellen's universe. Even from her childhood Ellen showed signs of special destiny. Her own estrangement from her strictly Presbyterian father and attachment to her sympathetic and depressive mother made her live in her own world of imagination, which very soon turned into her literary cosmos. With a keen perception she understood the gradual disappearance of the affected, sentimental and pretentious aristocratic society, to which she also belonged, giving place to a modern atmosphere, being dominated by industrialism, the rise of the common man and the much awaited reality. Her extensive travel across the British and European literary world, her study of Science, Economics and Philosophy, and her mother's depressing agony for which, Ellen felt, her father was responsible, influenced Miss Glasgow to rebel against a static society and a romantic literary world. Hence her early novels have radical protagonists. Tracing the "social history of Virginia from the decade before the confederacy" (Glasgow, 1943; 3) was one of her aims of writing fiction. In her prefaces, she grouped her novels into three sections, as Novels of the Commonwealth, Novels of the Country and Novels of the City. Virginia (1913) belongs to the first group and traces the history of Virginia from 1884 to 1912. As in the social conditions of the state, a gradual change and growth could be seen in the mental attitude and artistic skill of Ellen Glasgow. The outright rebel who created Michael Akershem,
the bastard protagonist of *The Descendant*, grew more sympathetic towards Virginia, the representative of the Genteel Tradition, or nineteenth-century Southern womanhood.

By the time *Virginia* (1913) was written, the image of the lady was almost vanishing from the society. Although, Ellen Glasgow’s gallery of Southern female portraits includes woman of every class and stature, she evinced special interest in the lady who had been a glowing ornament of the age because of her grace, beauty, vital essence, shimmering radiance etc. Her fond admiration for that character was partially due to her profound love for her mother in whose lines Virginia was drawn. Being born in a traditional family, Miss Glasgow had an intimate knowledge of the ideal Southern woman and made a close study of her as tradition, training and circumstances had shaped her. With her vision, sharpened by a radical irony and clarity of mind, she crystallized into a destined form her panorama of a society at “a dissolving moment in time” (Glasgow, 1943; 82). *Virginia* (1913) and *The Sheltered Life* (1932) are refractions of a dying passion against a dying culture.

In *A Certain Measure*, she writes that the chief end of the novel is 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” (1943; 30). From her own knowledge of her loving mother who was an ‘ideal lady’ after the Victorian tradition, Miss Glasgow tried to interpret the concept of lady and the pathetic unthinking woman’s growing awareness of her own misery caused by her intellectual limitations. She attempted to point out the strongest imperfections of the Southern code which deprived them of a rich experience of life by their decaying standards of morality. With her pungent irony and stabbing satire she felt she would
prune the social and moral conditions of the society. She probed deeply into the psyche of her characters victims of their convictions and passions as they are.

Ellen Glasgow's abiding interest in the lot of woman, her deep love for her sister Cary and her adoration of her mother - an embodiment of the Victorian concept of lady - gave impetus to the creation of a perfect lady moulded by tradition, in her *Virginia* (1913). While Cary was treading towards her impending death, owing to cancer, Miss Glasgow shaped her first novel and its heroine. Cary resembled in many ways her mother Anne. As Cary died in 1911, Miss Glasgow dedicated her novel "to the radiant spirit who was my sister Cary Glasgow Mc Cormack". She closely observed the plight of Cary, her mother and many Virginian women ill-matched in their marriage with men less worthy than they were - Cary's husband William Mc Cormack committed suicide and Francis' double moral standards depressed and expedited Anne's death.

Ellen Glasgow, while tracing the social history of *Virginia* during 1884-1912, makes a thorough study of the changing attitudes of a woman in a transitional society. The traditional lady was slowly disappearing giving place to a "new woman". *Virginia* is the last tribute Miss Glasgow pays to the Southern lady, cherishing the memory of her mother, on whom *Virginia* is modelled.

*Virginia* (...) was the evocation of an ideal and is always associated with my mother and the women of her period. I describe Virginia in the beginning exactly as I was told my mother looked when she was a girl. (*Letters*, ed. Blair Rouse, 1958; 131).

Along with the changing woman, a deep study of the institution of marriage - a major concern of the traditional lady, its varying meanings in different contexts, occupied Ellen Glasgow's mind. In *Virginia* and its successive novels, *Life and Gabriella* (1916) and *Barren Ground* (1925), she creates different types of Southern
women whose development suffering are precipitated by their marriage or their relationship with men of mean nature. Also, in each of these novels, Miss Glasgow presents an ideal of feminine behaviour which makes the heroine either contend against or emulate. Virginia, having been brought up in a genteel society, submits herself to traditional constraints and is defeated in marriage to a successful playwright. Though Gabriella Carr comes from a similar background a decade later, she frees herself from the bonds of custom and conventions. When her dissolute husband abandons her, she turns self-reliant and takes care of her children. Dorinda Oakley of Barren Ground, though betrayed by an ill-balanced country doctor, learns to live without love or passion and later becomes a successful farmer. Miss Glasgow focusses on the gradual independence of woman, adapting herself to the changing circumstances.

Blended with this study of a woman’s role in a changing society, Miss Glasgow gives vent to many of her views on growing materialism, resulting in the steep fall in moral standards, on Darwinian concepts, the crumbling institution of the family, interracial relations, and the emergence of the new woman. Despite her sympathy for the traditional lady, Ellen Glasgow was all admiration for feminine strength in the face of adversity. In A Certain Measure she writes,

Although, in the beginning, I had intended to deal ironically, with both the Southern lady and Victorian tradition, I discovered, as I went on, that my irony grew fainter, while it yielded at last to sympathetic compassion (1943; 79).

Virginia faithfully adheres to the “feminine ideal of the ages” rooted in “the great tradition which was older even than Victorian manners, since it had sprung from the dreams of Adam, and had been preserved in the eternal forms of religion and legend”
(Glasgow, 1943; 96). However, the novel moves beyond region and period, achieving a universal importance in its depiction of women's condition.

In *Virginia* (1913), Ellen Glasgow draws an elaborate picture of evasive idealism that stifled thought in the South. Virginia is an illuminating portrait of a Southern girl, raised according to the precepts of Victorian tradition. She is educated by Miss Priscilla Batte her school mistress, who firmly believes that the less a girl knows about life, the better she is prepared to cope with it. Equipped with such training, Virginia loves and marries an ambitious and high-spirited Oliver, nephew of Cyrus Treadwell, a successful, materialistic business tycoon with lesser morals. Susan, her childhood friend and daughter of Cyrus, is a new woman with sharp wits and is a foil to Virginia. Being untrained, Virginia fails to perceive the mind of Oliver during his depression over the failure of his plays. Her inability to extend moral support to her husband pushes him toward his professional companion, Margaret Oldcastle, an actress. Learning Oliver's association with Margaret, Virginia is drowned in pathos and is least understood, still less sympathized, by her husband and children for whom she selflessly devotes her precious life. Her material failure, denotes the defective system in which she grew because she proves her enormous spiritual strength by receiving calmly the heavy blow dealt by life.

The story of Virginia's courtship, marriage and desertion is divided into three parts: "The Dream", "The Reality" and "The Adjustment". In "The Dream", Virginia Pendleton is introduced as a lovely and romantic girl of nineteen. Her early life in Dinwiddie – Petersburg disguised – comprises her upbringing by her tradition-bound parents, her education, her close association with her friend Susan – whom Glasgow uses as a foil to Virginia – and her budding love for Oliver Treadwell, Susan's cousin.
The characterization of Virginia developed from memories of the author's mother, especially with respect to her "sweetness", her enduring trouble, her self-sacrifice for her children and even her appearance. (Blair Rouse, 1962; 79).

Virginia, a girl of nineteen, at the opening of the novel, has "an old-world charm of personality", and is an embodiment of "the feminine ideal of the ages" bearing an "expression of natural simplicity and goodness." She receives with pleasure "the earnest exhortations of the teacher (Miss Priscilla Batte) on the joys of cage life for both bird and lady" (5).* With scintillating irony Glasgow describes the education provided to Virginia and other young ladies by their school mistress Miss Priscilla Batte, the Head of the Dinwiddie Academy for Young ladies and a dignified relic of the education principle. Ignorance would guarantee a young woman's desirability to a worldly knowledgeable man.

The less a girl knew about life, the better prepared she would be to contend with it. Knowledge of any sort (except the rudiments of reading and writing, the geography of countries she would never visit, the dates of battles she would never mention) was kept from her as rigorously as if it contained the germs of a contagious disease, and this ignorance of anything that could possibly be useful to her was supposed in some mysterious way to add to her value as a woman and to make her a more desirable companion to a man who either by experience or by instinct, was expected "to know his world" (22).

Virginia's tragedy is rooted in her inability to shape herself according to the needs of the time. The natural law requires unresisting elasticity in any organism for its continuation of existence. Virginia's morbid terror of change does not allow her to outgrow the image of traditional lady and consequently she meets her tragic end. Miss

Glasgow recaptures, the attitudes of the Dinwiddians or Virginians or rather Southerners in their valiant fight against everything new. Their intrepid faith in the old order was at the root of their miserable, sometimes, tragic life, as in the case of Virginia who was a part and parcel of her town, Dinwiddie. "I could not separate Virginia from her background, because she was an integral part of it, and it shared her validity. What she was, that background and atmosphere had helped to make her," (Glasgow, 1943; 82). Miss Glasgow commiserates their antiquated convictions and distrust of Science even after the publication of "The Origin of Species" which had changed the very course of the world's thought. Their only strong belief was that it was their divine duty to preserve the existing institutions from extinction. Yet, Glasgow observes that human nature in this region was the same as elsewhere:

The same passions stirred its heart; the same instincts moved its body; the same contentment with things as they are and the same terror of things as they might be warped its mind. (15)

The "evasive idealism", a characteristic of the Victorian Age in England and America reached its climax in the South where the bitter truths of life were avoided. W.J. Cash, comments on the conditions in the South. "Nowhere, indeed, did this Victorianism, with its false feeling, its excessive nicety, its will to the denial of the ugly, find more sympathetic acceptance than in the South" (1941; 82).

The degenerating aristocrats and their despicable evasive idealism become the main targets of Ellen Glasgow in this novel. That Virginia is the victim of the traditional code is suggested by the image of Miss Priscilla Batte feeding her canary. Miss Priscilla, a spinster, belongs to the impoverished aristocratic family and is the Head of Dinwiddie Academy for Young Ladies. Ellen Glasgow skilfully uses Miss Priscilla Batte as a narrative device to introduce Virginia Pendleton and Miss Batte,
who, in addition to Virginia’s parents, plays a major role in shaping Miss Pendleton’s character into a perfect lady on the lines of Victorian tradition.

In the opening scene, “The System” Miss Glasgow touches upon her recurrent themes: the vanishing genteel code of conduct, the decadence and the evasive idealism of the aristocrats, the emergence of the new woman in its nascent stage, the rise of industrialization and growing materialism and the Negro problem. Virginia is the product and victim of the disappearing tradition. Miss Priscilla Batte, besides the Pendletons, represents that traditional code which is gradually going out of harmony with the developing industrialism and materialism. Susan, in whom Miss Glasgow puts her own ideas mostly, is Virginia’s bosom friend, daughter of Cyrus Treadwell – the financial master of the town, Dinwiddie – and an admired cousin of Oliver whom Virginia marries later. She stands for progressive scientific development and independent thinking. She is “as intellectual as the early eighties and the twenty one thousand inhabitants of Dinwiddie permitted a woman to be”. She remains a life-long foil to Virginia with “the force of an energetic and capable mind” (6) for she decides that her happiness will not depend on any man. Being young women, they wait for some miracle to happen to make their lives different. Cyrus Treadwell, Susan’s father, is mentioned to be “the wealthiest and therefore the most prominent citizen of the town” (6) – a social condition which values material success. He is Dinwiddie’s industrial leader, president of the railroad, builders of the tobacco industry, owner of interests in lumber and cotton. But as the town’s commercial saviour, Cyrus Treadwell has less interest in relieving the downtrodden than in treading profitably upon them. His personal relationships with family and dependent blacks reveal his cruelty. Treadwell’s nephew, Oliver, an aspiring playwright comes to town. Oliver and Virginia mistake
their youthful desire for love, although they are scarcely acquainted. Miss Glasgow’s irony is pungent in the early portion of the novel but it transforms itself into a moderate and sympathetic tone as the plot reveals.

Miss Glasgow’s brisk irony is levelled against the shallowness of social dictum which snubs severely any development of mind. Miss Priscilla, the mentor of Virginia, is an embodiment of all that is regressive in the New South, an anachronism in the midst of progress and a representative of the town’s past. All the daughters of the leading families invariably wear “the mark of Miss Priscilla” (12). Despite “the fugitive joys and the brutal disillusionments of life”, Miss Priscilla would not lose “an expression of child-like confidence, of touching innocence”, for she “was the product of a courage that feared nothing except opinions [...] She was capable of dying for an idea, but not of conceiving one. She had suffered everything from the war except the necessity of thinking independently about it. She clings passionately to the habits and customs of the old, remaining “firmly rooted in all that was static” (12) (italics mine). For her the industrial growth appears to be the worship of Mammon. It is only the “arid stretch of civilization from which the last remnant of beauty was banished forever” (13). Despite many changes that have been brought by Science the Dinwiddians prefer the old institutions.

Oliver receives impetus to write great plays having received his “enlightening education” in Germany but his own personality blurs the type of dramas he would write. He little realizes the nature of his love for Virginia, which is only a youthful fascination, never a life-long love.

In the character of Oliver, Miss Glasgow throws light on her conviction based on the Darwinian concept that heredity plays a vital role in the development of one’s
personality. Oliver, nephew of Cyrus Treadwell, is considered to be 'immoderately generous', a weakness he must have inherited from his mother who "was one of the improvident sort that couldn’t make two ends meet without tying them into a bow-knot" (8). Oliver’s unstable personality brings about the tragic end of Virginia’s marital life with him.

Oliver is introduced through the dialogues of Susan, Virginia and Miss Priscilla. Miss Glasgow makes Oliver, Susan’s cousin, her own zealous mouthpiece for sometime. Through him she establishes firmly the ideal relationship that should exist between a writer and his society. "[...] he seems on fire when he talks of [...] art and its service to humanity and (of) going down to the people and uplifting the masses" (18). She denounces the romantic novels as "immoral stuff" (19). Ellen Glasgow, perhaps, gives an honest expression of her own ambiguity about the future of society. When Susan puts a plain and direct question about the nature of movement Oliver intended to have in the society, he only gets impatient and accuses Susan that she “was trying to bury the principle under the facts” (19). Cyrus Treadwell, Susan’s father, advises him to be very careful while writing as there is always the danger of hurting the feelings of one section of the society, if he is bent upon reflecting realities. That is one of the reasons why the writers prior to Miss Glasgow confined themselves to histories and romances, avoiding the reality in which the problem of Negroes occupied a major part.

In Susan, Miss Glasgow reflects her own self. Though Susan lives in the same age, she is free from the traditional bonds, intelligent and strong, she dominates “every person or situation in life, not by charm, but by the force of an energetic and capable mind” (6). She is sensible, and with her clear and precise thinking overcomes the
defects of her education (29). Her quick perception understands Oliver’s shallowness
and his ambitious but ambiguous state of mind, which stand unworthy of their
admiration (28).

Ellen Glasgow, through Miss Priscilla Batte, focuses on the impact of traditional
education on Virginia. The education is framed in such a way that it would not leave “a
single unprotected breach in the girl’s mind through which an unauthorised idea might
enter” (21). Miss Glasgow makes here the fullest use of irony – her weapon to attack
the deficiencies in the social system. Their academician firmly believes that “to solidify
the forces of mind into the inherited mould of fixed belief (...) (is) to achieve the
definite end of all education” (22). Susan is endowed with sufficient courage to defy
the foolish system whereas Virginia is an embodiment of it. While Susan entertains the
inquiring spirit, Virginia has “accepted with humility the doctrine that a natural
curiosity about the universe is the beginning of infidelity”. “With Susan she (Miss
Priscilla) (has) failed, because the daughter of Cyrus Treadwell (is) one of those
inexplicable variations from ancestral stock over which the naturalists (are) still waging
their merry war; but Virginia, with a line of earnest theologians and of saintly self-
effacing women at her back, offered as little resistance as some exquisite plastic
material in the teacher’s hands” (22-23). Virginia owes her misery to her uncritical
mind and emotional softness (29).

Miss Glasgow throws light on the character of Cyrus Treadwell and the place he
occupies in the society. She unveils effectively the hypocrisy that goes with material
success and the genteel tradition. Miss Priscilla honestly admires Cyrus and considers
him “a great man” owing to his financial success, though he possesses “the qualities her
soul abhorred”. “The simple awe of financial success, which occupies in the American
mind the vacant space of the monarchical cult, had begun already to generate the myth of greatness around Cyrus” (24). It is this Treadwell-urge for material satisfaction which draws Oliver away from Virginia. Ellen Glasgow writes in *A Certain Measure*, “Every person in Dinwiddie, from the greater to the least, was linked, in some obscure fashion, with her tragedy, and with the larger tyranny of tradition” (1943; 82).

Though Miss Priscilla is a minor character, her reflections set the tone of irony and sadness that would pervade the novel. She hopes “if there was ever a girl who looked as if she were cut out for happiness, it is Jinny (Virginia) Pendleton” (25). Being disappointed in love, she dreams that she would “change and glorify the reality”, she thinks, though dimly, about the future lot of Virginia. Miss Glasgow reiterates her belief in the Darwinian theory that life exists only in one’s ability to move. Static life, spent in waiting would perish in misery. Through Miss Priscilla’s reflection Ellen Glasgow forebodes the sad and miserable events that take place in Virginia’s life.

The heritage of woman was hers as well as Virginia’s [...] was it all waiting — [..] Did the future hold this for Virginia also? Would life yield nothing more to that radiant girl than it had yielded to her or to the other women whom she had known? (25)

Ellen Glasgow levels her pungent criticism against the social system as well as the heritage which stunts the intellectual growth of a section of people and thereby distorts their relationship with those who trek the progressive path. She, endowed with a sharp intellect, keen observation, independent thinking and unfeigning moral standards, observes South’s disgraceful dependence upon simple heredity, unchanging human behaviour and tradition. Having read thoroughly and influenced strongly by Darwin, she intends to fight against the unwholesome adherence of the South to the vanishing values of Victorian tradition. One of the statements of Darwin, “Existence
(becoming) precedes essence (being)” was analysed by the subsequent Biologists that an organism’s life depends on its capacity to change. To express it in social terms, stereotyped behaviour, fixed views would not favour cultural development. Struggle and change are the conditions of existence. Basing on this principle, Ellen Glasgow has woven with admirable dexterity the woeful story of Virginia into a fascinating novel. Beneath the emotionally soft passages with which the novelist captures the attention of the reader, there is a knife-sharp irony, attacking vehemently the shallow social and moral conditions of the society which lead to the pathetic end of Virginia.

While tracing Virginia’s life, Ellen Glasgow lays stress on the importance of environment in shaping one’s character. Virginia’s parentage, her education and the books she reads mould her into a perfect traditional lady. Virginia’s parents, though impoverished, are heirs to weaknesses of the aristocratic community. Miss Glasgow severely denounces their “evasive idealism,” hypocrisy and less critical thinking. Gabriel Pendleton, Virginia’s father, an idealistic Episcopal minister married a woman “only less ignorant of the world than himself”. “Both cherished the naıve conviction that to acknowledge an evil is in a manner to countenance its existence and both clung fervently to the belief that a pretty sham has a more intimate relention to morality than has an ugly truth” (34 & 35). With a firm belief in the perfection of the past, his sole hope for the future is “not progress, but a return to the ideals of our ancetors”. Lucy Pendleton faces a “hard life” with a faint, grave smile, in which there was almost every quality except that of humour” (39). Despite her upbringing by such parents who passed “from the dignity of possession ( . . . ) to the finer dignity of poverty” (39); Virginia hopefully cherished a firm belief that “her own life would be different from anything that had ever been in the past” (33). She eagerly looks forward for the day
when "the miracle would happen, and everything would be different", "an importunate desire for the coming of the lover to whom she had been taught to look as to the fulfilment of her womanhood" (6, 37). Love, marriage and children are the only concerns of a traditional lady.

Ellen Glasgow satirises the type of books – "sugared falsehoods about life" (45) - allowed to be read by the Southern belle.

-- the poems of Mrs. Hemans and Adelaide Anne Procter, a carefully expurgated edition of Shakespeare, with an inscription in the rector's handwriting on the flyleaf; Miss Strickland's "Lines of the Queens of England"; and several works of fiction belonging to the class which Mrs. Pendleton vaguely characterized as "sweet stories" [. . .] That any book which told, however mildly, the truth about life should have entered their daughter's bedroom would have seemed little short of profanation to both the rector and Mrs. Pendleton (52-53).

As it becomes a Southern belle, Virginia is always spared from the daily drudgery of her mother. She is not supposed to help her mother who deems it her duty to slave herself despite ill-health (54). She is not supposed to give importance to time (60) or to criticise any one in strong terms (63). Virginia inherits the same 'evasive idealism' which is a mark of the aristocracy. Miss Glasgow shows their evasive idealism in an ironical passage.

[. . .] the three stood in silence, gazing dreamily, with three pairs of Pendleton eyes, down toward the site of the old slave market. Directly in their line of vision, an over-laden mule with a sure shoulder was straining painfully under the lash, but none of them saw it, because each of them was morally incapable of looking an unpleasant fact in the face if there was any honourable manner of avoiding it (65).

Miss Glasgow denounces their inhumanity which makes them conclude that "it was best" for them (the pullets) to be fried and eaten, or Providence [. . .] would not have permitted it" (67). In the market Virginia meets Oliver who sympathises with the
traditional women who should do both domestic work and marketing, and wonders “if they won’t revolt some time” (71).

Miss Glasgow picturises the strained relation between Cyrus and Oliver. Cyrus is too practical to approve of Oliver’s ideal ambitions. Yet, he shows some concern for his daughter who, he is afraid “[. . .] will get crazy and imagine she’s fallen in love with him” (80). As Oliver refuses to give up his writing, Cyrus turns him out. Oliver shifts to the back room of Mrs. Peachy and Susan helps him in packing. Oliver admires her intelligence and courage. She is the new woman who “looked as if she could ride life like a horse – could master it and tame it and break it to the bridle” (101). Miss Glasgow uses her as a foil to Virginia who makes her life miserable by lacking these ‘unwomanly qualities’. Miss Glasgow also exposes the hypocrisy of Oliver who despite his liberal views, reflects, “She’s not the sort of girl a man would lose his head over” (101). Through him, she shows the place of a writer in a society which prefers fantasy to reality. Oliver speaks out his creator’s anguish over the ignorance of people who are incapable of appreciating truth. “They don’t want life on the stage; they want a kind of theatrical wedding-cake” (105).

Miss Glasgow mocks the shallowness of Oliver who thinks too high of himself. “I could commercialize the stage, [...] as successfully as your father has commercialized the railroad. [...] I sincerely and enthusiastically believe that I am a genius” (106). Susan stands as a foil to Oliver also, as she humbly admits that she is not a genius but would like to study in a college. Glasgow shows her disapproval of materialism and excessive love of money which hinders man from parting with it. Cyrus’s meanness discourages Susan’s college education which involves money. Susan’s company makes Oliver realise the importance of a woman in his life. It is his male chauvinism for “he
understood now the primal necessity of woman, not as an individual, but as an incentive and an appendage to the dominant personality of man” (115). Ellen Glasgow sheds light on the distorted relations between man and woman which ultimately lead to the pathetic end of a traditional woman.

Miss Glasgow exposes the poor state of honour awaiting a free-thinker in the traditional society. The ambitious Oliver comprehends his situation, for the social status of a writer or thinker is only a little better than a slave (133). Miss Priscilla diverts his attention to Virginia with a good samaritan’s view that she should save Oliver’s soul from paganism by entrusting the sacred duty of his redemption to the pure-hearted Virginia. She rouses his interest in Virginia by describing her ‘womanly qualities’. Ellen Glasgow suggests the unseen role of society in making or marring human relations.

Irony of situation is one of the devices Miss Glasgow employs to heighten Virginia’s future misery. Virginia being ‘innocent’ looks forward to her ‘happiness’ which, she believes is in stock for her (148). For a Southern belle, happiness means “only the solitary experience of love. Whereas a man might have missed love and still have retained life with a woman love and life were interchangeable terms”. Love, for her is the door through which she can enter a larger world. As expected of the traditional woman, she should not think of love until it comes to her way unsolicited. Virginia, despite her ecstatic dreams, makes efforts to maintain her poise, for to be feminine is to be morally passive (148 & 149). Miss Glasgow expresses her belief that a happy life is the outcome of some incessant effort. While waiting to participate in the dance at Abby Goode’s party, Virginia ironically thinks, “was that a woman’s life, after all? Never to be able to go out and fight for what one wanted! Always to sit at home.
and wait, without moving a foot or lifting a hand toward happiness!” (152). The party brings Oliver and Virginia closer. The fire of love having been kindled in her soft heart, she is eager to “squander herself magnificently in his service” and dedicate her life to the “inherited ideals of self-surrender, of service, pity, loyalty and sacrifice” (159).

Miss Glasgow once again shows the role of society in establishing the relationship between man and woman. Mrs. Peachy conveys to Cyrus Oliver’s love for Virginia. Cyrus’ interest in Oliver, despite his dislike for Oliver over his refusal to stop writing, shows the strength of the feeling for family. The same feeling went into his helping Miss Priscilla, his spinster relation. When Cyrus meets Oliver in his room, “his power of reading human nature” (180) perceives that Oliver has been struggling to resist the temptation to marry. At the rectory he declares his love for Virginia. He announces his decision to marry Virginia to his uncle Cyrus and requests him to provide a job on the railroad. As he is leaving he sees his aunt Belinda. Miss Glasgow suggests through Belinda’s presence there the unhappy course of Oliver and Virginia’s love. Belinda and Cyrus stand for distorted marital relationships for it was founded on “his dogged male determination to override all obstacles, whether feminine or financial.” Cyrus comes “to like her for the very qualities which had first caught his fancy.” Though he married a “dove-like creature” by choice, he “had never forgiven her that she did not develop into a brisk, cackling hen of the barnyard” (89). Oliver, who inherited the same Treadwell blood, finds those womanly qualities which lured him to marry Virginia, boring and less appealing, after a time. In his passion for Virginia, he is ready to sacrifice his art and accept the drab job on the railroad. Ellen Glasgow describes his self-deception: “The thing he wanted was transmuted by the fire of his temperament into some artificial likeness to the thing that was good for him” (189).
In Book II, “The Reality”, Miss Glasgow describes the many experiences of Virginia, both happy and bitter as a true traditional wife and mother. The first years of Virginia’s married life are intimated through her bright-spirited letters to her mother, from Matoaca City, a mining town in which the newly wedded husband finds employment. The bloom of passion slowly vanishes, as four children are born in rapid succession, one dying in infancy. In her absorbing devotion to children she neglects both herself and her husband’s interests. Oliver’s unexpressed dissatisfaction over Virginia’s inability to be his mental companion and his disappointed hopes of a serious literary career, depress him. When Harry, her son, is seriously ill with diphtheria, Virginia prays to the Lord that she would renounce her personal happiness, if only her son is spared. Quite ironically, her prayer is granted – Harry is relieved and the doors are closed on her youth and happiness.

Ellen Glasgow shows the loving relationship existing between Virginia and her mother who by being an exemplary ideal woman, has played an important role in shaping Virginia’s personality as a perfect traditional lady. The conversation between Mrs. Pendleton and Virginia before the marriage mirrors “the canonical vision of woman” (203) and Mrs. Pendleton’s motherly instructions to her daughter, to become an ideal wife. Through Mrs. Pendleton, Miss Glasgow details at length the womanly duties expected of a traditional lady: not to call husband by his name, to be gentle enough to sacrifice her ideas whenever they cross her husband’s, to accept the doctrine of her inferiority to man, to yield to the husband’s will even in the matters of religion. Virginia, who has little suspicion of the traditional wisdom, readily promises her mother, “I shall try to be just what you have been to father – just as unselfish, just as devoted” (201). Virginia faithfully fulfills her promise but Oliver does not prove
worthy of her love and devotion. Susan is able to see through Oliver and rightly advises Virginia not to spoil him. She says "his character is not formed yet, you must remember. So much of him is imagination that he will take longer than most men to grow up to his stature". Unlike Susan, Virginia is too innocent to penetrate into Oliver's petulant nature. Susan's suggestive warning -- "the chief characteristic of every Treadwell is that he is going to get the thing he wants most. It doesn't make any difference whether it is money or love or fame," -- is beyond the grasp of Virginia (207 & 208). Instead, Virginia quite ironically responds that neither Mrs. Pendleton nor Susan has as much an understanding as she has. More than in any novel, Miss Glasgow effectively employs irony of situation to intensify the tragic turn of Virginia's life. Virginia even wonders, "what the wise Susan could see in the simple John Henry?" (209). Enveloped by her absorbing love for Oliver, conforming herself "in spirit to the classic ideal of her sex", Virginia imagines only the exquisite details of her marital life, simply ignoring the subtle variations that might be brought by years. Her unwavering faith in her husband leads to her staunch belief that "the fact of marriage would crystallize him into a shape from which he would never alter or dissolve in the future." Her conventional background makes her too delicate even to think of motherhood, "though motherhood was supposed to comprise every desire, adventure and activity in the life of woman, it was considered indelicate for her to dwell upon the thought of it until the condition had become too obvious for refinement to deny" (205). It is this delicacy which comes in her way to win back her husband from the actress, Margaret.

Ellen Glasgow describes the first years of her marriage which are quite humorously documented in Virginia's naïve but bright-spirited letters. The newly
wedded couple live in Matoaca city where Oliver finds employment. Miss Glasgow through Virginia's letters exposes Virginia's "lady-like" qualities; her traditional outlook which strongly disapproves the city-bred and educated Mrs. Payson, the manager's wife; her happy relation with Oliver; her gradual immersion into the drudgery of daily chores, her surprise at Oliver's appreciation of Mrs. Payson; her disinterest in reading books as "it is a waste of time" (224) etc. To her surprise, Mrs. Payson extends her helping hand during Virginia's first delivery. Even before the second child is born, Virginia's attention to her domestic work and her child makes her less attentive to her own self and to her husband. She is simple enough not to realise the thinning of the loving bond between herself and her husband. She even worries over "Oliver's peculiar attitude of mind" and his complaint "that I don't dress as well as I used to do" (235). She returns to Dinwiddie, with her three children, after seven years, looking older and dowdy.

Miss Glasgow observes that human relations would flourish only with clear understanding of one another. She contrasts Virginia and Oliver's marital ties with those of Susan and John Henry. Susan's marriage has not yet taken place, as Susan has been patiently waiting for John Henry to understand his own feelings for her as she believes that the edifice of marriage built on mutual understanding would last longer. As a sharp contrast, she finds Virginia attending more to her children than to her husband.

Virginia cannot leave her children even for a day or two, to spend her time with her husband. She belongs to that institution of marriage in which a wife's duty does not go beyond attending to the physical needs of the members of her family. Such a marriage often crumbles as the wife fails to peep into her husband's heart and mind and
extend her support whenever the need arises. Virginia deems any indulgence in personal satisfaction leaving the children to the care of her mother, as ‘neglecting (her) duty’ (266) and hence refuses to accompany Oliver to New York for the rehearsal of his play ‘The Beaten Road’. The disappointed Oliver leaves for New York alone for two weeks, not caring to be present on his daughter’s birthday during that time. Virginia’s force of character comes out when she hurriedly rushes to New York, alone, fearing Oliver’s illness. It is a pity she cannot grasp the impact of theatrical failure on Oliver’s mind. In a hopeless attempt to revive his spirits, she passes an uncritical comment, ‘It is a beautiful play’ (289) and it irritates him more rather than consoles him. “Something had gone out of their marriage, and this something was the perfect understanding which had existed between them” (296).

Ellen Glasgow examines the role of society in shaping one’s character. Virginia cannot penetrate into the root of the problem, as introspection is under moral ban in her society (297). It is beyond her domain of understanding to grasp Oliver’s disturbed mental state, which makes him feel even his children as “rather a nuisance” (299). Virginia finds her state pathetic for she finds herself unable to talk to her husband about his work, though she would darn his stockings. Her inability to be his mental companion leads to Oliver’s gradual indifference in her. She is rather baffled by her discovery of “terrible and unfamiliar qualities” in Oliver (286). She feels that she is in want of “something else” (288) to soothe her husband. The system in which she had been born and brought up had provided her no such training. Her “refusal to face the reality” (300), her evasive idealism, makes her come to the conclusion; “It can’t be that he is different – I must have imagined it” (301). She has been trained by her
tradition “to undervalue the physical pleasures of life” (305) and so cannot live up to Oliver’s satisfaction in such simple matters as dressing up neatly or riding a horse.

Miss Glasgow denounces the double standards of inconsistent Oliver. Though he likes the social activities of Abby Goode, he cannot choose her for a wife as he finds her wanting in “true womanliness”.

He saw woman as dependent upon man for the very integrity of her being and beyond the divine fact of this dependency he did not see her at all. [...] It was one of those mental attitudes, which, in the days of loose-thinking and of hazy generalizations, might have proved its divine descent by its universality [...] in accepting the historical dogma of the supplementary being of woman (306-307).

Virginia proves herself a perfect wife, but she can never understand what her husband needs. The deficiency lies in the tradition. Though Oliver disapproves the unwomanly qualities of Abby Goode, he does not hesitate to go out riding with her.

Ellen Glasgow studies closely the effect of biology over human nature. She sees that primitive instincts dominate the civilization acquired through centuries. Mrs. Pendleton’s revelation about the gossip of Oliver and Abby’s ridings, brings out the primitive female in Virginia. Miss Glasgow also shows the strength of upbringing and inheritance. Though they belong to different periods of the same life, youth and age, “both were creatures trained to feel rather than think, whose very goodness was the result, not of reason, but of emotion” (313-14). But even this strong discipline yields to natural impulse which is evident in Virginia’s joining the fox-hunt and her extravagance in the purchase of twelve yards of blue silk. The savage passion of jealousy roused by Oliver’s attention to Abby makes her rebel against the disciplined and moderate rule of her conscience. “The natural Virginia had triumphed for an instant over the Virginia
whom the ages had bred" (320). Miss Glasgow analyses subtly the power of passion over traditional virtues.

Ellen Glasgow presents the loving relationship that exists between a mother and her children. Both Mrs. Pendleton and Virginia are affectionate mothers. Virginia refuses to accompany Oliver to Atlantic city as she finds Harry sick of sore throat which bears signs of worsening. With her constant serving and loving attention for three full days, Virginia has her son Harry recovered.

