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THE THEORY OF FICTION IN ENGLAND,

1860-1900

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ABSTRACT.

The novel-criticism of Henry James has been allowed to overshadow the achievement of his English contemporaries, whose essays, letters, and periodical-articles show a highly articulate concern with many of the most fundamental problems of novel-writing. This study examines the whole body of critical opinion over the years 1860-1900, both in its detailed expression and in its general movements.

The status of the novel as a genre is hotly debated during the first fifteen years or so from a predominantly moral view-point, and critics show themselves urgently concerned with its vast dominance over the literary scene and its influence on the behaviour of society. The old Evangelical suspicions remain, and those who defend fiction are usually obliged to do so in a utilitarian way, emphasing its provision of noble exempla and strengthening maxims, and its effect on the imagination and the sympathies, which are the key to a virtuous life. After 1880, the moral respectability of novel-reading is fairly assured, in spite of continuing traces of doubt, and argument over the novel's general position is now concentrated on its claims to offer more than mere relaxation, many holding, to the end of the century, that this is the form's main function, but a growing number (especially among the novelists themselves) stressing, on the contrary, its "seriousness", its philosophic scope, and the imaginative heights to which it can attain. At the same time, the aesthetic status of the novel is slowly changing by the attempts of critics to define it vis-à-vis the other arts, to describe its history and its categories, and to enunciate its own laws, despite the opposition of many who continued to believe in spontaneity and informality. The new devotion by some to craftsmanship and the artistic conscience is the final factor in a status for the novel that remains, even in 1900, controversial and insecure.

The central question of the novel's realism or non-realism is resolved for many critics in terms of a simple correspondence with life, a mirroring of normal experience without exaggeration or convention, and, above all, a portrayal of characters which affect the reader as if alive.

This is widely challenged, however, sometimes only unconsciously, by the modifications necessary in order to give pleasure, the exclusion of dull or sordid subject-matter, the selection of "agreeable" characters, and an artistic treatment that is generally optimistic and consoling. More consciously, Idealism reveals itself in accounts of the novelist's temperament and imagination as a valid distorting medium, his subjectivity, "vision", or sympathy; and, again, in thoroughly non-Realist descriptions of a transcendental realm of Beauty, or Truth, or Essence, which the novel should represent, sometimes by use of the Type or the Symbol. The structural nature of the form is also used to distinguish it from life, especially with reference to the non-mimetic quality of artistic illusion, vraisemblance and compression. All of these traits, Realist and Idealist, are crystallized in the great disputes of the 'eighties and 'nineties caused by the advent of French Naturalism and the supposedly Realist school of Henry James and W.D. Howells; and proponents of Idealism, an unexpectedly numerous band, express their ideas with enthusiasm in their reactions to the revival of the Romance-form in the last two decades.

The novel's representation of reality is also modified in various ways by its embodying various value-judgments, and the necessity for moral didacticism dominates many accounts, especially in the earlier years. The nature of the moral code to be observed by novelists is generally of more interest to critics than the specific manner of its implementation in aesthetic terms, and the values prove to be either vaguely Transcendental - the enshrining of the Moral Ideal - or more Empirical, based on social convention and the Christian tradition. The operation of values and ideas in fiction is usually examined by critics from the standpoint of their effect on the "moral sense" or the emotions of readers, or their origins in the moral nature of the artist himself, and comments on how the novelist's judgments are embodied in his

characterization or in his use of the convention of Poetic Justice take us only a little nearer to the heart of the problem. Didacticism is also widely attacked, on the grounds that it causes unnaturalness and that values should be in some way dramatised and made inherent, but again, few details are given of this proper method, most accounts, like Leslie Stephen's and Saintsbury's, returning to the moral quality of the writer's imagination. Even enemies of traditional morality, like Pater, Swinburne, Henley, Moore, and Havelock Ellis, confine themselves to demanding fewer moral restrictions for the novel, and none denies - or satisfactorily explains - its essential moral or philosophical relevance.

Lastly, novel-critics prove to have much to say on questions of technique, centered on the antinomy between the Novel of Plot and the Novel of Character, the organic unity of a novel, and the various problems of narrative-method. After the early favour given to "Character", a reaction occurs against the excessive character-analysis of the French and American schools, and "plot" becomes a desirable and much-sought quality. The novelty of Henry James' methods is unappreciated, and the conservatism of novel-theory in this respect is most marked. Constructive unity, on the other hand, is a concept that receives much valuable elaboration, and, under various interpretations, is a reviewers' fetish at all times. The question of Point of View is also well-known to the period, the advantages and disadvantages of Omniscience and Autobiography being fully gone into, and, in one remarkable essay by Vernon Lee, is the subject of a full and intelligent discussion.

The age's criticism of fiction, then, despite its limitations, gives an impression of some width and insight, and, with its many unexpected characteristics, must be regarded as an important sector of Victorian literary theory.

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INTRODUCTION.

Appreciation of the literature of any period is aided by a knowledge of the aesthetic ideas current at the time. But the significance of Victorian novel-criticism has been slow to achieve recognition, due partly to the difficulty of access to it and partly to the hypnotic effect exercised by the name of Henry James, whose own criticism is undoubtedly more comprehensive and more profound than that of any one other contemporary critic and the erection of whose particular views into dogma has caused much of the modern depreciation of others. W. K. Wimsatt and Cleanth Brooks, for example, in their Literary Criticism: a Short History, accept the existence of novel-criticism only from James, Ford, and Conrad onwards,[1] and Bradford Booth writes in 1958:

> "The aesthetics of the novel, while certainly not completely lost upon such writers as Dickens, George Eliot, and Meredith, had to wait for organization and coherent expression until Henry James bent his fine critical intelligence to the task... A review of modern criticism of the novel properly and, indeed, inevitably begins with James."[2]

The many studies of literary reputations in England, such as C. R. Decker's The Victorian Conscience (1952), accounts of Turgenev and Dostoevsky by R. A. Gettmann and Helen Muchnic,[3] and, most notably, G. H. Ford's Dickens and his Readers (1955), provide some illumination, but give in the first place a history of taste rather than of theory. Richard Stang's recent The Theory of the Novel in England, 1850-1870 is the only study to aim specifically at collecting and evaluating

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1. New York, 1957, pp. 681-2.
2. "The Novel", Contemporary Literary Scholarship, ed. Lewis Leary, New York, 1958, p.259.
3. R. A. Gettmann, Turgenev in England and America (Illinois Studies in Lang. and Lit., xxvii, no. 2), Urbana, 1941; H. Muchnic, Dostoevsky's English Reputation (Smith College Studies in Mod. Langs., xx), Northampton, Mass., 1939.

statements on the novel in general.[1] The object of this present enquiry is to trace the developments in novel-theory over the wider, and in many ways more interesting period of 1860 to 1900, which begins during the last stages of mid-Victorianism, with Dickens, Thackeray, and Mrs. Gaskell still alive, which then sees the dramatic arrival of James and Howells, the growth of Naturalism and psychological analysis, the attack on Grundyism, the rise of the Romance, and the new Flaubertian devotion to craftsmanship, and which ends with the new stars of Conrad, Wells, and Bennett on the horizon, and a promise of the further controversies to come. This period has always been recognized as witnessing the break-down of Victorianism, in the literary as in other spheres, and the criticism of fiction will be found to reflect both the exploratiVeness and the conservatism that a time of transition brings.

Our exact dates, inevitably, have been imposed arbitrarily, although a few examples from outside their limits are allowed to enter. Even more arbitrary is the decision to relegate Henry James, for once, to the background - not with any seditious intent, but out of a recognition that his criticism has already been more than adequately documented.

The material is drawn largely from periodicals, and also from volume-criticism - though most of the latter appears first in article-form, and has been noted there. A survey of contemporary letters, diaries, and memoirs has produced little of relevance to novel-theory, though, of course, much for a history of individual reputations. When the intelligentsia of the day had an idea to air and develop, it was to the great sounding-board of the Victorian periodical that they turned.

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1. For further examples of modern disparagement of Victorian criticism see his Introduction, op. cit., London, 1959, pp. ix-x.

Our treatment, lastly, has been thematic rather than chronological, and also makes no attempt at a comprehensive account of any individual critic. Certain figures at times receive some personal attention, where one theme is particularly well illustrated throughout their writings, and the constant appearance of some names suggests candidates who might deserve a fuller assessment elsewhere. But it is the general movement of opinion which is the primary concern throughout. This topical arrangement, it must be stressed, unavoidably conceals the continuous interdependence of the various aspects of criticism. A whole age's theory of fiction is an idea-complex rather than a progressive series, and one in which sheer variety and contradiction play a meaningful part. Yet it is hoped that from this study will emerge an impression not only of the abundance and scope of Victorian criticism of the novel, but of certain distinct traits, developing through time, which determine its character and distinguish it from a mere Babel of opinion.

Chapter One.

THE STATUS OF FICTION

Our conception of the status of the novel in late-Victorian England will be affected by the material presented in every chapter of this study. The actual prescriptions by critics concerning realism, morality, and formal technique in the writing of a novel can all imply varying valuations of its place in society and the seriousness with which it ought to be regarded. Our particular concern in this chapter is to arrive at a picture of the changing image presented by the genre itself over the forty years, as an important background against which to view the subsequent details of critical theory.

The great predominance of the novel at the time, in terms of popularity and numbers, attracted much comment, ranging from Cassandra-like laments to mild and intelligent caveats, with, at first, few expressions of enthusiasm. Even the most hostile of critics admitted the unassailability of its position, and throughout the period the novel is repeatedly described as the typical art of the age, like the drama to the Elizabethans, and as embodying the spirit of Science and Realism that, for good or ill, is the prevailing tendency of thought. A few were hopeful that the tide would turn - the Spectator, in 1869, believed that most types of fiction would eventually be superseded by the newspaper, and that such a displacement would leave room for new and healthier growths in literature.[1] But whether they regretted or approved of the growing habit of novel-reading, and even if they expected the phenomenon to be short-lived, the critics of our period were obliged to consider the novel with a new urgency,

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1. "The Empire of Novels", xlii (1869), 43-4. [Attributed to R. H. Hutton by Richard Stang, op. cit., p. 234]

and to judge its moral function as a social activity, its claims to intellectual and imaginative profundity, and those principles of form which might determine its autonomy and its eminence as an artistic structure.

1. Moral Utility.

The influence of fiction on morals and behaviour was the occasion of a full-scale controversy between 1860 and 1880, in which the estimates of the novelist's calling ranged from outright condemnation to the highest praise. Nearly all are agreed on one thing, that his influence is vast and that it is still *sub judice*. For the *Dublin University Magazine*, in 1867 - "The novel is one of the problems of modern literature, and its effect upon morals is yet in experiment", but it fears that the influence could be so great that actual immorality in literature must be "one of the greatest evils which the intellectual history of a nation can record." [1]

Wilkie Collins, ridiculing this terrifying power attributed to the novel by his contemporaries, gives an amusing picture of suspicions that were to linger in many quarters till the end of the century:

> "If the dull people of our district were told to-morrow that my wife, daughters, and nieces had all eloped in different directions, leaving just one point of the compass open as a runaway outlet for me and the cook, I feel firmly persuaded that not one of them would be inclined to discredit the report. 'This is what comes of novel-reading! ' they would say - and would return, with renewed zest, to their Voyages and Travels, their accouchements in real life, their canting 'national morality', and their blustering 'purity of hearths and homes'." 2

An undeniable status of a kind is thus accorded to the novelist in his supposed capacity as national preserver or destroyer. The *London Quarterly Review*, in 1866, has an almost apocalyptic vision of the whole of society crumbling under the baleful influence of Sensation novels and the "subtle poison" of Reade, Collins, and Mrs. Henry Wood, [3]

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1. "Balzac - His Literary Labours", [1]xx (1867), 529.
2. *My Miscellanies*, 1863, i, 77.
3. "Recent Novels: their Moral and Religious Teaching", xxvii (1866), 100-24.

just as the equally conservative Quarterly was to have twenty-five years later, when it saw Zola dragging the nation towards the Pit.[1]

