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*The American Critical Archives* is a series of reference books that provide representative selections of contemporary reviews of the main works of major American authors. Specifically, each volume contains both full reviews and excerpts from reviews that appeared in newspapers and weekly and monthly periodicals generally within a few months of the publication of the work concerned. There is an introductory historical overview by the volume editor, as well as checklists of additional reviews located but not quoted.

This book reprints contemporaneous reviews of Ellen Glasgow's books as those reviews were published from 1897 through 1943. Originally printed in newspapers and other periodicals in the United States and in Great Britain, they tell the story of Glasgow's critical reception during her long and productive career. Nineteen novels, as well as a volume of poetry, one of short stories, and one of criticism, were published during her lifetime. Her first book, published anonymously in 1897, elicited much attention when it was revealed that the author was a young Richmond woman. By the time of the 1943 publication of her volume of literary criticism, *A Certain Measure*, she was a much respected and much honored author—winner of a Pulitzer Prize, a Howells Medal, and other awards.

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AMERICAN CRITICAL ARCHIVES 3

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### The American Critical Archives

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# Ellen Glasgow

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## The Contemporary Reviews

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Edited by  
Dorothy M. Scura  
*University of Tennessee, Knoxville*



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*This book is for the memory of three men who encouraged and supported me in my work: J. Edgar McInnis, 1905–1985, my father; George W. Scura, 1924–1981, my husband; Lewis G. Leary, 1906–1990, my mentor.*

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# Series Editor's Preface

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The American Critical Archives series documents a part of a writer's career that is usually difficult to examine, that is, the immediate response to each work as it was made public on the part of reviewers in contemporary newspapers and journals. Although it would not be feasible to reprint every review, each volume in the series reprints a selection of reviews designed to provide the reader with a proportionate sense of the critical response, whether it was positive, negative, or mixed. Checklists of other known reviews are also included to complete the documentary record and allow access for those who wish to do further reading and research.

The editor of each volume has provided an introduction that surveys the career of the author in the context of the contemporary critical response. Ideally, the introduction will inform the reader in brief of what is to be learned by a reading of the full volume. The reader then can go as deeply as necessary in terms of the kind of information desired—be it about a single work, a period in the author's life, or the author's entire career. The intent is to provide quick and easy access to the material for students, scholars, librarians, and general readers.

When completed, the American Critical Archives should constitute a comprehensive history of critical practice in America, and in some cases England, as the writers' careers were in progress. The volumes open a window on the patterns and forces that have shaped the history of American writing and the reputations of the writers. These are primary documents in the literary and cultural life of the nation.

M. THOMAS INGE



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# Preface

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This volume reprints reviews of Ellen Glasgow's books as those reviews were published during her lifetime. Reviews not printed in full or in part are listed at the end of each section. If printed reviews have excisions, the missing parts are indicated by ellipses, in the case of a brief deletion, or by [. . .], in the case of a lengthier deletion. If a review covers more than one book, the part of the review that focuses on Ellen Glasgow's work is reprinted with no indication of deletion.

In general, the reviews have been reprinted as they appeared originally. Typographical errors have been silently corrected; book titles and characters' names are consistently spelled correctly; book titles are consistently italicized.

Every effort has been made to be as comprehensive as possible in collecting reviews. Although the reviews reprinted include ones from newspapers and journals in the United States and in Great Britain, not all of the contemporaneous reviews of Glasgow's work are reprinted or listed in this volume. Many that do appear here come from major newspapers and journals, and it is hoped that they provide a representative sampling of the variety of critical responses printed in Glasgow's lifetime.

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# Acknowledgments

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In studying the critical reception of Ellen Glasgow, one begins with the work of William W. Kelly—his 1957 dissertation for Duke University, “Struggle for Recognition: A Study of the Literary Reputation of Ellen Glasgow,” and his 1964 volume *Ellen Glasgow: A Bibliography*, edited by Oliver Steele and published by the University Press of Virginia. I am most grateful to him for his work. Also very helpful is the secondary bibliography printed in Edgar MacDonald and Tonette Bond Inge’s *Ellen Glasgow: A Reference Guide*, published in 1986 by G. K. Hall.

In the years I have worked on this project, three graduate students have provided valuable assistance—Rebecca Wall, Carla McDonough, and Margaret Bauer. For their diligence, I thank all three of these young scholars. And I am most grateful to my secretary Margaret Goergen, who assisted me with typing, permissions, and a multitude of other details.

The staffs of several libraries have been cooperative and helpful: the Alderman Library at the University of Virginia, the Richmond Public Library, the Richmond Newspapers Library, the Virginia Commonwealth University Interlibrary Loan Department, the University of Tennessee Interlibrary Loan Department. To all of the workers in those libraries who assisted me, especially to Edmund Berkeley, Jr., Michael Plunkett, and William S. Simpson, Jr., I extend my appreciation.

For support in obtaining permissions to reprint reviews, I acknowledge the John C. Hodges Better English Fund in the English Department of the University of Tennessee. For collegial support of this project, I thank Maggie O’Connor and Tom Inge.

Perhaps my greatest debt is to the newspapers, journals, and authors who have granted permission to reprint their reviews in this volume. I am sincerely grateful to each of them.

Acknowledgment is made to the newspapers, journals, and individuals listed below for permission to reprint reviews. Francis X. Connolly, “Inspid Liberalism Challenged in Great Prose,” reprinted with permission of America Press, Inc., © 1941 All Rights Reserved. “New Novel by Ellen Glasgow Is Worth While”; R.E.S., “Sex, Marriage and Blueblood”; Emily Clark, “Emily Clark Finds a Charm in Miss Glasgow’s Stories”; Emily Clark, “Glasgow Novel of Virginia Poor Whites: A Triumphant Experiment”; Gerald W. Johnson, review

