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THE USES OF THE POPULAR NOVEL:

SATIRE AND AFFINITY IN THE FICTION OF SELECTED AMERICAN REALISTS AND NATURALISTS, 1865-1910

by

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The City University of New York

To my father, Daniel Harris

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION: DEFINITIONS AND MANIFESTOES

In an important essay, "Productive Conditions of American Literature" (Forum, 1894), the literary realist Hamlin Garland detailed his objections to the best-selling novels of the late nineteenth century.[1] Much of the essay is a critique of popular fiction, although it attempts to define and describe an ideal American literature that would reflect conditions in contemporary American life with as much accuracy and attention to detail as the art of fiction permits. Despite his objections to the best sellers, however, Garland claims that in order for the would-be realist to achieve verisimilitude, he must be aware of the reigning popular tradition--precisely in order to reject it: "The new art, the modern statement, must make its way against the traditional" (p. 691). That is, the realist must produce an accurate picture of life, but he must also be critically conscious of the romantic tradition from which he is departing. Garland's program for literary realism is thus a dual one: to give a faithful picture of modern

life and to combat the decadent romanticism which he believes distorts that picture.

It is important to clarify what Garland meant by romanticism and to see how his definition differs from the conventional ones. Representative definitions such as those found in Joseph Shipley's Dictionary of Literary Terms, Frank L. Lucas's The Decline and Fall of the Romantic Ideal, and the OED all give the earliest meaning of romantic as something fictional rather than factual, something fantastic rather than recognizable.[2] They distinguish this kind of romantic from the later historical term applied to the nineteenth-century literary movement. Romanticism as a literary movement was characterized (very briefly) by emphasis on the individual expression of emotions, belief in the power of imagination, and reverence for nature.[3]

Garland's definition of romanticism includes the earlier one. He largely ignores the historical definition and calls that writer a romantic who tells sensational stories that seek to excite and arouse rather than stories which to Garland are faithful reproductions of events observed in life:

> The difference between the veritist and the romanticist is expressed, first, by choice of subject. The veritist chooses for his subject not the impossible, not even the possible, but always the probable. He does not seek the exceptional, the sensational. . . (p. 690).

In addition to airily ignoring the historical definition of Romanticism (one which perhaps he feared might have given more philosophical substance to the romantic writer), Garland seems to be resting his definition on two erroneous assumptions. The first is that there are inherently and irreconcilably "romantic" and "realistic" materials; there are not, although there may be essentially "romantic" or "realistic" ways of regarding the same material. The second assumption, equally false, is that romantic subjects or materials are inherently inferior to realist ones. Garland is so intent upon denouncing the popular fiction of his time that he "confuses literary realism with success," in Edwin Cady's words.[4]

Having given this loaded and pejorative definition of romanticism, however, Garland does narrow and qualify it. He says that his real objection is not to a romantic worldview but to what he considers second-rate romanticism, the imitations and mediocre versions of romantic novels:

> I have no war with any sincere artist, but I despite imitation and effectism. . . . The romanticist as well as every other artist should ask himself whether he is working to please some cult. . . . (p. 696).

Garland's point about the poor quality of popular fiction is well taken, as we shall see. As Cady has remarked, popular romantic novelists were not able to have genuine

romantic faith (or to explore meaningfully Romantic literary ideas) although they still thirsted for romantic effects.[5] It is however obvious that Garland's definition of romanticism is a reductive one. He assumes that there is no common ground between the romantic view of human actions and "the truthful treatment of material" (p. 690). His definition also overlooks the fact that, as Charles C. Walcutt and Donald Pizer have pointed out, naturalism, with its interest in the sensational and the extreme, approaches the orthodox definition of romanticism. Walcutt has also argued that naturalism is philosophically romantic, descending straight from transcendentalism.[6] Indeed naturalistic fiction often achieves a romantic effect. But for the purposes of this discussion it is more important to recognize Garland as a significant voice in the criticism of popular fiction, and to recognize the validity of his criticism of debased popular romanticism.

The reaction of sentimental-romantic critics to the realists and naturalists was no less combative. Critics of William Dean Howells's novels claimed that he ignored the proper function of literature, which was to deal with the grand passions that have always moved men, in order to focus on contemporary American conditions with mere scientific accuracy, unfeeling detachment, and a dull

concern for the commonplace.[7] Charges against the naturalists were more serious. Theodore Dreiser's Sister Carrie, which Doubleday had reluctantly published after Dreiser held them to their contract, was condemned by many reviewers for its "offensive immorality" masquerading as truth.[8] Books like Stephen Crane's Maggie: A Girl of the Streets, which was unpopular with audiences because it described slums without sharply condemning their inhabitants, caused genteel critics like Burton to charge the new writers with the abandonment of religious convictions and ethical ideals.[9] Naturalism, then, was revolutionary, realism was unconventional, and both were criticized harshly.

Modern critics, among them Robert Falk, Floyd Stovall, and Donald Gibson, have noted the fact that naturalism was considered shocking and realism dull and overly factual.[10] Yet they have done so without discussing the specific relation of realist and naturalist fiction to the popular literary tradition it was overturning. This study contends that if we are to discuss the ways in which realism and naturalism departed from popular literary tradition, we should construct descriptions of these late nineteenth-century movements that would include the specific methods these writers used to undermine that tradition. (The fiction in that tradition, and the assumptions on which

such fiction was based, will be discussed and defined in Chapter One.) The relation between realism and naturalism and the popular romanticism they were rebelling against is more complex and interesting than many critics have realized.

Writers of realistic and naturalistic fiction were deeply involved with the tradition that, according to modern critics, they were breaking with. They were both using the techniques and tones of popular fiction and at the same time parodying and satirizing these very techniques and tones. As this study will show, realist and naturalist writers undermined the assumptions of popular literature by a variety of satiric methods: derisive critical refutation of popular literary tenets, parody of romantic and sentimental plots and character types, satire on the form and point of view of the popular novel, burlesque of typical kinds of popular novels.

It is important to mention here that when I use the terms satire, parody, and burlesque, I am using them in the following sense. Alvin Kernan, Gilbert Highet, and David Worcester all define satire as the attempt to ridicule an idea or person through exaggeration and irony in an effort to improve or correct.[11] The satirist uses exaggeration to make the original look foolish. He uses

irony to "pretend not to be doing what he in fact is doing," as Kernan observes.[12] The usual function of irony, in other words, is to make it clear that the opposite of what is said is meant. Furthermore, Kernan's definition of satire implies that the true satirists have a vision of human folly:

> The scenes of idiocy and greed which they construct are not, they have argued, the products of misanthropy, but the work of serious artists trying to catch the grotesque shapes toward which the human form and the world are being forced under the weight of stupidity.[13]

I do not wish to suggest that the authors to be studied here are satirists in the sense that they developed entire satirical visions of the kind Kernan is describing. I rather wish to demonstrate that Howells, Dreiser and Crane used satiric <u>methods</u> in their work. They were involved more in literary satire, i.e., satire directed toward a particular literary school, than in the satire on human folly and frailty that Kernan defines as intrinsic to satire. To this end they used parody, closely following the original and exaggerating it in an attempt to belittle or distort.[14] Whether it is a type or a tool of satire, parody is a particular satiric method of deflating an author or work which depends largely for its effect on the audience's knowledge of the work being parodied. Finally,

when satire and parody try to make the original literary work appear totally ludicrous, they use burlesque by exaggerating the actions, characterizations, speech, and episodes of the work to an absurd degree. We shall see how satire, parody, and burlesque operate in the authors to be studied here.

If we return to Garland's essay "Productive Conditions" and look at it more closely, we see that it provides a model for the realist's satiric approach to popular literature. Garland mentions the popular novel only to ridicule it. Although he does not explicitly direct would-be realists to satirize popular fiction, all of his suggestions in the essay satirize and refer ironically to the popular novel.

Garland sees melodrama, with its fixed complications, requisite shady villain, and inevitable happy ending, as the prime characteristic of the popular novel.[15] To write the melodramatic novel, he explains ironically, "requires only scissors and the carpenter's hammer" (p. 695), and he chooses to criticize it by mocking its formulas. He gives a "realistic" version of a typical melodramatic plot:

> The spy who is condemned to death is <u>not</u> a son of the general, nor a nephew--not even a son of an old classmate; he is a stranger. . . . The hero does not rush in at the last moment and bid the villain "stand back." The son and

> husband who goes off to war, and whom everyone supposes dead, continues to be dead, notwithstanding the need of him at home. The old curmudgeon who holds the mortgage has not the slightest desire to possess the widow--he wants the interest. In this novel the hero does not hear of the heroine's danger; the will stays lost, and the wife marries again, and her step-children get on peaceably with her (pp. 692, 693).

The method Garland uses in this quotation is to rely on the reader's knowledge of melodramatic plots (coincidence, last-minute rescue, villainous rent collector) and mockingly reverse the typical endings of the episodes: "The hero does not rush in at the last moment and bid the villain 'stand back'"; "the will stays lost." He assumes that the ideal realistic plot would be one which ridicules or reverses a melodramatic one and provides more credible events; life to him is a quieter affair than that found in popular fiction. This view of things is clearly a prejudice, but one apparently shared, to a certain extent, by others, notably Howells and Crane.

Although "Productive Conditions" is not a satire on the popular novel, it does contain a prime characteristic of satire, the attempt to discredit the opponent through exaggeration and ridicule. Garland's essay singles out the weak points of the popular novel--the authors' lack of originality or talent, their idealization of the characters, resulting in sentimentality--and pretends that all melodramatic

novels contain them. Then, using irony and sarcasm, he tries to make the novel look ridiculous: "Because the romancer puts his scene afar off and clothes his assassin in scarlet-and-green doublet and in gold-inlaid steel, it is all beautiful and moral and inspiring for our sons and daughters to read!" (p. 694) And:

> The romanticist, notwithstanding his themes of blood and lust and tears, is supposed to be a wholesome and inspiring creature. He can slay men in war, and imprison maidens in donjon keeps, and hound poor peasants to death, and yet be called a joyous and lovely teacher of the splendor and glory of life (p. 698).

Howells, Dreiser, and Crane also chose to ridicule the popular novel by calling attention to its defects, either through satirizing stock characters or by parodying the form and language of melodramatic works. Garland used a tone of raillery when he was describing his opponents' literary faults; the three novelists studied here transferred this tone to their fiction. Where Hawthorne a few decades earlier, faced with the popularity of female novelists who wrote best sellers, had angrily dismissed them as a "damn'd mob of scribbling women," these three novelists instead imitated and ridiculed such writers in order to criticize their works. Paradoxically, Howells, Dreiser, and Crane frequently employ plot configurations characteristic of the sentimental novel, and then transform by their insight

the trappings of cheap fiction into deeper studies of character and circumstance.

Cady and Fryckstedt writing on Howells,[16] Sheldon Grebstein and Daryl Dance on Dreiser,[17] and Eric Solomon on Crane,[18] have all noted these writers' use of parody and satire. Cady's remarks summarize the common view:

> Anti-romanticism, the reduction by ridicule and irony of the romantic to the commonplace, was the first . . . way for the realists to define themselves.[19]

There has, however, been little critical attempt to describe the manner in which the early development of all three writers was conditioned by their common necessity to rebel against the devices and attitudes of best-selling novels. There are, of course, a variety of satiric responses among these writers. Howells writes lightly ironic versions of sentimental plots, in which the characters, most often a pair of lovers, learn to see truth instead of continuing in their romanticized illusions, or in which lovers are mocked because they refuse to learn. Keeping to this basic plot structure (an ironic use of sentimental plot), Howells experiments with a variety of fictional forms (autobiographical sketch, travel sketch, short story, novel) and narrators (sympathetic to ironically detached), so that his early fiction, while it criticizes the sentimental tradition, shows considerable difference and variation.

Tracing the development of Howells's enterprise of shedding romantic illusions will help us to understand the nature of his artistic growth in his early work.

Crane's response to popular fiction is parodic. He closely follows the original type, exaggerates or burlesques it in order to ridicule it, as he works with a number of popular forms: the slum story, the temperance tale, the Western dime novel. (Sometimes the resemblance between his works and popular forms is less marked and his work is more satiric than parodic.) Crane's version of a sentimental slum novel, Maggie: A Girl of the Streets, takes the standard pathetic slum environment of a sentimental novel and distorts it so much that it becomes an absurd landscape filled with swearing drunks and ludicrous barroom brawls. Instead of the pathetic wrecks of humanity offered by the sentimentalist as a woeful and moving warning to the would-be drinker, Crane presents bumbling buffoons and truculent loudmouths who generally inspire neither sympathy nor pity in the reader. Such a transformation makes the stereotyped characters, attitudes, and world-view of the sentimental novel seem laughable. Of course, Maggie is much more than a satire on the sentimental slum novel, but, as we shall see, its resemblance to the popular novel is marked.

As Crane's work matured, his fiction began to reveal

a more complex attitude toward popular romanticism. His later work combines parody and satire of popular forms with an appreciation for them, expressed through non-satiric transformation of the popular novel. Thus the first half of "The Blue Hotel" satirizes the Western gunfight novel, but the second half follows the form seriously and uses it to make a statement about man's propensity for violence. As in a Western dime novel, the story builds up tension about a saloon showdown between a stranger and a gambler. When the showdown comes and the stranger is killed, Crane gives the encounter a symbolic dimension. The stranger becomes a representative protagonist, victimized by an unfriendly universe and his own delusions of grandeur. In works like "The Blue Hotel" Crane successfully balances against satire and parody an appreciation of the symbolic possibilities of popular fiction.

Dreiser's use of sentimental fiction, though less obvious than Crane's, also combines satire on the stereotype with an affinity for it. Dreiser implies a similarity between the melodramatic story of the villain pursuing the innocent beauty and those of his characters. He works with the distinct similarities between sentimentalism and naturalism, the typed characters, the extreme situations. Carrie (Sister Carrie) and Jennie (Jennie Gerhardt), pursued and

seduced, are reminiscent of the embattled virgins of sentimental melodrama, and Dreiser plays on his audience's familiarity with it. He presents a stereotyped dramatic situation, such as a servant girl's seduction and betrayal; he then reverses the audience's expectations for the stereotyped episode and presents a different conclusion from the one provided by the sentimental writer. For the sentimentalist, a woman was to be punished if she lost her virtue; Dreiser attempts to understand her, allows her to survive and even prosper. Where the sentimentalist ended a seduction scene by censuring the woman and giving dire predictions about her future, Dreiser underplays the dramatic editorials. He follows stereotype where it helps define his characters. When it no longer applies, he reverses it.

The methods of Howells, Dreiser, and Crane suggest that the response of such new writers to the sentimental melodramatic novel was more complex than pure rebellion. In a sense their fiction was interrelated with popular fiction because it imitated and manipulated popular forms. In expressing this affection for the popular novel, the new writers were also revealing its influence. It is not, of course, surprising that they had a debt to sentimental tradition: it was extremely influential and the new writers could hardly ignore or escape it. F.L. Pattee's definition of popular tradition in the early part of the century applies

equally well to the later part:

> this amazing jungle in which . . . [legitimate] writers were compelled to work, this jungle of the annuals, the gift-books, and the anthologies . . . an atmosphere created by . . . the interminable tribe of . . . sentimentalists . . . an atmosphere of literary commonplacenesses issued as classics and bought with eagerness.[20]

It was a situation in which the realists and naturalists could hardly ignore the sentimental.

What is impressive about the way the new writers used sentimental tradition is that they were not simply stuck in the sentimental (although <u>at times</u> they were) but were often able to bring new life to old forms. Dreiser is able to ad pt the sentimental view that fate pushes a sinner down, to use the form of melodrama to embody that vision, and yet avoid sentimental moralizing or blaming. Crane also manipulates popular fiction and balances admiration for melodrama with parody of it. When he dispenses entirely with parody, he sometimes reproduces sentimental plotting in a less creative way. His later war stories merely imitate sentimental fiction and do not enrich the mechanical plots or transform the sentimental banalities on which they are based. Howells too does his best work when he manipulates the form of the sentimental novel of romantic love for the purposes of satire on sentimental ideas. When he simply <u>follows</u> the romantic plotting without

irony, he too often returns to stale stereotyped situations involving handsome men falling in love with classically pretty girls. He lapses uncritically into cliché-ridden dialogue and too-familiar narrative. Neither he nor Crane could simply reproduce the clichés of the sentimental novel without distancing themselves from the material and still produce effective work. When they balance imitation with satire, however, their work is impressive.

The combination of satire of the sentimental tradition and affinity for it proved useful in giving Dreiser and Crane transitional forms that would convey their observations about American society before their mature works stated these observations more fully. Sometimes, as with Howells and Crane, when they dispensed with satire this affinity became stale imitation. Yet the very fact that they used satire enabled them all to have a certain critical detachment not shared by their contemporaries. Representative local colorists such as Edward Eggleston and Philander Deming, who chose to follow Garland's injunction to give faithful studies of American small-town life, did so without satirizing popular novels. Without the kind of critical view of such novels that satire would have encouraged, these writers recreated many standard plots and character types, as we shall observe.

A word about the choice of realist and naturalist authors. I have chosen to study Howells because he is more the practitioner of literary realism than Hamlin Garland, who after Main Travelled Roads applied to his work (Rose of Dutcher's Coolly, A Spoil of Office) formulas combining romanticism and socialism.[21] Howells is also one of the few realists, apart from literary humorists like Mark Twain and Artemus Ward,[22] who applies ridicule of popular literary forms to his early work. To provide a contrast to Howells, a chapter on the regional realists will study those writers whose works lack effectiveness because they do not satirize or control sentimentalism. In selecting naturalist writers, I chose Crane and Dreiser because they are representative naturalists who produced distinctive works. They display the variety of satirical methods used by writers of that school. Frank Norris is another case entirely, and is not considered in this study because he is a naturalist who ultimately redefined his naturalism so that it was compatible with a kind of epic romance (The Octopus, The Pit).[23] His early fiction is divided between romantic stories (Blix, A Man's Woman) and pseudo-clinical stories (McTeague). In none of his early works does he engage in the kind of parody and satire on the popular novels that characterize Crane and Dreiser.

The study will confine itself to the early works of Howells, Dreiser, Crane, and the local colorists. These were written in a time of transition before the acceptance of realistic and naturalistic literature, when writers were both trying to disprove earlier assumptions and excite readers by presenting new material. During this time realist and naturalist fiction embodied the new vision that rebellious literary movements need, but many of the new works also contained criticism of the reigning tradition. It is not surprising that after the romance-realism controversy had died down and realism and naturalism had found acceptance, the later works of Howells and Dreiser (Crane did not live to literary or chronological maturity) dispensed with the satire of the elder tradition and concentrated instead on exploring new literary territory.

The similarities between these representative realists and naturalists are greater than the differences that divide them. Both literary realists and naturalists dedicate themselves in the novel to describing the phenomenal world and to producing a recognizable picture of contemporary manners and morals with as little subjectivity as possible in the presentation of such a picture.[24] To be faithful to the original, to come as close as possible to the pure essence of

that world which one has observed, to give "the truthful statement of an individual impression corrected by reference to the fact"--all these definitions have been offered to describe realist movements in general; they apply to nineteenth-century American realism in particular.[25] Although few realists are really objective--or even intend to be--these are good definitions of an "ideal realism."

In the history of literary criticism, naturalism has been frequently linked with realism, as in George Becker's statement that "in essence and origin naturalism is no more than an emphatic and explicit philosophical position taken by some realists who are materialistic determinists."[26] That is, the difference between naturalists and realists is that the naturalists emphasize determinism more. One may not agree with such a slighting of the differences between these two schools, but Becker has suggested a basic similarity which divides realism and naturalism from romanticism and sentimentalism. Both the naturalism of a Crane or a Dreiser and the realism of a Howells or a Philander Deming have a philosophical grounding in the idea that human personality is conditioned if not determined by heredity, milieu, and environment, the society and time in which the individual finds himself. This concept of environmental determinism led, under the direct and indirect

influence of French naturalists, to the idea that the individual was worth studying to demonstrate the way he was conditioned by society. Artists were to become, in Zola's words, "experimental moralists showing by experiment in what fashion a passion behaves in a social milieu."[27] Applying the principles of scientific analysis practiced by Claude Bernard, Zola advocated a system of careful observation and reporting of facts at the same time that he lashed out at romantic writers for what he considered their inattention to environmental influence. This idea of the powerful influence of environment was connected with Darwin's and Spencer's speculations that the laws of biology could be applied to society as well as to nature. Just as lower forms of life, through a process of selection and endurance, were perfected or discarded, human life in society followed the "survival of the fittest." Robert Scoon writes on Social Darwinism (the application of biology to philosophy): "In Darwin's mind there was apparently no clear line of demarcation either between biology and other closely allied sciences, or between science and morality."[28] In Herbert Spencer's writings especially, realists and naturalists found a further corollary to the biological law of natural selection in the idea that society itself was comparable to a natural phenomenon, constantly changing, constantly moving

toward greater sophistication.[29] Dreiser at one point in Sister Carrie remarks, "We have the consolation of knowing that evolution is ever in action, that the ideal is a light that cannot fail."[30] It is easy to see why romantic worshipers of the great past crossed swords with these realists and naturalists; it is also clear that naturalism itself, with its belief in better, other circumstances, was becoming a new romanticism.

The difference between the realist and naturalist interpretations of these open-ended ideas lay in degree of emphasis. At first, realists took over Spencer's idea that society was in flux; they optimistically emphasized his point that society always moves toward improved and higher political forms.[32] If the ape had progressed into the higher form, man, so went the argument, political forms like monarchy (with the literature produced under a monarchy) should now be giving way to the more modern forms of the democracy. Society was characterized by a change for the better, and in the nineteenth century democracy, rather than aristocratic government, was its manifestation. Garland even rather brashly saw nineteenth-century American society as a throwing over of the old stale forms, both in history and literature. It was no longer the duty of literature to tell tales of kings and knights and super-heroes. Such

subject matter more accurately reflected a feudal society. Instead, now there should be

> a new literature from the plain people, reflecting their unrestrained outlook on life. . . . The business of the present is . . . to sincerely present its own minute and characteristic interpretation of life. . . .[32]

Howells concurred. Speaking of his return to America after a voyage, he said:

> I saw a young, free, energetic society. I saw a society in which the relation between man and woman was simple and pure. Here, I thought, are the materials for novels. Why should I go to the people of bygone ages and of lands not my own?[33]

Howells here sounds the note of contention between romancers and realists. In Chapter Two we shall see that the American writer had depended chiefly on Europe and England for his literary inspiration; the popular novel in Howells's time was still reworking the stereotyped formulas that had been originated by Richardson or Scott. But now that America was coming into her own, American literature had no need to be imitative. It was the duty of the American writer to reflect actual life and not outworn European forms. On the thematic level, as we shall see in Howells's novels, the representative realist rejected Europe by ridiculing stuffy Americans who pretended to be Europeans.

The naturalists joined the realists in advocating new forms and themes for literature and they too wanted

to study contemporary society in a scientific manner. But whereas the realists take the average home or the plain citizen to be the optimal representatives of democratic subject matter, the naturalists seek extreme examples of man assaulted by great forces and either triumphing or being crushed. In the naturalists' works the outcast, the pauper, the magnate, or the millionaire are studied because they represent the extreme situations in which human beings find themselves. When the realists study such characters, they use them as representative examples of common types: Lapham is a typical Horatio Alger millionaire (The Rise of Silas Lapham); the impoverished farm families in Main Travelled Roads are typical poor people. If early realism studied the habits of passengers on a street car on their way to work, then naturalists would describe how the passengers acted when the street car collided with a truck and produced a horrible accident. Naturalists prove laws, therefore need extreme situations; realists demonstrate the norm, therefore need the mean. With this distinction dividing them, however, they were united in their opposition to the popular literature of the time, and in their derivation from it.

NOTES TO CHAPTER ONE

1. Hamlin Garland, "Productive Conditions of American Literature," Forum, 17 (Mar.-Aug. 1894), 690-698. Page references in the text will be from this version.

2. Joseph Shipley, "Romanticism," Dictionary of Literary Terms (Boston, 1943), pp. 281-283; Frank Lucas, The Decline and Fall of the Romantic Ideal (New York and Cambridge, England, 1947), pp. 16-21, pp. 46-47; Oxford English Dictionary, 8 (1937; rpt. London, 1961), pp. 767, 769.

3. I am indebted to Perry Miller, "The Romantic Dilemma in American Nationalism and the Concept of Nature," Nature's Nation (Cambridge, Mass., 1967), and Lucas, Chapter 1, for precise definitions of European Romanticism.

4. Edwin H. Cady, The Light of Common Day (Bloomington, Indiana, 1971), p. 14.

5. Cady, p. 25.

6. Charles Child Walcutt, American Literary Nationalism: A Divided Stream (Minneapolis, Minn., 1956), p. 22; Donald Pizer, Realism and Naturalism in Nineteenth-Century American Literature (Carbondale and Edwardsville, Ill., 1966), pp. 88-99.

7. A representative Howells detractor is James Herbert Morse, "The Native Element in American Fiction," Century, 26 (July, 1883), 369-370. Morse criticizes James for being too scientific in "Henry James, Jr. and the Modern Novel," The Critic, 2 (Jan. 14, 1882), 288. F. Marion Crawford, The Novel: What It Is (New York, 1893), pp. 68ff. criticizes the realist method in the novel and defends the romantic method.

8. Review of Sister Carrie, Commercial Advertiser, New York, Dec. 19, 1900, The Stature of Theodore Dreiser, ed.

Alfred Kazin and Charles Shapiro (Bloomington, Ind., 1965), pp. 55-58; W.A. Swanberg, Dreiser (New York, 1965), pp. 102-108.

9. R.W. Stallman, Stephen Crane: A Biography (New York, 1968), pp. 79 ff. and pp. 87ff., discusses Maggie's reception, as does (briefly) Larzer Ziff, The American 1890s (New York, 1966), p. 190.

10. Robert P. Falk, "The Genteel Decades, 1870-1900," The Development of American Literary Criticism, ed. Floyd Stovall (Chapel Hill, North Carolina, 1955), pp. 124-126; Joseph Warren Beach, The Twentieth Century Novel (New York, 1932), pp. 324-334; Donald Gibson, The Fiction of Stephen Crane (Carbondale, Ill., 1968), p. 68.

11. Alvin Kernan, The Plot of Satire (New Haven, Conn., 1965), Chap. 1; Gilbert Highet, The Anatomy of Satire (Princeton, N.J., 1962), Chap. 1; David Worcester, The Art of Satire (New York, 1960).

12. Kernan, p. 82.

13. Kernan, p. 5.

14. The following discussions of parody and satire have been helpful: Gilbert Highet, The Anatomy of Satire (Princeton, N.J., 1962); Edward M. White, "Emma and the Parodic Point of View," NCF, 18 (June, 1963), 55-63; David Worcester, The Art of Satire (New York, 1960); Eric Solomon, Stephen Crane: From Parody to Realism (Cambridge, Mass., 1967); Parodies: An Anthology from Chaucer to Beerbohm--and After, ed. Dwight Macdonald (New York, 1960); William Flint Thrall, Addison Hibbard, and G. High Helman, eds., A Handbook to Literature (rev. ed., New York, 1960), pp. 341, 436-438.

15. Both Garland's and the contemporary use of the term melodrama are in the sense of any fictional work--prose or play--with predictability of plot, stereotyped characters, and general lack of depth. Harry Levin's capsule definition of melodrama, "drama in which we do not believe," "Charles Dickens (1812-1870)," ASch, 29 (Autumn, 1970), 675, is the definition that will be followed in this study. In other words, melodrama is a quality of all popular literature and is not simply confined to the stage play. Richard Chase, The American Novel and Its Tradition (Garden City, New York, 1957), pp. 29-36 also uses the term in this fashion.

16. Edwin H. Cady, William Dean Howells: The Road to Realism. The Early Years, 1837-1885. (Syracuse, New York; 1958), Chapters 6 and 7; Olov W. Fryckstedt, In Quest of America: A Study of Howells' Early Development as a Novelist (Cambridge, Mass., 1958).

17. Sheldon Grebstein, "Dreiser's Victorian Vamp," Midcontinent American Studies Journal, 4 (Spring, 1963), 3-11; Daryl Dance, "Sentimentalism in Dreiser's Heroines Carrie and Jennie," CLAJ, 14 (Dec. 1970), 127-142.

18. Solomon, passim.

19. Edwin H. Cady, Stephen Crane (New Haven, Conn., 1962), p. 122.

20. Frederick L. Pattee, The First Century of American Literature, 1770-1870 (1935; rpt., New York, 1970), p. 394.

21. Jay Martin, Harvests of Change: American Literature 1865-1914 (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey, 1967), pp. 129ff.; Larzer Ziff, The American 1890s (New York, 1966), pp. 93-107, gives a good discussion of both tendencies; see Hamlin Garland, Rose of Dutcher's Coolly (New York, 1905), and Jason Edwards (An Average Man) (New York, 1897). In Garland naturalism cedes to sentimentalism, both political and literary. Both novels tend to idealize their female characters; the former becomes a romantic novel, the latter a socialist tract.

22. Charles Farrar Browne, From The Writings of Artemus Ward, Native American Humor, ed. Walter Blair (San Francisco, 1937), pp. 400-410; Mark Twain, The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn, ed. Kenneth Lynn (New York, 1961), Chapters 17-20. See also Walter Blair, "Burlesque in Nineteenth-Century American Humor," AL, 2 (November, 1930), 236-247.

23. See Frank Norris, "Zola as a Romantic Writer," "A Plea for Romantic Fiction," The Literary Criticism of Frank Norris, ed. Donald Pizer (Austin, Texas, 1964), pp. 71-73, pp. 75-80, and The Responsibilities of the Novelist (New York, 1903). In Norris's redefinition of romance, the true romantic writer and the true naturalist writer have no quarrel with each other. See also George Johnson, "Harold Frederic's Young Goodman Ware: The Ambiguities of a Realistic Romance," MFS, 8 (Winter 1962-63), 373, on Norris's "romantic signification."

24. Good discussions of the beginnings of realism and naturalism are: René Wellek, Concepts of Criticism (New Haven, Conn., 1963), pp. 230-236; Erich Auerbach, Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature, trans. Willard R. Trask (Princeton, N.J., 1953); Robert Scoon, "The Rise and Impact of Evolutionary Ideas," Evolutionary Thought in America, ed. Stow Persons (New Haven, Conn., 1950), pp. 34-43; Malcolm Cowley, "Naturalism in American Literature," Evolutionary Thought in America, pp. 300-355; Lars Ahnebrink, The Beginnings of Naturalism in American Fiction (New York, 1961), pp. 60-104.

25. The three definitions of realism are from Wellek, p. 230; Auerbach, pp. 31, 486ff., 491 ff.; Hamlin Garland, "Productive Conditions of American Literature," 690.

26. George Becker, "Modern Realism as a Literary Movement," Documents of Modern Literary Realism, ed. George Becker (Princeton, N. J., 1963), p. 35. Wellek, p. 233, makes a similar statement. Ahnebrink treats realism as a subdivision of naturalism.

27. Emile Zola, "The Experimental Novel," Documents of Modern Literary Realism, p. 177.

28. Scoon, p. 18. See also Richard Hofstadter, Social Darwinism in American Thought, 1860-1915 (Philadelphia, Pa., 1945).

29. Cowley notes that between 1860 and 1903 there was an increase in the number of editions of Spencer's works from 368 to 755 (p. 302). He writes that Spencerian thought gave both naturalists and the public a unified world picture to replace Christianity--hence its popularity (p. 304).

30. Theodore Dreiser, Sister Carrie (New York, 1961), p. 74.

31. Scoon remarks that a main difference is that the realists stressed co-operation as a force that would make society work, where the naturalists saw warfare as the essential factor which composed society (p. 25). See also Donald Pizer, Chapters 1, 2.

32. Hamlin Garland, "The Local Novel," Crumbling Idols, ed. Jane Johnson (Cambridge, Mass., 1960), pp. 62, 69.

33. Quoted in Olov W. Fryckstedt, In Quest of America: A Study of Howells' Early Development as a Novelist (Cambridge, Mass., 1968), p. 83.

CHAPTER TWO

THE POPULAR LITERARY ESTABLISHMENT

The rise of American literary realism and naturalism as distinct and influential literary movements took place in an era that also saw the rise of the best seller.[1] In addition to these books selling over a half-million copies, there were numerous popular works catering to the tastes of a rapidly proliferating mass audience that was buying the wares of traveling book salesmen and literary emporia like Brantano's, which opened in 1870.[2] This audience, largely female, had both leisure time and interest in reading novels. T.S. Arthur's sentimental and sensational temperance novel, Ten Nights in A Bar-room, sold to this audience almost twenty times as many copies as Howells's most popular works were to sell at the height of his successful career.[3] The domestic tearjerker Wide, Wide World vied with The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn in popularity.[4] Typical readers of such novels saw Twain mainly as an entertaining story teller and overlooked his social criticism. As this reading public clamored for more, books like Five Little Peppers and How They Grew, Little Lord Fauntleroy, and Black Beauty sold

over a million copies each quite late in the century.[5]

Besides literature for or about children, historical adventures (Graustark, When Knighthood was in Flower), and sentimental romantic novels (Soldiers of Fortune, Trilby) captured the vast market for superficial fiction.[6] Leaving the reader with transitory thrills but with no enrichment, the majority of these novels catered to the popular demand for entertainment and escape. The books which molded taste, far from being serious literature, were generally gushy and trivial.

The American realists and naturalists were aware of this development and deplored the power and influence of such works. Perhaps in an effort to goad their public into awareness of the shoddy quality of these books, realist writers tried to prove to readers how "juvenile" they were, since they appealed to escapist fantasies rather than provoking thought. Hamlin Garland wrote acidly that these tales could be thought to appeal more "to our sons and daughters" than to mature readers.[7] Although Howells found the best sellers less puerile than Garland did, he too spoke out about their harmful influence. Recognizing the need of both the multitude and the "literary elect" to read escapist books, Howells nevertheless criticized the literary climate for nurturing such fiction.[8] He argued that it was the function

of serious literature to elevate the average reader above "clamoring about the book counters for the romances of no man's land" (p. 110). Let him shun the romance and take pleasure instead in the great realists Tolstoi and Eliot, or in American local colorists like Sarah Orne Jewett, Mary Wilkins Freeman, and Rose Terry Cooke.

Howells's slighting references to the popular novel are the key to his ideological position. To Howells the best-selling novel presented unreal situations and ideas as well as unconvincing (because stereotyped) people and motives. In his criticism of the popular novel, however, Howells went further than issuing sarcastic manifestoes. In his early fiction, as in Dreiser's and Crane's, his opposition to the popular novel formed the basis for a program of literary parody and satire. Howells and other novelists attempted to counter their influence and popularity by burlesquing, parodying, and satirizing works which before had been read only with excitement and reverence. Through extensive ironic references to works like Mrs. Southworth's India, Pearl of Pearl River, Davis's Soldiers of Fortune, and Arthur's Ten Nights in a Bar-room, they mocked the established popular literature in a way that no realist manifesto, however witty, could equal. Before investigating the specific satiric methods Howells, Dreiser, and Crane used (in Chapters

Three, Four, and Five), I will try to define the popular novel and give some representative examples.

It is a commonplace in literary criticism that American writers embraced the romance and refashioned it into a distinctly American form whose central concern is the confrontation of the often innocent individual with the unknown forces of the American wilderness.[10] Certainly the nineteenth-century American romance, or, more properly speaking, romance-novel, of Hawthorne, Melville, Cooper, and Poe, creates a world of symbolic heroic confrontations. In this world the individual--Arthur Dimmesdale, Ahab, Natty Bumppo, A. Gordon Pym--confronts mysterious terrors, unknown forces, malign influences. He may, like Bumppo and Pym, be confronting the awesome and mysterious forces of nature and the wilderness; like Dimmesdale, he may be battling the evils which his own sins have created. Or, like Ahab, he may be combatting both nature and the evil in his own soul. In all of these instances, the confrontations are idealized and mythified and occur in a world outside the normal world. In this world, characters tend to relate much more to their plight (or adversary) than to each other. Yet given these general guidelines, it is important to clarify the definition of American romance with reference to two questions. One is

how the American romance differs from the earlier forms of romance; the other is what distinction exists between the romance-novels of classical authors like Hawthorne and Poe and the popular novels such as those to be discussed in this study.

The nineteenth-century American romance like The Scarlet Letter differs from both medieval and later romance first in that it has more characteristics of the novel than its two predecessors. It is actually a romance-novel, for it attempts to present a recognizable social context, an implied authorial voice, and, most importantly, some description of the psychological motivations of the characters. To the extent that it has these elements, a work like The Scarlet Letter is a traditional novel. To the extent that it presents the intensified world of heightened possibility, the inexplicable, the marvelous, or the mythic, it resembles the romance.[12] Another difference between nineteenth-century romance-novels and earlier romance is that this "atmosphere of strange enchantment,"[13] to use Hawthorne's phrase, is an accepted part of a medieval or Elizabethan romancer's tradition, whereas in Hawthorne it is something deliberately injected into the narrative to produce the effects of wonder or terror, awe or delight.[14] (This atmosphere of the otherworldly is characteristic of the romance but not

essential; a writer can create the same mythic quality through the description of a confrontation or quest.)