Book III, "The Adjustment" traces the various events in Virginia’s life, leading to her miserable end. Virginia mourns for her father, brutally killed in a lynching incident. Her mother’s death follows shortly. At thirty, Virginia considers her life over but Oliver is thirty-five and is very hale and youthful. By the time, Virginia is forty-five, Oliver’s success has purchased comforts for all the family. The children, having grown up amidst feminist ideas are no more interested in their tradition-bound mother. Oliver develops fascination for Margaret Oldcastle, an actress of talent and intelligence and spends much of his time in New York. On one of her visits to New York, Virginia learns the heart-breaking news of her husband’s wild love for Margaret. She tries to speak to Margaret but fails to be candid, recognizing Margaret’s superior natural force, against which her own civilized, socially conditioned submissiveness is helpless. She returns to Dinwiddie with a heart full of void. She grants her husband a divorce. The novel ends with an optimistic letter from Harry telling his return to her.

Ellen Glasgow delineates the strong relations existing in the Pendletons. The sudden tragic death of Gabriel has brought about a sense of loss coupled with ‘a horrible sense of the pitiful insufficiency of life’ (385) in Virginia. Her unsurmountable sorrow makes her feel grown up, passing through her girlhood forever. Miss Glasgow
adores a sense of responsibility on the part of the younger generation towards their parents. Susan deems it her duty to look after her paralyzed mother and thinks of necessary precaution she has to take, if she marries James Henry. Virginia also takes care of her mother after Gabriel's death. She brings Mrs. Pendleton to her home.

Miss Glasgow's great concern for moral standards and sublime virtues make her denounce the lack of them in human beings. Yet, she tries to understand how circumstances further weaken the morally inferior people. Failure of his plays embitters Oliver and causes degeneration in his standard of values. Instead of enduring the buffets of life with a moral courage he compromises his ideals. He gives in to the financial pressure and gives up his ambition of writing great plays with a noble message. Despite his love for Virginia, Oliver feels a strange mixture of sympathy and resentment over Virginia's prolonged sorrow over her father's death. The marital relationship between Virginia and Oliver, which started weakening by her excessive care for her children and her inability to understand Oliver's mental needs is further deteriorated by Oliver's bitterness over his failure and his impatience with the virtuous Virginia. He yearns for a different and modern kind of woman as his companion. He finds such new woman in Margaret Oldcastle, a talented actress. Miss Glasgow shows his replica in Charley, Janes's husband in Life and Gabriella. Charley finds Janes's virtue insufferable.

Ellen Glasgow contrasts the stunted growth of Virginia with her children's full-fledged development which is in tune with the new spirit of their age, with all their eagerness to test life, to examine facts and their feel for truth. Susan had already possessed these qualities making her a foil to Virginia. Of the three, Harry has more love for his mother. Harry, fortunately has inherited the good traits of both the Pendletons and
Treadwells. From the Treadwells he had received the ability and regard for material success and a hard, clear vision of affairs necessary for such an achievement. From the Pendletons – Gabriel – he had inherited the genial temper, the charm of manner and faith in life (402). Along with the fine qualities of their age, Lucy and Jenny, the daughters, specially Lucy, are under the influence of its negative side. Lucy is very coquettish, selfish and least considerate. The girls do not have patience with their mother. Virginia’s love for hygiene and cleanliness appears to them “fussy” (411). Oliver’s material success enables them to employ servants. The same material success of Oliver keeps him in New York for the most part of the time and takes him more and more away from Virginia who never perceives the subtle changes that are taking place in their marital relations.

Ellen Glasgow establishes her strong conviction that in movement alone life exists. Through Susan who “was a large, young, superbly vigorous woman of forty-five, with an abundant energy which overflowed outside of her household in a dozen different directions” (446), she conveys that life becomes worth living only when it is crammed with experience: “Experience, though it contained an inevitable pang, was better than ignorance” (450). Virginia, whose universe is centred round her children and husband, finds life empty when her children and husband leave her: Lucy gets married, Jenny and Harry go away for education and Oliver keeps himself busy with his plays. She feels, “there was nothing to do to-day; there would be nothing to do tomorrow; […] there would be nothing to do next year or the years after that” (441). Susan tries her best to revive the sunken spirits of Virginia by encouraging her to participate in all the beneficial activities relating to a charity or a public movement, just as she does. But Virginia’s traditional rearing would not allow her. At all the important
turns of life, Miss Glasgow puts Susan beside Virginia to focus on the contrast between them. While Virginia finds life dull and insipid, Susan feels all the phases of life quite interesting.

It was good to have been young; it was good to be middle-aged; and it would be good to be old. For she was one of those who loved life, not because it was beautiful, but because it was life (450).

Susan acts as a mouthpiece of Miss Glasgow.

Ellen Glasgow argues that movement is life but does not deny the importance of the past. In her speech “The Dynamic Past”, she puts forth her belief that “we can make a great future [. . .] not by copying the past, but by lighting again and again our fresh torches by the flame of the old” (Reasonable Doubts, ed. Raper, 1988; 49). She elucidates elaborately the factors which caused Oliver’s degeneracy. The power of understanding others, which is the only effective way of establishing strong ties between one another, is so weak in him that he fails to “look into the heart of another” (457). His blind rebellion against the old faith has weakened his powers of resistance, though it had liberated his thought. He is indignant with himself for being too weak to resist life. Miss Glasgow emphasizes the importance of values and virtues which would discipline one’s life and which the modern age lacks badly.

Like his age, he was adrift among disestablished belief, among floating wrecks of what had once been rules of conduct by which men had lived. And the widening responsibilities, the deepening consciousness of a force for good greater than creed or rules, all the awakening moral strength which would lend balance and power to his age, these things had been weakened in his character by the indomitable egoism which had ordered his life (460).

As a young man, Oliver wished to marry only the ‘sacrificial womanly woman’ who would be “an incentive and appendage to the dominant personality of man” (115), but never an independent individual. For that very reason, he could not think of marrying
the intelligent and buoyant spirited Susan or a “bouncing woman” (28) like Abby Goode. Though he married Virginia by choice, he could not remain loyal to her. “While Oliver had been ‘adrift’ in a modern world, Virginia remained utterly stationary. Despite “her sweetness, her humility, her old-fashioned courtesy and consideration for others”, she could never understand that “the needs and the desires of man were different” (467). Oliver is unhappy over the loss of the bloom and the freshness of youth in Virginia. At forty-seven Oliver is still young and active and eagerly yearns for the young as his companions. Virginia is too innocent to see through his arrangement of dividing his income. She happily accompanies him to New York, unable to bear with her solitude at home in Dinwiddie. In New York, unfortunately, she meets one of ‘life’s cruelties’. Overhearing a talk, she comes to know that Oliver is madly in love with Margaret Oldcastle. She is shocked and drowned in a sea of melancholy. She makes a futile attempt to win back Oliver, by going to Margaret. “Even in the supreme crises of life she could not lay down the manner of a lady [. . . ] In the crucial moment it was principle, and not passion which she obeyed” (487-88). Miss Glasgow analyses the evils of sheltered life. She is not taught to resist, but with abundant endurance she passively yields to suffering. There is a hopeless absence of struggle to live.

Miss Glasgow exposes the moral cowardice of Oliver. Through him she conveys that too much of anything is not wholesome and it would yield only bad results. While confessing that he never wanted to hurt Virginia (489), he explains to her the anguish of his heart, “You’re too good for me, that’s the trouble. You’ve been too good for me from the beginning” (491). Being true to his Treadwell blood – “A Treadwell will always get the thing he wants most in the end” – he succeeds in driving
home his idea. Virginia without any resistance, calmly submits to his will for “the fighting courage, the violence of revolt, had no part in her soul, which had been taught to suffer and to renounce with dignity not with heroics” (494). Miss Glasgow’s belief in struggle as a sign of life is suggested in almost all her works. Later, in her opening speech at the Southern Writers Conference, held in 1931, in Charlottesville, she reiterates the same opinion.

Maturity lies not in conquest but in ceaseless struggle and in endless reversals of the situation. And believing this so heartily, I welcome change and conflict and abhor standardization as the earliest sign of death and decay (Reasonable Doubts, ed. Raper, 1988; 94).

As ‘Character is Fate’, the seed of Virginia’s pathetic end lies in her own self. She could not revolt against the injustice done to her as “it took passion to war with passion and in this she was lacking. [. . .] (she) could not break through that gentle yet invincible reticence which she had won from the past” (496). She leaves Oliver and New York for Dinwiddie. She gives freedom to Oliver and “nothing remained except the long empty years, for she had outlived her usefulness” (522). Amidst her pathos, she sees a ray of hope when she finds Harry’s single lined telegram; “Dearest mother, I am coming home to you” (526). Harry represents the younger generation progressing towards a bright future, with an optimistic mind. Of the three children, it is only Harry who has true love for his mother.

An affectionate exposure of the retrograde South, Virginia is about the girl and the place. Ellen Glasgow writes on the appropriateness of the South as a background to Virginia. “Although the gentlewoman has existed, more or less precariously, in all parts of the world, the native climate and soil of the South have combined with its particular
institutions to furnish for her species an appropriate background of fauna and flora” (Glasgow, 1943; 78).

Virginia resembles the South in its dignity and defeat. “Her happiness was of that invulnerable sort which builds its nest not in the luxuriant gardens of the emotions, but in the bare, rock-bound places of the spirit”. She imbibed the same “capacity for self-sacrifice which had made the South a nation of political martyrs” and inherited those “qualities which had passed from the race into the individual and through the individual again back into the very blood and fibre of the race” (132). At the root of her self-sacrifice there is her immense capacity to love which is her strength. Miss Glasgow emphasises, “she is not weak in fibre”, “her strength ( . . . ) hardens into the inherited emotional pattern. as wife and mother, she approaches perfection; but it is a law of our nature, as of all nature, that change only endures, and the perfect mould must be broken” (Glasgow, 1943; 91). Virginia is an embodiment of many noble traits: love, selfless devotion, self-sacrificing nature, striving for other’s happiness. She knows only to give, never to demand anything from others. The tie between her and her only son was unbreakable. Her son’s return, which is unasked for, is a sign of her moral victory (Glasgow, 1943; 92). The ever-changing material values cannot really dominate the never-changing spiritual values, though for sometime they seem victorious.

Ellen Glasgow firmly believes that the past is a source of strength to enable the present to run towards the rich future.

We can be as great as we were in the past only when we open the flood-gates of thought, and the river of the past flows through us and from us onward into the future. For the past and the present and the future are the same endless stream, and with all our efforts we can merely change the course a little – we can never break the eternal continuity of the race. (Reasonable Doubts, ed. Raper, 1988; 53).
Besides the main theme of the importance of mobility and struggle for the progress of life, Ellen Glasgow touches upon some important themes such as evasive idealism (the Pendletons), the growth of materialism (the Treadwells), the emergence of the new woman (Susan) and the Negro problem.

In the characters of Mr. and Mrs. Pendleton, Ellen Glasgow analyses ironically but accurately a comprehensive picture of the traditional society. She lays bare the self-deception and the hypocrisy in the clergymen, who are meant to promote cordial relationships among men, states and nations, when they involve themselves in cruel wars with a “child-like trust in providence” (34) and a steadfast belief in the righteousness of wars. Ellen Glasgow is all against wars which involve much cruelty, unnecessary wastage of human life and the cause for much suffering. Gabriel Pendleton is one such clergyman who resembles Mr. Black of Vein of Iron. His sentimental nature would never allow him to perceive things in their true colour. Miss Glasgow’s irony sharpens as she attributes his happy marital status to the fact that both are cut from the same cloth.

Having married at twenty, an idealist only less ignorant of the world than himself, he had, inspired by her example, immediately directed his energies towards the white washing of the actuality. To “take a true view” was to believe what was pleasant against what was painful in spite of evidence: to grant honesty to all men [. . .]; to deny virtue to no woman, [. . .]; to regard the period before the war in Virginia as attained perfection, [. . .] (35)

With all this “evasive idealism” he maintains his assumption that marriages are made in heaven. “Unhappy marriages, like all other misfortunes of society, he was inclined to regard, as entirely modern and due mainly to the decay of ante-bellum institutions. [. . .] Not progress, but a return to the “ideals of our ancestors,” was his sole hope for the future” (36). A strong loving bond exists among the Pendletons. They possess all the
ideal relationships within the family and with others around them in the society, but unfortunately they hold all the time an unrealistic view of life – a fact which has brought about their misery. Perhaps this is the reason why Ellen Glasgow’s sharp irony melts into heart-touching pity as the plot unravels itself. Gabriel believes that a Southern lady has always been an ideal mother who takes every care in bringing up her children, specially her sons. He warns Virginia against spoiling Harry with her excessive attention.

I like a woman to be wrapped up heart and soul in her household- and I don’t suppose anybody ever accused the true Southern lady of lacking in domesticity – but if they have a failing, which I refuse to admit, it is that they are almost too-soft-hearted where their children – especially their sons – are concerned. (250)

Gabriel Pendleton tries to prevent violence to the young negro boy the neglected mulatto son of Cyrus. In his benevolent attempt he makes a chivalrous sacrifice of himself. On the request of one of his former slaves, an old negress, Aunt Mehitable, Gabriel Pendleton comes to meet her who wants to talk to him about the trouble in which her grandson gets involved. Aunt Mehitable’s grandson, in a slip while crossing, knocked a white woman and he was accused of jostling her and a great trouble started. Miss Glasgow is always sympathetic to the negroes. Gabriel tries to save the negro boy from the lynch by some drunken men. The negro boy escapes death but Gabriel is killed by those drunken people. Commenting on Miss Glasgow’s attitude to this race problem, Marion K. Richards writes:

[. . .] (Gabriel Pendleton’s sacrifice) parallels the death of Nick Burr, who is killed saving a Negro from lynching. Gabriel’s action is, of course, noble, but like Nick Burr’s it is also seen as a waste. This problem appears in many of the later works, since the mixing of the races
appeared to Miss Glasgow a sin parallel to that of slaveholding. (1971; 129).

Virginia is a perfect replica of her mother who believes that love, marriage and children give fulfilment to womanhood. Mrs. Pendleton has genial links with all the sections of the society who have made it almost a custom to share their strawberries or raspberries or lemon pie etc. with her. She maintains equally kind relationships with her “numerous negro dependents” (38). Though she was “born a great lady [. . .] she had descended from her aristocratic niche into unceasing poverty and self denial” (39) with a cheerful acceptance. She has “every quality except that of humour. [. . .] To her the daily struggle of keeping an open house on starvation fare was not a pathetic comedy, as with Gabriel, but a desperately smiling tragedy” (39-40). Her “false pride” and love of appearance would not allow her to attend to the “pitiless drudgery” of household chores while neighbours watch her (40).

Mrs. Pendleton, makes her own contribution to the development of Virginia’s character. Like the education system, Mrs. Pendleton has taught her daughter to accept the Prayer Book dogma of woman’s inferiority (200) and to assume that all things happen for the best (67), to look upon the oppressed situation of the blacks without seeing it as a problem (47) to efface herself (43) and suffer with a smile (42) and to regard the world outside Dinwiddie with the most provincial fear imaginable (199). Her “evasive idealism” is best seen in her belief about art:

The sacred shelves of that book case [. . .] had never suffered the contaminating presence of realism. The solitary purpose of art was, in Mrs. Pendleton’s eyes, to be “sweet”, and she scrupulously judged all literature by its success or failure in this particular quality. It seemed to her as wholesome to feed her daughter’s growing fancy on an imaginary line of pious heroes, as it appeared to her moral to screen her from all suspicion of the existence of immorality (53).
Through John Henry, Gabriel Pendleton's nephew, Miss Glasgow expresses her views on the positive side of progress. He is free from the snobbery of his class, though his mother disapproves of the nature of business, he believes in the dignity of self-help. "He was of a practical bent of mind and had developed a talent for his branch of business, which, to the bitter humiliation of his mother, was that of hardware, with a successful speciality in bathtubs" (44). He accompanies Virginia and Mrs. Lucy Pendleton to the market. Lucy would not allow anyone to share her domestic drudgery and Gabriel is so accustomed to see "her suffer with a smile" that he would not deny her "the privilege of working herself to death" (42) as is expected of a traditional woman.

The market-scene is one of the most important scenes in the novel where Ellen Glasgow pours out her anguish over the pitiable plight of the "Problem of the South" – the Negroes – and she lashes at the cruelty of the 'genteel tradition' which never considered them as human beings or tried to maintain respectable relationship with them. "In these squalid alleys, [...] the more primitive forms of life appeared to swarm like distorted images under the transparent civilization of the town. The sound of banjo strumming came faintly from the dimmers beyond, while at their feet the Problem of the South sprawled innocently amid tomato cans and rotting cabbage leaves" (45) (italics mine). This scene also throws light on the gossip that creeps into the conversation of women when they meet one another.

Ellen Glasgow has created Cyrus Treadwell as a symbol of growing materialism and diminishing moral values which surround wealth. Cyrus Treadwell rises to an exalted position among the Dinwiddians by being "the inexorable foe of the old feudal order and the beneficent source of the new industrialism." (73). He is the President of one of the Machlin railroads. His material success facilitates him to have good and
dominating relationships with everyone in the society. Just as Miss Glasgow dealt with social transition in her previous novels, *The Voice of the People*, *The Deliverance*, *The Romance of a Plain Man* and *The Miller of Old Church*, in *Virginia* also, she traces the inroads made by the new bourgeoisie upon the dissolving aristocracy. Cyrus Treadwell, with his awesomely dominating tobacco factory, surmounts the Dinwiddie society. People hate his gratuitous meanness which keep his wife in abject poverty. Yet, he is considered ‘great’ because of his wealth. “But he’s a great man. You can’t deny that” (64). With her subtle irony, Miss Glasgow describes his hypocrisy even in religious matters.

> [. . .] he was as strict in his attendance upon church as he was loose in applying the principles of Christianity to his daily life. (75)

Miss Glasgow unveils the distorted marital relationship between Cyrus and his wife, Belinda. It is one of those marriages of opposites, rooted not in love but in male pride and determination “to override all obstacles, whether feminine or financial” (89). When pretty Belinda declines his proposal, his determination grows stronger to possess her under any circumstance. The dome of marriage has crumbled ultimately as both have been disillusioned of their image. Belinda fails to fit into Cyrus’s slot of the ideal woman. For Belinda, marriage is an end in itself, provided it is founded on love. But the absence of love in her marriage makes her life miserable. Cyrus’ indifference drives her to distress. A little kindness might have averted the tragedy of her ruined soul. Through Oliver, Ellen Glasgow reflects on the philosophy of human relations, which could have filled the society with the kind of pleasant and healthy atmosphere one would wish for. “If men and women would only stop judging each other and make allowances!” (114) • Cyrus is pitiably ignorant of the primal necessity of woman who
would supply man with the "daily tonic of (her) love and service" and 'as an incentive and appendage to the dominant personality of man" (115).

Cyrus appears like "a pitiless manifestation of destiny - of those deaf, implacable forces by which the lives of men and women are wrecked" (165). He does not prove to be an ideal father. Cyrus mercilessly denies an opportunity for Susan to go to college because of his inherent contempt for women which is partly due to his disillusioned marriage. He dislikes a forceful character in women. He could think only in terms of money. Any affliction that had nothing to do with money would only make him think of the suffering as self-inflicted by the sufferers and of those people as those nursing grief. He could comprehend marriage only as an economic necessity, never as a matter of sentiment (362).

Through Cyrus Miss Glasgow reflects on the miserable relationship between the negro slaves and their master. Cyrus has a very mean moral opinion about negro servants. Though he would use the female servants for his bodily comforts, he would not wish to help them in their misery,

> If only one could get rid of such creatures after their first youth was over! (366)

Cyrus is a man craving for possessions, a man with a single-minded desire, a tenacity of grasp, a dread of relinquishment and a cold-blooded determination to keep intact the thing which it had cost so much to acquire it.

He has no sympathy for the Negroes. The illegal mulatto son of Cyrus Treadwell by his laundress, Mandy, is accused of jostling a white woman and the mob is about to lynch him. Mandy pleads Cyrus for help, which he mercilessly denies. Instead of saving him from the unjust and false accusation, he exhibits his "sound
principle of justice” by maintaining that “your race has got to learn that when you break
the law you must pay for it” (367). Miss Glasgow insists that the effects of social
dishonesty ultimately demand an expiation commensurate with them. Consequently,
Virginia’s father, falls a victim to the evil practice, which was encouraged by his own
forebears.

[...] the once widespread relationship between the southern gentleman
and the Negro woman (is) a recurring theme in Ellen Glasgow’s more
important novels, including Virginia (1913), Barren Ground (1925) and
The Sheltered Life (1932). In each case, she handles the miscegenation
with an authority [...]. This is especially so in Virginia where aspects of
Cyrus Treadwell’s character were apparently modelled after her father”
(Raper, 1971; 29).

After the death of Mrs. Treadwell there comes a conspicuous change in Cyrus.
He looks like, in the pithy expression of Miss Glasgow, “an orange from which every
drop of juice had been squeezed” (445). His terror of death generates tremendous
generosity in him, owing to which, he starts donating large amounts to churches,
perhaps to buy his salvation. He could think of everything only in terms of money:
[...] every minute might mean the loss of a dollar, there was no use dragging in either
religion or sentiment” (371). Gabriel reflects on Cyrus “[...] he takes a false view of
life”. “It’s odd how the commercial spirit seems to suck a man dry when it once gets a
hold on him.” (373). Miss Glasgow, through Virginia, expresses her sympathetic
understanding of the Negroes.

His colour, which was back, inspired her (Virginia) with confidence
(280).

The Negroes in all her novels are hard working, honest and helpful. Gabriella was able
to support herself with the assistance of Miss Polly Hatch, a negro seamstress and
Dorinda was helped by Aunt Mehitable, an old ex-slave and Fluvanna, the younger
woman, a valued assistant and trusted friend, As the issue of Negroes was controversial, many Southern writers avoided writing about them, they preferred to write history or romance, giving free reins to their imagination.

Miss Glasgow throws light on the frivolity of the young through Lucy. Virginia’s daughter Lucy, being very indifferent and casual, gives no importance to such valued traits as sense of duty or consideration for family or a sacred feeling for the institution of marriage. Coquettish as she is, she is ready to marry a man whom she knows only for a short period.

Then a month after her twenty-second birthday, she had coolly announced her engagement to a man whom she had seen but six times—a widower at that, twelve years older than herself, and the father of two children (415).

She is too self-conceited to allow her parents’ interference. Her excessive individualism which bred in her egoism and lack of reverence for elders makes her refuse her mother’s advice or have a second thought on her decision. Her utter disrespect for authority and a very poor opinion of the sanctity of the institution of marriage shock Virginia. Lucy does not hesitate to desert her husband if she is determined that she has ceased loving him.

It’s perfectly absurd to think I’ll have to live with a man if I find I don’t love him (435).

In Jenny, Virginia’s younger daughter, Miss Glasgow, puts the positive aspects of the new age. Jenny has a sharp mind and penetrating eye. She enlightens her mother over the evils of their civilization, which are rooted in lack of, or, insufficient education.

To Virginia

it was as if the sharp and searching light of truth had fallen suddenly upon all the frail and lovely pretences by which she had helped herself to live and to be happy (430).
Jenny’s study of Science has endowed her with an accurate vision, logical thinking and clearly formulated morality. To Virginia, who has tradition sunk into her sinews, Jenny’s plea to think independently is simply incomprehensible. But, befitting her traditional upbringing, Virginia never argues. Having outgrown their need of her, the children find their mother faded and uninteresting. The bond between the mother and daughters is ruptured by their independence and new feminism.

Feeling lonely in the empty nest of home, Virginia visits New York, where Oliver spends much of his time. To her great shock, she learns of her husband’s wild love for Margaret Oldcastle, an actress, acting in the plays of Oliver. She understands that Oliver is no more interested in her and is ready to take divorce without any sting of heart. She makes Oliver free and returns to Dinwiddie with a broken heart, finding life an empty shell, a void.

She is not a weak woman. "On the contrary, she was a woman whose vital energy had been deflected, by precept and example, into a single emotional centre" (Glasgow, 1943; 83). In their sacrifice, women are abetted by male vanity.

Miss Glasgow ends her novel on a positive note by making Harry come back to his mother, most probably to comfort her. Harry represents the modern period, while Virginia symbolises the traditional past. Though Miss Glasgow intended in the beginning to satirize Virginia’s conventional mould, the satire gradually gives place to sympathy, as Harry with utmost sympathy comes to understand his mother. Phillip D. Atteberry argues:

This gesture (Harry’s coming back), however, has considerable thematic and tonal significance because it qualifies the atmosphere of abandonment and despair that has climaxed in the final chapters (1995; 130).
Oliver, who believes in adaptability is unable to bear with the never growing Virginia and hence, he abandons her. Virginia, though she lacks this movement, has her own noble qualities of head and heart. Harry, a better representative of modernity, comes back to Virginia. This gesture suggests Miss Glasgow’s conviction about the past and the present – an idea to which she gave a veritable expression in her address “The Dynamic Past”:

“It (The Past) is a place to which we should go for inspiration and worship; it is a place from which we should come with renewed strength and courage; but it is not a place in which we should live and brood until we become like that ancient people whose “Strength was to sit still” (Reasonable Doubts, ed. Raper, 1988; 47).

In the same speech, she said that a true patriot must have love and reverence for the past but should break away from tradition when “tradition endangers natural development” and “(. . .) in movement alone is there life – that the only permanent law of our nature is the law of change” (Reasonable Doubts, ed. Raper, 1921; 48).

Through Virginia, Miss Glasgow suggests that the modern age should progress, drawing its moral strength, specially the quality of endurance, from the past, not by abandoning it completely.

J.R. Raper pays an excellent tribute to Ellen Glasgow in his Without Shelter, The Early Career of Ellen Glasgow:

Not only is Virginia one of Ellen Glasgow’s four or five best novels – with Barren Ground, The Romantic Comedians, They Stooped to Folly and The Sheltered Life – but its publication in 1913 must be counted one of the major events to occur in American fiction during the decade and half which passed between the appearance of James’s The Golden Bowl (1904) and Anderson’s Winesburg, Ohio (1919) (1971; 246).

Miss Glasgow presents Virginia – “the first book of my maturity “(Glasgow, 1954; 188) – as a struggle between the old sentimental tradition and the new materialistic society.
At a metaphorical level, Virginia, the state or the backward agrarian South confronts the new industrial South. Throughout the novel she advocates the necessity of change.

Though Miss Glasgow makes the Pendletons and the Treadwells, the objects of her pungent satire, through them she expresses some of her convictions. Gabriel Pendleton is an embodiment of “the greatest belief on the earth – the belief in life – in its universality, in spite of its littleness, in its justification in spite of its cruelties.” (373-74). She condemns the moral cowardice of Oliver, yet through him she suggests a healthy way of establishing human relations: “If man and woman would only stop judging each other and make allowances!” (114).

Miss Glasgow displays great control and firm insight in establishing Virginia’s final tragedy by underlaying it emotionally: “It was impossible to say the things she had come to say, because even in the supreme crises of life she could not lay down the manner of a lady, she smiled the grave smile with which her mother had walked through a ruined country and taking up her muff, which she had laid on the table, passed out into the hall. She had let the chance go by, she had failed in her errand, yet she knew that, even though it cost her life, even though it cost her a thing far dearer than life – her happiness – she could not have done otherwise (487).

Virginia observes Margaret’s ambivalent nature, her freedom and nobility. Though these qualities are commendable, there is an obvious disregard of the weaker, less selfish individuals. Virginia’s pathos became intense because she cannot translate her strong emotions into words or actions.

In the next scene, when Oliver expresses his desire for his freedom, Virginia’s pain is greater for she cannot articulate her suffering. But seeing a feeling of “shame in his eyes” (488), she forgets her own grief and speaks “so gently that she might have
been speaking to her sick child," (489). After returning to Dinwiddie, she lives a lonely and bitter life for some months. Her wanderings in the “streets which were associated with her girlhood” and her visit to the rectory where she lived with her beloved parents (502) deepen her sense of deprivation.

Though Ellen Glasgow planned *Virginia* as one of her novels of social history, its importance lies more in the psychological insight into the characters. Neither the characters, nor the place are confined to Dinwiddie but they are part of the broad world:

> Human nature in this town of twenty-one thousand inhabitants differed from human nature in London or in the Desert of Sahara mainly the things it ate and the manner in which it carried its clothes. The same passions stirred its heart, the same instincts moved its body, the same contentment with things as they are, and the same terror of things as they might be, warped its mind (12).

Miss Glasgow reminds Henry James in her deep penetration into the consciousness of her characters. The contrasting natures of Virginia and Oliver naturally culminate in their tragic separation. Virginia is an ironical admixture of ignorance and goodness while Oliver’s character combines in itself an incisive intellectuality and a moral complacency. Both of them together contribute to the debacle of Oliver’s high ideals, she by unintelligence, he by enervating selfishness. Virginia is rather immature in her philosophy, but she has great capacity to endure; though Oliver has a sharp brain, he lacks moral stamina. Thus, the consequential anguish of two opposite persons yoked together by fate, end up in their drifting apart.

Miss Glasgow seems to suggest the worthlessness of physical love, by dividing her novel into three books entitled, *The Dream, The Reality* and *The Adjustment*. The first book “The Dream” deals with Virginia’s deep love for Oliver, which culminates in her marriage. In the second book “The Reality” she deals with the actual life of
Virginia, which was far from the ironic conviction of Miss Batte who believes that Virginia is destined for supreme happiness (25) and Virginia’s own feeling that her life, would certainly be far more superior to that of her fellow citizens in Dinwiddie (33). In the last section “The Adjustment” Virginia’s powers of endurance come to her rescue as she makes painful attempts to adjust herself to her ruined life. J.R. Raper calls this pattern which recurs in almost all her key novels written in all phases of her career, as thesis or illusion, antithesis or reality and synthesis or imaginative fusion of illusion and reality. “This dialectic mirrors Ellen Glasgow’s stormy personal development–biographical, intellectual and literary” (Raper, 1971; 12). The tone in the first part which conveys the passion of youthful lovers is luscious but gradually it becomes sober as Virginia’s life becomes more and more pathetic.

Miss Glasgow’s narrative structure is consistently complex in a manner befitting the complex subject. The major interest of the novel lies mainly in prying and making a study of character whose mind has been incapacitated by cultural conditioning. This study is made interesting by Miss Glasgow’s effectively framed scenes and rich images. Scenes, images and episodes of contrasting nature are woven together to heighten the necessary effects. Book One deals with Virginia’s eye-fluttering courtship with Oliver Treadwell. In this lightest section of the novel, Miss Glasgow initiates the contrasts which will later darken the novel’s tone and deepen its thematic texture. Virginia Pendleton is introduced as the archetypical embodiment of feminine youth and beauty - with a laugh like “the song of a bird” (7), eyes as blue as “wild hyacinths after rain” (5) and blushes as red as “a rose” (9). Into this same section Ellen Glasgow builds three disturbing images of middle age which not only refute the implication of the former images - timelessness and indestructibility – but prefigure the intellectual paralysis, the
social rigidity and the marital frustrations that will ultimately afflict the middle-aged Virginia. Miss Priscilla Battle with whom the novel opens represents intellectual immobility, “static” and “obsolete” social order in the Virginia of the eighties. She, being a teacher, not only thwarts Virginia’s intellectual development but foreshadows her intellectual destiny. Lucy Pendleton represents the social rigidity from which the adult Virginia will suffer. Lucy’s main drawback is her inability to realize that life necessarily involves change. Belinda Treadwell’s unhappy married life prefigures Virginia’s marital frustrations. Both Virginia and Oliver fail miserably to deal with the meaning of marriage.

As Oliver’s and Virginia’s marital happiness advances, Miss Glasgow introduces the images of ill-health to suggest the deterioration of their diseased relationship. Virginia rushes to New York to attend on Oliver who is believed to have met with an accident. Harry’s illness further alienates Virginia from her husband. Virginia’s notion of motherhood and responsibility would not yield to accept a holiday trip to Atlantic city whereas Oliver would not refrain himself from his freedom and enjoyment. The sub-plot of Cyrus and Mandy also suggests Oliver’s infidelity and his abandonment of Virginia. Susan, with her physical and intellectual vitality and a power to think with “clearness and precision” (29) is created as a contrast to Virginia. Ellen Glasgow puts her own self into Susan’s character “who had kept her mind as alert as her body and the number of books she read had always shocked Virginia a little” (446). Susan and John Henry stand for a healthy marriage for none of them allowed their personal concerns to absorb them, neglecting their marital relation, as it happened in the case of Virginia and Oliver. Virginia is preoccupied with her domestic concerns while
Oliver with his professional, so that they have no common interest to strengthen their relationship.

Ellen Glasgow’s artistry comes to the foreground very prominently in *Virginia*. The characters are endowed with a symbolic significance in terms both of the social milieu and the moral value. The Pendletons stand for strength and the inadequacy of southern tradition and morality in the eighties while the spiritual hardness of the growing industrialism is represented by the Treadwells. Oliver with his bleak prospects signifies the uncertainties of modernism. Virginia, with her fine qualities—“service, pity, loyalty, and sacrifice”—is drawn by Miss Glasgow as a symbol for the pre-war South. In her defeat by life, except for retaining “the inviolable sanctities of the spirit”, Virginia suggests the downfall of the South though she preserves her self-respect.

Miss Glasgow has conceived all her characters as individuals with their conflicting motives, though they symbolize social forces and moral qualities. Flat characters like Belinda Treadwell, Miss Priscilla Batte to more fully developed figures as Gabriel Pendleton, Cyrus Treadwell, Oliver and Virginia, are all equally convincing. Though many times Glasgow speaks through them, the social and ethical commentary does not come in the way of their free movement.

At the beginning of the novel, Miss Glasgow uses Miss Priscilla Batte as the “interested observer” to introduce Virginia, Susan and Oliver. In Book One the point of view changes from Miss Batte to Virginia and to the author as omniscient story-teller. But in the last two books the story largely takes place in Virginia’s consciousness. The book is a satire on the evasive idealism and dramatizes the dangers of sentiment and sacrifice.
When *Virginia* was published, it was received favourably by the reviewers who considered it as her best novel up to that time. But the reading public did not receive it very strongly. Moreover, Miss Glasgow tells us in *A Certain Measure* that it was misunderstood. She was asked by a lady in Richmond: "Do you really think, my child, that a young girl could be inspired to do her duty by reading *Virginia*? I do not deny that there is truth in your book; but I feel that it is a mistake for Southern writers to stop writing about the war" (84). That it is one of Miss Glasgow's favourite novels is clear in her letters.

*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. Those were the days when one fattened and waxed rich on illusions, yet. I kept even then to the bare and sober reality (*Letters*, ed. Blair Rouse, 1958; 70).

A true chronicle of Southern life, *Virginia* is one of Glasgow's finest works, "an American naturalist novel of major importance" (Thiebaux, 1982; 110).
LIFE AND GABRIELLA

You can't slip away from things and be a quitter, no matter how hard you try. Life pulls you back again till you've learned to play the game squarely.

-- Ellen Glasgow

The changing values and the dying traditions of the South during the last decade of the nineteenth century and the transition of the next century formed the base for Ellen Glasgow who strove for a life-time to illuminate what she believed universal and enduring in human experience.