In at least partial justification of what seems a grotesque exaggeration to us today, it should be borne in mind that the Victorians were more reliant on literature for their ideas of life than the present age - not just women, in their obviously more restricted lives, but all society saw in the writer of the day the priest and prophet who might provide them with a code of values as a guide through the intellectual confusion of the age. The self-professed prophet, from Carlyle down to Tupper, perhaps exceeded the novelist in pragmatic effect, but the extent to which, for example, George Eliot's novels were openly regarded by many as a handbook for life is an indication of the reality of that influence the critics so feared. Typical of this approach, which dominated so much intelligent criticism of the period, is Frederic Myers' obituary article on George Sand, in 1877, which credits such novelists as she with the moral leadership of the whole reading world, and which treats her almost entirely as a Sage and Teacher: ".. it is distinctly as a force, an influence, a promulgation of real or supposed truths, rather than as a repertory of graceful amusement, that these books claim consideration."[2]

Not only is the novelist seen as the potential moulder of the morality of society, but at the same time as its most accurate reflector and exponent. The mirroring of manners, though held by some to ensure the ephemerality of his creations, is used by others to confer on him the additional onus of being the Historian by whose account the future will judge us, the age's "special correspondent for posterity."[3] For example, the Leader, in 1869, regrets that the promise in Fielding that the novelist would take on this importance

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1. E.g. "Realism and Decadence in French Fiction", clxxi (1890), 57-90; and "The French Decadence", clxxiv (1892), 479-504.
2. "George Sand", Nineteenth Century, i (1877), 221-41.
3. Walter Bagehot's phrase for Dickens in his "Charles Dickens," National Rev., vii (1858), 468.

of historian of manners has not been fulfilled, except in Dickens, Thackeray, and George Eliot:

> "And yet were this theory of transmitting the lineaments of his own age to be the ideal of the modern novelist, to the realisation of which he bent all his energies, can it be doubted that the art of novel writing would enjoy a material exaltation?" 1

The result of this further dignity is to make a Recording Angel out of one who has already been named Agent for the redemption or damnation of society.

With such a belief in the novel's influence and central position in the social activity of the age, critics of the 'sixties and 'seventies proceed to describe the nature of its moral utility, some taking a patriotic pride in the national literature, and at the same time justifying it as if some new and controversial public institution:

> ".. in this branch (our country) especially excels - that from her have sprung high-minded and impartial authors of fiction, the brilliancy of whose writing is no less conspicuous than the purity of their moral teaching - that by this instrumentality education has been advanced, social abuse rectified, and virtue generally encouraged." 2

Similarly, George MacDonald's use of the novel to perform a moral and religious ministry to society is "the truest and highest conception of fiction, and gives it its noble place in the priesthood of letters", [3] just as the presentation of the Moral Ideal "often makes the novel perform its highest function as teacher and instructor." [4] And Charles Reade's long struggle to win social recognition for "fiction, the king of the fine arts", is based squarely on its supposed reformation of the evils of society. [5]

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1. "Light Literature", iii (1869), 252.
2. "The Art of Novel Writing", Gentleman's Mag., ix n.s. (1872), 384-93.
3. British Quar. Rev., lv (1872), 265-6.
4. "Miss Braddon. The Illuminated Newgate Calendar", Eclectic Rev., xiv n.s. (1868), 23.
5. "The Rights and the Wrongs of Authors" (1875), Readiana, 1883, pp. 127-8.

Such high estimations of the novel on moral grounds are the more forcibly expressed as their writers belabour those novelists who have betrayed their high calling in ignorance of its great moral duties and potentialities. Macmillan's, for example, describing the moral and intellectual dangers that arise from such books as Harrison Ainsworth's Jack Sheppard, laments that trash of this kind should obscure the fact that novels on the whole "minister to culture", reveal new aspects of life, and pave the way to the greater humanity and unity of society. [1]

In 1870, in the midst of the debate, Tinsley's Magazine stands out against the current tendency of its utilitarian age to insist on some use for fiction other than that of mere amusement, but reveals the conscious weakness of its position by proceeding unabashed to give details of how novel-reading broadens the experience, "keeps awake a good ideal of life", "awakens a little heroism", teaches girls "unselfishness, and kindliness, and courtesy", and provides an education in the world for young curates.[2] And in the following year, the same magazine disparages even Scott for failing to develop fully the moral usefulness that has brought about the respectability of fiction since the time of his own pioneering work. His novels amuse, but "they lack an object worthy of such genius and power... we are tempted to ask, Was there no great living truth to defend?" [3]

Trollope, in his defences of the novel, makes no prefatory apology for his persistent utilitarian approach. Novel-reading for women can be a dangerous opiate and time-waster, he readily concedes, but -

> "If you will take some little trouble in the choice of your novels, the lessons which you will find taught in them are good lessons. Honour and honesty, modesty and self-denial, are as strongly insisted on in our English novels as they are in our English sermons."[4]

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1. "Recent Novel Writing", xiii (1865-6), 202-9. [By Thomas Arnold, Jr. - identified Wellesley Index to Victorian Periodicals]
2. "The Uses of Fiction", vi (1870), 180-5.
3. "The Scott Centenary", ibid., ix (1871-2), 85-6.
4. "Higher Education of Women" (1868), Four Lectures, ed. M.L. Parrish, 1938, pp. 85-6.

In his "On English Prose Fiction as a Rational Amusement" (1870), he is more confident in his vindication. Scott, whose moral teaching "tended to elevate the mind, and left the reader better than it found him", is praised for bringing to an end the era in which the novel was "powerless to teach to man or woman any lessons which could be of real service", and introducing the present age, in whose stories girls find instruction in the morality of love, and "lessons of life are being taught from the first page to the last."[1]

This straightforward, indeed crass, moral justification of the novel in general is a recurrent theme in the Autobiography. He is obsessed with the influence of fiction on its readers, particularly the young, who take it as their vade mecum to life, and while he admits the superior position of poetry, perpetually urges a truer appreciation of the novelist's high calling, based on the fact that his teaching is of the same nature as poetry's and directed to the same ends of honour, love, worship, and humanity.[2]

The case for the prosecution over these years is also to be heard - also it might be suspected that the novel suffered more from its moral utilitarian friends than its Evangelical enemies. Such critics usually proceed from moral disapprobation of certain individual novels to an attack on what they imply to be the inherently corruptive nature of the genre itself, indicating that the theory of fiction is not yet viable enough for the novel to be considered in conceptual terms, apart from the actual productions of inferior exponents.[3] Temple Bar, for example,

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1. Ibid., pp. 94-124. Trollope is so naively enthusiastic in his defence of the moral good name of his profession that he even cites Thackeray's Amelia as an example of virtue being made more attractive than vice, in the person of Becky (ibid., p. 110; and "Novel-Reading", Nineteenth Century, v (1879), 36).
2. E.g. Autobiography, 1883, ii, 25-37. See also "Novel-Reading", Nineteenth Century, v (1879), 24-43; and Thackeray, 1879, pp. 202-4.
3. Hugh Miller is, in 1855, an early example of this rare ability to distinguish between "the Novel" and "most novels to-day": "The novel per se, the novel regarded simply as a literary form, is morally as unexceptionable as any other literary form whatever... We must hold that, on every occasion in which the form is made the vehicle of truth... it should be received with merited favour, - not frowned upon or rejected." (quoted by Richard Stang, op. cit., p. 48)

in 1874, is moved to regret the dominance of the novel as the "manna of the latter half of the nineteenth century" because of its pandering to the lower tastes of mankind, its tendency to foster insularity and narrowness of mind by its domestic subject-matter, and, in a favourite phrase, its relaxation of the moral fibre,[1] while Aunt Anastatia, in Tinsley's Magazine for 1867, warns her niece that the habit of novel-reading will prevent her "ever becoming a rationally useful human being", through its essentially harmful and enervating effects, and its providing her imagination with examples of evil and immodesty.[2] Aunt Anastatia is smiled at by the writer as a little old-fashioned (although, he makes clear, basically correct in her views), but the same warning is expressed in most solemn and unambiguous tones by the Bishop of Peterborough, who in the following year devoted a prize-giving speech to a denunciation of the novel for the effect of its predominantly low moral tone on such readers as his own youthful audience.[3]

Moral denigration like Aunt Anastatia's often expresses itself with particular reference to the effects of reading on the imagination and the sensibilities. The Saturday, in 1875, takes a balanced view, and finds much to praise in the novel's enrichment of the reader's moral nature through his imbibing the author's theory of life, but sees great danger in that indulgence of emotion on which the novel seems particularly to depend. Many of the old prejudices against fiction have gone, but the writer suggests that a kernel of truth remains in the old adage, that "indulgence in sentiment which necessarily leads to no action must be injurious."[4] Ruskin is more forthright in his condemnation, and sees the dangers of the enervating effects of reading novels as outweighing their occasional usefulness when read as "treatises on moral anatomy":

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1. "The Novels of Miss Broughton", xli (1874), 197-200.
2. "Aunt Anastatia on Modern Novels", i (1867-8), 308-16.
3. Reported in the Leader, ii (1868), 262.
4. "Novel-Reading as a Vice", xl (1875), 452-3.

> ".. with respect to that sore temptation of novel reading, it is not the badness of a novel that we should dread, but its over-wrought interest... the best romance becomes dangerous if, by its excitement, it renders the ordinary course of life uninteresting, and increases the morbid thirst for useless acquaintance with scenes in which we shall never be called upon to act."1

However, the positive side of such emotional and imaginative stimulation also receives considerable emphasis, and becomes in turn an instrument in the hands of the novel's defenders. The Saturday Review, for example, ten years before its cautionary article above, sees this indirect influence as the novel's most important, linking man's "dramatic imagination" closely with his moral nature and with the resultant practical concerns of life - one alleged cause of the Indian Mutiny being lack of such imagination by the British.[2] Similarly, Fraser's also refers to fiction's effect on the "dramatizing imagination", which is the soul of sympathy, and calls this "culture of sympathy" the novelist's mission.[3]

George Eliot, as the supreme representative of many of the traits of this first part of our period, explicitly defended her art upon this principle. The "appreciation of the sacredness of the writer's art" which she continually urged on contemporary novelists[4] was always based on her belief that "man or woman who publishes writings inevitably assumes the office of teacher or influencer of the public mind", and cannot avoid forming his readers' "moral taste."[5]

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1. Sesame and Lilies, 1865, p.163. The tone and content of this is a perfect expression of the early Benthamite and religious attitude - e.g., it echoes exactly an attack by the Christian Observer for 1815 quoted in R. D. Altick, The English Common Reader, Chicago, 1957, pp. 110-1. Despite Ruskin's early defence of Scott and Bulwer from their more absurd Puritan detractors in "Essay on Literature - 1836" (Works, Library Edn., 1903-12, i, 357-75), and despite his frequent recommendations of Scott, Richardson, and Miss Edgeworth, and his own reading in such surprising fields as Miss Braddon, Ouida, Gaboriau, Dumas, and Eugène Sue (Works, passim), his basic distrust for novel-reading never altered.
2. "The Uses of Fiction", xxii (1866), 323-4.
3. "Fiction and its Uses", lxxii (1865), 753-5. [By Edward Dowden - Wellesley Index]
4. "Silly Novels by Lady Novelists", Westminster Rev., x n.s. (1856), 460.
5. "Leaves from a Note-Book", Essays, ed. C. L. Lewes, 1884, p. 358

This is done not by overt didacticism, according to her theory, but by a revelation of the elements that bind all men together,[1] and by appealing directly to the perceptions: "If Art does not enlarge men's sympathies, it does nothing morally."[2] And:

> "The greatest benefit we owe to the artist, whether painter, poet, or novelist, is the extension of our sympathies... When Scott takes us into Luckie Mucklebackit's cottage.. more is done towards linking the higher classes with the lower, towards obliterating the vulgarity of exclusiveness, than by hundreds of sermons and philosophical dissertations. Art is the nearest thing to life; it is a mode of amplifying experience and extending our contact with our fellow-men beyond the bounds of our personal lot."3