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of *The Romantic Comedians*; Gerald W. Johnson, "Ellen Glasgow's Mailed Fist Inside a White Kid Glove"; Gerald W. Johnson, "Ex Libris"; Gerald W. Johnson, "World of Women" reprinted from *The Baltimore Sun*, © 1919, 1922, 1923, 1925, 1926, 1929, 1932, 1935. "The Benefit of Malice"; Lee E. Cannon, "Unending Quest"; Lee E. Cannon, "Harvest of the Years" published originally in the *Christian Century*. "Miss Glasgow Turns Out Another Splendid Novel," originally published in *The Plain Dealer*. Review of *The Builders*, reprinted with permission, from the Columbus, Ohio, *Dispatch*. Roland Nelson Harmon, "Fool's Paradise"; Edward Skillin, Jr., "*In This Our Life*," reprinted with permission of *Commonweal*. John Chamberlain, review of *Vein of Iron*, reprinted with permission from *Current History* magazine. James Sibley Watson, Jr., review of *The Builders* printed in *Dial*, permission granted by Literary Executor of the Estate of Dr. James Sibley Watson, Jr. The Sigma Foundation, Inc. "An Inconoclastic Hero"; "Strength Gone Astray"; "Ellen Glasgow: Her New and Striking Novel, *The Voice of the People*"; "*The Voice of the People*"; "Miss Glasgow's *The Battle-Ground*"; "Some Recent Verse"; Mrs. M. Gordon Pryor, "First Novel of 1904"; M. Gordon Pryor Rice, "The First Important Novel of 1906"; Issac F. Marcossou, "A Virginia Valjean"; "Class and Caste in Old Virginia"; "*The Miller of Old Church*"; "Miss Glasgow's Strongest Book"; Louise M[ausnell] F[ield], "*Virginia: Miss Glasgow's Portrait of a Last Century Type*"; "The Hundred Best Books of the Year"; "Humor and Pathos in a Woman's Life"; "Ellen Glasgow, Works of Fiction by Many Well-known Novelists Among the Important Books Published This Week"; "*The Shadowy Third*"; Joseph Collins, "Gentlemen, the Ladies!"; H. I. Brock, "Southern Romance Is Dead"; Joseph Collins, "Ellen Glasgow's New Novel a Tragedy of Old Age"; Percy Hutchison, "Wit and Wisdom in a New Novel by Ellen Glasgow"; J. Donald Adams, "Ellen Glasgow's Finest Novel"; J. Donald Adams, "A New Novel by Ellen Glasgow"; J. Donald Adams, "The Novels of Ellen Glasgow"; Charles Poore, "Books of the Times"; J. Donald Adams, "A New Novel by Ellen Glasgow"; John Chamberlain, "Books of the Times"; Hamilton Basso, "Ellen Glasgow's Literary Credo," Copyright © 1897/98/1900/1900/02/02/04/06/08/09/11/11/13/13/16/19/23/23/25/26/29/32/35/38/41/41/43/43 by The New York Times Company, reprinted by permission. Malcolm Cowley, review of *The Builders*; Carl Van Doren, "*Barren Ground*"; Robert Herrick, "*The Romantic Comedians*"; Louise Bogan, review of *They Stooped to Folly*; Clifton Fadiman, "Ellen Glasgow's South"; Stark Young, "Deep South Notes, VI: At Sheltered Valley"; Stark Young, "Prefaces to Distinction"; Stark Young, "Ellen Glasgow's New Book"; Robert Cantwell, "A Season's Run"; Malcolm Cowley, "Miss Glasgow's 'Purgatorio'"; Stark Young, "Beautiful Apologia," originally published in *The New Republic*. Clifton Fadiman, review of *Vein of Iron*, copyright © 1935, 1963 by Clifton Fadiman, review originally appeared in *The New Yorker*; Clifton Fadiman, review of *In This Our Life*, copyright © 1941,

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# Introduction

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To read the reviews reprinted in this volume is to trace the story of the critical response to Ellen Glasgow's work in journals and in newspapers from the publication of *The Descendant*, her first novel, in 1897 to the publication of *A Certain Measure*, a volume of criticism, in 1943. Between 1897 and 1943, she published nineteen novels, a volume of poems, a volume of short stories, and a collection of prefaces to thirteen of her novels. Two collected editions of her work also appeared in those years: *The Old Dominion Edition of the Works of Ellen Glasgow* (1929–33) and *The Virginia Edition of the Works of Ellen Glasgow* (1938). Other works, not included in this volume, were published posthumously: her autobiography, *The Woman Within* (1954); a selection of her letters, edited by Blair Rouse (1958); a collection of short stories, edited by Richard Meeker (1963); and a novella, *Beyond Defeat*, edited by Luther Gore (1966). Recently, Julius Raper has collected other unpublished material, including essays and interviews, in *Ellen Glasgow's Reasonable Doubts* (1988).

Glasgow was born 22 April 1873, eight years after the close of the Civil War, and she died 21 November 1945, three months after the close of World War II. When her first novel was published, in 1897, Queen Victoria was on the throne in England and William McKinley was in the White House; when her last work was published, in 1943, King George VI occupied the throne and Franklin D. Roosevelt the White House. In the first decade of her writing career, authors such as Thomas Nelson Page, Stephen Crane, Theodore Dreiser, and Edith Wharton were publishing books. By the second decade of her career, 1907–14, Gertrude Stein, Willa Cather, Ezra Pound, Robert Frost, and T.S. Eliot were publishing prose and poetry. When she published *Barren Ground*, in 1925, the literary scene included Sinclair Lewis, Ernest Hemingway, F. Scott Fitzgerald, Thomas Wolfe, and William Faulkner. The year of publication of *In This Our Life*, her last novel, 1941, is also the year of Eudora Welty's debut with *A Curtain of Green*. Glasgow's literary career, therefore, spans the time from Thomas Nelson Page to Eudora Welty.

Because her literary career was a long one and her publications were substantial, the story told by the reviews collected in this volume is lengthy. Her two earliest novels showed promise but were heavily influenced by her reading in science and philosophy. She improved in her art when she abandoned

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New York City as a setting and came home to Virginia for her third novel, but she did not actually end her apprenticeship until her tenth novel, *Virginia*, in which she not only used Virginian materials but also made a woman the protagonist for the first time.

Glasgow's best work was published between 1925 and 1932, when she was in her fifties, and she experienced seven miraculous years artistically with the publication of *Barren Ground*, *The Romantic Comedians*, *They Stooped to Folly*, and *The Sheltered Life*, her masterpiece. If the shape of her writing career was plotted, the line would move upward steadily with a few valleys and a few peaks for almost three decades and then ascend dramatically for seven years, dropping slightly for the last two novels, *Vein of Iron* and *In This Our Life*. With the publication of her last book, *A Certain Measure*, in 1943, her career reached its apex. It is, in fact, a most interesting career, with growth and change and recognition present for forty-five years but with the best work and the great honors coming to the mature artist. From 1925 onward, Glasgow was consistently reviewed by important critics in the major journals and newspapers. Many honors were bestowed on her late in her career.