In Virginia Miss Glasgow has dealt with the vanishing genteel tradition. But her next novel, which she intends to make a companion study to the previous one, presents woman as a reality. “Although Gabriella lived only a decade later than Virginia, a whole era of change and action, one of the memorable epochs in history, separated the two women”.

Life and Gabriella was written during Miss Glasgow’s stay in New York from 1911 to 1916 following the death of Cary McCormack. After her return from England, she started her new novel, Life and Gabriella: The Story of a Woman's Courage, in which she celebrates the virtue of courage after a long time. Besides a faithful rendering of life, Miss Glasgow makes a fearless exploration into the interior world of mind and heart which contain the subtle realities of life. In this novel, Ellen Glasgow is seen striving “for a more intense consciousness and for a closer agreement with the realities of experience” (Glasgow, 1943; 115). While retaining the graces of past culture, she tries to develop the broader comprehension of the modern point of view. She makes every effort to preserve the virtue of good manners — a decency of perception and consideration for others with a regard for sensibilities — which is a part
of social morality. She dreams of a world where happiness and speaking truth are encouraged; where class consciousness which inflicts pain on others is eradicated. With the advent of democracy she sees signs of new freedom from the troubled ideals, disturbed human relationships, pretences, beliefs and prejudices of older authority. She illuminates the condensed experiences of life and the new trends in the social values which can better human ties.

Ellen Glasgow's plan to deal with the history of Virginian manners comprising a period from 1850 to 1914 came to an end with Life and Gabriella. Observing the changing conditions in the society around her, she found that "the once firm bonds of the genteel convention were beginning to loosen and to give way" (Glasgow, 1943; 102).

*Life and Gabriella* appears to be a contrast to her previous novel *Virginia*. But actually they represent various developing stages in Southern characteristics and culture. In an interview, conducted in 1913, she reveals her mind:

I have in my mind the stories of several women. [...] I want to tell for one thing the story of the business woman who has been highly successful.

Miss Glasgow fulfills this plan by telling the life stories of three women from different walks of life. *Virginia* (1913) is a wife and mother; *Life and Gabriella* (1916) is the story of a successful business woman; and *Barren Ground* (1925) is the tragi-comic career of Dorinda Oakley, a successful farmer though defeated in her emotions. The turn of the century still showed signs of the lingering Victorian tradition, while the decade that followed ushered an era of change and action. The new woman with her native energy and independence, with a dynamic philosophy and a quick relish for the immediate stands a symbol of an advancing economic order. The poverty-stricken post-
war times gave rise to insurgent youth; even in the feminine sphere, and self-assertion slowly displaced the age-old custom of self-sacrifice, just as sentimentality gave place to the more practical and profitable commonsense. The early nineties also witnessed a flight of the youth of the South towards the North, in search of livelihood. In her letter to Van Wyck Brooks, Richmond, she mentions this fact

Only very lightly have I dealt with the flight of the Southerners after the Civil War and that was in Life and Gabriella (Letters of Ellen Glasgow, Letters, ed. Rouse, 1958; 369-70).

The Fowlers are one of those who moved to New York after the Civil War. Keeping herself truthful to history, Ellen Glasgow, as she tells, in A Certain Measure, limits her scope only in dealing with the Virginians in New York, who remained parochial in sentiment with ancestor worship at heart, besides those who most actively rebelled against Southern tradition after the Civil War. Miss Glasgow presents the whole train of events - from Gabriella’s early revolt in the deep Victorian gloom of the front parlour in Hill Street, to the last scene where she meets O’Hara at the Pennsylvania station – as it took place in the consciousness of Gabriella and from her point of view. The scene of action is an accurate reflection of Richmond and the New York streets where Miss Glasgow lived. In one of her letters she writes,

What you wrote of London terrace interested and amused me. I shall always remember that part of town because I haunted it while I was writing Life and Gabriella. The number of the house has slipped from my mind in so many years but Gabriella’s house may well have been the place where you lived in that year (Letters, ed. Rouse, 1958; 338).

Right from the opening scene, there is a mood of the comedy of manners. Miss Glasgow’s comic vision is evident in the lighter, satirical interpretation of life and in the keen penetration into personalities and circumstances. With Gabriella’s life in New York after her marriage, the texture of her prose becomes heavier; the rhythm of the
action is slowed; the tone also changes a little from that of social comedy to domestic romance. However, despite the grave mood, the over-all effect is comic. Her phrases such as “the sheltered life” and “the vein of iron” later become titles of her novels which explore the evils and dangers in lives devoted to maintaining appearances and the evasion of ugly realities. In this novel, the vein of iron refers to the strengthening character elements which preserved Gabriella. Their absence results in the demoralization of George Fowler, the mischief of Florrie Spencer, and the weak, shadowy failure of Arthur Peyton. Her style is effective. Her prose is usually clear, fluent accurate and adequate for revealing her immediate perceptions.

Ellen Glasgow staunchly believed that “in movement alone is there life – that the only permanent law of our nature is the law of change”. Virginia’s tragedy is rooted in her inability to move along with the times. Miss Glasgow creates Gabriella to prove the virtue of movement and a strong will to conquer life. Gabiella’s inherent love of this virtue but her inability to recognize the absence or presence of this trait in the men she loves throws her into a life of struggle and hardship for a period of nearly twenty years. When financial disaster befalls her and she is left to depend upon her own slender resources, she discovers her hidden strength and strives hard to reach her true level of circumstances. While Virginia has been a victim of traditions, a certain code of manners, Gabriella Carr, proves her modernism by fighting with the twin powers of decay and inertia in the Richmond of the 1890’s. In this novel, Life and Gabriella, Ellen Glasgow assesses the impact of modernism upon Virginian social tradition with its rejection of inherited moral authority. She projects the inflexible traditionalism in the minor characters in an expert and humorous way, which distinguishes the novel from her other ones.
In Book One “The Age of Faith”, Miss Glasgow presents Gabriella’s revolt against Richmond tradition in the early nineties and her subsequent marriage to George Fowler which shows her submission to romantic illusion despite her commonsense: Book Two “The Age of Knowledge” traces Gabriella’s emotional recovery, over a period of twenty years, from her disastrous marriage and her succession to ownership of Dinard’s, a fashionable women’s shop in New York. Born in an impoverished aristocratic family, Gabriella Carr, is courageous enough to break the traditional code by seeking an employment to support her family. She even breaks her engagement with Arthur Peyton, an ineffectual aristocrat, with all the weaknesses of his class. Being attracted by his physical charm, she marries George Fowler who exhibits his true colours within six months of their marriage. The marriage ultimately fails after the birth of two children. Gabriella, again joins a job in a dress-making shop. With her effort, she becomes the owner of the shop. She meets Ben O’Hara, a common man who acquired great wealth, but is repelled by his crude appearance. She meets Arthur Peyton after a period of eighteen years and realises his worthlessness. She comes back to Ben at the right time to share his life.

Ellen Glasgow scrutinizes the nature of human relationships as they exist in the society around her. She stresses the necessity of loyalty in marital relationship because the lack of domestic felicity disturbs not only the couple’s lives but extends to the lives of their relatives as well. The plot gradually unravels how Charley’s infidelity to Jane affects Gabriella’s life. Gabriella is a fountain of love and maintains ideal relationship with all the people whoever come into her life. To support her family, instead of depending on charity, she is ready to break the convention of the society by joining the departmental store. The pot of blue hyacinths in a cracked china plate
suggests Jane’s ‘tragic’ return to her mother’s shelter after excusing her husband Charley for his double moral standards. The scene touches some of the major themes of Ellen Glasgow – the rise of a new spirit in the South, in terms of the emergence of a new independence and new opportunities for women despite strong opposition by conventions, the farce of keeping up appearances, the decaying aristocrats etc. The central theme of the novel – Gabriella’s revolt against debilitating conventions – is suggested when Gabriella expresses her readiness to “work my (her) fingers to the bone to help her (Jane) take care of the children” (Glasgow, 1916; 48).*

Gabriella protests vehemently against Jane’s return to her unfaithful husband who has taken fancy to Jane’s dressmaker. The members of the council – cousin Jimmy Wrenn, Pussy, his wife, Mrs. Carr’s tenants, the spinster sisters Amelia and Jemima, uncle Meriweather – accuse Mrs. Carr for allowing her unmarried daughter Gabriella to be present in the room while they are discussing Jane’s connubial problem. The whole scene has an undercurrent of Miss Glasgow’s superb irony and wit. They are taken aback by Gabriella’s declaration to work in Brandywine’s store instead of going for the traditional and lady-like professions of sewing, teaching, making lampshades, crocheting mats or cooking. Despite strong protest from Mrs. Carr and others, Gabriella is steadfast in her unflinching decision. She is appreciated by cousin Jimmy for having courage. She stands in contrast to the beautiful Jane, with “something else” in her face labelled as “sunny temper”. She detests their dependence on the charity of their relatives and Jane’s return with her children is an added burden. Her courage to meet the situation – her vein of iron – comes to the surface: “I’d rather die than be dependent all

my life and I'm going to earn my living if I have to break rocks to do it" (29). Miss Glasgow exposes effectively the “evasive idealism” of the society which tries to keep their girls in “dangerous innocence” away from the bitter facts of life. Gabriella, being unmarried, is not expected to know the nature of Jane’s problem.

Ellen Glasgow denounces the debilitating conventions of the society, the shameless hypocrisy in its members, seen especially in their attitude towards the institution of marriage. Mrs. Carr typifies the inefficiency and hypocrisy which originate in subservience to custom. Miss Glasgow’s exquisite irony is exhibited in moulding Mrs. Carr, “a weak person of excellent ancestry” (3), “who always fails in a crisis, starting from Jane’s unhappy marriage to the last. She opposes Gabriella’s working in a shop for a living, for fear of disgrace. Her prejudices are far worse than her ineffectual nature. She believes that God has endowed men, not women, with passion (7-8). Her “evasive idealism” supports a woman who prefers a sheltered life, who is spiritual, and is free from worldly temptations. Miss Glasgow’s gentle irony and subtle wit is explicit in Mrs. Carr’s letter to Gabriella in which she comments upon Florrie’s unconventional ways. The conventions of the society expect a divorcée to lead a semi-retired life as a sign of her fallen position and never to think of remarriage while her former husband is alive. Mrs. Carr is too conventional to accept suffrage for women. “I shall never knowingly bow to one (a suffragette) even if she is related to me” (406). To her inelastic standards, her actual life never suits her, and hence, she is often disillusioned by experience and drifts into a resigned pessimism. Her only consolation is that life is too much for her languid temperament.

Miss Glasgow presents her spirited comedy by making Jane, with all her sound moral standards to be linked with the morally indifferent Charley. Jane remains a
perfect wife inspite of Charley’s waywardness. She is generally called “Poor Jane
Gracey” who makes futile efforts to hide her “unfortunate marriage beneath an
excessively cheerful manner” and by a continuous talk to keep up an appearance (5).
Jane, a replica of her mother, cannot think of others knowing her distress. “It would kill
me to have everybody know I am unhappy” (6), she thinks. Her hypocrisy is clearly
evident in her inevitable “heart attack” which follows her husband’s infidelity each
time. Gabriella despises Jane’s farce of excusing her husband. Gabriella would not
hesitate to expose the shame-faced nature of Charley but Jane would safeguard her
family honour by protecting him from public censure and by excusing all his grave
mistakes. Miss Glasgow satirizes Jane’s chief hypocrisy which lies in an unwillingness
to modify her situation by leaving Charley. She makes fun of Jane’s amusing situation
of self-pity at having been cheated by life as Charley reforms himself and becomes a
brisk Rotarian spokesman for the New South, leaving Jane nothing to think about. She
also exposes the shallow marital relationship between Jane and Charley who never try
to understand each other. Instead of reclaiming Charley from his mean nature, Jane’s
nagging only confirms it. Charley finds his wife’s “virtue” insufferable.

Mrs. Carr’s spurious values regarding the institution of marriage would not
allow her even to think of Jane’s separation from such an unfaithful husband. “I
couldn’t bear a separation, not a legal one at any rate” (23).

The family council scene is a penetrating study of human nature. Jane’s leaving
Charley and her return to her mother alters the whole course of Gabriella’s life. If only
it had not happened Gabriella would have married Arthur Peyton to whom she had been
engaged for two years and would have lived a sheltered life as any other girl of her
times. The necessity of Gabriella’s joining service in Brandywine’s store displeases
Arthur who represents the ineffectual gentleman of the old fashioned and decadent South. He could worship her only as an ideal Southern woman. He assures her that he will not give her up, though Gabriella makes it plain that their engagement will have to be broken to enable her to work for her family. Miss Glasgow probes into his nature by unveiling the real reason for his faithfulness - it is not his staunch love for her but his inability to change, or to break a fixed way of thinking to which he is accustomed. This very quality of remaining static makes Gabriella ultimately renounce him with no regret. He is a victim of a doting mother who is a perfect representative of the tradition which has enervated her son. To such an unthinking man, propriety is more urgent than poverty and starvation; pride is more preferable to economic security. Miss Glasgow exposes his irrational conservatism through his nobility and generosity of response to Gabriella’s “unladylike” declaration of interest in another man – George Fowler. He is a typical Old South gentleman.

Ellen Glasgow satirizes the Southern system which demands a wife to be duty-minded despite her husband’s infidelity. Jane’s broken heart leads to her heart attack causing great strain to both Mrs. Carr and Gabriella, who face a testing time looking after the sick Jane and her children. Charley comes back with a convenient penitence and a promise to be good thereafter. Gabriella’s preference to be natural and her detestation to everything affected, make her bitter over Jane’s decision to forgive Charley, assuming it a sacred duty of a devoted wife. For once Mrs. Carr seems to expose her natural emotion by bursting out that she would prefer Gabriella remain unmarried – a thing which could not even be dreamt of in a society which regards even a bad marriage better than no marriage (p.58).
Gabriella’s unfailing courage stands her in good stead. Despite severe disapproval of her working outside, she joins the well-established and reputed Brandywine Plummer’s dry goods store. Within no time, by taking sufficient interest in others – a practical key to success in business – she proves herself an asset to the management and a dependable and much sought - after counsellor to the customers. Miss Glagow puts her own self in Gabriella who revolts against the “world of decay and inertia”. She disapproves of the world “where people hated change, not because they were satisfied, but because they were incapable of imagination” (75). This bubbling enthusiasm to live, a willingness to move forward inviting every healthy change enriches the ‘not-pretty Gabriella’ “with an interesting face (...) (which) is so full of life” (69).

Had she started life as a funeral director instead of a milliner, it is probable that she would have infused into the dreary business something of the living quality of genius (71).

Through the dialogue between Mrs. Spencer and her daughter Florrie who visit the store, Miss Glasgow reveals the fascination and craze George Fowler has got for Gabriella. A sudden surprising visit by George Fowler drifts Gabriella to a world of romance and love. The Gabriella who has “clear-sighted judgement” (37), “habit of being reasonable” and a “practical mind” (38) and who is confident enough to say, “I can manage my life”, suddenly becomes a “love-sick girl” (87). Mrs. Carr remarks: “(...) Gabriella (...) is so changed, (...) a smart woman in love is worse than a silly one.” Here Miss Glasgow presents the devouring aspect of love. In her unlimited infatuation for George, Gabriella does not mind giving up her essential characteristic, that is love of independence. She becomes a woman to the core by laying down her life and her very identity for his love. George detests independence in a wife and hence
Gabriella leaves her work in Brandywine’s millinery department. Miss Glasgow throws light on his unstable nature and his insensitivity, using the image of a squirrel, playing in the branches (95), crushing the geranium flower in Mrs. Carr’s window box (107). He is the same old haughty man who cannot just bear the sight of woman equal much less above him. “A mannish woman is worse than poison,” he believes, and also that woman has nothing to do with money matters, “… the less you know about stocks the more attractive you will be” (102). He doesn’t want Gabriella to support her lonely and helpless mother, who is compelled to live with Jane and Charley much against her heart. He says, “Your first duty would be to your husband” (107). His lack of virtues makes him detest a strong will and force of character in woman (110). Though she resolves that “the vein of iron in her soul – would not bend, would not break, (…)”, and she will not yield to his humiliating demands, her passion proves stronger. He makes a pretence of yielding to her desire of keeping her mother with them, and Gabriella already overcome by her passion, wants “only to yield to him and to make him happy by yielding” (121). Ellen Glasgow criticizes the distorted views held by the society which expect a woman to live a ‘sheltered life’ ignorant of the world outside, still worse, indifferent to her own development.

While presenting Gabriella’s life in New York with the Fowlers, Miss Glasgow takes all care to limit her scope to Virginians only, as she writes in A Certain Measure.

Nevertheless, in writing of life in New York, I have been careful to deal only with Virginians and with their transplanted loyalty to their native culture (1943; 99).

Within six months of time George has lost love for Gabriella. Gabriella’s disillusionment starts with his indecent and indisciplined behaviour at the table during parties.
Social movements and the development of civilization interested him as little as did art or science – for which he entertained a chronic suspicion due to the indiscretions of Darwin. Change of any kind was repugnant to his deeper instincts (...)(151).

Judge Crowborough, one of the regular guests at the Fowlers’, responds to Gabriella who assures him that she will try to change him (George),

You won’t. No woman alive ever changed a man’s habits. All you can do is to hide them (155).

The omniscient author speaks through the judge. She describes accurately with a touch of irony, the changes that have come over Gabriella just in a month after her marriage.

Marriage, at the end of a month, had already disciplined the fearless directness of Gabriella. She had learned not to answer back when she knew she was right; she had learned to appear sweet when her inner spirit demanded a severe exterior; she had learned to hold her tongue when a veritable torrent of words rose to her lips. And these lessons, which George’s temper and her own reason had taught her, remained with her in the future, long after she had forgotten George and the severity of her schooling (165).

Gradually the passionate tenderness of their early days of marriage is replaced by prolonged boredom. George’s weak morality is apparent when he begins to drink. Gabriella is unable to tolerate his submission to weaknesses.

She despised people who submitted to circumstances, who resigned themselves to necessity, as if resignation were a virtue instead of a vice (181).

Bitterness and hardness take the place of her sweetness, “there is safety in hardness” (180). Glasgow traces various phases of Gabriella’s development. Through an unrestrained practice of virtues such as love, self-sacrifice and devotion, she experiences a loss of self-discipline. She realizes the importance of balance, moderation and restraint – the things worth striving for (183). George fails her in his love. He refuses to give her an amount of four hundred dollars which is requested by Mrs. Carr towards her medical expenditure. Gabriella sells her trinkets presented to her...
by George’s parents to help her mother. She realizes that love’s charm is lost and life has become hard. However, her vein of iron would not allow her to give in. She feels that she will die, rather than become a victim” (201). Gabriella remembers her mother’s words that all the Carrs married badly. Florrie, who is cheap, vulgar, unscrupulous, egotistical and a childhood acquaintance of Gabriella and who has divorced her second husband, comes to New York. Miss Glasgow comments on the irony of life that Florrie who has no single virtue but beauty and ‘dash’ achieves all the things she aspires. George, the father of two children - Frances and Archibald - takes fancy to Florrie, who is worthless and devoid of any morality which can inspire love. Patty, George’s sister, reveals the immoral link between George and Florrie to the horror of Gabriella who has already stopped loving him for his drunkenness. She curses herself for her weakness in marrying George, rejecting Arthur Peyton. Gabriella and George show another facet of marital relationship. The institution of marriage flourishes when there is love and care for each another. Gabriella proves herself an ideal wife, bearing patiently with the selfishness and immorality of George. But George’s morality is too weak to protect their home from breaking. Gabriella’s vein of iron comes to the surface as she does not resemble Jane in excusing her husband. Miss Glasgow endows her protagonist with utmost courage in facing life with all its upheavals. “Whatever living meant in the end, ( . . . ) it must mean not resignation, not inertia, but endeavour, enterprise and courage” (299). Gabriella, with great difficulty, earns a job in Madam Dinard’s shop, to support herself and her children. She would not allow a man’s weak morals to ruin her life and make her a victim.

Ellen Glasgow has all appreciation for the new woman who possesses courage and fortitude in facing any upheaval in her life and praises her great capability to adapt.
herself to the changing situations in her life. The unexpected death of Archibald Fowler brings about unanticipated changes in Gabriella’s life. Archibald Fowler is one of the virtuous gentlemen created by Miss Glasgow. He turns out his son George for breaking his promise not to see Florrie. His own financial troubles become a heavy hand on his heart and he passes away in his sleep. Gabriella is left alone with her children as Mrs. Fowler leaves for South owing to her illness. She would not yield to the buffets of life, as the other women of her times, because she has “the fighting spirit of her father” (281) in her. Her own experience which she had gained in Brandywine & Plummer’s shop and her own talent turn Gabriella an asset in Madam Dinard’s shop. Miss Polly Hatch, a negro assistant, stays back with her to look after her children. Ellen Glasgow always maintained a sympathetic understanding of the negroes and her protagonists usually hold good relationships with their negro servants. Gabriella and Miss Polly Hatch possess such friendly relationship, just as Dorinda has with her assistant Fluanna. She moves into a small apartment, paying twenty five dollars a month. She being confident and courageous gently rejects any kind of help and money offered by Judge Crowborough. Her extraordinary ability in maintaining her house with a meagre income is clear when Archibald declares, “Mother, I like being poor. Let’s stay poor always.” Miss Glasgow emphasizes the importance of character when she speaks the same through Mrs. Fowler, “Happiness costs so little” (272). Even in business it is honesty which pays. Gabriella’s tackling Mrs. Pletheridge with great courage and honesty impresses Madam Dinard. With the same courage, she overcomes the melancholy in her personal life: “If I lose my courage I shall have nothing left” (322). She gently discourages Dr. French’s fascination for her by revealing her love for Arthur whom she thinks she loves.
As a realist, who has her hidden vein of romanticism Gabriella responds to this admirable side of Arthur (- his nobility and generosity -) when she is away from it and she falsely idealizes him after her unhappy marriage to George Fowler. This enslavement of the realist to illusion – to the point that she gives up an admired suitor in New York, Dr. French – is one further ironic involution of Miss Glasgow\'s artistry (Mc Dowell, 1963; 131).

Miss Glasgow indicates the passage of time by describing Gabriella\'s appearance. Ten years have passed after Gabriella is left by George.

Though the hard work of the last ten years had left its visible mark upon her and she looked a little older, a little tired, a little worn, experience had added a rare spiritual beauty to her face, and she was far handsomer than she had been at twenty. (332) Gabriella sees her own reflection and feels happy: "Yes, it is true, you are better looking at thirty-seven Gabriella, than you were at twenty" (459).

The vigour and youthful attraction in her may be attributed to her love of life and the true American spirit – optimism springing out of a struggle – at its best with its unquenchable youth, its gallantry, its self-reliance (326). Her faith in herself and her optimism make her aspire ownership of Madam Dinard\'s show-room. Her hard life for ten years working from dawn to midnight has enabled her to endure the strain without breaking. "Nobody, except myself, is ever going to make me happy" (334).

Miss Glasgow never idealizes her characters. They are very near to life with their strengths and weaknesses. Despite her highly disciplined nature, clarity of thinking and intelligence, she fails to perceive the true nature of the person behind his appearance. She fails to recognise Arthur\'s steadfast love for her and is carried away by the smart looking George Fowler. Again she mistakes the crude and common appearance of O\'Hara and does not recognise the heights of his personality. Ellen Glasgow professes a strong belief in the strength of character rather than the charm of physical appearance. Her protagonists are agreeably attractive but never paragons of beauty. O\'Hara lives in the apartment below Gabriella.
Of them all, the improbable figure of Ben O’Hara is the only one that conformed to an original model. But for an accidental acquaintance with his counterpart, it is unlikely that Gabriella’s break with the past would ever have assumed the shape it wore at the end. Because in this book I was painting directly from life, it could not have been otherwise in her truthful biography (…). In my opinion, Gabriella was, as she was meant to be, far from extraordinary. Without any great endowment of beauty or charm or intellect, she possessed character and courage, sincerity of purpose and an approach to life that was fundamentally intelligent (Glasgow, 1943; 101-102).

Ellen Glasgow’s biographer Stanley Godbold gives the details of the original:

The original model was an Irishman named Muthem who owned the apartment house where Ellen was living in New York city. Ellen’s friends described him as “terribly virile” and big and attractive (1963; 131).

O’Hara, an Irishman had risen from the level of a street-boy selling newspapers in Bonanza city to the ownership of mines and railroads in the West making millions of money, through his sheer hard work. Gabriella detests her son Archibald coming closer to O’Hara who doesn’t appear respectable. At this juncture, Gabriella receives repeated suggestions from her own heart to go back to Arthur Peyton. Miss Polly Hatch and her mother, Mrs. Carr also advise her to do the same.

Ellen Glasgow exposes the weak morality and the meanness that are often associated with aristocracy. Her irony is explicit in the disposition of Judge Crowborough. Though one of the regular visitors at Mrs. Fowler’s parties, he is base and indecent in his behaviour despite his high position. Gabriella finds that one of her dreams of owning Madam Dinard’s show room come to life when Madam desires to dispose it off so that she can go to Europe because of her asthma. She approaches Judge Crowborough for help but he tries to take advantage of the opportunity. Gabriella’s courage brings him down to his senses. She settles the business affair with Madam Dinard by becoming a managing partner with a share in the profits.
In the characters of Fanny and O'Hara, Miss Glasgow establishes her theory of the importance of heredity and environment in the development of one's character. When Fanny takes fancy to a stage actor, Gabriella worries and feels dissatisfied over her own failure to take sufficient care in Fanny's upbringing. But Polly Hatch soothes her: "Her father's in her as well as you, and it seems to me that she grows more like him every day that she lives." Gabriella shows her motherly concern for her children. Ben O'Hara, in spite of his hard life of an orphan, grows up to be a man of virtues which lie beneath his common appearance. His faulty pronunciation further diminishes Gabriella's good opinion of him. Miss Polly appreciates his becoming great even without 'blood' for O'Hara was born in a cellar. To Archibald, O'Hara at once becomes a hero when he rescues a woman and some children from a fire accident, even before the firemen come. Miss Glasgow appreciates and upholds one's care for one's community and one's readiness to stand by the helpless during the hours of need. Ben O'Hara is a man in the community and when the fire breaks out, he at once plunges into action instead of waiting for others to do it. Men like O'Hara are always exemplary. Miss Glasgow draws John and Grandmother Fincastle on similar lines. Besides revealing his courage through the fire accident, Miss Glasgow suggests his soft nature through his love of red geraniums which he would like to be planted in the yard (396). Miss Polly is always practically accurate in her understanding when she assures the much worried Gabriella that O'Hara is not at all harming Archibald.

Through Patty's letter, Miss Glasgow throws further light on the characters of George Fowler and Florrie. Florrie leaves George within six months, for a richman in London,
With a strength and a sharpness her own dislike of him provided, Miss Glasgow firmly established the outlines of George Fowler’s personality. Like Jonathan Gay, Jason Greylock, and George Birdsong, he is at first the good-natured man without principle who manages, through physical appeal, to win a superior woman. Like these men George Fowler is attracted by a noble nature so long as it does not interfere with his own inclinations. With firmness of touch Miss Glasgow created in him a character of some complexity who is at first a charming egoist, and finally a sadistic one (McDowell, 1963; 132).

Patty detests her brother’s lack of morality. Forsaken both by women and money, George writes to his mother for money. His over-drinking leads slowly to his quiet death in Gabriella’s house. Miss Glasgow presents a similar incident in Jason Greylock’s quieter death owing to alcoholism in *Barren Ground*, in the house of the woman who loved him once.

In her essay “I Believe”, Miss Glasgow strongly states her belief in the good. Though goodness is not often “victorious among the utilitarian morals of civilization” and has “gone down before the cannibal necessities”, she has deep respect for this virtue because, “it has endured and survived in the struggle with evil” (Raper, ed. *Reasonable Doubts*, 1988; 232). She visualizes this quality in the character of O’Hara. Gabriella sends her children to the country with Miss Polly and goes to Paris to study dress designs. On her return she finds Archibald’s interest in O’Hara’s company and accuses O’Hara for spoiling her son. O’Hara is not hurt by her harsh attitude but tells her of his own knowledge of the boys and his life. His great struggle has given him a positive force of character. It reveals to Gabriella her own ignorance of the bigness of the world and largeness of life. An Irish politician who had a weak social morality had picked up O’Hara and had given him a new life. Through him Miss Glasgow speaks some of the truths of life that “you can’t judge unless you’ve been right in the other man’s place - ” (417). “I’ve noticed that the virtues don’t seem able to work along peaceably in one
another's company, for if they did, I guess we'd have pure saints or pure sinners instead of the mixed lot we've got to make a world out of" (417). Gabriella learns a lesson in life -- how foolish it is to judge others until one really knows them.

O'Hara had moved her, not as a man, but as a force - a force as impersonal as the wind or the sea, which had swept her intellect away from its anchorage in the deeps of tradition (420).

Gabriella learns to distinguish between the faults of manner and the faults of character.

Sense of responsibility is one of the virtues Miss Glasgow believes in. O'Hara is, unfortunately linked up with a drug-addict wife who falls ill owing to heavy drinking. Out of the eighteen years of married life, the last ten years she is mentally deranged. But O'Hara despite everyone's suggestions, would not take divorce but provides her with all the available medical care and takes every care to get her cured. His sense of responsibility towards her had endowed him with infinite patience.

When a thing once belongs to 'em, no matter what it is or how little its worth, they'll go through fire and water for the sake of it - and it makes no difference whether it's a woman or a railroad or a dog or a mine. They've got the sense of responsibility like a disease. You see, Mr. O'Hara is that sort (...) (425).

The discovery of spirituality hidden under O'Hara's roughness enlightens Gabriella who experiences some divine joy. Her own self-realization makes her aware of an invisible current of joy which flowed from the crowd into her thoughts and through her thoughts back again into the crowd. For the first time, she was feeling and thinking in unison with the multitude (427).

Through him Miss Glasgow stresses the importance of character in a person. It is neither education nor culture that is essential.

"( . . ), I suppose it is a kind of spiritual consciousness that makes character," she said aloud, "and you can't train that into a man if he isn't born with it" (428).
Miss Glasgow once again strikes the note of the importance of heredity in one’s character (Gabriella realizes her own shortcomings as a wife). Miss Polly Hatch possesses a deeper perception of life. She consoles Gabriella who blames herself for not being able to be as patient as O’Hara was with his wife, she tells her that “it’s the stuff in a man (...) that counts more than the way a woman handles him” (428).

It is Miss Polly who perceives O’Hara’s attraction for Gabriella much before Gabriella is aware of it. O’Hara is created by Miss Glasgow as a contrast to George. He proves himself better than any university student - George - for he is strongly exposed to life. He advises Gabriella about Archibald:

Let him learn his own strength (...), the boy who is tied to his mother’s apron strings, loses his grip when he is turned out into the world (432).

O’Hara’s words prove true as George, deceived by a woman, losing his money and health, comes to Gabriella, with a hope to take shelter under her roof. Though she rebels against him, her vein of iron comes to her help. She brings him up to her first floor with great difficulty. Again it is Miss Polly who sees first that George has gone deranged. Gabriella runs for O’Hara. O’Hara sits through out the night with the dying George, keeping Gabriella out of the situation. This incident once again shows him as a man of the community and throws light on his readiness to help, quickness in understanding the situation, his gentleness in serving, his penetration into the depths of life – “Life has a way of jerking you up at times and making you stand still and think” (451), “life pulls you back again and again till you’ve learned to play the game squarely” (452). His generosity in understanding his wife who had given him nothing but strain and his spiritual exaltation in the teeth of trying crises are exemplary.

In her essay “What I Believe” (1933) Ellen Glasgow expresses her understanding of a well-bred man:
Good breeding may go in rags and often has gone rags; it may step into the gutter; but it does not belong in the gutter and usually contrives to step out again (Raper, ed. *Reasonable Doubts*, 1988; 226).

She moulds Ben O’Hara as an example of her conviction. She peeps through Gabriella’s reflection.

Before this man, who had sprung from poverty and dirt, who had struggled up by his own force, overcoming and triumphing, fighting and winning, fighting and holding, fighting and losing, but always fighting — ( . . . ). Without friends, without knowledge, except the bitter knowledge of the streets, he had fought his fight, and had kept untarnished a certain hardy standard of honour. Beside this tremendous achievement she weighed his roughness, his ignorance of books and of the superficial conventions, and she realized how little these things mattered in the final judgement of life. She thought of George, dying a drunkard’s death in the room at the end of the hall — of George whose way had been smoothed for him from birth, who had taken everything that he had wanted (456-457).

Through O’Hara himself, Miss Glasgow reiterates her love of fighting with life, “getting on in spite of hard knocks and smashing things that stand in your way” (468). The teaching-emotion Gabriella gains, after she had seen through O’Hara, makes clear Miss Glasgow’s detestation for superficial refinement, lack of depth, manner without substance and charm without character (469). Despite her soft feeling, admiration for his virtues which were left ‘unrefined’ by custom or tradition, his force of character, his vital optimism which embodies American democracy — “this democracy of ugly fact and of fine ideals, of crooked deeds and of straight feeling, of little codes and of large adventures of puny lives and of heroic deaths — (480)” — Gabriella finds it impossible to replace Arthur Peyton with O’Hara, as she thinks she still loves Arthur.

O’Hara, who diffuses always “a glowing consciousness of success, a sanguine faith in the inherent goodness of experience” (481), a result of his acceptance of life, never betraying an elimination of struggle, declares his love for her on her thirty-eighth birthday. Gabriella bluntly rejects his offer as she is ignorant of her own self and
thinks, she loves Arthur. Gabriella’s bitterness after meeting O’Hara is doubled on her seeing Florrie in Madam Dinard’s shop. Miss Glasgow presents one of the ironies of life by making Florrie – shameless, unscrupulous and immoral - enjoying all the things she loves.

Ellen Glasgow’s ardent belief that “in movement alone is there life – that the only permanent law of our nature is the law of change [...]” is a recurrent motif in the novel. The past, however splendid, must be the fruitful soil in which the seeds of the future are planted. She expresses her steadfast conviction that one should break, “from tradition when tradition endangers natural development”. (Raper, ed. *Reasonable Doubts*, 1988; 48). She makes Arthur Peyton, an example of failure caused by immobility. Gabriella, after eighteen years, visits her home city which has acquired all the signs of progress – big buildings, factories, cars, department stores – which have been shown enthusiastically by the reformed Charley. She meets Arthur, who remains the only person who has not made any kind of progress either financially or mentally.

Charley calls Arthur’s ideas as “wrong” but cousin Jimmy modifies it as “out of date” (511). She clearly sees his failure in life, caused by his indifference to the rewards of a life of struggle. His immobility, lack of faith in the future, lack of effort at least for fear of taking a wrong step has brought his ultimate ruin. Miss Glasgow in her opening speech delivered at the Southern Writers’ Conference, Virginia, states emphatically her belief in struggle: “Maturity lies not in conquest but in ceaseless struggle and in endless reversals of the situation. And believing this so heartily, I welcome change and conflict and abhor standardization as the earliest sign of death and decay” (*Reasonable Doubts*, ed. Raper, 1988; 94). Though Arthur still loves her, she suddenly realizes that she does not love a dream but a fact.
in a flash of intuition, it (knowledge) had come to her like one of those discoveries of science, which baffle investigators for years, and then miraculously reveal themselves in a moment of insight (521).