In applying this definition to the best sellers and popular novels of the later nineteenth century, we can recognize the deliberate artifice and fanciful nature of such works, with their outlandish or improbable situations, but we cannot call these works romance-novels in the sense that a Hawthorne work is a romance-novel. Edwin Cady has called popular works "neo-romances,"[15] Richard Chase the "other" or "second stream" of romance.[16] Grant C. Knight, classifying such works under the heading romance, has qualified that statement by pointing out their inferior quality. What more properly describes these novels, however, and what takes into account the <u>treatment</u> as well as the theme, is the term <u>sentimental</u> romantic novel. Warner Berthoff has defined sentimentality as the creation of an idealized world accompanied with a lack of control over that world.[18] James Russell Lowell describes that world when he points to the insincerity of the presentation of emotion as characteristic of sentimentality;[19] Harry Levin too sees sentimentality as emotion in which we do not believe.[20] Works like <u>Wide, Wide World</u> and <u>Soldiers of Fortune</u> are sentimental works because although they have story elements that resemble the plots of romance-novels, they cannot reproduce their essence,

their "atmospherical medium"[21] and convincing world view. They replace the archetypes and legendary characters of the romance-novel with stereotyped and impossibly idealized characters.[22] The romance-novels emphasized the power of the unusual individual; the sentimentality of popular authors transformed this interest into shallow hero-worship; the interest in beauty in the romance-novel became in the hands of the popular sentimental writer an adoration of the Pure Beautiful Woman.[23]

Adulterating the form of the romance-novel, the sentimental romantic novels of popular author form an inferior body of literature.[24] Yet writers of some creative power chose to use the modes and styles of these novels in order to lure a large new reading public into accepting a more vigorous view of reality than that offered by popular fiction. Furthermore, talented writers often lapsed uncritically into these modes and styles when they were not parodying or satirizing them. The following discussion will treat some of the most famous--or notorious--examples of such popular fiction.

One major type of popular sentimental novel dealt with the theme of romantic love and was directed to the aspirations and fantasies of its female audience. The high priestess of this form was Mrs. E.D.E.N. Southworth, who had to use all four initials because a rival with the same last name was

trying to sell her novels on the strength of the similarity. Mrs. Southworth was the author of sixty novels with alliterative or sensational titles like The Curse of Clifton, The Hidden Hand, The Deserted Wife, and India, Pearl of Pearl River. She certainly serves as a representative of what was popular for many decades before and during the time when the realists and naturalists were publishing their fiction. While I do not mean to suggest that my discussion of Mrs. Southworth describes the entire field of sentimental novelists, I do believe that her treatment of romantic plots is typical of a popular novelist's way of handling plot configurations and characterization. Her immense popularity for decades suggests that Mrs. Southworth had mastered the formula of the sentimental romance--much as Agatha Christie mastered the formula of the detective novel.

India, Pearl of Pearl River (1857) is typical Southworth. The plot concerns the erratic fortunes of three characters, Mark Sutherland, a rich Southern plantation owner and slave holder, India, his superficially beautiful and materialistic fiancée, and Rosalie, a patient Griselda type with many Christian virtues, whom Mark finally marries. India has boldness and beauty, but none of the Christian humility, courage, or tendency to moralize of the retiring Rosalie. Mark's decision to marry Rosalie after becoming disinherited for freeing his slaves is supposed to be a moral triumph

after his infatuation with India. Emotions and motivations are radically simplified. Mark becomes the good man when he spurns outward show in India to lead the truly Christian life with Rosalie. Set up according to categories of absolute good or evil, the characters are either sympathetic or unsympathetic.

No sooner does a character in a Southworth novel have an urge for good or evil than he rushes off to put it into action. At the beginning of India, for example, Mark has graduated from college a rich Confederate; he travels to New York a few days later and is immediately converted to abolitionism. Furthermore, each scene is calculated either to present some monumental decisions in the characters' lives (such as Mark's resolution to marry Rosalie) or to show the good characters constantly in difficult straits. The intended effect of this rapid succession of emotionally intense incidents is to keep the reader in constant suspense and sympathy with the fortunes of the characters. The rationale was that quick and violent action focused the reader's attention and elicited an intense emotional reaction. But the actual effect is rather different--the reader is dizzy from such a constant merry-go-round of reversals and decisions. In order for these characters and scenarios to be believable to any discriminating audience, their reactions

would have had to be somewhat individualized. Instead the characters remain abstract, sounding only like the virtues they are supposed to represent. A heavy reliance on repetition as well as great exaggeration of tone produce speeches like this one from the saintly Rosalie as she urges Mark to continue striving to be a good man:

> "I have not asked you to do this from the fear of any punishment, or the hope of any reward; I have not required it at your hands for God's sake, least of all for mine; I have simply demanded it in the name of the RIGHT!"[25]

In addition, scenes which consist of such speeches turn on clear-cut moral issues, the conflict between love and duty, or charity and selfishness, and how the characters resolve these issues determines how the reader is to view these people. For example, when India and Mark Sutherland renounce each other because Mark has given up his patrimony and turned abolitionist, Mrs. Southworth suggests that India has pridefully sacrificed her love to a desire for show and finery. She then has both characters mouth abstract phrases about love and duty. But what they say could apply to any situation of conflict between desires and duties, and does not help to give them any distinctness as characters.

The novels of Southworth contain assumptions about romantic love in America that Howells especially was to satirize. The prime assumption is that the world is basically a

setting for the romance of the heart. In such a world, the reader's expectations about the conduct of men or women are always fulfilled; good men are heroic and strong; and woman are chaste, shy, and inspirational. Finally, in this world of love encounters, highly dramatic scenes take place in exotic locales where the settings are as exceptional as the characters themselves.

If the characterization, plotting, and strongly moralistic platform in the work of Mrs. Southworth and her contemporaries all depend on exaggeration combined with idealization and stereotype, so too does the style. A final element in popular sentimental novels is what can be called the tyranny of exaggerated style. The sources of this style, as Edmund Pearson, Richard Bridgman and Howard Mumford Jones have noted, were English.[26] Bridgman remarks: "Well into the nineteenth century many Americans continued to look to England for stylistic guidance."[27] But whether, as Bridgman suggests, because American idiom jarred with British prose and speech or, as Constance Rourke and F.L. Pattee argue, because of the natural tendency of American speech to be flamboyant,[28] the prose style that resulted often bore little resemblance to the English of Richardson, Fielding, and Scott. Popular American authors developed a misconception of what it was to be eloquently English, and achieved

instead "a characteristically ornate and diffuse style," in Harold Harding's phrase.[29] High-toned language was interpreted to mean high-flown language, as unlike normal speech as possible. The more inferior the writer, Jones notes, the more ornate and rhetorical his style becomes. Edmund Wilson has rightly called this style "the clogged and viscous prose style of the early nineteenth century."[30] And to Twain and Howells, writing later in the century, it seemed as if even the characters of Sir Walter Scott, a literary model for popular writers, "talked as seldom man and never woman talked," and they called for a prose style that would reflect the speech patterns of the average American.[31]

The style which resulted substituted sententiousness for seriousness, verbosity for eloquence. When used in speeches, it was called spread-eagle style, possibly because it was the standard style for patriotic occasions. Here is one example of such circumlocution, a July 4th oration:

> Bleak as were their prospects, they enlisted for their country--desperation brooked their pains, for victory fed their agony--hunger they endured, for their religion was their liberty. Hammockless and tattered--jaded and homeless--forbearing, yet intrepid like soldiers, they accepted their furloughs from eternity.[32]

This was an accepted style of literary production of the time, no matter whether the work was sermon or gift-book, novel or

Fourth of July oratory.

We can see this embellished and stilted style in the speeches of characters such as Mrs. Southworth's: she in turn was imitating the less skilful James Fenimore Cooper novels. The following passage from a Cooper novel, The Pioneers, written a few decades before India, could have come from one of Mrs. Southworth's novels. The hero and heroine are trapped in a forest which is in flames. The style of their conversation, lengthily inappropriate to the urgency of their situation, puts such importance on eloquence that language seems to replace meaning. The lady begins rhetorically:

> "At such a moment, Mr. Edwards, all earthly distinctions end . . . let us die together."
> "If anything could reconcile a man to his death," cried the youth, "it would be to meet it in such company!"
> "Talk not so, Edwards, talk not so. . . we must die; yes, yes, we must die--it is the will of God, and let us endeavor to submit. . . ."
> "If I had possessed but a moiety of your heavenly resignation, all might yet have been well."
> "Name it not--name it not. . . . Fly! Leave me. An opening may yet be found for you. Tell [my father] that the hours of this life are as nothing when balanced in the scales of eternity . . . And say . . . how dear, how very dear, was my love for him; and that it was near, too near, to my love for God."[33]

Although the mythic hero Natty Bumppo finds a way to save these characters from the flames that envelop them, nothing saves the reader from the assault of their verbosity. It is

no wonder that Garland, considering the combination of Latinate speech and melodramatic emotional outburst, angrily dismissed it as "mere effectism."

Just as the style of Mrs. Southworth's novels was an imitation of and a degeneration from English models, so too the form of her novels was based on the late eighteenth-century English novel of sensibility. In its purest form the novel of sensibility, or of tender and refined emotionalism, was perfected by Mackenzie in The Man of Feeling (1771) and Sterne in A Sentimental Journey through France and Italy (1768).[34] Such novels present characters whose feelings are aroused by every situation from a startling perception about a painting to the death of one's beloved of a broken heart, and who enjoy every emotion and every chance to emote. In an 1886 edition of Mackenzie's The Man of Feeling, the editor indexes the number of times tears are shed and finds that they dampen every two or three pages.[35]

By the early nineteenth century, the form had been so much and so crudely imitated both in America and abroad that the characters were now merely hysterical and tearful rather than vessels of nuanced feelings and delicate sensibility. The typical American character displayed an extreme lack of restraint

and over-indulgence of feelings. Indeed American additions to the form made it possible for any characters, however lowly, to be sentimental, and middle-class characters often replaced aristocratic ones. The American sentimental novel can also be distinguished from its European counterpart by its emphasis on ideas like slavery and transcendentalism, yet these ideas serve only as a topical scafford on which to hang the plot. Howells satirizes this kind of novel when he presents characters who couch their romanticism in sentimental diction, but it is for Crane and Dreiser that this kind of fiction was ripe for parody, as we shall observe in the chapters devoted to these writers.

Sentimentality in the popular novel reflected the author's efforts both to move the audience through excessively emotional and sympathetic portrayals, as well as to show the characters' own tearful self-conceptions. The form depended implicitly on the idea that susceptibility to emotion was proof of moral virtue. The characters were endowed with a quivering susceptibility to emotion which the reader was expected to share. Linked with this requirement was an ethical position which, as Ernest Bernbaum points out, reflected the optimism and idealism of an upwardly mobile middle-class audience.[36] Believing that the combination of hard work and virtue would be rewarded, such an

audience wished to see such beliefs reflected in literature. Therefore in the sentimental novel formula, whether the plot was about a worthy orphan or a group of discontented factory hands, the appeal to the emotions was always accompanied by an affirmation of the value of work and faith.

In Stephen Crane's George's Mother, the exaggeratedly pious old mother urges her reluctant son to accept the sentimental ideas described above. Her portrait is a takeoff on many other didactic and concerned mothers in the sentimental novel. Although there is no evidence that Crane had any one author or work in mind, a perfect model for scenes in George's Mother could have been Elizabeth Wetherell's Wide, Wide World (1850). Together with the author's other domestic tearjerker Queechy, the work sold over one hundred thousand copies and was reissued frequently.[37] It contains a series of scenes where a fragile mother tries to teach Christian lessons about patience and humility to her adoring child. Such scenes read rather like catechisms ("Do you love God, Ellen?" "Yes, mother.") and are supposed to work on the reader's emotions:

> "Remember, dear Ellen, God sends trouble upon his children but in love; and though we cannot see how he will no doubt make all this work for our good."
> "I know, dear mother," sobbed Ellen, "but it's just as hard!"[38]

In George's Mother Crane will cleverly parody such a scene by presenting an extremely reluctant son and an overly aggressive yet plaintive mother.[39] In Wide, Wide World, however, after a novel filled with tearful scenes, the little girl listens to her mother's (and the author's) advice and is rewarded by growing up to be a beautiful and happy woman.

The children of parents who drank were not so lucky as Wetherell's Ellen. The typical fate of such unfortunates is reflected in this passage from The Distillery:

> The innocent daughter of John Monroe died while stretched between the bloated, mangled body of the expiring father and the more insensible and attenuated form of the faithful mother.[40] (italics added)

Here, as in most sentimental novels, rather than reminding the reader of the social problems which led to such a situation, the author heavy-handedly focuses on the pitiful spectacle of the dead child. This temperance tract, which was supposed to prove by dreadful example the dangers of drink, succumbs to the sentimentalist's love of creating pathetic situations for their own sake.

Many sentimental novels espoused an idea that had its roots deep in what R.S. Crane calls the anti-Calvinist, anti-predestination philosophy behind the cult of sensibility: the man who wished to reform or better his own life

was never lost.[41] (We will see in the Dreiser discussion that this dictum applied mostly to men.) Within every alcoholic who began the "fatal journey" to drunkenness, as one temperance novelist put it,[42] there was still the possibility that he could reclaim himself through the force of his free will. The characterization of Joe Morgan in the enormously popular Ten Nights in a Bar-room by T.S. Arthur is a case in point. Morgan begins life as an honest but inexperienced mill owner, "married to one of the sweetest girls in town."[43] He has a promising future until he falls prey to Demon Drink and the machinations of the town's tavern owner. (This villain has used the proceeds of Joe's mill to finance the decorating of the tavern.) The author devotes the customary few pages to describing Morgan's slow but relentless fall from solvency, until Morgan is reduced to "earning scarcely enough to buy the liquor it requires to feed the inordinate thirst that is consuming him" (p. 30).

The accidental death of his little girl one night in a tavern suddenly and dramatically gives Morgan the resolve to fight the compulsion to drink. From that moment, the author avers with characteristic sentimental optimism, Morgan never again touches liquor. The reformed drunkard transforms himself so successfully that when the narrator pays a visit to the town a few years later, Joe has succeeded

financially as well as morally and is a pillar of the community. One could never imagine such a happy resolution to a naturalist's study of alcoholism.

Obviously the sentimental formula applied to social problems tended to simplify and exaggerate the problems while overlooking their complexities. Temperance novels were extreme examples of this over-simplification because the sentimental authors had no doubt that someone who took a drop of liquor was on the way to certain ruin. (Crane's takeoff on this idea is the drunkard Mary, Maggie's mother, who daily drinks enough to kill her but instead seems to be stronger and heartier than most Bowery residents.) This quick perdition occurs in novels like Edgar Fawcett's The Evil that Men Do and Walt Whitman's Franklin Evans. This certainty in turn accounts for the shrill sermonizing quality of the form. Walt Whitman's early novel intones:

> and there we were, benumbing our faculties, and confirming ourselves in practices which ever too surely bring the scorn of the world, and deserved disgrace to their miserable victims![44]

The same rhetoric was applied to a social problem the sentimental reader considered even more ominous: the certain danger of the seducer for the poor and untutored young virgin. This idea descended virtually unchanged from the time when Richardson presented his virtuous, pious, and lovely paragon Pamela and told the reader that

> the whole [novel] will show the base arts of designing men to gain their wicked ends; and how much it behooves the fair sex to stand upon their guard against artful contrivances, especially when riches and power conspire against innocence and a low estate.[45]

The plight of woman, from Pamela to its late nineteenth-century imitations, was that she was easily victimized by unscrupulous or depraved seducers. If the novels of Mrs. Southworth ignore this unpleasant fact and often elevate woman to the position of divine oracle, the sentimental novel about seduction concentrates on the theme of victimization. An early sentimental predecessor of Sister Carrie treated the theme of the unwary shop girl in a sensational manner. The title page announces the plot:

> THE GREAT WRONGS OF THE SHOP GIRLS: THE LIFE AND TIMES OF MISS BEATRICE CLAFLIN. . . . How Miss Claflin became the White Slave in the Gilded Dry Goods Palace of a Merchant Prince![46]

Joaquin Miller, later considered a local color realist, ends a scene in which a young innocent has unknowingly met a madam and gone home with her: "And where will it end? Where have such things always ended?"[47] Unless a girl was rescued at the eleventh hour, it seemed inevitable that she would fall victim to a seducer.

The last-minute rescue, a standard incident in the seduction plot, occurs in Edgar Fawcett's A New York Family (1891) in a chapter entitled "Was it worse than death?"

which examines the difference between the pure and the impure woman. A part of the chapter is worth quoting because it established the kind of thinking Dreiser was confronted with when he wrote and defended Sister Carrie a decade later in 1900. In the scene, the erring daughter has just been rescued by her father from the married scoundrel with whom she eloped. Repentant, she faces her parent:

> "My father!" she murmured, and he saw that the tears were now streaming down her cheeks. "Kate," he pleaded, "as you love me, tell me one thing. You meant to live with Duncannon until he had got his divorce. But up to this time, Kate, what have been your relations with him. . . . It is what you have done that I wish to hear. . . . I have no punishment to inflict on you if you are guilty. I--I--yes, I will even love you just the same. . . . But Kate, would you dare to lie to me now, at such a moment. . . ."[48]

What is interesting about this interchange is the intense emphasis the father places on his daughter's chastity. He does not worry so much that she has run off with a married man, has made plans to live with him. Her virginity is all that matters. Luckily, Kate has been misled but not violated and she is admitted back into her family and society, But her story is meant to be a warning to other young women.

The heroine in A New York Family is fortunate in that she has a wealthy and loving father to rescue and protect her from her seducer. Other young women were not so

fortunate. Then the sentimental novelist was faced with the problem of reconciling censure of the fallen woman, who fell victim to a seducer because of poverty and defenselessness, with the optimistic sentimental philosophy that one chooses his own fate and is responsible for his sins. In a later Fawcett novel, The Evil that Men Do (1891), the young Cora has become a prostitute largely because of evil influences. Defenseless, poor, alone in the world, and working in a sweatshop, Cora falls prey to a rich seducer. Must she be blamed for her fall? Confronting the reader with such a pathetic picture, Fawcett still finds a way to reconcile it with the idea that Cora has deserved her awful fate. In a key scene Cora meets Owen, the man who once loved her and whom she rejected for a richer man. She realizes that her earlier error turned her on the downward path.

> "I've gone right down . . . I'm as bad as the worst now, Oweny . . . An' if we'd married, it might 'a been the savin' of us both. I'd a kep' straight if I'd had ye . . ." Here was the naked and shameless fact [which] Cora seemed to recognize . . . as she slowly nodded.[49]

Thus are the opposing ideas of free will and economic determinism reconciled. It was Cora's fault that she fell, as both she and the reader recognize. Again, the sentimental novelist has been faithful to the formula of damning the fallen woman.

While I do not mean to suggest that every sentimental novel about seduction followed the formulas outlined above, these works serve as good representatives of popular conceptions about the fallen woman. Even the more revolutionary works of the time echoed such censure. James A. Herne's famous stage play Margaret Fleming (1890) was considered daring in its time because it treated the subject of seduction with some frankness,[50] as opposed to the circumlocution found in Fawcett's novels, for example. Yet Herne's play contains the same assumptions about woman's guilt as A New York Family and The Evil that Men Do. The play treats in a traditional way the shopgirl who is the victim of her affluent seducer. Pitied before she loses her virtue, she is blamed after her fall and must be punished even more severely than he. The stock solution to the "problem" of the sinning woman was that she could live on, repentant or unrepentant, only to die in poverty.[51] Herne too chose this solution: the mistress dies, refusing to name her seducer. His punishment, on the other hand, is to receive temporary public disgrace and financial set-backs. But in accord with the sentimental philosophy of self-help discussed in the section on temperance novels, he is allowed to repent and return to prosperity and his pure wife Margaret Fleming. Audience and writer alike accepted this double standard for the sinning mistress and the seducer,

and Herne is no exception.

The Herne play rather too neatly ties in the concept of the pure woman, in this case the seducer's wife, as saint and inspiration, to contrast with the wayward mistress. When Margaret learns of her husband's sins, she feels responsible for his illegitimate child. Showing her husband how to repent, she wishes to set an example of penance and humility by adopting the child. Yet she is too pure to be believable --she never really reproaches her husband or complains of his treatment in strong terms--and the play leaves the discerning viewer dissatisfied with the dichotomy between pure wife and impure mistress. Furthermore, the mistress was pathetic and wronged; Herne's attempt to display Margaret's saintliness at the expense of the dead woman's sinfulness goes against the very implications of the play. Despite Herne's so-called honesty about the subject, it was left for Dreiser to challenge this categorization of pure and impure woman.

Popular sentimental novels, as we have seen, were predictable: they presented characters who were expected to act nobly, feel deeply, and speak dramatically. The plots were as inevitable as the characters were predictable: there were requisite obstacles to be conquered, mysteries

to be solved (usually three-quarters of the way through the stories), and happy resolutions at the end.

Novelists working in these modes were prevented from treating their subjects with either subtlety or complexity. A writer attempting to describe the poor within this tradition, for example, found that he had to reconcile the unpleasant facts of poverty with the need to present his subjects either as happy with their lot or as Horatio Alger types working to better themselves financially and socially. (Alger sold seventeen million copies of one hundred and twenty titles by peddling this philosophy of strive and succeed.)[52] Those impoverished characters who did not fit either category were held responsible for their poverty and even harshly criticized. Catharine Maria Sedgwick's The Poor Rich Man and the Rich Poor Man (1864) preaches:

> In all our widespread country there is very little poverty. In New England--none that is not the result of vice or disease. If the moral and physical laws of the Creator were obeyed, the first of these causes would be at an end, and the second would scarcely exist.[53]

Even novels which started out in sympathy with the problems of the poor fell into sentimentality instead of trying to resolve the problem. Mary Wilkins Freeman's The Portion of Labor (1901), which describes the struggles of a working class family in a Massachusetts milltown, is a case in point.

Freeman often raises questions about who is responsible for the poor conditions among the mill workers, representing the mill owner as a proud, hard man who does not respond even to little children and one who makes no attempt to pay adequate wages or to keep old employees on the payroll. But she does not attempt to study the implications of the situation she has presented. Instead, the novel reverses itself and falls completely into the sentimentality that has been hovering over it for three hundred pages. The heroine, Ellen Brewster, who has been disturbed by the inequities in the mill, becomes the rags-to-riches heroine of this novel, with its conventional happy ending of a virtuous young beauty who marries well. When Ellen falls in love with a wealthy young man, nephew of the mill owner, the reader is expected to see this as a complete resolution of the poor Brewster family's hardship: the father need not go back to the mill and the mother can stop weeping over the family's poverty. Freeman ignores the plight of the rest of the mill workers who are not so lucky as the Brewsters.

As Ellen's former life of poverty fades from the reader's mind, Freeman adjusts the données of the earlier portions of the novel to fit the conclusion. Ellen's father, who had protested against the unjust treatment mill workers received in the town, now sees Ellen's new success as proof

of the virtue of Christian faith and resignation and preaches acceptance of the very conditions that the novel had spent so much time criticizing as unjust. This jarring inconsistency suggests a weakness in the composition of the work. The novel that had begun as a social protest tract about the problems of the laborer has become a confused muddle of sentimental ideas. What Freeman did in The Portion of Labor was to present a complex social problem and apply to it the formulaic conclusion of the sentimental novelist.

Students of the popular novel from Chase to Q.D. Leavis have noted that it replaces complexity of characterization, discussion of complex moral problems, and reverberations of meaning with simplicity of character portrayal, stereotyped problems and solutions, and "fatal inner falsity."[54] The sentimental novels discussed in this chapter bear witness to such observations. It was not that the popular novels did not present the same themes as would great fiction: Southworth deals with the same problems as Tolstoy, Flaubert, or, for that matter, Dreiser. It was that the high quality of treatment, the depth, insight, and honesty of serious fiction, was lacking in the popular fiction of the time. The cheap fiction dealt with urgent human problems, but gave them shoddy and inferior discussions.

Although these novels successfully reflected their

readers' aspirations and interests, the works studied here made no attempt to explore honestly the problems of their age. When they did not deny or overlook evil, pain, and unpleasantness on the social scene they used them as convenient obstacles for the hero or heroine to meet with, struggle against, and at last overcome triumphantly. It was this reliance on literary formula, embodied in a style which reflected such stereotyped responses, that the realists and the naturalists were combatting. Recognizing the importance of the issues in sentimental fiction, Howells, Dreiser, and Crane particularly, found new ways to use the old plots of cheap novels with new depth, attitudes, and insights. In theme the earlier best sellers are clearly aligned with the later more serious works. The complexity and implications of that similarity will be explored first in the works of Howells.

NOTES TO CHAPTER TWO

1. Definitions and statistics about the American best seller are in Edward A. Weeks, "The Best Sellers Since 1875," Publisher's Weekly, April 21, 1934, 1506; Alice P. Hackett, Fifty Years of Best Sellers, 1895-1945; Frederick L. Allen, "Best Sellers: 1900-1935," Sat R, 13 (Dec. 7, 1935); Frank L. Mott, Golden Multitudes (New York, 1947).

2. Good discussions of the rise of the best seller are J.C. Furnas, A Social History of the United States, 1587-1914 (New York, 1969), pp. 734ff.; Russell Nye, The Unembarrassed Muse (New York, 1970); James D. Hart, The Popular Book (New York, 1950); Henri Petter, The Early American Novel (Columbus, Ohio, 1970), provides good and full discussions of eighteenth-century popular books.

3. Alexander Cowie, "The Vogue of the Domestic Novel, 1850-1870," SAQ, 41 (Oct. 1942), 416; Elizabeth Winslow, "Books for the Lady Reader, 1820-1860," Romanticism in America, ed. George Boas (New York, 1961), pp. 89-109.

4. Weeks, p. 1506.

5. Weeks, p. 1506.

6. The phrase "vast market for superficial fiction," is Donald Pizer's."Popular Fiction, an Introduction," The Literary Criticism of Frank Norris, ed. Donald Pizer (Austin, Texas, 1964), p. 126. Hackett lists all of the books mentioned in the best seller lists, passim.

7. Hamlin Garland, "Productive Conditions of American Literature," Forum, 17 (Mar.-Aug. 1894), 691. Page references in the text will be from this article. See Robert P. Falk, "The Rise of Realism, 1871-1891," Transitions in American Literary History, ed. Harry Hayden Clark (1954; rpt. New York, 1967), pp. 379-442, for a full discussion of the critical reaction to romanticism. See also H.H. Boyesen, "The Great Realists and the Empty Story-Tellers," Forum,18 (Feb. 1895), 725-731 and George Pellew, "The New Battle of the Books,"

Forum, 18 (Dec. 1890), 470-480 for a representative sampling of other realists.

8. William Dean Howells, Criticism and Fiction (New York, 1891), p. 108. The phrase "literary elect" is Howells's. Page references in the text will be from this edition.

9. See William Dean Howells, Criticism and Fiction, pp. 63ff., 118. Howard Mumford Jones, The Age of Energy, Varieties of American Experience, 1865-1915 (New York, 1970), p. 221, mentions that Howells distinguishes "honest" from "dishonest" romances.

10. See R.W.B. Lewis, The American Adam (Chicago, Ill., 1955); Tony Tanner, The Reign of Wonder (Cambridge, England, 1965); Perry Miller, Nature's Nation (Cambridge, Mass., 1967); Richard Chase, The American Novel and Its Tradition (Garden City, New York, 1957); Daniel Hoffman, Form and Fable in American Fiction (1961; Corrected ed., New York, 1965), pp. 40-50, 356; Constance Rourke, American Humor (New York, 1931), p. 87, pp. 101ff.

11. Chase, p. 19.

12. Helpful definition-discussions on the form of the romance are in Northrop Frye, Anatomy of Criticism (Princeton, N.J., 1957), pp. 186-205; Frank Lucas, The Decline and Fall of the Romantic Ideal (1936; rpt. New York and Cambridge, England, 1937), passim.; Joseph Shipley, Dictionary of Literary Terms (Boston, 1943), pp. 281-283.

13. Nathaniel Hawthorne, The Blithedale Romance (New York, 1960), p. 22.

14. The best Elizabethan example of conscious artifice as accepted tradition is Sir Philip Sidney's Arcadia.

15. Edwin H. Cady, The Light of Common Day (Bloomington, Ind., 1971), Chapter One, passim.

16. Chase, p. 20.

17. Grant C. Knight, The Critical Period in American Literature (Chapel Hill, N.C., 1951), pp. 96ff.

18. Warner Berthoff, The Ferment of Realism: American Literature, 1884-1919 (New York, 1965), p. 97.

19. James Russell Lowell, "Rousseau and the Sentimentalists," The Writings of James Russell Lowell (Boston and New York, 1898), 2, 242.

20. Harry Levin, "Charles Dickens (1812-1870)," ASch, 25 (Autumn 1970), 675.

21. Nathaniel Hawthorne, The House of Seven Gables (New York, 1954), p. v.

22. Discussions of this process of stereotyping or "denaturing" literature are found in Q.D. Leavis, Fiction and the Reading Public (London, 1932), and Albert Van Nostrand, The Denatured Novel (New York, 1956), pp. 39ff.

23. I am indebted to Perry Miller, "The Romantic Dilemma in American Nationalism and the Concept of Nature," Nature's Nation (Cambridge, Mass., 1967) and Lucas, Chapters 1, 2.

24. See George Santayana, The Genteel Tradition at Bay (1931; rpt. Cambridge, Mass., 1967) and Knight, passim. for further definitions of the Genteel Tradition's transformation of Romanticism.

25. Mrs. E.D.E.N. Southworth, India, Pearl of Pearl River (New York, 1857), p. 365. Page references in the text will be from this edition.

26. Richard Bridgman, The Colloquial Style in America (New York, 1966), Chapters 1, 2 passim.; Edmund Pearson, Queer Books (Garden City, New York, 1928), pp. 250ff.; Jones, pp. 267ff.

27. Bridgman, p. 40.

28. Rourke, Chapters 1-4; Edmund Pattee, The First Century of American Literature, 1770-1890 (1935; rpt. New York, 1966), p. 107.

29. Harold F. Harding, Everett L. Hunt, and Willard Thorp, "The Orators," Literary History of the United States (3rd. ed., rev., New York, 1963), ed. Robert Spiller et al., p. 544.

30. Edmund Wilson, "The Chastening of American Prose Style," Patriotic Gore (New York, 1962), p. 636.

31. William Dean Howells, "Editor's Study," Harper's, 88 (1889), 983. Both men were aware of the falsity of "literary talk." Howells in the 'eighties said that Scott made his characters talk absurdly; Twain made a similar observation about Cooper,"Fenimore Cooper's Literary Offenses," Portable Mark Twain, ed. Bernard de Voto (New York, 1946).

32. Pearson, p. 30.

33. James Fenimore Cooper, The Pioneers (New York, 1962), p. 13.

34. On the novel of sensibility: Herbert R. Brown, The Sentimental Novel in America, 1800- 1860 (Durham, N.C., 1940); Bonamy Dobrée, Oxford History of English Literature in the Early Eighteenth Century, 1700-1740 (New York, 1967), pp. 624ff.; Ronald S. Crane, "Suggestions toward a Genealogy of the 'Man of Feeling,'" ELH, 1 (December, 1934), 224-234; Edgar Branch, The Sentimental Years, 1830-1860 (New York, 1934): An American novel of sensibility is William Hill Brown, The Power of Sympathy, ed. Milton Ellis (New York, 1937).

35. Henry Mackenzie, The Man of Feeling (New York, 1886). The editor is not named in the edition.

36. Ernest Bernbaum, The Drama of Sensibility (Gloucester, Mass., 1958), p. 2.

37. Quoted in Cowie, p. 416.

38. Elizabeth Wetherell, Wide, Wide World (New York, 1852), p. 60.

39."George's Mother," Stephen Crane: Stories and Tales, ed. Robert W. Stallman (New York, 1952), p. 113.

40. Quoted in Brown, p. 221.

41. Crane's article gives a good summary of the Calvinism in sentimental thought.

42. The phrase is from Walt Whitman's temperance novel, Franklin Evans (New York, 1842), p. 90.

43. T.S. Arthur, Ten Nights in a Bar-room, ed. Donald Koch (Cambridge, Mass., 1964), p. 29. Page references in the text will be from this edition.

44. Whitman, p. 90.

45. Samuel Richardson, Pamela, or: Virtue Rewarded, ed. William M. Sale, Jr. (New York, 1958), p. 91.

46. Quoted in Pearson, p. 175.

47. Joaquin Miller, The Destruction of Gotham (New York, 1886), p. 7.

48. Edgar Fawcett, A New York Family (New York, 1891), p. 269.

49. Edgar Fawcett, The Evil that Men Do (New York, 1899), p. 330.

50. James A. Herne, "Margaret Fleming," The Black Crook and Other Nineteenth-Century American Plays, ed. Myron Matlaw (New York, 1967), pp. 460-510.

51. A notable exception to this was D.G. Phillips, Susan Lenox: Her Fall and Rise (1908). The heroine gone bad does not end up poor or die young, but her success does not bring her happiness. She succeeds in life as an actress but is lonely and unhappy. In addition, the novel is not a a nineteenth-century novel, but an early twentieth-century one: Sister Carrie had paved the way eight years earlier.

52. Furnas, p. 654.

53. Catharine Maria Sedgwick, The Poor Rich Man and the Rich Poor Man (New York, 1864), p. 22. John Hay, The Breadwinners: A Social Study (New York, 1905), gives the subject a similar novelistic treatment.

54. Chase, p. 20.

CHAPTER THREE

HOWELLS AND THE DEFLATION OF THE SENTIMENTAL PROTAGONIST

Howells put forth a suggestion in The Rise of Silas Lapham (1895) that the ideal modern novelist would be one "who could interpret the common feelings of commonplace people,"[1] and many of his later, socially oriented novels try to reach that objective, sometimes to the point of dullness. But for a writer whose critical enterprise was to choose the average and representative in American life and portray it as objectively as possible, Howells's early novels and short fiction contain a disconcertingly large number of sentimental plots and romanticized characters. The term "romantic" used as a criticism of Howells's characterizations needs some qualification here. One group of Howells critics, represented by Granville Hicks and Harley Grattan, say Howells is "romantic" in the sense that he presents characters largely in terms of their love interests and "domestic" emotions.[2] Hicks and Grattan claim that Howells in so doing ignores the hard economic and social realities of American life. Yet these critics overlook the fact that

love interests too are a legitimate aspect of the reality of American life and that Howells is not a writer with a romantic outlook simply because his characters talk and think about middle-class love. The sense in which Kenneth Eble uses Romanticism as a charge against Howells (i.e., sentimental romanticism resulting in poor quality of work) is more to the point.[3] Eble finds that Howells too often merely imitates the pointless emotionalism, stale stereotypes, and shallow characters of the popular sentimental novel instead of manipulating these forms creatively. If this is true, this is a lapse in Howells's realism, and is a legitimate criticism of his work.

Critics who defend Howells against the charge of sentimental romanticism in his early fiction find that these works contain satire on the characteristics of novels dealing with romantic love and that this satire has often been mistaken for the elements it mocked. Edwin Cady, William Wasserstrom, and John R. Dove argue that Howells's supposedly sentimental and clichéd heroines are more often the confused victims either of their own wilful caprice or of the semi-invalid role to which society, in Howells's opinion, has consigned them as women.[4] Far from being stereotypes, these women, it is argued, are often as complex as they are perverse. Similarly, Howells's so-called morally delicate

and high-thinking gentlemen are said to be no mere conventional heroes but rather the objects of his ironic though sympathetic regard.[5]

In a sense Howells is both following sentimental romanticism and satirizing it. His early work did ridicule sentimental novels and sketches. Yet his work displays such a preoccupation with the ideas of popular novels--especially that of the overly susceptible literary man--that it often presents these ideas in the same way (i.e., with the same treatment) that a popular novel would. The problem confronting Howells in his early works was how to gain a mature perspective on sentimental fiction and romantic stereotypes so that he could satirize without imitating. Given the enormous influence of the traditions discussed in Chapter Two as well as Howells's affinity for the sentimental novel, satirizing it was one way Howells could free his work from a dependence on popular sentimental tradition. Regardless of whether his early work was "too romantic," what it developed was a satirical approach toward popular literary romanticism. The discussion which follows will trace the evolution and growth of these methods from the early travel sketches to their flowering in the ironic novel Mrs. Farrell (1875).

The early travel sketches, Italian Journeys (1867)

and Suburban Sketches (1871), which are in large part local color descriptions of Italy and Boston respectively, also create narrators whose overly literary and romantic (or sentimental) conceptions are deflated by "poor real life."[6] The sketches were written with a view to capturing the audience for comic travel literature by debunking imagined European splendors.[7] (Twain's Innocents Abroad, written in 1867, was published in 1869.) The sketches also base their comedy on satirizing the romantic concept, encountered on its lowest level in Mrs. Southworth, that the setting for literary inspiration must be exotic and dramatic. Not surprisingly for his first published works, Howells presents narrators who are partly autobiographical. Like Howells in the 'seventies, these narrators are young, fascinated by the great writers of the past, and ambivalent about the need for romanticism in modern life and literature.[8] Both romantic and cynical about romantics, these young men are Howells's first ironic protagonists.

In "The Picturesque, the Improbable and the Pathetic in Ferrara," the narrator of Italian Journeys somewhat skeptically visits the place where the great Tasso was supposed to have been imprisoned for seven years. He encounters a guard who is avidly engaged in reading a Dumas romance. The atmosphere seems hardly propitious for romance if the guide,

who lives there, has to seek it elsewhere. Finally the guard looks up from his reading to give the narrator a mournful tour through a place supposedly filled with romantic and literary associations. Here Howells raises the reader's expectation about a romantic setting--but with reservations: the narrator insists that he doesn't believe in myth, and furthermore, has never even read Tasso. But when he discovers a few days later in a "factual" travel narrative (such as Howells himself was trying to write) that the Tasso myth was just that, he "felt somehow that . . . he had been awakened from a cherished dream."[9] Although Howells seems to sympathize with the shock of disenchantment, he yet jars his narrator--and the reader--into an awareness of their desire to believe in romantic stories.

Continuing this journey into sobering disillusionment, the literary narrator discovers a few days later that Ariosto's birthplace has been carelessly sold and redecorated. Again his hope that the present can preserve the past has been dashed. All of his romantic expectations are defeated when he visits the supposedly gloomy dungeons where famous lovers pined, only to find that the dungeons have become rather pleasant sunlit rooms--although his guide "obligingly" assures him that they were much more dingy in the past. The dramatic irony of the guide's reassurances is Howells's commentary on the foolishness

of scavenging for the past.