Perhaps the lateness of all those honors contributed strongly to Glasgow's feeling that she was neglected, misunderstood, and ignored during most of her career. Certainly, the record of reviews of her books shows that she was from the very beginning taken seriously by critics and that her books were widely recognized by reviewers. She felt, however, that her work was not appropriately appreciated while that of other writers, less able than she, was acknowledged and honored more.<sup>1</sup>

Glasgow was extremely sensitive to criticism, and she believed ferociously in her work. As a result of these feelings, she took an active interest late in her career in the critical reception of her books. She has, in fact, been accused of cultivating reviewers of importance and of mercilessly manipulating the reviews of her work. James Branch Cabell reports in *As I Remember It* that she invited to her beautiful home in Richmond anyone who was in a position to review books, and seductively played Circe, turning the critic into her press agent (228–30). Too, her volume of letters reveals her cultivating and sometimes instructing such people as J. Donald Adams, Henry Seidel Canby, Allen Tate, Carl Van Vechten, Howard Mumford Jones, Stark Young, and Irita Van Doren. Frequently she befriended wives of powerful men—Bessie Zaban Jones, Sara Haardt (wife of H. L. Mencken), Signe Toksvig (wife of Francis Hackett). In *The Woman Within* she lists her New York friends, and they are all people involved in the reviewing of books—Van Doren, Young, Adams, the Canbys, the Van Wyck Brookses, the Joneses, the Herschel Brickells, the Van Vechtens, and the Menckens.<sup>2</sup> Certainly all of this evidence raises the question of how much influence Glasgow exerted on her late critical reception.

In addition to providing much material for the study of Glasgow's early critical response, the reviews in this book tell stories about the changing

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fashions in reviewing, the reception of a woman author in the first half of the twentieth century, the comparative responses from journals with various political leanings. And these reviews furnish part of the material for a comparative study of the critical response to three important women authors publishing during these years—Glasgow, Edith Wharton, and Willa Cather. Although a number of stories are embedded in these texts, this introduction will focus on Ellen Glasgow's early critical response.

**“Not a Trace of the Feminine Hand”:  
 Ellen Glasgow's Auspicious Literary Debut**

In the context of Glasgow's view that she was not treated well by critics during the first thirty-five years of her career, it is interesting to go back and look at the critical reception of her first six books. What we find is that from the very beginning she was reviewed seriously and thoughtfully in major newspapers and literary journals. Many critics read her work carefully and offered criticism that might have been helpful to the young writer. On the other hand, many of them encouraged Glasgow in her own attempt—conscious or unconscious—to write like a man, praising her “masculine force and vigour” (*Bookman*, May 1897) from the first. In a 1900 review of *The Voice of the People*, Issac F. Marcossion succinctly states the view expressed by other critics of each of her novels when he observes that her work shows “not a trace of the feminine hand.”

Glasgow's first novel, *The Descendant*, was published anonymously in March 1897, one month before her twenty-fourth birthday. It tells the story of Michael Akershem, an illegitimate child from the white underclass in Virginia, who becomes an advocate of social reform and moves to New York City, where he eventually edits a socialist publication, *The Iconoclast*. Michael has a love affair with Rachel Gavin, a painter, but eventually falls in love with a more conventional woman. He murders an associate from *The Iconoclast*, serves eight years in prison, and dies in Rachel's arms.

The publication of this book was an auspicious debut for the young author. Laurence Hutton, in an April review in *Harper's Magazine*, calls the novel a “very strong, and a very unusual, piece of fiction.” He describes the story as “exciting,” “rarely dull,” “well considered,” and “well handled.” “And the reading world,” he explains, “will wonder who the unknown author can be.”

Some readers thought the author might be Harold Frederic, author of *The Damnation of Theron Ware*, and at least two of the earliest reviewers refer to the author as “he.” One, the reviewer for the Boston *Evening Transcript*, begins by saying that the novel “is unquestionably a strong book, but the strength is that of bitter aloes.” After praising the “color and passion,” “the acute character study and careful description,” and the sparkling epigrams, the reviewer criticizes the book's “dominant note” which is “cynically bitter”:



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“Not that the author has made it so intentionally” the writer explains; “one rather obtains the impression that he would willingly have had it otherwise, but that he is overpowered by his motive.” For this reviewer the book is “sad reading.”

Many reviewers describe the book in terms that are clearly masculine. The *Chap-Book* says it is “forcefully written”; the *New York Times Saturday Review of Books and Art* observes its “uncommon vigor”; *Bookman* notes its “masculine force and vigour in characterisation”; *Literary World* says it is “virile and vigorous”; the *Critic* calls it a “strong book” and compares reading it to “being out in a tornado.”

When the news breaks that this powerful and somber book has been written by a young Richmond woman—always referred to as a “girl” in the reviews—Clarence Wellford in *Harper’s Bazar* writes about Glasgow’s “keen brown eyes and chestnut hair” as well as her dainty hands and feet. He compares her to George Eliot, Olive Schreiner, and Emily Brontë. The tone of many of the reviews changes as reviewers focus on their curiosity at a young Richmond woman’s writing this gloomy and philosophical book.

The most important of the reviews is the one by Hamlin Garland published in *Bookbuyer* in August 1897. Garland praises the book extravagantly and—echoing Emerson’s words about Whitman—observes, “It is evident that in Ellen Glasgow American fiction has acquired a novelist worthy the most cordial greeting.”<sup>3</sup>

Glasgow’s second novel, *Phases of an Inferior Planet*, published in the fall of 1898, a year and a half after *The Descendant*, did not elicit the kind of review written by Garland about the first one. *Phases* tells the story of Mariana Musin, a modestly talented singer from the South, who comes to New York and marries an agnostic biologist, Anthony Algarcife. Mariana leaves Anthony for a singing tour, they are divorced, and eventually he becomes a famous Episcopal priest, although privately he is an unbeliever. Mariana and Michael are reconciled at the end, before she dies. Anthony is saved from suicide by a summons to speak to striking workers.

There is much negative criticism of *Phases*. The *Dial* remarks on the “strange title,” the meaning of which is unclear; the *Brooklyn Daily Eagle* refers to the title as “a somewhat infelicitous caption. . . . too bookish . . . scarcely definitive.” The darkness of the book is observed by many reviewers: John Kendrick Bangs, in *Harper’s*, advises that pessimistic readers “will enjoy the somewhat despondent note which it has been given to Miss Glasgow’s lyre to sound forth.” The Boston *Independent* complains that the plot has “no light or joy” and sees the novel as “sodden with hopelessness all the way through.”

Critics complain of more than the bleakness of the philosophy. One observes that the book is “about three times too long” (*Athenæum*); another, that its plot is “melodramatic” (*Literary World*); Droch, in *Life*, says it needs an infusion of humor; the *Brooklyn Daily Eagle* suggests the novel shows

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more knowledge of books than of human nature; and the *Nation* sums up the book's effect by claiming that it is "shallow science, shallow art, and shallow feeling."

The reviews, of course, are not wholly negative. A number of critics remark that the novel shows strength, power, and promise. The *Richmond Times* review, a reprint of the one in the *Boston Evening Transcript*, is a mixed response that compares the work to Thomas Hardy's. And in what is surely meant to be a compliment and was doubtless taken as one by the young writer, the reviewer quotes "one of our best masters of prose" as saying of Miss Glasgow that here is "one woman writing like a man in a nation of men writing like a woman."