Discussions of the novel as an art-form centred on the question of its moral utility decline markedly after 1880, and Trollope's preoccupation with this issue in his Autobiography, in 1883, has an unmistakably old-fashioned air. The majority of critics, perhaps, would still have subscribed fundamentally to his words, but it is no longer necessary to conduct the business of novel-criticism from such a defensive position. Articles abound on moral problems in novel-writing still, but are concerned more with how morality is best to be embodied in a novel than with the basic justification of novel-writing or novel-reading as one of the activities of mankind. When a novel is attacked for not observing the moral code, the critic now takes it for granted that it could be written better, instead of automatically deducing the inferiority of the whole genre. In addition, in the later years, the moral respectability of fiction receives indirect but unmistakable testimony in the novelist's rapid rise in the social hierarchy, reflected in every gossip-column and in such new periodicals as Bookman and Literature, as well as in the professionalisation of authorship by such

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1. George Eliot Letters, ed. G.S. Haight, New Haven, 1954-5, iv, 472.
2. Ibid., iii, 111.
3. "The Natural History of German Life", Westminster Rev., x n.s. (1856), 54.

dedicated organizers as Walter Besant.[1]

However, it would be misleading to suggest that the novel had won complete moral respect from all critics by 1880, as the older attitude continued to reveal itself in various forms during the next twenty years. It does so mainly in cases where the writer still feels the necessity of proving the form's moral usefulness, even where this is not the main burden of his article. For example, Besant's The Art of Fiction, in 1884, is mainly an attempt to establish the novel's status on the grounds of its formal laws and technical demands, as we shall see, but he adds to these credentials its influence as a universal teacher of "life and manners, of philosophy and art; even of science and religion", its preaching of a high morality, and its enlivening of the sense of sympathy,[2] while Mrs. Craik, in 1882, and Henry Norman, in 1883, still describe the importance and responsibility of the novelist in terms of his capacity to corrupt the nation's youth and lead our daughters down the primrose path of "forbidden topics", and the future of his great art as one of guidance, mediation, and the saving of souls.[3] Outright denunciation of the novel-form in the old moralistic terms are much less common: one example drawn from Blackwood's in the startlingly late year of 1898 will suffice

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1. His The Pen and the Book (1899) gives a valuable account of the rise to social respectability and commercial security of "the Literary Life", and of the commendable motives which inspired him to play such a notable part: "I have endeavoured to make my readers understand that this kind of work should be regarded as a career worthy of the highest honour and respect: that it should be taken in hand most seriously and earnestly, and with due regard to the responsibilities of the work." (p. vii)
2. Pp. 8-9.
3. Mrs. Craik, Plain Speaking, 1882, pp. 173-7; Henry Norman, "Theories and Practice of Modern Fiction", Fortnightly, xxxiv n.s. (1883), 883-6.

to record a patently outdated, though perennial, cast of mind. The writer, after finding some merit in contemporary fiction, suspects dolefully that all novel-reading at last is -

> "..enervating and debilitating rather than bracing and tonic; that instead of building up character upon the solid foundation of principle, it runs it up on the rickety foundation of emotion; and that, far from fortifying the reader for the trials and vicissitudes of life, it saps such resolution and firmness as he may already possess."1

In 1880, Henry Holbeach expresses his amazement at the novel's rapid rise to respectability during the previous twenty years, and he confines its present detractors to a small band of "the Evangelical."[2] By 1888, Hardy, in his "The Profitable Reading of Fiction" - a title which might be straight from the controversy of the previous decade - is able to concern himself not with defending the very act of such reading, as his predecessors would have done, but with increasing its discrimination instead. What is significant for our purpose is not simply that the "intellectual or moral profit" he promises to novel-readers is more subtly conceived, arrived at by the intuitions and only "from elements essential to the narratives themselves", but above all that he is able to offer it as an extra bounty, and confidently, from a new position of strength.[3]

2. Mere Entertainment.

The status of the novel also provoked controversy around the issue of its function as an entertainer - did it merely provide relaxation, or some more intellectual pabulum? The notion of

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1. "Among the Young Lions", clxiii (1898), 742. [By J. H. Millar - Wellesley Index]
2. "The New Fiction", Contemporary, xxxvii (1880), 247-62.
3. Forum, New York, v (1888), 57-70.

entertainment has formed at least a part of most aesthetic theories in all ages,[1] but by itself is obviously insufficient to sustain any complete theory of an important art-form. Over the earlier years of our period, as might be expected from what we have just seen, critics mostly offset the lightness of entertainment by the ballast of moral profit, in any consideration of the ends of fiction. Besant again, for example, discoursing on "The Value of Fiction" in 1872, begins by describing mental diversion as the chief gain from novel-reading, but goes on to explain that this diversion is, in fact, provided by the picture of an ideal world, happier than ours, from which we learn tolerance and the truth of the old maxim, that the "only way to be happy is by the narrow road."[2] And John Morley, more uncompromisingly, looks to fiction to rise above the level of mere amusement by its becoming "a repertory of vivid texts" which will stimulate morally as well as intellectually.[3]

Other accounts of how the novel entertains are so clearly depreciatory - often unconsciously so - that the makeweight of moral utility such critics offer is hardly enough to retrieve its reputation. Edward Dowden's article which in the end justifies fiction by its cultivation of sympathy and the dramatic imagination is almost obliged to do so after the opening assertion that its first function is to relax and amuse, and that the best conditions for reading a novel are when resting after work, and when under the age of twenty-five.[4] And, in the same way, Trollope's high view of the moral influence of novel-reading cannot raise it in his own mind beyond one of the minor activities of life which, useful and necessary like sports, is, if indulged in too frequently, "utterly destructive of that energy which

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1. E.g., it was the essential starting-point for Henry James: "The only obligation to which in advance we may hold a novel without incurring the accusation of being arbitrary, is that it be interesting." ("The Art of Fiction", Longman's, iv (1884), 507)
2. Belgravia, xvi (1872), 48-51.
3. "George Eliot's Novels", Macmillan's, xiv (1866), 272-3.
4. "Fiction and its Uses", Fraser's, lxxii (1865), 746-51. See above, p. 11.

is required for high purposes", and, in any case, "can hardly strengthen the intelligence."[1] Another example of such unwitting depreciation of the novel as a mere entertainer, without even the compensation of moral utility added, is a not untypical review in the Athenaeum for 1869, which criticises Breaking a Butterfly for imposing too severe a strain on the reader's mind by its introduction of too many characters: "In real life such exertion is, of course, inevitable; but one goes to light literature for real life stripped of all such troubles - for relaxation, and not for mental fatigue."[2]

Temple Bar, in 1870, is more explicit in deducing from a similar estimate of how the novel makes its appeal that the form is inevitably inferior: ".. novels, quâ novels, are not peculiarly an intellectual exercise, either for the reader or the writer of them." In spite of the example of George Eliot and, peculiarly, Lytton's Zanoni, prose fiction, it is held, can never produce a work of high art, since it is inevitably bound to the ephemeral subject-matter of contemporary manners, and the world of the Ideal, the only source of artistic greatness, is shut off from it. Had Lytton and George Eliot lived in a different age, they would have been poets, and the writer concludes by foreseeing, not unhappily, the day when the novel form will die altogether. The "Simple Novels" of ordinary life, in the style of Fielding or Jane Austen, are the best the form can ever produce, and they are dismissed as only "a very honest and honourable sort of thing in themselves."[3] Three years later the Saturday disagrees with Trollope's claim that the novel is the pulpit of the present day, not because it is vicious but because it is mentally enervating:

> ".. it is a natural impression that the habit of endless story-telling and endless story-reading is hardly likely to encourage strenuous thought. If not demoralizing in the sense of actually encouraging vice, it is perhaps

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1. "Higher Education of Women" (1868), Four Lectures, ed. M. L. Parrish, 1938, pp. 85, 69; and "Novel-Reading", Nineteenth Century, v (1879), 26.
2. 1869 (i), 632-3.
3. "Our Novels. The Simple School", xxix (1870), 488-503.

> demoralizing in the sense of softening the intellectual fibre."1

In the 'sixties and 'seventies, a number of critics are obliged to counter this prevailing attitude by specific emphasis not on the morally uplifting but on the intellectual and imaginative elements in novel-writing and novel-reading, as David Masson and J. C. Jeaffreson had done so eloquently ten years before.[2] In the British Quarterly Review for 1867, the genre is praised for its comprehensiveness, its embracing the functions of epic, drama, and lyric - what can the artist not do in the novel? The highest truths - as distinct from mere moral lessons - can be arrived at through fiction, especially when, as here, it is in the hands of George Eliot, whose High Seriousness is compared with Goethe's.[3] And the Leader, in 1869, deplores the depreciative opinion of most "intelligent critics" of the day, claiming that -

> ".. the novel proper deserves to be regarded with as much reverence as any choice work of art, making demands upon the head which the highest works in other departments - the historical, the critical, the biographical - would dismally fail to supply."4

A writer in the Saturday, in 1876, is even more confident, seeing in Romola a sign that the novel has become a challenger to poetry, by its new penetration to the ideal world, and its probing beneath the surface of life "to fathom the profoundest problems of the soul."[5]

The responsibility of the novelist to establish his own intellectual respectability receives testimony in the same magazine's welcome for Meredith's Egoist, in 1879, on the grounds that its sheer difficulty disturbs the customary idea, created by the mass of

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1. "Mr. Trollope on Novels", xxxvi (1873), 656-7.
2. See British Novelists and their Styles, 1859, pp. 292-308; and Novels and Novelists from Elizabeth to Victoria, 1858, ii, 304-7.
3. "George Eliot", xlv (1867), 141-3.
4. iii (1869), 252.
5. "The Limits of Fiction", xlii (1876), 132-3.

soporific fiction, that novel-reading is an unintellectual purging of the passions, usually in a context of "armchairs, pipes, and slippers."[1] And another article on Meredith in the same year, in the British Quarterly Review, gives one of the most enthusiastic of all accounts of the high potentialities of fiction. The novel, according to this writer, has supplanted poetry and the drama as "the interpreter of thought and feeling and passion, the teacher of the lessons of life, the mirror of humanity", and gives us not just a picture of outward manners, but of the very springs of action and philosophy. Without needing to preach, the novel can attain to the highest attributes of poetry:

> "It may be true to its object of giving us the external aspects of human life, of setting forth those moral and social phenomena we have spoken of; may delight us with characters so painted that fiction becomes reality; and may yet attune our minds to the music of the spheres... Writing as one who aims always at discerning and being true to the deeper, underlying truth of things, [the novelist] will show you the meaning of those phenomena; he will reflect not only the thought of the age, but will prepare our minds for the thought of the future."2

Such a Shelleyan manifesto is hardly typical of the attitude to the novel taken by most critics before 1880, but it is very significant that it should have been evoked here by a consideration of Meredith, whose name points to an important development in the general status of the novel which began to show itself most clearly about this date. A stronger demand than ever before for "seriousness" and "thought" springs up, which not only supplants moral utility as the chief counterweight to the "mere entertainment" approach to fiction, but in fact sees in that utility the chief cause of the prudery which has prevented the novel achieving maturity and profundity.