As the wisdom of her own love of vitality, movement and struggle, dawn on her in the last moment, she realizes that she doesn’t love Arthur but she loves O’Hara.

It’s strange how little I’ve ever understood, how little I’ve ever known myself (...). I have gone on in the dark, making mistakes and discoveries from the very beginning. (...) – always moving, always changing, always growing in new direction. (...) today I know that he (O’Hara) is the future for me – (...) I realize that I shall never change him (...). It isn’t the vital thing. The vital thing is character, and I wouldn’t change that if I could. (...) it is what he is – it is not something else that I want (523-24).

Miss Glasgow in A Certain Measure has stated that “(...) all creative writing is an extension of personality” (12). Gabriella’s self-realization bears resemblance to Ellen’s own realization about which she writes in her autobiography The Woman Within. While describing her romantic disillusionment, she asks herself, “How I, who worship reason, could have remained, for almost twenty years an unwilling prisoner of unreason” (213).

Her education and her growth are complete with her reiterated determination, “(...) I will never be conquered” (525). Something mightier than tradition, her unconquerable “will to live, to strive and to conquer” (525) envelops her mind. She gets what she strives for, O’Hara, with whom she would walk toward her future.

Despite her cogent revolt against decaying traditions and customs, Miss Glasgow is not without sufficient admiration for the Southern tradition.

Her ideal was the responsible intelligent woman who had something to occupy her mind yet who still retained an aura of Victorian grace and a lady-like dignity. (Thiebaux, 1982; Introduction, 7).

Miss Lancaster, at Brandywine and Plummer’s Store in Richmond is seen immersed in the past to the extent that she loses her identity from “a world where things happened
today just as they happened yesterday, where no miracles had occurred since the miracles of scriptures, where people hated change, not because they were satisfied, but because they were incapable of imagination” (75). Yet, Miss Glasgow describes her and other impoverished ladies who work at the store, as possessing the “courageous and yet essentially light-hearted Southern Spirit” (73) which is impressive. Even Gabriella who defies tradition is a “lady” at heart and brings into the business world of New York the finer attributes which nature had bred in her race. Ellen Glasgow believed in a system which absorbs the good in the past but progresses forward keeping pace with the changing times. It is evident in Gabriella’s rejection of Arthur Peyton who “had failed because he lacked the essential faith in the future” (515) and accepting O’Hara who embodies the fighting spirit and the hope of the future.

(. . .) in his practical efficiency and his crude yet vital optimism he embodied, she felt, the triumphs and the failures of American democracy – this democracy of ugly fact and of fine ideals, of crooked deeds and of straight feeling, of little codes and large ventures, of puny lives and of heroic deaths – this democracy of the smoky present and the clear future. “If this is our raw material today,” she thought hopefully, “what will the finished and signed product of tomorrow be?” (480)

In the words of Joan Foster Santas,

Gabriella seeks and finally wins a fulfilment at once more revolutionary and more complete than Susan would have dared to imagine. Nonetheless Gabriella is not a conquest through rejection; she preserves as steadfastly as Susan, as completely as Virginia Pendleton, the commitments of her heritage to honor, duty and responsibility. The chronicle of her achievement, Miss Glasgow intended as both the concluding volume in her history of manners and as “a companion piece” to Virginia (1965; 99).

Miss Glasgow picturizes the Southern traditional society through her minor characters, in the first half of the novel. Cousin Jimmy Wrenn is a successful businessman but with a streak of sentimentality concerning women. His practical wisdom is in contrast to his mental naivety, “the incorruptible innocence of a man who
had never imagined anything" (16). Uncle Meriweather, “feebly violent” in the support of convention, is constantly disturbed by Gabriella in maintaining his complacency. The spinster Peterborough sisters, Amelia and Jemima, who live on the second floor of the Carr House, represent the futile pretence of the impoverished genteel tradition. While Amelia looks back upon a youthful love with a jaundiced memory, Jemima looks back upon a loveless youth with a jaundiced regret. Mrs. Spencer is another such character, whose gossip everyone fears, but who outfaces criticism by repeatedly telling that “she never meant any harm”. Colonel Buffington, whom Gabriella meets in New York, is an exile from Virginia. He carries the charm of Southern manners and also the barren intellect of the “Old School”. Another family which has shifted from Virginia to New York is that of the Fowlers. Mrs. Fowler’s weekly parties and love of appearance denote her evasive idealism. Judge Crowborough who is ugly but exceptionally vital and Florrie who is dashing, are successful in their lives though they lack “intelligence (...) feeling (...) imagination, virtue, breeding or good taste” (180). Madam Dinard represents the aging woman who successfully fights with her physical decay rather than her business competitors.

In the character of Mrs. Fowler, Miss Glasgow satirizes the foibles of aristocratic ladies. Mrs. Fowler, like Mrs. Carr, belongs to the old school of tradition. She is snobbish, has respect for the mushroom plutocrats and enjoys the social activities of the wealthy with surprising resourcefulness and vivacity. Even her own daughter Patty would not approve of her artificial appearances. Patty like Gabriella despises her snobbishness and is in perfect harmony with her life of poverty after marrying her beloved painter Billy. Mrs. Fowler actually wanted one of those rich girls as wife for George and the Duke of Toxbridge as Patty’s husband. Despite Archibald Fowler’s
financial crisis, she engages herself in weekly parties to “pay off social scores” (166). She allows herself to be extravagant when it would show a result. She would never allow money to be spent on things which would not have an effect.

“Of course I like good underclothes,” she remarked cheerfully to her daughter-in-law, “but, after all nobody sees them.” (168).

Miss Glasgow satirizes the false appearances and spurious values of the poverty-stricken aristocrats who are reluctant to face reality. While Mrs. Fowler falls victim to these false pretences, her husband is delineated by Ellen Glasgow as a perfect gentleman, above the weaknesses of other rich men with whom he spends his time in weekly parties and who are corrupted by their ceaseless pursuit of wealth. He is “the only member of the household who possessed even a glimmer of spirituality” (169).

Ellen Glasgow is deeply concerned with the healthy relationship between parent and child. That the unbridled love of parents results in spoiling the child, is shown in George, in this novel and in Janet Rowan of Vein of Iron. Mrs. Fowler, George’s mother, confesses that she is responsible for spoiling George who has grown up to be frivolous, inconsistent, reckless, extravagant, wild and irresponsible. George cannot stick to any business until it is a success. He is just the reverse of his father who is adored and admired by his wife. George’s weak morality is always hidden from his father. The beauty of the child George attracted her so much that she just could not deny him anything he liked. As a grown-up man, he has come to indulge himself in debts and love affairs with girls of no respect or dignity. Mrs. Fowler feels that Gabriella is the right wife for George but George proves himself to be a bad husband. Patty, George’s sister, a perfect foil to her brother, is beautiful, not only physically, but also morally. Though she had loved and married a poor painter, Billy, she is perfectly happy with him. Patty and Billy represent Miss Glasgow’s view of happy relationships.
between a wife and a husband. Though they belong to different classes, and are poverty-stricken, they are harmoniously united together.

When the novel *Life and Gabriella* was published in 1916, the reading public enjoyed the story of Gabriella and her Irishman O'Hara. The novel was placed fifth on the best-seller list for the year. Except for a few unfavourable reviews, the novel received good critical acclaim.


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Ellen Glasgow’s keen interest in women was not confined to her class, it has a broad scope and envelops women from all classes. While in the previous novels, Virginia (1913) and Life and Gabriella (1916), the heroines come from aristocratic (though impoverished) families, in the present novel Barren Ground (1925), the protagonist is a female version of Miss Glasgow’s ‘Plainman’. Unlike the earlier genteel heroines, who were subjected to the Victorian code of feminine conduct, this heroine, Dorinda Oakley, is a new, elemental woman, sharing the strength of the independent yeoman farmers. Besides the autobiographical element – betrayal of love – Glasgow endows Dorinda with immense strength of will, not to yield to the misfortunes in life but to yield a rich harvest from out of a barren-ground-like life. Dorinda struggles and succeeds in her effort to free herself from male domination. Being a plain woman, she is also free from the romantic illusion of love, marriage and children which were of utmost importance to the ladies belonging to genteel tradition. Success in Dorinda’s life required a painful sacrifice of passion, as also a hardening of the heart.

The First World War destroyed the harmony between Ellen Glasgow and Henry Anderson who, being entangled in an affair with the Queen of Rumania, left unsurmountable agony for Miss Glasgow. Unable to come out of her terrible anguish, Miss Glasgow tried to commit suicide but she exclaims, “yet life would not release me”. (Glasgow, 1954; 240). After experiencing that unbearable agony and intolerable
suffering, she realised that they had given her “a deeper source of creation, a more
penetrating insight into experience, a truer knowledge of what the human heart can
endure without breaking. Beneath dead and dying illusions, Barren Ground took form
and substance in her imagination” (Glasgow, 1954; 241). When she began Barren
Ground, she believed that she “had found a code of living that was sufficient for life or
for death” (Glasgow, 1954; 271). That code is a philosophy of life so without feeling or
emotion that its adherent is almost equal to a dead person. She had adopted this code of
avoiding all kinds of human relationships, their demands of giving and receiving, only
“as a simple means of survival in the aftermath of the rupture of her painful relationship
with Henry Anderson (…)” (Godbold, 1972; 137). In her autobiography, she writes:

Gradually, as this grasp weakened and relaxed, all the other parts of my
nature, all that was vital and constructive, returned to life. Creative
energy flooded my mind and I felt, with some infallible intuition that my
best work was ahead of me. I wrote Barren Ground, and immediately I
knew I had found myself (Glasgow, 1954; 243).

Her bitter experience lead her to the painful discovery that “if falling in love could be
bliss, (…) falling out of love could be blissful tranquility” (Glasgow, 1954; 243). In
this novel, she has put all her self and it is the most autobiographical. Perhaps this is the
reason for her liking the novel as the best of her works. In her letters, she expressed her
love for this novel (Glasgow's Letters ed. by Blair Rouse 1958; 74, 118, 339). She
considered Barren Ground “a rich harvest” which she had gathered up from the whole
of her life (Glasgow, 1954; 270). Dorinda to her was “connected, or so it seemed, by a
living nerve” (Glasgow, 1943; 163).

The germ of the novel was laid by Ellen Glasgow's “earliest meeting with
Dorinda; (…) leaning against the whitewashed wall of the almshouse. (…) She gave
me, in a single phrase, the vital clue to her past. ‘Those summer evenings thirty years
ago, and this autumn day beside the wall of the poor house!” (...) For the three years, while she lived actively in my mind, this sentence flickered up again from my memory and ran, like a soundless murmur, under her story” (Glasgow, 1943; 159-160). She had nurtured the seed of the novel for ten years in the layers of her mind, before it actually grew up into a magnificent reality. The novel was published in 1925, marking a significant increase in her popularity. In this book, she once again deals with the decline of aristocracy in whom “the spirit of adventure has disintegrated into an evasive idealism” and fortitude has “degenerated into a condition of moral inertia” (Glasgow, 1943; 155). She blends many minor themes— the social history of Virginia; the betrayal of love; the deep instinct for survival against the hostile elements of climate: drought, poverty and sterile soil—a quality which they inherited from the Scotch-Irish and English forebears; the Virginian strain or the American fibre of the capacity to exist without living, to endure without enjoying—with one major theme that character is fate. She presents a whole catalogue of evils—murder, suicide, illegitimacy, poverty, ignorance, natural and accidental death, a hostile environment and all sorts of inherited weaknesses—lurking in human consciousness inflicting sorrow unto them and to others. These are made minor, confining themselves to the background and Miss Glasgow brings to the forefront the virtues of courage and fortitude as seen in Dorinda who takes pride in herself, in her ability to live without joy and to transform the barren ground into productive soil. She allowed the minor tragic episodes as minor for she believed that “behind the little destinies of men and women, I felt always that unconquerable vastness in which nothing is everything” (Glasgow, 1943; 158-159). Her Dorinda is universal—“she exists wherever a human being has learned to live without joy, wherever the spirit of fortitude has triumphed over the sense of futility” (Glasgow, 1943; 154).
Miss Glasgow depended on her childhood memory for the setting and characters of the novel: “The houses, the roads, the woods, the endless fields of broomsedge and scrubpine, the low, immeasurable horizon” – all come from her accurate childhood impressions (Glasgow, 1943; 154). Into the gallery of her characters which are drawn from her acquaintances she includes all categories of people – right from the degenerating aristocrats, down to the negro slaves – who have played a vital role in the making of Southern history, with a special attention to the poor farmers who owned the impoverished soil and who had hitherto been neglected by Southern literature and tradition. The novel has a strong temporal and spatial dimension. From the beginning of the novel, Miss Glasgow evokes “a background of unlimited space”, “where the flatness created an illusion of immensity” and “over the immutable landscape human lives drifted and vanished like shadows” (Glasgow, 1943; 158). The passage of time is more effectively achieved by describing the pause of seasons, which in turn reflect the tone of the narrative. Dorinda sees Jason in the last quarter of winter and with her romance Spring season starts. In May and June, they plan to marry. Dorinda miscarries in late October and spends two winters in New York before she returns to Virginia to redeem the farm. Each subsequent October provides her with a sense of achievement as she contemplates her increasing harvest. By the end of the novel, she achieves a final affirmation of optimism and looks forward to other bountiful autumns, glowing winters, coral springs and profuse summers. The cyclic quality of time is established by her return to the winter weather in which she began.

The structure of the novel, divided into three parts, is in harmony with Dorinda’s chief phases and stages of power in Dorinda’s life. The first movement of the plot shows Dorinda as a flighty romantic girl, eager to find some beauty in life through
sensual excitement. This part is relatively static until violence overcomes Dorinda, at Jason’s betrayal. The first part covers a period of one year 1894 to 1895, when Dorinda is twenty. It is quite appropriately entitled “Broomsedge” as broomsedge, the adjunct of barren ground and wild nature dominates this section both physically and symbolically. Miss Glasgow uses Geneva Ellgood as a foil to Dorinda to bring into sharp focus the essential character of Dorinda. Geneva’s severe disappointment over the failure of her marriage which is the single source of meaning in her life, leads to her insanity and ultimate death. Hers is a tragedy as a woman who never comes to know what Dorinda understands, that life has some value if one exercises some control over one’s mind. The second movement of the novel in Part Two – “Pine”, covers the years from twenty one to thirty eight in Dorinda’s life. The chief event in this section is Dorinda’s marriage, never consummated, to a man she does not love, Nathan Pedlar. The main incident in “Broomsedge” has been her abandonment by the man she loved. The harp-shaped pine with its living roots in the family graveyard is symbolically used to denote both the great endurance by which Dorinda overcomes her grief and her personal frustration having failed to become a successful farmer, and the continuity of life amidst the presence of death. From the impoversihed land grows the hardy pine, a symbol of tenacity, fortitude and the ability to thrive. Besides poor farming tactics, the innate barrenness of the land is the reason for its productivity. Through Mrs. Oakley, Glasgow catches the temper of endurance in the midst of desolation as she tells that a woman’s search for a husband is only a “struggle to get away from things as they are” (81). But Dorinda is not the woman who would let herself be ruined as Geneva Ellgood nor would she allow her life to remain barren. Her success in her battle with the land stems from the vein of iron that runs through her Scotch – Irish personality. “She
would never be broken while the vein of iron held in her soul”. Dorinda discovers her strength and perseverance which she must have inherited from her father, Joshua, had uncomplainingly accepted his death, while watching the hardy pine through the window. In her dream, Dorinda sees her father like a pine, whereas Jason in his weakness is like the prickly purple thistle, only an obstruction to her plough and her life. Part Three, the final section “Life-Everlasting”, traces Dorinda’s life from forty-two to fifty, from 1916 to 1924. The most important part in this section is Dorinda’s deserved success, over the land and over the man who has crushed all happiness in her life. She realizes that the ruined Jason is too weak – physically, mentally and morally – to remember their early passion and she develops a severity to accept the reality of her life of service. At middle age, she faces her future with integrity of vision, without romantic glamour. The possibility of eternal renewal of life is indicated by the bright “life-everlasting” flower in the face of Dorinda’s loveless life and Jason’s wasted energies. The elusive beauty and the vital abundance of nature is connoted by the silvery radiance and the pollen which suffuse this part of the novel. Dorinda learns to accept life with a calm resignation. “Though in a measure destiny had defeated her, for it had given her none of the gifts she had asked of it, still her failure was one of those defeats, she realized which are victories” (408).

Miss Glasgow uses land chiefly dominated by broomsedge as a symbol of fatality. The potential but hostile force of land is conveyed through Old Matthew Fairlamb: “You’ve got to conquer the land in the beginning, or it’ll conquer you before you’re through with it” (14). Dorinda’s victory is suggested by her ability to subjugate the land, while Joshua perishes in an endless struggle to conquer it. Land is elevated to the level of a character which can exert its force on the lives of the Oakleys: The land
with its granite endurance becomes a symbol of the strong qualities in Dorinda’s nature and emphasizes her moral force. Joshua, though crushed by the farm, from his long association with the land, attains a rare serenity. Joshua is the product of the soil even to the stale briny odour which exudes from him. In the fate of the Greylocks who do not adjust themselves to its stern power of the land, the devouring quality of the land is symbolized. Man’s eternal fight against the hostile power of Nature is implicit in the unending struggle of the farmers of Pedlar Mill, where broomsedge recurs at the end of the novel. The images of light and shadow indicate the circular aspect and continuity of the process of nature:

Wave by wave, that symbol of desolation encroached in a glimmering tide on the darkened boundaries of Old Farm. (107). (...) a slow procession of shadows was moving across the broomsedge, where little waves of light quivered and disappeared and quivered again like ripples in running water. (228)

The untiring fight against broomsedge suggests man’s eternal struggle against the primitive instincts in his nature. The uprooting of broomsedge indicates his self-assertion, his efforts at uprooting the sinful impulses in him, while the lurking broomsedge at the edges of cultivated fields waiting to repossess the land indicates the presence of these primitive instincts beneath a superstructure of civilisation. Dorinda, despite her Calvinist upbringing, yields to this primitive impulse when she attempts to kill Jason after he betrays her.

In the early part of the novel, Miss Glasgow uses the images of running, flowing, rushing, moving water which suggest Dorinda’s aspiration, in her eager youth, for growth and achievement and her desire for a life of love and delight. She also uses dim and bright colours to convey melancholy, dim and veiled colour – cinnamon red, yellow-green, the red light, to convey the mixed experiences that occupy Dorinda’s life.
As part of social history, Miss Glasgow makes *Barren Ground* "as one of the scenes from country life in a social history of Virginia since the Civil War" (Glasgow, 1943; 152). The time in the novel stretches from 1894 to 1924, a period when the results of the Civil War were still felt in the South and which extended to the unsettled years just after World War I. She writes:

I intended to treat the static customs of the country, (...) and (...) planned to portray the different social orders and especially for this would constitute the major theme of my chronicle, the rise of the middle class as the dominant force in Southern democracy. (...)In my critical opinion, my best books have been written since 1922; yet all these later novels, from *Barren Ground* to *In This Our Life* were so arranged as to fall within the now broadened scope of my original plan (Glasgow, 1943; 4&5).

Miss Glasgow’s skill in designing and constructing the novel *Barren Ground* is superior to her earlier novels. The development of plot is appreciated for its stark simplicity, its clear line and its lack of complication. Ellen Glasgow admits that she is more interested in character development than in plot for its own sake. She makes Dorinda the centre of her narrative and achieves a tightness of structure.

The style in this novel is neither gloomily depressing nor confusing. Miss Glasgow has maintained for the most part a flowing but simple style. The language used is mostly on traditional lines. Here and there, she uses the stream-of-consciousness technique in order to heighten the impact of the scene, which cannot be served by the mere use of dialogue or narrative.

Thirst. Would they bring her something to drink? (...) What was it she couldn’t remember about snakes? Something important, but she had forgotten it. “I’ve always funked things.” Who said that? Why was that woman moaning so behind the screen in the corner? ... The snake had come back now. Jason had put his hand on a snake, and that was why everything else had happened. (...) What was it her mother said so often? The ways of providence are past finding out. ... The nurse again. Oh, yes, water. ... (169-70).

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Dorinda Oakley is a girl of twenty in the beginning of the novel, full of vigour, with the bloom of her newly awakened love for Jason Greylock. But she is betrayed by him as Jason, unable to resist the pressure put upon him, marries Geneva Ellgood. Dorinda takes shelter in New York, among strangers, as she is aware of her conception. Through a fortuitous accident, she loses her child and works for the doctor who saves her in the accident. During those two years she learns the latest methods of farming.

With the death of Joshua, her father, Dorinda takes over the responsibility of the land. She marries Nathan Pedlar who has advanced views on farming. With his help, she brings the broomsedge under control and transforms it into a thriving dairy farm. Jason deteriorates in health and wealth owing to his heavy drinking. “Five Oaks” – their farm is to be sold to pay taxes and Dorinda buys it. Geneva goes mad and drowns herself. Nathan meets his unexpected, accidental death while saving people in a wrecked train. Jason is worn out with drink and consumption and is put in the alms house. Dorinda brings him home and serves him until his death. As she surveys her life, she believes that through her fortitude and sheer hard work, she has conquered all the forces that might have destroyed her. She has learned to live, though without happiness, a good and worthy life.

Ellen Glasgow has a steadfast faith in the major impulse, will-to-live, on which she focuses in this novel and a later one, *Vein of Iron* (1935). In her essay “What I Believe”, she expresses this idea:

 [...] even if we fall, we are obliged to fall somewhere, and both history and anthropology assure us that we can never fall so low that the discredited will-to-live cannot pick us up, shake us well, and start off again on our uncertain road between two eternities (*Reasonable Doubts*, ed. Raper, 1988; 223).
The very opening sentence of the novel, “A girl in an orange-coloured shawl (...)” strikes the note of the gay temperament of the girl, Dorinda, who looks “as if she were running toward life” (3). Miss Glasgow emphasizes the role of heredity in the formation of one’s character.

While recording the genealogy of the Scotch-Irish farmers, who have “conquered the land not by force, but by virtue of the emphatic argument that lies in fortitude” (5), to which Dorinda is connected, Miss Glasgow traces the lineage of Dorinda’s fortitude. She describes the different classes of the society – tenant farmers, owners of the land, the good family which has “preserved custom, history, tradition, romantic fiction and the Episcopal Church” and “the good people (...) who have preserved nothing except themselves” (4,5). Dorinda’s father Joshua Oakley belongs to “Poor White” class, born with ineffectual spirits and wedded to Eudora – a religious maniac. Joshua has not been a successful farmer and has left much of his land to be occupied by scrub pine, scrub oak and broomsedge. Through old Matthew Fairlamb Miss Glasgow explains the nature of broomsedge and the defective farming methods. “Broomsage ain’t jest wild stuff, it’s kind of fate” (4) and “it wasn’t the land that was wrong but the way you had treated it.” The plot unravels the harmonious relations existing among different classes in the community, excepting the aristocrats who are on the verge of decay and who inevitably bring forth ruin to themselves and to others. Miss Glasgow elaborately describes the hostile force of the land which has an “expression of an animal that man has forced into sullen submission” (9) to intensify the value of Dorinda’s future victory over it. Dorinda’s fancy for something different from the tedious present – adventure, happiness, even unhappiness, casts an ominous light on the future course of events.
Ellen Glasgow vehemently disapproves the degenerating morality of the aristocrats. The Greylocks belong to that decaying class. They represent a distorted relationship between a father and son. Dr. Greylock is a demanding father, like Arthur Peyton's mother, and he has no consideration for the bright future of his son. Young Doctor Greylock's filial devotion, at the cost of his career, to his drinking old father Doctor Greylock who is attended by an enormous brood of mulatto offspring (6) begets ruin to him; the recurring image of a veil of snow suggests the unhappiness awaiting Dorinda and Jason Greylock with whom she falls in love. Miss Glasgow speaks of the ironies of life through Rose Emily's "Planning to get up in the morning" which never occurs as she has been suffering from consumption about which she is ignorant. Rose Emily is the wife of Nathan Pedlar at whose store Dorinda works. With the coming of Jason, Dorinda faces the moment, "when life, overflowing the artificial boundaries of reason, yields itself to the primitive direction of instinct" (24). Miss Glasgow shows the power of this primitive nature in man which is not ruled by reason. She suggests the ruinous nature of this love with the image of an eagle seizing its prey (24). Through Jason she shows the static nature of the country people who fail to become successful farmers due to their incorrect and primitive ways of farming.

(...) I'm trying to enlighten the natives. God! What a country! Nobody seems to ask any more of life than to plod from one bad harvest to another. They don't know the first principles of farming, except of course Mr. Ellgood, who has made a success of Green Acres, and that clownish-looking chap who owns the store. I wonder what the first Pedlars were like. The family must have been in the same spot for a hundred and fifty years (25).

Miss Glasgow strongly believes in the virtue of movement which alone can make one successful in life. In her essay, "The Dynamic Past" she writes that "the law of progress (is) superior to the rules of precedent" (Reasonable Doubts, ed. Raper, 1988; 48).
She also talks about the evil system of tenant farmers through Dorinda: “No man will work himself to death over somebody else’s land” (26). She suggests the remedy of such a cursed system. As soon as one owns the land, one turns out to be a successful farmer.

Even the negroes become thrifty – when they own a piece of land. And I’ve noticed (...) that they are the best farmers about here. (26)

Miss Glasgow takes most of her images from land. The meek and dumb Joshua who “struggles against the blight of poverty and barrenness of the soil”, never rebels against anything. “His resignation was the earth’s passive acceptance of sun or rain” (32). His hands were “gnarled, twisted and earth-stained like the vigorous roots of a tree” (33).

By describing the members of Dorinda’s family and their daily chores, Miss Glasgow reflects the usual picture of a country family which is held together by the bond of love. But the family relationships of the Fincastles of Vein of Iron prove stronger than those of the Oakleys because the Fincastles would never allow any hardship in their lives to weaken their ties. Joshua, Dorinda’s father is a humble, slow-witted, hard-working man whom Dorinda pities, “Poor Pa, he has never known anything but work” (33). His passive nature and dull wit are shown through his animal traits – he “ate and drank like a horse” (32), his “pathetic groping stare” resembled the wistful expressions of Rambler, their dog and of Dan and Beersheba, the horses (38). Josaiah, the elder son is also hardworking, painstaking and frugal but he prefers comeliness to good character in a woman. After a widowerhood of ten years, he falls in love with a silly young woman, Elvira Snead, the daughter of thriftless Adam Snead, who has not even a single acre to his name. Rufus, the younger one, the apple of his
mother's eye is a wild young man seeking pleasures. Mrs. Oakley who comes from Scotch-Irish stock is married into “poor white class”, for the one reason that Joshua, with his unshaven face, has resembled John the Baptist in their family Bible. Miss Glasgow makes fun of the shallowness of the impoverished aristocrats as she describes Mrs. Oakley’s unfulfilled love for the young missionary in the Congo, whose death has turned all her romance into religious fervour without which “as she had confessed to Dorinda, she would have been lost” (35). She is subjected to “missionary dreams” – in which she sees “blue skies and golden sands, palm trees on a river’s bank and black babies thrown to crocodiles” (35) – which lead to her neuralgia.

Ellen Glasgow delineates the devouring aspect of love while dealing with the love between Jason and Dorinda, for it brings to the protagonist initial joy but ultimate misery. With Jason’s coming, Love springs in her heart and keeps her gay in a solemn country. Dorinda experiences blessedness given by religion for a short period. But with its waning, she speaks her creator’s words, “No, religion had not satisfied” (48). She feels peace and serenity only in this newly begun love little knowing its disastrous end. Her immaturity and infatuation for Jason make her unable to see through his instability hidden behind his impressionable appearance. Instead, she sympathizes Jason for keeping up with his immoral father, who in his drunken frenzies would turn on his mulatto brood with a horsewhip. “He’s been a notorious sinner, (...) even before his wife died, he kept that bright yellow girl, Idabella, (...). And he’s not only as hard as nails, (...) he’s close-fisted as well” (97). Jason’s moral weakness is no less. He is “dependent upon human association” and is “easily discouraged” even by a small failure. He lacks courage and perseverance to pursue what he wants, he confesses his weaknesses to Dorinda,
I am not made for the country. It depresses me and lets me down too easily. I suppose I’m born lazy at bottom, and I need the contact with other minds to prod me into energy. (70) He’s (his father) got a will of iron – that’s the only thing that keeps him alive – and he’s always had his way with me. He broke my spirit, (...). And it was the same way with Mother. She taught me to be afraid of him and to dodge and parry (...). I never wanted to study medicine. (...) – but Father made up his mind, (...). But you can ruin people’s lives – especially young people’s lives – from the best motives” (71).

Jason’s mother is similar to Mrs. McBride in bringing up her son who has turned out to be dissolute. She is a typical example of the distorted relationship between parent and child. The parents who never try to understand or sympathize with their children, only bring them up in the most unhealthy way. As the child grows, it fails miserably to make its own life or that of others happy. Jason, brought up in such an undesirable way, ruins his life and Dorinda’s happiness. He meekly yields to his father’s wish, rather order, and returns from New York. He fails to pursue his well-intended and ambitious attempt to teach the ignorant farmers, who do not welcome change, improved methods of farming, sanitation or the changes in political conditions.

Miss Glasgow shows the power of passion even over a practical girl like Dorinda. Like Gabriella, who yielded to the charming but unstable George Fowler, Dorinda also gives in to Jason. She intends to buy the blue dress which Jason wanted her to wear, squandering the money she has saved for months to buy the red cow. Though the love between Jason and Geneva Ellgood is hinted at by Miss Seena the dressmaker, the love-stricken Dorinda, would not come to her senses. Defying reason, she chooses to remain extravagant. The same spell of passion had driven Virginia to become a spendthrift in New York, soon after learning her husband’s affair with the actress.
Ellen Glasgow comments on the ironies of life, describing Bob Ellgood’s attention towards Dorinda. It would have flattered her before a week, for Dorinda is absorbed in her love for Jason. “Was that the way things always came, after you had stopped wanting them?” (57)

Dorinda puts on the much-desired-and-dreamt-of blue dress on the Easter Sunday. Ellen Glasgow opens the scene with some humour which emerges from the introduction of new the character Almira Pryde. Joshua’s niece, who possessed all the virtues and vices of the poor-white.

Married at fifteen to a member of a family known as “the low-down Prydes”, she had been perfectly contented with her lot in a two-room log cabin and with her husband, a common-labourer, having a taste for whiskey and a disinclination for work, who was looked upon by his neighbours as “not all there”. As the mother of children so numerous that their father could not be trusted to remember their names, she still welcomed the yearly addition to her family with the moral serenity of a rabbit (72).

The humour is intended to intensify the pathetic feelings of Dorinda owing to many things. The blue dress which she wears to please Jason, pricks her Presbyterian conscience, “(…) she did not doubt that it was the symbol of selfishness” (75). Her parents’ magnanimity only sharpens her guilty feeling. Her realization that “possession of a new dress does not confer happiness” (74) is true even in the case of Joshua. He feels uneasy in his Sunday clothes “which obscured the patriarchal dignity of his appearance” (74). In his love of simplicity and love of animals, Ellen Glasgow’s own love and compassion for these dumb creatures is obvious:

Unlike the Southern farmers around him, and the unimaginative everywhere, who are without feeling for animals, the better part of Joshua’s life was spent with his two horses (74).
Joshua feels at home in the company of these horses and when alone he talks to them in the “intimate language of his heart” (74).

Dorinda’s dream while she is on her journey to the church forebodes evil:

The dream, like all her dreams, carried her so far and no farther. At the very point where she needed it most, it broke off and left her suspended in a world of gossamer unrealities.

She makes an attempt to get over her despondent mood by gazing at the huge harp-shaped pine tree standing in the centre of the graveyard. Symbolically signifies Dorinda’s eventual victory over the tragic turn of her life. Miss Glasgow describes the customary dinner at four o’clock, with no supper on Sunday, at which men gorge themselves to “tide them over until breakfast” (76). Dorinda’s dull participation in the dinner leads her into an elaborate exploration into many things including the close and loving relationship that exists between a mother and daughter. It also throws light on the author’s staunch belief in fate and predestination and the role of heredity. Fate is dominant in the marriage of Dorinda’s parents as seen in Mrs. Oakley’s confession that her love for Joshua had almost thrown her into distress. Her faith in the strength of heredity is also seen in Dorinda inheriting the fraility of her great-aunt, after whom Dorinda is named. She also throws light on the traditional approach to love. “(...) if it’s woman’s nature to take it too hard, it’s just as much the nature of man to take it too easy” (81). Despite her steadfast faith in Religion and Fate, Mrs. Oakley instills courage in her daughter’s mind by her wise advice: “(...) if you just make up your mind that whatever happens, you ain’t going to let any man spoil your life” (81). It awakes the vein of iron in Dorinda’s nature.

Jason’s self-pity over his inability to turn against the loving tyranny of his father owing to his inherited weakness, arouses sympathy in Dorinda’s heart for him. She
thinks of her creator’s philosophy: “Life would be so much simpler (...) if people only build on facts, not on shams” (85). Their decision to get married in the autumn lets her yield to Jason’s uncontrolled passion.

Ellen Glasgow holds up Darwin’s theory that a creature’s survival depends upon its ability to adapt itself to the environment. Failure to change oneself often brings about ruin. Jason’s inability to mould himself according to the needs of life paves the path to his tragic end. Jason says, “(...) How often in life, I’ve seen men betrayed by their good impulses” (86). He believes in his good impulse to stand by his father until the end, which in turn causes his misery. Joshua’s stubborn adherence to one-crop system, despite Dorinda’s advice which she had learnt from Jason ruins him in the end. “I ain’t one fur new-fangled ways, honey” (91) is Joshua’s attitude towards life. Even the prudent Scotch-minded Dorinda, brushes away many implications of Jason’s betrayal. When her mother breaks the news she heard about Geneva Ellgood’s engagement with Jason, she dismisses the news as absurd. She doesn’t realise the truth in her mother’s words, “Mighty few folks in this world ever get what they want” (93), or in Old Matthew’s shrewd judgement of Jason, “He’s got everything you want in a man except the one quality that counts with the land, that is character” (104). Dorinda goes to Aunt Mehitable whose daughter, Jemima, works at Five Oaks, to hear news about Jason. To her shock, she is enlightened by aunt Mehitable that she is in the family way.

Miss Glasgow uses the image of storm to signify her stormy state of mind. Also it is noteworthy that Miss Glasgow’s protagonists, caught up in the storm, meet their turning point in their lives. Roy Timberlake meets a stranger in the park, where she takes shelter from the storm. Dorinda takes shelter in Jason’s house where she learns
from the old doctor, the marriage of Jason with Geneva whom Jason courted in New York the previous year. He also certifies Jason, “He’s a pleasant-tempered boy (...) but he ain’t dependable, (...) The trouble with him is that he was born white-livered” (116). Jason tries to wriggle himself out of Ellgood’s grip but he fails to turn against Jim and Bob Ellgood who force him into marriage with Geneva. Dorinda is shocked by the sight of Jason and Geneva returning to Five Oaks. Her dream world has crumbled because of Jason’s weak morals.