With her third novel, *The Voice of the People*, published in April 1900, approximately a year and a half after *Phases*, Glasgow abandons New York City as a setting and comes home to Virginia. Set in Kingsborough, a town based on Williamsburg, the novel features a protagonist from the white underclass. Nicholas Burr rises to become governor of Virginia and is killed in the denouement as he tries to prevent the lynching of a black man. For the first time Glasgow has placed her novel in a setting she knows well.

Reviewers agree that with this novel Glasgow has regained her position as a promising novelist after the critical debacle that followed *Phases*. On April 21 the reviewer for the *New York Times Saturday Review of Books and Art* writes that *The Descendant* had "proclaimed the advent of a new and vivid pen," but *Phases* had proved a "disappointment," and "the reader greatly feared that the author's genius was about to flash in the pan." This reviewer finds the new novel to be a story of "compelling interest," "sometimes sparkling and sometimes sombre," "irradiated with humor." The review closes by calling the work a "genuine contribution to both literature and life."

There are negative comments among the mostly positive reviews. A number of reviewers find the book too long, among them those for the *Spectator* and *Academy*. The reviewer for the British journal *Academy* churlishly berates Glasgow for the length of the novel and for her "triviality of observation." "Miss Glasgow's faculty of observation," the reviewer continues,

needs discipline. It is too busy, too fussy, and a great deal too fanciful—fanciful where it should be imaginative. She often does not observe the right *kind* of thing. She trifles, and gives rein to mere fancy. And gradually she passes into a condition, a mood, which, without conscious intent, twists and contorts life into something untruthfully pretty—something emasculate and feebly emotional.

All this sounds as if the reviewer actually wants to say that Glasgow is writing like—a woman.

For her fourth book, *The Battle-Ground* (1902), Glasgow chose to write a

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historical romance, her first work in this popular genre. The book tells the story of two aristocratic Virginia families, the Lightfoots and the Amblers, including the love story of Dan Montjoy, grandson of Major Lightfoot and Betty Ambler, daughter of Governor Ambler. The spirited Betty Ambler is perhaps the most appealing of all of Glasgow's heroines. The tale begins years before the Civil War, at the well-ordered plantations Uplands and Chericoke, and ends with the broken and exhausted Dan, after the war, united with his gallant and indomitable wife, Betty.

The reviews are generally positive. *Athenæum* calls Glasgow's account "reminiscent of the late Stephen Crane's vividly impressionistic work" in *The Red Badge of Courage*. Hamilton Mabie, in *Outlook*, says, "She writes simply and truly," terms her characters "human and well rounded out," her humor "natural and unforced." William Payne, in the *Dial*, raves that this is "one of the best novels of the South during the period which precedes and includes the Civil War that has ever been written," and he says that "the war itself is excellently done."

The Louisville *Courier-Journal* calls the 29-year-old Glasgow "one of the foremost women writers of her country." And reviewers continue to praise her masculine abilities. The *Spectator* observes, "The picture of the war drawn by the author would be remarkable in any case, and is especially so as coming from a woman's pen." *Book News* comments on the "virility and mastery of stroke in Miss Glasgow's novels which make one almost forget that their author is a woman, so masculine do her works appear at times."

*The Battle-Ground* is well received, and although it is written in a popular genre, reviewers take the work seriously. *Current Literature*, for example, calls it "a historical novel in which character takes the place of claptrap melodrama" and says the story "shall appeal to the intellect and to the emotions, rather than merely to the nerves." Glasgow placed this novel first in her social history of Virginia because it told a story of the years 1850–65. She explains in *A Certain Measure* that in *The Battle-Ground* she "tried to portray the last stand in Virginia of the aristocratic tradition."<sup>4</sup> "For Virginia, in that disastrous illusion," she observes, "the Confederacy was the expiring gesture of chivalry" (25).

In 1902, Glasgow publishes not only her Civil War novel but also her only volume of poetry, *The Freeman and Other Poems*. The Book is not widely reviewed and does not sell well. The Boston *Evening Transcript* points out that "Miss Glasgow's thoughts . . . dwell frequently and strongly upon ethical problems," and her verse "is both genuine poetry and sterling truth." The *New York Times Saturday Review of Books and Art* notices "in these poems . . . their virile, and militant, though somewhat sombre strain." The *World's Work* observes that the poems "present some of the darker aspects of life . . . with daring and vigor." In a brief but scathing review, the *Nation* charges that "Byronic fever" is prevalent in the poems and observes that Glasgow's novels

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show “so much more maturity of judgment as to make it a pity that her fifty pages of verse, full of flashes of power, should be almost wholly painful, even to ghastliness.” Perhaps such a review discouraged Glasgow; in any case, she would publish no more volumes of poetry. *The Freeman* serves as little more than a footnote to her career.

Her next novel, however, *The Deliverance*, published in 1904, is well received and sells well, earning second place on the year’s list of best-sellers.<sup>5</sup> Set in the tobacco country of Virginia in the years 1878–90, again the plot involves two families, the Fletchers and the Blakes. The Blakes, having lost their plantation and most of their land to their former overseer Fletcher, now live in a small house. The Blake matriarch is blind, and her children have conspired—at great personal cost—to keep from her the news of the fall of the Confederacy. Nor does she know that the family no longer has an estate. The plot tells a story of revenge, with Christopher Blake seeking to corrupt Fletcher’s grandson. It ends happily, however, with the reconciliation of the two families in the planned marriage of Christopher and Maria, Fletcher’s granddaughter.

The book receives positive reviews; a number of them could be classified as rave reviews. One dissenter is the reviewer for the *Times Literary Supplement*, who calls the book a failure, and a number of reviewers find Mrs. Blake not a credible character. The *New York Times Saturday Review of Books and Art*, in a generally positive review, questions that Mrs. Blake could be deceived for so many years. Eleanor Hoyt, in *Lamp*, proposes that “Mrs. Blake’s deception staggers even willing credulity.” William Payne, in the *Dial*, concurs with that opinion, as does the reviewer for *Everybody’s Magazine*. This criticism would apparently still rankle Glasgow more than three decades later, and in an essay included in *A Certain Measure*, she would persuasively defend the character of Mrs. Blake, explaining that this character has symbolic meaning and represents “Virginia and the entire South, unaware of the changes about them, clinging, with passionate fidelity, to the ceremonial forms of tradition” (27).