Howells gives some American examples of the futility of the romantic quest in "A Romance of Real Life" (Suburban Sketches). There a well-to-do literary resident of Cambridge meets a vagrant whose life story perfectly resembles some account from a romantic novel: the man is looking for his long-lost daughter, Excited and interested in the dramatic possibilities the story suggests, the literary man is so pleased with the story that he does not ask himself whether it is plausible. After exhausting himself trying to locate the daughter, he finds out at the end of the sketch that the story was all a fabrication and the man was a con man looking for a dupe. As in Italian Journeys, Howells uses the sketch to teach the narrator, whose initial complaint was that "the oxygen has perished from every sentiment,"[10] not to trust in his romantic tendencies.

Howells's best extended satirical effect concerning illusions overturned by reality is in "Scene" in Suburban Sketches. It is a serious sketch about the suicide by drowning of a young wayward Irish girl and it looks forward to Crane's Maggie both in tone and subject matter.[11] From the beginning, images of water, associated with wretchedness and despair, are thrust upon the protagonist, a blithe young literary man. Strolling along the river bank before he has noticed the men taking away the girl's body, he is

> so filled with the tender serenity of the scene as not to be too troubled by the spectacle of the small Irish houses standing miserably about on the flat ankle deep.[12]

Howells here deliberately associates the misery of the drowned girl with the misery of the tenants in these water-soaked houses. But the young man is impervious to such realities. His is the language of the literary man who depicts picturesquely sentimental scenes ("tender serenity"). Howells ironically juxtaposes this language, which glosses over the actual situation, with language describing the reality ("miserably," "ankle deep"). Noticing some "literary value" in the story of the drowning, and seeing the corpse, the man stifles any natural sympathy through the idea that he "had lately been thinking what a very tiresome figure to the imagination the Fallen Woman had become" (p. 191). He is not interested in what brought her to commit suicide, in her human reality, only in the potential marketability of the idea of her "case." As they bring the body past him in a cart, his reaction is to fall into a reverie about the romantic possibilities of suicide, another attempt to visualize her once more in literary terms. At the conclusion of the sketch, therefore, he has learned nothing about his romanticism.

It is a measure of his skill that Howells does not have the young man jolted out of his need to romanticize

life and death at the end of the sketch (a sharp contrast to the pointed disillusionment of the other sketches). Instead he leaves the youth's illustory world intact and switches to the spectacle of the dead girl.

> In the bottom of the cart lay something long and straight and terrible, covered with a red shawl that drooped over the end of the wagon; and on this thing were piled the baskets in which the grocers had delivered their order for sugar and flour. . . .(p. 194).

Everything conspires to make the dead girl an object. After this harsh description, which deflates the earlier literary speculations, Howells ends the sketch by describing the unexpected hilarity of the young boys following the cart. To them, as to the young man and the grocers, this suicide is cause for neither pity nor sympathy. The boys use the suicide as an occasion for shouting down the street as they follow the cart, much as the young man uses it as an occasion for literary reverie.

Howells faced a complex problem in characterization here. On the one hand, he writes about a recognizably autobiographical character, a literary man who is romantic but professes not to be (Italian Journeys). In depicting this type of character, Howells is not totally successful, for the characters in their indecisiveness about romanticism mirror Howells's own very real ambivalence. The attractive pictures of the young man with romantic illusions (Italian

Journeys) seem to indicate that Howells himself identified with these characters and thus plausibly explain why his treatment of them was not consistently satirical or critical. The other type of character Howells presents is that of the completely romantic young man ("Scene"), filled with illusions and fancy literary ideas. Howells seems to be at ease with this character because he is simple and easy to mock and therefore, if my speculations are correct, reflects only one side of Howells himself. "Scene" is the most effective of Howells's early sketches because in it he is able to distance himself from the character in a way he had not done before. Despite his affinity for romanticism, in these early sketches Howells developed a method for deflating romantic ideas by ironically juxtaposing them with reality.

Howells applied his new method of ironic deflation to a longer prose work, the half-character sketch, half-travel book Their Wedding Journey (1871).[13] Still exploring the figure of the literary man who denies his romanticism but practices it anyway, Howells created the author Basil March. (A more chastened and less romantic March reappears in later novels.) March and his bride Isabel claim that they are not romantics or sentimentalists, but they decide

to go on a honeymoon to Niagara Falls, and that despite the fact that they are ten years older than most newlyweds. The plot thus revolves around their experiences on the trip to and from the Falls, and combines travel description with the theme of the disillusionment of the romantic character.[14]

March, like the earlier travellers in Italian Journeys and Suburban Sketches, is unaware of how much of a romantic he is. Every time he describes or reacts to a landscape, "he imagined the romance of a life spent at a watering-place,"[15] a city, a town. Although March decries the sentimentality of the English colonists in Montreal in erecting the statue of an English hero, and although he later tells Isabel that he was sentimental in the past but is completely changed, all of his actions, speeches, and feelings belie his words.

An extended example of Howells's ironic treatment of the Marches is found in one scene where, at Niagara Falls, they encounter a group of brightly dressed Indians with red shawls and dark eyes. Howells's vivid description of the Indians invites reactions from both the reader and the Marches. The reader's response is to consider the Indians colorful and distinctive. On the other hand, Isabel is disappointed to learn that these Indians are so healthy, cheery, and not at all legendary. They have names like Daisy Smith, speak "distressingly good English," and are Protestants rather

than worshippers of the Great Spirit. Isabel had hoped to find monuments to a lost tribe; instead, as she says,

> "how shocking that they should be Christians, and Protestants! And that woman said that they were increasing. They ought to be fading away" (p. 86).

Disliking the reality she has found, Isabel would have preferred a romantic conclusion to the story of the Indians.[16]

Turning away from such a disillusioning spectacle, these inveterate romanticizers sit facing the Falls while Basil tries to create an appropriately sad and intense mood. He recites a sentimental poem about a man watching his brother drown in the Falls. Isabel, who wants events like the drowning to be true so that she can indulge her sensibilities, immediately reacts to Basil's poem by asking half fearfully and half hopefully whether it is true. Howells implies here that it is not the truth that Isabel craves (like the young man in "Scene"), for she had been displeased by the truth that the Indians were no longer subjects to mythologize. What she really craves is a superficial emotional jolt.

Isabel and Basil are sentimentalists who seek strong emotional stimuli of a sensational (but not authentic) kind. They would like to have dwelt on the lurid idea of drowning in the Falls. But Howells comically undercuts their reverie by having them quarrel, as real people will, about

whether it is safe to cross a bridge to get back to their hotel. Howells has them see an old man gamboling about on the rock Isabel so feared to fall from. This incident adds yet another comic detail to emphasize the absurd falsity of the Marches' attempt to infuse emotion into every situation.

Howells further satirizes the Marches when he has them worry about being the typical love-obsessed honeymoon couple. They have married somewhat late and are trying to disguise the fact that they are newly married:

> She drew closer and closer to him, and looked at him in a way that threatened the betrayal of her bridal character.
> "Isabel, you will be having your head on my shoulder, next," said he.
> "Never!" she answered fiercely, recovering her distance with a start. "But dearest, if you do see me going to act absurdly, you know, do stop me!"
> "I'm very sorry, but I've got myself to stop" (p. 7).

Although they romanticize the rest of the world, in their view of married love the Marches are the first of Howells's unconventional couples who try to reject the conduct of typical lovers. But the humor of the exchange above comes from the fact that even when the Marches are not trying to be romantic, they fall into a standard love scene and then try to stop themselves from being so romantic. The very fact that they are aware of curbing their tender impulses and

disguising their real feelings makes their rebellion unsuccessful. A further irony lies in the fact that the Marches have no self-knowledge about their romanticism. They think that they want to be anti-romantic but they actually prefer romanticism to its alternative. At one point, for example, Isabel laments the fact that people will believe they are not in love if they do not let their tender feelings show a little: "Do you know," she tells Basil, "that Miss Ellison took me at first for--your sister!" (p. 110). She wants to be thought of as the newly married bride, although she doesn't want to accept some of the public consequences.

The Marches' ambivalence toward romantic marital conventions reflects Howells's own conflict. As Lynn remarks, "Howells's satirization of the Marches' romantic attitudes is inconsistent."[17] Howells spends much time satirizing the Marches, yet he confesses admiration for

> those absurdly sentimental people whom yet I cannot find it in my heart to blame for their folly, though I could name ever so many reasons for rebuking it (p. 125).

Perhaps the Marches remind him of himself and his wife Eleanor. In any event, he himself forgets his pose of ironic amusement at times to praise "the romance of each little mansion" in Montreal (p. 126) and to mourn the vanished "rich romance of old European days" (p. 89). (His sincere admiration for the romantic and the ideal is apparently as strong as his

suspicion of it--this is part of the complexity of his works which elevates them beyond popular sentimental fiction.) Having created characters who embody the ambivalence about romanticism that he repeatedly confesses, he does not however endow them with enough self-knowledge to recognize their conflict. Instead he lightly satirizes them and sends them home from their wedding journey.

Their Wedding Journey is thus limited by its contradictory attitude toward sentimental, nostalgic romanticism, although it is Howells's first attempt to satirize romanticism in a long fictional work. A Chance Acquaintance (1873) is a more ambitious literary undertaking. Howells's first novel, it applies the technique of ironic deflation to the form of the romantic novel instead of the travel sketch. It also attempts to present a sustained ironic critique of the illusions of its characters. All of the events in A Chance Acquaintance seem to revolve around the shipboard romance of the arrogant Bostonian Miles Arbuton with the unsophisticated Kitty Ellison or Eriecreek. But those critics like Robert Falk[18] who have taken the novel to be a simple variant of a typical best seller by Richard Harding Davis or Mrs. Southworth have scanted the technical difficulties with which Howells was presented when writing the book. First, he was attempting to parody lightly the framework

of the sentimental romantic novel. His two protagonists do not have a happy love affair, and they part at the end of the novel. Second, he wanted to link this reversal of a typical sentimental plot with the theme of defeated romantic illusions that he had been exploring in the travel books, a fairly sophisticated undertaking. Third, as Cady and Fryckstedt note, he was treating the theme of the conventional vs. the unconventional in American manners.[19] By creating for the heroine, Kitty Ellison, the distinct personality of the unconventional American individualist, he was approaching the theme of the superiority of the natural manners over the Boston affectation of the anti-hero, Miles Arbuton. Finally, he had to balance the reversal of the sentimental plot with the creation of distinct characters.

Howells begins by connecting the ill-fated lovers to their illusions about the ideal gentleman and the ideal lady. The reader's first introduction to Kitty Ellison is oblique, through her expectation of the ideal Bostonian. Her uncle has fired her imagination by telling her that Boston is

> a city where man is valued simply and solely for what he is himself, and where color, wealth, family, occupation, and other vulgar and meretricious distinctions are wholly lost sight of in the consideration of individual excellence."[20]

As in the earlier Howells fiction, the ideal view, in this

case the view of the noble Bostonian, is soon to be deflated by the reality.

Holding such grandiose conceptions about the Boston gentleman, Kitty finds herself on the same pleasure boat to Canada as Mr. Miles Arbuton of Boston. Arbuton is so excessively proper and well-polished that the American passengers assume he is an Englishman--no compliment in a Howells novel. Arbuton is actually a caricature of an Englishman, for instead of cultivating snobbery, he worships it. He reacts in this way to the cheerful and friendly Kitty Ellison:

> Mr. Arbuton's eyes fell from the face to the vivid blue dress, which was not quite fresh and not quite new, and a glimmer of cold dismissal came into them. . .(p. 25).

Aping the English system of class distinctions, Arbuton has no appreciation for the beauty of a casually dressed American girl. Thought to be an English gentleman, he takes Kitty for a low English actress. The theme of false preconceptions will be explored in the novel, and events will show that Arbuton is no gentleman but an actor, and that Kitty is in fact a true lady. Arbuton, contemptuous of anything outside of Boston or Europe, assumes that Kitty would like to be transformed into a lady and tries to change her identity to suit his own anti-American notion of refinement. Kitty, so respectful toward the legend of the Bostonian, learns that actual Bostonians are not noble or humane, certainly

not representatives of the American ideal. Arbuton's behavior ultimately enrages Kitty and precipitates her spirited rejection of him and the non-democratic values he represents. The novel, ostensibly about romantic love, becomes a satire on the illusions of its main characters.

Early in the novel, Arbuton does fall in love with the appealing Kitty, but this is partly because he mistakenly assumes that he can save her from the Eriecreek origins he despises in her and that he can make her a "lady" instead.

> Mr. Arbuton brought his fancy to bear upon Eriecreek and wholly failed to conceive of it. He did not like the notion of its being thrust within the range of his knowledge; and he resented its being the home of Miss Kitty Ellison, whom he was beginning to accept as a not quite comprehensible yet certainly agreeable fact, though he still had a disposition to cast her off as something incredible (p. 65; italics added).

As in "Scene," Howells here is the ironic observer of a young man's foolish notion that to be worth considering a woman must be related to a romantic stereotype. In Arbuton's case it is the idea that a lady must be as reserved, elegant, and coldly distant as he is himself. By reproducing the circumlocutions of Arbuton (see italics), Howells satirizes him. (One remembers the ornate style of the popular writers in Chapter Two.)

Arbuton's mannerisms form a striking contrast to the fresh and direct way in which Kitty expresses her opinions.

Her speech has a colloquial twang that Howells's good friend Mark Twain would have approved.[21] As if in response to Arbuton's condescending interest, she complains to her aunt:

> "I don't know whether I'm tired of him--but I'm tired of it [the relationship] . . . I'm perplexed and troubled the whole time, and I don't see any end to it. Yes, I wish he'd go away!" (p. 154)

Kitty only half means what she says, since she is at this point considerably involved with Arbuton. But this is hardly the way a Southworth heroine (or, for that manner, Arbuton's ideal lady) would talk. Kitty's speech establishes her as a forthright American woman, using her native speech, and rejecting the affectation of Boston.

Arbuton's opinions on American landscape are as snobbish as his speech: "I should like to see an American landscape that put me in mind of anything. What can your imagination do for the present scenery?" (p. 43).[22] Here Arbuton, reminiscent of the seekers after the picturesque in Italian Journeys, Suburban Sketches, and Their Wedding Journey, is mouthing a favorite assumption of popular romanticism: the American landscape offers little interest for the sensitive observer because it has no ancient ruins or medieval castles to inspire or elate. (In a review for the Atlantic Monthly written in 1871, Howells argued that the American landscape was fully as inspiring as the European.[23]) Arbuton's

comment to Kitty (who admires the view) simply shows that he prefers to romanticize landscape rather than to observe and appreciate what is actually in front of him. Kitty's response is to ignore this obvious flaw in Arbuton's character, but the reader is expected to see through him.

Howells does not prolong this improbable love affair. Indeed, to have a credible plot he could not prolong the courtship, for Arbuton has been built up not only as an unsympathetic character, but also as a man who would be totally incompatible with Kitty were they to marry. While his snobbishness does not quite repel Kitty it is his idea of the lady that finally does. When he encounters two lady acquaintances from Boston, he is ashamed to introduce Kitty to them because he still feels that she does not act or look as she should. His idea of the ideal woman ultimately prevents him from appreciating the one he has. Challenging him--"you were ashamed of me in this dress before those people" (p. 267)--Kitty realizes that his code is a warped one and that he prefers his Boston illusions to her Eriecreek reality. The reader realizes that Arbuton hasn't changed since the day he first judged Kitty on the basis of her slightly soiled dress. Arbuton recognizes his snobbery himself in a flash of insight and momentarily admits to himself that Kitty is a true lady because she has a strong sense of morality and

dignity. But having tried all of his life to conform to a story-book image of an aristocrat, he cannot now change. Kitty exits, leaving Arbuton temporarily abashed but ultimately no wiser. Howells implies that this ideal Bostonian will forget her and forget too the fact that he has behaved so little like a true gentleman. It is really Kitty who has learned to be wary of high ideals until they have been tested by reality.

Although Howells manages the role of ironic narrator much better in A Chance Acquaintance than he did in Their Wedding Journey, he does not sustain the irony about Arbuton as consistently as he might have. Too often Howells reveals a division of attitude toward the Bostonian, whom he has created as an absurd and rather heartless prig. But Howells seems to have sympathy for Arbuton as well, a sympathy that intrudes into the ironic solidity of the novel. In the love scenes between Kitty and Arbuton, for example, where Arbuton drops his guard momentarily, Howells's sympathy for the man turns the scenes into romantic trifles, celebrations of puppy love and silliness. These encounters distract the reader from the underlying issue of the novel, the vitality of the native American personality; for Kitty, who symbolizes that vitality elsewhere in the book, becomes in these scenes the hackneyed heroine of Southworth and Wetherell. Cady

suggests that Howells had the sensitive Boston audience as a reason for toning down the satire on Arbuton.[24] Whatever the reason, when Howells allows his sympathy for the unsympathetic Arbuton to appear, he loses the satirist's detachment and mars the work.

Nevertheless, A Chance Acquaintance was an important experiment in deflating popular romantic conceptions of the time. It is also important to remember that A Chance Acquaintance, unlike other sentimental romantic novels, does not resolve the problemsof the characters at the end. Arbuton will still be a haughty snob; Kitty must find someone else to marry. This lack of resolution is comparable to an unsolved mystery in a movie today, With its non-tragic emphasis on the failure of a love affair, A Chance Acquaintance defeats the reader's expectation that love will conquer all, yet does not bewail the fact that it did not. Instead of the idealization of love, Howells presents the truth that a down-to-earth small-town girl would probably not have been happy with an affected Bostonian of independent means. Had the point of view in A Chance Acquaintance been as consistently ironic as the plot was satiric, the novel would have been entirely effective. As it was, it represented Howells's first application of ironic deflation to the form of the popular novel about romantic love.

The Lady of the Aroostook (1879) provides further evidence that Howells was experimenting with satire of the popular novel and criticism of the affected romantic protagonist rather than merely writing a light romantic novel, as Falk has suggested.[25] The novel is a variation of A Chance Acquaintance, but with some important differences. Here again there is a proper Bostonian, Staniford, who assumes that American life has little of the romantic or picturesque and therefore little that is worthwhile. Staniford meets, scorns, and eventually falls in love with a young American girl, Lydia Blood, whom he meets on the ship "Aroostook" bound for Europe. Unlike Arbuton, however, Staniford is able to learn the error of his ways and win the love of this American girl. The ending (Staniford marries Lydia) suggests that Howells is working out an alternate solution to the romantic involvement plot about country girl and city sophisticate which he introduced in A Chance Acquaintance. Although Arbuton has been momentarily shocked into an awareness of his own snobbishness about small-town American girls, this awareness did not last very long, and Kitty was never able to make him realize the worth of American life (outside of Boston) and American landscape. Staniford, on the other hand, crosses over entirely to Lydia's corner, so that by the end of the novel, when he marries her in Venice, he has

decided to take her away from the falseness of European society. We have a polished ironic reversal worthy of Restoration Comedy.

The characters in The Lady of the Aroostook are much more clearly representatives of romantic and realistic attitudes than Arbuton and Kitty had been. Although Arbuton preferred romantic European scenery to American vistas, he was hardly a typical poetry-reading, emotion-prizing romantic. Nor was Kitty, with her own illusions and foolish hopes, the representative of realistic thinking. Staniford, by comparison, is a total romantic who will reverse himself when he falls in love; Lydia is the pragmatist who deflates him and his poses, persuades him to stop reading romantic novels, and inspires him to return with her to settle down in California. Clearly Howells here is drawing the symbolic battlelines between romantic and realist, and providing a definite victor.

At first Staniford is a satiric figure reminiscent of the overly literary protagonist of "Scene." When he meets Lydia and finds that she is from a small New England town, he immediately makes fun of her to his friend Dunham by mockingly "transforming" her into the figure or Lurella, a unthinking peasant maid. In order for him to think about Lydia, even to mock her, he must rely on his talent for comparing

figures in life to figures in literature. At the same time Howells, with an inspired twist, has Staniford lament to Dunham that he wishes he could romanticize Lydia further but that her life in an American small town does not furnish him with enough material to be poetic about. But unlike Arbuton, who does not care to let his imagination dwell on Eriecreek (or any American scene), Staniford enjoys creating his own literary picture of what North Bradfield, Maine, Lydia's home town, must be like. Sarcastically speaking of Lydia's background, he says:

> "Poor girl! How she must be rioting on the united devotion of cabin and forecastle, after the scanty gallantries of a hill town populated by elderly unmarried women."[26]

and later:

> ". . . She has never known anything like society. . . . Why I don't suppose the girl ever saw anything livelier than a cattle show, or a Sunday-school picnic, in her life!" (p. 88)

These passages are especially ironic because Staniford, who affects to despise small-town culture, will marry Lydia and settle in a rural region himself. Staniford is preposterous in his condescension about Lydia's town and is using what small knowledge he may have of a small town to create a story in which Lydia is the comic heroine suddenly confronted with the great world ("How she must be rioting. . . . Why I don't suppose the girl ever saw anything . . ."). He actually has

little or no knowledge of America outside of Boston. He is, he says, only interested in the sophistications of Europe. Yet he never bothers to consider whether or not his image of Lydia's background is consistent with actuality.

Howells establishes Lydia as the realist who overcomes romantic foolishness. The representative of common sense and sincerity in the novel, Lydia does not pretend to be anything more than she is. This simplicity can readily be seen in her speech; like Kitty Ellison, she speaks American English. To Staniford's first remark to her that it is a hot day, she replies: "I want to know!" His haughty reaction, expressed later to his friend Dunham, "What a bore!" (p. 55), is more an ironic commentary on his snobbery than a correct judgment on her speech. Every time Lydia uses American expressions, affected Americans reprove or condemn her for it. When Lydia arrives in Europe, her American aunt makes the same judgment of her speech that Staniford and Dunham did. When Lydia remarks to her aunt, who is complaining of being delicate and ill (another affection in a European setting), "You don't look very sick now," her aunt corrects her: "Ill . . . you must say ill. Sick is an Americanism" (p. 276). Lydia speaks what she thinks and has a good answer ready for her aunt: "It's in the Bible," she says gravely. Defending her speech and herself against affected Americans, she will

not let herself be fooled into accepting their manners.

Howells is ironically showing that the way characters use American language is linked to their sincerity or lack of it. (We recall that both Howells and Garland emphasized sincerity as an ideal for literature and literary characters.) Both Staniford, who is satirically described as reading only foreign newspapers so that he can pretend he is a European, and Lydia's aunt, who is married to an Englishman and trying to pretend that she is English too, use their speech as a way of avoiding the reality that they are Americans. By contrast, Lydia, who is confused and irritated by their behavior, appears as the representative of reality in the novel because she dislikes pretense in speech or action.

Howells constructed a plot in which a pretty woman infatuates a young man and presented it in a realistic rather than a sentimental way. But in places the execution is not as brilliant as the conception. As a character Lydia is inconsistent. She is supposed to be an average, forthright American girl, embodying representative qualities but not exceptional ones. Yet, rather inexplicably, she is revered by the ship's captain and crew:

> she was . . . the centre about which the ship's pride and chivalrous sentiment revolved. They were Americans, and they knew how to worship a woman (p. 95).

Worship her they do: the captain denies himself delicacies so that Lydia can eat them, blushes when she kisses him on the cheek (despite the fact that he has three daughters of her age), and is in general awed by her. When Lydia starts to sing a hymn at a morning service on the ship, she receives this reception:

> When the hymn was given out, she waited while experimental search for the tune took place among the rest. They were about to abandon the attempt, when she lifted her voice and began to sing. She sang as she did in the meeting-house in South Bradfield, and her voice seemed to fill all the hollow height and distance; it rang far off like a mermaid's singing, on high like an angel's; it called with the same deep appeal to sense and soul alike. The sailors stood rapt. . .(p. 118, italics added).

Even taking into consideration that Howells may have felt kindlier toward the crew as plebeian types who work than toward the fop Staniford, and was not disposed to ridicule their view of Lydia as he did Staniford's, Howells shows a distinct lack of irony here. He favorably represents the crew's adoration of Lydia and appears to approve of it. Perhaps we are meant to take their view of her as Howells's version of the cliché that American men are childishly worshipful of "nice" women, in contrast to European blasé sophistication about them (represented by Staniford). Yet Howells seems somewhat taken in by this adoration himself; he does not really indicate to the reader how much Lydia is being

idealized by the crew and how much she is being seen accurately by them. The reader is uncertain: is she an average girl or a romantic heroine?

Howells's lack of objectivity in treating the American heroine is a perennial problem in his work. In both early and later novels, when he tries to present a realistic heroine, a colloquial-speaking American woman, he always gives her characteristics of the sighing heroine of best-seller fame. We can only speculate that Howells found the theme of the fresh young American girl so moving that he could not treat it without romanticizing it and stereotyping her. Whatever the reason, this affinity undercuts the satire and weakens his work.

When Howells's novels do present an unsympathetic female protagonist, they display more effective satire of romanticism. Howells's satires are successful in a handful of later works where demanding young women with grandiose ideas about self-sacrifice and heroism put foolish young men who adore them through a series of ridiculous tests and trials. In April Hopes (1887), the heroine keeps break-off her engagement because her fiancé is not daily doing unselfish and dramatic deeds in her behalf. In this heavily ironic work, the couple are finally reconciled when the foolish young man promises to be more like the man she wants. In "Editha" (1905), the stakes are even higher than marriage.

The strong-minded woman sends her lover out to fight in the Civil War because she is fascinated with the idea of heroism in battle. He is killed in the war, and this puts an end to her plans but not to her foolishness, for she can now rhapsodize about his heroism.

Nowhere does Howells criticize idealistic heroines and their misguided admirers better than in Mrs. Farrell, which under the title Private Theatricals was published serially in the Atlantic Monthly in 1875 and 1876. It did not appear in book form until 1901, a year after Howells's death, and Cady has suggested that one reason for its delayed publication was the harshness of Howells's tone toward his anti-heroine, Mrs. Belle Farrell.[27]

Howells regards Mrs. Farrell as a calculating and heartless woman, deficient in moral purity. He has little sympathy for her except to describe her loveless marriage, ending in widowhood, and her unfeeling relatives, all of which contributed to her emotional hardness. Artfully pretending to be defenseless and artless, Mrs. Farrell contrives to have two young gentleman visitors at a boarding house where she is staying, Easton and Gilbert, fall in love with her. She poses as a shy, fragile, and exquisitely sensitive woman, but this pose masks a clever aggressiveness which she knows is at odds with the part of the heroine she

must play. Easton, the more innocent of the two men, foolishly falls in love with her because he thinks she is pure and perfect. But Mrs. Farrell, finding that Gilbert, Easton's skeptical friend, is the wealthier and more fascinating of the two, makes Gilbert fall in love with her too, although he has disapproved of her from the first. With Gilbert's fall, Howells uses an ironic variation of one of his own plot devices (A Chance Acquaintance, Lady of the Aroostook), the assured and snobbish young man who scorns to fall in love but falls anyway. Where in his earlier novels the lover was satirized because he did not at first appreciate the worthwhile girl, in Mrs. Farrell Howells focuses his satire on the unwary young men who fall in love with a crass Mrs. Farrell.

Mrs. Farrell's machinations collapse when Gilbert, out of loyalty to Easton, leaves, considering that Easton has a prior claim to her. Outwitted by the very high idealism she has counted on in these gentlemen, she renounces Easton, whom she did not want anyway, and decides to change from these private theatricals to a career on the stage.

Unlike earlier novels, Mrs. Farrell is Howells's first true anti-romantic work. None of the characters is spared, but the irony is controlled enough so that Howells can achieve his realist's goals. The plot of Mrs. Farrell

consists of a series of vignettes in which Belle Farrell, consciously playing on the masculine fantasy image of the ideal woman, either gives an excellent performance and convinces her spectators, or, less frequently, gives an unconvincing one in that her audience knows the motives behind her act--and her actions. Before her acquaintance with Easton and Gilbert, as the novel opens, she is practicing creating the effect she wants to create. Her audience is the women in the Massachusetts summer resort hotel where she is lodging. Whatever their opinion of her genuineness, these women recognize an accomplished player, so that when she starts her intrigues with the two men, these ladies await her return from walking with one of the men as "spectators," ranging themselves "in attitudes of expectancy along the edge of the piazza."[28] Mrs. Farrell is described as the "Babylonian priestess" who sings the closing hymn in the West Pekin choir. As always, she is supremely aware of her audience and the effect she will create: to be thought beautiful, and to be prized and worshiped.

Mrs. Farrell's best performance is playing the innocent with Easton in a forest setting, before she decides that she doesn't care for him:

> that a gentleman pays for the pleasure of going braking with a lady is to have his hat trimmed and to be made to look silly" (p. 69).

Mrs. Farrell then proceeds to make Easton look very silly indeed, for she bewitches him into thinking that she is a lady in distress. The only one of Howells's early heroines who consciously manipulates the rhetoric of the romantic novel (what a lady is suppoed to do, what a gentleman is supposed to respond), she enlists her knowledge of literary conventions to help her in snaring Easton. In the course of her manoeuver with Easton's hat she deliberately catches her glove in her hair and is "obliged to look up to Easton in despair" to help her, which is just what she had planned. (Here Howells is imitating the diction of the best seller while his Mrs. Farrell is imitating the actions of the best-seller heroine.) Easton, accepting without question the chivalrous role he conceives of as the proper conduct with a lady, says "May I try to help you?" to which Mrs. Farrell daintily replies, "Why if you will be so very kind." She has succeeded in bringing Easton close to her perfumed mane of hair, Feigning fatigue, in accordance with the role of the delicate woman (one recalls the saintly and sickly Rosalie in India, Pearl of Pearl River), Mrs. Farrell sighs quietly while she "allows" Easton to sniff her perfumed hair. The parody of a love scene is complete.

There are some added touches in the scene, reminiscent of ironic comments by Howells in the early travel works.

Mrs. Farrell's laugh is "well-embarrassed:" she evinces a "quick sympathy of tone" to draw Easton to speak of personal problems; when, in acting as his confidant, she senses his timidity, she makes "obvious haste to get away from a subject that annoyed him," and instead "dragged her shawl down for a prettier effect." Again she tries to create the image of sympathetic womanhood, inspiring and lovely.

Mrs. Farrell gives another especially good performance when Easton, fatigued in mind because he has been "deserted" by his friend Gilbert and not knowing why, takes to his bed. Mrs. Farrell is the cause of Gilbert's departure, although she does not let Easton know that Gilbert is in love with her. Instead she takes on the role of nurse and is so convincing that she dazzles both Easton and the skeptical women of the boarding house. Howells's handling of the situation suggests that by now she may be feeling some remorse and is atoning, but the reader is made to see that even this is an act which she has only partly convinced herself is real. I quote a crucial passage at length because it so well demonstrates Howells's ironic art:

> She threw herself in to her part with inspiration; rising far above the merely capable woman, she made her care of Easton a work of genius, and not only divined his wants and ministered to his comfort with a success that surprised all experience, but dealt so cunningly with his moods

> that he was at last flattered into submission if not resignation. . . . She overcame his scruples [about being a burden] and reconciled him to fate, so that it did not seem an unfair advantage to inflict the kindness against which he could not struggle. . . . Since she was not allowed to give up her room to him, she devoted herself in the moments of her leisure to the decoration of his chamber. . . . It must be owned that when all was done the place had a certain spectacularity; the furniture and ornaments wore somehow the air of properties. . . the whole sympathetic household sighed . . . at the perfection with which she, as one may say, costumed the part . . . in emblem of devotion to the sick-room she denied herself every ornament; at first she even left off her Etruscan ear-rings, [and wore] a scarf tied at her throat in a sentiment of passionate neglect (p. 177; italics added).

Howells plays off the imagery of the stage ("threw herself into her part," "air of properties," "costumed the part") against Mrs. Farrell's pose of earnest domesticity ("divined his wants," "ministered to his comfort"). She is the perfect woman here, both loving wife and seductive mistress--except that, as Howells shows, it is all a pose. "Decoration" is in an ironic way her whole manner with men, for her method is to coat over the truth or embroider any situation between herself and a man in order to involve him more deeply in a compromising situation with her. Howells plays on the alternating images of home and stage which provide the two reasons for her every action, to appear to rise "far above the merely capable woman," and to create a striking, theatrical effect. He thus gives a double

significance to her desire to "inflict kindness" on Easton, for she has been trifling with him throughout the novel. Now she inflicts her attentions on him by busily caring for him out of guilt and her sense of theater rather than out of kindness.

A final irony that Howells points up here is that her actions in Easton's sick-room, artificial as they seem to the reader, do create an effect of altruism and fool both Easton and the women in the boarding house:

> maid and matron, those tender hearts were alike glad of the occasion to renew their faith in romance and they turned fondly to Mrs. Farrell for the fulfilment of their ideal of devotion (p. 177).

Mrs. Farrell appeals to their romantic images and ideals. She wins them over because she is such a good actress, however, not because she actually is what "those tender hearts" imagine her to be. Howells spreads the irony to ridicule the duped as well as the one who dupes.

To make her even less sympathetic to the perceptive reader, Howells shows Mrs. Farrell to be aware that her repertoire is based on that of the standard romantic heroine of stage and novel. Mrs. Farrell knows all too well that she can manipulate and move her "audience," Easton. In describing Easton to Rachel Woodward, an innocent type who is horrified (and fascinated) by Mrs. Farrell's duplicities,

she discards all of her poses. In a moment of truth, though still at heart the actress, she parodies a romantic scene:

> "Now [Rachel] you are the fatally beautiful Mrs. Farrell, and you're sitting on a rock in the hollow near the sugar house. Your head is slightly downcast, so--yes [to herself] very good--and you are twiddling the handle of your sun umbrella and poking the point of it in the dirt. Mr. Easton is standing before you with his arms folded thus--ahem!--waiting for life or death at your hands" (p. 72).

Like Howells, Mrs. Farrell criticizes Easton's foolish blindness in wanting to believe that she is the ideal woman. In this sense she is the realist spokesman in the novel: she admits that she is playacting and ridicules Easton for not seeing things as they are. James Russell Lowell in his essay "Rousseau and the Sentimentalists" wrote that the chief fault of sentimental fiction was its insincerity, for no character could possibly maintain the high degree of emotionalism and high heroism required by the sentimental school.[29] Mrs. Farrell would have agreed with Lowell. Her witty speech mocking romantic posturing confirms what Lowell observed in sentimentalism. Her speech is the farthest extent to which Howells carries his satire on romantic fiction. In the speech he has his character take over the narrator's role, which is to mock the self-dramatizing falseness of romantic love scenes in popular fiction--and in life.

Easton, of course, cannot recognize that he holds impossible ideals, In his adoration of Mrs. Farrell ("How could he believe ill of her? What oblique motive could be attribute to her that his heart's tenderness would suffer?" p. 99), he resembles the typical woman-worshipper of the Richard Harding Davis best seller. For Easton, as for the Davis protagonist, no matter what wrong a woman may do, the man must be faithful. Easton especially resembles the young man in one story in Davis's collection The Lion and the Unicorn (1899), who, constantly scorned by his ideal woman, endures her fickle behavior patiently and refuses to criticize her. Davis's heroines, though not as calculating as Mrs. Farrell, can be as wilful and fickle as she is when she plays Easton off against Gilbert. The Davis hero, like Easton, perseveres. Such perseverance (or naiveté) always wins the woman in romantic fiction, and the lady in Davis finally comes to accept the man she has scorned so long. Whereas Davis applauds the man's constancy, however, Howells satirizes it in Easton, who absolutely refuses to believe that Mrs. Farrell has plotted to estrange him from Gilbert. When she finally rejects him to go into the theater, he is somewhat crushed but will soon be ready to take up the role of patient suitor to a new lady.

Mrs. Farrell is Howells's best early novel because

he has used irony to show all of the duplicity involved in the creation of those dramatic, extraordinary situations for which the narrators and protagonists of the travel fiction had yearned. In the conclusion it is appropriate that Mrs. Farrell, who generated melodrama in her private life, should go onstage to do it in public. It is as if Howells is saying that in depending on artifice so much, , Mrs. Farrell rightly belongs in a world of the theater, where artifice is legitimate. For the rest of us, he cautions, it is better to leave such conceptions about the ideal woman to the realm of theater. The message he had been trying to convey about romantic illusion from the travel sketches onward he finally expresses brilliantly in Mrs. Farrell.

Howells wrote his early sketches and novels in the decade immediately following the Civil War, a decade which, to the literary historians Alexander Cowie and Warner Berthoff, displayed nostalgia and a return to romanticism rather than the embittered and disillusioned realism one associates with a postwar era.[30] It is important to have this historical perspective if one charges that Howells's criticism of romanticism is too weak. It is true that it does not extend further than mild ironic attacks on the romantic, literary values of a series of impressionable

(and usually autobiographical) characters. But by comparison with his contemporaries, Howells was quite aware of the pitfalls of debased romanticism and the need for a new realism in American literature.

Despite the romantic literary climate, Howells is, however, definitely limited by his affinity for the romantic novel and the romantic heroine. He creates his best effects in the early fiction when he satirizes romantic and sentimental stereotypes; the self-sacrificing young lover, the pure, goddess-like woman, the perfect marriage of true lovers. In his best early works the defeat, disillusionment, and ironic deflation of the romantic protagonist take on a symbolic implication--truth and reality conquer literary myth and romanticism. But Howells achieves these effects only when he distances himself from devotion to or identification with the characters he is satirizing. He is a realist, but a reluctant one.

NOTES TO CHAPTER THREE

1. William Dean Howells, The Rise of Silas Lapham, ed. Harry Hayden Clark (New York, 1951), p. 179.

2. Granville Hicks, The Great Tradition. An Interpretation of American Literature Since the Civil War (Chicago, Ill., 1969), pp. 74-77, 85-89; Harley Grattan, "Howells: Ten Years After," American Mercury, 20 (May 1930), 42-50.

3. Kenneth Eble, "Howells's Kisses," AQ, 10 (Winter 1957), 441-447. Malcolm Cowley, "Naturalism in American Literature," Evolutionary Thought in America, ed. Stow Persons (New Haven, Conn., 1950), p. 300 touches on the issue of Howells's watered-down romanticism.

4. John R. Dove, "Howells's Irrational Heroines," Texas Studies in English, 25 (1956), 64-80; Edwin H. Cady, The Gentleman in America (Syracuse, New York, 1957), pp. 200 ff.; William Wasserstrom, "William Dean Howells: The Indelible Stain," NEQ, 12 (Dec. 1959), 486-496).