Miss Glasgow celebrates the virtues of courage and fortitude and proves their strength by subjecting them to severe test in the unexpected buffets of life. Dorinda, her protagonist is endowed with plenty of courage with which she is ready to fight with her life until the end. She decides strongly to do something. “If I don’t do something, I shall die” (126). She goes to meet Jason at Five Oaks. In a fit of passion she tries to kill him but the gun misfires. Miss Glasgow shows the strength of primitive nature which often hides itself behind civilization. Virginia is overcome by jealousy while Dorinda by anger. She sees through him, “... he was false, vain, contemptible, a coward in bone and marrow” (130). He tries to justify himself by blaming others who are responsible for his marriage. She detects his weakness which has ruined her life. Her bitter experience makes her look at life from an angle with which she had been hitherto unfamiliar. Her vein of iron holds her to face life. She reflects, “That’s what life is for most people. (...) Just barren ground where they have to struggle to make anything grow” (150).

Being unable to bear the surroundings, Dorinda tries to fly to a strange place. Her experience has taught her to see through Jason beyond his physical charm. She finds finer sensibilities in Nathan, a tact by which he never alludes to her misery. When
she sets out for New York, Nathan brings her a pack of snacks. Dorinda, educated by life, enriched with experience, finds Nathan not ugly but understanding.

In this section, Miss Glasgow reiterates her belief in life existing in movement, and stagnation leading to virtual death. The Second Part, “Pine”, starts with Dorinda’s life in New York. Dorinda is like the pine which is strong and grows even in adverse atmosphere. Dorinda’s mental agony, restlessness and her own temperament does not allow her to sit and think. She finds comfort and a soothing sensation in walking, which affirms Ellen Glasgow’s belief in mobility. Though her feet are terribly paining, Dorinda “walked on grimly because it was easier to walk than to wait” (155). Ellen Glasgow pities the traditional woman who simply kept on ‘waiting’ instead of doing something and thus only existed and never lived. But Dorinda is the new woman and hence is not depressed and discouraged by misfortune. While writing his article on “The Comedies of Manners of Ellen Glasgow”, C. Hugh Holman makes a passing comment on *Barren Ground*:

Upto the age of forty-nine, her (Ellen Glasgow’s) life, aside from this realm of thought and creativity, had been one of ill-health, growing deafness, suffering, bereavement, anger, unhappy love affairs, humiliation and despair — or at least, looking back upon it, she saw it so. But after 1922, after she was reconciled to the end of her engagement to Henry Anderson, she found herself in what she later called “one of those blessed pauses that fall between the ‘dark wood’ of the soul and the light on the horizon” (*Letters*, 341). She did almost all her best work, and she was certainly correct when she said, “Between fifty and sixty I lived perhaps my fullest and richest years” (*The Woman Within*, 273). During those years she produced *Barren Ground* and the three Queenborough novels, [...] into the story of Dorinda Oakley she could pour herself — [...]. She heaped upon Dorinda her suffering, her bitterness, her sense [...] and then she gave Dorinda the victory (*Centennial Essays* ed. by Inge 1976; 108-9).

Dorinda makes every attempt to depend on her own self: “I’ve got to do something”. The idea of appealing to Jason for help never enters her mind (141). She
believes in her vein of iron. Miss Glasgow’s belief in the virtues of courage, fortitude come to the forefront in this scene. Dorinda is optimistic and looks for a better change in life.

There was no self-pity in her thoughts. The unflinching Presbyterian in her blood steeled her against sentimentality. She would meet life standing and would meet it with her eyes open (156).

While crossing the road, Dorinda meets a fortuitous accident and miscarries. Dr. Faraday, the owner of the car, admits her in his hospital and gives her a free treatment. He is kind enough to arrange a job for her – working in the hospital in the morning and looking after children in the afternoon at home. Mrs. Faraday, talks to Dorinda with a maternal affection. Dorinda’s bitter experience and her illness drive away her capacity for emotion but strongly enough, some diabolical sense of humour springs up strongly from within. She finds that she can laugh at everything, but in an ironic way. She feels, she is dried up at the core and is like a “dead tree walking” (175).

Miss Glasgow shows the passage of two years of time by a brief description of the important events that have taken place in Dorinda’s life while working at Dr. Faraday’s home. She keeps herself in touch with her family at Pedlar’s Mill by a regular correspondence with her mother. She helps them financially. She perceives the young doctor Burch’s love for her. She feels, “I am ignorant, yet I am educated, compared to what I was two years ago. I know life now, and that is a great deal” (183). Finding the springs of love and happiness dead in her, she denies to marry Dr. Burch, as suggested by in spite of Dr. Faraday’s advice. Her love-life is like broomsedge, a barren ground, out of which she tries to come out. When Dr. Faraday with his kind concern enquires about her future, she gives the answer that she intends to fill her life.
“with something better than broomsedge. That’s the first thing that puts out on barren soil, just broomsedge. Then that goes and pines come to stay – pines and life-everlasting” (184).

Her parched soul fails to enjoy the music concert which she attends with Dr. Burch. Miss Glasgow gives a clear picture of her mental state as Dorinda imagines the sound changing into different colours (185). Music seems to have a strange effect on her. It seems to have “released some imprisoned force in the depths of her being” (188). She feels like learning modern methods of farming and throwing herself on the Old Farm. The very idea fills her with life. Mrs. Faraday promises financial help to run a dairy farm. She is impressed by Dorinda’s efficiency and her practicality. Dorinda learns nursing so perfectly, within a short period that Mrs. Faraday believes, “I am sure you will never fail in anything that you undertake” (192). Dorinda is so repelled by love that she is unable to bear any physical touch. The soft side of love is dead in her, “Oh I’ve finished with all that!” (191) is her repeated saying. “There must be something in life besides love” (193). She refuses Dr. Burch’s gentle offer. From her mother’s letter she learns about her father’s sickness. She is surprised by the inscrutable ways of life which hasten her return to the Old Farm. She pities her father who is not educated as the society would not approve of a poor white learning. A poor white is expected to remain unlettered (196). Besides exposing one of the unhealthy conventions of the society to keep the poor white uneducated, Ellen Glasgow throws light on the desirable relationship between parents and children. Dorinda proves a good daughter and she readily returns from New York in order to help her parents.

The two years’ stay in New York make Dorinda a different person. Her physical and mental qualities are much more improved: “‘She is like a paper doll in (...) one of those fashion books Miss Seena Snead has’ – Minnie exclaimed” (201). Her
love and concern for parents have not diminished. As soon she gets down the train, she asks Rufus if her mother needs anything from the store. She is ready to talk to Nathan Pedlar about the pathos involved in Minnie working at the store as well as looking after the children after Rose Emily's death. Rose Emily's words that "the child's a born little mother" (62) prove true as Minnie is only thirteen years old. Her apparent self-confidence makes Rufus aptly remark, "You've come back looking as if you could run the world" (199). She proves herself to be a self-reliant, cool, composed and competent person. On her way home she sees Geneva who has lost her charm and looks like an aged woman, even in her twenties. The worthlessness of Jason who has taken to drinking heavily had crushed the spirits of Geneva.

Miss Glasgow builds up slowly the importance of Nathan and his most agreeable nature. Through him she projects both ideal domestic relationships and communal connections. Like Grandmother Fincastle and John, he is always ready to be at the service of the needy in the society. Nathan is of great help to Mrs. Oakley during Mr. Oakley's ill-health. Dorinda observes his faithful and good nature. His hard work in the store does not spoil his clean appearance. His cleanliness outweighs his physical ugliness. Her enlightened nature helps her to regard his deficiencies more leniently. Her education takes deeper roots as she looks at the real nature of comedy which actually lies in mankind's "strutting with pompous solemnity into the inevitable abyss (...)" (211). The "waggish hilarity" at Pedlar's Mill or the classic jokes simply sicken her. Despite a few weaknesses - a neighing - like laughing and his habit of amusing himself over trivial things - Dorinda finds Nathan intelligent, considerate, likable and chiefly dependable - the traits previously praised by Rose Emily. The only people who have a good knowledge of farming, at Pedlar's Mill, are James Ellgood and
Nathan. Dorinda requests Nathan to send a few negroes to help her to start farming. Ellen Glasgow expresses her own love of animals and even trees through Dorinda. "She could never think of living trees as timber" (203). Cutting down the tall trees is still out of question. "It would be slaughter (...), I'll let the woods stand as long as I can" (236). The sick and fallen Joshua looks like a pine tree that has been "torn up by the roots". Dorinda tries to cheer him up by telling her plans to cultivate Five Oaks in the modern way and to raise a dairy farm, in vain. Joshua, rather, tries to pull up his cheer by looking out at the big pine which dispels all the meaning of life. His helplessness rouses pity in Dorinda for "the pathos of life was worse than the tragedy" (207).

Ellen Glasgow sees that the chief reason for the undeveloped state of the South is lack of encouragement and lack of confidence in its inhabitants. When Dorinda eagerly explains her plans to her mother, she puts a damper on her enthusiasm by telling that Dorinda is inexperienced. Dorinda assures her mother of her acquired knowledge and tells her, "(...) The chief thing was that it is slighting that has ruined us, white and black alike, in the South" (208).

Through Dorinda Miss Glasgow shows her own attitude toward the negroes. She had never looked down upon them and treated them as slaves, inferior in status. Miss Glasgow comments on the flawless connections between master and servants. Dorinda had always been considerate and generous to the working people. Dorinda scorns Nathan for using the disrespecting term 'niggers' (212). Dorinda believes that they may be immature but they are "generous", "impartially just to their dependents", "industrious and prosperous" (217). She observes that though they are considered inferior, socially, they live contentedly.
Dorinda is a shrewd employer and knows perfectly well how to extract labour from her negro workers. An easy laughter and a friendly treatment would make negroes work twice for their employer (218). She asks Fluvanna Moody, grand daughter of Aunt Mehitable, who nurses her father, to help her in her leisure. She knows how difficult it is to bring Old Farm under cultivation. The importance of the novel lies not only in the conquest of the land but also in the way a woman learns to know herself. The sight of the green pastures with a befitting name Green Acres, which belong to James Ellgood had impressed her and the positive-minded Dorinda sets her aim at turning Old Farm as good as Green Acres. She has faith in herself and hence makes a strong determination. “I’ll not give up as long as there is breath left in my body.” She buys seven Jersey cows from Bob Ellgood to start her dairy initially. He gives her a few suggestions on the methods of managing a dairy successfully. Bob is attracted by the courage and confidence reflected in Dorinda’s face. He is sorry for his sister Geneva who has ruined her life by marrying such an unworthy and lazy person as Jason Greylock. Moreover, he is matched with a delicate wife who has no spirit to work and who is afraid of everything, from a grasshopper to an ox. Ellen Glasgow finds such ironies of life inscrutable. Dorinda asks the carpenter William Fairlamb to repair her cow-barn and the her house. Under the lights and shadows, the land appears to Dorinda as bearing an expression of unresisting fortitude. She realizes that, below her own varying moods – despair and enthusiasm, weariness and cheerfulness – “the general aspect of her life would be one of unbroken monotony,” and among other qualities “nothing would last through to the end except courage” (228). On her way back, she sees Jason but resolves strongly not to speak to him. As she reaches home, she finds her father dead a few minutes.
Ellen Glasgow analyses the faultless marital relationship that existed between Joshua and Eudora. They were interdependent and had enjoyed each other’s company. Dorinda is surprised by the strong bond between her parents. Joshua had always been proud of his wife and Eudora had depended on him for all the practical needs. Dorinda reflects on the varied texture of life and realizes her own folly “in attempting to weave durable happiness out of a single thread of emotion” (231). Much to the relief of her brothers, she declares to take care of her mother. Josaiah’s appalling futility, his slowness in work make Dorinda reflect upon the influence of circumstance or environment in the development of one’s personality, for both Mr. and Mrs. Oakley are highly industrious possessing an undrained energy.

Was it a matter of circumstance, after all, not of heredity? Had the more active stain succumbed at last to the climatic inertia? (233)

In her own independent way, she tries to remove her mourning dress despite her mother’s protest. Moreover, she tries to use the overalls of Rufus, which would be convenient for her to milk the cows and to work in the farms. She is not afraid to break the custom of wearing her conventional dress. She decides to put her heart and soul into the farm. She believes “the farm isn’t human and it won’t make you suffer. Only human things break your heart” (235). Her sigh of relief over her doing away with love reflects Miss Glasgow’s exasperation: “Oh, if the women who wanted love could only know the infinite relief of having love over!” (238).

Dorinda is successful with her dairy, though she fixes the price of her butter higher than that of Pedlar’s Store’s butter. Miss Glasgow exposes the sham inherent in the values held by the people in cities.

Some people are always ready to pay a higher price, and they value a thing more if they pay too much for it (240).
Though her success makes her dream of possessing more cows realized and feel happy, the irresponsibility, the bad company and the of-late-begun habit of drinking bad whiskey of Rufus worry her. Rufus lies about his murdering Peter Kittery, and his mother certifies his statement on his request and against her conscience. The Sheriff who has come on an enquiry believes her words. Miss Glasgow is critical in her opinion of the youth of her day proving often to be irresponsible and indifferent to others. The young are wild and aimless, Rufus stands as a symbol for that frivolous generation.

Ellen Glasgow throws light on another distorted relationship between parent and child. The unbridled love of parents results in the ruination of the child causing indiscipline and irresponsibility. Eudora’s unlimited love makes Rufus a spoilt child. Mrs. Oakley admits to Dorinda her faults in spoiling Rufus. “I reckon I spoiled him (...) your father used to tell me I made a difference because he was the youngest” (244). Dorinda reflects on how her mother’s love, though wonderful, brought about the ruin and the mortal failure of her son. Dorinda fails to tolerate her mother’s sentimentality, her evasive idealism which prevents her from looking at the true nature of her son. Dorinda is sorry that her mother’s sacrifice of her piety over her worthless son is a mere waste. Mrs. Oakley, still clings to the old tradition, “she had not lost her confidence in the male as a strong prop in the hour of adversity” (254). She prefers Nathan to Dorinda, to accompany her to the magistrate. Her lie saves Rufus from punishment, but it stings her conscience fatally.

Mrs. Oakley falls sick and is confined to bed for more than a year. Sick in her spirit, she almost loses her dauntless fight against poverty and unhealthy surroundings. Her vigorous life of relentless toil, ironically enough, turns out to be worthless and
futile as she is disillusioned by Rufus; heinous and immoral hasty deed. She gives in to the heavy weight on her spirit and one afternoon she dies in her sleep. The void in Dorinda’s heart after the bitter experience, leads to her to become more stoical. She finds that she is unable to feel any emotion. Miss Glasgow penetrates into the deep core of Dorinda’s heart: “For a few minutes, Dorinda broke down and wept, less from grief than from the knowledge that grief was expected of her” (266). Nathan is ironically associated with funerals, he renders great help to Dorinda during her mother’s funeral.

It was a mark of her proud and self-sufficient nature that she could not forget either gratitude or resentment (266).

This trait is perhaps the cause for her terrifying dreams in which she is still chased by Jason. Her resentment for Jason is not completely out of her mind.

Miss Glasgow shows the passage of time. Within a period of ten years Dorinda has worked relentlessly, with a fear of indolence and assisted by the industrious and intelligent coloured girl, Fluvanna. Dorinda reveals a trait of her character while answering Fluvanna’s question, whether Dorinda would go back to New York. Dorinda tells her that she is not interested because the farm now belongs to her and there is nothing she possesses in New York. This sense of possession is one of the reasons for Dorinda to develop the farm. With the passage of time and ravaged by experience Dorinda begins to lose her physical charm. Fluvanna, exclaims, “Miss Dorinda, you’re too young to have crow’s feet” (274). Dorinda is startled to see that though she is only thirty three she is no longer youthful in her appearance. She tries to save her appearance by buying a fashionable dress. On her return, she meets the demented Geneva who harps on her observing secretly Jason killing her child. From Nathan she learns the possibility of the Five Oaks being sold. Seeing her interest in Five Oaks, Nathan, who
owns already a major part of it, proposes to her so that they can unite their farms which are adjacent and he would help Dorinda in her farming. But Dorinda bluntly puts down the proposal, saying she has no such interest.

Miss Glasgow shows how power or success would command respect in the society. Dorinda in her beautiful and rich dress is admired and respected at the church where she would not go in her overalls. At the church she sees the indolent, ruined Jason who looks quite dull and sapless. Involuntarily she begins to compare Nathan who is always helping, kind, honest and unselfish, with the broken-spirited, weak and hypocritical Jason. The only reason for her marriage would be to escape her much dreaded loneliness. Her thoughts take a natural and realistic turn.

(...) You couldn’t have everything. If the outward man had been more attractive, the inward one (...) would have been less humble; (...) Few virtues are more comfortable to live with than humility (289).

The marriage of usefulness and convenience takes place quietly at the church. Dorinda expresses Miss Glasgow’s love of past as she doesn’t like to change the old furniture though she hates their appearance, for it is linked with the memories of her ancestors (294).

Miss Glasgow analyses the utility of science and its inventions which quicken progress and help to get a better yield. Dorinda is very successful at her dairy as she uses the latest machinery which the negroes are still afraid to use. So, Dorinda personally supervises the milking process. This untiring hard work creeping into the midnight sometimes means to her several things: to see personally whether the cows are handled properly, to check the workers from slighting their work and, above all, to divert her mind from restless thoughts. She does not want Nathan to poke his nose in
her work. One more irony of life is, on the day of her marriage, she learns the sad death of Geneva who throws herself in the old mill-pond and drowns herself.

Miss Glasgow shows the passage of five more years of Dorinda’s marriage. She points out the difference in the nature of the relationship existing between Dorinda and Nathan. It is a little too unusual, because it is never consummated though both of them have concern for each other. At the age of thirty-eight, she is still youthful and faces her middle age with “repose, dignity and independence.” During these years she develops generous sympathy for Nathan and learns to tolerate him. Nathan never demands anything from Dorinda and is satisfied to remain “scarcely more than a hired man on the farm” (300). Dorinda finds him an easy man to live with, excepting for a few of his habits such as drinking coffee from the saucer or sitting with his feet on the railing of the porch. Nathan’s kind and understanding gesture of buying Five Oaks, only to please Dorinda brings her closer to him. Possession of the Five Oaks is her last victory and she wins it despite the neighbour’s critical remarks. During the transaction, she meets Jason who resembles his father, in his drunkenness. With his charm lost, he looks like the broomedge. Feeling the magnanimity and nobility of Nathan, in comparison with Jason, Dorinda feels, “He is worth twenty of Jason” (311). Though she feels highly grateful and protected, by his tenderness, she is unable to express her soft feelings for him. Miss Glasgow’s love and sympathy for the ‘womanly woman’ peeps through this scene.

Miss Glasgow explains the advantages of implementing modern methods of farming which would certainly lead to immeasurable success. Clinging to the past or old ways destroy progress. Dorinda gives herself completely for a few years to enrich the Five Oaks and is immensely successful. Nathan, always ready to implement the
latest methods, suggests to let the farm “on shares” but Dorinda is not interested in it. Dorinda observes the devouring nature of love not only in her life but in most other women’s lives. Even those who married the men they loved “had paid for it, (...) with a life time of physical drudgery or emotional disappointment” (319). She thanks her stars, for the turn in her life with Nathan whom she comes to appreciate more and more. She realises that Nathan is the only man at Pedlar’s Mill who lives in the future. He has brought about many new changes at home and at the dairy. The curtains, the thick carpets, the soft blankets, the easy chair are the domestic comforts, while the modern churn, the separator and the telephone are the extra accessories for the business. He starts thinking about the installation of the new electric plant on the farm which means all the cows would be milked and the cream separated by electricity. Dorinda respects his moral integrity, ignoring his unattractiveness, admires his magnanimity and good judgement. He wins her ungrudging esteem by loving her, refraining himself from the demands of love. Dorinda who has inherited the virtues of her pioneers – firmness of purpose, independence of character, courage of living – triumphs over her life. But she also realizes that she has never been in possession of the spiritual repose her parents attained though enjoyed even they lacked in material comforts. She neglects the barrenness of the spiritual field in her heart.

Miss Glasgow shows how inscrutable life is. Dorinda reflects, “it was always the little things, not the big ones that influenced destiny” (322). Nathan who had been suffering from cold, leading to abscess in one of his teeth which is to be pulled out in Richmond postpones his visit to Richmond from a week before Christmas to twentieth January. On that date, he has to attend court as a witness in a case, filed by Bob
Ellgood. He stays in Richmond for a week during which period Dorinda feels his absence.

Ellen Glasgow uses the storm or rough weather to suggest the stormy incidents in Dorinda's life and the harp-shaped pine to denote Dorinda's moral strength in overcoming trying circumstances. On the day on which Nathan is expected to return, there is heavy snow fall, disturbing the normal chores of life. The telegraph wires are affected, breaking all communication. The anxiously waiting Dorinda and John Abner, Nathan's club-footed son, learn about the train wreck. Dorinda instinctively understands, "Something has happened. Something has happened. Something has happened" (343). Bob Ellgood breaks the news of Nathan's accidental death while the mob elevate it to the death of a hero – "He died a hero" (343). The train in which Nathan had been travelling down, had got wrecked and caught fire. Nathaniel being strong had jumped to save women and children from the burning compartments and had met his death. His countrymen unanimously decide to give him a grand funeral befitting his heroic death.

Miss Glasgow aims her sharp satire at the shallowness of the society which is more concerned with the appearance than with the hidden real self. Dorinda, in her own characteristic way, does not bother to wear the conventional mourning dress. But Miss Seena, without being asked, brings a black dress for Dorinda and Flunanna is in great haste as she observes the approaching mob. Flunanna urges Dorinda to put on quickly her mourning clothes. "Thar they are, Miss Dorinda, you hurry up and get into that black bombazine befo' they catch you out of mournin'"(347). In Miss Seena's continuous commentary, Miss Glasgow exposes the callous nature of the society.
I no sooner heard of po’ Nathan’s death than I began to study about where I could find a good black dress for you to wear to the funeral. (...) Then, while I was in the midst of trying to recollect who had died last year, young Mrs. John Garlick drove into our yard with this dress and a widow’s bonnet in her arms. She told me she’s stoutened so she couldn’t make the dress meet on her, and she’d be obliged if you’d do her the favour to wear it. The bonnet she sent along because it’s a widow’s bonnet anyway, and she can’t wear it herself until she loses John (...) John bought it for her in New York when she lost her mother. Wasn’t that like a man all over again, to go and buy his wife a bonnet with a widow’s ruche when her mother died?” (348)

Miss Seena, while adjusting the mourning dress on Dorinda quite casually makes an observation of Dorinda’s beautifully maintained figure and its attractive appearance in the black crepe dress ignoring the seriousness of the situation. Miss Glasgow’s subtle mingling of humour with pathos only heightens the impact of the tragedy. Many people speak about the greatness of Nathan, exalting and ennobling him, harping on the refrain – “There was a heap more in Nathan Pedlar than people made out” (353). Quite ironically Dorinda reflects that Nathan would have been pleased to hear such high words spoken about him. “Well, some people had to wait until they were dead to get the things that would have made them happy while they were living” (352). Strangely enough, Nathan had always associated himself with funerals, in which he used to participate actively. A monument is soon erected in memory of Nathan Pedlar, with an inscription on it:

HERO ON WRECKED TRAIN GIVES HIS LIFE FOR OTHERS.
DESCENDANT OF FIRST MILLER OF PEDLAR’S MILL
DIES AFTER SAVING WOMEN AND CHILDREN.
MONUMENT TO BE ERECTED IN CHURCHYARD AT PEDLAR’S MILL.

The First World War gives rise to the scarcity of labourers as many men have gone to fight in the War. Miss Glasgow worries over the effect of the War: “And the worst thing about the War (...) is not the fighting. It is not even the murder and plunder
of the weaker. The worst thing about it is the number of people, both men and women, who enjoy it, who embark upon it as upon a colossal adventure" (358). The society is forced to combat with the demoralization of peace and the general disintegration. James Ellgood could not but leave his fields to run to waste because he could not find labourers to till them. But Dorinda’s intelligent maintenance of friendly relations with the coloured families has come to her rescue.

Miss Glasgow shows different stages of Dorinda’s mental development. She is able to meet Jason with neither love nor hatred, while she is returning from the coloured families who are affected by pneumonia. Jason tries to explain to Dorinda, the role played by irony giving a tragic end to his life. Dorinda’s own life with varied experiences has taught her: “You couldn’t have everything” (365). (After Nathan’s death, when she is filled with an aching void in her heart, Bob Ellgood proposes to Dorinda. But Dorinda replies, “I’ve finished with all that”). The innate moral fibre, the instinctive vein of iron have always stood by her through her adversity. She makes a thorough survey into the “irreconcilable difference between character and conduct.” In her own life she could trace no logical connection between being and behaviour, between the thing she was in herself and the things she had done. She thought of herself as a good woman, yet in her girlhood she had been betrayed by love and saved by the simplest accident from murder. Surely these were both flagrant transgressions according to every code of morality! (...) The strong impulses which had once wrecked her happiness were the forces that had enabled her to rebuild her life out of the ruins. The reckless courage that had started her on the dubious enterprise of her life had hardened at last into the fortitude with which she had triumphed over the unprofitable end of her adventure. Good and bad, right and wrong, they were all tangled together (368).

Dorinda’s knowledge of herself and her education of life show the signs of ripeness and a state of completeness.

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Dorinda’s inward ripeness and outward prosperity go together. The application of electricity and gasoline has lessened the question of labour. Miss Glasgow’s ripe practical wisdom is clearly seen through Dorinda who suggests Mr. Kettledrum a solution to their regional problem of mending roads. “I’ve been trying to get some of the negroes to mend this bad place before winter. The only way is for the farmers to keep their own roads in repair” (371). Instead of looking forward to the Government to solve their problem, it is better to be done by the farmers themselves. From Mr. Kettledrum she also comes to know about Jason whose health has deteriorated and hence is about to be admitted in the poor house. Though she does not owe him anything, nor is there any sympathy for him, she takes an impersonal pity on him as she thinks “the pathos of life is worse than tragedy” (392). She decides to give him shelter under her roof. When John Abner expresses his reluctance for him, she wins his willingness in her own characteristic shrewd way. She serves Jason till he succumbs to his inevitable death. Dorinda does not mourn his death. Still, “what she mourned was not the love that she had had and lost, but the love that she had never had” (404). The minister who performed Jason’s funeral, praises Dorinda’s great virtue of charity. A feeling of despair envelops Dorinda’s soul, brooding over the futility of her life which is devoid of love. A storm breaks out that night, as usual, as it happens to Dorinda at all important phases of her life. As she wakes up, she finds “the storm and the hag-ridden dreams of the night were over and the land which she had forgotten was waiting to take her back to its heart. “Endurance – Fortitude – the spirit of the land was flowing into her, and her own spirit, strengthened and refreshed, was flowing out again toward life” (408). She remembers Old Matthew’s words: “Put your heart in the land. The land is the only thing that will stay by you.” She comes to realise: “(...) Life is never what one
dreamed, that it is seldom what one desired; yet for the vital spirit and the eager mind, the future will always hold the search for buried treasure and the possibilities of high adventure” (408). She declares John Abner as the heir to the two farms after she is gone, refusing his suggestion to marry Bob Ellgood; with an ironic satisfaction she says, “I am thankful to have finished with all that” (409). Dorinda’s self-education is complete. Her life proves how “one may learn to live, one may even learn to live gallantly, without delight”.

Ellen Glasgow has always been sympathetic towards her negro characters, who wear an “expression of wistful resignation,” a characteristic sign of their race. Aunt Mehitable is a midwife, supposed and feared to have the powers of a “conjure woman” to remove moles and warts and to make cows go dry at the wrong season. Miss Glasgow throws light on the superstitions associated with negroes. Yet, the negroes enjoy a respectable place in the society and maintain cordial relationships with one and all. Aunt Mehitable is one of the freed slaves who have improved their status with intelligence and industry. She commands respect because of her stature and age. Nathan Pedlar asks Dorinda to attend to her, as she comes to the store to buy things.

Miss Glasgow has great concern for ideal relationships to exist among the members of a family. Nathan Pedlar, though not in the least charming, is a gentleman, an honest tradesman besides a good husband and a good father. His relationship with his sick wife is commendable for he serves her with all care and affection. Later, when Dorinda marries him for her own reasons, he extends his helping hand to her in the same unselfish way and remains loyal to her. He believes in the intelligence and quick understanding of Dorinda and asks her to be at the bedside of sick Rose Emily when the doctor, Jason, comes. From him she learns the bitter truth of Rose Emily’s fast
approaching death. Rose Emily is incapable of perceiving the facts and hopes to get cured. She also wishes Jason to fall in love with Dorinda. She does not possess an accurate sense of assessment, though she is a teacher.

(...) He (Jason) didn’t seem to me to lack backbone. Anyhow, I’d rather be married to a sweet nature than to a strong will (62).

Teaching is one of the professions open to dignified women. Miss Glasgow does not seem to have a high opinion of teaching. She assigns the job of teaching to women of poor intellect as Miss Priscilla Batte in *Virginia* and Rose Emily in this novel. Quite ironically Dorinda pities Rose Emily for never being ‘fortunate’ enough to enjoy love, just as she does.

There could be no drearer lot (...) than marriage with Nathan for a husband; better by far the drab freedom of the Snead sisters (68).

Linda Wagner, making a critical appreciation of the novel, writes:

Glasgow shows clearly that fear and resentment have tempered Dorinda’s insistence that work is all-important. It takes many more years before she learns the compassion that marks her as a woman. Glasgow’s story in *Barren Ground* is not only an account of the way a woman learns to know the land or the culture but also the more important story of the way a woman learns to know herself (1982; 74).

*Barren Ground* received high critical acclaim from the critics and Miss Glasgow’s reputation as a novelist rose to dizzy heights. Carl Van Doren praised Ellen Glasgow as “the one important realist” of the new dominion of Virginia (Rev. 1925; 271).

*Barren Ground* has acquired a special place among Ellen Glasgow’s other works for its dextrous mingling of different elements - the autobiographical element, her knowledge gained from the study of Science and Philosophy, the special attention given to the land as a symbol and character revealing the different phases of Dorinda’s
life and her deep exploration of the moral fibre in a person against the social background of her times – all go into one complex plot. In its rural background and the study of the deeper rhythms of life, Miss Glasgow is likened to Hardy.

Stuart Sherman, James Branch Cabell and H.L. Mencken, noteworthy critics who took a serious notice of the novel, praised *Barren Ground* for its careful planning and bold imagination. James Branch Cabell wrote his first review of the novel and he proclaimed *Barren Ground* to be the “best of many excellent books by Ellen Glasgow”. Stuart P. Sherman, literary editor for The New York *Herald Tribune*, held the view that Ellen Glasgow was a “significant leader of contemporary realism”. Reviewers in England extended a favourable reception to the novel. That the reading public enjoyed the novel is evident from the letter by a soldier who was invited to One West Main and was given a warm reception.

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That Ellen Glasgow's novels constitute social history of Virginia is generally accepted as functional. In *A Certain Measure*, she claimed that the “general scheme” of the social history entered her mind in the flurry which followed the publication of *The Descendant* in 1897. Then she decided to write “not merely about Southern themes, but a well-rounded social record of Virginia from the decade before the confederacy (...)” (1943; 53). In the preface to *The Battle Ground* she arranged the novels of the Virginia Edition in three categories, as Novels of the Commonwealth, Novels of the Country and Novels of the City, so that she can show how they compose “in the more freely interpretative form of fiction, a social history of Virginia” (1943; 3). That Miss Glasgow decided early to exploit Virginian materials, is expressed in her letter to Walter Hines. She refers to her novel *The Voice of the People*:

The book represents, to a certain extent, a change of literary base with me, and if it should chance to find a wide reading public, I should probably work upon a series of Virginia novels as true as I believe this one to be (*Letters*, ed. Rouse, 1958; 28-29).

During 1930s Miss Glasgow was absorbed in the thought of incorporating the history of the Scotch-Irish settlers who included the Glasgow's in the Appalachian Highlands, in her scheme of writing social history of the Commonwealth. The ramifications of her thoughts are two long substantial books *Vein of Iron* and *In This Our Life*, which treat incidentally of the Southern past and for the most part focus upon the contemporary scene. She is mostly preoccupied with the true and ideal nature of
human relationships which consequently instil a sense of security or insecurity as seen in these novels respectively. The protagonists in these novels are alive and solidly real, as they reflect distinctively their creator’s personality.

These two novels have some technical similarities. The point of view in both the novels is restricted mainly to two characters – John Fincastle and Ada, his daughter, in Vein of Iron and Asa Timberlake and his daughter Roy in In This Our Life. There are also contrapuntal passages where certain events are related from varying points of view, imparting the reactions of several individuals to a single situation. In such parts in the novel, the reader perceives the incident through the minds of different characters. Early in the novel Vein of Iron in the Chapters 4, 5, 6, 7 and 8 of Part One Grandmother Fincastle, John Fincastle, Mary Evelyn, Aunt Meggie and Ada in her childhood reflect in front of the fire at the Ironside manse. In Chapter 12 of Part Two, John, Ada and Grandmother assemble round Mary Evelyn’s coffin and ponder upon her death simultaneously. The same polyphonic technique is used in In This Our Life in Part One, 5th, 6th, 7th and 8th chapters where the oppressive atmosphere in the Timberlake household is revealed through the varying reactions of Asa Timberlake, Lavinia his wife, Roy his daughter and Minerva the negress. Vein of Iron is a chronicle describing three generations among the descendants of the Scotch-Irish settlers in the Southern part of the Great Valley of Virginia. To write with complete knowledge of the normal, solid and substantial folk of Appalachian Virginia, is one of the great achievements of Miss Glasgow. In A Certain Measure she says:

[. . .] it was my original intention to depict such aspects of the Southern scene as I had actually known and to avoid the romantic delusion, [. . .] prevalent in fiction at the turn of the century [. . .] (1943; 167).
Having set her mind to delineate the Presbyterians who were made of sterner stuff from which her father sprang, Miss Glasgow makes a study of the breed and examines whether it would yield to the disintegrating forces in the modern world and whether those staunch believers would perish in an age which believes in the machine only. Writing about the theme of this novel in her letters to Stark Young, she explains her intention of searching for the motive that enables human beings to endure life on the earth. “In my book the Vein of Iron is of course this Scottish strain of fortitude that has come down from the earliest pioneers in the Valley” *(Letters, ed. Rouse, 1958; 191 & 193)*. To pursue her intention, she set out,

[.. .] to set the scene and attempt to analyze the primary elements that composed the Presbyterian spirit and the Presbyterian theology. And the chief of these elements [.. .] was the substance of fortitude (Glasgow, 1943; 169).