A number of reviewers find much to praise in *The Deliverance*. The Louisville *Courier-Journal* terms the novel “mighty in proportion, great in promise, magnificent in the fulfillment.” Archibald Henderson, writing in the *Sewanee Review*, calls the novel her “most distinguished piece of work” and praises Glasgow for combining a “Southern instinct for feeling” with a “Northern passion for ethics.” Henderson’s praise ultimately echoes the view of many critics of Glasgow’s earlier novels: “The book betrays the strong, sure grasp of genuine literary craftsmanship, the keen power of clear and epic visualization, the reach and mastery of a tremendous moral, ethical, and social problem. The masculinity and stark power of its appeal grip and hold you to the end.” Also echoing earlier reviewers who have praised her “masculine” gifts is Edwin Clark Marsh, in *Bookman*, who observes that “she has a style that

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at times is distinctly virile, and a gift of generalisation that is rare in women.”

The story of the critical response to her first six books shows that Glasgow’s work—with the exception of her second novel and her book of poetry—was well received. Her first novel was reviewed seriously and attracted attention when she was revealed as the author only after publication. The second novel was clearly a disappointment to reviewers, but the next three were widely reviewed in journals and in newspapers across the United States, as well as in England. Although her work did receive negative criticism, Glasgow earned much praise for her fiction. Her claims of neglect and misunderstanding are not based on the critical response to her early work.

An obvious leitmotiv in these early responses is the observation that Glasgow produced surprisingly strong and virile fiction. Those reviewers who praised her work by suggesting that she wrote like a male author may have postponed Glasgow’s achievement of her own voice in fiction, which enabled her to write her best novels—each of which shows more than a trace of the feminine hand.

### “Trespassing upon an Alien Field”: Three Poorly Received Novels, 1906–1909

With her first five novels, Ellen Glasgow built a solid reputation, but beginning in 1906 with *The Wheel of Life*, she published three novels that did not add to the luster of her critical reputation. Some critics believe that the end of her most meaningful love affair, in 1906, led to heartbreak and depression that affected her work. She tells in *The Woman Within* about this romance with a married man who, according to Glasgow, died in 1906.<sup>6</sup>

Whatever the reasons may have been for a drop in quality of her fiction, it is clear from the reviews that her work between 1906 and 1909 was not well received. In a negative evaluation of *The Wheel of Life*, the reviewer for *Literary Digest* criticizes Glasgow for an “imperfect assimilation” of the New York atmosphere that is the setting of the novel. He goes on to explain that the novel is not up to her usual standard and to suggest that “this seems largely due to her trespassing upon an alien field.” William Payne, in the *Dial*, makes a similar observation when he remarks that Glasgow should not have deserted her “native heath.” In choosing New York City as the setting of her sixth novel, Glasgow repeats the choice she had made with her first two novels. She would set no more novels outside her native Virginia except for *Life and Gabriella* in 1916 and a part of *Barren Ground* in 1925. While writing *Life and Gabriella*, she would actually be living in New York City, and she would do her usual research on locale and have a better knowledge of the place than she had when she wrote *The Wheel of Life*.

*Wheel* is a novel of manners and includes a large number of characters, six of whom play important roles. Some are sophisticated New Yorkers, happiness hunters; others are transplanted Southerners. The novel features psycho-

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logical approaches to characterization, and it also carries a heavy weight of philosophy.

*The House of Mirth*, by Edith Wharton, had been published several months before *Wheel*, and comparison of the two works is undertaken in many reviews. When the novels are viewed retrospectively, there is no question that Wharton's book is superior, but Glasgow's friend Louise Collier Willcox compares the novels in a glowing appraisal for the *North American Review*. She comments that Glasgow's novel is "the work of a genius" and Wharton's "the output of an artist." Other reviewers are not so balanced in their comparisons.

Although there are other positive reviews, negative ones outnumber them. The reviewer for the Richmond *Times-Dispatch*, for example, predicts that the book is "almost certain to be a disappointment" to Glasgow's admirers, criticizes the number of characters with no single one taking a "commanding place in her scheme," and considers the author "ill-advised in forsaking the Virginian background" so effective in other books. Other reviewers complain that male characters are not believable, that the book lacks humor, that Glasgow's use of psychology is intrusive, that the style is pretentious, that the book is too long, and that it is simply not interesting. In advising Glasgow not to "go further in this direction," *Outlook* seems to be saying what others are implying. Not since *Phases of an Inferior Planet* has Glasgow received such a negative response to a novel.

Two years later, in 1908, Glasgow's seventh novel, *The Ancient Law*, is published with a reception that again includes many negative reviews. The main character is Daniel Ordway, a man who goes to prison and then builds a new life with a new name, only to return to prison for a crime he did not commit. The book is dark, philosophy-laden, and seems to portray the purifying effects of suffering. Set in Virginia, the novel's "alien field" is Glasgow's attempt to tell the story largely from the point of view of Ordway, "a very ordinary person, if he is a person at all," according to H. W. Boynton in *Bookman*. The Boston *Evening Transcript* observes that Ordway is "never for a moment a convincing character," and the *Nation* points out that he is "commented upon rather than presented."

Other "alien fields" for Glasgow in this novel are both sentimentality and melodrama. The *Nation* terms the work "crude melodrama," and William Payne, in the *Dial*, comments on the melodrama at the end of the novel. The British *Saturday Review* claims, "The story is founded on a basis of false sentiment and false psychology and is constructed throughout on sentimental sensational lines."

Some positive views of the novel are expressed. Issac Marcossou, in the *New York Times Saturday Review of Books*, calls it "a novel of dignity and of distinction." Louise Collier Willcox again writes a positive review for the *North American Review*, and Edwin Mims praises the book highly in the

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*South Atlantic Quarterly*: “Glasgow shows that she is a thinker as well as an artist. She has humor and pathos, and rare insight into human nature. She has distinction of style, too.” Most reviewers, however, would have agreed with H. W. Boynton in *Bookman*; he calls the novel “a mediocre affair at best.”

Glasgow’s next novel, *The Romance of a Plain Man*, is published in 1909—again to negative reviews. In this tale of the rise of a poor boy to the presidency of a railroad, Glasgow chooses—for the first and only time—to make the narrator a man, Ben Starr, the “plain man” of the title. The “alien field” in this novel is the male consciousness, which reviewers criticize in scathing terms. Francis Hackett of the Chicago *Evening Post* calls the novel an “amateur romance” and explains that the narrator, a man of affairs, talks “in the pretty idiom of a southern lady.” Edwin Francis Edgett, in the Boston *Evening Transcript*, observes that “Benjamin Starr is created in woman’s image” and that the author “is not able to discern how a man can feel and behave.” The reviewer for the *New York Times Saturday Review of Books* says the “narrating hero . . . is never quite convincing.”