5. Edwin H. Cady, William Dean Howells: The Road to Realism. The Early Years. 1837-1885 (Syracuse, New York, 1958), passim; Olov W. Fryckstedt, In Quest of America: A Study of Howells' Early Development as a Novelist (Cambridge, Mass., 1958), passim.; Charles L. Campbell, "Realism and Romance: Multiple Fictional Worlds in Howells' Novels," MFS, 16 (Autumn 1970), 289-302.

6. The phrase is Howells's.

7. Frederick L. Pattee, The Development of the American Short Story (1923; rpt. New York, 1970), discusses the humorous travel sketch and the necessity for humor to camouflage unpleasant realities in the writing of the 'seventies.

8. Louis Budd, "Howells' Defense of the Romance," PMLA, 67 (March 1952), 37: "He fully accepted that vein of romanticism which studied the nature and destiny of the individual." Budd argues convincingly that Howells was opposed to popular romantic fiction but not to all romances or to the romantic outlook. See also Fryckstedt, Chapter One and John K. Reeves, "The Limited Realism of Howells' Their Wedding Journey," PMLA, 77 (Dec. 1962), 620ff.

9. William Dean Howells, Italian Journeys (Boston, 1895), p. 19. Page references in the text will be from this edition.

10. William Dean Howells, Suburban Sketches (Cambridge, Mass., 1871), p. 172. Page references in the text will be from this edition. Other sketches, "A Day's Pleasure," "Doorstep Acquaintance" among them, explore the theme of disillusionment too but do not focus on the literary illusion of the character.

11. Daniel Aaron, "Howells' Maggie," NEQ, 37 (1965), 86, makes a similar observation.

12. Quoted in Aaron, 86-87. Future references to this article will be incorporated into the text.

13. Clara Marburg Kirk and Rudolph Kirk, "Introduction," Howells: Representative Selections (New York, 1961), also call Their Wedding Journey half-travel, half character sketch, to distinguish it from a novel, p. lxx.

14. Fryckstedt, p. 10 also mentions Howells's satirical attitude toward the Marches, but does not explore it.

15. William Dean Howells, Their Wedding Journey, ed. John K. Reeves (Bloomington, Ind. and London, 1968), p. 98. Page references in the text will be from this edition.

16. Kenneth S. Lynn, William Dean Howells--An American Life (New York, 1970), p. 210, uses this quotation to make a similar observation about the Marches. I discovered his mention of the quotation after the chapter was written.

17. Lynn, p. 211; see also Fryckstedt, p. 120.

18. Robert P. Falk, "The Literary Criticism of the Genteel Decades, 1870-1900." The Development of American Literature, ed. Floyd Stovall (Chapel Hill, N.C., 1955), p. 122.

19. Cady, The Road to Realism, p. 186, discusses the unconventional,conventional theme in Howells. Everett Carter, Howells and the Age of Realism (1950; rpt. Hamden, Conn., 1966), p. 53, mentions Howells's "cultural patriotism." Fryckstedt, Chapter 5, discusses Howells's interest in and defense of American landscape. Lynn, pp. 214ff. discusses the America-Europe debate in A Chance Acquaintance.

20, William Dean Howells, A Chance Acquaintance (New York, 1873), p. 10.

21. In a letter to Howells (Nov. 23, 1875), Twain wrote: "There is one thing which I can't stand . . . sham sentimentality . . . the rot that deals in 'the happy days of yore,' 'the sweet yet melancholy past' . . . all that sort of drivel." Quoted in Portable Mark Twain, ed. Bernard de Voto (New York, 1946), p. 750.

22. Lynn, p. 216, quotes this line and says that Arbuton's remark is based on derogatory remarks that James made about Quebec in two travel letters, but does not mention the part the line plays in the America-Europe debate.

23. Atlantic Monthly, 27 (April 1871), 522. Later, in the 'eighties, Howells no longer felt it necessary to have "picturesque" landscape in his novels, whether American or European.

24. Cady, The Road to Realism, pp. 183, 190, talks about the Boston audience; Larzer Ziff, The American 1890s (New York, 1966), p. 43, discusses the typical audience of Howells's time.

25. Falk, p. 122.

26. William Dean Howells, The Lady of the Aroostook (Boston, 1879), p. 10. Page references in the text will be from this edition.

27. Cady, The Road to Realism, p. 192. There is a mystery surrounding the publication of Mrs. Farrell, however, which has yet to be solved.

28. William Dean Howells, Mrs. Farrell (New York, 1921), p. 57. Page references in the text will be from this edition.

29. James Russell Lowell, "Rousseau and the Sentimentalists," The Writings of James Russell Lowell (Boston and New York, 1898), 2, 243.

30. Alexander Cowie, The Rise of the American Novel (New York, 1948), pp. 511, 520; Warner Berthoff, The Ferment of Realism. American Literature, 1884-1919 (New York, 1965), pp. 8ff.

CHAPTER FOUR

DREISER AND THE NATURALIST MELODRAMA

Theodore Dreiser attacked an idea that was central to both the sentimental novel and stage melodrama: censure of the fallen woman. Writing about the same time as Dreiser, George Du Maurier, the author of the best-selling Trilby (1894), admitted to his public that the story of the artist's model and singer Trilby was not really fit for the ears of young ladies.[1] (The reading public did not seem so delicate as Du Maurier and read the book avidly.[2]) Trilby, according to her creator, though "the very heart of compassion, generosity, and warm sisterly love," contained in her character "a thin slimy layer of sorrow and shame" (p. 34).

Dreiser's novels, in contrast to Trilby, do not condemn their "fallen" characters or pass judgment on their morality. Rather they attempt to explain the factors that produce a fallen woman like Trilby. Given Dreiser's rejection of the convention, it is fascinating to discover that not only did he admire Trilby when he read it in 1895,[3] but that he also used the plotting devices and characterizations

typical of such works in his two novels relating the theme of the fallen woman to the culture of the modern city, Sister Carrie (1900) and Jennie Gerhardt (1911). (Manipulations of that theme in an urban context are not of course uncommon in naturalism and even realism.) More importantly, there are definite similarities of plotting, characterization, and tone between Sister Carrie and Trilby. Trilby was not the only influence on Dreiser's work, but it makes an enlightening comparison with Sister Carrie. For in that novel Dreiser creates a representative naturalist work, one showing the influence of environment and circumstance on character, one which "breathes new life into old stereotypes," as William Handy remarks.[4]

Leslie Fiedler, Daryl Dance and Handy have all noticed the resemblance of Dreiser's heroine to the general sentimental stereotype of the innocent servant girl seduced in (and partly by) the city.[5] Sheldon Grebstein notes that Carrie comes very close to the stereotyped heroine of melodrama because her behavior operates within a field of action congenial to both naturalism and melodrama.[6] In both there are typed characters; coincidence, accident, and circumstance play important roles; the action is rapid and scenes shift quickly; and there is a definite struggle between good and evil (or the naturalistic equivalents,

pleasure and pain). Shapiro has argued that Sister Carrie would have been a complete melodrama if it had had a happier ending.[7] One must add to that judgment, however, that it would not have been a melodrama approved by its audience, since virtue is not triumphant at the end: the fallen woman succeeds in life instead of failing.

Handy, Dance, and Grebstein feel the need to apologize for this resemblance between Dreiser's work and sentimental melodrama by assuming that his use of such material is satiric.[8] It is important to mention that these critics are using the term "satiric" in its broadest sense, that of ridicule of the faults of the original. They do not take satire to mean that which depends on exaggeration or humor as it does in the satires of Howells and Crane. They recognize that in general Dreiser can be said to be satiric only in the sense that he uses irony and plays on the very real differences between the excesses of sentimental melodrama and real life. These critics claim that Dreiser found nothing admirable in sentimental melodrama and that his "obviously intentional use of sentimental plot"[9]--the servant girl seduced and betrayed--is to criticize the original. Fiedler sees less of the satiric in Dreiser than do other critics but claims that there is so little admirable in melodrama that when Dreiser does not seem to follow it, his

work fails.[10]

All of these critics are making an assumption about melodrama which Richard Chase warned against in The American Novel and Its Tradition, i.e., that it is always an inferior form:

> The fact is that most people use the word melodrama only in the opprobrious sense. Yet melodrama is an ancient and honorable, if easily degarded form, and the American novel cannot be understood without some attention to its methods.[11]

Melodrama is effective in a representative American author like Charles Brockden Brown, for example, because it creates a world in which human beings are subject to "dire, intractable, and contradictory forces,"[12] which although they do not create a tragic world, create a dangerous and violent one. Irving Howe remarks that melodrama is useful in a Hardy novel because it "lessens our expectations in regard to verisimilitude and credibility" and allows the conflict, "the fierce motion of characters hurtling to their destinies," to be presented effectively.[13]

Melodrama can produce legitimate aesthetic effects, and it is not correct to assume that a writer like Dreiser would use melodramatic methods only to criticize the form. But in their desire to establish and define Dreiser's relationship to sentimental tradition, many Dreiser critics overlook whatever empathy or admiration

Dreiser may have had for it and the fact that he could have used this admiration to help rather than hinder his art.

This chapter will focus on the important similarities between Dreiser's naturalism and the popular sentimental melodrama that he encountered and admired in his youth. Dreiser biographers Ellen Moers and W.A. Swanberg note that Dreiser appreciated sentimental musicals such as those his brother Paul Dresser wrote.[14] One theme common to musical comedy and melodrama, both in the novel and on the stage, was that of the lure of the wicked city for the innocent girl. A typical Paul Dresser song, "She went to the city," ends its first stanza with the line, "but she never returned."[15] Dreiser was fascinated by this idea and incorporated it into Sister Carrie rather than simply satirizing it by exaggeration. Of course at the same time that his novels show immense sympathy for the impoverished girl lured to her social ruin they question the validity of the terms "ruin" and "fallen woman." To Dreiser, the pat moral categories of the sentimental melodrama--good woman, wicked city, sinful seducer--could not adequately account for human behavior. Before discussing Dreiser's complex relation to sentimental melodrama, however, a short review of his philosophical divergences from sentimental tradition will be useful.

Dreiser's main points of disagreement with sentimental thought are on the issues of moral responsibility and freedom of the will.[16] Sentimental writers, confronting the idea of the fallen woman (no matter how pathetic) and her seducer, looked at them both and assumed that they had broken the moral order imposed by God and were therefore to be judged and punished. Dreiser looked at the illicit love affair and saw that something other than immorality motivated human beings to act as they did, that, in Charles Walcutt's phrase, "conventional ethical codes are . . . invalid or at least impractical for evaluating life as it is."[17] "What the so-called judges of truth of morality are really inveighing against," Dreiser remarked in an essay called "True Art Speaks Plainly," is not "sexual lewdness" or something which can be judged immoral, "but the disturbing and destroying of their own little theories concerning life."[19] For the terms "moral" and "immoral" Dreiser substituted the biological terms "weak" and "strong." Rather than censure Carrie's second seducer, for example, Dreiser describes Hurstwood thus:

> A man's fortune or material progress is very much the same as his bodily growth. Either he

> is growing stronger, healthier, wider, as the youth approaching manhood, or he is growing weaker, older, less incisive mentally, as the man approaching old age. There are no other states.[19]

Dreiser ascribes Hurstwood's decline to biology rather than to the punishment meted out to a sinner. He sees man on a biological continuum with the rest of nature. All natural things are subject to "forces," and although man is the most sophisticated and complex form of life upon which these influences operate, he is never exempt from them. On the contrary, man, as the most complicated of organisms, is simply subject to a larger variety of forces, social and economic as well as chemical and psychological.

Seen from this perspective, man often resembles some wisp in the wind (that and "drifter" are Dreiser's favorite terms), controlled and determined. Walcutt speaks of Dreiser's belief that "the will is not free to operate independently, that it has not the power to bring its impulses to fulfillment";[21] Alfred Kazin says that Dreiser's vision was of the "hand of fate" governing human actions;[22] and Warner Berthoff suggests that the idea of characters who drift rather than choose in life is central to Dreiser's thought.[23] Dreiser has so much confidence in the idea of willessness that he has his most intelligent characters express it. Lester Kane remarks to Jennie Gerhardt: "all of

us are more or less pawns. We're moved about like chessmen by circumstances over which we have no control."[23]

Dreiser as novelist, however, encounters a problem with determinism. Believable characters must make decisions and act on them; these decisions involve choices which distinguish men from each other, despite the fact that their circumstances may be similar. Determinism, therefore, cannot be said to account for everything, and in fact Dreiser usually retreats, in his character depiction, to the assertion that individuals are unique, their behavior often mysterious. Dreiser, as Eliseo Vivas comments, "was a better artist than his philosophy permitted him to be";[24] he balances determinism against characterization.

Within such limits, Dreiser keeps close to a deterministic framework, and it was this (and the form it took in his novels) that shocked his contemporaries. It mattered very little what men <u>said</u> were their motives for acting; their real motives were instinctive responses to their own needs, and quite close to animal feeling. What man called love, therefore, was actually a biological urge disguised by rhetoric; what woman called love was merely the need to be dominated, mastered, protected. So Carrie is described:

> She might have imagined herself to be in love, when she was not. Women frequently do this. It

> flows from the fact that in each exists a bias toward affection, a craving for the pleasure of being loved. The longing to be shielded, bettered, sympathized with, is one of the attributes of the sex. This, coupled with sentiment and a natural tendency to emotion, often makes refusing difficult. It persuades them they are in love (p. 208).

In his early novels, both Dreiser's editorial comments and his love scenes are deflations of the romantic ideal. (In a later novel, An American Tragedy, Dreiser does present Sondra Finchley's relationship with Clyde Griffiths in a more romantic light.) Whether it is Carrie succumbing to Drouet, or to Hurstwood because he is "stronger" than Drouet; Jennie giving in to Lester Kane or, in a curious reversal, an "exhausted" Lester giving in to a triumphant Letty Gerald--love is only the victory of superior animal strength, the power of one human being over another.

Dreiser sees this triumph of the stronger over the weaker in love as one more example of a survival-of-the-fittest theory. In any circle of human behavior, as in the biological world itself, the strongest examples of the type survive. Using this idea Dreiser shows how in a sense both Drouet and Hurstwood victimize Carrie, taking advantage of their superior physical and financial powers to persuade her to do their bidding. They make her see that as a young girl without a job or prospects in a big impersonal city she is in a helpless position. They suggest to her that it is

through allying herself with them that she will do well in life. Later on, when Carrie is more sure of herself and her talent and has developed a financial strength of her own, she will see that she can do without Drouet and Hurstwood. Financial strength can replace physical; the victim can become independent. This idea marks Dreiser's departure from Trilbyesque fiction. With its combination of determinism (albeit a compassionate view of the victim's circumstances) and his understanding of the nature of individual power to escape from circumstance, he creates characters richer in their responsibilities than Du Maurier's. But without some kind of endurance or strength the individual is not likely to succeed.

As much as its ideas diverge from sentimental thought, the form of Sister Carrie resembles sentimental melodrama. Like a writer of a typical sentimental novel, Dreiser focuses his attention on the forces leading to the seduction of the virtuous heroine: her extreme poverty, frustration at her inability to find decent work, illness, unfeeling relatives, and the seductive "friend" who offers to help her out when all other avenues are closed to her. As in the sentimental novel, this offer of help is only to lure Carrie to become a kept woman. In a much-

quoted passage, Dreiser's language is reminiscent of a host of novels about the perils of the evil city for the unwary girl. It summarizes Carrie's plight:

> If, unfortunately, the fly has got caught in the net, the spider can come forth and talk business upon its own terms. So when maidenhood has wandered into the moil [sic] of the city, when it is brought within the circle of the "rounder" and the roué, even though it be at the outermost rim, they can come forth and use their alluring arts (p. 119; italics added).

This passage, with its slanted language and stock terms, illustrates Dreiser's habit of borrowing sentimental conventions. Dreiser follows sentimental diction, cliché, and situations: Carrie is the fly about to be caught by the spider Drouet. Dreiser then uses such melodramatic situations and diction to suggest the naturalist's view that Carrie and her seducers have no true freedom of choice.

When Carrie, forced by the degrading conditions of her life and the longings of her pleasure-loving nature, gives in to Drouet, Dreiser replaces the idea of moral censure with the idea of survival through self-protection. Using the extreme situation characteristic of the melodrama, Dreiser demonstrates that life forced Carrie to act:

> she had been dominated by distress and the enthusiastic [sic] forces of relief which Drouet represented at an opportune moment when she yielded to him (p. 115).

It is no different when Hurstwood, who has been introduced to Carrie by Drouet, is pursuing her:

> She endeavored to stir, but it was useless. The whole strength of the man's nature was working. . . . The little shop-girl was getting into deep water. She was letting her few supports float away from her.
> "Oh," she said at last, "you mustn't look at me like that."
> "I can't help it," he answered.
> She relaxed a little and let the situation endure, giving him strength.
> "You are not satisfied with your life, are you?"
> "No," she answered, weakly.
> He saw he was the master of the situation--he felt it. He reached over and touched her hand (p. 116; italics added).

Dreiser is playing on the traditional types of the melodrama: the soft, understanding, seductive villain and the uncertain, yet soon to be captivated virgin. The passage suggests that Carrie's instinct tells her not to give in to the seducer Hurstwood ("you mustn't look at me like that") but that she will give in despite her sense of self-protection. (Actually when Hurstwood does finally run off with Carrie, he uses Lovelace's tactics to insure his success; he tricks her into coming to the train station with him.) Chase has observed that the plot of melodrama is basically one of "cruel victimization."[25] The passage above is reminiscent of melodrama in that it suggests that Carrie is soon to be a victim of Hurstwood's wiles. In Sister Carrie Dreiser shifted the idea of victimization from its

debased Christian context, as in melodrama--where the pure maiden must never give in to her seducer if she is to survive the reproaches of her religious conscience-to a Darwinian deterministic context. The constant iteration of "weak and strong" in the scene and throughout the novel implies that it is in the nature of things for the weak Carrie to give in to her strong seducers. Yet the scene skillfully manipulates the familiar elements and language of melodrama ("The little shop-girl was getting into deep water," "He reached over and touched her hand").

Hurstwood, Carrie's would-be seducer, is not the first man in her life. She has already lived with Drouet, Hurstwood's friend, for some time. To audiences accustomed to sentimental-novel fare, Carrie is already a fallen woman who attracts men because of her easy virtue. But Dreiser skillfully leads the reader's attention away from this idea. To Dreiser Carrie is still an innocent who "looked about her upon the great maze of the city without understanding" (p. 120). Playing on the association of the seduction scene and the virgin, Dreiser tries to create sympathy for Carrie's plight by showing that like an embattled virgin she <u>wants</u> to protect herself from Hurstwood. By calling up traditional associations of the innocent young woman fending off her seducer, he links Carrie to

that stereotype rather than to the stereotype of the woman who has already fallen.

Dreiser constantly balances the sentimental image of the young girl warding off her seducer against the naturalist image of the individual trying to survive. In both cases there is an instinct for self-protection. In melodrama, to survive means not to give in to the seducer and the plot is so constructed that giving in means social ostracism and disaster. (One remembers Fawcett's chapter title from A New York Family, "Was it worse than death?") For Carrie, to survive means to give in to Drouet and later, when he abducts her, to Hurstwood. Although on one level there is this basic divergence between the sentimentalist and the naturalist plot, Dreiser uses the idea of the plight of the sentimental heroine. He keeps the basic choices of the seduction scene: survival or destruction. He merely reverses the terms of the situation, so that instead of death being preferable to social ostracism, for Carrie it is the other way around. But with both the sentimental and the naturalist heroine, the choice of action is so severely limited that there is actually only one choice, survival.

If Carrie is hardly a free agent, neither are her seducers. In a typical sentimental novel like Trilby, when

the seducer Svengali appeared, the reader immediately felt that the man was depraved: he had consciously chosen evil. For the sentimentalist, lust and desire are made to appear the result of free choice, no matter how incongruous this is with the idea that people are actually driven by evil impulses to act as they do. Both ideas appear in the portrait of Svengali and in those of many other villains of the popular novel. Dreiser, sensing this incongruity, uses the idea that certain types are driven by their sexual needs to seduce innocent girls. For him lust is merely one more sign of how biology--in this case, sexual need--determines people's actions. That is the reason why Dreiser's seducers superficially resemble the stereotyped depraved and wily seducer of popular melodrama. Of Drouet Dreiser writes early in the novel,

> That worthy had his future fixed for him beyond a peradventure. He could not help what he was going to do. He could not see clearly enough to wish to do it differently. He was drawn by his innate desire to act the old pursuing part. He would need to delight himself with Carrie as surely as he would need to eat his heavy breakfast (p. 75; italics added).

In addition to the frequent references to need as instinctive, we notice that in this passage the verbs of action are mostly either in the passive voice or are preceded by a negative. Stylistically this weakening of the active voice

of the verb ("has his future fixed," instead of "he fixed his future"; "was drawn by his innate desire") reflects Dreiser's philosophy that the actions of characters are less the result of decisive choice than of instinct.

The portrait of Hurstwood also balances melodramatic stereotype against naturalism. Hurstwood's initial resemblance to Svengali is noticeable. Like Svengali, he is an actor with women, a rather magnetic personality although a "man of surfaces," to use Moers' phrase. And, like Svengali, he spirits his young woman away because his desire gets the better of his reason. He lies to her, cheats others to possess her, and, brushing away his responsibilities to his real wife, pretends to marry her--all similar to the Svengali model, as we shall observe. Hurstwood's fall, although unlike Svengali's in that it is slow, is equally wretched and pathetic. Both men, who do not repent, are suitably punished.

But in using these facts about Hurstwood and perhaps playing on audience familiarity with the Svengali stereotype, Dreiser instead creates in Hurstwood a character who is not evil, only pushed and defeated by circumstances and forces. (Du Maurier seemed unaware of the fact that Svengali's portrait could have been more moving if Svengali had been made to appear a little less sinister.) Hurstwood

loses because he "would promise everything, and trust to fortune to disentangle him" (p. 194). As the plot proceeds, and his choice of action grows more and more circumscribed, he becomes a man in a cage.

The first force that is pressuring and thwarting Hurstwood is his wife. Dreiser sees her as a social and economic force rather than as a mere outraged woman. The marital battle in Chapter 22, where Mrs. Hurstwood has just found out that her husband is a woman-chaser, is seen solely in terms of stronger against weaker. Mrs. Hurstwood has the advantage:

> She, impending disaster itself, walked about with gathered shadow at the eyes and the rudimentary muscles of savagery fixing the hard lines of her mouth (p. 202).

The very opposite of an appealing woman, not only does she have the power of surprise in this scene of confrontation, but she also has the savagery of the enraged animal about to strike. The reader forgets that it is Hurstwood who is in the wrong for philandering. Carrie seems preferable to this disagreeable woman. Dreiser, faithful to the determinist view of the survival of the strongest, continues to build up the analogy between this woman and a striking animal:

> The finality of the woman's manner took away his feeling of superiority in battle. . . .

> "You know what I mean," she said finally.
> "Hmph!" he murmured. . . . It was the weakest thing he had ever done. It was totally unassured.
> Mrs. Hurstwood noticed the lack of color in it. She turned upon him, animal-like, able to strike an effectual second blow. . . . She gazed at him --a pythoness. . . .
> Hurstwood fell back beaten (pp. 205, 206).

Here Hurstwood, who earlier in the novel had been Carrie's master, is the weaker opponent. Mrs. Hurstwood is the victor because she has the social force of being the legal wife and the financial force of owning Hurstwood's property. Hurstwood is trapped. He feels that he must steal his employer's money to elope with Carrie. In order to stay out of jail he must work to pay the stolen money. But he is not as young as he once was, nor as aggressive. He is forced to take unsuitable jobs and finally sinks to such despair that he cannot work at all.

At first, in his cunning pursuit and capture of Carrie, Hurstwood resembles the all-powerful seducer. His decline and fall may be seen as a judgment on him for his villainy and for his refusal to reform or repent, but Dreiser proves that Hurstwood should not be blamed. Defeated as much by the forces of life itself--Dreiser's Darwinian struggle of strong against weak--he is finally driven to commit suicide, after wondering weakly, "What's the use?" (p. 462). He resembles the villain in sentimental melodrama

in that he is punished severely for his crimes against society; but he is unlike a Svengali because he is not punished by social condemnation or ostracism but by his own inability to survive in the battle of life. In the portrait of Hurstwood, Dreiser has played on a sentimental stereotype, used it, and ultimately diverged from it.

The final divergences from stereotype are in the conclusion of the novel. Carrie's first seducer, Drouet, is not punished at all for his sexual crimes, nor is he seen as an evil man. (The only "punishment" he receives is a rebuff from Carrie when he comes to see her after she has become a successful actress.) More importantly, the fallen woman Carrie, although she feels guilty about her deeds at times, does not give in to the standard remorse or despair expected of the wayward woman in a sentimental novel.[26] Her behavior, as Grebstein remarks, is pragmatic. Her lack of remorse and her success in life must have shocked conservative readers of the novel.

There <u>are</u> basic differences of philosophy, characterization, and viewpoint between Dreiser and the sentimentalists, as we have seen. Despite such differences, however, the basic plots of naturalism and sentimentalism are often quite similar. Perhaps Dreiser saw in the characters of

melodrama, assaulted as they were by economic, social, and psychological forces, a corollary to his own view of what life can do to people. Sister Carrie largely follows the plot of sentimental melodrama. Frequently, of course, it follows sentimental stereotype to play upon audience sympathy by showing the similarity between Carrie and a virtuous heroine; at other times, it diverges from or reverses stereotypes to prove that determinism and not sentimental optimism is the "correct" key to life. Whatever critical use Dreiser makes of the popular form, much of his achievement in Sister Carrie consists in his ability to adapt melodrama to the needs of his own vision.

Sister Carrie demonstrates that there does not seem to be any inconsistency in placing melodramatic elements in a naturalist tale. In the same sense, the sentimental melodrama can be given a naturalist interpretation. Dreiser's use of sentimental stereotype becomes more understandable if one compares his novel with George Du Maurier's Trilby, which Dreiser read and admired in 1894 and reviewed two years later for the periodical Ev'ry Month.[27] What would have attracted Dreiser in his determinist reading of such a work is that the heroine Trilby does not influence her life as much as she is influenced and formed by her

poverty, parentage, and reception by society. Trilby therefore illustrates the theme of inevitability that Dreiser saw in sentimental melodrama and applied to his own novels.

The plot of Trilby tells of a young woman with good qualities who is doomed by her own sordid past. The heroine, a somewhat tarnished though lovely waif of the Paris streets, meets a group of English artists, falls in love with one of them, and ultimately renounces him because she feels that she is not respectable enough to be his wife. Falling under the influence of the evil genius Svengali who is infatuated with her, Trilby rises to great concert-hall fame. She is rescued by her old artist friends, plunged into remorse, repentance, and death as a suitable punishment--or martyrdom--as the pathetic story ends.

Trilby is ultimately a novel demonstrating the idea that the woman of little virtue, however saintly, can still be punished. Yet Du Maurier can't reconcile Trilby's magnetic personality and obvious goodness with the so-called just punishment that society metes out to her because she is not a respectable woman. When her artist love's mother and sister chastise her, Trilby flees their censure, unites herself with the shady Svengali, and finally chooses death

as a way out of her problems. But Du Maurier also makes it clear that Trilby was a greatly wonged woman who but for the accident of birth would have been a fine lady. She was at the mercy of forces, both economic and social, that made her what she was. It was this contradiction between what a fallen woman might be like and the punishment society demanded she undergo that must have fascinated Dreiser.

Du Maurier, who alternates between compassion and censure for Trilby, shows that her life was controlled by certain forces and influences. Her parents never impressed morality upon her, and her early training became the first cause of her sins. Like Carrie, Trilby had no "home principles" or training:

> Whether it be an aggravation of her misdeeds, or an extenuating circumstance, no pressure of want, no temptations of greed or vanity, had ever been factors in urging Trilby on her downward career after her first false step in that direction--<u>the result of ignorance, bad advice</u> (from her mother, of all people in the world), <u>and base betrayal.</u> She might have lived in guilty splendor had she chosen, but her wants were few. She had no vanity, and her tastes were of the simplest, and she earned enough to gratify them all and to spare (p. 40; italics added).

Although he suggests determinism operating in Trilby's life, Du Maurier can never decide how much emphasis to place on the extenuating circumstances of Trilby's upbringing and

the accidents of fate that throw "base betrayal" in her path. He never really solves the problem of how to look at his erring heroine, but he does suggest that it is a problem.

Just as in Sister Carrie, a large part of Du Maurier's novel is the rags-to-riches story of a popular star's rise to fame. In his descriptions of Trilby's effect on audiences such as those who might have gone to hear songs by Paul Dresser, Du Maurier stresses the Siren song effect Trilby's voice had on her following. Whether she is singing a familiar sentimental battle tune or interpreting a Chopin "Impromptu," she has a special power to appeal: "It is irresistible! it forces itself on you; no words, no pictures, could ever do the like!" (p. 257). Later in the novel, Du Maurier summarizes Trilby's unique gift:

> she was one of those rarely gifted beings who cannot look or speak or even stir without waking up (and satisfying) some vague longing that lies dormant in the hearts of most of us. . . (p. 310).

Carrie has this effect on her suitors, Drouet and Hurstwood, when she plays the virtuous woman wronged by society in the sentimental melodrama Under the Gaslight. Gifted, as Trilby is gifted, with natural stage presence, Carrie

> was moving forward with a steady grace, born of inspiration. She dawned upon the audience, handsome and proud. . . . Hurstwood blinked his

> eyes and caught the infection [of the audience's enthusiasm]. The radiating waves of feelings and sincerity were already breaking against the farthest walls of the chamber. . . . Every eye was fixed on Carrie. . . . They moved as she moved (p. 174).

And, as with Trilby, her voice and personality draw the audience into sympathy and longing:

> Hurstwood began to feel a deep sympathy for her and for himself. He could almost feel that she was talking to him. He was, by a combination of feelings and entanglements, almost deluded by <u>that quality of voice and manner which, like a pathetic strain of music</u>, seems ever a personal and imtimate thing (p. 178; italics added).

Dreiser, following Du Maurier, is fascinated by the natural talent of his heroine, that pure inspiration she had to become a Siren for her auditors. He is much more critical than Du Maurier of sentimental theater and concert-hall fare like <u>Under the Gaslight</u>, but shares with him a fascination with the phenomenon of natural success.

The reason why Dreiser is interested in this phenomenon relates to his idea that neither success nor failure is the direct result of acts of will on the part of the individual. Once again Du Maurier presents tentatively what Dreiser will develop at length. Trilby's creator suggests that her success is not the result of her own will to succeed. But then, instead of giving a determinist explanation, Du Maurier says that Trilby has fallen under the spell of the evil Svengali, who has hypnotized her into having

such a magnetic voice. With this kind of ploy Du Maurier retreats into the realm of the Gothic horror-romance tale. His description of Svengali's influence is stock melodrama:

> Trilby . . . felt cold all over. He seemed to her a powerful demon, who . . . oppressed and weighed on her like an incubus. . . (pp. 105, 106).

Svengali's baleful influence grows, and Trilby goes on to concert-hall successes. The reader is supposed to be further convinced that she has been hypnotized into success rather than that she has chosen it by the fact that after her English friends abduct her from Svengali she completely loses both her voice and her memory of stardom.

The theme that people have little control over their own lives runs through Trilby. Thinking that she has made a decision to free herself from her English love Little Billee, Trilby falls completely under Svengali's crippling influence and has no freedom at all. Her artist love, hopeful that he can forget Trilby and make a new life for himself, struggles fruitlessly to overcome his memories of her. His mother and sister, convinced that they have influenced him correctly to renounce Trilby and have a happy life with a decent woman, are dismayed at his misery and remorseful about their actions. Even Svengali, who had thought to possess Trilby for a lifetime, loses her and dies of shock. No one can mold his fate, or the fate of others.

One reason, however, why this theme of lack of control does not dominate the Du Maurier novel as it would Dreiser's is the sentimental code of values on which the earlier book is based. Implicit in this code is the idea that the individual is free at all times to act virtuously and, in so acting, to control his actions. Whereas the Dreiser character is unsure (though hopeful) or totally skeptical about free will, characters in Trilby think that they have freedom of choice. Success would have brought no happiness to Trilby even had she not been in an hypnotic state, because she wanted only to act virtuously and heroically. If she could not merit the love of a fine man, she wished to renounce him and happiness as well. Another of the characters, an artist friend of Little Billee, finding that Trilby loved another, did not think to press his suit but renounced her immediately, according to the code. Among the major characters, the minor ones being more frail and subject to cowardice, the test for conduct was to sacrifice one's desires in order to do the noble thing. The reward was the only true reward of the virtuous, dignity and self-esteem. In presenting this code, Du Maurier is merely following an accepted idea of the self that runs through much of the popular fiction of the later nineteenth century. But if one looks at the way this idea is worked

out in the plot, one sees that the effect of all these "independent" decisions made by the noble characters is that their fates seem more determined than chosen.

Du Maurier presents situations in which Trilby and her friends make moral choices, but he implies that the outcome of these situations is not the result of their decisions. Whether he is aware of it or not, Du Maurier is suggesting that morality does not rule the fates of his characters. Dreiser admired Trilby and, presenting stereotyped characters and dramatic situations within his determinist framework, makes explicit in Sister Carrie what is merely implicit in Trilby.

Sister Carrie both expands and reverses the stereotypes of Trilby to show that the moralistic view of human conduct neither accounts for nor solves social problems. Yet Dreiser was uncomfortable with a philosophy which said that if one's choices were limited "morality" was not an issue. Rather Dreiser felt that the official morality of his day, being so inconsistent with the way people acted, needed improvement. Robert Elias has stated Dreiser's dilemma accurately:

> on one hand Dreiser regarded all struggle as fundamentally futile; on the other he could not reconcile himself to the prospect of failure. . . .

> Dreiser refused to remain true to the implications of the [deterministic] theory--he shared Carrie's hope that things might be otherwise for the weak.[28]

In accordance with this need to reform morality, in Jennie Gerhardt (1911) Dreiser tries to show that the the difference between the so-called virtuous woman and the otherwise admirable (but kept) woman lay in the kind of treatment each was likely to receive from society. The plot of the novel resembles that of Sister Carrie to the extent that it concerns a poor young girl, seduced by one man who never gets around to marrying her, who then drifts into a second illicit liaison, wondering drearily at the end of the novel what her life has meant. But it was not enough for Dreiser to defend the average girl who falls, as he did in Sister Carrie. In this novel, written twelve years later, Dreiser proves that some fallen women can well be saints. For although Jennie Gerhardt becomes a kept woman, she is of transcendent purity and goodness, and is, in Kazin's words, "exceptional in a mediocre world."[29]

As in Sister Carrie, in Jennie Gerhardt Dreiser uses sentimental stereotypes to advantage. For this kind of figure, he had several literary models to choose from. Bret Harte had already sentimentalized "the whore with the heart of gold" in his Luck of Roaring Camp and Other Sketches (1870), and Harte's characterization became a

standard one. Later Trilby repeated this image (one man tells Trilby that she has a heart of gold) and represented a young woman, victim of a poor upbringing but good hearted. The young castoff mistress who dies in childbirth in Herne's Margaret Fleming (1890) shows goodness when she steadily refuses to divulge the name of her seducer. But in all of these characterizations, the writer who wished to describe the good woman who had gone to the bad resorted to a tone of mixed pity and contempt. The woman was to be allowed neither marriage nor survival, only retribution or death.

In his characterization of Jennie, Dreiser turns away from such portraits to a related sentimental stereotype that frequently appears in these works as a contrasting figure: the angelic, long-suffering, virtuous woman. In Margaret Fleming, she is the betrayed wife of the seducer; in Trilby, she is the mother and sister of Little Billee. And in Harte such a woman is either angelic or one who holds herself aloof from the wild Western community to keep her purity, earning the admiration of the author and the rough cowboys.

In none of these works is it possible for a woman to be pure if she has fallen. In Jennie Gerhardt, on the other hand, Dreiser's innovation is to combine the angelic stereotype with that of the fallen woman. Of course Jennie is

much more than a mixture of clichés. She is a deeply moving figure, portrayed in much greater depth and complexity than her prototypes. Although she is betrayed by two seducers, she is far superior to any suffering heroine in a Southworth tearjerker or T.S. Arthur temperance tale. Daughter of poor immigrants, uneducated and innocent, Jennie must throw herself upon the generosity of a rich man to rescue her family from the poverty in which they are sunk. Working as a cleaning woman in a grand hotel to support her family, she catches the eye of the respected Senator Brander. Bills are due, and the senator is kind, and Jennie accepts his gifts. The senator seduces her after a time; but the seduction, in typical Dreiser fashion, is ascribed more to biological need than to evil intent. Pursued by ill fortune, Jennie again finds herself in a weak position when the senator dies before he can decently provide for Jennie and the illegitimate child she has borne. But Jennie neither blames the senator (who died before he knew of the child's existence) nor kills herself in a fit of remorse. Instead she continues to be the steady, loving person she has always been, and herein lies the complexity of her character. The courage and open-heartedness which allowed her to choose difficult and then unconventional ways to help her family now sustain her in more tragic circumstances. She

responds authentically, in character. Concerned about helping her family (although her father, the first of many representatives of public opinion in the novel, casts her out), she leaves home and goes to another city.

Instead of resembling the conventional seduction plot, however, the plot of Jennie Gerhardt resembles that of the good woman tested by life who deserves her reward in tranquillity, security, and marriage. Jennie comes to be more and more reminiscent of the pure woman of sentimental literature (see Chapter Two). When her father is disabled in an accident, she comforts her mother:

> "Now don't you cry, Ma," she said, barely able to control herself. "Don't you worry, I know how you feel, but we'll get along. . . ." She realized, as she sat there, that fate had shifted the burden of the situation to her. She must sacrifice herself; there was no other way (pp. 158, 159; italics added).