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1. xlviii (1879), 607-8.
2. "The Novels of George Meredith", lxix (1879), 411-3. [By Arabella Shore - Wellesley Index]

For Meredith, the novel, embodying "brainstuff", "philosophy", and "the Idea", and hand-in-hand with the Comic Spirit, is one of the instruments of intellectual civilization, rather than a mere time-killer on the one hand or an inculcator of bourgeois morality on the other.[1] For Hardy, too, the novel's task is one of philosophical comprehensiveness rather than of mere ethics: "The business of the poet and novelist is to show the sorriness underlying the grandest things, and the grandeur underlying the sorriest things."[2] And within a few years, George Moore led the attack not only on the restrictions of Grundyism but on what he saw as the mindless superficiality of the English novel, its neglect of psychological depth, and its concern for the "mere appearance of life."[3] As a professed "soul searcher",[4] Moore is typical of those, in the last two decades of the century, who found in the French and Russian novel the seriousness and intellectual self-respect which they wished to bring to their own art. The "Artistic Conscience" becomes a rallying-cry - George Gissing, in this matter one of Moore's comrades-in-arms, exhorts his fellow-writers, in 1884, to free the novel from the stranglehold of popular demand and the prudery of the Circulating Library:

> "English novels are miserable stuff for a very miserable reason, simply because English novelists fear to do their best lest they should damage their popularity, and consequently their income... Let novelists be true to their artistic conscience, and the public taste will come round."5

The concept of the novel as an entertainer is obviously incompatible with the growing breach between artist and

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1. See below, pp.126-7.
2. F.E. Hardy, Early Life of Thomas Hardy, 1928, p.223.
3. "Since the Elizabethans", Cosmopolis, iv (1896), 42-58. In 1919, Moore was to look back disapprovingly on Swinburne's attitude to Charlotte Brontë in 1877: "Like everybody else in these islands, he looked upon prose narrative as an entertainment rather than an art." (Avowals, 1919, p.72).
4. Preface to Muslin, 1915 edn., p.viii.
5. "The New Censorship of Literature", letter to the Pall Mall Gazette, xl (Dec. 15, 1884), 2.

public, as exemplified in such writers as these. In spite of their occasional compromises with conventional morality and the public distaste for profundity, expressed via the demands of editors and publishers,[1] their attitude on the whole was one of superior contempt and a compensatory turning to the "happy few". Gissing again serves to sum up the position of the conscientious novelist of this date, in his commendation of Meredith, in 1885, for being popular only among "a small circle of highly cultured people";[2] his statement of his own aims: "When I write, I think of my best readers, not of the mob";[3] and finally, in his gloomy contrast, in New Grub Street (1891), of the fate of such a novelist, Edwin Reardon, with the success of Jasper Milvain, compromiser, tradesman, entertainer, who can boast: "I am the literary man of 1882."[4]

Proponents of the novel's possible width of subject-matter and intellectuality of treatment are not to be seen as limited to the small group of writers most esteemed to-day. The concept of fiction which they advocated also received some support from the sudden proliferation after 1880 of the "Novel of Ideas" - for all its very differing levels of literary merit - emanating from such figures as J.H. Shorthouse, Mrs. Humphry Ward, Mark Rutherford, Olive Schreiner, Grant Allen, Sarah Grand, Edna Lyall, even Marie Corelli and Hall Caine. No matter how inferior the actual performance, the intellectual ambitions behind the writing of such novels as Shorthouse's John Inglesant (1881) and Mrs. Ward's

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1. Compare, e.g., Hardy's eloquent plea for artistic freedom in "Candour in English Fiction", New Rev., ii (1890), 15-21, with his amused compliance with Grundyism, as described in M.E. Chase, Thomas Hardy from Serial to Novel, Minneapolis, 1927.
2. Letters, ed. A. and E. Gissing, 1927, pp. 171-2.
3. Ibid., p. 196.
4. World's Classics Edn., 1958, p.5.

Robert Elsmere (1888) gave the novel the status of a widely-heard participator in most of the great religious, social, philosophic, and scientific controversies of the day - and the two in question brought even Mr. Gladstone into the ranks of novel-critics, as champion of the one, and severe opponent of the other.[1] In 1885, Frederic Harrison, who had suggested to George Eliot in 1866 that she write a novel to disseminate the principles of Positivism,[2] looks back on her attempt to make the novel a vehicle for thought as pointing the way to a glorious future for fiction. When the novelist learns to embody "religious and social ideals" artistically, as she never quite succeeded in doing, then the dominant art of our day, still in its infancy, will have attained its great goal.[3] By the following year, Julia Wedgwood also detects a great change in the novel's position, which has now encroached on that of the preacher, the political essayist, and the biographer, and rather exaggerates its revolutionary aspects, forgetful of the earlier Social Purpose novels of Dickens, Kingsley, and Mrs. Gaskell:

> "Perhaps the most marked characteristic of the fiction of our day, as compared with the fiction of our fathers, is its ambitious character. To them it was the diversion of an idle hour, the repository of their lighter fancies; to us it is the vehicle of almost all thought for which a large audience is desired."4

And in 1895, Grant Allen confidently testifies to this "ambitious character" of the new controversialists, declaring his intention of

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1. For a general account of the impact these books made on society, see Amy Cruse, After the Victorians, 1938, pp. 27-36.
2. George Eliot Letters, ed. G.S. Haight, New Haven, 1954-5, iv 286-9.
3. "The Life of George Eliot", Fortnightly, xxxvii n.s. (1885), 322.
4. Contemporary, xlix (1886), 593.

using fiction as "the best medium for the preacher of righteousness who addresses humanity":

> "Not to prove anything, but to suggest ideas, to arouse emotions, is, I take it, the true function of fiction. One wishes to make one's readers *think* about problems they have never considered, *feel* with sentiments they have disliked or hated."1

However, belief in the novel as pure entertainment died hard: in fact, a reaction noticeably occurs in its favour about this time, in protest against the new seriousness of "light literature", and such critics often turn in relief to the fare offered by the new school of Romance (though, as we shall see, the significance of the Romantic revival cannot be summed up merely in terms of the Georgian palates which found refreshment in it). Mrs. Oliphant, in 1884, questions Besant's recent "elevated ideas concerning fiction as an art", and accepts it, rather, as "one of the alleviations of life", which she herself indulges in mostly when in bed with a cold.[2] Mowbray Morris, in *Macmillan's* for 1890, agrees with this, holding that fiction has become over-privileged and over-estimated, in the new high-sounding aims claimed for it by Hardy and others, and that its real purpose is to refresh and amuse.[3] And Edmund Gosse, in 1892, while appreciative of the pleasure he has received from novels, implies that this has been in his weaker moments, attributing the dominance of the form to the fact that it requires little attention from the fatigued mind, and is restful and refreshing.[4] This view is shared by many of the Gentlemen-Scholars of the end of the century, above all by Andrew Lang,

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1. Introduction to *The British Barbarians*, 1895, pp. xiii-xvi.
2. "Three Young Novelists", *Blackwood's*, cxxxvi (1884), 296-7. [Identified *Wellesley Index*]
3. "Candour in English Fiction", lxi (1889-90), 318-9. [Identified *Wellesley Index*]
4. "The Tyranny of the Novel", *National Rev.*, xix (1892), 166-8.

whose lifelong attitude of - "More claymores, less psychology" won him the contempt of serious practitioners,[1] and the milder rebuke of Annie Macdonnell that he regarded "imaginative literature too much as a rest for tired men, a bath to purge them from the world's cares."[2]

This dilettante approach continued to flourish through the latter years of the century, in spite of the growing claims of Realists and Didacticists alike, and moved its opponents to angry scorn. J. M. Barrie, for example, is a somewhat surprising recruit on the side of Hardy's tragic pessimism, in 1889, praising that author as -

> "..one who thinks that the art of storytelling may aim higher than to rest the brain of Darwins or Ruskins when they are tired of thinking. Fiction is not necessarily a substitute for marbles."3

And his protest is echoed by Moore, in 1897, who links the English novel, and its guiding principle of mere diversion, with the Rossinis and Donizettis of the world of music: "My concern is not with those who look upon literature as another form of bicycling."[4]

H. G. Wells, speaking in 1911, sees "the Weary Giant theory of the novel" - that fiction is to provide escape and "cooling refreshment" for the tired professional man - as having ended at the turn of the century (a date, of course, not unconnected with the arrival of H. G. Wells),[5] but it may be doubted whether such optimism was justified then, or whether the devaluation of fiction as a time-killer has ever disappeared. For our purposes, it needs only to be pointed out that Literature, in 1900, describes how hostility to the novel has been exacerbated by the recent statistics which show the English to read more fiction than any nation in Europe, and that the writer goes on to

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1. See, e.g., M. Elwin, Old Gods Falling, 1939, pp. 190-1.
2. "Living Critics. V. Mr. Andrew Lang", Bookman, ix (1895-6), 150.
3. "Thomas Hardy: the Historian of Wessex", Contemporary, lvi (1889), 58.
4. "A Tragic Novel", Cosmopolis, vii (1897), 38, 58.
5. "The Contemporary Novel", An Englishman Looks at the World, 1914, pp. 148-9.

defend the right of "frequenters of the Free Library" to read novels, not on any grounds of the genre's high intellectual or imaginative qualities, but, indeed, the reverse:

> "The majority of them work hard for ten or twelve hours a day; it is absurd to expect them to devote their evenings to what is called 'improving reading'... Is it worse for such an one to amuse himself, after a hard day, with 'Ivanhoe' or 'Vingt Ans Après' than to go to sleep over a volume of Mr. Spencer or Mr. Lecky?"[1]

The simple pleasure of entertainment, then, that is contained in the experience of reading a novel is balanced, in the first part of our period, mainly by the moral profit demanded by a utilitarian age, and, in the second, by the psychological or philosophical profundity upon which a new generation of writers insisted. When valued for its own sake, it remains little more than anti-theory, and a perpetual incubus on the art which its advocates purport to esteem.

3. The Art-Form.

The public status of the novel as a genre is also determined by more strictly aesthetic matters - by critical attitudes to the general nature of its form; by the need felt to define it and describe its own particular categories, history, laws, and theory; and lastly, by the urgency, or lack of urgency, brought to the maintenance of those standards of technique resulting from the theory. Again, we are not concerned here with what the theory or the standards are, in detail, only with the no less significant realization that the novel is a specific form of artistic activity, with its own inner nature and organization, and its own right to insist on conscientious workmanship.

The idea is sometimes expressed - especially in the earlier years - that no matter how the formal elements of the novel are to be defined

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1. "The English Appetite for Fiction", vi (1900), 492-3.

or legislated for, they will always be in some degree un-aesthetic by their very nature. For example, George Barnett Smith, in 1874, bestows high praise on Fielding, but holds that - "The novel will never be able to assume a position of equal importance with the drama, because of its comparative defectiveness of construction",[1] apparently believing, like many other critics of the time, that the novel's apparent looseness of structure was to be judged against the requirements of some entirely different art-form, and not according to its own ends. Others, however, like the author of "Novels and Novelists" in the Saturday Review for 1872, accept the flexibility of the novel as a valid aesthetic merit: "Of all forms of literary art, the novel is the one which lends itself with the greatest facility to the expression of every possible variety of emotion" - though the temptations and dangers that this unavoidably lax canon entails are admitted.[2]

By the 'eighties, there is little or no direct questioning of the novel's eligibility to be an art on the grounds of its formal nature, but some suspicion always remains, due, as before, to a lack of enquiry into the principles of a novel's structure made without reference to the means and ends of other, older, art-forms. Vernon Lee, for example, despite her own noteworthy contribution to this vitally-needed enquiry,[3] at times sees the novel as only a half-art, compared with painting or music, since it does not have the means to convert its usual subject-matter of human, moral concerns into those certain sense-impressions which constitute "the beautiful". Its attractions are mainly non-aesthetic: the logical appeal of statement, the gaining of knowledge of life, emotional excitement, and the satisfaction that comes from expectation and fulfilment. The aesthetic attractions it has to

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1. "Our First Great Novelist", Macmillan's, xxx (1874), 1.
2. xxxiii (1872), 722-3.
3. See below, pp. 226-31.

offer are its occasional ability to convey directly on to our "nerve tracks" the impressions of characters or places beautiful and harmonious in themselves, and also the mysterious charm that comes from complex patterns of words. Only the latter, of course, could be called Form in the novel, and Vernon Lee goes on to claim that it can get by without such aesthetic qualities, appealing to its readers usually in their more practical moments and capacities.[1]

However, in spite of such doubts as Vernon Lee's, there were many critics industriously preparing the ground for a full acceptance of the novel as an independent, documented, and internally regulated art-form. From the outset of our period, attempted definitions abound, often, like the Argosy's, in 1872, still based on the traditional notion of a "prose epic", with the emphasis on truth to nature, regular development of plot, leading up to a climax, and "something of the dramatic element" added.[2] Belgravia asks, in 1867: "What is a Novel? A picture representing, with more or less truth and faithfulness, the manners and customs of society."[3] And the Spectator, in 1871, reviewing a history of the eighteenth-century novel, writes:

> "Defoe, indeed, did not bring into full development what is now called a novel. That description of contemporary manners thrown round and identified with fictitious personages who move about the stage of ordinary life and enact an imagined and not too improbable history, is of later date."4

In these earlier years, there is still a need for the occasional critic to draw a distinction between fiction and history, or biography.