Several reviewers compare *Plain Man* to Mary Johnston’s *Lewis Rand*, published in 1908. The *Nation* points out that there are “startlingly frequent points of similarity,” and the *Independent* says both Glasgow and Johnston “are a trifle too much inclined to intimate the peacock tails of their own excellent pedigrees in fiction.” H. L. Mencken deals Glasgow the unkindest cut of all: “Miss Johnston’s volume is a work of art, while Miss Glasgow’s is not.”

Some reviews were positive, but the response to this novel could not have cheered Ellen Glasgow. The years between 1906 and 1909 mark the low point in the critical reception of her work. Glasgow included none of the three novels published in those years in the eight-volume *Old Dominion Edition* (1929–33) of her works and included only *The Romance of a Plain Man* in the twelve-volume *Virginia Edition* (1938).

### “The Feminist Note”: Glasgow Writes Women, 1911–1923

Two of the five Glasgow novels published between 1911 and 1923 feature protagonists who are women—for the first time. And each of the other three novels includes important and interesting female characters. Her volume of short stories, published in 1923, includes sensitive portrayals of important women characters. A focus on women characters is a significant development in Glasgow’s work because it allows her both to move beyond the need to write like a man and to acknowledge in her art the importance of women. Responding favorably to her 1913 novel *Virginia*, the reviewer for *Athenæum* remarks that “the Feminist note . . . is commendably mellow throughout.”

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The “Feminist note” is sounded in all of the work published during this period.

*The Miller of Old Church*, published in 1911, has a complex plot involving two families: the Gays, enervated aristocrats, and the Revercombs, members of the emerging middle class. Abel Revercomb is the miller of the title, but the novel includes a gallery of women characters: Molly Merryweather, the spirited heroine, who is illegitimate but also part Gay; Angela Gay, a protected and genteel lady; Kesiah Gay, a talented artist condemned by homely looks; and Blossom Revercomb and Judy Hatch, both doomed by love. Glasgow pursues her theme of the rise of the middle class, but she also focuses on the position of women.

Some reviewers note the interesting treatment of women in the novel. The *Nation* points out: “No one has heretofore let in the cold clear light of common sense upon the status of the Southern woman under the old regime.” And the *Independent* notes: “It may be suspected that Ellen Glasgow is a bit heterodox as to both Calvinism and ‘the womanly woman.’”

The book receives positive reviews in the *Richmond Times-Dispatch*, *Bookman*, *New York Times Saturday Review of Books*, *Nation*, *North American Review*, and *Athenæum*; *The Miller of Old Church* is called “a capital piece of work” and “her best book up to the present time.” She is compared to Thomas Hardy, and her “epic method” is praised. Dissenters criticize the plot and the characters, and H. L. Mencken claims he cannot even read the book and quotes other reviewers. Although the critical response is not wholly positive for this novel, it receives a much better reception than the three that preceded it.

*Virginia* (1913) is Glasgow’s tenth novel. Her finest thus far, it is also her first with a woman protagonist. The title of the book suggests the main character, Virginia Pendleton Treadwell, but it also suggests the state, as well as a state of mind. Set in the period 1884–1912, the novel tells the story of a beautiful young woman—the perfect Southern lady—who marries a playwright. She focuses her energies on her children, and she plays the complete martyr in her family life. Her husband eventually finds success on the New York stage, falls in love with an actress, and divorces Virginia, leaving her bereft and alone in her forties.

The critical reception for this novel is mostly positive, the best reception since that for *The Deliverance* in 1904. The *New York Times Book Review* calls *Virginia* Glasgow’s “most mature and significant” book and compares her to Jane Austen. Lewis Parke Chamberlayne, in the *Sewanee Review*, points out that the novel gives “a picture of the ideals of a whole people reflected in one woman’s life.” Chamberlayne terms the work a “noble tragedy” and points out that it is a “most important contribution to the vigorous feminist movement now in progress in the South.” *Book News Monthly* calls it a “remarkable book, alight with life and compelling in its truth.”

Two of the negative responses are registered by Edwin Francis Edgett in



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the Boston *Evening Transcript*, who criticizes the “archaic theme,” and the *Literary Digest*, whose reviewer considers the work an “involved and depressing tale.” Other critics complain that the book is too long and lacks humor. There are a number of negative responses, and the book does not sell well, but it is the work that marks the end of Ellen Glasgow’s long literary apprenticeship.

*Life and Gabriella*, published in 1916, also features a woman protagonist, but this woman is very different from Virginia Pendleton Treadwell. Gabriella Carr is, according to Glasgow, a woman who departs completely from the great Victorian tradition, “the symbol of an advancing economic order.”<sup>7</sup> Gabriella, the daughter of an impoverished widow, takes a job in a department store in Richmond. She falls in love with wealthy George Fowler and marries him, and they move to New York City. George, a failure as a husband, keeps a mistress, and Gabriella divorces him. To support her two children, she works for a dressmaker, and she is so successful that she buys the business from the owner. At the end of the book she plans to marry a man from the West, Ben O’Hara. Set in the years 1894 to 1912, this novel has a protagonist who does daring things for the time, including finding her own successful career. While writing *Life and Gabriella*, Glasgow lives in New York City, and this is the only novel she will actually have written outside of Virginia. Although the work is not as fine a novel as *Virginia*, it sells well, achieving fifth place on the best-seller list.

*Life and Gabriella* receives favorable, if not enthusiastic, reviews. The *New York Times Review of Books* is positive about the novel, calling it “exceedingly well written.” The *New York Tribune* terms Glasgow a feminist writer and says she has produced “another readable and extremely well written novel.” Emilie Blackmore Stapp, in the *Des Moines Capital*, points out that Glasgow “reflects the feminist awakening by the economic success accorded her heroine.” The *Nation* is negative—accusing Glasgow of verbosity and of using “repetitions and reassurances.” Edward E. Hale in the *Dial* is also negative, but H. L. Mencken, in giving this book faint praise, writes for Glasgow a better review than he has thus far. He accuses her of sentimentality but calls her “much above the average woman novelist in America.”