As in Sister Carrie, Dreiser uses sentimental rhetoric to suggest the plight of the beleaguered heroine. Jennie's impulse to sacrifice herself for the family is laudable, but there are no rewards for heroism in Dreiser. Instead Jennie, in striving to support her family, drifts into another liaison with a forceful young businessman, Lester Kane, who commands her to be his. As in Sister Carrie, the strong dominate the weak. Lester reflects Dreiser's own philosophy of man-woman relations: "He [reflected that] he

had only to say 'Come' and she must obey; it was her destiny" (p. 147). (Although this sounds dangerously like the grammatic simplications of romantic rhetoric, in this context is it not a romantic statement. Lester's view, mirroring Dreiser's own, is a Darwinian one: Jennie is the woman, the weaker sex, and she must consent to be commanded by the man.) As with Senator Brander, again Jennie is trapped into an alliance. She gives in to Lester because she is pushed by economic necessity as well as by her own legitimate desire for love.

Society is the villain and Jennie is the victim. Just at the point in the novel where Dreiser has attempted to reform the stereotype, however, he shifts the focus of the novel away from Jennie and toward her lover, Lester Kane. With this shift comes, interestingly, a corresponding movement away from melodramatic (therefore deterministic) action. In this second part of the novel the focus is on Lester Kane as a new kind of character, one who is not buffeted and driven like the characters in melodrama and pure naturalism, but who is instead a defiant fighter who believes in and acts on the idea that, in Walcutt's words, "the only good lay in exercising one's will to power."[30]

Lester is not pictured as a typical seducer who has his pleasure and then betrays, although the final years of

Lester's life, after he jilts Jennie to marry Mrs. Gerald, can be seen as a kind of punishment. It is true that he is not overly happy with his new wife. His rather dissipated life leads to ill health and death in middle age; and on his deathbed he confesses to Jennie that he knows he was cruel to her and is sorry for what he has done. But despite these incidents, Lester is not left to occupy the position of seducer as villain. Dreiser neither approves nor disapproves of Lester's decision to take up with Jennie. Nor, as in the portrait of Hurstwood, does Lester emerge as a pathetic casualty in the struggle against the forces of life. He emerges instead as somewhat of a philosophical fighter, a freethinker.

Early in the novel Dreiser establishes Lester as a skeptic about marriage:

> Of course the conjugal state was an institution. It was established. Yes, certainly. But what of it? The whole nation believed in it. True, but other nations believed in polygamy. There were other questions that bothered him--such questions as the belief in a single deity or ruler of the universe, and whether a republican, monarchical, or aristocratic form of government were best. In short, the whole body of things material, social, and spiritual had come under the knife of his mental surgery and had been left but half dissected (p. 138).

As with his other characters, Dreiser is able to suspend moral judgment, but this time for a different reason than the idea that men and women are driven to do what they do. (This

was the case with Hurstwood and Drouet, as well as with Carrie and Jennie.) Dreiser suggests that both Lester's initial resistance to his family's urging that he leave Jennie, and his refusal to marry her, were the actions of a strong-minded individual resisting outside forces, societal conventions. Lester's view of the relationship with Jennie is that he is "perfectly satisfied with the outcome of the experiment" (p. 191). Although Lester weakens and gives in to society and marriage to a wealthy woman at the end of the novel, he has attempted a philosophical rebellion.

Lester thus becomes the first of Dreiser's sensitive egoists, a man determined to fight against any forces that impinge on what he considers his freedom. One could argue that in a sense Hurstwood is the first example of such a fighter, but it is clear that he is much more the instinctual man than Lester and acts rather from passion and a feeling of entrapment than from a philosophical position. Unlike Lester, Hurstwood really has no mind.

Lester's life comes to be a quest for understanding the processes of life and attempting to control them. His struggles with his brother Robert for control of the father's carriage company, though completely unsuccessful, prepare the way for the study of Cowperwood's vast success in the streetcar business in The Financier (1912) and The Titan (1914).

(In Jennie Gerhardt the power struggle is not a major part of the novel; in the later work, it is of central importance. The extreme selfishness and egotism of business tycoons as a prerequisite for success in business and life, implicitly condemned in Jennie Gerhardt, are studied in the Cowperwood novels.)

The shift of focus from anger at society and concern over its attitude toward women like Jennie to an interest in the activities of the likes of Lester Kane sheds light on Dreiser's use of melodrama. For if he had been true to the implications of Lester's characterization--the defiant tycoon searching for his own way to live, regardless of what others think--Dreiser would have moved completely away from his affinity for the sentimental stereotype. He would have concentrated on the steps such a man as Lester would take to achieve power: this rise to power is the subject of his next series of novels.[31] It is not that the subject of the power-hungry individual is foreign to the melodrama, but that Dreiser seemed to seek out his own form of the novel to portray such a subject in his later work.

In Jennie Gerhardt, however, Dreiser still carries out the reliance on melodramatic stereotype that he has originated in Sister Carrie. His development of Lester's characterization does not follow up the idea of Lester as

a defiant battler and business mogul. After Lester has lived with Jennie for a number of years, defying society and enjoying his defiance, he rather inconsistently comes to feel that he has lost rather than gained prestige by that defiance. He has lost the battle for control in business (his brother has unseated him) and for respect in society. Like Hurstwood, though much higher up financially, Lester too becomes a drifter, letting things happen to him without taking much care to resolve problems or difficulties. He takes the traditional refuge of the Dreiser character in a deterministic world, that of defeatist resignation. We remember Hurstwood's dying phrase, "what's the use?" Lester ceases to struggle to change society's idée fixe about the marriage state. He capitulates to society, farms Jennie out on a stipend, and lives in lavish comfort with his new wife Letty Gerald. Dreiser, apparently undecided himself about what Lester could have done, vacillates between suggesting that Lester was a strong man who might have done much with his life and suggesting that what really determined Lester's actions was out of his control.

Dreiser has not crystallized his new philosophical position by the end of the novel. Instead he retains the form of the melodrama to reinforce his old ideas about determinism. For if Lester, representing Dreiser's newly

emerging philosophy, had a chance for freedom and power, Jennie, to whom the novel returns in conclusion, had little, or no chance at all. Her life, however, is not quite that of the saintly sufferer in a sentimental play, nor is she a pure naturalist heroine. She remains enigmatic, moving in her courage and loyalty to those she loves, a woman strong enough to fight for survival. The combination of the form of melodrama and the naturalist philosophy, however, create complexity of characterization impossible for a pure (hence sterile) philosophy or for a hackneyed art form.

NOTES TO CHAPTER FOUR

1. George Du Maurier, Trilby (London and New York, 1970), p. 39. "I have found it impossible to tell her history as to make it quite fit and proper reading for the ubiquitous young person so dear to us all." Future references will be from this edition and will be incorporated into the text.

2. Alice P. Hackett, Fifty Years of Best Sellers, 1895-1945 (New York, 1945), p. 11, lists Trilby as the number two best seller for 1895.

3. Ellen Moers, Two Dreisers (New York, 1969), pp. 26 and 36, mentions that Dreiser read Trilby, as does W.A. Swanberg, Dreiser (New York, 1965), p. 69.

4. William Handy, "A Re-examination of Dreiser's Sister Carrie," TSIL, 1 (Autumn 1959), 387.

5. Leslie Fiedler, Love and Death in the American Novel (rev. ed., New York, 1966), pp. 242-250; Daryl Dance, "Sentimentalism in Dreiser's Heroines Carrie and Jennie," CLAJ, 14 (Dec. 1970), 127-142; Handy, 381-393. See also Charles Shapiro, "Jennie Gerhardt: the American Family and the American Dream," Twelve Original Essays on Great American Novels, ed. Charles Shapiro (Detroit, Mich., 1958), p. 177, and Sheldon Grebstein, "Dreiser's Victorian Vamp," Midcontinent American Studies Journal, 4 (Spring 1963), 3-11.

6. Grebstein, p. 5. Good definitions of melodrama are in Richard Chase, The American Novel and Its Tradition (Garden City, New York, 1957), pp. 37-41; Albert Van Nostrand, The Denatured Novel (New York, 1956), pp. 40ff.; Russell Nye, The Unembarrassed Muse (East Lansing, Mich., 1970), p. 27.

7. Shapiro, p. 183.

8. Dance, p. 131; Handy, passim.; Grebstein, passim.

9. Dance, p. 131.

10. Fiedler, pp. 242-250.

11. Chase, p. 38.

12. Chase, p. 40.

13. Irving Howe, Thomas Hardy (New York, 1967), p. 56.

14. Moers, pp. 90-99; Swanberg, pp. 81-83. The admiration was mixed with envy of his brother's success and a measure of scorn for the trivilaity of the music hall stage, however. See Swanberg, pp. 92ff.

15. Quoted in Moers, p. 99. Another reason Dreiser would have to be interested in the theme of the young girl lured to live in sin is that two of his sisters ran off with men and lived illicitly with them. Swanberg, pp. 23-25.

16. The following sources, in addition to Dreiser's novels, provided me with excellent discussions of Dreiser's thought. Alexander Kern, "Dreiser's Difficult Beauty," The Stature of Theodore Dreiser, ed. Alfred Kazin and Charles Shapiro (Bloomington, Ind., 1965), pp. 161-170; Eliseo Vivas, "Dreiser, an Inconsistent Mechanist," Stature, pp. 237-245; Robert Elias, Theodore Dreiser: Apostle of Nature (rev. ed. New York, 1970); Charles C. Walcutt, American Literary Naturalism, A Divided Stream (Minneapolis, 1956), Chapter 8; Vernon L. Parrington, The Beginnings of Critical Realism in America, vol. 3, Main Currents in American Thought (New York, 1927), 354-359. See also similarities between Dreiser's thought and Spencer's essay "The Law of Evolution," First Principles (4th ed., New York, 1880), 271-290.

17. Walcutt, p. 193.

18. Theodore Dreiser, "True Art Speaks Plainly," Great Short Works of American Realism, ed. Willard Thorp (New York, 1968), p. 691.

19. Theodore Dreiser, Sister Carrie (New York, 1961), p. 304. Page references in the text will be from this edition.

20. Walcutt, p. 197.

21. Alfred Kazin, On Native Grounds (New York, 1942), p. 65.

22. Warner Berthoff, The Ferment of Realism. American Literature, 1884-1919 (New York, 1965), pp. 238ff.

23. Theodore Dreiser, Jennie Gerhardt (New York, 1963), p. 386. Page references in the text will be from this edition.

24. Vivas, p. 244.

25. Chase, p. 39.

26. Grebstein, p. 7.

27. Moers, p. 36. Swanberg, p. 557, notes that at 67, Dreiser was still impressed by Du Maurier's accomplishment. In an article about famous authors who published major works when they were past their first youth, he included Du Maurier and Trilby.

28. Elias, p. 109.

29. Kazin, "Introduction," Jennie Gerhardt, p. 8.

30. Walcutt, p. 199.

31. On Dreiser's philosophical changes, see Walcutt, pp. 197-200; Vivas, pp. 237-245; Elias, pp. 109ff.; Kenneth Lynn, The Dream of Success (Boston, 1955), pp. 42ff.

CHAPTER FIVE

CRANE: FROM PARODY TO AFFINITY

Howells satirizes sentimental plots by providing conclusions in which common sense and reality defeat affectation and romantic illusion. Dreiser creates plot situations which are reminiscent of sentimental melodrama but which are presented within the framework of a world view very different from sentimentality with its uncritical devotion to free will. Stephen Crane in a sense combines the satiric techniques of both writers. Like Dreiser and Howells, he both plays on the similarity between beleaguered naturalistic and sentimental characters and defeats the sentimentalist's expectation that a character's action in extreme situations can simply be the result of free choice.[1]

Crane is different from Howells and Dreiser, however, in that he carries this reversal of the reader's expectation to an extreme verging on burlesque.[2] The end of "Five White Mice," for example, totally undercuts the reader's expectation. The story builds up to suspense about a south-of-the-border gunfight between a young American, the New

York Kid, and some fierce Mexicans. Crane builds up the tension and leads the reader to expect a showdown.

> The New York Kid contemplated his Spanish grandee. He drew his revolved upward, until the hammer was surely free of the holster.[3]

At the precise moment when the Kid confronts the Mexicans in this way, however, Crane interrupts the natural flow of the action. The Mexicans, seeing the Kid draw out his revolver, strangely and grandly refuse to fight. The story does not imply that the Mexicans alone were cowards, however. Both sides, it now turns out, "were unanimous in not wishing too bloody a combat" (p. 173), and have mutually recognized their own cowardice. Their conduct is a burlesque-like opposite of the typical gunfighter's. The last line, "Nothing had happened" (p. 175), completely reverses the traditional ending of the Western tale where the ground is strewn with wounded and dying gunfighters and the hero walks bravely away.

By reversing the expectations of the reader of popular fiction, Crane mocks the traditional Wild West story. Elsewhere, as we shall see, he reverses the reader's expectations by abruptly cutting off melodramatic action ("A Prologue," "Manacled"), by providing conflicting interpretations or surprise endings (Maggie, "The Blue Hotel"), or by giving contradictory views of the same character (the

Swede and Johnny in "The Blue Hotel").[4] This chapter will discuss how Crane ridiculed sentimental ideas by satirizing the style, plots, and stereotyped characters of popular sentimental fiction. It will show how Crane combined satire on popular levels with an affinity for them. Finally it will demonstrate how this affinity, which grew as Crane's work matured, proved damaging to his objectivity in certain later works when it developed into uncritical admiration for the sentimental scene and the romantic hero (Wounds in the Rain, "A Grey Sleeve").

Critics agree that Crane is a writer who has an ironic attitude toward sentimental middle-class conventions. Robert W. Stallman finds that Crane ridicules middle-class hypocrisy about religion in Maggie,[5] while Donald Pizer mentions that Crane assails the weakness in social morality that helps create slum environments like the one in Maggie.[6] Larzer Ziff speaks of Crane's "ruthless irony" toward his subjects[7] and Joseph Brennan even finds that Crane's irony is so "intrusive" that in undercutting both character and theme, it damages the plausibility of his characters.[8]

Where critics differ about Crane's work is in regard to the amount of sustained satire and parody toward which this irony contributes. Stallman and Malcolm Bradbury

emphasize that although Crane is critical of sentimental conventions, he does not parody sentimental melodrama in his major works so much as follow the form and provide ironic variations on it.[9] On the other hand, Eric Solomon, in Stephen Crane: From Parody to Realism, sees much more of a deliberate attempt in Crane's work to parody popular forms by "exaggerating and adapting the conventions of other novelists." Although Solomon argues that Crane is attacking popular conventions, he sees Crane's parody primarily as creative, "based upon literary samples in which the aim is creating a meaning that is positive and constructive."[10] To that end, Solomon adds, "Crane will employ and parody the convention in a single passage, both raising and lowering the model."[11] Yet Solomon, though persuasive, does not compare Crane's passages with nearly identical sentimental ones and prove that Crane is deliberately exaggerating the ridiculing the original. At best Solomon can only point to the parodic effect of Crane's work when compared with the popular modes of the time, yet he himself admits that Crane's vision was unique and so avoided being categorized. I must, therefore, qualify Solomon's statement about deliberate parody in Crane. Sometimes ("Prologue," "Manacled") Crane is obviously parodying sentimental forms. At other times, especially in Maggie,

the effect of Crane's work is parodic although that may not have been his deliberate intention; indeed he may well have been presenting a vision of reality which had similarities with the sentimentalist's view. And at other times ("The Blue Hotel") he may, by ironically criticizing a popular form, be producing a satiric effect though not necessarily a parodic one.

One major way in which Crane satirizes sentimental and melodramatic fiction is by reversing the authorial voice customary in these forms. The typical sentimental author guides the reader to a chosen conclusion. Edgar Fawcett, for example, describes his grocer hero, Everard, in A New York Family:

> He was, indeed, the hardy opposite of an idler; his little grocery, at a street-corner but a stone's throw inland, had cost him great pluck to start and keep alive. Borrowed funds had commenced it; collapse had stared every separate potato in the eye; and made each tomato look apoplectic. . . . But he soon paid back his debt, and profits flowed to him. . . .[12]

The author here is hard at work directing the reader's emotional response. Although it is not the sentimental novelist alone who presents characters and urges us to sympathize with them, the sentimental writer uses exaggerated language sprinkled with adjectives ("little grocery," "hardy opposite") and cliché phrases ("borrowed funds," "profits flowed") to move the reader. Through such language a writer like

Fawcett simplifies the situation and leads the reader to form the "correct" conclusion. In the passage quoted above there is supposed to be no doubt as to what the reader should think of Everard. He is a hero because the author tells us that he is.

Crane deflates the authorial voice of the sentimental writer by contrasting its exaggerated diction with reality. In Maggie: A Girl of the Streets (1893) a character is described as "a woman of brilliance and audacity," a typically exaggerated phrase which could have come from a popular novel. But Crane defeats the reader's expectation that such language will accurately describe the character; the woman turns out to be a dance hall prostitute who talks like a Bowery inhabitant: "he didn't have as many stamps as he tried to make out, so I shook him, that's all."[13] The reader is meant to be shocked when the reality contradicts what the elevated style had led him to suppose. A young child fighting in the streets is described as "one who smote the deeply engaged one on the back" (p. 40). This comparison of a young urchin with a Biblical or epic warrior, rather than "elevating" the subject as it would in a Fawcett novel, makes both the inflated language and the child's actions seem comic. Furthermore, where the popular novels use hyperbolic praise to identify good characters

and moving situations, Crame employs such language to describe sinful characters (the prostitute) or censurable actions (the young boy's street fight). What at first seemed to be Crane's imitation of sentimental style actually has the effect of an abrupt reversal of it.

Crane's most compact criticisms of sentimental melodrama, the parodic "A Prologue" (1896) and the satiric "Manacled" (1900), reproduce the very language of melodrama but give the reader no clear guidelines as to how to look at the dramatic situations presented. "A Prologue" is a very short sketch making fun of melodrama:

> A gloomy stage. Slender curtains at window, centre. Before the window, a table, and upon the table a large book, opened. A moonbeam, no wider than a sword-blade, pierces the curtains and falls upon the book.
>
> A moment of silence.
>
> From without, then an adjacent room in intention--come sounds of celebration, of riotous drinking and laughter. Finally, a swift quarrel. The din and crash of fight. A little stillness. Then a woman's scream: "Ah, my son, my son."
>
> A moment of silence.
>
> CURTAIN[14]

Even in such a short piece, Crane implies that authors of popular plays spoon-feed their audiences, presenting them only with traditional stereotypes such as the inevitable quarrel and duel--instead of challenging them with new material or new forms.

The scene itself has little internal logic. No relation is set up between the mysterious opened book and the offstage fight. The sketch is simply a parodic jumble of elements found in the typical melodrama. Though brief, it contains in burlesque form all of the characteristics of the successful melodrama: the build-up, the dramatic moment, the calamity, the aftermath. But because the sketch is not followed by any play, Crane is satirically pointing attention to a typical prologue to a melodrama. "A Prologue" is significant because Crane is here establishing in a crude form the authorial attitude that he will use until the end of his career. He sets up the reader's belief that the prologue will actually introduce and describe the play to come. He then defeats that belief by the brevity of the sketch itself and offers no explanation. The sketch is a joke undercutting the reader's faith in the conventional author.

"A Prologue" depends for its effects on knowledge of the literary form being ridiculed and is too short to attempt more than a few burlesque touches. "Manacled," written late in Crane's lifetime, continues the satire on stage conventions and parodies sentimental language in doing so. It opens with a description of a popular melodrama in progress. Recounting the first act, Crane switches

suddenly in the middle to the play itself. The valiant prisoner, in chains, is resisting his "brutal warder":

> "Tis well, Aubrey Pettingill, you have so far succeeded, but mark you, there will come a time,"[15]

begins his standard hero's speech to the sneering villain. That is as far as Crane permits the illusion of heroism to go. Instead of the usual rescue of the hero at this point or some literary contrivance to enable the suspense to continue, a real-life fire breaks out in the theater where the audience is viewing the melodrama. The illusion on which art depends is broken both for the audience in the story and for Crane's reader. Crane has deliberately emphasized the difference between melodrama and reality.

When the fire breaks out, the "hero," in the face of real danger, has been left, with his chains, on the stage. Cursing the chains for not being papier-maché (perhaps expressing a desire to be back in the world of theatrical make-believe), he alternately screams for help and yells that the chains are too heavy. His stage line, "there will come a time, Aubrey Pettingill," changes to "Hey Pete, you've left me chained up." The control which characters in the world of the stage have over events, a control the audience wants to believe in, becomes spurious when actual danger intervenes. The scene closes rather

horribly with the gradual envelopment of the hero by the flames. "Manacled" parodies melodrama although it reverses the conventional ending: Crane's stage hero perishes and his stage villains survive. It also satirizes the main assumption on which melodrama is based, that heroism is often its own safeguard and will protect the righteous hero.

Both "Manacled" and "A Prologue" are examples of a method Crane uses in a more ambitious and complex work, Maggie: A Girl of the Streets (1893). Maggie parodies a number of popular forms, including the temperance tract, the social problem novel, and the melodrama (see Chapter Two). Maggie, a child of slum drunks who dreams of better things than her job in a sweatshop, becomes involved with a bartender dandy who proves to be a blackguard and not the hero Maggie fantasizes him to be. He seduces her after her drunkard mother unreasonably throws her into the streets, and he abandons her for the more sophisticated beer-hall prostitutes. Maggie's fall is set against the beer halls of the Bowery, which become correspondingly nattier and more sordid as her situation worsens and she falls from shop girl to prostitute to suicide.

This plot was familiar at the time, used by sentimental novelists to warn innocent girls (or their novel-reading

mothers) about the dangers of the big city. Edgar Fawcett's The Evil that Men Do (1889), for example, closely parallels Maggie in plot structure and character types. Like Maggie, its young heroine Cora is forced by necessity to work in sweatshops. And like Maggie Cora falls in love with a rake who throws her over, after which she sinks to prostitution. There are further parallels with Maggie in Fawcett's figure of the honest working man Owen, who truly loves Cora but is not glamorous enough for her; for in George's Mother (1895), Crane's later slum tale, he mentions that the young workman George Kelcey cares for Maggie and is crushed when she drops him for the more glamorous Pete. A final parallel between Fawcett and Crane is that both Owen and George turn to alcohol, although Owen's alcoholism is more directly related to Cora's rejection than George's is to Maggie's.

The parallels of Maggie with Fawcett's sentimental The Evil that Men Do are so numerous that Solomon has remarked that Maggie could be considered in part a parodic reaction to Fawcett's school of fiction.[16] Although this discussion will point out instances in Maggie of an exaggerated and ironic version of the sentimental-melodramatic slum novel, it will not argue that Maggie is deliberately parodic so much as a work which adapts sentimental melodrama

for ironic uses. When Crane's description of the landscape of the slums resembles an ironic version of a sentimental novel, we can call the effect a kind of parody. Sustained parody has to exaggerate consistently the vices of the work it parodies; if parody is his primary intention, for example, Crane (or his characters) should moralize so sickeningly that even the silliest reader gets the point. At times, indeed, Crane does just this. But to do justice to his vision, we should distinguish Crane's fictional world from deliberate parody. Although his characters are reminiscent of sentimental types, they are also the product of his unique vision, a "reality," in Ziff's words, "projected by . . . [Crane's] will rather than . . . one observed and ordered."[17] Crane creates a surrealistic nightmare world of drunken truculent characters who are intent on defending their opinions and whose constitutions seem to strengthen rather than buckle under the load of alcohol consumed. Barflies, prostitutes, truck drivers, Bowery street people, infants all roar and scream and protest against those around them; to Charles C. Walcutt the effect of Crane's "rather fantastic but obviously intentional exaggeration . . . renders . . . [his] sense that this world is so warped as to be mad."[18] It is, finally, a naturalist world; characters try to assert themselves in

an environment which reduces them (or threatens to reduce them) to animals struggling for survival.

The difference between Crane and the sentimental writers is not so much in the way each presents the sordid city environment, although in Crane's version the series of violent encounters reaches a more absurd pitch than in the sentimentalists'. (At one point an old woman asks the weeping Maggie, "What is it dis time? Is yer fader beatin' yer mudder, or yer mudder beatin' yer fader?" p. 46. Such events are of daily occurrence in Crane's slum world.) Rather the basic difference is in the way they view the many trials that beset their characters. Fawcett and his school see calamity as a judgment on their slum characters, and look at it through a mist of tears and pity; Crane replaces their moralizing with a different attitude toward his characters. He describes Maggie's brother Jimmie getting the education of the streets:

> After a time he . . . became so sharp that he believed in nothing. To him the police were always actuated by malignant impulses, and the rest of the world was composed, for the most part, of despicable creatures who were all trying to take advantage of him, and with whom, in defense, he was obliged to quarrel on all possible occasions. He himself occupied a downtrodden position, which had a private but distinct element of grandeur in its isolation (p. 52).

On the one hand Crane seems to be ridiculing Jimmie for his exaggerated self-importance and his image of his own grandeur.

These concepts seem ludicrous in a sordid slum environment: "At first his tongue strove with these beings, but he eventually became superior" (p. 52). On the other hand it is difficult to detect what precise purpose Crane seems to have in using the high-toned and ornate language in the passage, whether it is to parody the language and character or to suggest, even partially, that Jimmie is superior. Is Jimmie more hero than fool?

Crane critics have recognized that there is a problem in describing Crane's attitude toward his characters as entirely ironic. To John Berryman, Crane is both at war with his characters and on their side.[19] Maurice Bassan has noticed in passages such as the one quoted above a mixture of contempt and sympathy;[20] Donald Gibson, in noting that Crane has a divided attitude toward his characters, charges that the effect of his work is confusing and results in "tonal inconsistency."[21] Certainly this division of attitude toward his characters makes it difficult to categorize Crane's work as totally ironic; but what we can sense in his overall attitude is that where the sentimentalist would pity or censure, Crane distances himself from the characters.

What Crane found most objectionable about the sentimental novel, and what Maggie avoids despite its

inconsistencies and lapses in artistic control, was the application of the Faith-and-Virtue formula to every situation. Characters in the sentimental novel, however impoverished and embattled, who possessed those qualities, succeeded in life eventually; those who veered from them fell into disgrace. Fawcett suggested that slum people were free to reform themselves if they would be self-reliant and virtuous. Crane, who found this morality totally unrealistic, parodies Fawcett when he presents slum dwellers who hypocritically mouth this middle-class morality. At one point, Mary, the tattered and drunken mother of Maggie, yells at her son Jimmie because he has torn his clothes in a street fight. One logical reason for her anger, of course, is that she does not want to buy him new clothes. The scene is also, however, an ironic takeoff on the bourgeois maxim "Cleanliness is next to godliness," because Jimmie's clothes were rags to begin with. The scene, though realistic also, is ironic because Mary, who chastises her son for brawling in the street, is constantly being arrested for drunken behavior and is always unkempt and slatternly herself. She applies morality to others only as a way of asserting herself or playing on their feelings. Mary uses her suspicion that her daughter is being seduced by Pete when she is hauled into court for drunkenness to play

on the feelings of the judge and try to get a suspended sentence. Her son Jimmie is no better. He is shocked that Pete would seduce his sister but has no qualms himself about seducing a young woman who is very much like Maggie. With such examples, Crane points out the hypocrisy he finds in conventional sentimental morality and suggests that slum characters are incapable of understanding and applying such a morality to their lives.

Against this background of depravity, Maggie is judged for her "illicit" relationship with Pete. Two crucial scenes illustrate how Crane opens to question sentimental conventions about characters like Maggie. The scenes, when Maggie is thrown out by her mother (Chapter 9) amd when Mary and Jimmie talk over Maggie's "failure" (Chapter 13), present the conventional solution and reaction to the problem of the fallen woman. In these scenes Mary wrongly judges Maggie, first by suspecting her virtue and then by not realizing that the family has let Maggie down and has forced her into a life as a streetwalker. Crane presents the conventional opinion about the wayward daughter (see Chapter Two) and appears to ridicule it by using Mary as the spokesman for conventional morality. By having the worst reprobate in the novel self-righteously castigate Maggie, Crane reverses the expectation of the

sentimental reader that the spokesman for morality be morally upright.[22]

In the banishment scene, Crane presents the stock figure of the outraged parent who calls up all of the sanctions society permits a mother shocked by her daughter's "immoral" conduct. At the height of Mary's rage against Maggie, she yells: "Ye've gone t'd' devil, Mag. . . . Yer a disgrace t'yer people . . ." (p. 71). The irony here is that the chapter opened with Mary dragging herself out of a saloon and making her belligerent way home, offering to fight with anyone who stood in her drunken path. Maggie is the only one she is able to bully successfully, having herself been jeered at by street urchins and pulled up the stairs by her son Jimmie. Her indignant lashing out at what she suspects is Maggie's loss of virtue, legitimate in a Fawcett novel, becomes ludicrous in this context and calls into question the value of anything Mary says. Putting morality into the mouth of the immoral speaker, Crane both shocks the reader and mocks the stock figure of the outraged parent.

In the scene between Mary and Jimmie after Maggie, forced out of the house and deserted by Pete, has fallen, Crane bases his parody on the cumulative effect of repeating sentimental expressions:

> "She's d'devil's own chil' . . . Ah, who would t'ink such a bad girl could grow up in our fambly, Jimmie, me son. Many d'hour I've spent in talk wid dat girl an' tol' her if she ever went on d'streets I'd see her damned. An' after all her bringin'-up an' what I tol' her and talked wid her, she goes teh d'bad. . ."(p. 73; italics added).

On one level this speech is quite realistic, for it exhibits just the kind of self-deceiving hypocrisy that such a character would employ. But it is also standard sentimental speech-making, which Crane reproduces. It provides an ironic effect, because Maggie has had neither training ("after all her bringin'-up") nor proper home influences ("Many d'hour I've spent in talk wid dat girl") to steer her in the right direction. In the scene as a whole, Crane has Mary repeat so often the same rhetorical question--how could Maggie go wrong?--that it becomes a travesty of sentimental condemnation. Exaggerations of sentimental rhetoric, Mary's speeches repeat the same phrases so often that the sense of the words is lost and the reader is made to feel that they are meaningless. Indeed they are: moral judgments cannot be made in such an environment. The realism of the charactr's "accidental" self-revelation occurs, it seems, in spite of Crane's intention to mock melodrama.

Crane criticizes sentimental social concepts about the moral responsibility for "sin" in the portrait of Mary. The characterization of Maggie extends that criticism by

showing that she is a victim of both the sordid environment that Mary symbolizes and of the romantic way in which she thinks about the world. Pete is Maggie's "ideal man" (p. 59) who would be a "defender and knight" for her (p. 59). She thinks of him as a lover in "dream gardens," who chooses her over the "half-dozen women" who are in love with him (p. 59), and she hopes that he will take her away from her life in the slums. Instead Pete takes her to flashy beer halls which Maggie also transforms in her imagination into wondrous palaces. She even hears Pete's Bowery talk as if it were the language of the romantic hero: "Hey Mag, I'm stuck on yer shape" inspires Maggie with the perception that "here was the ideal man" (p. 57). Maggie's dreams about life are reinforced rather than corrected by the popular literature she is exposed to. When Pete takes her to a melodramatic stage play performed in a beer hall, instead of seeing the disparity between the adventures of the stage heroes and heroines and her own life, Maggie leaves inspired.

> She wondered if the culture and refinement she had seen imitated . . . by the heroine on the stage, could be acquired by a girl who lived in a tenement house and worked in a shirt factory (p. 67).

Crane's irony extends both to Maggie's romantic illusions and the exaggerated style, based on popular

literature, in which they are expressed. His irony is based on the incongruity between what Maggie's prospects in life are and her dreams about the ideal life. Then too there is the ironic difference between actual speech, the way characters like Maggie and Pete talk, and literary speech, the way popular authors had recorded their speech. Crane's description of Maggie is a parody of romantic authors' phrases, phrases he then contrasts with the reality of actual Bowery dialect:

> To her the earth was composed of hardships and insults. She felt instant admiration for a man who openly defied it. She thought that if the grim angel of death should clutch his heart, Pete would shrug his shoulders and say, "Oh, ev'ry't'ing goes!" (p. 59).

Larzer Ziff remarked of Ambrose Bierce that he "revealed his contempt for what he was treating by exploiting the incongruity of its vocabulary with his syntax and diction."[23] Crane too uses incongruity to reveal his contempt for romantic phraseology and the romantic novel. The Bowery speech only makes the cliché phrases ("grim angel of death," "instant admiration") sound absurd.

Like Mary, Maggie has a vision of life which is a reflection of the ideas and diction of popular literature, and which is totally inapplicable to the life she leads. But whereas the irony of Mary's characterization depends on

the fact that Crane allows her to pretend hypocritically that she can apply sentimental morality to her family, the irony of Maggie's characterization depends on Crane's refusal to allow Maggie to pretend that her romantic view of life is true. All of her romantic dreams about Pete turn to dust when he seduces her and then contemptuously casts her off. Not only does he betray instead of "rescue" her, but also the "half-dozen women" whom Maggie thought were in love with him prove to be cynical barroom prostitutes who take his money and make a fool of him. All of Maggie's ideas about her dream lover, founded as they are on popular literature, are proved wrong.

Taking her disillusionment hard, Maggie does not return to her sweatshop existence to construct new dreams about a new hero. Instead, as in a sentimental novel, she falls into further degradation and becomes "a girl of the painted cohorts of the city" (p. 96). At first she is able to survive and support herself but after a time is forced to pass by the "glittering avenues" and walk into "darker blocks" and poorer districts of the city (p. 97). Finally Maggie feels remorseful about her sinful life and drowns herself near the bleak docks of the city: "At the feet of the tall buildings appeared the deathly black hue of the river" (p. 98). Society feels the impact of her

death so little that in the next scene, where Pete is carousing with a predatory group of prostitutes, no mention is made of her. On one level, Crane is parodically following the sentimental novel by demonstrating that the indifference of society toward a prostitute's death is a "typical" fate. But the juxtaposition of Maggie's suicide with Pete's indifference also suggests that the only way to survive in the Bowery world is to be as hardened and callous as Pete and the women who take his money.

The final scene, where Mary receives the news of Maggie's death from Jimmie, completes the tale of Maggie's victimization and parodies the moralistic ending of a Fawcett novel. Mary changes here from the outraged parent to the mother melodramatically mourning the death of a wayward child. She is reminiscent of the mother in "A Prologue" who screams "My son! my son!" Asked if she will forgive her daughter now that the girl has been judged, Mary screams and cries with "tears [which] seemed to scald her face" [in] an "agony of grief:" "Oh yes, I'll fergive her! I'll fergive her!" (p. 104) Here I disagree with Solomon, who sees the last scene of mourning as one which changes from "a parody of mother love" to one of genuine anguish: "narration transcends parody . . . and touches upon anguish."[24] While it is true that Maggie is

larger than the sum of its parodic elements, Mary is never anything but a bathetic character; it is not possible for her to change so quickly in one speech, especially in a speech that has so much of the exaggeration of bad melodrama.

This final scene is reminiscent of one in Fawcett's A New York Family. There the son, seized with remorse for his crimes, kills himself rather than face his family. The family sits in mourning and promises to forgive the wayward child just as Mary promises to forgive Maggie. The scenes are similar, but the Maggie scene is an ironic variation on sentimental fiction because Mary is so unlike the typical virtuous and wronged sentimental parent. It is not her place to "fergive" anyone; it was she who provided Maggie with the foul home environment and then unjustly drove her into the streets to find refuge with the two-faced Pete. Mary's reaction is only a mockery of the sentimental relative moralizing over a much-loved dead child who had gone astray. Maggie ends as it began, satirically.

As Stallman has noted, Maggie was not popular.[25] Apart from the "shocking" descriptions of beer halls and slums, another reason for its lack of popularity could have been the absence of authorial voice guiding the reader to draw moralistic conclusions from the tale. Instead of

providing such guidelines, Crane satirizes them by choosing slum characters to be the spokesmen for sentimental social views. The slum dwellers, products of an insane environment, have views which are twisted and irrational; yet these are the very views that authors like Fawcett preach in their novels. Crane further satirizes the conventional authorial voice by omitting the standard moralizing about good and bad characters. Instead he creates characters who are neither lovable nor hateful. Mary is neither a sympathetic figure nor a calculating villain; like Pete and Jimmie, she is ludicrous. Maggie, instead of being pitiful or censurable, is not fully realized enough to be a character whom the reader can like--or judge. Where Fawcett would damn or praise, Crane burlesques. He also plays on the reader's expectation that, as in a sentimental novel, the characters will be judged according to their "moral" or "immoral" actions.

The parodic burlesque effects in Maggie are balanced by Crane's view of the power of oppressive environment and romantic illusion to twist and control character. The reader never has the feeling that the Bowery characters are free agents. Maggie does not seem to have any choice in what she does; it is inevitable that she will fall into someone's clutches. Nor is Pete the master of his fate; although

stronger than Maggie, he is victimized by the beer hall prostitutes who are cleverer than he. Like Jimmie and Mary, he will drink his way through life, always trying, in vain, to assert himself.

The sentimental novel simplistically confronted such "depraved" characters by asserting that if one simply changed the environment surrounding them, these people would immediately be morally cured and would set about helping to raise themselves. Fawcett and Arthur wanted to alter the environment by legalizing prohibition. Freeman suggested making wages higher and bringing Christianity to the masses. Maggie also presents an environment which needs reform, but it ridicules the sentimentalists because it presents characters who are too deluded by sentimentality and alcohol to respond to any program for self-help. The ultimate question Maggie raises, and one which is Crane's response to conventional morality, is of how much people are victimized by themselves and how much they are controlled by a series of calamities or outside forces. Perhaps in such an ironic work Crane could not answer these questions. Maggie only makes questions out of sentimental answers; it does not resolve the issues it has raised.

Crane's relation to sentimental tradition is a complex one in this novel. He seems to be saying "This is my

vision of the way people life in the slums," and he uses sentimental melodrama to reflect that vision, both in form (plotting) and conventions (exaggerated and insincere emotionalism of the characters). At the same time he is giving an ironic perspective on the melodrama as a literary form. He thus transforms melodrama and adapts it to his own uses at the same time that he provides an ironic commentary on it.