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1. "The Aesthetics of the Novel", Literature, v (1899), 98-100. See also her "A Dialogue on Novels", Contemporary, xlviii (1885), 384-8.
2. "On the History of the Novel in England", xiv (1872), 273.
3. "French Novels", iii (1867), 78.
4. "Novelists as Painters of Morals", xliv (1871), 484-5.

In 1855, Fitzjames Stephen had expressly linked the latter with the novel, like Carlyle before him,[1] thus exemplifying the way in which the non-fictitious progenitors of the novel (the others being the epic and the mediaeval romance) continued to influence the conception of the art-form that had developed out of them, both here, in the question of definition and status, and, more significantly, in the critics' enquiries into the part played by mimesis in its techniques.[2] Especially when discussing a historical, or above all a foreign novel, there is evident difficulty in observing the proper definitions, and a fairly common defence of novel-reading is the strictly irrelevant one, that it purveys facts to the reader. Informativeness of any kind is enough to ensure many pseudo-novels serious critical attention, especially when the facts are about Life in Our Colonies, and the approach often obscures proper consideration of more worthwhile writers.[3] However, definition of the novel is sometimes explicitly made in terms of its independence from these other disciplines, as when the Contemporary denies the name of "novel" to Henry Kingsley's Mademoiselle Mathilde because of its excessive closeness to historical events: "Give us history, or biography, or fiction, but do not attempt to unite the charm of fact with the charm of illusion."[4] And again in the following year T. A. Trollope's Leonora Casaloni is criticised for following the "founded-on-fact" fallacy. Biography and fiction are based on two entirely different kinds of knowledge,

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1. See Richard Stang, op. cit., pp. 150-1.
2. See below, pp. 47-9.
3. E.g., one of the most recurrent themes of articles on Turgenev is seen in R. F. Littledale's words on Virgin Soil: "..it has an interest and value beyond that of narrative and style,...namely, that it is an account ..of the political condition of Russia." (Academy, xiv, 1878, 263) Similarly, Kipling is often valued mainly as a recorder of facts about Anglo-Indian society (e.g., "The Works of Mr. Rudyard Kipling", Edinburgh Rev., clxxxvii, 1898, 206-7).
4. ix (1868), 633-4.

and to become the latter, fact requires to pass through the solvent of the imagination.[1] The distinction is made clear in the Westminster Review's praise of F. Marion Crawford's success in such a fusion, in his Saracinesca. The picture of Rome's nobility in this book is praised for its own interest -

> "But the real interest of a novel can never lie in the information which it incidentally affords on any extrinsic topic. A novel is not an explanatory diagram nor a chart; but, like a picture, it is a work of art, and it must be judged successful or the reverse in proportion to its power of depicting character and presenting truly and forcibly the play of human passions."2

Associated with the desire for definition is the relish of early critics for drawing up categories of novel.[3] These are usually vague, and often facetious, but they do represent to some extent the feeling that there is such a thing as "the Novel", and that fiction, like the other creative activities of men, must have its inner sense of order revealed by external classification. Thus, the St. James' Magazine, in 1869, examines modern novels under the headings "the physiologically erotic", "the polemic", "the subjective", "the smart", and "the mimetic."[4] Other headings frequently used are the "Historical Romance", the "Sensation School", and the "Simple School." And in 1885, a latter-day Polonius discusses "the various species of novel romantic, novel of sentiment, of character, of passion, of every-day life, of 'society', the novel idyllic, sensational, mystical, metaphysical, and historical."[5] Such categorisation becomes less frequent in serious articles after the 'seventies, but the time-honoured classifications of "novel of character" and "novel of incident", or "novel" and "romance", provide, despite

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1. Contemporary, xi (1869), 466-7.
2. cxxviii (1887), 517.
3. Many of these admit to following the example of David Masson, who had classified the novel after Scott very tidily into thirteen distinct varieties, based largely on subject-matter (British Novelists and their Styles, 1859, pp. 214-29).
4. "Modern Novels", ii n.s. (1868-9), 565-76.
5. "Some Historical Novels", Time, ii n.s. (1885), 573.

Henry James' contumely,[1] the catchwords for continuous debate.

Similarly, the desire of periodical writers to establish a historical pedigree for the form they are discussing is rather more apparent over the first twenty years, although, of course, published histories of the novel continue throughout the period. The pattern of these brief histories in articles is traditional and almost unchanging: the descent from the Romance and the novella; Chaucer and Malory; Bunyan and Mrs. Aphra Behn; the intriguing and ambiguous position of Defoe; the excellent and moving character-analysis of Richardson; the humorous but improper social history of Fielding; the regrettable melodrama of the Gothic school; concluding in the inevitable drum-roll around the name of Waverley.[2] The accounts are unexciting, and essentially the same as those later embodied in the histories of Raleigh and Saintsbury, but their significance lies in the very fact of their being written, rather than in their intrinsic merits.

Apart from such preliminaries as these, a growing demand is also to be noted for a more formal exposition of the theoretical principles which govern the writing of a novel, and for their stricter observance by authors. Although there were many like the British Quarterly Review writer who, in 1867, believed that the essence (and value) of the novel lay in its very indefinability and lack of any possible theory (anyone can write a thing called a novel: a novelist is really just a man),[3] there was also, from the very first years, a strong body of opinion on the other side. Lewes, in the Fortnightly, urges that the most rigorous standards of criticism be applied to the novel, which, he claims, deserves them, and proceeds to give examples of what

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1. See "The Art of Fiction", Longman's, iv (1884), 511-2.
2. A few examples are: "Past 'Sensationalists'", Argosy, v (1867-8), 49-56; "On the History of the Novel in England", ibid., xiv (1872), 273-7; "Novels and their Times", Macmillan's, xxvi (1872), 297-303 and 358-67; "The Growth of the English Novel", Quarterly, clxiii (1886), 34-64; and "Novels of Adventure and Manners", ibid., clxxix (1894), 530-52.
3. xliv (1867), 142.

technical features the critic should look for - plot-interest, verisimilitude, "vision", and "sincerity". According to Lewes, higher standards of criticism would bring higher standards of performance to an art-form which is amply capable of them,[1] an opinion shared by "H. Lawrenny" (Edith Simcox) in the Academy for 1871, who regrets the lack of principles in the appreciation of fiction, and that Lessing is not alive "to expound the laws of romance" in such a way as to prevent the artistic profligacy of so talented a writer as Meredith.[2] Even Trollope, whose mechanical methods and references to the novelist as a cobbler aroused criticism when his Autobiography was published in 1883, was a lifelong upholder of standards of some sort of craftsmanship, the need for training and industry, and the desirability of following "rules for the writing of novels."[3]

The wish for the novel to be more strict with itself results in an endless campaign against the carelessness and mass-production of contemporary novels. The Westminster, in 1867, ends such a lament: "These remarks show how high a form of art we consider the novel to be.. The average novel is simply an abortion",[4] and, in 1872, holds up the painstaking methods of Hawthorne as an example of care: "Few writers understand that a novel is as much a work of art as a poem."[5] The lack of craft is bewailed throughout the periodicals of the time in terms so mordant and sincere as to establish the writers' credentials as upholders of the novel's standards in general, although not, for the most part, as theoreticians of any remedial value. There always remains a very British prejudice against prescription and exact

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1. "Criticism in Relation to Novels", iii (1865-6), 352-61.
2. ii (1871), 552-4.
3. E.g., Autobiography, 1883, ii, 45-62; and Letters, ed. B. A. Booth, London, 1951, p. 57.
4. xxxii n.s. (1867), 593.
5. xlii n.s. (1872), 544.

codification which in this field, as elsewhere, produces contradictions with the desire for good workmanship. Examples of this are provided by writers in the Saturday Review. In 1868, the competent mediocrity of Mrs. Craik's Mildred is regretted:

> "We cannot help wondering more and more deeply, as we read more and more novels, why the writers should so systematically abstain, as their books amply prove them to have done, from the study of anything like a complete theory of fiction."

One has mastered this quality, another that -

> "Then there comes the great ruck of novel-writers, who just catch their story as they may and treat it as they can; who appear to write one chapter knowing but vaguely whence will come the next, whose language is bald and thin, and whose thoughts are more bald and thin still... they are either ignorant that fiction is a proper field for art; or else.. knowing this, they give preposterously inadequate labour, or none at all, to the working out of their conception of what their art demands or permits."1

And in 1874 fiction is unfavourably compared with painting for its lack of official standards:

> "Now what is clearly required, so as to give the novelist the same advantages as the artist, is an Institute of Novel-Writing. There, under the guidance of professors, students would learn, not certainly to write an original work - for originality cannot be taught - but to make a composition which should not be in glaring violation of all principles of good taste."2

Yet in 1870, the same paper reviews Lady Fullerton's Mrs. Gerald's Niece:

> "That there should be any fixed principles for novel-writing is a long-exploded error. The literature which describes the life and manners of men must be as various as men's lives are, and all that the critic can fairly require in products of this libertine and freakish art is that they should represent faithfully some fact of human character, or at least reflect fairly some temper of the period. So fiction may range from the Golden Legend to Guy Livingstone, from Candide to Mrs. Gerald's Niece."3

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1. xxvi (1868), 303-4.
2. xxxvii (1874), 415-6.
3. xxix (1870), 388-90.

A similar contradictory tendency is shown in the writings of Saintsbury. Though his attitude to the novel is often one of well-bred academic condescension, he is a perpetual champion of the diligence required by the art, and the necessity for standards to be maintained. In 1874, he reviews G. Cameron's Charlie Lufton:

> "Mr. Cameron has yet to learn (for the matter of that so have thousands of other people) that novel writing, so far from being appropriate to a coup d'essai, is about the hardest of all tasks which an author can set himself"-1

and in his years with the Academy he continually attacks wilfulness and lack of regulation and conscientiousness on the part of authors. Yet in 1887, Saintsbury indulges in one of his insular sneers at the excess of self-conscious novel-theory in America, preferring the natural "literary breeding" of Englishmen,[2] and five years later expresses annoyance at modern young writers' devotion to such "secondary and subsidiary matters" as style and formal construction. Unlike poetry, he believes, form is not part of the novel's essence, and while it is a pity that a novel should not be written carefully according to principles of construction, the fault is not a fatal one, as many of the greatest novels have shown.[3]

However, by the 'eighties a far more consistent and single-minded advocacy of technical care and proficiency in novel-writing was to be heard among many of the writers whom we have already seen to revolutionize the attitude to fiction in other respects also. The trio of Gissing, Moore, and Stevenson represent (along with Henry James) a well-known extreme of that preoccupation with the craft of

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1. Academy, vi (1874), 479.
2. "The Present State of the Novel. I", Fortnightly, xlii n.s. (1887), 412.
3. "The Present State of the English Novel, 1892", Miscellaneous Essays, 1892, pp. 412-8. His scepticism as to the value of technique in fiction is given its fullest expression in his "Technique", Dial, New York, lxxx (1926), 273-8.

fiction which flowered in the 'eighties and 'nineties. On the model of Flaubert, each was a self-conscious martyr to the technique of his art. Moore's endless rewriting in a quest for verbal perfection became legendary,[1] and Gissing, who compares the freedom of Dickens and Scott with the exacting standards of his own day - "our grave Art of Fiction, a bitter task-mistress"[2] - gives ample testimony, throughout his letters and diary, of his own devotion to the new goddess: "Wrote from 3 to 9 but with no results: it must all be cancelled... My patience is inexhaustible", and - "The first volume I am re-writing for at least the fifth time, and, for a wonder, I feel tolerably satisfied."[3]

The similar agonies of Stevenson emphasise even more clearly how, for these writers, craft in the novel had taken on the aspect of a religious fanaticism. Thus, Stevenson's progress with The Ebb-Tide, in 1893, is like that of a flagellant, spending half-an-hour over one clause and completing twenty-four pages in three weeks, working for seven hours a day.[4] The old utilitarian defence of art is never completely out of Stevenson's mind,[5] but it is much more by this insistence on matters of form that he justifies his own high concept of his art, recommending, as the ideal towards which the novitiate must strive, "those more exquisite refinements of proficiency and finish... for which, day after day, he recasts and revises and rejects."[6] His rule, in 1883, for the writer, as for "the student of any art", might be taken as the quintessence of formalist devotion and as representing one particular peak in the history of the status of fiction:

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1. See, e.g., M. Brown, George Moore, Seattle, 1955, pp. 44-5.
2. Charles Dickens, 1898, pp. 48-9.
3. Letters, ed. A. and E. Gissing, 1927, p. 206.
4. Letters, ed. S. Colvin, 1911, iv, 169, 171-2.
5. See, e.g., "The Morality of the Profession of Letters", Fortnightly, xxix n.s. (1881), 513-20.
6. "Letter to a Young Gentleman Who Proposes to Embrace the Career of Art" (1888), in Across the Plains, 1892, 272-88.