*The Builders*, published in 1919, focuses on the time period of World War I. The novel has three main characters: the Blackburns—David and Angelica—and Caroline Meade, a nurse who comes to work for the Blackburns to care for their invalid daughter. The most interesting character is Angelica, a duplicitous and manipulative woman. David is involved in politics, and the novel is full of his pontificating and theorizing. Caroline is attractive and idealistic. Although she and David care for each other, they eventually renounce their love. The novel serves as a vehicle for Glasgow’s expression of her ideas about the war and about the political situation in the

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United States. It is heavily influenced by her fiancé at the time she was writing the novel, Henry Anderson, a successful Richmond lawyer.<sup>8</sup>

The critical response is surprisingly positive, given the present view of the work as a failure. Reviewers praise the characterization of Angelica: *The New York Herald* says, “the delineation of Angelica Blackburn is the real triumph of *The Builders*”; Jay Hubbell, in the *Dallas News*, calls Angelica “the most interesting character in the novel”; and the *Salt Lake City Herald* finds Angelica “one of the best studies of a woman” Glasgow has written. Other positive reviews appear in the *Boston Evening Transcript*, *Philadelphia Press*, *St. Louis Globe Democrat*, and *Baltimore Sun*. Negative reviews of the book comment on the amount of theorizing and point out that the book is “over solemn” and superficial. The *Knickerbocker Press*, in a fairly positive review, expresses the book’s weakness well, observing that Glasgow is carried away by her concern with the problems in America and that, in her desire to find a solution, “she has sacrificed her story in a good cause.”

Three years later, Glasgow publishes her thirteenth novel, *One Man in His Time* (1922). The “one man” is Gideon Vetch, who rises from life in a circus tent to the governorship of Virginia, only to be killed accidentally at the scene of a strike. Because he is a progressive politician, this novel is reminiscent of *The Builders*; it is also reminiscent of the earlier *Voice of the People*. As do the other novels written in this period, this one has interesting women characters—Patty Vetch, the governor’s daughter, and Corinna Page, one of Glasgow’s most attractive heroines.

*One Man in His Time* receives better reviews than might be expected for a novel Glasgow would choose not to include in either of her collected editions or to mention in *The Woman Within*, her autobiography, or in *A Certain Measure*. The *Literary Digest*, *Louisville Courier-Journal*, and *Philadelphia Evening Ledger* award the novel good reviews. British journals are more positive than American ones, with the *London Morning Post*, *Bookman*, *London Daily News*, and *Yorkshire Post* all praising the book.

*The Shadowy Third and Other Stories*, Glasgow’s only collection of short stories published in her lifetime, comes out in 1923 (published in England under the title *Dare’s Gift and Other Stories*). Of the seven stories in the book, four are ghost stories and three focus on an abstract moral problem. Included is the much anthologized “Jordan’s End,” which features the strong and tragic Judith Jordan, who prefigures Dorinda Oakley in *Barren Ground*.

All of the reviews for this volume are favorable, both those in the United States and those in England. Glasgow’s friend the neurologist Joseph Collins seems prescient when he writes in the *New York Times Book Review*, “She has never done anything that better entitles her to be called artist than ‘Dare’s Gift.’ From consideration of her last volume we readily convince ourselves that she has not yet done her best work.”

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### “Her Best Work”: The Miraculous Years, 1925–1932

In 1925, when she was fifty-two years old, Ellen Glasgow published the first of four novels that constitute her very best work. *Barren Ground* is a long, somber novel that tells the story of Dorinda Oakley from age twenty to age fifty. Glasgow explains in *A Certain Measure* that Dorinda “exists wherever a human being has learned to live without joy, wherever the spirit of fortitude has triumphed over the sense of futility. The book is hers, and all minor themes, episodes, and impressions are blended with the one dominant meaning that character is fate” (154).

*Barren Ground* is told from Dorinda Oakley’s point of view. The young daughter of a poor farm family with worn-out land, Dorinda is jilted by her lover. She flees to New York City, but ultimately returns home to Virginia. Beginning with borrowed money, she directs her energies to the land, redeems her father’s farm, increases her holdings, and becomes a successful farmer and landowner. Glasgow explains in *A Certain Measure* that she had determined that “for once, in Southern fiction, the betrayed woman would become the victor instead of the victim” (160).

The critical reception of *Barren Ground* is overwhelmingly positive. Joseph Collins, in the *New York Sun*, calls it “her masterpiece”; Edwin Francis Edgett, in the *Boston Evening Transcript*, terms it “an epic story”; Cameron Rogers, in *World’s Work*, says it is “her most distinguished” novel; the reviewer for the *Times Literary Supplement* regards it as “an unusually impressive and fine book.” Archibald Henderson, in the *Saturday Review of Literature*, compares Glasgow to Hardy and to Zola and says, “Surely *Barren Ground* is a great novel—great in austerity, great in art, great in humanity.” And Stuart Sherman, writing in *New York Herald Tribune Books*, gives her perhaps the finest comprehensive review she would ever receive. He explains, “She treats provincial life from a rational point of view; that is, without sentimentality, without prejudice, with sympathy, understanding, passion and poetic insight, yet critically and with a surgical use of satire.”

Glasgow’s fellow writer from Richmond James Branch Cabell reviews *Barren Ground* for the *Nation* and mentions for the first time in print that her work portrays “all social and economic Virginia since the War Between the States.” Glasgow may have later adopted this idea and claimed she had this plan all along. Critics have debated which of the two writers actually first formulated the idea.<sup>10</sup>

H. I. Brock writes a savagely negative review for the *New York Times Book Review*. The *New Yorker*, *Time*, and *Smart Set* also print negative reviews. The reviewer for the *New Yorker* claims to be “bored to misery” by the book, and H. L. Mencken, giving his usually negative response to Glasgow, charges

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in *Smart Set* that the novel “is boldly imagined and competently planned. But it is not moving.” Negative reviews, however, constitute a small minority in the reception of this book.

Glasgow considered *Barren Ground* her favorite book, and some critics agree that it is her best, although others prefer *The Sheltered Life*. Although reviewed positively, *Barren Ground* was not a popular book, perhaps because of its somber tone. Glasgow must have felt great disappointment at her lack of recognition at the time. Edith Wharton and Willa Cather had certainly been regarded as Glasgow’s competitors for many years. Wharton had won the Pulitzer Prize in 1921 for *The Age of Innocence*, one of that author’s finest novels and published during a period when Glasgow’s books were among her weakest. Cather had won the Pulitzer in 1923 for a book that is not among her best, *One of Ours*. Then, when *Barren Ground* was published in 1925, Glasgow’s most important book up to that time, the American novel celebrated a banner year. Among the works published almost simultaneously were John Dos Passos’s *Manhattan Transfer*, Theodore Dreiser’s *American Tragedy*, F. Scott Fitzgerald’s *Great Gatsby*, and Sinclair Lewis’s *Arrowsmith*. The Pulitzer was awarded to Lewis. It was not the last time Glasgow would be passed over for this prize.

Beginning in 1926, Glasgow published three novels of manners—*The Romantic Comedians*, *They Stooped to Folly* (1929), and *The Sheltered Life* (1932). *The Romantic Comedians* offers a dramatic change of pace and tone when compared with *Barren Ground*. Whereas the earlier novel is a serious treatment of character, the later one is a witty and ironic comedy that focuses on society. According to Glasgow, *The Romantic Comedians* is a “tragicomedy of a happiness-hunter.”<sup>11</sup> She seems to have followed the advice of James Branch Cabell and others to concentrate on her comic talents. In addition, she follows the advice of book reviewers for almost three decades and produces a novel shorter than her usual ones.