To avoid any kind of misreading of the title, as it happened in the case of *Barren Ground*, the protagonist of which was mistaken to be a victim instead of a victor over the barren ground, Ellen Glasgow “this time chose to be directive in her title; characters with the vein of iron were survivors” (Wagner, 1982; 94).

Underlying this study, there is a keen interest in the nature of “the vital principle of survival which has enabled races and individuals to withstand the destructive forces of nature and of civilization” (Glasgow, 1943; 169). This theme needs a thorough examination to explore both the force of tradition and break with tradition. Thus Glasgow makes Grandmother Fincastle assisted by Aunt Meggie a personification of tradition. Because of Ralph, Ada Fincastle has to break with the tradition. In order to probe deeply into the nature and strength of the vein of iron possessed by the pioneers and their descendants, the endurance which has assisted them to meet the unexpected and inexplicable demands of life, Miss Glasgow has created characters and events from
her own knowledge. "In most of them, a single living cell, or germ was supplied by an
anecdote or appearance of a “real person” (Glasgow, 1943; 170).

She universalizes her theme by viewing man as struggling ordinarily against
indifferent, arbitrary fatality and suffering inexorably as a result of the failure of his
efforts. The scene and character are successfully and artistically interwoven and the
scene seems to have direct influence on the character's development. The strong
currents of fortitude and morality that have been inherited by the Fincastle family from
their ancestors have been enhanced by the isolation of the Virginia village. While in
Ironside, the Fincastles succeed in maintaining their sense of purpose, their direction,
but once they move to Queenborough, the sheer weight of other attitudes begin to
undermine their beliefs and sometimes shakes their sense of purpose.

The novel is set in a sombre mood from the beginning part in which the Ironside
children, out of wanton perversity, chase the idiot boy Toby Waters, till the closing
sequences in which the McBrides and their neighbours struggle to keep going during
the Great Depression. Glasgow's use of internal monologue rather than omniscient
point of view shows her constant sense of involvement with the characters and also it
allows the reader to feel empathy with most of the characters in the novel. The
unfailing faith in the Calvinistic concept of belief – that the inequalities of the world are
to be endured, even welcomed as a sign of God's concern for man and that He causes
suffering out of ultimately benevolent motives, is thoroughly examined through the
principal characters in the context of changing social conditions.

The possession of life-sustaining virtues of the Calvinists such as moral
integrity, self-reliance, devotion to a cause of their own formation or of God's,
endurance and fortitude – lead the Fincastles, the descendants of the early settlers in the great Valley of Virginia, to endure the anguish of life uncomplainingly.

Miss Glasgow was concerned with the varied qualities of Calvinism like intolerance and sometimes cruelty, from the beginning of her literary career, yet there came a great change in her attitude in her later age. It seems as though time has brought everything to its opposite and as Frederick P.W. McDowell points out this change, “Miss Glasgow in later years became increasingly dominated by her father’s moral seriousness [. . .]” (1963; 205). Despite many objectionable traits in Calvinistic faith, Miss Glasgow felt that Calvinism embodies a number of virtues which ought to be preserved. In her effort to trace the history of puritanic heritage she also rediscovered the bedrock of American tradition during a period she called the Dying Age. “Although Vein of Iron is not about the Great Depression, it attempts to discover a way out of the cultural decay blatantly manifested by the depression” (Raper 1980; 152).

Ellen Glasgow, in times of personal calamity in her 20’s, turned to stoical philosophers such as Marcus Aurelius and Plotinus, for fortitude, stability and consolation. Similarly, when the nation was going through a crisis, she searched for a native expression of stoical endurance and naturally settled upon the descendants of Old Virginia. The two elements of America’s puritanical tradition, namely its dream and endurance, carried the nation through the Depression. Of these two, Miss Glasgow emphasizes the quality of fortitude, the need of the hour and names her novel Vein of Iron, suggesting the didactic element in it.

In this novel, the setting is divided between Ironside and Queenborough. This division of setting provides a useful contrast in customs and attitudes. Ironside possesses a withdrawn and isolated community whereas Queenborough presents the
commercial atmosphere. The old and the new traditions have been clearly differentiated. Ironside is a small village lying in the mountains of the upper valley of the James River, a part of the Great Valley of Virginia. Queenborough is in reality her Richmond of the post-World War I and the Depression years, when the older generations still upheld the old traditions and customs and the younger generation lacked the fibre of moral strength. Ellen Glasgow skilfully dramatizes the contrasts between the shallow views of the youth with those of the Fincastles.

Miss Glasgow experiments with a fan-like structure by shifting the point of view from one character to another. Yet, the stress is laid on only two characters — John Fincastle and his daughter Ada.

From the beginning to the end, the events must be registered either in the mind of Ada, or in the mind of John Fincastle. The eyes of youth must look on life through the courage of emotion, while the eyes of age regarded it through that fortitude which wisdom bestows (Glasgow, 1943; 180-81).

This varied technique is one of the factors that accounts for the novel’s success. Particularly in the early part of the novel, the scene of family members sitting by the fire reflecting on a single event is superbly drawn. Glasgow enters the minds of her five characters to present five different points of view. She uses the appropriate rhythms for each character, depending on their individual nature:

Grandmother’s retrospect moves with a slow rocking vibration, as when one is reluctantly falling asleep and grows fainter and farther away as drowsiness conquers. [. . .] And so the stream of reverie flows on and downward through the metaphysical consciousness of John Fincastle, the practical mind of Aunt Meggie, and the flashes of insight that illumine Mary Evelyn’s reflections, until it finally ripples out in the staccato cadences of little Ada’s fanciful musings (Glasgow, 1943; 182).

Time is woven inextricably into the fabric of the novel. The Fincastles are one of the earliest inhabitants of Shut-in Valley. As such, Miss Glasgow presents her
human history of the Fincastles with accounts of their earlier, sterner days, when Indians carried off great-great-grandmother Tod. The past, traced in the consciousness of the characters, is linked with the present, from time to time, giving a zig-zag structure to the novel. She had collected accurate details from several records of the frontier warfare. Her own heritage enters into the making of the novel. This vein of iron, which becomes the title of the novel, belongs specially to the Scotch-Irish Calvinist settlers of Virginia, from which her father came.

Ellen Glasgow deliberately chooses clear transparent prose devoid of embellishment to suit her characters who live a quiet, simple life. Getting into the consciousness of Ada, she writes,

Mother had a way of living that made everything pretty. She was glad that the candlesticks were not solid silver, that copper gleamed through in places where they were worn. The copper, she would say with a laugh, was more precious than silver, for it was the only thing that had kept them from being turned into money. (35)*.

The tone of the novel is predominantly sober and sombre. Even the seemingly humorous passages that are sparse evoke pity rather than laughter.

"Please put the patch where it doesn't show, Mother", Ranny begged. "If you put it in the seat, the boys will call me Bottom Patches". (381).

The style is rich in evocative imagery, one that harmonizes all the elements – ideas, characterization, setting – to make an observation of life that would be illuminated. Grandmother’s arms are as firm as the roots of an Oak (261). The images of spider and mouse (63) – to be caught in a trap – suggest Ada’s life being trapped by the cruel forces of fate and Ralph being caught in Janet’s trap. Ada sees a soaring hawk seizing a

*Ellen Glasgow, Vein of Iron, Harcourt, Brace and Company, New York, 1935. All further references are to this edition.
small bird (161) as Ralph expresses his anguish over his helpless submission to Janet’s plot. The whole novel is aglow with piquant lines, illuminating the intricacies of life.

Life had been eager, piercing in flashes of ecstasy, tragic at times beyond belief, but never drab, never tedious; never, not even at its worst, ... (56) [. . . ] life was something more than mere living (173). True goodness is an inward grace, not an outward necessity (Italics mine) (246).
Yet this proved that one human being could never completely understand another (301).
Shelters and systems and civilizations were all overwhelmed in time, [. . . ] by the backward forces of ignorance, of barbarism, of ferocity. (359)
To drink for pleasure may be a distraction, but to drink from misery is always a danger. (376)
There is only once force stronger than selfishness and that is stupidity. (422)

Ellen Glasgow’s novels, specially of her later period are primarily concerned with human relationships with their varied nuances in a society undergoing a transitional period with a changing social and moral order. She probes into these changing values which sometimes evaporate in an increasingly unmannered, and amoral barbarism calling itself civilization. She explores, in these novels, the role of fortitude for men and women who prefer to live a simple and quiet life.

The Fincastles live in Ironside, a small village, in the great valley of Virginia. They are the descendents of the Presbyterian forefathers, who had built and occupied the manse eversince they came to the valley. John Fincastle is a scholar and had the prospects of becoming a minister but owing to his heretical beliefs he had been deposed from the ministry. He tries to eke out his living teaching profane subjects to the village children. The rest of his time he spends in his garden and on his five-volume philosophical work.
Mary Evelyn is John’s wife who has all admiration for his ideas and places him beside Socrates and Plato. Despite her delicate health, she is always cheerful in the midst of poverty to which she is subjected after her marriage with John. Ada is their daughter, ten years old, at the beginning of the century, when the narrative starts.

Grandmother Fincastle, John’s mother, is one of the pillars of strength in the village. Like a fountain she squirts out courage to both her family and the community at large. John’s heresy is a terrible shock to her staunch Presbyterian faith but she stands by her son. Aunt Meggie is John’s spinster sister who might have been modelled on the author’s own Aunt Rebecca. She is industrious and religious but her religion is tempered with moderation and good sense.

Ada Fincastle is the centre of interest in events which take place from the turn of the century to the middle of 1930’s by which time she is a mature woman. Though she resembles Dorinda Oakley in her fortitude, she is different from her in her reaction to the buffets of life. She is not hardened by hardship and disappointment. Ada and her family are not victims of “evasive idealism” but they are, in their sterner fashion, cultured people.

The other important inhabitants of the village are: the Rowans, the wealthiest people; Dr. Updike who is ever ready to help the Fincastles; Mr. Black, the minister; and Mrs. McBride and her son Ralph. Mr. Rowan is a rich merchant and small industrialist of the community. Janet is their only daughter, who is spoiled by their unbridled parental love. Mrs. McBride is a Calvinist with her warped religion rooted in hatred. She makes her son’s life miserable by breaking his will, in a belief that it is in accordance with her religion. She is duty-degraded and religion-distorted.
Ada and Ralph love each other since their childhood. Ralph is a handsome, lively boy with an Irish charm. He studies law and looks forward to marrying Ada. Miss Glasgow makes a dexterous use of Time by making it oscillate between past and present, events taking place in the consciousness of the members of Fincastle family as they set about the manse fire. Owing to poverty Ada cannot get a doll with real hair. Her greater disappointment is the loss of Ralph, when she grows up. Ralph falls a victim to the mean trick played by Janet and marries her, yielding to the social pressure in that mountain village which is guided by stern rules of religion.

Ralph and Janet have a very unhappy married life, owing to Janet’s quarrelling nature and infidelity. Janet is about to get a divorce, when the I World War breaks out and Ralph returns to Ironside from army training. Ada and Ralph enjoy a few days’ love in a mountain cabin, before Ralph leaves for the War. Ada does not inform of her pregnancy to Ralph for fear of distracting him. Grandmother is almost broken-hearted over Ada’s sin. Ada remains at the manse and never enters the village. Though her Grandmother does not approve of Ada’s act, she assists her in her labour. After the child, Ranny’s birth, Grandmother gradually weakens and dies.

The Fincastles leave Ironside for the city, Queenborough to make a living. John finds a place as teacher in a girls’ school and Ada works in a department store. After Ralph’s return from the War, he joins an automobile shop as salesman. His study of law remains incomplete. Though he lacks Ada’s vein of iron, they live a considerably happy life. John Fincastle completes his fifth volume but it does not receive much attention.

Though Ralph loves Ada, he takes fancy to the empty-headed Minna, the daughter of their neighbour. When they go out in a car one night, they are met with an
accident and Ralph is seriously injured. His long illness drains their savings. During the Depression, Ralph, Ada and John lose their jobs. Some of their neighbours are forced to starve or depend on charity. John Fincastle, old and wornout perceives his approaching death. He goes back to Ironside to save the burial charges. He dies at the manse. Ralph, Ada, Ranny and Aunt Meggy also return to the manse for a better life than their life in Queenborough.

From the beginning of the novel, till its end Miss Glasgow lays stress on the need for basic virtues such as courage, loyalty, truth, justice, compassion etc., to establish a moral order in the society.

Miss Glasgow pleads for pity for the weak and less fortunate. In her autobiography she states, “Either by fate or by choice, I have found myself on the side of the weaker” (1954; 59). She is a vigorous advocate of humanity and denounces vehemently any breach of this law. “The cruelty of children, the harshness of health and happiness to the weak, the blindness of the unpitiful – these were my terrors” (1954; 53).

The opening scene of the novel in which an idiot boy, Toby, is being chased by the children of the village Ironside reflects Ellen Glasgow’s own childhood experience of being chased by her classmates – highlighting two of Ada’s chief traits, pity – in saving Toby and courage – in facing the Minister. Toby’s running for his life shows,

The vital principle of survival, which has enabled races and individuals to withstand the destructive forces of nature and of civilization (Glasgow, 1943; 169).

Toby is the son of Mrs. Waters, a social outcast who lives an immoral life with her visitors at night. The mocking and chasing children stand for the society which
does not bear with any violation of morality. Miss Glasgow’s criticism of Puritanism is
less serious compared to her contemporary American writers such as H.L. Mencken,
Sherwood Anderson and Sinclair Lewis who consider Puritanism as a synonym for
what is wrong with American culture. The community of Southern Calvinists, by its
intolerance and cruelty, turns a boy born out of wedlock into a potentially violent
enemy of society. Ada Fincastle, a child of endowed with her creator’s sympathy for
the weak, takes pity and stops tormenting the unfortunate Toby. Moreover, she gives
her red woolen cap to him. Ellen Glasgow uses a perfect colour scheme to denote the
psychology of her characters. Her description of the Minister who disperses the savage
— like children, is a striking piece of irony — “though he was a man of humane instincts,
[...] he preferred children in Sunday school.” He had “a livid birth mark [...] on the left
side of his face between nose and temple” and “the eye of a caged hawk; [...] because
he was a saint he had been able, in spite of his disfigurement, to attach to himself with
brief intervals of widowerhood, three excellent wives” (5-6).

Instead of praising Ada for her charity, Mr. Black, the Minister frightens Ada by
speaking in a stern tone that her mother might chide her. He even notices the lining
cloth of Ada’s short squirrel-skin coat. Ada’s self-respect saves her from a sense of
shame, for an old petticoat of grandmother is used as a lining cloth. Miss Glasgow
focuses on Ada’s courage. When all the other children run away for fear of the
Minister, Ada stands to answer all his enquiries.

In the character of Ada, Miss Glasgow studies the Darwinian concept of
heredity playing a major role in the formation of one’s character. Through Ada’s
consciousness, Miss Glasgow delineates Grandmother as an embodiment of strength
and fortitude which are inherited by Ada. Grandmother believes in healthy family ties,
which extend wide enough to embrace the whole society in which persons rush to the rescue of other people in need. She praises profusely those great souls who are the pillars of strength to lean on during adversity. The Minister tells Ada about how her Grandmother helped most of the villagers and the people in her vicinity with her home-made medicines. This makes Ada reflect upon her mother's statements about her Grandmother and father John Fincastle. Miss Glasgow also deplores one of the unhealthy features of the society. It is never ready to accept new ideas easily in any branch of knowledge. The persons with innovative views are often subdued low so that their opinions would not disturb the established ones. John Fincastle had to lose ministership twice for holding new ideas with which the society is not familiar, but which in the eyes of his wife, are as great as those of Socrates and Plato. Miss Glasgow's technique of revealing the past through dialogue or reflection is highly effective. The dialogue between the Minister and Ada throws light on the Fincastles' poverty – they pick up sticks from the woods to use as firewood and Ada also has earned two and a half dollars by picking up berries for Mrs. Rowan. Ada eagerly awaits her father who would bring her a doll with real hair, with her savings.

Changing of the point of view from time to time both unfolds the personality of the character and imparts the necessary perspective to the events. By revealing through Ada's reflection, the proud history of the pious Scotch-Irish pioneers who are simple despite their learning. Miss Glasgow lays stress on the importance of heredity in moulding her character. Ada is consistently reminded of her strong blood, inherited from the pioneers. She is warned not to "let it be weakened" for "thin blood runs to wickedness" (21).
Miss Glasgow emphasizes the role of fate in one’s life and also ponders on the moral issue of discipline versus human nature. Ada meets her first disappointment when her father brings her only an ordinary toy with painted hair, owing to lack of enough money. Mary Evelyn, her mother, understands her dissatisfaction but Grandmother insists, “little girls should be taught their responsibility” (31). While Grandmother is all for discipline, Mary Evelyn stands by human nature, with its strengths and weaknesses. Mary Evelyn light-heartedly dismisses Grandmother’s suspicion that Ada is not jealous of Janet’s toy with real hair, but it is only a child’s natural craving. Mary Evelyn has an optimistic bent of mind which knows how to make life happy with simple things in the face of poverty. In spite of her ill-health, she always bears a cheerful and contented expression. She is the only member of the family who perfectly understands her husband John’s great interest in philosophy and proudly feels “he might have walked with Socrates, he might have been the companion of Plato” (11). Besides her traditional traits, she has modern outlook in accepting new things. Ada’s cheerful optimism, inherited from her mother is cherished throughout her life which turns out to be tough struggle with fate, starting with her first disappointment at the age of ten. Like her mother, she has the ability to adapt herself, without renouncing the strength of character, then Finecastle quality. Ada’s playing the role of “prisoner on trial for life” (63) in her childhood, the spider and cobweb and mice caught in traps, forebodes Ada’s life of strife due to Ralph’s entrapment. Entrapment is one of the themes of the novel. Being a child, unable to see through God’s plan, she thinks, “why did God make idiots (Toby)”? (65) Why does God make mice to be caught in trap? (63). She makes in her own childish way an attempt to understand the Calvinistic principle of predestination. Humane as she is, she wishes “the pioneer”, the oldest Oak
in their garden to be spared from the bad winter wind lest innumerable birds would suffer, deprived of their nests.

Miss Glasgow shifts the point of view to Grandmother Fincastle to trace their noble ancestry and their strong family ties along with their benevolent consideration for their servants. The big manse built by John’s grandfather with all the conveniences for his wife and the kitchen specially made large enough for the family of servants brought by his wife show their healthy ties. The same kind of loving relation between husband and wife has lasted through the succeeding generations, Grandmother Fincastle and Mary Evelyn have utmost happiness with their husbands despite their hard life owing to poverty, of which both of them have never been ashamed or dissatisfied. Grandmother Fincastle, a pillar of strength as well as an embodiment of tradition, has the same loving bond with her daughter-in-law, Mary Evelyn. She finds fault with Mary Evelyn for encouraging John’s heretic philosophy, instead of putting him back on the right track as expected of a duty-bound-traditional-wife (43). She believes, lack of proper upbringing turned Mary Evelyn forgetful and flighty (53). Yet she extends her motherly care and moral support to Mary in distress when her children die of diphtheria. John’s heresy is a terrible shock to the staunch faith of Grandmother, yet she sympathizes him. Through her Miss Glasgow shows her country’s attitude towards new ideas in the field of religion.

What future was there in a Christian country for a man who had denied his Redeemer? [...] Nobody could earn a livelihood in America by thinking the wrong thoughts (45).

Miss Glasgow regrets this ignoble state in America which would not encourage a search for Truth, as is done in Europe leading to Renaissance. John’s sincere quest for Truth is condemned and he is suppressed to poverty and isolation. But John’s morality
“preferred the independence of spirit that comes from not owning things”. (49). Ellen Glasgow links this love for learning as a trait inherited from his grandmother and probes the role of heredity, while exposing narrow social customs which deny education to women. Despite the discouragement, Margaret Graham, John’s grandmother, had acquired considerable knowledge of history and languages (51).

Miss Glasgow upholds the strength of the family ties in tracing John’s relation with his wife, Mary Evelyn and his sister Meggie. The weaknesses in Mary Evelyn’s mind or body do not diminish John’s love for her. His patient nursing of her during her illness – pneumonia – without leaving her bed and his readiness to attend to the needs of Meggie illustrate the exemplary husband-and-wife relation along side the brother-and-sister bond.

Spinsters are recurring characters in most of Ellen Glasgow’s novels (Miss Glasgow herself was a spinster). One of the social customs that is responsible for spinsterhood is the practice of running after boys. Those who fail in this running race to catch hold of bridegrooms, often remain spinsters. Meggie is one such case. Though Dr. Updike has shown signs of love for her, they are not strong enough to lead to marriage.

In Part One “Toward Life”, Miss Glasgow uses a zig-zag style of narration – the past taking place in the consciousness of characters who return to the present from time to time. By using the image of mouse and trap, she suggests the powers of predestination and the inevitability and helplessness of man being caught in it.

Miss Glasgow weaves into the plot the extra dimension of time in an inextricable way. Part Two “The Single Heart” begins after the passage of ten years of time during which period Ada becomes twenty years old and Grandmother is eighty.
Ada and Ralph love each other and their marriage is to take place the next year. Ada wants to keep it a secret from others till the marriage materialises. She has a vague fear that Janet or Mrs. Mc Bride might come in the way. Ralph works for Mr. Rowan in his automobile store to earn enough money for his mother to live on, when he would be away in Queenborough studying law. It is a recurring feature in Ellen Glasgow’s novels that the ineffectual gentlemen are overpowered by their demanding parents – Arther Peyton has his mother, Jason his drinking father and Ralph his bothering mother. Roused by Janet’s finicky interest in Ralph, Ada, in a moment of passion, lets out her secret of marriage (89). Miss Glasgow presents Ada in the most realistic way with her genuine feelings and natural responses to life’s situations. Ada regrets her quick temper in vain for it starts a chain of events, beginning with Janet’s hatching a plot to trap Ralph. Mary Evelyn develops a spinal malady. Miss Glasgow speaks of the charitable societies which extend their service to patients or the needy. She creates a similar society in this novel – Ladies’ Aid Society. This society supplies Mary Evelyn with a wheel chair. As the child characters – Ada, Ralph, Janet - grow up to their youth, Ellen Glasgow expresses her own opinion about the younger generation through Grandmother. She deplores their wild, crazy enthusiasm and ruined morals. “I can never understand [...] what has got into the young folks now-a-days. It looks to me as if they were clean deft, every one of them [...]” (74). Drinking and dancing during social functions was considered the fashion of the day. Sometimes their wilderness drives the host to bring the function to a sudden closure. Miss Glasgow condemns their wilderness and lack of moral discipline.

Miss Glasgow creates Janet as a representative of irresponsible and spoilt youth. She reiterates the importance of careful upbringing of children as she reveals Janet’s
character more vividly. Janet, being the daughter of the rich Rowans, grows wild with a serious lack of all moral traits. She is selfish, jealous (of Ada) flirtations and unscrupulous. In order to win over Ralph for whom she has only infatuation, not love, she makes him drink and traps him.

Quite ironically Miss Glasgow, through Ada's consciousness, explores the unkind attitude of the society towards ruined women. Mrs. Waters is subjugated pitiably to live in the outskirts of the village. Though she has been helped by Dr. Updike, Grandmother, and Ladies' Aid Society during her illness, she is denied Christian burial after her death, as she was expelled by the Church during her life time. While Grandmother totally approves of the decision, Mary Evelyn considers it "merely human" (84) and John Fincastle remarks that it is but logical that a person turned out of the Church may not be received in the churchyard. Miss Glasgow, by making Ada reflect on Mrs. Waters' tragic life, foreshadows Ada's tragic life which resembles Mrs. Waters' in a distant way.

The ideal relationship between mother and daughter is drawn vividly in a long discussion between Mary Evelyn and Ada. They speak about the love of Ralph and Ada. Mary Evelyn sees through the quick-tempered nature of Ralph and advises Ada to be patient with him. Miss Glasgow contrasts the loving domestic atmosphere of Ada with that of Ralph. Ada thinks of her home as "an invisible network of affection and security" (91). But Ralph never enjoys such peaceful and loving atmosphere of a home. Mrs. McBride had never tried to make Ralph happy, rather she "enjoys making Ralph miserable" (93). Miss Glasgow tries to probe into her psychology to elucidate her irritable nature. Mrs. McBride is forced to work hard to sustain herself and her son.
But her resentment about her hard life finds its righteous outlet [...] in the curdled Calvinism that she uses to belittle Ralph until his will to mold his own life has been destroyed (Raper, 1980; 156).

Her approach to religion is distorted and “Calvinism does curdle in some natures” (93). Her upbringing turned Ralph infirm, destroying his faith in himself, which lead to his weak morality. Ralph’s lack of strength very badly affects Ada’s life.

Miss Glasgow lays a strong emphasis on domestic love. “Love has been stronger than religion” (96). Mary Evelyn sustains through her illness only because of this love which she has received in plenty from her husband, her mother-in-law and sister-in-law. All of them are blessed with contentment and fortitude. They enjoy living a simple life. John finds his satisfaction in writing his philosophy in five volumes. Miss Glasgow shows his purity of spirit and universal love as he chants an ancient Hindu prayer, “May all that have life be delivered from suffering” (116). Mary Evelyn’s cheerful temperament even in the face of odds in life, helps her to undergo the hard struggle and make her life simpler.

Miss Glasgow presents a different kind of mother-and-daughter relationship in Mrs. Rowan and Janet. Mrs. Rowan’s unbridled love for her daughter had spoilt Janet. Janet has no patience with her mother whom she feels ‘fussy’. She is selfish and ungrateful and takes her parents’ attempts to keep her happy, for granted. She proves herself to be “a born trouble-maker” (131). Miss Glasgow shows that neither too strict control (as in the case of Ralph) nor too liberal an attitude (as in Janet’s case) towards children is desirable. They bring forth unpleasant results. She makes Janet a foil to Ada who has deep love and admiration for her mother. Ada patiently nurses her mother in her final sickness and craves with her whole heart to resemble her mother in every aspect. “I hope I’m like you, Mother. Oh, I hope I’m like you” (97).
Courage and fortitude are the most celebrated virtues in all the novels of Ellen Glasgow. She believes that the absence of these traits often throws human life into a gulf of misery and suffering. Life yields itself to the possessor of these qualities. Miss Glasgow delineates Ralph as a personification of weak morality, in contrast to Ada who has inherited the strength of the Fincastles. Ralph drinks in the party for fear of not becoming a kill joy. Ada is indignant over Ralph’s yielding to Janet. In a fit of anger she leaves him when “he needed her ( . . . ) more than ever” (133). His pride being hurt by Ada – an act of her immaturity – Ralph goes to dance with Janet and gets trapped by her. Ada’s impatience costs her, her love. Miss Glasgow traces the gradual growth of Ada’s moral stature. Ralph is forced to marry Janet, yielding to the cruel custom of tradition. Using the image of a red bird flying away from the Oak tree but returning again to it, Miss Glasgow suggests Ralph’s going away from Ada and his ultimate return to her.

“It is the custom” [...] to accept a woman’s word in such cases”. “[...] we cannot alter a rule of conduct. No matter how wrong or absurd it may be, it is stronger than we are” (147).

Mr. Rowan, takes advantage of all the “forces of society” – religion, law, morality, influence, even money to bring Ralph to his side (148). Through this incident, Miss Glasgow expresses her own convictions about life.

We are still savage, my child. What we call civilization is only a different and perhaps a higher level of barbarism. (148)

Ralph laments bitterly, “I am trapped” (159). Ralph remains a phantom and Adas sees that she cannot fight for a phantom. Miss Glasgow suggests a proper way of receiving life in times of misery. When Ada is drowned in sorrow over her loss of Ralph, Miss Glasgow makes Ada meet Toby.
Being an idiot was more terrible than anything in the world. It was worse than death; it was worse than losing your lover [...], in some strange way she seemed to deny her own suffering while she dwelt on the dirt and squalor and horror and inescapable misery of life. (165)

Ada feels that she is as repulsive as the ugly idiot boy Toby. She thinks that she is also born to suffer like that boy. Ellen Glasgow examines the theory of pre-destination. The virtue of fortitude helps Ada to look at misfortune from a positive angle. Yet, Ada is not convinced of her Grandmother’s faith. “God would not have sent you a trial of faith if it were not for your good” (169). She reflects Miss Glasgow’s attitude when she decides, never to pray again as long as she lives — a decision which startles Grandmother’s steadfast faith.

Ellen Glasgow shows the passage of three years of time before Mary Evelyn passes away calmly. Ada wonders at the strength of her will to live even in the face of decease and deprivation. Ellen Glasgow stresses the power of fortitude which is at the root of the will to live. “If broken hearts could kill (...) the earth would be as dead as the moon” (178). Ralph comes to condole Ada. Miss Glasgow contrasts his wedded life with the happy married life of Mary Evelyn and John. Janet would always quarrel with Ralph and is always ready to leave him as and when she finds a rich man.

Ellen Glasgow describes the impact of Depression on the villagers and the changes it has brought in the social and moral codes. Materialism has grown more important than domestic relations. The poverty-stricken young people leave their homes and go out of their villages, in search of livelihood in cities. At the same time, Miss Glasgow studies the strength of family ties which hold all the Fincastles together even in the face of domestic disasters and financial distresses. “[...] This bond of personality stronger than death held the family together” (183). The outbreak of the World War worsens the situation. Miss Glasgow deplores the reaction of her people to
the War. War kindles more excitement than disapproval over the unnecessary wastage of precious human life. Miss Glasgow is cynical about the clergy. "Clergymen seemed to want war more than most other persons, [...]"(187). Mr. Black, the Minister believes it to be a righteous war and so he is sure of God’s support to them. But Ada and John Fincastle cannot think of the sanctity behind war. Ada says, "It is hard to understand [...] how God can want war" (187). John calls it a moral pestilence (186) and insists "there is no such thing as a righteous war, not even in the Old Testament, and that makes people furious" (195). Both of characters articulate Miss Glasgow's opinion on war. The War turns out to be a turning point in everyone's life. Ralph, vexed with the infidel Janet decides to join the army, after six years of bitter wedded life. The passage of time is suggested through the comment of Judge Melrose who comes to Ironside to participate in the Red Cross meeting: "Your grandmother says she will be eighty-six tomorrow . . . but I tell her she has more pith and sap left in her still than many who are yet in the prime of life" (190). Ralph returns to Ironside unexpectedly on three days of leave. He expresses his desire to marry Ada as and when he is divorced from Janet. Ada is happy over his readiness, "How careless, short-sighted, splendid' and, irresistible to the heart of a lover!" (193). She agrees to spend time with him on Thunder Mountain during his leave. She has that Fincastle love of life in her (194). Quite ominously she thinks, "she would have her dream come true if she paid for it with all the rest of her life" (200).

In Part Three, "Life’s Interlude", Miss Glasgow throws light on Ada’s courage to defy the social code of conduct. Ada does not hesitate to break even her Grandmother’s moral code by enjoying two days’ tryst on Thunder Mountain with Ralph, before he leaves for the War. Perhaps Miss Glasgow relates her own experience
and happiness which she enjoyed with Gerald B. Ada’s maturity is not ripe. She is yet to learn man’s place in and his relationship with his community and the necessity of upholding the moral code of his society. In her selfish seeking of happiness Ada thinks, “we have done no harm, (...). We have hurt nobody. We have asked so little beyond ourselves, so little beyond being together” (223). She reminds Jenny Blair of *Sheltered Life*.

Part Four, “God’s Mountain” traces Ada’s life after Ralph’s going to the War until his return. Miss Glasgow examines Ada’s personal code of morals against the background of the general code. She distinguishes between “black lies” which were evil and “white lies which were always harmless and occasionally benign” (228). Through aunt Meggie one moral principle is suggested: “I believe in taking pleasure ( . . . ) without being selfish” (228). Ada feels no remorse for telling a lie about her secret trip to Thunder Mountain. She accuses the elders of the village, including her Grandmother of separating her from Ralph. But Grandmother tries to soften her feelings by telling that it is only a trail of faith and none except God can spoil a life which is only taking away His grace. Ada’s prompt reply, “And God would it ( . . . ) not the God I believe in,” reflects Ellen Glasgow’s belief.

Miss Glasgow presents an ideal master-servant relation in this work as she does in most of her novels. Aunt Abigail Geddy is a freed negro servant but she prefers staying with the Fincastles. She has lived at the manse for forty-odd years. When John had lost his church and was unable to pay her wages, she stayed on “because she said it was respectable to work for a minister” (22), “[...] she is like one of the family” (104). Even though, she is unable to do much work, with her rheumatism, she is of great help in the kitchen. When she falls ill, all the Fincastles attend on her. After Ada’s return
from Thunder Mountain, within a fortnight Aunt Abigail dies and all the Fincastles — even Grandmother — drive to the Negro Church where her funeral takes place. Miss Glasgow gives her a better status than the other negro servants who need a careful watch over their work.

In the scene of Ada’s meeting Mrs. McBride, Miss Glasgow throws light on the distorted religion of Mrs. McBride. “Her piety (...) was rooted in hatred” (238). She exposes her hypocrisy hidden behind her religion, through Ada’s consciousness.

Yes, religion could be bitter and a terrible thing! As a child, she (Ada) had known that Mrs. McBride enjoyed punishing Ralph. [...] the older woman (Mrs. McBride) found a thrill of cruelty in the Christian symbols of crucifixion and atonement, she had wished him to marry Janet, [...] she had wished him to be hurt. Even if she doesn’t know it, the girl thought, she really hates him. Something deep down in her, perhaps an embittered love for his father, perhaps the crying blood of persecutors, was gratified when she thought that anyone, even her own child, would be punished by God (239 & 240).

Ada fails to understand Mrs. McBride’s religion which teaches them that “salvation was better than happiness” (241). Through Mrs. McBride she comes to know about Janet’s divorce and her hasty and shameless remarriage on the very next day. Ellen Glasgow shows how a marriage founded on deceit and jealousy is doomed to crumble down.

Miss Glasgow describes the vein of iron or fortitude in Ada when she conceives. Pregnancy out of wedlock is a violation of both social and moral code. As if to reiterate the necessity of love rather than social sanction in a marriage, Miss Glasgow moulds Ada as a defiant and courageous woman. Ada does not repent for the ‘sin’ committed. It is a terrible shock to the morality of her Grandmother. Despite Grandmother’s advice, Ada refuses to let Ralph know the matter for she is afraid of his rash temperament.
Miss Glasgow shows the strength of family ties and the power of inheritance as all the Fincastles have been endowed with fortitude or vein of iron which has come to their rescue through thick and thin. Aunt Meggie takes every care of the pregnant Ada. Even Grandmother, inspite of her disapproval of the act, assists Ada in her labour. Ellen Glasgow lays stress on the necessity of sympathy and understanding on the part of human beings and the lack of it most of the times. Though Ada bravely accepts her conception, she is afraid of facing the society. Grandmother is more worried about the social disgrace than sin. John is quite ironical when he advises his daughter that sheep are more companionable than human beings who lack sympathy.