"The Blue Hotel" (1898) raises many of the same issues about victimization and the limitations on free will as Maggie does. But it balances satire of a popular form with a much greater affection for the form than Maggie displays. The form satirized in this long short story is the dime novel about the wild West. It was an enormously popular form--one publisher alone put out three thousand different titles.[27] Like the sentimental novel, the dime novel teaches definite lessons about the victory of good over evil and the virtue of heroism in the face of danger. The battle between bad and good takes the shape of the barroom or sagebrush showdown between hired gun and cowboy:

> [he had] a face that had a villainous and disagreeable expression. . . . and a deep, livid scar ran from his right cheek bone, near the eye, down across to the corner of his mouth. . . .

> This much of his exterior Colonel Joe took in at a cursory glance. . . . But the other was not to be bluffed so easily, for he stepped quickly in pursuit, and slapped one brawny brown hand down on the colonel's shoulder with force. And almost before he knew it . . . [he] found himself ranged along the bar again, and confronted by his villainous-looking visitor.[28]

In this description of Colonel Joe and the badman from Edward L. Wheeler's Deadwood Dick on Deck (1873), there is the same obvious stereotyping and the same attempt to guide the reader as in the sentimental novel. Books like Wheeler's merely trade the sentimental emphasis on moving the sensibilities of the reader for the creation of thrills through description of violent adventure.

In the first scenes of "The Blue Hotel," Crane ridicules this Western variation of the sentimental novel. He compares the myth of Western violence, on which the dime novel is built, with an actual situation, a stranger's entry into the comically named town of Fort Romper, Nebraska. A Swede from the East, who is not used to Western ways, arrives in Fort Romper abnormally afraid, "wild-eyed" with fear, the result of his vision of the West which, as one character remarks, is based on reading too many dime novels. Fed on these Eastern ideas of the West, he persists in an unreasoning terror. He will not listen to the soothing words of the hotel owner who has picked him up at the train station and brought him to the blue-painted Palace Hotel.

At first the story seems to ridicule the delusions of the Swede, who believes that everyone wants to fight with or ambush him. The gaily painted blue hotel itself is a reversal of western myth because its proprietor is concerned only with pleasing traveling businessmen, not sheltering rustlers, and is anticipating profits rather than showdowns. He even mentions his dear little dead daughter to the Swede to convince the fearful traveler of his peacefulness and sentimentality.

The Swede is unconvinced. Even the angry outburst of a lazy cowboy fails to alter his preconceived idea:

> The cowboy was in a state of deep stupefaction. "Say . . . say, what are you gittin' at, hey?" The Swede sprang up with the celerity of a man escaping from a snake on the floor. "I don't want to fight!" he shouted. "I don't want to fight!" . . . "Well, who the hell thought you did?" . . . [the cowboy] inquired.[29]

The cowboy's attempt to set the Swede right seems the most comic of all the attempts. To the reader, it now appears that the Swede's fears about the savage West <u>are</u> completely ungrounded; he has indeed read too many dime novels.

"The Blue Hotel" is a more complex satire on romanticism, however. In <u>Maggie</u>, a character creates illusions only to see them destroyed or to have the narrator show the disparity between these illusions and reality; in "The Blue Hotel," however, the character eventually creates the very

situation he has imagined.[30] Buoyed by liquor that the hotel owner has supplied to soothe his nerves, the Swede assumes that everyone in a Western town wants to pick a fight because that is what he has read in the dime novel. So when the Swede sits down to a card game with the proprietor's son Johnny, he accuses the boy of cheating at cards. As a result the two decide to have a fist fight, and the Swede wins, grandly leaving the blue hotel for the saloon. The Swede has finally created the violence he feared.

After his victory over Johnny, the Swede assumes the swagger and stock mannerisms of what he imagines is the Western tough guy. But again he is acting in terms of dime novel stereotype. He still fails to recognize that the world of Fort Romper is not the world of the popular novel. When he leaves the hotel to go to the saloon, he feels that he has conquered all dangers. No longer fearing the stage villains of his fancy, he has replaced them with delusions about himself as an infallible Western hero. He assumes that because he has beaten one man in a fight, he himself cannot be beaten, a dangerous delusion in Crane's world.[31]

Thinking himself a victorious strong man, the Swede enters the saloon. Just as in the dime novel, the bartender and the men drinking in the saloon become quiet as he enters. The Swede boasts to them that he has beaten (symbolically

killed) a man. Brashly and with great bravado, he asks everyone to drink with him. All refuse, "encased . . . in reserve" (p. 312). Irritated at the thought that he cannot command friendship, the Swede chooses the most secluded group in the saloon, players in a private card game, and begins to invite and intimidate. "I asked you to drink with me." "My friend, I don't know you," is the gambler's paradoxical reply (p. 314; italics added). Crane here is both following the dime novel scenario (the bully barges into the town and thinks he can order lesser men around) and at the same time is suggesting another motive for the Swede's behavior. He deliberately leaves it unclear whether the Swede is imitating a Western tough guy or is trying to control the situation by making an overture of actual friendship: "Oh, hell," the Swede answers the gambler's refusal, "Come and have a drink."

But the gambler will not be controlled and is firm in refusing to drink with the stranger. The stranger persists in his attempts to control the situation--or to make friends--and, irritated with the refusals, picks a fight with the gambler. But the saloon is not like the blue hotel. Here the Swede, with his dime-novel ideas of violence, is unwittingly reaching the real violence existing in the town. The saloon is not a parodic version of a dime-novel showdown

place; it is the place where showdowns can actually occur. In contrast to Johnny and the lazy cowboys in the hotel, the gambler resembles the Western stereotype of the deadliest man in town. And although in some ways he is not typical of the wild West tough man of the Swede's imagination (Crane ironically mentions that the gambler has a wife and two little daughters), he is a killer when aroused. He is not, like the Swede, a papier-maché tough man; he is truly tough and violent. The Swede, having forgotten his original fears about the West, and deluded into thinking that he is the dime-novel hero who can control any situation, pushes the gambler into a fight. The price of his disillusionment is death: the gambler stabs and kills him.

Although in a sense the saloon showdown is Crane's final satire on the Swede and his delusions, the Swede's death is not the conclusion to Crane's ridicule of the dime novel. Rather, like Maggie's death, the death of the Swede is the fate of the victimized protagonist. Deluded into thinking that he has control over his life and is capable of great deeds, the Swede is crushed by a combination of the violent environment and his own false expectations. If his death had been a parodic conclusion, the Swede would either have been the victorious hero who triumphed over

the gambler or the obnoxious braggart bested by the forces of righteousness. In "The Blue Hotel," he is neither. Instead the saloon episode portrays a dime-novel showdown as a naturalist would see it: the Swede is the deluded victim in a world where there are no heroes.

In a post-mortem between an Easterner and a cowboy, both of whom witnessed the Swede's fight with Johnny and heard of his death in the saloon, the Swede is now seen as a victim. The Easterner says that the Swede was victimized from the very beginning of his stay in Fort Romper. The evidence is the fact that he had seen Johnny cheating at cards; that was no delusion of the Swede's after all. And from that moment, the Easterner continues, the Swede was victimized by the unfriendliness of everyone he encountered, culminating in his rejection by the men in the saloon and his ultimate death there. A passage describing the Swede after his fight with Johnny now has a symbolic significance:

> There was a splendour of isolation in his situation at the time which the Easterner felt once when, lifting his eyes from the man on the ground [Johnny], he beheld that mysterious and lonely figure, waiting (p. 307).

The reader now remembers that the Swede, who came to town expecting no friendship, only hostility, <u>was</u> rebuffed by Johnny, who cheated him at cards, and later was further rebuffed by the gambler and the other men in the saloon. As

the Eastern talks, the Swede emerges as a symbol of the friendless condition of strangers--or perhaps of all men. To the Easterner, when men do not wish to help each other or to communicate, they create "mysterious and lonely figure[s]" like the Swede.

But the Easterner's view is not necessarily Crane's, and the Easterner may be only partly correct. It is unclear whether (as the Easterner argues) the Swede is victimized solely by the violence and unfriendliness of the townspeople. Crane suggests that the Swede is also victimized by delusions of grandeur, delusions that he can control any situation. If one accepts this view, it is not certain whether the friendship of the townspeople would have helped change or overcome the Swede's delusions. Neither Crane--nor the reader--can say with certainty.[33]

Whatever interpretation of the events leading to the Swede's death is correct, the death itself appears inevitable. After his fight with Johnny, he thinks he has mastered the town and can avert any further danger. But as he leaves the hotel to go to the saloon in which he meets his death, Crane suggests that the Swede is in more danger than he was before the fight with Johnny, for now he thinks that he is in control:

> He found a street and made travel along it, leaning heavily upon the wind whenever, at a corner, a terrific blast caught him.
> . . . it was hard to imagine a peopled earth. One viewed the existence of man then as a marvel, and conceded a glamour of wonder to these lice which were caused to cling to a whirling . . . bulb. One was a coxcomb not to die in [the storm] . . . However, the Swede found a saloon (p. 311; italics added).

The passage is an ominous prolepsis of the Swede's impending death. A typical Crane character, the man is too deluded, too much of a "coxcomb" to know that the odds are against him. He does not know it, but he is a man fighting for survival in a world where both man and nature are hostile to him. For the Swede, defeat is inevitable.[34] He never had a chance to get out of Fort Romper alive: the odds were too great.

To say "The Blue Hotel" merely satirizes the popular Western dime-novel is to gloss over its complexity. The story certainly cuts away at certain myths about the West by reversing the reader's expectation that there are recognizable heroes and villains in showdowns, and that from this kind of battle a hero always emerges. Maggie had a superficial resemblance to the sentimental slum novel in the depiction of individuals bombarded by the forces of a sordid environment; the world of "The Blue Hotel" more closely resembles the violent world of the dime novel, where once

the lone stranger comes to town he will inevitably battle with the town tough man, be he good or bad. With its foolishly heroic Swede, chance happenings, and violent catastrophes, it is a world in which confrontation is inevitable and characters have very little choice about avoiding violence.

It is as if in the course of writing the story Crane had worked through his need to parody the Western dime novel until he came to see the symbolic possibilities of the popular form. He has moved in the tale from ironic criticism of the dime novel to the use of dime-novel conventions to make a naturalist statement about the helpless and friendless condition of men.

After the point in Crane's development where he demonstrates such a distinctive adaption of the popular novel, his work goes off in a number of different directions. He either largely dispenses with satire and creates more original work ("The Open Boat"),[35] or continues with it and centers it around the idyllic village story (Whilomville Stories, "The Monster"),[36] or, most significant for this study, abandons satire and parody entirely and lapses into debased romantic plotting and sentimental authorial view. The remainder of this chapter will study these lapses for

what they demonstrate about Crane's need to have an ironic stance toward popular fiction if he was to create successful works.

Wounds in the Rain (1900), one of Crane's last collections of stories before his early death at the age of twenty-eight, displays many characteristic traits of popular fiction, especially its slavish admiration for the beleaguered hero in war. It is not that Crane abandons his skepticism about free will or his belief in the power of violent environment to shape lives and destinies. Rather it is that his characters receive exaggerated praise for being in situations where their power to act is so limited: Crane has sentimentalized his own vision. In the conclusion to "The Blue Hotel," he had begun to establish a sympathy for the isolation and lack of freedom of the Swede. But "The Blue Hotel" was parodic. In Wounds, these ideas of isolation and lack of control receive a sympathetic treatment which is untempered with parody or satire. And without the objectivity or control of distance that an ironic attitude confers, the stories in Wounds often founder.

Instead of using the metaphor of man in wartime to suggest man's embattled condition in life, Crane uses the war setting as a reason to praise the courage of the enlisted men and officers. It is as if he had praised the

Swede for standing up to the town. In Wounds, the men are idealized; they do not complain much, do not brag, and are patient. Doing one's duty in the face of great odds is prized and held up as a positive ideal:

> He sprang to his feet, and, stooping, ran with the others. Something fine, soft, gentle, touched his heart as he ran. He had loved the regiment, the army, because the regiment, the army was his life. . . .37

Heroism is frequently described with reverence as well as with poignancy:

> But it is quite sure that hardly another man in the battalion was engaged in any thoughts concerning the historic. On the contrary, they deemed it ill that they were being badly cut up on a most unimportant occasion. It would have benefited the conduct of whoever were weak if they had known that they were engaged in a battle that would be famous for ever ("Price of the Harness," p. 31).

Had the phrase "a battle that would be famous for ever," appeared in an earlier Crane work, it would have been wickedly ironic; here irony is dramatic irony (the men did not know how famous the battle would be). Crane's tone here is so serious that it verges on the maudlin excesses that his earlier fiction ridiculed.

Stories like "The Second Generation" and "The Price of the Harness" describe heroism in a way suspiciously close to that of romantic war fiction like Richard Harding Davis's Soldiers of Fortune. Honor is everything, reputation

is life. In "The Second Generation," a senator works to get his son into the army during the Spanish-American War only to find that the son is not worthy of such a high honor. Disappointed, the father remarks to his son that the latter is just a failure after all. The reader is supposed to feel that the son is truly a scoundrel for not performing better in battle, perhaps for not dying a hero's death. "The Price of the Harness," more like vintage Crane, does present disjointed impressions of an absurd world, a crazed soldier crying senselessly for bread while the sun is burning down steadily on scenes of carnage. Yet Crane is divided between describing such horrors of war and presenting the soldier's idealistic code. The man seem unaware of the hell around them. They are proud to be in the regiment and even resent raw recruits for not being serious and dedicated enough. Although most of these valiant enlisted men are either killed, dying, or wounded by the end, the implication is that since they are "professional"soldiers they had little to look forward to except this fate. The story thus ends reaffirming a code of courage and honor.

Crane was not able to avoid a certain contradiction of ideas in Wounds. On the one hand, he idealizes the enlisted man--"Attention! Kim up, the Kickers! and the Twelfth knew that it had been told to go on."[38] On the other hand,

descriptions of carnage (reminiscent of the brawls in Maggie) seem to condemn both war and life itself as senseless. In earlier works, Crane would have satirized the ideals of the soldiers, their heroism, grim determination, and blind loyalty, and would have contrasted such ideals with the unromantic reality of war. Yet in Wounds his affinity for these ideals causes him to drop the ironic voice.

"A Grey Sleeve," (1896) published separately from Wounds, best demonstrates Crane's development from parody of romanticism to damaging affection for it. Set during the Civil War, it concerns a confrontation between Union soldiers and a proud, Confederate family--father, daughter, wounded soldier son--whose home they invade. The story opens with Crane's usual device of building up suspense about a situation, the danger to the Union soldiers in the South. Crane then foils the reader's expectation that the soldiers will meet danger by showing that the enemy obstacle they are so alarmed about is only a deserted-looking house. Another surprise fools the soldiers (and the reader). When the officers and enlisted men run around with great fanfare to investigate the house and decide to rush it, they expect to find soldiers hidden within. Instead of the expected rebels, a lone, frail Confederate girl greets the

captain, who has angrily kicked down the front door and who stands "with his bright saber held threateningly."[39] So far the story is a comic takeoff.

With the appearance of the young woman, however, the story changes from parody to sentimental romance. A picture of terror when the soldiers invade, she is meant to inspire compassion. The officer finds that she is clumsily hiding an unloaded pistol and quickly takes it from her. As he questions her about the pistol, the story shifts from satire on the men themselves to their sensibilities and susceptibility to young girls in distress. I quote the passage at length because it illustrates how Crane faced the problem of his affinity for sentimentally romantic scenes.

> He [the captain] leaned towards the shaking girl and said gently: "Will you tell me what you were going to do with this pistol?"
> He had to repeat the question a number of times, but at last a muffled voice said, "Nothing."
> "Nothing!" he insisted quietly upon a further answer. . . .
> "Won't you tell me? Please tell me! . . . Please, won't you tell me?"
> Then the girl's voice began in stricken tones, half coherent, and amid violent sobbing: "It was grandpa's. He-he-he said he was going to shoot anybody who came in here. . . . And-and I know he would and I was afraid they'd kill him. And so-and-so I stole away his pistol--and I was going to hide it when you-you-you kicked open the door." . . . The men straightened up and looked at each other. . . . [the captain gripped the corporal by the arm and dragged him some yards back from the others. "Jones," he said in an intensely earnest

> voice, "will you tell me what in the devil I am going to do?"
> " . . . Suppose I take her by the arm and lead her ---"
> "What!" interrupted the captain from between his clenched teeth. As he turned away from the corporal he said, . . . "You touch that girl and I'll split your skull!" (p. 136)

In this passage Crane is actually changing his attitude toward his own characters, from light mockery to something resembling the sentimentalist's glorification of the man of feeling. It is true that there are comic tones in the passage. Crane does not take the girl's troubles as seriously as she herself takes them. He laughs a bit at the captain's earnestness about his terrible dilemma. But Crane also wants to show approval of his characters and their feelings, and he does not know how to do this without resorting to a standard melodramatic scene ("You touch that girl and I'll break your skull!"). He has not been able to strike the right balance between showing how ridiculous the soldiers were in their fear about the enemy house and showing how laudable they are in treating the girl with kindness and even reverence. His problem is not actually one of trying to reconcile ironic and sentimental tone, and he has not done it in this passage. The sentimental simply replaces the ironic.

By the time the hidden rebel brother appears, the captain, who has fallen in love with the girl, rather outlandishly grants her brother a pardon. Such an action

could be consistent with Crane's typical device of fooling the reader by giving a comic variation on a Civil War tale. But the presence of the appealing young woman brings the story back to sentimentalism.

> The girl pleaded with the captain. "You won't hurt him, will you? He doesn't know what he is saying. . . . Please don't mind [my brother]. . ." "I won't touch him," said the captain, with rather extraordinary earnestness, "don't you worry about him at all. I won't touch him!" (p. 141; italics added).

Here repetition of the same phrase, a device which Crane used in the Maggie scenes to mock sentimentality, is now being used with sentimentality to describe a beginning love affair. The war is forgotten as Crane describes the halting vows of love made by the captain and the young girl. He even provides a happy ending as the girl finally admits that she is in love with the Union officer. The story ends on this note of romance as Crane pulls in the tired plot of lovers from two different worlds who meet and pledge themselves to each other.

What Solomon labels a "confusion of thought" in the war stories may well be Crane's attempt to reconcile the positive values of love and heroism with his naturally ironic reaction to these values. What is important is that he did not seem to be able to depict heroic action (in love or war) in a manner independent of romantic stereotype: the doomed soldier fighting to the death, the altruistic enlisted man,

the damsel in distress. In Wounds and "A Grey Sleeve," the great foe of romantic convictions and sentimental attitudes reverts to them.

Ziff has remarked that a generation of American newspapermen-novelists of which Crane was a member displayed cynicism combined with sentimentality.[40] We have noticed this mixture in Maggie and "The Blue Hotel." In these works, Crane's cynicism, which expresses itself in satire and parody, controls his affinity for sentimental forms. When, in later, non-parodic works, like Wounds in the Rain, sentimentality overbalances cynicism, Crane's work is little better than that of the Fawcetts and Arthurs he ridiculed so much.

NOTES TO CHAPTER FIVE

1. On Crane as determinist, see Robert Spiller, "Toward Naturalism in Fiction," Literary History of the United States, ed. Robert Spiller et al. (3rd ed., rev., New York, 1963), pp. 1016-1038; John Berryman, "Crane's Art," Stephen Crane, A Collection of Critical Essays, ed Maurice Bassan (Englewood Cliffs, N.J., 1967), pp. 27-51; Warner Berthoff, The Ferment of Realism: American Literature, 1884-1919 (New York, 1965), pp. 231ff.; Marcus Cunliffe, "The American Background of Maggie," AQ, 7 (1955), 31-44; Clark Griffith, "Stephen Crane and the Ironic Last Word," PQ, 41 (Jan. 1968), 83-91; On Crane as a hopeful semi-determinist, Edwin H. Cady, Stephen Crane (New Haven and New York, 1962), passim; Charles C. Walcutt, American Literary Naturalism A Divided Stream (Minneapolis, Minn., 1956), Chapter 4.

2. Critics who discuss reversals in Crane's fiction are Eric Solomon, Stephen Crane: From Parody to Realism (Cambridge, Mass., 1967), passim.; Alfred Kazin, On Native Grounds (New York, 1942), pp. 48-52.

3. "The Five White Mice," The Works of Stephen Crane, ed. Wilson Follett (1926; rpt. 2 vols. in 1, New York, 1963), 11-12, 175. Page references in the text will be from this edition.

4. On Crane's conflicting views of the same character, see Maurice Bassan, "Notes on Stephen Crane and 'the Eternal Mystery of Social Condition,'" NCF, 29 (March 1965), 387-394; Donald Gibson, The Fiction of Stephen Crane (Carbondale, Ill., 1968), pp. 77ff.; Maurice Bassan, "Misery and Society: Some New Perspectives on Crane's Fiction," SN, 35 (1963), 109. On Crane's surprise or conflicting endings, Malcolm Bradbury, "Romance and Reality in Maggie," J AmS, 3 (July 1969), 119-121. See Stephen Crane, Sullivan County Sketches, ed. Melvin Schoberlin (Syracuse, New York, 1949), for early examples in Crane's apprentice fiction.

5. Robert W. Stallman, "Crane's Maggie: A Reassessment," MFS, 5 (Autumn 1957), 258.

6. Donald Pizer, "Stephen Crane's Maggie and American Naturalism," Stephen Crane, A Collection of Critical Essays, p. 106.

7. Larzer Ziff, The American 1890s (New York, 1968), p. 192.

8. Joseph X. Brennan, "Crane and the Limits of Irony," Criticism, 11 (Spring 1969), 184.

9. Stallman, p. 258; Bradbury, 120.

10. Solomon, p. 4.

11. Solomon, p. 6n.

12. Edgar Fawcett, A New York Family (New York, 1891), p. 34.

13. Stephen Crane, Maggie: A Girl of the Streets. Stephen Crane: Stories and Tales, ed. Robert W. Stallman (New York, 1952), p. 86. Page references in the text will be from this edition.

14. "A Prologue," The Works of Stephen Crane, ed. Wilson Follett, 11-12, 311.

15. "Manacled," The Work of Stephen Crane, ed. Wilson Follett, 11-12, 233.

16. Solomon, p. 26.

17. Ziff, p. 190.

18. Walcutt, p. 68; Other good discussions of Crane's vision of the slums are in Donald Pizer, "Stephen Crane's Maggie and American Naturalism," Stephen Crane, A Collection of Critical Essays, pp. 110-118; Walcutt, pp. 67-72; Robert W. Stallman, "Crane's Maggie: A Reassessment," MFS, 5 (Autumn, 1959), 251-257.

19. Berryman, p. 34.

20. See footnote 4.

21. Gibson, p. 89.

22. Pizer, p. 114, makes similar observations about Mary's theatricality and middle-class morality, but does not discuss the idea of reversal of sentimental expectations.

23. Ziff, p. 169.

24. Solomon, p. 44.

25. Stallman, p. 87. discusses Maggie's lack popularity.

26. Solomon, pp. 232-238, gives a discussion of Western stories which were popular in their day, observing that Crane was familiar with the form. See also Edmund Pearson, Dime Novels (Boston, 1929), pp. 202-206.

27. Philip Durham, introduction, Seth Jones and Deadwood Dick on Deck, ed. Philip Durham (New York, 1966), p. vi.

28. Edward L. Wheeler, Deadwood Dick on Deck, ed. Philip Durham, p. 111.

29. Stephen Crane, "The Blue Hotel," Stephen Crane: Stories and Tales, ed. Robert W. Stallman, p. 291. All future references will be from this edition and will be incorporated into the text.

30. Jay Martin, Harvests of Change, American Literature, 1865-1914. (Englewood Cliffs, N.J., 1967), p. 58, uses this phrase as the pivot of his interpretation of "The Blue Hotel." I am indebted to his discussion of the story for the material in my interpretation.

31. Good critical discussions of the delusive character in Crane are in James B. Colvert, "Structure and Theme in Stephen Crane's Fiction," MFS, 5 (Autumn 1959), 250, and Berryman, pp. 33-42, passim.; Philip H. Ford, "Illusion and Reality in Crane's Maggie," ArQ, 25 (Winter 1969), 302: Maggie"is a romantic in a world that has no place for romance."

32. Solomon writes that the Swede "falls victim to some of the very conventions that Stephen Crane reduces to parody throughout his Western fiction," p. 258. But Solomon does not see this use of convention as affinity for the dime novel, but rather as Crane's assertion of "reality" in the story.

33. On Crane's philosophical uncertainty, see Gibson, pp. 147ff., Berryman, pp. 33, 34; Berthoff, p. 136 is perhaps the most critical of Crane's inconsistencies. He finds "no clear pattern of understanding" in Crane's work.

34. Martin, pp. 67ff. provides a good discussion of the symbolic nature of "The Blue Hotel," although he does not study Crane's affinity for the violent dime novel.

35. Ziff notices "a new tone of communial identity" in Crane's "The Open Boat," p. 204. It is in this work that Crane turns away from parody and satire, which negate values considered foolish or dangerous, to an affirmation of positive values.

36. Solomon, Chapter 7, gives a full discussion of the parodic small-town stories.

37. Stephen Crane, "The Price of the Harness," The Work of Stephen Crane, ed. Wilson Follett, 9-10, 37. Future references will be from this edition and will be incorporated into the text.

38. Stephen Crane, "The Kicking Twelfth," The Work of Stephen Crane, ed. Wilson Follett, 145.

39. Stephen Crane, "A Grey Sleeve," The Work of Stephen Crane, ed. Wilson Follett, 1-2, 132. All future references will be from this edition and will be incorporated into the text.

40. Ziff, p. 152.

CHAPTER SIX

EXCEPTIONS:

THE HALFWAY MEASURES OF EGGLESTON, DEMING, AND HARTE

While Howells, Dreiser and Crane in their early work were giving familiar sentimental subjects satiric and parodic treatments, the regional or local color writers, among them Edward Eggleston, Bret Harte, and Philander Deming, were treating less familiar subjects with romantic or sentimental attitudes. Wallace Stegner, for example, mentions that Harte and Eggleston were sentimental "romanticists," while F.L. Pattee, in his important work The Development of the American Short Story, discusses all three writers to be studied here in terms of the popular sentimental tradition of the 'seventies and 'eighties.[1] It has been a repeated contention of this discussion that through satire and parody, Howells, Dreiser, and Crane were able to achieve a measure of detachment from popular tradition. The importance of satiric methods for these realists and naturalists becomes all the more obvious if one studies some other early attempts at realism which did not use such methods.

Chief among these attempts are Edward Eggleston's The Hoosier Schoolmaster (1871), Bret Harte's collection of Western tales The Luck of Roaring Camp and Other Stories (1870), and Philander Deming's Adirondack Stories (1880). Because these fictional tales describe very different geographical areas and characters, they can serve as examples of the similar pitfalls the non-satiric writers fell into--the writers who attempted to give a realistic portrayal of regional characters without controlling previous romantic or sentimental tradition.

Some qualification about the contribution of the local colorists is needed here. Although, or perhaps partly because, they were mired in sentimentalism and debased romanticism, they were instrumental in bringing unfamiliar subjects to public view. (The public would accept new wine only if it was in old bottles.) Such subjects, the regional customs and dialects of average Americans, were unfamiliar in the sense that they had largely been relegated to brief and condescending descriptions in travel books by gentleman writers like John Pendleton Kennedy (Swallow Barn, 1832).[2] Kennedy was much more interested in the noble, the grand, and the heroic than in the low or the common. He visited plantations and spent the bulk of his work describing the owners rather than the slaves. The exception to

this "aristocratism," Augustus Longstreet (Georgia Scenes, 1835), expressed a desire to write authentically about average Southerners, although he saw them as comic material and stressed that portraits of these people would provide "a rich fund of amusement."[3] In contrast, local color writers of the later nineteenth century claimed that they wanted to present the customs and manners of rural Americans without condescension and they were only willing to use humor if it helped present these people more effectively, not as an end in itself. But they did not have the distance from writers like Kennedy that satire would have brought nor the consistently comic purpose of a Longstreet. As a result, their works contain uneven or inconsistently comic material.

The problem confronting the local colorists was one of giving convincing descriptions of local color material. It was not that their works did not approach verisimilitude in descriptions of character, dialogue, and landscape. Eggleston's well-rendered small-town Indiana talkers, Harte's highly individualized California gamblers, dance-hall girls, and miners, and Deming's sparely described morose spinsters and hermits are all departures from the reigning literary clichés of the time. Furthermore, as writers these men are aware of the necessity to

deromanticize the ordinary man. Early in his book Eggleston informs the reader:

> You wish me to tell you now of this true-hearted girl and her lover, of how the silvery moonbeams came down in a shower through maple boughs . . . But I shall do no such thing.[5]

His desire to avoid sentimental plotting was shared by Deming, who pared down his plots in many of the Adirondack sketches until they had acquired the concise, stark quality of the newspaper article.[6]

Nor was the problem that these writers did not have a sense for the original in plot construction. The Hoosier Schoolmaster even has hints of the sociological study; it reveals conflicting forces in a Hoosier town, forces which emerge when a new school teacher comes to a community which needs its youngsters as much in the fields as in the schoolroom. Harte and Deming, in describing locales ignored by standard literary travel sketches, marked a new departure for regional fiction by presenting new plot situations which grew out of the attitudes and problems of the characters: Harte's sketches, for example, present a rough California mining camp where the miners agree to bring up the orphan infant of the town prostitute.

The problem with these writers, however, was that, given their accurate observations and frequently original plot incidents, they were nonetheless unable to produce

fictional work that was not mired in sentimentality or a debased romanticism. Eggleston, for instance, begins the description of the impact of the new schoolmaster, Ralph Hartsook, on the town of Flat Creek, Indiana, by taking up the implications of his arrival. Hartsook boards with the school trustee, Means, because Means is one of the few members in the community affluent enough to have rooms for lodgers. Soon Means' teenage son, Bud, resenting Ralph's superior education, sets himself up against the schoolmaster in a struggle for control over the pupils in the school, a score of youngsters ranging in age from seven to seventeen. Hartsook gains the respect of the class, and eventually of Bud himself, by humorously dressing Bud down. So far the plot is faithful to the probable.

But when Eggleston has to extend the plot to encompass the more serious problems which might confront a green schoolmaster in a small uncultured Midwestern town, his imagination fails him. He does not choose to describe the struggle such a character might have met, the ignorance, hostility, and envy that would probably face the town's only school teacher. Nor does he describe the possible rewards for such a teacher, confronted with semi-literate farm children eager to learn (or resistant to learning) about a world beyond Flat Creek. Rather Eggleston resorts

to the standard clichés of the sentimental novel. He embroils Ralph Hartsook (whose name the reader begins to suspect is a pun on heartsick) in a secret romance with the Means' mysterious bond-girl, Hannah. Hannah, pledging to love him always but abjuring him to keep their love a secret, will not reveal her past or her problems:

> "Tell me your circumstances," said Ralph at last. "I am sure I can help you in something." "No, no! you cannot," and Hannah's face was clouded. "No one can help me. Only time and God"(p. 60).

Even in this brief interchange, Eggleston reveals the dual approach to plotting that The Hoosier Schoolmaster displays constantly: the natural and actual vs. the affected and literary. Ralph, speaking as people actually speak, confronts a situation of a young woman in distress ("I am sure I can help you in something"). But Hannah answers him in the language of sentimental literature ("Only time and God"). Eggleston is thus divided between presenting actual and theatrical speech, a split in language which reflects a split in the novel as a whole.

It is at this point in the narrative, when Ralph pledges his love to Hannah, that the local color element in the plot fades before the introduction of the intrigue connected with Hannah. Eggleston then falls into treating a traditional sentimental subject (the appealing,

pious orphan), by exaggerated appeals to the reader's emotions. Ralph extracts a promise from Hannah to let him help her little brother Shocky. Both Shocky and Hannah have been left parentless by the death of their father and by their mother's incarceration in an insane asylum, and Shocky cuts a pathetic figure in town. He is so pathetic, in fact, that Eggleston digresses for some sentimentalizing about children which calls to mind the temperance tales where innocent children are victimized by the sins of their elders. Eggleston assures the reader that God does not desert little children, especially a little angel like Shocky, who is given speeches like this:

> "I'm Shocky, a little boy as God forgot, and then thought of again!" (p. 155)

> "You see, Mr. Hartsook, I thought God had forgot. But he ha'n't."
> And the words of the little boy comforted the [school]master also. God had not forgotten <u>him</u> either! (p. 148)

Despite the fact that numerous times in the narrative Eggleston tells the reader not to expect sentimentality, passages like this reverberate with it.

Eggleston's central thematic idea is melodramatic: he wants to show good doing battle with evil and emerging victorious. From an indulgence in the pathos of saintly, suffering, little Shocky, he switches to a new adventure and

intrigue element in the novel. Dismissing the Hannah-Shocky plot for a time, but suspending the reader's interest in their fates, he describes the exploits of a villainous gang of local thieves, whose disguises no one can penetrate and who are ransacking the countryside. The town, composed both of good, beleaguered types like Hannah and Shocky, and of evil, greedy ones like the Means family (who are illegally keeping Hannah to a servant's contract which long ago expired), wishes to find the desperadoes and hang them. The catastrophe of the story comes when the innocent Ralph is accused of the robbery and put on trial, with the real thieves acting as prosecutor's witnesses. But in typical melodrama fashion, one of the robbers struggles with his conscience at the last moment, repents, and confesses. The ringleader, Dr. Small, gives himself away later in the trial in an overzealous effort to clear himself. The noble characters are now in power, the ignoble ones routed.

By the end of the novel, good has triumphed over evil. Ralph has managed both to clear his name and to have Shocky and Hannah's mother released from the asylum where she had been mistakenly placed, again through the wrongdoing of the elder Meanses. After reuniting the mother with her children, Ralph marries Hannah. But Means, the

good scion of a bad family, follows suit by marrying the sweet girl he had promised himself to, and the happiness is complete. Such a plot in the hands of a more skillful author, it is important to add, would not have been unconvincingly melodramatic; it is the treatment and not the plotting that creates inferior art. The problem is that Eggleston's narrative has traded the originality of description and characterization which it initially promised for the banalities of bad melodrama.

Although the novel settles into melodrama when the Hannah-Shocky plot and the robbery plots are introduced, at certain points there is a curious meeting of local color and melodramatic elements. When the leader of the robbers, Dr. Small, wants to implicate Ralph in the robberies and have him brought to trial, instead of using some standard villain's strategem, he does what a smart small-town doctor would do. He visits the town gossip, old Granny Sanders, to get her to circulate the slanders about Ralph and set the town against him. This she unwittingly does and it results in Ralph's being brought to trial. Here the author is forced to choose between painting the cool, deliberate Dr. Small as a typical villain or being faithful to the character of a small-town doctor who turned to crime for money. Eggleston chooses the less melodramatic method. This

choice makes Small seem less of a villain than he is described as elsewhere ("the sinister shadow of young Dr. Small," p. 45. "Small was no ordinary villain. He was a genius," p. 65). But it provides a good observation of character.

The Hoosier Schoolmaster is similar to a later work, Twain's The Mysterious Stranger, in that its local-color observation is uneasily mixed with an intrigue which seems highly improbable in the context of the sleepy little town that Flat Creek (like Twain's Dawson's Landing) is supposed to be. Furthermore, Eggleston has difficulty in coordinating the Hannah-Shocky episodes with the Dr. Small robbery episodes, and ends up, as does Twain, having his protagonist solve all of the problems one after another: the Meanses are forced to let Hannah out of the bogus contract the day after Dr. Small has been convicted of the robberies.

Where Eggleston dispenses with such contrivances and relies on his knowledge of the manners and mores of Flat Creek, his material is quite convincing, as in the description of Dr. Small at Granny Sanders's, or in this description of the spelling bee, "the only public literary exercise known in Hoopole County" (p.24):

> Every family furnished a candle. There were yellow dips and white dips, burning, smoking, and flaring. There was laughing, and talking, and giggling, and simpering, and ogling, and flirting. . . . What a dress party is to Fifth Avenue, a spelling-school is to Hoopole County (p. 42).

Eggleston's description here is without his usual hyperbole and contains some acute analysis of social life in Flat Creek. Yet the spelling bee scene is not sustained local color-observation because for Eggleston such attention to what is distinctive in rural life is at odds with his characterization according to types: the good and long-suffering Hannah, the courageous Ralph. Therefore when Eggleston has to switch from perceptive commentary about Flat Creek to a sustained fictional form embodying these perceptions, he is unable to do so. He forgoes local color observation and relies on romantic incidents . This reversion to romantic plotting vitiates the local color description and makes The Hoosier Schoolmaster a work still romantic in form and content.

Bret Harte serves as another example of an important writer who gives in to popular sentimentalism. As comedian (see Appendix), he was able to burlesque and parody authors as diverse as Dickens, Bulwer-Lytton, and Charlotte Bronte.[7] But when he writes less comic tales, such as "The Luck of Roaring Camp" and "The Outcasts of Poker Flat," and does not satirize sentimental romanticism, he very nearly adopts it. One well-known romantic critic, J.H. Morse, applauded Harte in an essay called "The Native Element in American Fiction," for his "vigorous, brilliant, original

contribution to American romance."[8] And, as we shall observe, although Harte is quite capable of accurately observing his subject, he weakens this observation by sentimentality. His gambler in "The Outcasts of Poker Flat," John Oakhurst, is described as a calm, cool man, but he has a soft spot for young gamblers and warns them away from his gambling table. Mother Shipton, the town madam, wants to cut someone's heart out when the town throws her out, yet she grows maudlin when she sees an innocent young girl and is reminded of her lost youth. Harte's characters are both tough and tender. As Morse correctly though admiringly notes, Harte's characterization is done with "a tender feeling for the essential goodness of the human heart. . ."(p. 10). What Morse does not say is that this "tenderness" mars rather than helps the stories. Like Eggleston, Harte may be considered a local color realist to literary historians, but he is a sentimental romantic as well.