> "An art is the very gist of life; it grows with you; you will never weary of an art at which you fervently and superstitiously labour... forget the world in a technical trifle.
>
> ...In your own art, bow your head over technique. Think of technique when you rise and when you go to bed. Forget purposes in the meanwhile; get to love technical processes; to glory in technical successes; get to see the world entirely through technical spectacles, to see it entirely in terms of what you can do. Then when you have anything to say, the language will be apt and copious."1

This new enthusiasm and confidence in the structural principles by which the novel exists is also reflected widely in the writings of critics and reviewers. The lack of workmanship and method among English novelists is constantly lamented, and is seen as amateurish beside the expertise of the French.[2] J. A. Noble, despairing over an incoherent novel in 1883, asks: "When will people learn that novel-writing is an art, and that the novelist needs as severe a training as the painter or the sculptor?"[3] The need for a comprehensive novel-theory is also felt more acutely than ever before - by Henry Holbeach, for example, remarking in 1880 that criticism has lagged behind the astonishing developments in the novel itself over the past twenty years, and that consequently the canons for the New Fiction are not yet ready.[4] The French are again held up as examples, in their greater articulateness. Henry Norman, in 1883, disparages this neglect in English criticism: "Indeed, we shall look in vain to any Englishman for a discussion of the theories of fiction." Such pronouncements as Trollope's or Ruskin's are regarded as of little value, beside those of Spielhagen or Zola. English

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1. Letters, ii, 125.
2. E.g., "Recent Fiction in England and France", Macmillan's, 1 (1884), 251-2. [By Mrs. Humphry Ward - Wellesley Index]
3. Academy, xxiii (1883), 130.
4. "The New Fiction", Contemporary, xxxvii (1880), 247.

novelists, deprived of a theory, are without guiding principles, and justify the charge of Edmond Scherer: "Ils n'obéissent pas à une vocation, ils sont en quête d'une manière et d'un succès."[1]

Walter Besant's attempts to remedy the situation are of no great merit or originality as theory, except insofar as they bring together many of the most characteristic beliefs of his generation. The value of his 1884 lecture, The Art of Fiction, for which he is best known, lies less in its detail than in its governing propositions that Fiction is the complete equal of the other arts, and that it is regulated, like them, by laws as exact and as teachable as those of harmony. As we have seen, even Besant fell back on the traditional justification of the novel on moral and educational grounds,[2] but having established this he proceeds here to lay a new emphasis on the laws and methods necessary to achieve these great ends. His indignant attack on the society that still regarded the novel with "affectionate contempt" as an activity unworthy of official recognition by Court or University is based not just on what the art can do for them but on his sense of the high technical demands it makes on its practitioners.[3]

The progress of novel-criticism from this date largely justifies the cautious optimism evinced by Henry James in the same year:

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1. "Theories and Practice of Modern Fiction", Fortnightly, xxxiv n.s. (1883), 870-5.
2. See above, pp. 13;15.
3. His actual prescriptions have been called "second to Fielding's only in time for their sound and enduring sense", and his lecture "the first full statement made during the nineteenth century of the practices of the great novelists of the English humanitarian tradition" (Ernest Boll, "Walter Besant on the Art of the Novel", English Fiction in Transition, ii, 1959, 28-35), but one suspects that this is a reflection of the present glory of Henry James, whose article in reply, of the same title, it was perhaps Besant's main achievement to elicit.

> "Only a short time ago it might have been supposed that the English novel was not what the French call discutable... But within a year or two, for some reason or other, there have been signs of returning animation - the era of discussion would appear to have been to a certain extent opened."1

By 1890, detailed discussion and controversy over aims, methods,and principles had become such a feature of the literary scene that a reviewer in the Spectator commends "a writer like Mr. James Payn, who has never given a lecture or written a magazine article on the subject of his art",[2] and J. M. Barrie is able to indulge in the humorous little fantasy of "Brought Back from Elysium", in which the shades of Scott, Fielding, Smollett, Dickens, and Thackeray, after being harangued by a modern Realist, a Romancist, an Elsmerian, and a Stylist, representatives of current cliques, take their leave with a dignified reproval to think and write less about styles and theories, and concentrate on the business in hand.[3]

Nevertheless, the debate continued, Besant, for one, pressing on with his advocacy of instruction for novelists, and scoffing at the instinctive English belief in inspiration.[4] He praises the more practical Americans for a recent suggestion to found a School of Fiction, and for their recognition of the existence of a technique of the novel as valid as that of painting, without which writers and critics will continue to be blind to the fact that the novel is a fine art.[5] And

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1. "The Art of Fiction", Longman's, iv (1884), 502.
2. lxiv (1890), 919-20. Payn was not entirely inarticulate - see below, pp. 133-4, 169 n., 215.
3. Contemporary, lvii (1890), 846-54.
4. Typified still in James Purves' scorn for "Mr. Besant's recipe", which he praises Hardy for transcending in favour of "nature" ("Mr. Thomas Hardy's Rustics", Time, i n.s. (1885), 715-6); the Spectator's "Mr. Besant on the Art of Fiction" (lvii, 1884, 674-5); and in John Lomas' praise of Dostoevsky for his reliance on intuitive genius and his defiance of the academic canons about the novel ("Dostoïewsky and his Work", Macmillan's, lv, 1886-7, 187).
5. "The Science of Fiction", New Rev., iv (1891), 310-5.

in 1894, finally, confidence is expressed by Hubert Crackanthorpe that the new ideas have reformed novel-writing in England, and that technical craft is at last about to succeed to its patrimony:

> "Fiction has taken her place amongst the arts. The theory that writing resembles the blacking of boots, the more boots you black, the better you do it, is busy evaporating. The excessive admiration for the mere idea of a book or a story is dwindling; so is the comparative indifference to slovenly treatment."1

Avant-garde novelists influenced by the French and Russians are very far from summing up the critical opinions of their age, even of the 'nineties, as we shall see. But they undoubtedly represent the winning for fiction, even among those who disagreed with their detailed ideas, of a general position of aesthetic, intellectual, and (though now unvoiced) moral respectability. Over realism, ethical values, and all the questions of structure and technique, the critics continued to clash violently; but even the most conservative had come, often unknowingly, closer to accepting the premiss which was established and confirmed by the outlandish and disagreeable theories of their opponents - that the novel is a fully accredited form of literature, and one worthy of controversy.

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1. "Reticence in Literature. Some Roundabout Remarks", Yellow Book, ii (1894), 268.

Chapter Two

THE QUESTION OF REALISM

The relationship of the work of art to life as it is generally known is the central problem of all aesthetics, and must always receive particular attention in discussions of the novel because of the undoubted historical fact of the reliance of most novels on mimetic conventions and the accomplished "sense of reality".[1] Many critics, considering the history of the genre, have seen this characteristic as essential to its nature, accepting the eighteenth-century novelists' doctrine of authenticity as something more universally applicable than a merely temporary credo dictated by the particular aims of those writers and by the intellectual and social climate of the time.[2] Others, particularly in this century, have come to emphasize Aristotle's *armonia* at the expense of *mimesis* in their exclusive attention to symbol, myth, and formal technique. But the question of correspondence with experienced reality remains to vex them all, and the definition of "realism" a perpetual spectre at the feast.

In examining the same confusions and conflicts as they agitated Victorian critics over our period of forty years, we will restrict ourselves, in this chapter, to, firstly, their attempts to emphasize an exact correspondence between the novel and empirical reality without reservations; secondly, their admission of a degree of modification for the simple purpose of giving pleasure to readers; thirdly, their theories of the inevitable modifying effect of the artist's creating personality; fourthly, the question of a coherent World and a Truth, other than the pragmatic and everyday, to which the novel has access;

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1. "Mimetic", as elastic a word as any in literary theory, is throughout used in its narrower sense - as applied to the activities of Plato's poet - of a close correspondence between the art-image and the everyday world of appearance.
2. E.g., Ian Watt, *Rise of the Novel*, 1957, pp. 9-34, 290-301.

fifthly, the modifications in the correspondence rendered inevitable by the formal, organizational nature of the novel. Sixthly and seventhly, these foregoing ideas are retraced, for the sake of greater unity and coherence, as they occur in the critical reception accorded to Henry James, W. D. Howells and Zola on the one hand, and in the theory of the Romance as a separate genre on the other - two controversies which effectively (and, for our purposes, audibly) fluttered the critical dovecotes.

1. Simple Realism

The most interesting discussions of realism in the novel are those which begin from the premiss that the idea of the perfect mirror-image is an absurdity. However, most of these proceed to make mimetic representation the centre of their theory, despite the extent and the variety of the qualifications with which they surround it, and it is valuable to start with an examination of this key principle in its most straightforward, if naive, manifestations.

Throughout the period, but especially during the earlier years, before the onset of Naturalism forced the critics into a closer examination of the nature of the novel's representation, there is a strong emphasis on the novel as a simple recorder of the facts of human existence - its raw material the customs of society and the unchanging aspects of human nature, its means of effect direct communication and recognition, and the main faculty for its creation that of clear observation.[1] George Eliot and, above all, Trollope are obvious representatives of this fundamental tendency in critical thinking, in such comments as they allowed themselves to make on their own and on others' practice. Both are also typical in that their

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1. For the realism that dominated Victorian taste in general, see J. H. Buckley, The Victorian Temper, London, 1952, pp. 133-8.

remarks on realism can be called a general emphasis rather than a comprehensive theory.

One of the major themes running through all of George Eliot's criticism is the necessity to avoid exaggeration, conventionality, and all literary affectation, and by the canon of simple veracity she tries and condemns countless inferior novels in her reviews for the Westminster and the Leader in the 'fifties. In the former, she observes, significantly, of Ruskin's Modern Painters:

> "The truth of infinite value that he teaches is realism - the doctrine that all truth and beauty are to be attained by a humble and faithful study of nature, and not by substituting vague forms, bred by imagination on the mists of feeling, in place of definite, substantial reality."1

Her two most important essays, "The Natural History of German Life" and "Silly Novels by Lady Novelists", both stress her objections to the affected and the unreal, in the former the traditional sentimental picture of rural life, and in the latter the conventions and the woodenness of the "Silver Fork" School.[2]

Of her own work, she writes, in 1857:

> "Art must be either real and concrete, or ideal and eclectic. Both are good and true in their way, but my stories are of the former kind. I undertake to exhibit nothing as it should be; I only try to exhibit some things as they have been or are, seen through such a medium as my own nature gives me." 3

And two years later her famous defence of realism in Adam Bede reveals the simplicity and strength of her mimetic view, which, like Lewes', has as its basic justification a revelation of the deep feelings and the human glory that lie beneath the surface of everyday life: [4]

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1. ix n.s. (1856), 626.
2. Westminster Rev., x n.s. (1856), 51-79; and 442-61.
3. George Eliot Letters, ed. G.S. Haight, New Haven, 1954-5, ii, 362.
4. Lewes added important idealist qualifications to this which George Eliot, for all she may have observed them in her actual writing, did not explicitly mention. See A.R. Kaminsky, "George Eliot, George Henry Lewes, and the Novel", P.M.L.A., lxx (1955), 997-1013.