Miss Glasgow condemns Ada’s “dangerous innocence” which makes her disregard the opinion of others. What she calls “evasive idealism” is one of the traits she denounces. Despite her virtues, Ada is not without her weaknesses. Miss Glasgow never idealizes her characters. They are human beings with their strengths and weaknesses. She shows clearly how an act of ignorance effects others’ lives in the family, besides one’s own. Like her father who pursues his search for truth in his own personal way, unaware of its effects on his family, Ada also asserts her will over the needs and expectations of her family. Though, she fulfils her desire, her act of defiance makes her family face social ostracism. When Ada, in her insensible way feels, “My life was my own and I thought I’d be the one to suffer if I made a mistake” (251), John enlightens her, “we cannot suffer anything alone, not even disgrace” (251).

Miss Glasgow analyses one’s place in a society and one’s responsibility towards its members. Family, being the smallest unit of it, should necessarily be founded on mutual understanding and help. Grandmother’s generous act of assistance in her delivery makes Ada feel “the steadfast life of the house, the strong fibres, the closely
Ellen Glasgow, right from her childhood had a strong concern for the weak and helpless. She condemns severely any kind of cruelty or injustice done to them. She deplores the instinctive savage nature, hidden in the deep layers of one’s heart, which comes out only in the face of the helpless. Ada is thrown in such a tormenting situation as she enters the village for the doctor when Grandmother’s health deteriorates. While returning, in her anxiety to reach home quickly she runs. Her running reminds the children of Toby the idiot boy and they chase Ada and pelt her with bits of clay. Ada deplores the savage psychology: “Why does every frightened and fleeing creature awaken a deep-seated instinct of cruelty in the minds of children and savages?” (263).

Referring to the chase by the children John speaks out the mind of Miss Glasgow:

That chase began many years ago, and it is still going on. It will stop only when the human race becomes civilized (268).

At the time of Grandmother’s death, Ada is reminded of her own faults. She regrets her hasty deed of seeking pleasure, unmindful of its effect on the members of her family. “I killed Grandmother!” (...) It came over me then for the first time” (267). Ada’s anguish shows signs of her self-knowledge. John consoles her “you are good ... but in your own way. There are many kinds of goodness, my dear, but there is none that does not spring from the heart alone” (267-268). Grandmother’s death and their own poverty drives the Fincastles to sell their manse and leave Ironside for Queenborough in search of livelihood.

Part Five, the last section of the novel, “The Dying Age”, traces the hard life of the Fincastles in Queenborough which is passing through the Great Depression. One of the social changes that took place after the war in 1918, was the disappearance of
prejudice against women as workers. While economic need drove women to work, employers prefer them because they could be paid less. Ada gets a job in Shedwell’s Department store and John finds work in Boscobel School as teacher of history and languages. Miss Glasgow contrasts the simple life of the Ironside community with the culturally decaying Queenborough to test the strength of the Fincastles’ virtues.

Ellen Glasgow is never in favour of war for it exposes the innate disgusting cruelty of human nature. It often roughens one’s sensitivity. She is more worried about the way people – even women – enjoy the horrors of the war. Ralph writes to Ada:

But you come too close to human nature in a war like this, and when you are through, all you want to do is to forget you’re human (276).

Miss Glasgow regrets the emptiness and insatiable self-centredness in human beings, the shallowness observed more obviously in women who try to look like boys, with absolutely no values to uphold. The feeling for community, a dominant quality in the village is almost obliterated by the discord within human relationships. Miss Glasgow has a high opinion about the culturally rich past which sustains the present and pushes it to a bright future. She denounces the younger generation who by their sheer ignorance try to dismember the past, its centrifugal force and make dilirious attempts to build castles out of emptiness. Through Ada, she pities their dull wits which mistake sensation for happiness and change for progress. She disapproves of the growing materialism which expresses itself through radios, electric refrigerators or the newest model of Ford cars etc., because it wipes out man’s identity as a member of the community and encourages him to make the shrill human wail, “I . . . I . . . I . . . I . . .” (278). Miss Glasgow contrasts the shallowness of city life with the strength of Ada’s blood, which is her proud inheritance. Ada thinks,
They would build a home in the wilderness of the machines as their forefathers had cleared the ground and built a home in the wilderness of the trees. (278)

Amidst the sickening city atmosphere, Mulberry Street has a contrasting homely atmosphere where all the families experience a sense of community feeling. It consists of Mrs. Rawlings a poor widow and a dressmaker who works her finger to the bone to provide good education for her son Bertie; Otto Bergen, a thrifty and genial house-owner of the Fincastles; the Hamblens, the impoverished aristocrats; Mrs. Maudsley a benevolent neighbour who shelters Mr. Midkiff, a desolate, good carpenter who holds a great horror of the almhouse – the City Home. Living among them the Fincastles feel at home, “they are simple folk like us” (290). As Ralph returns, Ada expresses her remorse for grandmother’s death. Ada’s quick wit perceives the absence of radiance in his eyes, lack of passion in his touch and a missing sense of belonging in his attitude. It is the unfortunate aftermath of the War which had cast its miserable impact very easily on a less strong person like Ralph. The bitter experiences of war has deprived Ralph of his finer qualities and “he had forgotten how to smile”, “when you’ve been in that muck and got and of it, you don’t know the meaning of happiness” (285). Though he returned three weeks back from the war, he does not care to meet the anxiously writing Ada. He excuses himself – “It was like shedding a dead skin and growing a new one” (288). Miss Glasgow contrasts his dreamy, impractical and pleasure-loving nature with the clear-sighted, well-planning and simple living Ada. Though Ralph appreciates Ada’s skill in arranging her home neatly and beautifully, - “you’re like your mother. Wherever you are becomes home” (285), he wants to shift their house to a bigger one in better surroundings. But the practical-minded Ada postpones the plan for a year till they can save enough money to buy back their manse. His eagerness to shoulder the
responsibility of home is rooted less in his love for them than in his male chauvinism. He feels proud of himself selecting a 'red dress' for the bride, Ada. “For it was bliss, (...) to have everything, even the color of her dress, taken out of her hands” (291).

Shifting the point of view to John Fincastle, Ellen Glasgow moves the time to 1925. Miss Glasgow condemns the wilderness of the younger generation with their unimaginative cruelty, pitiless egoism and lack of a standard of living. It is an age, John muses, when “everything (...) appeared to whirl on deliriously, without a pattern, without a code, without even a center” (293). He compares his own youthful spirit “that will stay young, if I live to be a hundred. It was this something that loved life and would live it over again in its wholeness, mingling the good with the bad, that had never valued an effortless heaven,” with the reckless, aimless and hard-hearted youth of the day (294). John, Miss Glasgow’s mouthpiece, is astonished and indignant over the irresponsible, insensitive and casual way an accident is treated, in which a speeding car, full of youngmen, knocks down an old negro peddler and does not stop. All the people, including the policeman who gather round the dead body, do not bother about him and a passing physician stops his car and drags the body aside to be taken by the ambulance (294). Miss Glasgow is sorry for the sad state of affairs in which the young girls do not prove to be better. They love a shallow life of loose morals. The girls whom John teaches, do not hesitate to torment him. “They do everything they can to get rid of him, because he is old and they want a young man they can flirt with to teach them” (283). Their inhuman indifference to others and the considerable inconvenience they cause to their neighbours is detestable. Their crazy enjoyment of drinking parties and Jazz music on the radio at a high volume, leaves aunt Meggie sleepless most part of the night. Yet, they are impudent enough to complain of
Meggie’s cock’s crowing (325). Mr. Hamblen is almost distracted. The worst part of
the situation is that those girls who had bought radios, had never paid rent for their
lodging or boarding. Aunt Meggie holds their lack of convictions responsible for their
wildness.

To give a close picture of the past and present with its sticking to or losing the
ideal standards of living, Miss Glasgow draws Mulberry Street mostly on the lines of
Ironside, yet with its outstanding traits of the modern period. The inhabitants of the
Mulberry Street, where the Fincastles live, follow a mixed code of old and new ways of
life. Most of the young people “had escaped the post-war contagion of wildness, (...) helped to support families and most of them asked as little of life as their patient elders
had asked in their youth” (297). John deplores the terrible loss of ideals when he
observes the pleasure of a young mother in a neighbouring street as she proudly says
that her five year old son is “going to be a gangster when he grows up” (297). The
miserable lack of healthy, disciplined conduct among them worries Ada, for her seven
year old son Ranny picks up bad language and unwholesome habits. Ralph takes the
deterioration in values and the lack of discipline easily, “Nobody uses nice words any
longer. The world’s gone roughneck” (318). Even men do not hesitate to use such
words as “lousy” (323) which have been considered as vulgar in the past. The simple
life of the virtuous Fincastles is contrasted with the bustling style of their neighbours,
the Bergens. At Ironside, the anniversaries are ignored or neglected whereas the
Bergens celebrate every festival with a wistful remembrance.

The passage of time is shown through Ada’s reflection on the disgusting
wildness of the girls in 1928. Ada wonders that in her own disapproval of the cheap-
minded youth, she is more like her grandmother than her own mother (311). Ada and
Mrs. Hamblen denounce the vanity of the younger generation, who buy or sell very frequently their easy life without saving for a better future and their love of artificiality. While philandering with Minna, Ralph meets an accident. She serves him devotedly but is more worried over his changing attitude to modernity. Ralph believes “people don’t bother about moral quibbles now-a-days any more than they discuss the nature of reality. Anything that clicks is real and all right” (348). She tries to understand the modern bent of her son Ranny who loves “noise, size, numbers” (348) when Ralph reminds her that she too was a modern in her youth breaking with the tradition, she justifies her attitude saying that she was fighting for justice then. Ada sees the gulf of difference between the old faith and new craze. While Ada is very eagerly concerned with her husband and son. Ellen Glasgow contrasts her with a modern mother who leaves her teething baby in the case of the nursing doctor and goes to a movie with her husband.

Ellen Glasgow makes a close study of the lasting strength of human relationships, both domestic and communal, by putting fortitude and courage, outstanding virtues of her protagonist, to severe test. The feeble minded Ralph takes fancy to the wayward, wild, selfish, arrogant and flirtatious Minna Bergen who proves troublesome to her parents. Ada’s fidelity helps to make her love last longer. Besides being a good wife, she is a good mother to Ranny. She patiently teaches him good, disciplined habits. She takes care of her father who is becoming old.

Murberry Street is the quiet background, away from the dilirium of an ailing world, which shelters those human lives affected by the Depression. “It has come to seem like one big family” (313). Miss Glasgow analysed man’s role in a community. She praises the concern shown by those strong persons who stand as pillars of the
society and radiate strength and energy to all the needy around them. At Ironside Grandmother Fincastle, John Fincastle, Dr. Updike have lived such exemplary lives. When Ralph and Minna meet with an accident, one Mr. Hill picks them up and joins Ralph in hospital. Mr. Bergen stays with Ada in the hospital.

Miss Glasgow is sad that even a hospital is not exempted from the improper ways of the world. A place which needs utmost attention and every care is hopelessly neglected by the self-centred irresponsible and indifferent workers.

The queerest thing in life was that nobody wanted to work the right way simply because it was the right way, not even for the sick and the dying.

Even the necessary maintenance of cleanliness and the simplest decencies are miserably absent, yet nobody dares to complain for it enjoys political backing. Being unable to bear the terrible conditions in the hospital, Ada gets Ralph discharged as soon as he is barely fit enough.

Miss Glasgow elaborates her conception of civilized persons. Love of an independent spirit, self-sufficiency, consideration for others etc. are their distinguishing characteristics. It is a long cherished dream of Miss Glasgow that the society be full of such people. She endows these virtues to her male protagonist, John Fincastle. When Ralph’s long illness drains the family fund, John tries to be as less burdensome as possible.

Miss Glasgow focuses on the sense of responsibility felt by young women in contrast to the wildness seen in the younger generation in general. A welcome change in the social attitude towards working women increases their number. Dr. Updike who visits Ralph at home, observes subtly “... [ ... ] In the next fifty years a woman who sits at home in the evening will be as extinct as the dodo” (350). He encourages Ada’s
going to work in Shadwell’s shop to pool their lost savings once again. Through the character of Dr. Updike, Miss Glasgow’s idea of an ideal relation between man and community finds a fine expression. Many a time he comes to the rescue of the Fincastles. Earlier, he secures a job for John Fincastle, when he is tried for heresy and deposed (45-46). He sends milk for Meggy when she is ill (92). He purchases the manse and holds it for the Fincastles after a third party sells it to pay the taxes. He offers to return it to them at the original cost (351).

To be sure, Updike’s behaviour could owe as much to his medical training as to the milieu. He appears to be more in the community than of it. He is not, for example, part of the herd who pursue Ralph until the poor fellow weds Rowan’s daughter. [...] (Raper, 1980; 157)

Ellen Glasgow presents her severe dissatisfaction over the decaying systems in the commercial world, which often lead to a sudden collapse in the business. William Ruffner, Bergen’s son-in-law had earned sufficient money to build a bigger house than he planned. But as the Depression affects the Stock Exchange, his business is ruined and he becomes a bankrupt. Ellen Glasgow denounces the growing selfishness in men which prevents them from making “sacrifices even for their own children” (359). Through John, Miss Glasgow comments,

Shelters and systems and civilizations were all overwhelmed in time [...] by the backward forces of ignorance, of barbarism, of probity (359).

Yet, Miss Glasgow believes that the world is in possession of an indestructible will toward life.

Miss Glasgow celebrates the power of virtue to generate its reflection in others who lack it. The qualities of courage and fortitude in a person are potential enough to affect others and fill their minds with these two healthy traits. John Fincastle is an embodiment of these traits and often people at Ironside draw them from him in their
hour of need. When William is bankrupt, his wife Rosa tries to gather courage from John Fincastle and she sends a word for him.

People always send for him when they’re in trouble. That used to surprise me in Ironside. Though he lacks everything that they have, he seems to have something they’ve lost – or perhaps never had (360).

Ellen Glasgow makes a deep study of the role of environment, besides heredity, in moulding one’s personality. The powerful events which shake the very structure of society bring to the surface the dormant morality of a person. Though the institution of family shows signs of breaking up, there are still many more who cling to the roots of the old order. The Fincastles have been undergoing many hardships, including financial, yet they are pleasantly bound together. Ada happily reflects. “[…]. In Mulberry Street, […] there must be other families like ours, holding together through success and failure” (364). Ada is afraid of her son, Ranny’s future in a flighty world, dominated by violence. The living conditions made poor by both moral degeneration and horrible monetary problems have their effect on many families. Ada tries to fill the void in the heart of the disabled Ralph, by giving back to him “his pride in himself and his masculine vanity (366). Real scholarship comes to no help. John loses his job as a teacher. Young Bertie Rawlings, with his Ph.D. cannot find a job for himself.

Miss Glasgow shows that poverty or disaster is one touchstone to prove the strength of endurance. “Misfortunes never come singly” (371), but they do bring forth the elasticity of endurance, charity and generosity. She sheds light on how the wretched economic crisis of 1932 gave rise to moral decay, leading to a dying civilization.

Vein of Iron signals Glasgow’s definitive retreat before modernism, her inability to confront change that did not conform to her idea of progress, to comprehend alienation as a condition of contemporary life, or to grapple with the requirement of renewed self-definition in the fictional context of a dislocated world. Scarred and grim, her people denounce the
moderns and withdraw into a haven of inherited wisdom (Thiebaux, 1982; 163).

Miss Glasgow expresses her strong concern and deep dissatisfaction over the state of the world, through Ada’s reflection.

Distraught, chaotic, grotesque, it was an age, [...] of cruelty without moral indignation, of catastrophe without courage. Movie-minded children pounced in bands from the alleys. The nimble wits and legs of bandits were matched against the sluggish law and the heavy-footed police. Every class, every period of life even, demanded more freedom and stranger excitements (373).

While the people of lower classes are fighting valiantly with wretched poverty, the rich are indulging themselves in such forbidden sports as prize fighting, fox-hunting, horse racing, gambling and pari-mutuel betting (374). In contrast to this, there is also the charitable society dispensing food to the poverty-stricken people. As Ada’s endurance is strengthened, Ralph’s patience weakens in the same ratio. He is given to drink. Ada’s agony makes him to give it up. Like Gabriella, Ada pities the country clergyman who is reduced to live on charity. Miss Glasgow expresses her bitter animosity over such a humiliation.

[...] She (Ada) felt a vague resentment against society, against the world, against God, but, most of all, against human nature (380).

The many hardships drive Ada to penetrate into her own innerself. “Is God punishing me because I killed Grandmother (...) the idea seemed ludicrous. (...) If I had my life to go over, I suppose I’d do differently, “she thought” (383) (italics mine). Ada’s mental journey towards mature wisdom is in perfect progress. Despite the hard blows, Ada is satisfied that she is able to maintain homely ties, like many others.

All over the world, there were nameless wives and mothers still baking and scrubbing and washing in the hope that imperfect human ties might remain linked together. (384)
Miss Glasgow is consistently concerned with the degenerating morals of the aristocrats and their evasive idealism. The Ada who does not like to visit the rich Blands to whom she is connected by her mother—"I’d love to see them, but not now. I want to feel as dignified as they are before I claim kinship" (296) is ready to put aside her self-respect and seek help for her neighbours, the Hamblens who are badly affected by the bankruptcy of the Queenborough Central and Savings Bank. But the lady bluntly expresses her inability to help, as her son, one of the directors of the Bank, is himself in trouble. Ada is sorry for the Hamblens who “belonged to an age when vehemence was still regarded as vulgar. All their fine qualities, industry, veracity, self-denial were […] antiquated, […]. Nothing could stay young forever, not even the cardinal virtues” (392).

Miss Glasgow exposes the aristocrats’ shallowness, hypocrisy, ignorance and their unpardonable insensitivity to human misery around them. When Ada tells her that her father wrote books, Mrs. Bland says,

Books? Well, I don’t read. Nobody that I know ever opens a book. (402)

While denying any help to the Hamblens, she does not feel ashamed to inform the grand party being arranged for her granddaughter on her birthday. Miss Glasgow condemns their selfishness:

Each human being lived in its own cell of clay, confined within an inert speck of creation and indifferent to the other millions of cells by which it was surrounded (404).

Miss Glasgow stresses the necessity of an improvement in human nature to promote happy ties among them. Virtues like generosity, sympathy and understanding are to be cultivated. Ada, inspite of her meagre income, helps the old carpenter, Mr. Midkiff by sending through the Bergens enough money to feed him during the poverty
stricken days. She is greatly moved by his terrible humility and oxlike resignation when he loses his meagre reserve in the bank which he saved for his funeral expenses. Ada feels, "(...) the pathos of life, (...) was worse than the tragedy" (394). She tries to instil courage and hope in Mr. Midkiff. "It won't do you any good to sit and brood. You are strong for your age" (395). The long suffering makes Ralph cynical - "(...) it would take a new God to make over human nature" (405), but Ada remains the same optimistic - "(...) if we wait long enough, everything will come back, and we shall all be happy again" (407). The strong feeling for the family bond keeps them together "we've been happy together" (411), inspite of the terrible suffering. But the Hamblens fail to meet their wretched condition. For fear of the humiliation of going to the alm house, they commit suicide. Ralph also donates generously but imprudently, half of his week's salary towards the funeral expenses. John Fincastle, the personification of fortitude prays, "May all that have life be delivered from suffering" (414). He unhesitatingly sacrifices his only fine coat for Mr. Bertie Rawlings to attend an interview. Miss Glasgow denounces the growing materialism in the present generation of people. "Could the human race, glutted with horrors of its own making, survive upon a material basis alone?" (419), John Fincastle wonders. His optimism looks forward to a bright future in Ranny's confident words, "I'm going to do something" (422). He perceives his approaching death and decides to leave for the manse at Ironside, to save his burial charges. In this early life, he is absorbed in the pursuit of truth in his own way which makes him an outcast and places his family in uncomfortable circumstances. He agonizes over the miserable life his dependents have had because of his attention to his innerself. But his life is a journey from his early, necessary self-absorption to his equally necessary recognition of how his life is bound up with the welfare of others. He
leads Ada to her rejuvenating decision to stay in Iron side where the ancestral land and family heritage will sustain them. On his way back to the manse, he is guided by memories of his mother, and at the end, before he dies, the last thing he sees is his mother's face: “the dark face-dark and stern and bright-watching beyond the panes was the face of his mother” (457).

Ellen Glasgow analyses the importance of heredity. Ada has inherited her fundamental quality from her forbears. Though she is exhausted of her last cent, she does not lose hope. After John's death, they decide to return to their magnificent manse, a “perpetual remembrance” (459), which is the source of their strength and courage. With her ripe wisdom she is able to conquer Ralph's grim, bitter feelings. Through Ada, Ellen Glasgow articulates her understanding of the principle of survival as a matriarchally charged force. Remembering all her ancestors, especially her Grandmother Fincastle and Great-great-grandmother Tod, Ada had a sense, more or feeling than a vision of the dead generations behind her,

 [...] the dead generations (...) were lending her their fortitude; they were reaching out to her in adversity. This was the heritage they had left. She could lean back on their strength; she could recover that lost certainty of continuing tradition (461).

While John leads Ada finally to her strong maternal ancestors as a source of strength, it is Ada who first leads her father away from that home to a mechanical and barren life in the city where both of them experience a necessary testing of their fortitude and a blessed transformation. Ada's discovery of her innate strength to restore her own creative and inherited order completes her journey. She visualizes rebuilding the ruined manse, their loving homestead, planting a garden, finding work with her husband, in ways that bind her to “the first Fincastle” (460). Both John and Ada are dreamers,
Vein of Iron can be considered an epitome of all the values she has upheld, all her considerations, be they ethical or social, which she time and again establishes in her novels. By making Ada to come back to their ancient manse, Miss Glasgow seems to suggest that the young should fall back upon their glorious past in order to fill their nerves with enough strength, courage and fortitude to progress towards the future. Vein of Iron was an instant success. Miss Glasgow’s novel commanded the entire front pages of the book review sections of the New York Times and the New York Herald Tribune. It was praised highly by critics and was selected by The Book-of-the-Month Club. More than 1,00,000 copies were sold and it stood as the second-best seller of 1935. It was the first of her novels to be made into a film.
IN THIS OUR LIFE

Human relationship, to endure, must be woven of tough fiber underneath the gentler emotions.

-- Ellen Glasgow

After finishing Vein of Iron in April 1935, Miss Glasgow felt that it would be the last novel and she might not be able to write any more. In the autumn of the same year she realized that “a new novel was forcing its way into the lighted spaces within” (Glasgow: 1943, 246-47). The result was In This Our Life (1941) in which she makes “an analysis in fiction of the modern temper” which she perceives in the community around her as “confused, vacillating, uncertain and distracted from permanent values” (Glasgow, 1943; 249). To clarify many of the misreadings of this novel, Miss Glasgow wrote Beyond defeat wrote as a sequel to it. It was posthumously published in 1966. While in Vein of Iron she studies the strength of fortitude and the deep instinct for survival – with the help of which Ada Fincastle begins to rebuild her lives – in this novel she focuses on “the conflict of human beings with human nature, (and) of civilization with biology” (Glasgow, 1943; 250). Miss Glasgow observes the changing scene around her, in which “Scientific civilization (...) has destroyed the life of the soul” (Glasgow, 1943; 252). She had learnt that nations decay from within more often than they surrender to outward assault. The disintegration of character the decline of human relationships, weakening moral fibre, the struggle of average man with the forces of life become the matrix of this novel (Glasgow, 1943; 252).

In her perfect rendering of the “interior life of a community”, she reflects on a crumbling civilization owing to the absence of moral sense (Glasgow, 1943; 249). More than the fall of values, Miss Glasgow is interested in the many upheavals they
cause in the life of a woman. She divides her attention between her female protagonist Roy and her father Asa, one of her civilized men.

Regarding the meaning of the novel, Ellen Glasgow, in her letter to Van Wyck Brooks, writes: "(...) failure lies not in defeat but in surrender to life. (...), the whole theme was condensed into Roy’s cry in the last paragraph. “I want something to hold by! I want something good!” All through her confusion and blind groping she had been moving toward that search for “something good” and all through the book I was writing with that cry in my mind (Letters, ed. Rouse, 1958; 283). Through their actions and reactions to the many relationships within the family and outside in the community, Miss Glasgow draws a final picture of the prevalent conditions in the society around her. Asa’s life is embittered by his disastrous marriage to Lavinia and by family obligations. Roy’s life is tumbled by her sister, Stanley’s selfishness and by the vacillations of the two men in her life, Peter Kingsmill and Craig Fleming. As Stanley’s engagement is to take place in a week, she elopes with Peter, Roy’s husband, in an unscrupulous way. For a brief period, there develops an attraction between Craig and Roy but with Stanley’s return after Peter’s suicide Craig is once again drawn towards Stanley. Despite all disillusions, Roy makes a desperate search for the meaning of life. In Asa’s assurance to Roy – “You will find what you are looking for” there is an optimistic note. (Glasgow: 1941; 467).*

Believing that her “latest book came to a pause rather than to an end,” (Letters, ed. Rouse, 1958; 328). Ellen Glasgow wrote a sequel which “has developed, (...)
into the nature of a modern parable, with symbolic overtones”. The sequel deals

*Ellen Glasgow, In This Our Life, Harcourt, Brace and Company, New York, 1941.
All further references are to this edition. 195
with the major figures in this earlier novel. The scene is placed in the autumn of 1942, more than three years after the close of In This Our Life. The whole drama occurs in a single day, in the town of Queenborough, and on James River. The two older women embody the dying or dead past, so deeply planted in tradition, and in a declining social order, that they are unable to adjust themselves to a changing world, or to accept the unknown future, of which Roy's child by an unknown father is the living symbol.

Asa and Kate, on the farm, rooted, not in a decaying tradition, but in nature and in simple goodness of life, represent “the part of tradition that lives on, by adjustment, that does not repudiate the unknown and the untried” (Letters, ed. Rouse, 1958; 340) (italics mine). That Miss Glasgow believes in the happy blend of the old tradition with the healthy trends of the new is explicit in her letter. A persistent implication for the preservation of family — a great contribution of the old tradition — runs throughout her novels. A disintegrating house is a paradigm of chaotic society. In the words of Marcelle Thiebaux:

Glasgow insures the break down in human ties among the upper-class family members and between the whites and the blacks, who are bound together by ancestral blood. She saw the general “weakening of the moral fibre giving rise to greed, selfishness, hypocrisy and betrayal and eventually infecting the entire culture of America with vulgar materialism (1982; 163).

In her mature years of ripe wisdom, Ellen Glasgow felt more and more the necessity of family bound strongly by love as a source of better human relations, and as the only antidote to the disintegrating society. The anarchy or chaos, the result of a total break with tradition or a necessary discipline, threatens the very existence of human being. The stable ground under his feet being shaken by a terrible loss of faith in order, the baffled man drifts without aim or without direction like a leaf in storm. Ellen Glasgow, having perceived this miserable state of society, tries to reflect in this novel
"the disorders of a world without moorings and driven by unconscious fears toward the verge of catastrophe" (Glasgow, 1943; 256). The lost Englishman who has suffered more than Roy has, has been completely adrift since his mother's death and he whom Roy meets in the park, embodies "a modern malady, an individual fear of life which was seeking to lose itself in a collective fear of death" (Glasgow, 1943; 256).

While the other young characters symbolize the negative aspects of youth, Roy the female protagonist, represents the positive side and makes a desperate trial to make her life meaningful. In her ceaseless search for happiness, she realizes the deplorable absence of "something"—a strong moral code of conduct which envelops abiding love, mutual understanding, selfless devotion to the impersonal end of life. Her anguish is clear in her repeated words: "I want something to hold by. I want something good!" (467). As she expresses in her preface, Miss Glasgow has a deep sympathy for "that special aspect of youth—yesterday, today and tomorrow—with which I have always felt most sympathetic: that youth of adventurous heart, of the everlasting search for perfection, of the brave impulse to hazard everything upon the first, or upon the last, chance of happiness. Roy was a part of life, with its softness and its hardness, with its strength and its weakness. She was not ever on the outside, waiting for something to happen" (1943; 255).

That Ellen Glasgow wanted the final scene, in which Roy meets the stranger in the park, to be actually the beginning of the novel is stated in her preface. But, for fear of disturbing the organic structure of the novel, she retained the complete episode in the end because it possesses illuminating symbolic implications regarding her major theme—"the conflict of human beings with human nature, of civilization with biology" (1943; 250, 255, 256). In Roy are embedded many seeds of hopeful future. Being a fountain
of love she can build a strong, happy home. Like Grandmother Fincastle, Roy is capable of binding the members of her family with her compassionate understanding. Her sympathetic cognition of the stranger’s need for love which he is not likely to find “served as a flare of light in the darkness of her own mind” (Glasgow, 1943; 256). Her meeting with the stranger serves a double purpose focussing on her deep disgust with the debilitating tradition and her unconditional readiness to satiate a thirsty heart with her shower of love. With the heroines of Glasgow, indulging in physical love is often a sign of break with sterile conventions. Through the creation of Roy, Ellen Glasgow transcends the victimization that threatens her strongest female protagonists. Like Ada Fincastle who envisions in the final scene to build a home and start again, Roy feels as if she has overtaken time and “walks into a new age and new world” which is devoid of the infirmities of the present age (465).

In Part-I – “Family Feeling” – Ellen Glasgow focuses on her concern for two important institutions, family and marriage which are interlinked. She contrasts Asa’s traditional attitude towards them with Roy’s modern way of dealing. Both ways yield miserable results as neither Asa is happy nor Roy is content. Ellen Glasgow seems to suggest an ideal mingling of the traditional past, discarding its trite elements, with the vital and exuberant modernity. She emphasizes the necessity of a strong family based on healthy, moral traits which can direct the immense innate energy of man in a proper way. Much of the narration is done through her male protagonist, Asa’s consciousness. Through him Ellen Glasgow satirises the ‘progress’ or civilization of the society which means the demolition of the strong manse to give place to “a new service station” ( 3). The magnificent buildings and big trees suggest the strength of old order. Seeing the doomed house Asa is lost in a reverie of his childhood. His competent elder sister
successfully instilled a sense of mediocrity in his mind. In the character of Asa, Ellen Glasgow studies the importance of heredity and environment in moulding one’s character. Asa’s father, Daniel Timberlake, a man of new ideas, was not approved by his partners. Having lost his wealth and health Daniel committed suicide and his death reduced the Timberlakes to poverty and deprived Asa of his University education. He remains an average man on surface though he is a “sleeping giant” (7) inside. His mother turned their home into a lodge and supported the family. Asa’s fear of offending his mother’s indispensable lodgers later became his fear of life. Before he was thirteen he began his work in the factory, which once belonged to the Timberlakes.

Miss Glasgow praises the ideal relation that existed between Daniel and the factory workers whom Daniel knew by name and face. But the present masters who bought the tobacco factory in an auction, do not know even Asa and still less his connection to the factory. At fifty-nine, Asa feels insecure about his future when he outlives his usefulness. Through Asa, Miss Glasgow comments on the irony of life that one gets what one wants very rarely. Despite his abiding fighting spirit and his hatred for dependence, Asa is forced to depend on William Fitzroy, his wife’s uncle, a staunch pillar of stock exchange and of St. Luke’s Episcopal Church. Asa resents William’s avuncular interest in his younger daughter Stanley and constant slights to his favourite elder daughter Roy.

In the characters of Roy, Stanley and Andrew, Asa’s only son, Miss Glasgow examines the role of environment and heredity. Roy inherits all the good qualities of Asa – his fortitude, courage, fighting spirit and love of independence. While Stanley takes after her tormenting mother with all her selfishness, Andrew luckily escapes these perils of environment and heredity, by turning out to be a healthy and cheerful person.
But Lavinia is thoroughly affected by them as she inherits the mean qualities of her family about which Asa’s mother warns him. “Though excellence may be seldom or never handed down in the blood, meanness, (...) is a fatal inheritance” (16). Being a plain girl, she was tormented by men in her childhood and youth. These wounded instincts were assuaged by tormenting her husband under the veil of ill-health. Asa regrets his decision in marrying Lavinia against his mother’s remonstrance and the aloof disapproval of William Fitzroy. Yet Asa remains with her because of his family feeling and faith in the institution of marriage. Miss Glasgow contrasts the morally skewed atmosphere of family life at Queenborough with the wholesome pleasures at Hunter’s Fare, a farm of Asa’s friend Jack. The only happy time in Asa’s life is his visits to Hunter’s Fare on Sundays where he ‘lives’ in the company of Jack’s widow Kate Oliver and her two pointers.

Through Asa, Miss Glasgow reflects on the youth of her day. She is highly critical about their unbridled passion for freedom, recklessness and mostly their aimless lives. Though Roy possesses these qualities to some extent, she has the humane traits of Asa also. Peter, Roy’s surgeon husband, is reckless and “deficient in the true nature of man” (17). Craig Fleming, to whom Stanley is to be married in a week, reflects the confused state of the society with many entangled ideologies. Asa finds him as stable as a weathercock. He sees through Stanley’s selfish and jealous nature in preferring Craig. Stanley always takes sadistic delight in grasping any object that gives happiness to others. Because Craig is engaged to another girl, Stanley picks him up. Spoilt by her mother Lavinia and her lecherous old uncle William Fitzroy who gives her gifts in return for her flirtatious flattery, Stanley learns to be selfish and deficient in moral sensitivity. Miss Glasgow reflects in Stanley, the new Southern girl who inherits the
evasive idealism of her Victorian forbears but not their self-restraint; soft and winsome but unfeeling, willing to exploit her physical beauty for personal ends. Glasgow calls her "the soulless little pleasure-seeker (...). She embodies the perverse life of unreason, the logical result of that modern materialism which destroys its own happiness" (Glasgow, 1943; 25).

Using these characters as foil, Miss Glasgow focuses on the strength and difference in Roy's character. She is "self-reliant and unyielding" and has "some hard fine grain of integrity. She possessed all the qualities (...) that men have missed and wanted in women; courage, truthfulness, a tolerant sense of humour, loyalty to impersonal ends" (21). Though she is known for her self-respect, she has absorbing devotion to her husband Peter who had several romantic or moral entanglements before marriage. In her overwhelming love for Peter, Roy overlooks this defect in him and she is even ready to sacrifice herself for him, if need arises. Because of Peter's interest, she works in an interior decorating shop.