The familiar Christian idea, emphasized by sentimentalists although not exclusively by them, that each man has an innate ability to save himself, is very much a part of Harte's ethic in the Western tales. He cannot present a profligate gambler, a town prostitute, or a drunken miner, without moralizing about them and suggesting that they

should repent, which they frequently do. In Harte the sinner, no matter how small a sinner, is presented with the two alternatives characteristic of sentimental and romantic literature. He can either repent, or, as happens less frequently, he can sink until he is absolutely evil.

"The Outcasts of Poker Flat" presents characters who embody these alternatives. A group of town undesirables, among them John Oakhurst, gambler, Uncle Billy, drunkard and suspected thief, and two prostitutes, have been run out of town. They seek refuge in an abandoned house when a snowstorm threatens. There they are joined by two young lovers, Tom Simon, nicknamed the Innocent, and Piney Woods, who were eloping when they caught sight of the party and recognized Oakhurst. Harte includes these young people in the story, showing how tenderly most of the outcasts react to them. When Piney says, thinking that one of the prostitutes (ironically named the Duchess) is a rich and respectable lady, "I reckon you're used to fine things at Poker Flat," the Duchess blushes with shame for her profession. It is as if when goodness speaks, the sinner must repent.

The older prostitute, Mother Shipton, is inspired by the young Piney to self-sacrifice. When the party is unable to go for help in the snowstorm and is left stranded by the theft of their horses and food,

> Mother Shipton--once the strongest of the party--began to sicken and fade. At midnight on the tenth day she called Oakhurst to her side. "I'm going," she said, in a voice of querulous weakness, "but don't say anything about it. Don't waken the kids. Take the bundle from under my head, and open it." . . . It contained Mother Shipton's rations for the last week, untouched. "Give 'em to the child," she said, pointing to the sleeping Piney. "You've starved yourself," said the gambler. "That's what they call it," said the woman querulously, as she lay down again, and turning her face to the wall, passed quietly away (p. 109).

Mother Shipton has proved to be motherly toward Piney and has given up her life for the young girl. In another story than a sentimental one, however, this overnight reformation and act of supreme altruism would be improbable. But here Harte is following the sentimental formula that innocence can move the hardened sinner. And while Mother Shipton has been hoarding her food and weakening her body, the Duchess has been inspired to take cheerful care of Piney, and Oakhurst has decided that the Innocent should be allowed to save himself at least by going for help on the one pair of snowshoes left in the cabin.

The only one who has not been inspired to a new goodness by the young lovers is the evil drunkard Uncle Billy, who was so far removed from kindness and charity that he stole the horses and provisions of the group and left them helpless and stranded. In so doing, he was responsible for the pathetic situation of a group of reformed sinners

and young lovers dying for lack of food. They all perish (Oakhurst by his own hand) before help can arrive, leaving the reader to pity them and marvel at their goodness. One of the last tearful touches Harte adds is the description of the bodies of Piney and the Duchess locked in each other's arms:

> And when pitying fingers brushed the snow from their wan faces, you could scarcely have told from the equal peace that dwelt upon them which was she that had sinned. Even the law of Poker Flat recognized this, and turned away (p. 21).

Harte was fascinated, as were his lesser contemporaries, by the idea of innocence redeeming the tough or hardened character. He rehearses this theme in "The Luck of Roaring Camp," where an entire mining camp acts as Silas Marner to the orphaned infant of the late town prostitute. One of the miners, especially touched by a new tenderness towards the infant, drowns vainly trying to rescue it from a flood which engulfs Roaring Camp. In "The Idyll of Red Gulch," the town drunk reforms under the influence of the local schoolmistress, Miss Mary. Nor does Harte permit her influence to stop there:

> "Profane Bill," driver of the Slumgullion Stage, widely known in the newspapers for his gallantry in invariably offering the box seat to the fair sex, had excepted Miss Mary from this attention, on the ground that he had a habit of "cussin' on upgrades," and gave her half the coach to herself. Jack Hamlin, a gambler, having once silently

> ridden with her in the same coach, afterward threw a decanter at the head of a confederate for mentioning her name in a barroom. The overdressed mother of a pupil whose paternity was doubtful had often lingered near this astute vestal's temple, never daring to enter its sacred precincts, but content to worship the priestess from afar.[10] (italics added)

There is clearly a note of parody here. The language Harte uses to describe Miss Mary is so absurdly inflated that it sounds ludicrous in contrast with the rest of the passage. However, Harte is also serious about Miss Mary and if he exaggerates the language for a comic effect, he also elevates Miss Mary from an ordinary country school teacher to a symbol of purity. Earlier in the sketch he praised her for compassion toward the little schoolchildren, her admirable moral code in dealing with (and reforming) the town drunkard, and her general goodness and virtue. He seems divided here between ridiculing the inflated image of her and believing in it. Elsewhere in the collected sketches his language is less inflated but his belief in the woman remains. In "Salomy Jane's Kiss," for example, a confirmed outlaw, under the influence of a kiss from a young girl who meets him when he is being hauled off to be hanged, escapes, reforms, and returns to elope with Salomy Jane. A final tale in this vein is "Colonel Starbottle for the Plaintiff," in which the famous and well-heeled lawyer Colonel Starbottle finds that his cynicism cannot withstand the

attractiveness of a young girl who hires him to conduct a breach of promise case for her.

Despite all Harte's sentimentality and his formulaic belief in the supremacy of the pure woman, his sketches hold up better artistically than Eggleston's. Harte is often able to integrate his melodramatic situations into the violent texture of Western society, whereas Eggleston's intrigues seem artificial and unlikely in an Indiana farming town. Harte's gamblers like Oakhurst could have had a warmer side which they hid from the rough men they gambled with; the tough and tender character does not necessarily produce a melodramatic situation and it is not artistically incorrect for Harte to suggest that Oakhurst had a tender side. It is only when every Harte character seems too emotionally susceptible (or a creature of pure evil, like Uncle Billy) that Harte's work is flawed because he allows sentimental formula to dominate his knowledge of actual Western types.

Harte and Eggleston have obvious lapses into sentimentality and second-rate romanticism. In contrast, many of the tales by Philander Deming in Adirondack Stories avoid Harte's idealization of goodness and womanhood or Eggleston's admiration for melodramatic robbery plots and triumphant love. Deming's general posture in this bleak collection of stories is to demythify his plots and

characters. A bereaved father in "Lost" is accused of the murder of his missing child. Where another author would give the father a heavily dramatic speech filled with tearful eloquence, Deming describes his character as speaking dispassionately, deliberately, but with conviction. Instead of directly presenting his speech, Eggleston uses indirect discourse:

> there was nothing grand about the matter, except that here was a straightforward man . . . who had been "hard hit" . . . by the loss of his boy. . . . He only wished to brand this creation of some vile man [the murder accusation] as a lie. That was all he had to say upon that point.[12] (italics added)

In contrast to Harte's hyperbolic and literary style, Deming's style here largely relies on simplifying and negating statements rather than embellishing them. Similarly in another Deming tale, a man unjustly accused of his cousin's murder has only these words to say to his mother as he is going away to prison: "Good by: it will all be made right, mother. . . ." "Yes, good-by: I know it, my son," she replies (p. 59, "John's Trial"). Characters compress their feelings rather than display them in violent outpourings. Finally, the region these repressed characters inhabit provides a setting in which they shun sentimentality (especially in comparison with Harte's and Eggleston's characters):

> Sentiment of any kind was discouraged in this chilly region. A romantic attachment was simply a weakness; and, if long continued, it became almost a disgrace (p. 80).

Most of Deming's tales convey these attitudes. In such a setting, stories of little boys lost and found dead a few days later ("Lost"), lonely hermits living out their uneventful lives ("Benjamin Jacques"), troubled women committing suicide ("Ike's Wife") do not seem out of place. Usually with simply a name for a title ("Willie," "Joe Baldwin"), these sketches look forward in scope and treatment to Spoon River Anthology and Winesburg, Ohio.

Deming prefers a form resembling an extended newspaper account of a local tragedy or mishap. When he uses such a form, one which calls for less imagination than his more fictional sketches ("Lida Ann," "John's Trial"), he keeps the plot pared down to include only the important actions of the story and adds little or no narrative moralizing. "Ike's Wife" is representative of this method. Lucy, Ike's Wife, is seen beating her young adopted daughter. Despite Lucy's subsequent guilt and remorse ("she knew the Lord would never forgive her for being so angry with a child," p. 145), she is brought to public trial. Too ill and overwrought to be able to stay on the witness stand, she is sent home to brood, alone, on the crime she has committed. Some days later, a group of angry citizens, knowing that her

husband is away at a lumber camp, take it upon themselves to call for her to bring her once more to the courthouse. But Lucy has judged herself and has committed suicide: "It was Lucy, dead, hanging by a rope from a rafter of the cabin. . ." (p. 155). Ashamed that they have goaded her to death, the town buries Ike's wife.

Another author would have embroidered such a story, but Deming confines himself to the tragedy itself and the events leading up to it. He does not bring in much character description or detail and he even supplies a rational (if mechanical) explanation for Lucy's cruel treatment of the child. (At the funeral her husband explains that she had been under the influence of opium which she had been taking for an illness, and had not been in her right mind when she beat the child.) There are no unexplained actions or memorable characters; these characteristics of fiction are replaced by flat and colorless narration or incident and surface response. The sketch thus resembles a newspaper account.

When Deming attempts to present a tale resembling fictional sketch more than newspaper story, he has some difficulty. In "Ike's Wife," Deming had not described in any depth the relations between characters. The reader forms no distinct picture either of the marriage of Lucy and Ike,

or of Lucy's personality. When we look at the more detailed and imaginative descriptions of characters, "John's Trial," "Benjamin Jacques," and "Lida Ann," we suspect that the reason why Deming gives so few extended descriptions in Adirondack Stories is that he cannot describe in depth and detail without resorting to cliché. He cannot balance a sense of the somber quality of the region and its inhabitants with the creation of original fictional material. The more fictional a tale is, the more Deming relies on the same stereotypes used by Harte and Eggleston: the secret love, the idealization of the pure woman, the censure of the fallen one. The tales also include many coincidences involving long-lost relatives, prodigal children, and deathbed reunions--standard melodramatic devices for advancing the plot. It is as if when Deming has to extend his imagination to work on more substantial fictional material than the glorified newspaper story, his imagination fails him and he relies on the traditional devices.

In "John's Trial," a man who had been thought dead returns after eleven years of silence and absence and encounters the man who had gone to prison for murdering him. Although Deming attempts to make this long, unexplained absence consistent with the taciturn nature of the man who has been away, this reliance on standard plotting to describe

character is unconvincing. For such a character suddenly to choose to disappear and to reappear eleven years later, with no explanation for his disappearance or return, is not in keeping with the rational conduct Deming has said is characteristic of the inhabitants of the region. Nor does the author provide any logical explanations for the character's actions. He simply depends on the machinery of the mystery story to carry the plot. The reaction of John, the innocent man who had been imprisoned for the murder of the missing one, is at first believable. When John is face to face with the man who has returned from the dead he does not break into a stagey dramatic speech filled with recriminations and complaints--that would be inconsistent with his character and with the character of the region. Instead he is shocked into speechlessness and faints. But later Deming says that John becomes an inspiration to the people of the region because of his humble and almost saintly refusal to castigate the man who had ruined his life. Here the reader feels that Deming has reverted to the stereotyping characteristic of melodrama: John is saintly, his victimizer evil. Certainly John's overnight transformation into a pillar of the community does not make this plot of mysterious disappearance and unexplained return seem any more credible.

The plot of "Benjamin Jacques" is improbable because

it depends on a trio of fantastic coincidences. The wife of the preacher who presides over the funeral of the hermit Benjamin Jacques realizes that this man was the lover she had not seen in years. This coincidence would be startling enough, since the preacher came from a distant town to give the funeral sermon and it was only by chance that the townspeople chose him but Deming adds still another coincidence. The woman's two sons had accidentally stumbled on the hermit's cabin and supped with him some days before he died. A final coincidence, even less believable than the other two, is the one with which Deming closes the sketch. He implies that one of the boys is the natural son of Benjamin Jacques and the preacher's wife, and that for some mystical reason it was willed that the hermit would meet his son before he died. Given the fact that no one ever accidentally stumbled on the hermit's cabin because it was in such a remote and deserted place, it is difficult to believe that the boy found the cabin without the help of the author's melodramatic machinery. There are too many coincidences in the story to make it credible. Although in the tale Deming still retains the stark descriptions and understated narrative voice of "Ike's Wife" and "Lost," the structure of "Benjamin Jacques," like the structure of "John's Trial," is too contrived and too dependent on the appearance of

long-lost characters for the reader to believe the story.

In "John's Trial" and "Benjamin Jacques" Deming had kept his narrative voice unemotional. But in "Lida Ann," plotting, description, and narrative voice are all sentimental. An innocent and lovely girl, married too young to an older preacher, falls in love with a younger man and elopes to a big city. Confronted with the task of describing what happens to Lida Ann once she has let herself fall from virtue, Deming can think only in traditional sentimental images. Lida Ann is the typical unwary innocent who falls and is judged for falling. Trusting in her seducer, she is crushed when he deserts her, as seducers always do in sentimental seduction plots. The description of her return home is reminiscent of a Fawcett novel (see Chapter Two):

> The latch of the door-yard clicked; and the form of a woman was dimly seen coming to the door through the evening shadows. Half-way from the gate to the door she hesitated, stopped, and stood crying, and then sank down.
> "O my God, it is Lida Ann!" said [her mother] . . . It was true. For three bitter years, the poor, deserted, crushed, but proud . . . [Lida Ann] had fought the fearful battle which an ignorant, lone, girlish little girl has to fight to hold on even to <u>life</u> in the wilderness of a great city. Here she was at last, footsore, sick, emaciated, ashamed, crying, and almost swooning, before her own father's door. Her weak battle in a great town had brought her to this (pp. 46, 47).

Unable to treat the theme of the fallen woman with the objectivity and spare style he had brought to "Lost" and "Ike's

Wife," Deming here resorts to the loaded adjectives of the sentimentalist ("poor, deserted, crushed," "emaciated, ashamed, crying") and to moralizing about the evil of the city for the unknowing innocent. Deming had presented characters who felt emotion more deeply than they displayed it. Yet here, faced with a conventional subject, the fallen woman, he can only turn to the accepted sentimental (and censorious) treatment. Lida Ann, far from being an individualized portrayal of an Adirondack girl, is only a typical Virgin Betrayed.

Deming's need to believe that a fallen woman can, after long struggle, reform herself, is essentially a sentimentalist's view, although a more enlightened one than we saw in the novels discussed in Chapter Two. Deming, who had said that the people of the region were not interested in romantic love, reverses himself and describes how anxious the townspeople are for Lida Ann to repent and remarry her preacher husband:

> After the formal words were said, and the elder and Lida Ann were man and wife again, and the pastor had dismissed the congregation, the kind, simple-hearted women gathered around to welcome and kiss the bride: and some of "the boys," too, lingered to speak a good word. . . . There were many tears (p. 51).

The tearful reaction of the "kind, simple-hearted women" hardly seems consistent with the unromantic and hard

character of the people whom Deming describes elsewhere in Adirondack Stories. Confronted with a repentant and lovely young woman, the characters become, for the moment at least, sentimentalists. In their inconsistency they reflect their creator's divided attitude toward sentimentality.

In the fiction of Deming, Eggleston, and Harte, there was a certain lapse of imagination in the treatment of local color material. When it was simply a question of presenting description of scenery, customs, and dialect, they could do this with some attention to verisimilitude because they did not have to create new plots to contain these observations. But when these authors had to present fully rounded characters who made decisions, too often the plots were steeped in sentimentality. They were, as Alexander Cowie remarks, unable to integrate realistic elements with traditional sentimental plotting.[12]

What is true about lapses in plotting and characterization is also true about dialect. These local colorists said that they wished to describe folk speech accurately. Yet they were held back by the same attitudes toward folk speech that earlier travel writers had held, attitudes which either saw colloquial characters as curious, laughable oddities or

put refined English speeches in their mouths. In his preface to The Hoosier Schoolmaster Eggleston claimed that he had broken with such attitudes:

> [and] while I have not ventured to discuss the provincialisms of the Indiana backwoods, I have been careful to preserve the true usus loquendi of each locution. . . (p. 6).

What Eggleston actually did was to present native speakers using much the same distortion or comic contempt as earlier writers. Before we see how Eggleston and his contemporaries failed to break with traditional attitudes toward the American colloquial speaker, it is necessary to define that tradition.

The colloquial speaker of the folk tale tradition, when he appeared in a tall tale or ballad, was a mythic braggart like Davy Crockett or Mike Fink.[13] He appealed to the Western listeners of oral tales. The Eastern audience, however, saw him through the contemptuous eyes of writers like Augustus Longstreet, whose Georgia Scenes established rustic speakers as comic buffoons who had not enough education to speak correct English. As the author commented, "The way the natives sometimes talk here is amusing." He gave such conversations as proof:

> "Now, Nick, don't hold him! Jist let the wild-cat come, and I'll tame him. Won't you. . .?"
> "Oh yes, I'll see you a fair fight, blast my old shoes if I don't."

> Thus they went on, with countless oaths interspersed, which I dare not even hint at, and with much that I could not distinctly hear (p. 287).

The rather jarring contrast between the author's refined speech and that of the native speakers is meant to emphasize the folk character. Longstreet's elevated yet condescending comments reflect the aristocratic attitude of a writer who considered the slang speaker a subject only for comedy and not for serious attention and description.

This attitude filtered down to the local color writers. More than fifty years after Longstreet, local colorist Mary Murfree was still recording colloquial speech at the expense of the speaker. In The Tennessee Mountains reflects her attitude that folk speech is primitive, and strangely at odds with the character's emotions:

> "Look'a-hyar, boy, what be you-uns a doin' of that?" he asked, beset with a strange anxiety and a growing fear of he knew not what.[14]

Even though there is an attempt to portray folk speech here without satirizing the speaker, the implicit contrast between the speaker's dialect and the narrator's description makes him seem uncouth yet self-aware. The narrative summary serves to emphasize the oddity of the dialect and takes the reader's attention away from what the speaker is saying to focus instead on the narrator's explanation-translation. In Murfree, the condescension, though less conscious

than Longstreet's, is still there.

If the disparity between ornate style (see Chapter Two) and folk speech was jarring, James Fenimore Cooper and Harriet Beecher Stowe's attempts to present folk characters as if they thought and spoke in more than formal English were also unsuccessful. Natty Bumppo in The Deerslayer is a case in point:

> "If she has--if she has, Hurry, this is a school to set her mind right ag'in. But what is this I see off here, abreast of us, that seems too small for an island and too large for a boat, though it stands in the midst of the water?"[15]

Stowe explains her simple characters:

> Here were Melissa's cranberries, and by many a joke and wink we were apprised that the mate had a tender interest in that venture.
>
> [Homemade butter] was the venture of the thrifty housemother emulous to gather kindred gold in the Boston market.[16]

In all of these passages, whether the folk character is speaking or his thoughts are being summarized, the diction is more formal and pretentious than such characters could possibly have used. It was truly a case of the author putting words into the mouths of his characters. One problem for the nineteenth-century American writer who dealt with folk characters was that whether he chose to report dialects or to summarize the speeches of the characters, it was difficult for him to shift from the reigning style

of writing to the forthright, colloquial style of the native speaker.[17] It is important to note that this problem was one which did not confront comic writers like Mark Twain, Artemus Ward, and Charles Farrar Browne (see Appendix). Whether reproducing dialect or summarizing it, they were effective and convincing. It was when the local color writers were being serious and not comic that they seemed to lose their ear for accurate American speech.

The serious local color writers (or comic writers like Harte, when he did more serious work), whether they realized it or not, still considered formal speech superior to colloquial speech, just as did Longstreet, Cooper and Stowe. Eggleston was therefore only partly correct when he said that he had tried to render Hoosier speech objectively. His editorial comments make the native speakers seem like inferior and uneducated characters.

> "Git a plenty while you're a gittin," says I, "fer 'twon't never be no cheaper 'n 'tis now, and it ha'n't been, I knowed 'twouldn't," and Mrs. Means took the pipe from her mouth to indulge in a good chuckle at the thought of her financial shrewdness. "Git a plenty while you're a gittin," says I (p. 28; italics added).

> "I 'low," said Mr. Means, speaking as the principal school trustee, "I 'low our friend the Square is jest the man to boss this ere consarn to-night. Ef nobody objects, I'll appint him. Come, Square, don't be bashful. Walk up to the trough, fodder or no fodder, as the man said to his donkey" (p. 43; italics added).

The Meanses are mean, vulgar people, and the way they express themselves is always either to boast or to have a laugh at someone else's expense, as these two passages demonstrate. It can be argued that Eggleston's attention to colloquial speech is not as condescending as Longstreet's or Murfree's, because he is trying to present believable characters rather than clownish buffoons. Yet Eggleston too feels that colloquial speech is inferior to formal, more educated talk. Unlike the colloquial Meanses, the good characters, Hannah and Ralph Hartsook, speak little or no colloquial English. Although Hannah has had very little more education than Mr. and Mrs. Means, her correct speech is supposed to be an index to her breeding and gentility. It is also significant that Dr. Small, the villain, who pretends to be a good man, speaks formal English as a sign of his worth and respectability. The fact that, with the exception of Small, the evil characters speak colloquially, implies that Eggleston's avowed preference for folk speakers was not worked out in the plot.

Deming too makes a distinction between folk and educated speech that is uncomplimentary to the folk speaker. He cannot smoothly connect colloquial expressions to the narrative. In the middle of a passage he puts a colloquial term in quotation marks: "Tom's wife told him plainly that

it was [Joe's] 'bounden duty" to marry Maria" (p. 99). Deming often prefaces or ends folk speeches with long, involved sentences which set the folk speech off as an oddity rather than connect it to the description that precedes or follows it:

> She even urged that a wedding was the proper thing, under the circumstances, in view of the reconciliation and the arrangements in regard to property which Joe had made. She was accustomed to add to this reasoning, with a laugh half in wonder and half in derision, the statement that Joe and Maria were still like two silly children together, and that she "never see the beat of it in her born days, never!" (p. 98)

Whether Deming is aware of it or not, the difference between the formal, almost legal tone of the narrative ("the proper thing under the circumstances," "in view of the reconciliation") and the informal phrase ("never did see the beat of it") makes the folk phrase, instead of seeming accurate, seem odd. It is unlikely that the woman described in the above passage would think about the wedding between Joe and Maria in such legal terminology, but Deming makes it appear as if she would in order to dignify both the speaker and the occasion she is speaking about. He is following the convention that dictated that admirable but uneducated characters were supposed to speak in an elevated way so that they <u>appeared</u> more educated than they actually were. If they did not speak formally, but spoke

colloquially, they risked sounding comic and foolish. Like the romantic and sentimental writers he resembles, Deming does not recognize the integrity of folk speech as a possible descriptive style of a fictional work.

Bret Harte, like Deming and Eggleston, considers folk speech odd if not comic. Bridgman has remarked on the device of separating "quaint" folk speech from formal English by quotation marks, and Harte makes use of it.[19] In "The Luck of Roaring Camp," he implies that it is humorous in the miners to call an infant "a mighty small specimen" which "ain't bigger nor a derringer" (p. 26). He is slightly sarcastic about the rough miners in the camp and describes one of them as a "prominent citizen," when what he means is that the man is an uncouth and unkempt member of the camp. Finally, the miner who has principal care of the infant warns the baby, "Don't you . . . never to go back on us" (p. 29). Here Harte may be depending on his educated reader to notice the incongruity between formal and comic speech and to laugh at the colloquial characters. The comedy here, however, is not actually at the expense of the miners, who are sympathetic although sentimental and clownish characters (witness the miner trying to "talk sense" to a month-old infant). Rather it is their language that is humorous.

If Harte considers folk speech an oddity, he also includes humor about formal English. He describes the burial of the camp prostitute: "The next day Cherokee Sal had such rude sepulture as Roaring Camp afforded" (p. 27). Here it is hard to tell if Harte is ridiculing formal English; the phrase "rude sepulture" certainly sounds jarring and incongruous and the reader would consider "They buried Sal" a more appropriate phrase. The language seems too formal.

In a passage in "Tennessee's Partner," a shaggy prospector wanders into a courtroom and unceremoniously interrupts the trial of his partner.

> "I was passin' by," he began, by way of apology, "and I thought I'd just step in and see how things was gittin' on with Tennessee thar--my pardner. It's a hot night. I disremember any sich weather before on the Bar." He paused a moment, but nobody volunteering any other meteorological reflection, he again had recourse to his pocket handkerchief, and for some moments mopped his face diligently.
> "Have you anything to say on behalf of the prisoner?" said the judge finally.
> "That's it," said Tennessee's Partner, in a tone of relief. "I come yar as Tennessee's pardner--knowing him nigh on four years, off and on, wet and dry, in luck and out o' luck. His ways ain't allers my ways, but thar ain't any pints in that young man--as I don't know. And you sez to me, sez you, 'Do you know anything in his behalf?'"[20]

Generally in The Luck of Roaring Camp the contrast between formal and colloquial style is unflattering to the more

casual speech; here the two styles are contrasted with each other in such a way that both appear comical. By permitting the folk speaker a longer speech than he usually accords his characters, Harte allows the folk speech to sound gradually less odd and more natural. By the time the partner repeats the judge's question--"And you sez to me, sez you, 'Do you know anything in his behalf?'"--it is the formal language of the judge that seems strange. Although Harte never relinquishes the idea that the colloquial speaker is somewhat of a clown, sarcastically calling the partner's remark about "sich weather" a "meteorological comment," he also allows the folk speaker to mimic the judge's language and to assert the honesty of his speech over the stilted rhetoric of the courtroom.

The interchange between the judge and the prospector in "Tennessee's Partner" is successful because it satirizes ornate style instead of elevating it. Harte's method in the passage is similar to Crane's parody of literary style in Maggie and Howells's more gentle satire of the affected, non-colloquial gentlemen in A Chance Acquaintance and Lady of the Aroostook. When Harte satirizes the ornate, formal style instead of following it, he is able to do justice to the colloquial speaker because he is not using the mockery or contempt for the folk speaker implicit in the accepted

style of the day. But such was the continuing power and influence of romantic and sentimental writing that when Harte, Eggleston, and Deming presented new local color material they took over the attitudes and devices of the older traditions. No matter how much affection these local color writers had for their native characters, they introduced a contrast between colloquial dialogue and their narrative summaries which too often made the speakers sound ridiculous and contemptible.

This apparent condescension was part of a larger inheritance from previous tradition. Although the local colorists had new perceptions about regional characters, in their early work they did not have the new forms (or control over old forms) to contain these perceptions and relied instead on convention. Perhaps a more conscious manipulation of stereotype or the satiric methods employed by Howells, Dreiser, and Crane might have aided them in their attempt to free themselves from a damaging affinity for older forms. What is certain is that without any formal distancing technique the result was halfway measures toward realism in their fiction rather than full realistic presentation.

NOTES TO CHAPTER SIX

1. Wallace Stegner, "Western Record and Romance," Literary History of the United States, ed. Robert Spiller et al. (3rd ed. rev., New York, 1963), pp. 862-867; Frederick L. Pattee, The Development of the American Short Story (1923; rpt. New York, 1970), pp. 269ff.

2. I am indebted to the following studies about Southwestern humor: Kenneth Lynn, Mark Twain and Southwestern Humor (Boston, 1959); Walter Blair, Native American Humor (San Francisco, 1960), pp. 62-80. On the traditional contempt for the folk speaker in the nineteenth century, see Lynn, pp. 61-69.

3. Augustus Longstreet, Georgia Scenes, Native American Humor, ed. Walter Blair, p. 65. Page references in the text will be from this edition.

4. Warner Berthoff, The Ferment of Realism: American Literature, 1884-1919 (New York, 1965), p. 97.

5. Edward Eggleston, The Hoosier Schoolmaster (New York, 1898), p. 52. Page references in the text will be from this edition.

6. Pattee, p. 270, calls Deming's stories "sketches" rather than stories.

7. See Bret Harte, Condensed Novels (Boston, 1899).

8. James H. Morse, "The Native Element in American Fiction," Century, 26 (July 1883), 364. Underlining added.

9. Bret Harte, "The Outcasts of Poker Flat," The Luck of Roaring Camp and Other Stories (New York, 1968), p. 19. Page references in the text will be from this edition.

10. Bret Harte, "The Idyll of Red Gulch," The Luck of Roaring Camp and Other Stories, p. 56.

11. Philander Deming, Adirondack Stories (New York, 1968), p. 17. Page references in the text will be from this edition.

12. Alexander Cowie's comment on De Forest applies to these authors: a "failure to achieve a satisfying harmony of realistic subject matter and romantic plots." Alexander Cowie, The Rise of the Novel (New York, 1948), p. 40.

13. I consulted selections from Davy Crockett, Mike Fink and other folk heroes in A Treasury of American Folklore, ed. B.A. Botkin (New York, 1944). Helpful discussions of mythic protagonists occur in Blair, and in Constance Rourke, American Humor (New York, 1931).

14. Mary Noailles Murfree, In the Tennessee Mountains (1884; rpt. Boston and New York, 1899), p. 20. Such condescension toward a folk character was not simply in terms of speech. In another story in the collection, "The Romance of Sunrise Rock," two well-educated young gentlemen consider themselves greatly above the inhabitants of the region in polish and worth. Here, however, Murfree chastens them by the end of the story.

15. James Fenimore Cooper, The Deerslayer (1823; rpt. New York, 1963), pp. 28-29.

16. Harriet Beecher Stowe, Sam Lawson's Fireside Stories (Boston, 1890), pp. 269, 270.

17. Bridgman, Chapter 2 (Nineteenth-Century Talk), provides a full discussion of colloquial speech patterns and differences between colloquial and formal speech in America.

18. Bridgman makes the same observation about another local colorist, Joseph Kirkland. Bridgman, p. 26.

19. Bridgman, pp. 22-23.

30. Bret Harte, "Tennessee's Partner," The Luck of Roaring Camp and Other Stories, p. 43.

CHAPTER SEVEN

CONCLUSION: COMMON METAPHOR, COMMON GOALS

In Chapter Two we saw how glib popular novelists were in employing assumptions which asserted the triumph of goodness and the individual will over both human adversaries and the ills of mankind. Such novels preached the limitless possibilities that the idealized human personality could demonstrate in conquering everything from hereditary disease to a villainous rent collector. Reinforced by an adherence to a simplified Christian system of rewards and punishments, where the good person, after a suitable period of struggle, finds happiness and wealth, these novels based their conclusions on a faith that the lone and heroic individual could ultimately triumph.

The local color writers, intent on exploring differences between men due to place rather than showing that all men are either heroic or villainous, approached human personality from another avenue. But while their philosophy was different they were unable to create fictional forms to embody their new perceptions, and so relied

on the same structures as the romantic and sentimental writers did. And whether these regional writers were aware of this or not, such structures led them to the same conclusions about human behavior as those summarized above. On the other hand, Howells, Dreiser, and Crane, perhaps because they were more critical of the popular literary modes, frequently relied on satire and parody to embody their new ideas and their objections to the older ones. Where they did not lapse into sentimentalism themselves, their satire proved to be an effective form of literary expression.

As Gilbert Highet and Edward White have pointed out, both the authors and characters of a work to be parodied have assumptions about the world which the parodist, and his ally, the satirist, consider laughable and foolish.[2] Much of the literary satirist's work thus consists of setting the record straight. Whether it is Hemingway's parody of Sherwood Anderson, Howells's parodic satire on the light romantic novel, or Bret Harte's parody of Howells, satire and parody seem to be saying that life is just not what the satirized author or character or literary school had supposed.

The task of deflating a character is not, of course, confined to the satirist and parodist. Every writer who

sets out to write a novel of education will be presenting some character who sheds one set of ideas as he grows and learns and proceeds in the world. We see this process of disillusionment in Lazarillo de Tormes, in Madame Bovary, in The Grapes of Wrath. In each work some innocent character is stripped bare of certain foolish or unrealistic ideas about the world. But only satiric and parodic writers take some literary type, subject, or school and direct their criticism toward it. Such writers make satiric criticism of a character equally a criticism of the particular sort of literary work in which the character usually appears. In that sense, Crane's mockery of the stage hero in "Manacled" is also his criticism of the popular melodrama. Similarly, Howells's ironic presentation of Easton in Mrs. Farrell allows Howells to parody the light romantic novel in which characters like Easton are taken at face value.

Yet there is a similarity among Howells, Dreiser and Crane that goes beyond their common reliance on the corrective function of satire and parody. They all criticize the romantic or sentimental protagonist by seeing him either as the ham actor or the overly impressionable audience of melodrama. Acting in melodrama or being influenced to imitate such acting become metaphors for insincere or overly emotional behavior. In the satiric works studied here,

the ham actor is not just someone who overacts, catering to the popular taste of the late nineteenth century. Rather he is a figure who plays a role in which he does not believe but which his audience takes to be real (the ham actor in "Manacled," Mrs. Farrell in the love scenes with Easton). The metaphor of the ham actor also extends to the audiences who mistake the form of the melodrama for life in a direct emotional response to the exaggerations of the popular form. After seeing a beer hall melodrama, Maggie resolves to model herself on the heroine by imitating her culture and refinement, although Crane is careful to point out that the stage actress was at best a grotesque imitation of refinement (p. 67). Similarly, at Carrie's stage début, her two lovers Hurstwood and Drouet believe that the Carrie who is acting the wronged woman onstage, "framed in massy gold and shone upon by the appropriate lights of sentiment and personality" (p. 176) is the true Carrie, creating a power "which to them was a revelation" (p. 180). But only when she is acting in a popular melodrama do these men think they are seeing the real woman. Dreiser implies that had she never appeared onstage, they would never have responded so passionately to her. They mistake the melodramatic actress for the real woman.

The result of this identification with the actors

in melodrama is that characters delude themselves into thinking that their own lives should be (or actually are) as dramatic as life onstage or in novels and should resemble such a life in passion, excitement, and range of possibility. That is why characters in Howells's and Crane's novels so often seem to be imitating the kind of overacting that was popular. (Dreiser tackles the same issue from another angle. His characters express a minimum of dramatic reaction because Dreiser is saying that life is not the same as drama.)

Howells's characters are, of course, more cultivated than Crane's or Dreiser's, and their acting reflects this. Aware of how one acts in cultivated society, they are always in a sense putting on a show by assuming a pose of polite interest in the ladies and gentlemen they encounter. And Howells accepts this kind of playacting (at least in his early novels) as the way people behave. Civilized people should act according to certain conventions and be aware that they are doing so. Those who, like Arbuton and Staniford, are rude, are criticized for not acting according to the very conventions which they claim to respect. The conventions thus serve to facilitate communication rather than to block it. Howells's belief in the conventions led his twentieth-century detractors to call him stuffy and genteel, and his admirers to defend him for his true view of what

it was to be a gentleman or a lady.

But there is always in Howells a distinction between the natural gentleman or lady and the one who, by snobbishly putting on an act, hopes to be thought one. Howells reserves his irony for those who replace the mild playacting of the civilized and polished person with a theatricality designed to mislead or deceive. This is anti-social behavior, for it is not part of the mutually accepted conventions which society follows; rather it is a show that a character puts on to create an effect.

In A Chance Acquaintance and The Lady of the Aroostook, Arbuton and Staniford try to conform to their image of a gentleman in their prejudices, mannerisms, and opinions about country girls. Yet they act their parts instead of actually being gentlemen. They resemble the stock character of the fop in the drawing-room comedy. Howells's ironic thrust in the novels is that these fops fall in love with young women whom they do not at first consider worthy of them, only to be showed up and chastened by the ladies. But just at the point when these fops fall in love and promise to give up posing and playacting (in Arbuton's case a short-lived promise), Howells has his fresh natural heroines begin to play-act. In the love scenes, Kitty Ellison and Lydia Blood become conventional stage heroines: pursued,

embarrassed, acting roles that they think reflect themselves but which do not. Howells's ironic comedies falter at this point because the love scenes contradict his point, which is that one should not overact to conform to the image of an ideal aristocrat. Yet by the end of the novels the heroines have dropped their posing, regained their freshness, and, with different degrees of success, taught their lovers a lesson in sincerity.

Howells's young lovers are not the only ones who act parts taken from romantic novels. The playacting theme in Mrs. Farrell has already been discussed in the chapter on Howells; in that novel the anti-heroine plays a scene and creates an effect every time she enters or exits. Isabel and Basil March (Their Wedding Journey) are also actors conscious of the parts they are playing. They are torn between the desire to appear to be something they are not, an old married couple used to each other, and the desire to behave like the newlyweds they are. Howells gently satirizes them for being so concerned with their image and for desiring to put on a show, however inoffensive, for the same of maintaining that image. The same delight in the dramatic prevents the Marches from fully enjoying honeymoon sights that do not prove as emotionally inspiring as they had hoped. If there is no drama or intrigue attached

to a place, the Marches cannot truly appreciate it. In their own way, they are as conscious as Mrs. Farrell and the Arbutons and Stanifords of the need to dramatize in daily life.

All of Howells's characters, with the exception of Mrs. Farrell, are amateur actors rather than professionals. Despite the fact that Howells wrote many stage plays, he rarely mentions professional actors in his fiction and seems to have moral reservations about the profession. The only one of his characters who has innate acting talent and who does go on the stage, Mrs. Farrell, is the most criticized for her boldness and trickery. It is fitting for a woman who had acted in so many flawless private scenarios with young men to seek her true vocation on the stage, yet her decision to go onstage is treated with both irony and censure. The "raisonneur" character Mrs. Gilbert (who had rightly disapproved of Mrs. Farrell all along) considers Mrs. Farrell's choice of career as a punishment and a judgment on her, and suggests that she will not receive as much respect as she has been accustomed to receive. The reader feels that Howells applauds Mrs. Gilbert's view. Howells closes the novel with only a brief description of Mrs. Farrell's stage début: he seems unwilling to investigate her life as an actress any further than his concept of

propriety allows.