> "So I am content to tell my simple story, without trying to make things seem better than they were; dreading nothing, indeed, but falsity, which, in spite of one's best efforts, there is reason to dread. Falsehood is so easy, truth so difficult.
>
> It is for this rare, precious quality of truthfulness that I delight in many Dutch paintings, which lofty-minded people despise."1

Apart from the moral qualifications, on which she was highly articulate, and, above all, the duties of the novel to educate the sympathies and to humanise through its realism, George Eliot had little more to say on representation in the novel that is not merely eloquent repetition of this creed. No matter how unlike her novels were to the simple mirror-image, for example in their use of convention and the devices of melodrama, as well as the open subjectivity of much of their treatment, her actual critical opinions paid little attention to the various distorting effects of the artist's imagination or of the novel's structural demands, and in her own mind she seems to have remained as straight-forward a realist as most of her readers.2

Trollope is the High Priest of Victorian Realism, in theory as in practice. Among his favourite words of praise for his own novels are "realistic", "truthful", and "natural", and, in welcoming Hawthorne's description of his novels as being "just as real as if some giant had hewn a great lump out of the earth and put it under a glass case, with all its inhabitants going about their daily business", Trollope makes clear his own credo:

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1. Chapter 17 (Copyright Edn., 1901, i, 265-71). George Eliot's reference to the Dutch school reflects the taste of her day that frequently commended the "Dutch accuracy" of her novels and of others, preferring it, for example, to the Turnerian manner of Charlotte Brontë (e.g. British Quar. Rev., xliv (1867), 144-5). The term is being used of the novel as early as Mrs. Barbauld (Correspondence of Samuel Richardson, ed. A.L. Barbauld, 1804, i, cxxxvii), and of course receives its greatest elaboration in Mario Praz's extensive analogies with bourgeois-realist painting in The Hero in Eclipse in Victorian Fiction, 1956.
2. For a fuller treatment see R. Stang, "The Literary Criticism of George Eliot", P.M.L.A., lxxii (1957), 952-61; and W.J. Hyde, "George Eliot and the Climate of Realism", ibid.,147-64.

> "I have always desired to 'hew out some lump of the earth', and to make men and women walk upon it just as they do walk here among us, - with not more of excellence, nor with exaggerated baseness, - so that my readers might recognise human beings like to themselves." 1

Human nature should always be the novel-writer's guide, based on his experience and close observation, [2] and the age-old charge that all fictions are untrue is to be answered by the ability of the novelist to be true to the facts of life. [3] He uses the same terms of simple realism and recognition to formulate his famous definition, not just of his own practice, but of the art as a whole:

> "A novel should give a picture of common life enlivened by humour and sweetened by pathos. To make that picture worthy of attention, the canvas should be crowded with real portraits, not of individuals known to the world or to the author, but of created personages impregnated with traits of character which are known." 4

In pursuance of his doctrine, Trollope consciously avoids heroics in his novels, and frequently defends this practice in explanatory asides to the reader - for example, in Chapter 35 of The Eustace Diamonds (1872):

> "With whom are we to sympathise? says the reader, who not unnaturally imagines that a hero should be heroic. Oh, thou, my reader, whose sympathies are in truth the great and only aim of my work, when you have called the dearest of your friends round you to your hospitable table, how many heroes are there sitting at the board?" 5

Trollope does give signs of accepting values in fiction other than those he has described: he tells George Eliot that such high themes as that of Romola are superior to his own of commonplace life and ordinary people, [6] and, with great modesty,

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1. Autobiography, 1883, i, 193-4.
2. Ibid., ii, 60-1.
3. "On English Prose Fiction as a Rational Amusement" (1870), Four Lectures, ed. M.L. Parrish, 1938, pp.112-3.
4. Autobiography, i, 169.
5. Oxford edn., 1950, i, 318-20.
6. Letters, ed. B.A. Booth, London, 1951, pp. 138-9.

admires the sublimity and weird imaginativeness of Hawthorne.[1] In his lecture, "On English Prose Fiction as a Rational Amusement," he even admits that the Sensational is found in all novels, and that the Tragic is a higher aim than that of the writer who never leaves everyday life, although "truth of description, truth of character, human truth as to men and women" is still the essential framework.[2] At times he seems near to discovering that "realism" is an artistic effect achieved by artistic means, as when, in his Thackeray, he writes:

> "And yet in very truth the realistic must not be true, - but just so far removed from truth as to suit the erroneous idea of truth which the reader may be supposed to entertain" -

an ambiguous statement which probably refers not to the writer's accommodating himself to his reader's delusions and prejudices but rather to his access to the world of artistic illusion. Complete naturalism of dialogue would be as ludicrous as stilted artificiality - "The realistic, - by which we mean that which shall seem to be real, - lies between the two."[3]

However, Trollope is not really concerned with the possibilities of the Sublime in fiction, or with the nature of illusion. The earth-bound is most suited to his taste, and his enthusiasm is reserved for simple recognizability of delineation - for the outward effects rather than the analyzable causes of realism in the novel.

As might be expected, this unsophisticated viewpoint was shared by many of those who read him. For example, among critics, Joseph Knight saw in him the perfection of realism, as well as its extreme limit;[4] and the Dublin Review, five years later, looked confidently for

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1. "The Genius of Nathaniel Hawthorne", North American Rev., cxxix (1879), 204-7.
2. Four Lectures, pp. 123-4.
3. 1879, pp. 184-6.
4. Fortnightly, i n.s. (1867), 770-2.

agreement with its estimate of his pre-eminence from -

> "Those who hold that the novelist's business is to delineate the manners of his own day, and to draw portraits of the people among whom he lives or whom he has opportunities of observing," 1

Among his ordinary readers, lastly, Frederick Locker-Lampson's simple conception of the mimetic novel is typical of what the intelligent, un-literary public sought:

> "Trollope's chief excellence is in the portrayal of character: the dialogue is what people naturally use; it is even more than that - they could not well use any other. I am fond of his heroines; they are affectionate and true; one knows pretty well what they are going to do next, one always feels safe with them." 2

Just as the importance of the novel is often justified by its embodiment of the contemporary Spirit, so its realism is seen by some critics as its only proper function, or, at worst, its unavoidable function, necessitated by that same Scientific Zeitgeist, and in society interested above all things in itself. Several times, the development of the novel since the eighteenth century is seen as from a vaguely realized world of sentiment to one of physical and psychological exactness - the very change on which, ironically, the eighteenth-century novelists had prided themselves. In 1868, Tinsley's Magazine records the movement deterministically and with a trace of regret for the vanished age of Clarissa:

> ".. realism is asserting itself - the realism of a sceptical, undemonstrative, money-making, tolerant, comfortable, cosmopolitan age, which practically treats life as too brief to be wasted in strong emotions; and sensation (in books) will soon be as obsolete as romance." 3

However, many see the change as beneficial, like the Quarterly, in 1895, which describes the growth of the English novel as like that of the human being - from love of incident to sentiment and passion,

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1. "The Novels of Mr. Anthony Trollope", xix (1872), 393.
2. My Confidences, 1896, p. 334.
3. "Clarissa", iii (1868), 318-9.

then to the realities of life instead of ideal extravagance, then to cold psychological analysis, in the spirit of the times, and finally, in its dotage, away from reality, back to adventure.[1]

The general principle of truth to human nature, without reference to Zeitgeist or social history, could obviously be expected to be more durable and more widespread, and this, of all the aspects of straightforward realism, is the most deep-seated and the one least open to modification among critics. Reviews continually condemn characters as "unnatural" or "not true-to-life", and "hazy", "blurred", and "indistinct" are among the most recurrent words in the reviewers' vocabulary, although, once they take their enquiries as to why this character is unconvincing beyond the mere surface differences from real life, they are then faced inevitably with the question of artistic selection and the impossibility of complete "realism". However, as long as they confine their examination to the level of "exaggerated" or "very natural", they are able to express, unhampered and in these simple terms, the preference for a close correspondence between art and life that remains the dominant key of more subtly modulated theories.

"Caricatures" are generally deprecated, and "mixed" or "well-rounded" characters become a reviewers' fetish. On this score, Dickens is frequently taken to task - his characters are condemned as "speaking abstractions or animated machines", compared with Jane Austen's or Mrs. Gaskell's,[2] or with the more accurate "photography" of Thackeray,[3] or the complete realization and "sound, detailed, substantial completeness of sculpture" of Trollope.[4]

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1. "The Novels of Maria Edgeworth", clxxxii (1895) 307-8. [By R. E. Prothero - Wellesley Index.]
2. "The Domestic Novel", Argosy, xviii (1874), 295.
3. "Light Literature", Belgravia, xx (1873), 331.
4. "The Novels of Mr. Anthony Trollope", Dublin Rev., xix (1872) 396.

The debate on the Sensation School was already in full swing by 1865, and had subsided within ten years, but during this period critics were prepared to affix the damning label to any characterization that smacked of Dickensian unreality. For example, an article on the School in 1870 blames Dickens for influencing it to study "characteristics" rather than "character", the latter being seen as less superficial, producing not puppets but real people, like Tito Melema; [1] and the North British Review, lumbering to the attack in 1865, ridicules the Sensationalism of Lady Audley's Secret because "not a single personage has any resemblance to the people we meet with in the flesh." [2] Lytton is another victim of the comparison with Trollope and Thackeray, his Idealism and reliance on the Type resulting in inferior, because less lifelike, portraiture, [3] and even Mrs. Craik, generally admired for her real-life pictures, is at times criticised for the idealism of her heroes:

> ".. a lovely creature without bones, muscles, or articulations; a semi-divine personage devoid of all human weaknesses, but devoid also of most human qualities; a portrait much too idealistic to be true... ideality is better as a servant in literature than as a master." 4

Continually, then, throughout the earlier years, and sporadically in the 'eighties and 'nineties, it is hammered home simply that the essential power of any novelist "is the capacity of representing human nature, of creating any figure without life, which to all who see it shall seem to have life, and life of the vivid kind", [5] and "life" is judged, among such critics, by the conformity of the character's behaviour to what they see as the normal patterns and motivations of everyday life.

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1. "Our Novels. The Sensational School", Temple Bar, xxix (1870). 419-20.
2. "Sensation Novelists: Miss Braddon", iv n.s. (1865), 180-204. [By W. F. Rae - Wellesley Index.]
3. "Modern Novelists: Sir Edward Bulwer-Lytton", Westminster Rev. xxvii n.s. (1865), 497-501.
4. Saturday Rev., xxxiii (1872), 545-6.
5. Spectator, xxxviii (1865), 1438-9.

As a corollary, arising out of this use of the touchstone of normality, there comes a characteristic of reviews that, by its sheer persistence, can almost be considered as an established critical principle. That is, the appraisal of characters in a novel as "our real-life acquaintances" - a tribute to the illusion and persuasiveness that most theories, though not all, have always recognized as the end of artistic creation, but one version of it which most to-day would condemn for confusing, in E.M. Forster's phrase, Homo Sapiens with Homo Fictus,[1] for not distinguishing between the very nature of the perceptions involved in participating in life itself and in yielding to a contrived illusion of life. Other critics discussed, say, the "living" effect of Dickens' characters, and recognized the illusion as a quality of a different world from the everyday, but for many critics "realism" of characterization resulted almost literally in an addition to the taxable population of the country. For example, the British Quarterly Review, in 1868, praises the characters of Gogol because they become living people, not just portraits, developing indeperdently of their creator, and in such a way that we feel we know facts about their lives which Gogol has forgotten to give us.[2] Trollope is continually treated as a fountain of plenty in this respect, and his novels are for many critics a world of new friends in which it is just as natural to discuss whether poor Lily Dale will find her future life dull as a spinster as it was for Dickens' audience to plead for the life of Smike or Little Nell. H. Schütz Wilson, in 1890, devotes a very familiar type of article, "Colonel Newcome", to the emotional re-creation and expansion of the character, punctuated by apostrophes, that might be taken as typical of this type of criticism at its extreme:

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1. Aspects of the Novel, 1927, p. 78.
2. "Nicholas Gógol", xlvii (1868), 332-3. [By C.E. Turner - Wellesley Index]

"How living, and how real, are all Thackeray's characters! We seem to see them, to look into their eyes, to hear their voices, and to comprehend their natures. We live with them with delight, and we part from them with sorrow." 1

The idea, as might be expected, is found at its most unrestrained in the general reader of no critical pretensions, such as John Blackwood, who, after reading Book One of Middlemarch in manuscript, tells George Eliot of his anxiety as to how Dorothea will fare "when she wakens to real life", and, of Book Four, his wish that "Mrs. Garth had given Caleb a thump on the side of the head when he proposed to take Fred Vincy as his assistant."[2] And then there is the old lady, perhaps as typical of her fellow-readers to-day as she was ninety years ago, who lay awake all night after reading of Bulstrode and the death of Raffles:

"Poor dear creature, after he had done so much for the wretch, sitting up at night and attending on him! and I don't believe it was the brandy that killed him: and what is to become of Bulstrode now - he has nobody left but Christ." 3

Continually present at all levels of approach, among the literati and otherwise, the tendency is also given the full weight and respectability of one of the rules of art. Thus, the creation of permanent, living acquaintances, "more real to us than Mr. and Mrs. Jones who live in the next square", is seem by William Mackay, in 1870, as the highest attribute of the artist,[4] and the Times, in 1876, congratulates Trollope:

"The capacity for making your characters so life-like that your readers grow into their intimacy and are always eager to meet them again, seems to us one of the surest tests of a really gifted novelist." 5

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1. Gentleman's Mag., cclxviii (1890), 497-509.
2. George Eliot Letters, v, 148-9; and 255.
3. Quoted by Amy Cruse, The Victorians and their Books, 1935, pp. 283-4.
4. "The Late Charles Dickens", New Monthly Mag., cxlvii (1870), 87-8.
5. Aug. 18, 1876, p. 4.