The elderly, widowed Judge Gamaliel Bland Honeywell is the “happiness-hunter,” who seeks pleasure after his wife’s death not by marrying the lovely Amanda Lightfoot, who has loved him for almost four decades, but by marrying the 23-year-old Annabel Upchurch. The spry judge is exhausted after a three-month European honeymoon followed by the attempt to keep up with his young wife, who delights in parties and social events at home in Queenborough. Eventually Annabel falls in love with a young architect and deserts the judge, but his wandering eye still does not find Amanda. It lights, instead, on an attractive nurse in his hospital room. This comic novel was written easily and quickly in one year; Glasgow explains in *A Certain Measure* that Judge Honeywell’s “biography bubbled over with an effortless joy” (211).

Mostly positive reviews greet *The Romantic Comedians*. Gerald W. Johnson, in the Baltimore *Evening Sun*, calls it “almost a novelists’ novel” and terms it “high comedy, the sort that walks delicately upon the verge of tears.” Ellen

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Duvall, in the *Atlantic Monthly*, says the novel appeals to the intellect, not the heart, and compares the work to George Meredith's. A number of reviewers comment on Glasgow's wit. Among them are Christopher Morley, in the *Saturday Review of Literature*, who calls the novel a "really witty book"; Mary Ross, in the *Nation*, who terms it a "wise and witty book"; and Carl Van Vechten, in the New York *Herald Tribune*, who observes that the novel is "witty, wise, and delicious." Harry Esty Dounce, in the *New Yorker*, confesses that although he called *Barren Ground* "tiresome," he finds this novel "worth dozens of . . . *Barren Ground*."

*Time* pronounces Glasgow "too merciless to make her Judge bearable" and considers the book overwritten. Frederick P. Mayer, writing in the *Virginia Quarterly Review*, admits the book has "flashes of genius," but calls the plot wooden and the characterization stiff. Objections are few, however, and the novel not only receives excellent reviews but is a Book-of-the-Month Club selection and sells very well.

Glasgow's next novel of manners, *They Stooped to Folly*, is published in 1929. Glasgow would later explain that this story was inspired by "the almost forgotten myth of the 'ruined' woman," but in writing the novel, she widened her scope, and the novel changed from her originally planned "satire" to a "serious study, with ironic overtones . . . of contemporary society."<sup>12</sup>

The novel features three women of different generations, each of whom has "stooped to folly." Aunt Agatha, a flower of the Victorian age, suffers a lifetime sentence for a youthful indiscretion; she is banished to the third-story back bedroom, and she finds solace in banana sundæes and romantic movies. Mrs. Dalrymple, a product of the gay nineties, is a fallen woman who has had two husbands and countless lovers. Milly Burden, who has a love affair during World War I, learns that "being ruined is a state of mind."<sup>13</sup> Many more characters—both men and women—are satirized in this comic tale, which takes place in the short time of six months in Queenborough.

*They Stooped to Folly* receives many favorable reviews, but some critics find Glasgow's wit too harsh and her dislike of her characters reprehensible. John Hervey, in the *Saturday Review of Literature*, excoriates Glasgow: "With a pen like that of Suetonius, pitilessly barbed, each [character] in turn is flayed alive and placed quivering before us." He claims Glasgow has "not betrayed a spark of genuine sympathy for a single one" of the protagonists. Even a reviewer who likes the book, Percy Hutchison of the *New York Times Book Review*, comments: "Her caustic burns just a bit too deep, her rapier comes too near the slice of a saber; for it has, besides the sharp point, the cutting edge which that weapon should not possess."

Most reviewers, however, are enthusiastic about the book. In the Baltimore *Evening Sun*, Gerald W. Johnson offers high praise: "Ellen Glasgow in her latest novel has adopted the practice of Anatole France. She is wrapping dynamite in curl-papers. *They Stooped to Folly* is witty, amusing, light as

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thistledown in appearance, but under the surface it is as grim and ruthless as a prohibition agent raiding the Y.M.C.A.” Amy Loveman, in the *Saturday Review of Literature*, calls Glasgow “perhaps the leading woman novelist of America” and adds that no male novelist “surpasses her in the beautiful precision of a style which conceals its artistry under its art.” In *New York Herald Tribune Books*, Isabel Paterson suggests that without Glasgow “it is easily credible that [the Southern Literary Renaissance] would not have occurred in her time.”

*The Sheltered Life*, Glasgow’s third novel of manners, and perhaps her finest novel, is published in 1932. Set in Queenborough in the years 1910–17, before World War I, this story presents a darker view of society than is depicted in the two novels that preceded it. Glasgow again demonstrates her gifted use of irony and wit, but *The Sheltered Life* is ultimately a tragedy as well as a dark comedy.

Part I of the novel is primarily seen from the point of view of 9-year-old Jenny Blair Archbald, a bright and adventurous young girl. Part II takes place seven years later and is wholly in the consciousness of 84-year-old General David Archbald. The action of Part III is viewed through the eyes of several figures. At the center of the novel are the Archbalds’ neighbors the Birdsongs: Eva, a fabled beauty who has shaped her life to conform to the myth of the ideal woman, is struggling to maintain appearances in a troubled marriage to George, a weak but charming philanderer. The action moves inevitably to the tragic outcome when Eva finally expresses her repressed rage and shoots her husband. Jenny Blair, who has contributed to this drama, is immediately consoled by her grandfather, and the tragic act is called an accident to shelter her from the truth.

Glasgow’s subtle description of George’s murder at the denouement of the novel is misunderstood by some readers. The reviewer for the *Denver Post*, for example, thinks George Birdsong has committed suicide. Glasgow would explain later, in a letter to Van Wyck Brooks, that she added three words—“She killed him”—to subsequent editions in order to make it clear that Eva shot George.<sup>14</sup>

Among all the positive reviews of *The Sheltered Life*, one negative one stands out. Clifton Fadiman, casting a decidedly minority vote, attacks the novel in the *New Republic*: “There is nothing here . . . which retains freshness or vitality for us today.” Stark Young writes a second, wholly laudatory, review for the *New Republic*, plainly designed to counter Fadiman’s views. In a letter to Allen Tate, Glasgow explains that Fadiman, whom she calls a communist, wrote the only “disagreeable” review of the book and that Young’s review “expressed perfectly what I had had in mind. I had asked him to do it from that angle.”<sup>15</sup>

This tale seems to confirm the idea that Glasgow mercilessly manipulated reviews of her novels. In this case, however, she had another justification for