It is this very suggestion of moral disapproval of the stage and the actress that sets Howells off from Dreiser and Crane in the treatment of the playacting theme. Like them, he sees the individual who is posturing and acting too emotionally as an actor in a private scenario. But unlike them, in his early novels Howells is interested in the clash of the play-actor personality with select society, not in the melodrama as it reflects public taste--or lack of taste. Whereas characters in Dreiser and Crane go to see popular melodrama, complete with music and dancing, Howells's pairs of lovers do not react to the influence of melodrama, which they would have considered vulgar. It is not that they are not capable of histrionics, but only are as refined as they are passionate, and their interest does not extend to the vulgar fanfares of the popular stage. When Mrs. Farrell appears in a play, she plays in Romeo and Juliet rather than in the popular stage productions with which Maggie and Carrie are familiar. Howells's choice of a Shakespeare play rather than a Daly drama shows he thinks of an educated middle-class audience rather than a mass one.

In contrast to Howells, both Dreiser and Crane are willing to satirize and draw upon the plots of popular melodrama. Interested in the large appeal of melodrama for

credulous mass audiences, Dreiser and Crane frequently refer to the popular stage in Sister Carrie and Maggie, and link their heroines with melodrama. Carrie becomes a successful musical comedy star after playing in a Daly melodrama and numerous Broadway musivals; Maggie feels the lure of the stage but is too imprisoned by Bowery life to reach out for stage success.

Dreiser's interest in melodrama extends to his inventing titles of plays and threading the titles in between references to famous melodramas like Augustin Daly's Under the Gaslight and David Belasco's The Gold Mine.[2] When Carrie makes her stage début in the Daly play, Dreiser writes of that melodrama:

> It was true to the most sacred traditions of melodrama as . . . [Daly] found it when he began his career. The sorrowful demeanor, the tremolo music, the long, explanatory, cumulative addresses, all were there (p. 153).

Before describing opening night when Carrie entrances her seducers (see Chapter Four) Dreiser shows the play in rehearsal. He satirizes melodrama by giving dialogue from the Daly play and by undercutting the ham acting which the dialogue calls for. Even to the least critical reader, the Daly speeches are made to seem comical and exaggerated when contrasted with the stage cues of the director. Mrs. Morgan, one of the amateur actresses, speaks:

> "As mother felt in her pocket for some change, her fingers touched a cold and trembling hand which had clutched her purse," said Mrs. Morgan. . . . "A pickpocket! Well!" exclaimed Mr. Bamberger, speaking the lines that here fell to him. "No, no Mr. Bamberger," said the director, approaching, "not that way. A pickpocket--well? So. That's the idea" (p. 159).

As the rehearsal continues, the reader is more and more aware that Daly's dialogue is no reflection of everyday speech, and is totally dependent on the illusion the actor creates.

> "This hand," resumed Mrs. Morgan, glancing up at Mr. Bamberger and down at her book, as the lines proceeded, "my mother grasped it in her own, and so tight that a small, feeble voice uttered an exclamation of pain. Mother looked down, and there beside her was a little ragged girl."
> "Very good," said the director. . . .
> "'Who told you to steal?' asked my mother.
> "'She--there,' said the child, pointing to a squalid woman in a doorway opposite, who fled suddenly down the street. "'That is old Judas,' said the girl."
> Mrs. Morgan read this rather flatly, and the director was in despair (p. 160).

Both the amateurish way the actors say their lines, and the director's officious efforts to correct their acting make the Daly melodrama seem comic and artificial. Nor is Carrie's role any more convincing. It is true that she is a better actress than the others and "speaks her lines with a grace which was fascinating to look upon" (p. 161). But the lines she is given to speak are no less false, especially when contrasted with the understated and timid way she actually behaves when offstage.

Dreiser further shows that stage acting gives an unreal view of life when he gives a description of an invented play, the lush Wives of Abdul, in which Carrie works while she is climbing to success in New York City. It is not accidental that while audiences are paying well to see entertaining fantasy plays like The Wives of Abdul, Hurstwood is struggling to survive in the midst of strikes, fights between strikers and scabs, and bread lines. Inside the theater, people are enjoying the illusion that melodrama provides while outside there is the reality of life in a big city. Once again the reader is supposed to compare Carrie's stage role to the "real life" of the novel, and to notice the great differences. In contrast to Crane and Howells, in Dreiser it is not the characters themselves who have unreal expectations and melodramatic fantasies about life. Although Carrie acts in plays which contain fantasies, she does not expect dramatic of exciting things from life, and is surprised by her quick rise to success on the stage. Like Jennie, she is more of a determinist than a sentimental romantic, and she is only dismayed but not shocked when life does not measure up to her desires. And since Dreiser's characters, whom he treats sympathetically, often are mouthpieces for the philosophy he believes in, it is not his characters themselves whom he treats ironically. Rather,

it is the plots of sentimental melodramas. For what such plots suggested to enthusiastic audiences was that there would be dramatic resolutions for events, definite happy endings or decisive encounters between opposing forces. What contemporary audiences must have found most shocking about Dreiser's treatment of melodrama is that he leads up to a big dramatic moment--Hurstwood coming home to find Carrie has fled, Carrie discovering that Hurstwood is a bigamist, Lester discovering that Jennie haa an illegitimate child from a previous affair. But instead of presenting a dramatic scene full of violent activity or tearful recriminations, Dreiser deliberately undercuts this potential drama by having his characters react quietly, with acceptance or resignation. Life is not a melodrama, although there may be certain resemblances. People do find themselves overcome by calamity, as in the typical melodrama. But that does not mean that they automatically react exaggeratedly to such situations or that there is always a grand finale which resolves their crises. Dreiser's characters in these early novels do not react by giving dramatic speeches; they endure. Even the exception, Hurstwood, who chooses suicide rather than endurance, ends his life quietly and without fanfare.

Crane too chooses to undercut melodrama and ham acting, but he does it to punish his characters more than his

readers. Like Dreiser, he pays ironic attention to the differences between life as depicted in contemporary stage plays and the life his Bowery audience actually leads. Chapter Eight of Maggie describes such an audience reacting to a play, an audience which sees in the clichés of the stage some promise that enables them to escape from their tawdry lives. Victims of the shallow Victorian codes they have inherited, they identify with stage heroes and heroines and hiss the villains.

> When anybody died in the pale-green snowstorms, the gallery mourned. They sought out the painted misery and hugged it as akin [sic].
>
> In the hero's erratic march from poverty in the first act to wealth and triumph in the final one, in which he forgives all the enemies that he has left, he was assisted by the gallery, which applauded his generous and noble sentiments and confounded the speeches of his opponents by making irrelevant but very sharp remarks (p. 67).

The plot of this melodrama, Crane mockingly emphasizes, is a foolish and trite one concerning the struggle between good and evil ("march from poverty in the first act to wealth . . . in the final one," "generous and noble sentiments" of hero compared with ignoble speeches of "opponents"). In one of the rare scenes in which he didactically directs the reader, Crane criticizes the psychological power of the melodrama. The beer hall audience, although it is composed of hardened alcoholics, prostitutes, and derelicts, wants to feel that it is like the heroes pictured on the stage,

not like the villains. "Shady persons [revolted] . . . from the picturedvillainy of the drama" (p. 67). The disparity between the audience's enthusiastic reaction to the play and the sordid facts of their own lives is ironic: were they to be cast in melodramas, society would view them as the villains.

The crowd wishes it could be like the hero in melodrama: Crane's individual characters are so inspired by the form (on the stage and in the novel) that they become actors in melodramas. Crane places them in melodramatic situations--hero in danger, virtuous girl in danger from seducers--so that their lives do resemble melodramas. The difference is that the endings to their stories, although sudden, extreme, melodramatic endings, are not the happy endings these characters anticipated. The actor in "Manacled," in the midst of speaking a speech about defying great odds heroically, is suddenly left alone in just such a situation. Flames envelop him as he is chained to the stage: now is the time for his valiant and triumphant action. But he cannot free himself in time and dies in the theater. Disaster and not victorious escape provides the ending. Maggie, who dreams that she will play the heroine to Pete's hero, is instead seduced and abandoned. And the Swede, who tries to play Western hero, falls victim to the danger which surrounds

him, and perishes. In Crane the price of pretending that melodrama is real life seems to be violent death.

Because they are usually escapists with delusive ideas, Crane's characters, whether described singly or as a group, receive harsh and unsympathetic treatment from him. What one critic has called Crane's lack of compassion for his characters[3] is certainly connected with Crane's conviction that these parodic characters are only fantasizing about the world. Although there is a deterministic inevitability to events, what really shapes their lives is their illusions, their inappropriate values, and their unfounded or ill-founded judgments, all of which unfit them to see and cope with actuality. Yet although he scoffs at the illusions of his characters Crane was fascinated by the popular forms which fostered their illusions: the slum tale, temperance work, dime novel, war story. In his best work he is able to mock the myths these myths fed to the public at the same time that he finds symbolic truth in these forms.

The sentimental authors took as a given that the overplayed dramatic scene was the medium through which characters could truly express their feelings, that indeed high emotion and histrionics could not be separated. That reliance on the stagey and the rhetorical in speech,

as we have seen, is an index to the popular novelist's attitude toward life: it is as if characters existed in order to express "grand" emotions. In taking this emotionalism as their code (an emotionalism which, it should be added, could have been convincing in the hands of skilled writers), these authors cheapened the form of the melodrama. In contrast, Howells, Dreiser, and Crane recognized the value of the melodrama form as a framework for their fiction, and, in the case of the latter two, prized melodrama for what it accurately reflected about the world they also saw. But they all combined their appreciation of melodrama with satire on the melodramatic excesses of popular authors.

One major way in which Howells, Dreiser, and Crane responded to popular fiction was, therefore, to create the metaphor of the ham actor to suggest the false values characteristic of that fiction. The three writers all considered these values not so much follies of previous traditions, to be ignored, as mistakes to be criticized. They therefore criticized sentimental and romantic conventions both in terms of this common metaphor and in the distinctive satiric ways discussed in this study.

The early works of these writers criticized the older tradition so much, in fact, that one critic has suggested that they spent too much time and energy on satire.[4] But we

have seen that where they fail to reverse, or satirize, or consciously manipulate popular forms, their work frequently falls into the very sentimentalism or debased romanticism they hoped to mock. Furthermore, their contemporaries who dispensed with satire altogether, the local colorists, are even more prone to such lapses.

Not all lapses, of course, were damaging to the work of the new writers. The affinity of the naturalist novel for melodrama, an affinity which was perhaps based on the similarity between the two forms, is often useful to Dreiser and Crane and adds to the effectiveness of their works. With the realists, the opposite is true. There is little or no similarity between realism, which emphasizes the average and the common, and romanticism, which emphasizes the exceptional and the unusual. Howells is able to use romantic forms only when he is satirizing them at the same time. Eggleston, Deming, and Harte, who rely on romantic plotting and characterization without satirizing them, are unable to use them effectively.

Whether the affinity was useful or damaging, realist and naturalist writers needed to work through their attachment to older traditions. Harry Levin has written that all literary movements seeking to present reality in a more accurate and scientific way than before have not only been

intensely conscious of the variety of romanticism that preceded them, but have also needed to disprove that romanticism.[5] Howells, Dreiser, and Crane are no exceptions to this rule. If they were to free themselves from the weight of popular and accepted traditions, they had to develop a valid mode of criticizing these traditions. In their early works they do this largely through satiric reversals of romantic and sentimental stereotypes. Satire and parody of best sellers, by giving them models to contradict and overturn, actually provided them with forms for their early work. And the combination of satire and affinity, although certainly not the only way to present a new vision of reality, was certainly an effective one. How well these writers succeeded varies from writer to writer and work to work. There are advances beyond sentimentalism and lapses into it, satire on romanticism and unconscious returns to it. If there is any general lesson one can learn from this discussion, however, it is the interrelation of such a literary rebellion with the traditions against which these writers struggled.

NOTES TO CHAPTER SEVEN

1. Gilbert Highet, The Anatomy of Satire (Princeton, 1962), pp. 60-72; Edward M. White, "Emma and the Parodic Point of View," NCF, 18 (June 1963), 55-63.

2. Sally Tippetts, "Melodrama in Sister Carrie," N&Q, 3 n.s. (March 1966), 99-100.

3. Donald Gibson, The Fiction of Stephen Crane (Carbondale, Ill., 1968), pp. 147ff.

4. Edwin Cady, The Light of Common Day (Bloomington, Ind., 1971), p. 6. "[They] were fed up with romanticism, They expended magnificent resources of wit and creative energy to burlesque it out of public countenance. They defined their dearest wishes for expression and artistic success in contradiction to it. . . ."

5. Harry Levin, The Gates of Horn: A Study of Five French Realists (New York, 1955), p. 66.

APPENDIX

THE LITERARY COMEDIANS (METHODS AND PRECEDENTS) AND A NOTE ON BURLESQUE IN CRANE

In this study I stressed that there is satire on sentimentality in Howells, Dreiser, and Crane. This satire is serious rather than comic; it contains elements of what Maynard Mack terms the heroic voice, the stance of the "public defender"[1] who wants to guard against the forces of evil, in this case the reigning sentimental morality. And I have contended that such satire provided the realists and naturalists with distancing methods. To give a richer picture of the period, however, one must look at a related school of writers, who satirized sentimentalism through comedy. This school, the literary comedians, harbored the same objections to sentimental romanticism (what Twain called the "tears and flapdoodle" of the Sir Walter Scott-James Fenimore Cooper school of fiction) as did the realists and naturalists. They debunked many actors on the American scene whom they considered corrupt, from the political charlatan, war profiteer and religious enthusiast to the

sentimental orator or poet. Yet in these burlesquers and parodists was a pure comedy not evident in the more serious satires by the writers studied in this work. Armed with irreverence toward their subject matter, they used the engaging colloquial speaker and the incongruity between the narrative framework and the dialect of the comic narrator (or between the situation and the description of the situation) to create humor. These writers demonstrate fully that whatever difficulties the realists (especially the local colorists of Chapter Six) encountered when trying to be serious, to distance themselves, and criticize sentimentality, when writers were being humorous they had no difficulty at all. Finally, when Howells, Dreiser, and Crane adapted the literary comedians' methods to suit their purposes, their work effectively satirized sentimentality. The literary comedians were based in the West--Frederick L. Pattee mentions their "new California manner"[2]--and their burlesques and comic sketches were printed in the famous comic newspapers of the time, Puck, and Vanity Fair, as well as in the local newspaper The Californian. (The Californian is noteworthy in literary history because it was edited at one time by Bret Harte and published dispatches from the then young reporter Samuel Clemens.) Among the number of literary comedians was President Lincoln's favorite humorist,

the cranky eccentric Artemus Ward (pseudonym of Charles Farrar Browne), Bred Harte, David Rcss Locke (creator of Petroleum Vesuvius Nasby), Bill Nye and, most important, Mark Twain. As Walter Blair remarks, "Whole books by minor humorists were filled with hilarious apings of the popular orator" and of sentimental literature.[3] My intent here is to discuss some of the most talented and representative of them.

What largely distinguishes the literary comedians from Howells, Dreiser, and Crane in their relationship to sentimentalism is that whereas the latter were experimentalists in the serious use of satire to deflate the sentimental, the former were working out of an established comic tradition which provided them with methods for ridiculing sentimentality. Walter Blair has written that by 1850 there was a solid tradition of native American humor and that America "had discovered most of the things it was going to laugh at . . . thereafter authors played variations on themes already announced."[4] Among these subjects were the oratorical excesses of the spread-eagle style, as evidenced in sentimental funeral orations and poetry. The comic methods had also already been discovered: Rourke and Blair have isolated the deadpan colloquial speaker who amused his audience by quaintness of dialect and folk wisdom.[5] This comic figure had his roots deep in American folklore and

appeared in various guises: boatman Mike Fink, soldier Davy Crockett, New Englander Jack Downing, Westerner Pecos Bill, Southerner Uncle Remus, to name a few. Shrewd and bragging, courageous and crafty, this figure had humorous associations. Audiences both East and West were quick to appreciate his narratives, anecdotes, and tall tales. The work of literary comedians like Twain and Harte, then, was an outgrowth of this comic tradition.

Bret Harte's parody of a scene in Dickens's sentiment-haunted novels can serve as the first example of how these writers combined satire, parody, and burlesque about sentimental and romantic institutions and ideas. The aim of Harte's sketch is to show how hackneyed, melodramatic, and utterly formulaic Dickens's novels were--the same point Howells and Garland were making about Dickens's less talented contemporaries Southworth and Wetherell. Harte makes his point by telling a story of a haunted man, haunted because he cannot get "D..CE.S'S" plots out of his head. Mesmerized and tormented, he is visited by a phantom, the author of the plots, to whom he complains:

> "Here again?"
> "Here again."
> "Another novel?"
> "Another novel."
> "The old story?"
> "The old story."[6]

This interchange between Harte's haunted man and D. is doubly clever, for the point it is making about Dickens's plots--that they are the same story with the same characters, repeated endlessly--is made by parodying the very device of repetition Dickens favors in his own dialogues.

The sketch at the end changes from parody to manifesto as D. gravely informs his interlocutor, "Without forgetting me, 'twill be your lot to walk through life as if we had not met." The perceptive reader can take this to mean that Harte felt that he needed to be aware of Dickens's example so as to avoid it in his own work. (As it turned out, this was a message Harte was not able to follow, and ironically many of his minor works are far more sentimental and stereotyped, than any of Dickens's.) On the whole, Harte was not a perceptive critic of Dickens; he did not appreciate the value of his work. Yet given this limitation, the Harte sketch, utilizing the parallel of the Dickens character haunted by a ghost of the past, is clever satire of a Dickens novel.

When the literary comedians wanted to satirize the characters instead of the novelist, they introduced a colloquial character, half-buffoon, half-sage, who deflated the high-toned language of the sentimentalist. The use of colloquial diction was calculated to disarm the audience by

making them laugh. Here is Petroleum Nasby on why he should not be drafted:

> My teeth is all unsound, my palit aint eggsactly rite, and I hev hed bronkeetis 31 yeres last Joon. At present I hev a koff, the paroxisms uv wich is friteful to behold (p. 410).

Playing on the humorous sympathy such a character produced, the writer could then create characters who poked fun at the fakes and charlatans who manipulated ornate language and pretended to be sincere. Here is Artemus Ward meeting a group of corrupt office seekers swarming around the newly elected Lincoln:

> Sez I, "Squire, you wouldn't take a small post-offis if you could git it, would you?"
> Sez he, "a patrit is abuv them things, sir.'"
> "There's a putty big crop of patrits this season, aint there Squire?" sez I, when another crowd of offiss seekers pored in. The house, door-yard, barn & woodshed was now all full. . . .
> "Good God! cride Old Abe, "they cum upon me from the skize--"
> But I hadn't mor'n stood hum up strate before another man cum crashin down the chimney. . . . "Mr Linkin," shoutid the infatooated being, "my papers is signed by every clergyman in our town. . . . I workt hard for the ticket; I toiled night and day! The patrit should be rewarded!" (p. 402)

We notice that Ward and Lincoln both use colloquial diction, whereas the office seekers mouth high-sounding platitudes about what is due to a "patrit" at the same time they are falling all over themselves for patronage. Their language points out the hypocrisy of these men.

When C.F. Browne wants to suggest that the language of sentimentalism is ludicrous, he sends Artemus Ward to visit the Tower of London, a place filled with serious associations and easy to sentimentalize. A fellow tourist tries to do just that:

> "My frens," said a pale-faced little man, in black close, "this is a sad day . . . it is sad to think so many people have been killed within these gloomy walls. My frens, let us drop a tear!" (p. 405)

Ward's reaction to these effusions is irreverent and pragmatic:

> I can't sob for those who died four or five hundred years ago. If they was my own relations I couldn't. It's absurd to shed sobs over things which occurd durin the rain of Dick the Three" (p. 405).

While Ward clowns his way through the Tower, speaking of Old Dick the Three and offering to buy the Crown Jewels for a few cents, he is also mocking the solemnity of the pretentious little man in black. Having answered the man's comments in his down-to-earth way, Ward completes his response by mixing the high speech of literary English with his own native expressions: "Look at the festiv Warders, in their red flannil jackets. They are cheerful, and why should it not be thusly with us?" He goes on to generalize about the lessons of history:

> Take Mr. Gloster's case. Mr. G. was <u>a conspirator of the basest dye</u>, and if he'd failed, he would

> have been hung on a sour apple tree. But Mr. G. succeeded, and became great. He was slewed by Col. Richmond, but he lives in histry, and his equestrian figger may be seen daily for a sixpence, in conjunction with other em'nent persons, and no extra charge for the Warder's able and bootiful lectur (p. 405; italics added).

By mixing Shakespearean phrases with his own homely diction, Ward makes himself a comic figure. But he also satirizes high-toned language. In the sketch the high-toned speakers are always made to sound pompous rather than literate. "You have no Tower in America?" said a man in the crowd to Ward. "Alars! no . . . we are devoid of a Tower. America, oh my onhappy country! Thou hast got no Tower!" (p. 404). Taking a simple question addressed to him, Ward deflates its high tone by mimicking and exaggerating. He ends up making both literary and Elizabethan English sound quite laughable, and inappropriate.

Perhaps the most sustained satire on the language and values of sentimental romanticism is Huck Finn's description of Emmeline Grangerford. Little Emmeline is the beloved dead daughter of a feuding Southern family Huck meets in his travels. Sworn to a vendetta with the Shepherdsons, the family reveres the memory of the pious little girl who died. Every time someone died Emmeline wrote obituary poems: "the undertaker never got in ahead of Emmeline but once," Huck comments innocently. She spent her short life

collecting sad mementoes and paintings of pining young girls. These young ladies were pining for lost loves--or dead birds--and the pictures had titles like "Shall I Never See Thee More Alas" and "I Shall Never Hear Thy Sweet Chirrup More Alas." The ultimate in bathos is the one where

> A young lady was at a window looking up at the moon, and tears running down her cheeks; and she had an open letter in one hand with black sealing wax showing on one edge of it, and she was mashing a locket with a chain to it against her mouth, and underneath the picture it said "And Art Thou Gone Yes Thou Art Gone Alas." These was all nice pictures, I reckon, but I didn't somehow seem to take to them. . . . Everybody was sorry [Emmeline] . . . had died, because she had laid out a lot more of these pictures to do [funeral poems for], and a body could see by what she had done what they had lost (p. 55; italics added).

(The Grangerfords hang these funerary pictures on their walls, although the family is seldom there to enjoy them because they are always out fighting with their enemies.) This succession of sad titles, which get longer and longer, begins to sound totally ridiculous by the time Huck describes the last sad girl "mashing" her locket to her mouth. The humor here is the result of Huck's direct folk impression of the graveyard sentimentalism. He goes on to describe another black-clad lady mourner dressed in a gown with "bulges like a cabbage in the middle of the sleeves, and a large black scopp-shovel bonnet." But he combines his

observations with a faithful reproduction of the language of sentimental verse: "she was leaning pensive . . . her other hand hanging down her side." The folk language works here to deflate the sentimental diction and make it seem ridiculous.

Even the funeral poem about the death of a little boy which Emmeline is supposed to have written is comic. It carries out the combination of poetic and colloquial language which Huck had initiated:

> Despised love struck not with woe
> That head of curly knots,
> Nor stomach troubles laid him low,
> Young Stephen Dowling Botts.
>
> O no. Then list with tearful eye,
> Whilst I his fate do tell,
> His soul did from this cold world fly
> By falling down a well (p. 55).

Here readers would recognize a direct parody of the sentimental Song Book, which contained selections by writers like Julia A. Moore, "The Sweet Singer of Michigan,"[8] and whose verses seldom sounded much different from these although their intention was serious.

Huck's description of Emmeline's talents turns to another parodic description. Huck says that Emmeline probably died because she couldn't figure out how to compose a particularly difficult funeral tribute: "She warn't ever the same after that! she never complained, but she kinder

pined away and did not live long." Both the Stephen Dowling Botts poem and this description of Emmeline's death are in the tradition of the tall tale, a favorite device of literary comedians like Twain. Here even the least perceptive reader could see that Emmeline's values are sheer nonsense dressed in the respectable clothes of sentimental rhetoric.

The literary comedians were making two points about sentimentality and popular romanticism. The first is that the emotional self-indulgence which was the hallmark of the tradition was really a sham, because people were either only pretending to feel that way or were deluding themselves into creating artificial situations to cry or sigh over. The second point, directly related, concerns the language in which sentimental and romantic ideas were couched. Such language was not the language people actually spoke, but the way they felt speech <u>should</u> sound. With such mistaken conceptions about "high falutin'" language, they could only end up sounding ridiculous to the literary comedians.

The literary comedians left a legacy to the realists and naturalists. A few decades before Garland was urging writers to give their characters realistic, colloquial speech, the characters of Twain and Browne were speaking colloquial American English and were parodying literary

English. When Huck Finn describes Emmeline Grangerford he is using his own speaking voice and not the battery of pat phrases considered appropriate for the child in the sentimental novels described in Chapter Two. In Browne, orators who make public speeches and are swelled up with grand emotions are always shams and charlatans, and are bested by the level-headed colloquial speaker by the end of the scene or anecdote. If the realists and naturalists were seeking a precedent for the creation of realistic, sympathetic, colloquial characters, the literary comedians provided one.

A Note on burlesque in Crane's The O'Ruddy (1903) and "The Bride Comes to Yellow Sky" (1898).

Although comedy has a serious corrective function, on the whole the realists and naturalists under discussion did not consider the burlesques of the literary comedians appropriate models for their own writing; instead, as we have seen, they adapted comic methods without reproducing comic effects. Of the writers discussed in this study, only Crane in a few works used burlesque of the kind found in the works of Twain and similar comic writers.

One of Crane's last works, The O'Ruddy, a novel largely unfinished at the time of his death and completed by Robert Barr, takes the picaresque hero, an impoverished Irish nobleman seeking his fortune, through a dizzying series of comically exaggerated confrontations in which characters deliver speeches filled with empty rhetoric. What distinguishes the novel from a parody in the strict sense (although it does have parodic elements) is the frequent lack of logical connection between episodes (a parody would tend to follow closely the logic of the plot being parodied) and the wild exaggerations of speech and action. It resembles parody, however, in that Crane never loses an opportunity to deflate the conventions of the popular adventure novel: his hero is an outrageous boaster rather than a modest and courageous fighter, and announces his noble ancestry at every possible moment; the heroine is plump rather than traditionally slim and beautiful; and the burly red-haired highwayman whom O'Ruddy takes on as his servant (dressing him in pink and blue livery) is less bold than inept and has a domineering mother who chastises him constantly.

One episode, in which Crane burlesques the conventional duel between noblemen, indicates the method he employs throughout. In the beginning of the encounter, O'Ruddy tries to talk with the foolish Lord Strepp. O'Ruddy has been claiming

that he is of noble origin:

> [Strepp] had feared from the beginning that I was altogether in the right [that I was an O'Ruddy]. "Oh!" said he again. I made up my mind that he was a good lad. "That is dif--" he began awkwardly. "I mean, Mr. O'Ruddy!--oh damn it all, you know what I mean, Mr. O'Ruddy!" I bowed. "Perfectly, my lord!" I did not understand him, of course.[9]

Crane produces humor here by exaggerating Strepp's inarticulateness (the man can't speak a full sentence); and by contrasting O'Ruddy's pretense (his claiming to understand Strepp's incoherent mumblings) with the reality of the situation (O'Ruddy's complete confusion). Finally, when Strepp manages to speak more coherently, O'Ruddy quarrels with him (and with Strepp's friend, Colonel Royale, who eventually fights a duel with O'Ruddy) about whether O'Ruddy's father stole the breeches of Strepp's father in the late war--or whether it was the other way around. Crane spends a great deal of time on this quarrel, which appears sillier and sillier the longer the contestants haggle about it. Although the quarrel is no more ridiculous than some quarrels about honor in real life, Crane exaggerates the importance of the issue to a burlesque extreme.

Crane continues to burlesque the actions and speech of his characters. By the time the exchange of insults is over, O'Ruddy remarks that he has almost broken his back from bowing like a gentleman so many times. Not very

impressed with his opponents' intelligence, O'Ruddy makes fun of them by concluding that their "minds seemed to be capable of a process which may be termed human reflection" (p. 26; underlining added), but that he wasn't sure. In any event, he resolves to fight a duel to avenge his father's name (a decision he seems to make every two or three pages).

On the field of combat, O'Ruddy's servant sets the tone by bowing so low to the opponent that his head almost hits the ground. O'Ruddy continues the clowning: he doesn't take the battle seriously and engages in a number of comic asides while dueling with Colonel Royale. First he thanks his father for having taught him to fight:

> I had always thought that my father's judgment was very good, but I could not help reflecting that if it turned out bad I would have a grievance as well as a sword-thrust in the body (p. 39).

O'Ruddy's witticisms do not end there. He dances around the colonel, and makes speedy work of his opponent, who yells "Oh my God, Strepp! I couldn't reach him; Strepp! Oh my God, Strepp!" so many times that the effect is bathetic. O'Ruddy then remarks that he has decided not to kill the colonel, "having tired of this rubbish" (p. 43).

Much of the burlesque humor in the dueling scene depended on incongruity; instead of acting excited or nervous, O'Ruddy treated the whole duel as a joke. Elsewhere

too the humor rests on his making a joke of supposedly serious matters. O'Ruddy threatens a highwayman with death if the man does not lead him to where horses are hidden:

> "Sir," he begged, "think of my mother!"
> "I think of the horses," I answered grimly.
> "'Tis for you to think of your mother. How could I think of your mother when I wouldn't know her from the Head of Kinsale, if it didn't happen that I know that Head of Kinsale too well to mistake is for anybody's mother?" (p. 50)

The highwayman's reply is equally nonsensical: "You speak like a man from foreign parts, sir . . . but I am able to see that your meaning is serious." Here the humor results from Crane's combination of clowning--on one level both men are talking nonsense--and pretending that he is presenting a serious conversation: the highwayman does not know what O'Ruddy is saying but feels he is being threatened. Yet the reader knows it is <u>not</u> a serious encounter and can laugh at both O'Ruddy and the highwayman.

As in the literary comedians (and especially Artemus Ward), all of the characters are self-dramatizers who declaim oratorically and are ready to break into speeches at any moment. Much of the humor of their speeches results from the incongruity between their ornate language and the situations in which they find themselves. When the O'Ruddy first meets the highwayman Jem Bottles, the man recites a tale of his origins which includes lines like: "But

little knew he that he was laying the foundations of a career so illustrious" (p. 52). Considering that this is uttered in the middle of a desolate Irish moor by a man of little success and less education, the effect of the speech is quite comic. Later in the story, O'Ruddy has difficulty restraining his servants Paddy and Bottles, who "each wished to reply in heroic verse" to some sally from an opponent in a tavern. Not only does Crane exploit the comic incongruity between elegant speech and lowly situation, but he also plays with archaic language. Like Artemus Ward Crane interweaves Elizabethan speech with a narrative told in more modern English: "this mixture is full strange," the hero remarks about a drink in a low tavern. We encountered these devices--formal English made to seem ridiculous--in Maggie; the difference is that here the comedy which results is comedy for its own sake (burlesque) rather than corrective satire.

Despite the playing with language, the deflating of stereotype, the absurd brawls and hairbreadth escapes, The O'Ruddy is not so successful a burlesque as those of the literary comedians. One reason is that it is difficult to sustain burlesque in a full-length work (the literary comedians mainly used sketches and scenes). But a more important reason is that the central figure lacks the comic originality

of a Huck Finn or even a Patroleum Nasby; he is merely a pasteboard creation.

"The Bride Comes to Yellow Sky," on the other hand, is good burlesque, and quite successfully integrates burlesque effects into a larger thematic pattern.[10] The story revolves around expectations reversed, a familiar Crane idea, and uses burlesque to implement the surprise elements in the tale. In the story, a sheriff, Jack Potter, is bringing his undistinguished and homespun bride home to his town Yellow Sky by train. Both are anxious about the reaction of the town, which is unaware of Potter's marriage. Around the issue of the acceptance of their marriage the main action of the story turns. Everywhere they look they receive some form of condemnation of their union, from the sardonic smiles on the faces of railroad porters and fellow passengers, to the laughter of the station master at Yellow Sky. The main check they receive, and one which displays Crane's burlesque to best advantage, is from Scratchy Wilson, an old adversary of Sheriff Potter's. In the sheriff's bachelor days, it was Potter who had to calm Scratchy down when he went on his periodic drunks and tried to shoot everything in sight. Now Scratchy is drunk again and looking for Potter.

In describing the rampaging Wilson, Crane burlesques

the cowboy. Wilson is at best a sometime desperado; he is only violent when drunk, and although, in the words of the bartender, he was a tough guy who "used to hang out along the river," he is the last one left of the old gang and cuts a dilapidated figure now. His "cowboy" shirt actually comes from the Lower East Side and Crane compares his boots to those worn by little boys who want to pretend they are cowboys. As these details suggest, Scratchy is a child in cowboy costume, shooting at stray dogs and store front windows and looking for the sheriff much as a child looks for his playmate.

It is this absurd (though somehow touching) figure who greets the sheriff and his bride when they arrive home. Scratchy has expected, of course, to find the sheriff alone and is preparing himself for a good fight. Crane describes the meeting:

> Potter was about to raise a finger to point the first appearance of the new home when, as they circled the corner, they came face to face with a man in a marroon-coloured shirt, who was feverishly pushing cartridges in a large revolver. Upon the instant the man dropped his revolver, to the ground and, like lightning, whipped another from his holster. The second weapon was aimed at the bridegroom's chest (p. 283; italics added).

Here Crane builds up some real suspense, and for a short time the comedy changes into a dangerous situation. ("There was a silence. Potter's mouth seemed to be merely a grave

for his tongue." p. 282). But Crane soon transforms the scene into a comedy of errors, a comedy which builds on the incongruity between Scratchy's expectations (he has "feverishly" loaded his gun and expects a fight) and the situation he encounters (unarmed Potter bringing his bride back home). Not noticing the woman, and mistakenly thinking that Potter is trying to sneak up on him, Scratchy acts out an elaborate confrontation scene, screaming in rage at Potter, and steadfastly refusing to believe that the sheriff had no intention of fighting with him. He says, "Don't take me for a kid," just at the moment when he is acting his most childish by trying to pick a fight about nothing.

As Scratchy continues in his mistake, the scene becomes more and more ridiculous, with Scratchy stubbornly refusing to believe Potter and Potter acting much like a parent trying to calm and discipline a child. Finally, when Scratchy taunts Potter (much as a child would)--"why ain't you got a gun . . . Been to Sunday-school?"--(p. 204) Potter tells him he is unarmed because he is taking his bride home and expected no violence. At that moment, Scratchy's "tough man" pose is totally deflated. He realizes that Potter really does not want to fight, and with this realization he becomes a child disappointed in the outcome of his game. He says to Potter, "It's all off now," as if it were

a game and not a gunfight he had been preparing for all along. The presence of the bride did not give him an added advantage over his enemy (as it would have in a real confrontation); she disqualified the players and spoiled the game.

The conclusion carries out the image of Scratchy as a defeated child: "In the presence of this foreign condition [Potter's marriage] he was a simple child of the earlier plains" (p. 285). Having burlesqued the stereotypical gunfight by making it into a child's game, Crane sends the deflated Scratchy home to sober up.

Obviously the cowboy--his swagger, violent code and heroic image in the popular mind--is Crane's target in "The Bride," and on one level he certainly takes the wind out of his sails. Just as to Bret Harte, "the Noble Savage . . . [was] a humbug,"[11] to Crane the Wild West cowboy was a braggart who indulged in phony displays of heroism. In a larger sense, however, the burlesque in the story is just an element, and not the whole. Despite its comedy, "The Bride" includes nostalgia for the passing of the old West, when men like Scratchy did not have to be drunk to come into town and enliven it, when "hiding out" was a reality and not just a kid game. Scratchy's unwillingness to recognize the bride shows the old ways dying hard. His ludicrous defeat--

indeed the fact that there are no more battles except drunken trumped-up ones--is definitely the defeat of the old ways. The fancy new railroad that brings the bride, who, as Crane remarks significantly, "expected to cook, dutifully" (p. 273), brings the softening home influences the old West largely lacked, and heralds civilization, industry, and progress.

The image of Scratchy walking away defeated, "his feet making funnel-shaped tracks in the heavy sand" (p. 285), is, on a burlesque level, a deflation of an essentially pasteboard figure; on another level, however, his dejected shuffle marks the exit of the old-timer who no longer has a function in the modern, more law-abiding West.

NOTES TO APPENDIX

1. Maynard Mack, "The Muse of Satire," YR, 61 (1951), 86.

2. Frederick L. Pattee, The Feminine Fifties (Port Washington, New York, 1940), p. 215.

3. Walter Blair, "Burlesques in Nineteenth Century American Humor," AL, 11 (Nov. 1930), 238.

4. Blair, ed. Native American Humor (San Francisco, 1960), p. 104.

5. Blair, Native American Humor, pp. 62-101ff.; Constance Rourke, American Humor (New York, 1931), p. 87.

6. Bret Harte, "The Haunted Man," Native American Humor, ed. Blair, p. 431. Future references to literary comedians in the text will be from this source.

7. Mark Twain, The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn, ed Kenneth Lynn (New York, 1961). Page references in the text will be from this edition.

8. Julia A. Moore, from The Sentimental Song Book, quoted in Mark Twain, The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn, ed. Lynn, Part 2, Sources, p. 157:

Andrew was a little infant,
  And his life was two years old;
He was his parents' eldest boy,
  And he was drowned, I was told.
His parents never more can see him
  In this world of grief and pain,
And Oh! they will not forget him
  While on earth they do remain.

9. Stephen Crane, The O'Ruddy, The Work of Stephen Crane, ed. Wilson Follett (1926; rpt. 2 vols. in 1, New York, 1963), 7-8, 25. Page references in the text will be from this edition.

10. Stephen Crane, "The Bride Comes to Yellow Sky," Stephen Crane: Stories and Tales, ed. Robert W. Stallman (New York, 1952). Page references in the text will be from this edition.

11. Bret Harte, Condensed Novels (New York, 1899), p. 150.

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