While instability and disorder are the marks of her day, Miss Glasgow shows how Parry Clay, a negro boy, connected to both the Timberlakes and the Fitzeroys through blood, is different from the youth of his day. He has high aspirations to rise and wants to study law. Though Asa, being a civilized man, understands and sympathises with Parry's ambition, in the society of spurious values, the educated negroes are distrusted. Miss Glasgow is always sympathetic towards negroes and denounces the unjust treatment meted out to them "it was dark thickness of race, that impenetrable obscurity, which was welling up among the intricate ties of human relationship" (30). As he himself is helpless, Asa regrets his inability to help Parry.
Marriage is one of the institutions with which Ellen Glasgow is consistently concerned. She makes a thorough study of different kinds of marriages which yield varied results affecting the couple directly and the society in a distant way. Probing into the interior of the major characters who perceive some distressing apprehension, Ellen Glasgow suggests the approaching disaster. Through the skilfully juxtaposed scenes in which these people express their anxiety, she builds up the fretful atmosphere indicating catastrophe – a shameless and unscrupulous marriage founded on infatuation and jealousy. Simultaneously, she also studies critically the nature of relationship existing among the members of that community. She contrasts Asa’s strong adherence to family feeling with Roy’s modern outlook regarding marriage. “It isn’t like the old way of marriage. Neither of us believe in that old way. Both of us are perfectly free to change if we wish – if we . . .” (41). She is free from the intangible web of tradition, caught in which Asa struggles desperately and yearns for his freedom. Though Roy enjoys a happy married life with Peter, she does not want to be a dependent on him. She shares the weaknesses of her age – disorderliness, love of independence, smoking – which are not approved by the genteel tradition. Being a shrewd woman she sees through Stanley and is anxious about Peter. She wishes “it (the marriage) were over” (43). With subtle irony Ellen Glasgow describes Stanley to be the source of Roy’s trouble: “She was kind to her mother; she was gentle with old people (though she refused to bother about them); she was never out of temper, unless one stood between her and something she wanted” (21-22). While Stanley enjoys receiving many gifts from the incestuous William Fitzroy, Roy hates to be at the receiving end, like Gabriella. “I despise having to be grateful” (43). Asa regrets his helplessness in being forced to accept charity from William; “most unworldly men and women are still worldly for their children” (43).
Asa holds Roy very near to his heart. He believes strongly "Roy's fine, through and through. She's as square as a man" (51).

In Lavinia's character, Miss Glasgow studies the importance of upbringing and the nature of her marriage with Asa. Being neglected by her father and treated morbidly by her malicious younger brother, Lavinia developed a crooked nature: "All the beauty she had been denied in youth, all the emotional ecstasy she had craved and missed, had been miraculously fulfilled through the simple extension of her maternal ego. In Stanley, she could live more intensely and more abundantly than she had ever lived in herself" (48). Vexed with his hypochondriac wife, Asa looks forward for the day when William would bequeath her enough money to support her which would free him from the clutches of Lavinia and then he would live happily at Hunter's fare in the company of Kate Oliver and her dogs, free from the hypocrisy and sham of his society. Miss Glasgow associates her love of dogs with the virtuous characters like Asa, Kate and Parry, while those, devoid of humane qualities, like Lavinia, possess a strong dislike for dogs. Lavinia's practical wisdom penetrates into Stanley's mind. She hints Asa about Stanley losing interest in Craig as soon as the 'thrill' and 'excitement' in taking him away from Gertrude Bollon to whom he is engaged, dies. Through her Miss Glasgow offers a critique of the younger generation. "The whole younger generation looks to me like a sum that doesn't add up ( . . . ). The young are trying to build happiness without any foundation" (50-51). Though Asa agrees with her - "They are always running away from life" (51) - in her opinion about the young, he feels the loss of his softness in her dominating presence. With a hardened heart he clings to turns out to be sarcastic in his conversation with Lavinia. He is amused at her smothered ejaculation: "I sometimes think Asa, that you act like this just to make trouble" (52). The tradition-
bound Asa regrets his unsuitable marriage. "A little freedom for our generation might have spared us great misery (...) for the sake of a past tradition he had spent nearly thirty years doing things that he hated and not doing things that he liked" (52-53). Through him Ellen Glasgow suggests the wise policy of adapting oneself for the best part of tradition leaving the irrelevant conventions. "A great tradition is an expensive injury. (...) Falling back on the past may lend inspiration and it may also lead to gradual hardening of the arteries" (44).

Minerva, the negro washerwoman, plays a vital role in exposing the Stanley – Peter affair. Ellen Glasgow contrasts the shallowness and hypocrisy of the upper class with the simplicity and truthfulness in negroes. Asa finds the noise and glare in the party on the eve of Stanley's marriage quite suffocating. Minerva sympathises with Asa hiding himself in the kitchen unable to bear the hullabaloo. "But coloured parties were best, because white folks had never really learned how to have fun." The coloured are people "satisfied to make happiness out of a little or nothing (...). They did it just by living and not studying about it" (75). Unlike the aristocrats who live on spurious values, Minerva, enjoys a contented life with her husband Abel and son Parry. Asa is anxious about Roy's worried look, despite Roy's assurance: "I can take care of myself. I can manage my life" (73). Roy's self-confidence reminds Gabriella. Though Asa suspects something wrong in the party, it is Minerva, who discovers the unwelcome intimacy between Peter and Stanley.

Ellen Glasgow throws light on mother-daughter relationships. Though Roy has a job, she feels more responsible than Stanley towards her sick mother. But Lavinia is drawn more towards Stanley, her replica, than towards Roy. However, "long ago she had accepted the fact that she and her children could never learn to speak the same or
even a familiar language” (92). The changing time has widened the gap between generations. Miss Glasgow brings in one of the ironies of life as Lavinia, instead of worrying about Roy, shows more concern for Stanley who, she fears, may spoil her life, by marrying Craig. Roy’s intelligent assessment proves to be true. “She won’t spoil her life, Mother. She’ll only spoil Craig’s — or . . .” (93). She also understands how “radical” is Craig. “For all his hard-boiled theories, he’s positively mushy about Stanley” (93). Ellen Glasgow contrasts the meaning of marriage and the seriousness of the institution as held by the older with that of the younger generation. While Asa, despite his unhappiness, clings to the code, Stanley, the representative of the younger generation feels, “Marriage isn’t one’s whole life (. . .). Nothing can ruin your life so long as you’re free to get up and run away (. . .). We have a right to be happy” (95-96). Though Roy also believes in freedom in marriage, it is not for her selfish end but to make others happy, unlike the selfish Stanley. Despite her love for Stanley, Lavinia understands the worth of her daughter and pitied Craig who took fancy for her. “He (Craig) was weak (. . .). Any man was weak who sacrificed his convictions or his purpose in life for a woman, especially for the painted shell of a girl. Though she adored Stanley, she had, even as a mother, no illusions about her daughter” (102).

Miss Glasgow exposes the shallowness that abides in the marriage of William and Charlotte. While William thinks that his wife lacks “that vast inner area of waking and sleeping dreams” (113), Charlotte learns that “the ways of circumventing a husband are many and varied. They required diplomacy” (118). William is an embodiment of materialism with all its weaknesses. Despite his old age, at eighty, he loves to pursue pretty girls. He is ready to squander huge amounts on Stanley for her flirtatious flattery but he is not ready to help Parry, the negro boy, in his studies. In an inhuman way he
dismisses Parry saying “your race doesn’t need lawyers” (124). He even advises him to look for a job of a waiter or a porter or a postman and promises him to pay for looking after Stanley’s sports car. Miss Glasgow deplores the strained relation between the egocentric aristocrats and the negroes.

Ellen Glasgow satirizes the double moral standards of men which crumbles the institution of marriage. Despite Roy’s loyalty and adoration, Peter falls a prey to Stanley’s selfish motives. Stanley elopes with Peter as her marriage with Craig is to take place in a week. Asa is worried about the misery of Roy, “the core of his heart” (134). Knowing the fickle and jealous nature of Stanley, he rightly suspects her of being jealous of Roy, the sight of Roy’s happiness aroused a secret destructive instinct which still survived, under the sham called civilization, in most men and women?” (135). Miss Glasgow contrasts the response of Roy with that of Craig to the situation. While Craig feels desperate and drinks heavily to forget himself, Roy stands unbreakable. Seeing Craig, Asa reflects, “what feeble folk are human beings in a crisis, ( . . . ) especially modern human beings” (141). But the crisis brings out the courage and inner strength of Roy. She refuses to be pitied and protests against Asa to find fault with Peter for Peter is aware of his freedom. Roy is not as weak a person to worship a phantom. She is ready to give legal freedom to Peter through Craig who is a lawyer. She is self-confident “I’ll save myself. Nobody, not even Peter, is going to spoil my life ( . . . ). I have to save myself as I can. It may not be the right way, but it’s mine” (148). Miss Glasgow emphasizes the necessity of family feeling to be strengthened by love and mutual understanding and denounces the falsity that envelopes it, making it meaningless. “It has done harm enough, I know, but at least it held things together when the world rocked,” Asa reflects (148). Her disillusionment only hardens Roy, she
believes that “hard things don’t break easily” (149). Her fortitude and courage come to
the surface. She decides to “buy a new hat (... a red hat” (155) suggesting her
readiness to take the challenge of life and willingness to fight till she wins her victory.
She struggles hard to conquer the passion for love. Being stern and inflexible, she
resolves, “I will not be defeated” (161). She sympathizes with Craig, who she thinks
must be fighting with hatred and bitterness, like her. In trying to understand her own
self, Roy perceives her mother’s tormenting psychology. Ellen Glasgow makes a
thorough exploration into the depths of human heart and probes into the reason which
causes maladjustment of man to life. Lavinia who tasted cruelty, becomes cruel in
order to conquer that cruelty. Roy decides to be hard and cruel to escape from cruelty.
More than her mother’s selfishness, she is hurt by her father’s pity. “There was a nerve
of sympathy between them, a mental or emotional connection, which ran below the
uneven surface of family life” (166).

Through Roy, Ellen Glasgow, makes clear her own views on realism and
antipathy for sentimentalism and evasive idealism. “Most of our trouble in the South
comes from sloppiness. Sloppy thinking, sloppy feeling and sloppy workmanship”
(167). Roy’s realistic point of view breaks the shell of hypochondria of Lavinia who
reflects, “she had been driven from one strong hold of faith to another. Sentiment had
failed her; chivalry had failed her; feminine weakness and sex compulsion had alike
failed her; and it now appeared that her last lonely refuge of hypochondria was about to
be undermined” (167). Roy understands her mother’s fascination for Stanley, who is
actually an embodiment of her fantasy. Stanley possesses the beauty and charm which
Lavinia craved for in vain. In her attempt to cherish that dream, she clings to Stanley:
“After all, she is my baby” (168). Though Roy pities her mother, she hates her pretenses.

Ellen Glasgow is cynical while studying the root of successful marriage. After presenting a series of unhappy marriages — those of Asa and Lavinia, William and Charlotte, Roy and Peter — she probes into the secret of the successful marriage of Andrew and Maggie. While praising the practical intelligence of Maggie who has few desires but who would always take refuge in a delusion, through Roy, she wonders, “Did it simply mean (...) that human companionship, even at its best, is never enough? After all else had been given, does life still demand its share of self-deception?” Miss Glasgow regrets the miserable insufficiency of humane qualities which causes havoc in society.

In Part-II — “Years of Unreason” — Ellen Glasgow traces a chain of events that inevitably lead to considerable intimacy between Roy and Craig who are sailing in the same boat. Roy’s strength of character and her fortitude are put to severe test through Peter who becomes instrumental in her success. Through betrayal of love by Peter, Roy is deprived of her much adored husband. Having overcome the agony caused by Peter and Stanley, Roy proves her strength. The test is repeated by Peter’s unexpected death which snatches her lover for a second time, at the end, in a disgraceful way.

Asa’s weekly visit to Hunter’s Fare, a farm of his friend Jack Oliver, reinforces the necessary strength in Asa to face Lavinia’s cold humiliation. Ellen Glasgow describes the simple and unaffected life at the farm and Asa’s contended pleasure in the company of Kate Oliver, Jack’s widow who extends the same affection of her husband to Asa, and her two pointers, contrasting it with the hypocritical and artificial life at Queenborough. Lavinia’s great dislike of dogs, deprives Asa a happy and loving,
though mute, company of the dogs. Asa shares his creator’s love of dogs. He looks forwards to the day when Lavinia would be self-sufficient by the amount her uncle William is likely to bequeath her, so that he would be relieved of the burden of attending on her. At present, he is not wealthy enough to employ a nurse to which state he is reduced and so he binds himself though unhappily, to the duty of a husband. Kate’s genial company brings out the real Asa, which gives Asa utmost satisfaction. Similar to Asa’s visits to Hunter Fare, are Roy’s efforts to subjugate her agony by immersing herself in her job—interior decoration. Roy’s self-respect disdains others’ pity or any kind of help to mitigate her sorrow. She rejects William’s offer to send her to Europe for a change. “I don’t want anybody to do anything in the world” (176). Her refusal infuriates the egocentric William, for his pride is hurt. Roy meets Craig by accident and she turns to him for comfort because he has endured a similar agony.

Through Charlotte Fitzroy, Ellen Glasgow unveils the reason for William’s obvious lecherous interest in Stanley. “Stanley made an effort to charm him. Men are not ever too old to wallow in flattery” (194). She is sure that her husband would send a car to Stanley as requested by her in a letter to him, though she is not certain of him to help Parry Clay in his studies just because he does not belong to his race. Miss Glasgow exposes the ill-treatment given to the self-respecting negroes by the mean-natured aristocrats who take false pride in their superiority. She regrets that the hatred for the Yankees—“they called it moral indignation” (197)—played a serious role in disturbing human relations.

Ellen Glasgow criticises severely the shallowness and snobbery of the aristocrats through her delineation of William Fitzroy, an embodiment of all vices associated with material success. He cannot appreciate Roy’s self-respect and love of independence.
He indignantly comments; “All these modern-half-baked theories seem to have turned her head” (199). He disapproves of her brave efforts to keep up her self: “but it wasn’t womanly. I like a woman to be womanly” (200). He rails even at Stanley: “Tell her she needs a sound whipping more than she needs a car” (203). Through Asa Miss Glasgow exposes his real feeling; “I wonder how much of his anger with Stanley, for all its air of moral indignation, is mere jealousy in a perverted form?” (203). At last he concedes to send Stanley a car to be driven to Baltimone, where she stays, by Parry Clay, though he strongly detests Parry’s reading books and being influenced by those ideas. “I tell you the ideas people get out of books have made more trouble even than drink” (204). Miss Glasgow denounces the ignorant attitude of Southern people towards books, in all her novels.

While tracing the growing intimacy between Roy and Craig, Ellen Glasgow, through Asa, critically comments on the irresponsible, unstable and shallow nature of the youth of her day. “They don’t know what they really are, these young people, ( . . . ) but they obey an inner compulsion to make themselves appear worse. Was all their drinking, as well as their bad manners, which they called honesty, nothing more than bravado?” (207). Craig, with all his ‘radical’ ideas represents the youth of his age. As Asa believes that human behaviour if not human nature can be reformed and human appetites may be changed or controlled, Craig analyses the difference of attitudes of the old and the young. The old depend on the past tradition while the young totally reject it. Looking through the vascillating nature of Craig who cannot hold a conviction permanently but changes it from time to time, Asa understands why Stanley abandoned him. Stanley is crazy about in man and she recognizes it in Peter. However, Craig, bëfitting the youth of his times entertains “fantastic dreams and lost horizons” (209) –
“All we want to do is to make the world a little more decent” (209). Asa’s deep wisdom quickly perceives Roy’s serious adherence to ‘love’ inspite of her professed liberalism and modernism. Through Asa, Ellen Glasgow, penetrates into Roy’s heart. “If only she could learn to accept life and love less deeply, she would be happier in the future. Yet she took them so deeply (...), because she placed nothing above them”. Miss Glasgow stresses the importance of permanent values to be upheld by any one for a better life. “(...) could she ever find a refuge, or even security, in the things that are timeless? Or was she, like so many of her age and way of life, driven by forces she could not understand toward an end which was only a name” (209). Miss Glasgow expresses her sympathy for them, yet censures them for “they haven’t learned the first thing about order. They don’t know how to reason. They have fine ideas without a string of logic to hold them together. They have made a cult of loose thinking of disarrangement and rowdiness” (210). Roy is impressed by Craig’s exciting and passionate thoughts and comes close to him. She wonders at the role of chance which brought Peter and Craig into her life, by sheer accident.

While focusing on Roy-Craig relation, Ellen Glasgow throws more light on Roy’s inner consciousness – her finer qualities like pity, sympathetic understanding, quick perception, courage and her readiness to help the needy. She emphasizes the role of chance in Roy’s life which has, time and again, thrown Roy into heart-breaking misery, long back her meeting with Peter took place very accidentally, when she turned into an unknown road by mistake and Peter passing by her, looked back at her for instant. Roy reviews her life that she would have had a different life, had she not met Peter in such a way. A similar accident had occurred in Roy’s life, five months after Stanley’s elopement with Peter. While passing through Jefferson Park, quite
unexpectedly, she found Craig in a pitiably desolate condition. More than their similar state of misery and more than Roy’s sympathy which drew Roy towards Craig was her sympathetic understanding of her need to him. Perceiving his noble traits – “higher passions which distinguish between right and wrong, not only in the mass, but in individual relationships” – (220) and also the confused state of the present ideals, Roy took pity on him. She felt, it does not befit a man to be tramped down by “regrets and denials and betrayals of life” (222). Like Jason, Craig fails to fit into the frame designed by his father. While his father intended him to be a Southern gentleman, his own temperament turned him into a communist. The clash of interests weakens his fibre and he feels desperate when he meets a buffet from life “I can’t stand any more” (227). Roy attempts to instill her own courage into his mind, yet in the deep core of her heart she suspects quite ironically, “would this unpromising association prove to be as futile or as disappointing as most humanities? ( . . . ) Pity alone drew her to Craig yet she had learned that pity could become in itself a destructive force” (229). In his love Roy finds some freedom from restlessness. Gradually, she grows to accept and value his dependence on her.

Ellen Glasgow explores how the ‘dangerous innocence’ of Stanley can ruin her own happiness along with others. In a letter to her mother, she relates how Peter grows miserably impatient with her and how she is becoming more and more unhappy. With the moral support of Roy, Craig comes out of his pathetic state. Once again he plunges into action and tries to realise his dream of an ideal society where people like Asa need not be at the mercy of people like William Fitzroy. Roy is proud of her father “I’m Daddy’s daughter” (247). But like the youth of her age, she looks out for happiness besides security in marriage (257). They decide to marry the next April. Though Roy
loves her father more than she loves her mother, she takes care of them with equal responsibility. Miss Glasgow approves this sense of responsibility in the young. When Roy and Craig are in high spirits looking forward for their marriage to take place, they hear the death of Peter. Ellen Glasgow presents an unsuitable marriage without mutual understanding. She deplores the "dangerous appeal of an irresponsible innocence" (283) of Stanley which is an outcome of her 'sheltered life'. Stanley fails to understand Peter's mind and his means. Peter is unable to meet her extravagance, and even more it her flirting with other men. He shoots himself, unable to live with Stanley and still more unable to live without her. Through Asa Miss Glasgow reproaches her claim — "I had a right to be happy!" — by telling her "how could you expect happiness, my child, when you brought so much pain" (292). She feels that she does not deserve all the genuine sympathy the members of her family for her. Stanley's show of pathos had quite tragically brought out Roy's pity, she forgets the harm done by Stanley. It is Roy's pity and Craig's sympathy, ironically, that change the course of Roy's life. She also realizes that it is their craving for happiness that had almost killed her father.

Miss Glasgow explores the difference of attitudes between the old and the young. While the young - Roy - aspires happiness, the old never thought of it. "We didn't talk so much about happiness, (...) but we were brought up to think other things more important than happiness (...) like duty and personal responsibility" (303).

Miss Glasgow mocks the shallowness of the society. Mrs. Timberlake thinks of a "nice dark suit and a new black tie for the funerals in his own family" (307). Roy wonders how people like Lavinia and Stanley who never understand the depth of life, are able to get things they want. Nothing brings a change of vision in them. Miss Glasgow wonders how the vain nature of "youth - untarnished by misery, ( . . . ) could
ever have found a reason or a meaning in life?” It was all obscure, dark, formless; even though moments appeared to take form and grow with an inner radiance, yet in life as a whole, there was neither form nor illumination. A muddle in space” (308).

In Part III – “All Things New” – Miss Glasgow throws light on the Clays, the negro servants and the upbringing of Parry who, despite the humiliating mark of his race, aspires to study law. She deplores vehemently the unjust treatment meted out to the negroes and the unscrupulous exploitation of the weak by the inhuman and selfish rich. She presents a succession of events in which the self-pleasing actions of egocentric, unthinking and weak persons ruin miserably the lives of noble persons with finer traits like Asa, Roy and Parry.

Ellen Glasgow has always been sympathetic in her delineation of negro characters. It is quite ironical that while in the upper class, the institution of marriage is enveloped by hypocrisy and selfishness, in the lower cadre, it is supported by love and understanding. Miss Glasgow denounces the sham and evasive idealism in the rich but approvingly presents the simple and hard-working lives of the negroes. The religious-minded Minerva believes that her faith in the Lord and her prayers have brought back Abel, her husband from severe illness. But Parry, more pragmatic as the youth of his day, thinks that even without his mother’s prayers his father would have recovered. Though he has a few qualities in accordance with the fashion of the day, like love of jazz and swing music and belief in new ways and new notions, he does not drink, is not wild, and aimless and does not crave for absolute freedom like the youth of his day. Even as a child he showed interest in studies. As a student, he was nimble-witted and had won many prizes and even a scholarship. Despite William Fitzroy’s refusal to help him in studies, Parry is hopeful to become a lawyer. Mr. Craig promises to help him.
through Howard University. Parry readily accepts William's offer to look after Stanley's sports-car and drive her wherever she wants to go, so that he can save money for his education (320). Though he is "so light-colored he could pass for white, any day, in the North", he does not want to pass over like many Yankee Negroes of his day. Believing that a race is a race only when it withstands the buffets of life and comes out smiling, he feels proud of his race (319). He inherits the clean habits of his mother Minerva and always dresses himself well and looks smart. Through Minerva's consciousness, Ellen Glasgow shows the passage of six weeks after Peter's death as Minerva remembers Stanley's crazy drives, keeping Parry aside. Miss Glasgow presents an elaborate picture of Parry's character, to intensify the tragic effect of the pathetic situation in which he is put later.

Through Asa's consciousness, Ellen Glasgow exposes the evils of sheltered life. Being brought up under the protecting care of Lavinia who still feels her as a baby in her hands, Stanley has learnt nothing other than to make herself happy. Like the youth of her day she is self-centred and in seeking pleasure she never takes into consideration the inconveniences or troubles of others involved in it. Miss Glasgow uses her as a foil to Roy who has many nobler qualities. In her eagerness to make herself happy — by being extravagant and flirtatious with other men — she had driven Peter 'unconsciously' to his miserable end. Yet she is too ignorant and selfish to realize her role — "even if I killed Peter, it wasn't my fault" — and harps on her refrain, "I want to be happy again" (327). Miss Glasgow contrasts the flippant attitude of Stanley with the traditional outlook. Asa says, "In our day we took things harder, we thought about widowhood and (...) about all other passing afflictions, as tremendous disasters" (328). Having lost interest in Craig, Stanley wonders how Roy bears with "his prosy old theories"
(330). She even refuses to see him. All that she wants is unlimited freedom and wild drives in her car. When Parry comes, she tells him that she would go all by herself. Miss Glasgow focuses on her self-interest and pleasure-seeking. Asa regrets Stanley's indifferent attitude and feels that it is not fair that she alone, of us all, should appear untouched by her sorrow (335). Ellen Glasgow deplores the egocentric nature of the young, including Roy and Craig. “No one among them had solved the intricate problem of how one may take one's pleasure and still have it” (338). She exposes the hypocrisy of Stanley who pretends satisfaction at Roy’s love for Craig – “I’m glad she’s happy” (326), but she bursts out her jealousy before her father “I can’t bear to see other people happy when I’m so – so miserable” (340) (italics mine). As Stanley is too vain to understand the panicky state of the world due to war, she dreams of having a pleasure-trip to Europe. She implores her father, to seek William’s help, unmindful of William’s waning health and his many financial anxieties due to war.

Ellen Glasgow mocks the falsity that surrounds human relations especially when one is rich and dominant. When William is afflicted with “ulcer in his stomach” (346), all his nearest relatives feel happy. Asa reflects, “for thirty years they had cultivated the pretense – he satirically and Lavinia piously – that they both loved and respected William and would both be distressed when he died. (...) Now, for one searing, instant of truth, they (Asa and Lavinia) looked into each other’s unguarded eyes, while the screen of evasion shrivelled to ashes. She will be glad when William dies, he thought; and I – I shall be glad, too; and I wonder whether even Charlotte will be sorry. For no one, he told himself, would really regret William, least of all the men he had helped to make wealthy. . . .” (346-347). Miss Glasgow exposes this hypocrisy, an inevitable evil in the materialistic society.
Miss Glasgow makes a deep study of human nature and with a penetrating eye looks into the inner core of human beings. Charlotte tells Asa the many atrocities William committed in his business and now his fear of death makes him “anxious to make his peace with the next world” by sending “a cheque for a hundred thousand dollars to the Episcopal Orphanage” (350). Miss Glasgow unveils the unhealthy social conditions which encourage misdeeds. William regrets “I’ve done a lot of things in my life ( ... ) but when I come to look back on’em now, I’ll be dashed if I don’t seem to have done most of ‘em the wrong way” (352). Ellen Glasgow examines how environment plays a major role in moulding one’s character. William confesses his love of money which confers power. “I’d had a hard life, and I had to get even with the people around me. I had to prove to them that I was bigger than all of them put together” (353). With a little mellowness that is bestowed upon him by his impending death, he tries to “put my (his) affairs in better order” (354). He arranges “a comfortable little income” (356) to Lavinia who, he believes, “knows how to handle money without letting it slip through her finger” (355). He even admits his weakness for Stanley, “She was easy to look at when you were feeling hefty and strong” (358); but acknowledges the worth of Charlotte who always used to take shelter under diplomacy to meet his dominant and arrogant attitude; “but Charlotte ( ... ) is worth six of her (Stanley) when you’re down in the mouth” (358). His knowledge of approaching death softens William and he makes unreservedly a few honest statements regarding Stanley and Asa. He sees through the shallow and selfish Stanley: “She’s always been fond of what she could get out of me, ( ... ). Then, when she found out I wasn’t the easy game that I used to be, I reckon she sent you up here to see what you could make of me . . .” (360). William sincerely acknowledges Asa’s disinterest in his money and
his unsurmountable patience in bearing with Lavinia (362). He praises Asa's courage during many testing times: "That's what I call grit, and that's why I like this man Lavinia caught and married. He's not bright enough to set James River on fire, but he has grit. (...) When the time comes, you'll find he has more grit than all the rest of 'em put together. ..." (362).

Ellen Glasgow is severely critical about the deplorable egocentric attitude of the young. While Roy is indifferent to pay a visit to the sick William, Stanley who has been granted all her desires, except the last one—her pleasure trip—and who has caused terrible suffering to all, is inconceivably inhuman to wish "he'd die (...) but he won't. He'll live on until I'm old and too miserable to care any longer" (366). Asa bitterly questions himself, "Is there any hope of making a civilized world so long as we are imprisoned in a multitude of separate cells?" (366). Despite her undesirable qualities, Stanley would win "not through strength, but through some inner weakness, whether her own or another's" (366).

While examining the effect of environment in the development of one's character, Ellen Glasgow concludes, "It may be the Southern way—(...) they seem to excuse everything because she is young and has beauty". Besides such social conditions, Stanley is spoiled by the unbridled love of Lavinia, her mother who would not wish Stanley to mature in mind—"she's still my baby" (370). The petulant Stanley goes out alone in the night to have a long drive.

Finding himself surrounded by utter selfishness and hypocrisy, Asa yearns with all his heart to have a simple, unaffected life where he can "come alive" and enjoy the luxury of speaking the truth (372). Through Kate, Miss Glasgow analyses the ever-going battle within one's consciousness. "Your instinct still believes in all the things
they have rejected, and instinct, not reason, decides a man's life in the end. The belief
your mind denies is still working in your blood and your nerves ( . . . ). You’re trying to
change the very substance of yourself, and that has never been done. . . . “(373). Kate
is presented as Miss Glasgow's female version of 'civilized men'. In her presence
alone Asa feels a complete man (375). He feels that his family feeling has destroyed
him.” Kate rightly observes that duty had done its worst with him, ( . . . ) duty and the
sense of failure and an indomitable tradition” (377). Asa strongly desires to break all
his bonds and live a truthful, simple and happy life on the farm. He decides to revolt
against “a condition of life” and “a man’s customary lot” (378). He sees the futility of
his self-sacrifice as “people didn’t feel about institutions, or any moral symbols, as they
used to” (379). He determines to reveal to Lavinia his decision.

Ellen Glasgow presents one of the bitter ironies of life, the effect of which is felt
by Roy more than by anybody else. As Asa returns from Hunter’s Fare, he finds
William, Andrew, Roy, Craig, Lavinia, Stanley, together, it makes him. From their
version, Asa understands that a small girl died in a car accident made by Stanley’s car
but driven by drunken Parry. Having his own doubts about the veracity of their
statements, Asa decides to meet Minerva. Ellen Glasgow mirrors in the family’s
gloomy conference, the double-facedness and unscrupulousness of the aristocratic
society which does not hesitate to be mean by exploiting the weak.

Ellen Glasgow denounces the race snobbery and the injustice that is inflicted on
the hard-working and honest negroes. Minerva certifies Parry’s innocence but she says,
the police “wouldn’t believe me. I’m colored” (394). When Asa meets Parry in the
prison, he sees “his look of resignation, of defeat, of settled despair; the look of African
fatalism which had surged up in a dark wave from out the past” (400). With broken
spirits Parry tells Asa about his innocence. However, he declares in a hopeless mood: “It ain’t any use in this world”. Though Craig perceives the muddled up state of the world, and he is ambitious to turn the world into a better place, he does not have a clear aim “I want to fight for something, but I don’t know for what” (395). Returning from the prison he exclaims in desperation, “Another life gone to smash! Good God, what a world!” (406). But Asa’s conscience would not allow him to leave Parry to his fate. In the face of moral crisis, ‘the sleeping giant’ wakes up. Despite the severe protest from all and stiff resistance from Stanley, he succeeds in extracting the truth from Stanley. In her desperate attempt to escape “by weakness alone, from the full burden of circumstances” (408), she wails bitterly “I never wanted to hurt anybody” (410). Ellen Glasgow denounces white superiority and denounces the inequality – “It won’t be more than a fine for you Stanley (...) but it will mean a long sentence for Parry” (414) – and the detestable evasive idealism – “colored people don’t feel things the way we do ...” (415). Stanley’s confession releases Parry from the jail but kills his spirit permanently.

Ellen Glasgow’s close study of human psychology reveals the inner feelings of her characters. Roy being shrewd, perceives Craig’s pity for Stanley and she understands his divided loyalties. Once again her world of love is shattered. Craig confesses, “I do love you. But I cannot get rid of her” (426). He tries in vain to justify his pity for Stanley. “But there is another side to it too. She needs me. I am sorry for her. I’d like to save her from hurting herself” (427). With her ego wounded and heart broken, she shuns Craig.

Betrayal of love is a recurring theme in Ellen Glasgow’s novels. Miss Glasgow tests the strength of her protagonists by plunging them into an emotional crisis. Roy is
disillusioned by the existing institutions. She is repelled by the rotten atmosphere and the false appearances. "I hate most about the kind of world we are living in. It's a sham, through and through, from the top to the bottom. I want to strike back at it. I want to pull it down and destroy it" (435). She is puzzled to the core by the enigmatic nature of life. Failing to find peace or happiness in the things known, she aspires to get them from some unknown thing, unknown person or unknown future. Her agony turns to defiance "(...) I've finished. I am through with everything I've ever known; and I'm glad of it. (...) I don't care if I do make trouble. I don't care whether I'm decent. I don't care what I am. I have finished for good. (...) I don't expect to be happy. That's another thing I'm through with – looking for happiness" (438) with Ellen Glasgow the external rain always symbolizes the inner storm of the protagonist. Defying all traditions, family feeling, loving bonds, she runs out into the storm, searching for a new meaning of life. The 'red handbag' denotes her undiminished courage and unfailing fortitude. Despite Asa's sincere attempts to stop her, she steps out leaving behind a "world of solid institutions, of firm hypocrisy, of infirm human relationships" (440).

Ellen Glasgow's reviving optimism and her theory of chance make Roy meet a stranger in a public square. He, the son of a British father and American mother, is on his way to New York to participate in the war. With a father who deserted them and mother who died, he is left alone, desolate. Meeting him accidentally in a park, Roy goes with him to his apartment, which actually belongs to his friend who seems to belong to a respectable middle class family. Roy sympathises with the miserable life of the stranger. In his relationship with his mother, his school experience, where he is nick-named and ragged by boys, Miss Glasgow reflects her own life. Through him she
enlightens Roy the need for love as a binding force in the society. He is driven to war because he felt he is needed (457) and this feeling is the anchor to his drifting life. Ellen Glasgow emphasizes the importance of permanent values of life and the need to cultivate such noble traits as compassion, love, pity, sympathetic understanding, “To find something bigger than life... bigger than death...” (457). She spends that night with him and comes to understand the strength of biology over civilization for she resolves not to care any code of conduct, feeling herself rebellious. Stepping out in an unfamiliar street by day break, “she felt a sudden surprise, as if she had over taken time, and were walking into a new age and a new world” (461). Roy returns home to collect her things. “Oh, but Daddy. I want something to hold by! I want something good!”, is her desperate plea. Asa assures her firmly “you will find what you are looking for. It is there, and you – if not I – will find it.” He promises her to stand by her as long as she needs him (467).

By meeting the stranger, Roy feels her ego and vanity are lost (458). Miss Glasgow seems to suggest her discovery of a better meaning to life after her acquaintance with a person more miserable than her and who is in actual distress. Roy’s self-knowledge about her inner eternal springs of love which can satiate a thirsty, lone passenger in life, give her a new meaning to her life, placing her above selfishness, above passion and above all trivial things. Her realization of the immovable strength of the ‘dynamic past’ from which she can draw all that is permanent, leaving behind the trite traits, makes her the representative of the vitality in young, to depend on her father Asa, who stands for the finality of the 'jogey' old.

Miss Glasgow successfully chronicles the mal-adjustments of modern man to the world outside him. She shows that these mal-adjustments are engendered by his
sense of outrage at the disproportion between his expectations from life and the oppressive realities he confronts. In his review of *In This Our Life*, Francis X. Connoly, commends Miss Glasgow for she “has presented her picture of contemporary civilization and her challenge to that insipid, liberalism which has been so long regarded as an excuse for irresponsible conduct and sentimental thinking.” He feels the novel is significant as a family tragedy, study of frustration and as a criticism of society (*America*, 1941; 77-78). The novel traces the continual quest of modern man for an inner security. The distinction of the novel lies in its vital characters whose inner lives are genuine. Louis Kronenberger in his review of the novel, while praising Miss Glasgow’s study of family feeling and her unsentimental treatment, writes, “she understands what is southern about her people as she understands what is human about them” (*Nation* 152, 382-83). With a keen psychological acumen and astute sense of structure Ellen Glasgow has knit together the parts of a sprawling organism. The novel is praised as a substantial work which can leave the reader, stronger, more understanding and more mature. In recognition of her long record of achievement and for her rich contributions furthering women’s role in public affairs, she was deservedly awarded the Pulitzer Prize for the year 1941. *Saturday Review of Literature*, while announcing the award observed that “The Pulitzer Committee has crowned a novelist who stands second to none in America” (1942; 9).