The British Quarterly Review, five years later, makes it the one criterion against which prospective successors to George Eliot must be judged; [1] Walter Besant, in 1884, enshrines it among his tablets of the law; [2] and,finally, the Spectator, in 1881 and 1892, takes the everyday realism of Mrs. Oliphant as an occasion to formalize the similar practice of critics, as opposed to authors:

> "..the critic's office is to be chiefly performed by expressing an opinion on the doings and sayings of her characters, as though talking over the proceedings of actual flesh-and-blood acquaintances."

And:

> "Humanity has a faculty prompting it instinctively to criticise the behaviour of its neighbours, and say whether they acted rightly or not in any trying situation, which in real life is held in check by a sense of having no business to judge, and of not knowing all the ins and outs of the affair. But as, where fiction is concerned, there is no such restraint, one of the attractions of a good novel whose characters speak and move (as Mrs. Oliphant's always do) like living beings, is the opportunity it gives for the exercise of the aforesaid critical faculty." 3

Most ordinary readers are always subjective critics, and look to literature to provide an extension to their life in life's own terms. The critics who estimated the number of Lady Macbeth's children, or the readers who begged Trollope to let Lily Dale marry Johnny Eames, may not fulfil present notions concerning analysis and the relation of the work of art to reality, but they reflected more accurately, if more unthinkingly, man's instinctive search in literature for his own image. [4]

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1. "Mr. Hardy's Novels", lxxiii (1881), 341-2.
2. Art of Fiction, 1884, p. 22.
3. liv (1881), 703-4; and lxviii (1892), 648.
4. The predominance in much modern criticism of the concept of Character in entirely functional terms, as a dependent unit in the structural entity of the novel, is being increasingly challenged by another point of view which draws much of its support from this typical Victorian reaction we have been examining - John Bayley, for example, has recently made a most significant attempt to revive the "sense of life" in Character as a meaningful critical idea wrongly neglected in the rigours of our present formalism (The Characters of Love,1960).

The emphasis on character dominated the simple realism approach, but it was accompanied by a demand that the novel should observe mimetic accuracy in its picturing of facts and events also. "Unnatural situations" is a term of opprobrium almost as frequently met with as "unnatural characters", and is usually applied to events which cannot be justified on the grounds of empirical, everyday experience, without any reference being made to the demands of inner coherency. Once again, these critics experience an effect of illusion, or lack of it, and seek the cause in outward correspondence alone. Artistic conventions such as the coincidence and the convenient demise are widely frowned upon on the simple grounds that "such things do not normally happen". The Saturday Review argues that these conventions are acceptable in the theatre but not in the novel, whose closer relation to reality is its essential principle. For this reason, the English are superior to the French, who, in spite of greater skill in plotting, sacrifice this reality for mere effect:

> "The condition of really enjoying a novel is that we should have a kind of provisional belief in its historical truth; the very purpose of all the little details of conversation and manners is to produce such a temporary illusion. Now, to compose a really neat plot, it is usually considered necessary to make free use of those coincidences which more than anything shock our belief." 1

Of course, Dickens, as devoted a user of plot- as of character-conventions, was a major sufferer in the years under consideration, by which time, according to G.H. Ford, there was a rapidly growing revolution in taste which held that "a romantic's handling of probability was naively out of keeping with the requirements of realism and of mature taste".[2] For such critics, the absurdities and unnaturalness in plot of the average Sensation novel, in the earlier years of the period, were easy to point out, since its whole

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1. "French Novels", xxi (1866), 615-6.
2. Dickens and his Readers, Princeton, 1955, p. 155. Chapter 7, "The Poet and the Critics of Probability", interestingly examines such criticism between 1848 and 1872.

aim was something other than a representation of life. To demonstrate its artistic failings, critics usually relied upon their ordinary readers' sense of the absurd, making no attempt to examine the credentials of melodrama in fiction but merely setting their sarcastic paraphrase of the book's events against the accepted norm of everyday life, and allowing this to work its critical rejection. Words like "coincidence","stagey", "theatrical glare", "falsity", and (especially over the first ten years or so) "Sensational", are not used as descriptions of a certain effect which must be investigated before being dismissed, but as a priori terms of condemnation.

As an example of how the events of the novel are tried against real life, critics are always at their most scathing when they discover a factual error. Detailed verisimilitude is a carefully-cherished principle, and any offences against it are regarded as fatal to the work - reviews abound with triumphant discoveries of minute inaccuracies. In obedience to this, for example, George Eliot makes exhaustive enquiries of Frederic Harrison about legal points in the plot of Felix Holt,[1] and Wilkie Collins is upset when he learns, through a Times review, of an inconsistency in the arrival-time of a train in The Woman in White.[2] Charles Reade's Zolaesque passion du document is an exaggerated form, but it reflects a genuine doctrine of factual verification which is widely observed among novelists of his time,[3] and is seen even by such a Romancer as Robert Louis Stevenson as an important fructifier of the artist's imagination.[4]

Correspondingly, a rule of Authorial Experience is evolved which, like so many facets of this level of realist theory, arises

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1. George Eliot Letters, iv, 215 ff.
2. N.P. Davis, The Life of Wilkie Collins, Urbana, 1956, pp. 221-2.
3. See, e.g., Léone Rives, Charles Reade, sa Vie, ses Romans, Toulouse, 1940, pp. 189-97; and W.C. Phillips, Dickens, Reade, and Collins: Sensation Novelists, New York, 1919, pp. 137-9.
4. "My First Book", The Idler, vi (1894-5), 11.

out of a very valid requirement, but is desperately in need of modification. It is given pride of place by Besant among the laws of fiction: "First, and before everything else, there is the Rule that everything in Fiction which is invented and is not the result of personal experience and observation is worthless."[1] Or, in the words of Matthew Arnold, who, just before making his famous recommendation that "we are not to take Anna Karenine as a work of art; we are to take it as a piece of life", also writes, with no less shallowness: "..in the novel one prefers, I think, to have the novelist dealing with the life which he knows from having lived it, rather than with the life which he knows from books or hearsay." Hence, Anna Karenina is preferred to War and Peace, and Vanity Fair to The Virginians.[2] Often, the doctrine is used deservedly to condemn the many writers who stray into social realms where their ignorance is only too easily revealed and whose books obviously depend for their effectiveness on their supposed accuracy. But the more profound ramifications of the problem are ignored, and the need for experience is generally expressed in the naive and straightforward terms with which Henry James so conclusively took issue in "The Art of Fiction,"[3] and which are less important for the light they cast on a significant issue in itself than for the further evidence offered of the desire for realism.

What we have been examining so far, as has been pointed out, is more in the nature of a general and widely-shared penchant for "truth-to-life" than any carefully thought-out linking of art to reality. It is, perhaps, surprising that out of such a strong and perpetual tendency of the modern human mind so few theories

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1. Art of Fiction, 1884, pp.15-16. A typical earlier example is in the Saturday Rev., xxv (1868), 796-7.
2. "Count Leo Tolstoi", Fortnightly, xlii n.s. (1887), 784-5.
3. Longman's, iv (1884), 509-10.

of outright realism in the novel arose - even the French Naturalists had their firm belief in the particular distortions of art's mirror. However, one interesting attempt in this direction can be seen in an anonymous review of William Gilbert's De Profundis in the Spectator for 1865, a book in that strong Victorian tradition of low-life novels running from Jack Sheppard and Oliver Twist to A Child of the Jago and Liza of Lambeth. Gilbert's technique of presenting the very ore of life is, according to the writer, shared only by Defoe, and he succeeds in presenting it by avoiding all the processes of modification which every other writer utilises:

> ".. he gives the facts of the life he describes, - whether middle-class life as in The Goldsworthy Family, or the dangerous-class life as in De Profundis, - not only without idealization, for Mr. Trollope and many others do the same, but even without any of that half-unconscious distillation which has in view the clear reflection of character, the production of an intellectual picture."

The "delusive sense of solid fact" is produced by the piling-up of detail, apparently quarried out of the narrator's memory rather than refined and clarified for us by his imagination. The effect on the reader is that of the raw material of experience itself, out of the mass of which different writers could still evolve three or four different stories. Yet such writing is, in fact, a product of the writer's imagination: Gilbert succeeds "not because he has strung together details instead of imagined them, but because he has imagined events in their natural detail." All authorial interpretation is eschewed, as is the "falsifying" effect of association when events are described by the characters themselves:

> "The true difference between such stories as these and ordinary novels is that novelists usually aim at painting the expression of character, while this class of stories represent not its expression, but its influence as an active cause upon the circumstances of life, and their reaction upon it. No less imagination is required for the one task than the other, but it is the imagination of an interpreting mind in the one

> case, and of an acting will in the other. The intellectual novelist tries to think of what is most expressive of a particular state of mind; De Foe and his school only of what a man would actually do under certain circumstances, and not at all what that doing might mean. The one school treats motive as a secret constituent of character, to be brought into the picture as a feature of interest, - the other does not analyze motive at all, but simply presses on to the resulting action leaving its probable complexity of various motives unsifted. But imagination of the most tenacious kind is not less necessary, probably more necessary, to work out actions than to display character."1

Nevertheless, such perceptive accounts are rare, and it remains true that criticism based on straightforward realism is almost always unsubtle and superficial, while at the same time ubiquitous. Truth-to-life dominated the naive approach, and, much qualified, stood at the centre of many others on a higher plane; but with the admission of qualifications, the escape from the mirror-image was open. It was only where simple realism ended that real novel-theory began.

2. The Pleasing Image.

That modification of the world of reality which we will now consider is also unambitious in scope, though widespread, like the foregoing principle of simple imitation from which it is the first deviation. In its emphasis on audience-effect it might be said to be governed generally by the Horatian tenet of dulce, which, according to M. H. Abrams, is not only one of the most characteristic of Neo-Classic doctrines, but, indeed,- "Measured either by its duration or the number of its adherents... has been the principal aesthetic attitude of the Western world."[2] While this principle broke down, as far as poetry was concerned, with the Romantic shift of focus towards the individual artist, it remained widely operative in novel-criticism through the nineteenth century.

The purpose of the novel is to give pleasure, and in most cases it is accepted tacitly or openly that this is achieved only after the author has subjected his material to some kind of selective process. In

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1. xxxviii (1865), 71-3.
2. The Mirror and the Lamp, New York, 1953, pp. 20-1.

the present context, the processes we will look at are, on the one hand, omission of what is considered to be inherently unpleasant or uninteresting, based on the assumption that the pleasure-giving properties of art are not determined by treatment alone; and, on the other hand, the positive alteration of commonplace material by a treatment of reality which might be called "cheerful", or "optimistic", or the like, including the provision of "agreeable" characters and a "happy ending", plus the elements of "humour" and "pathos".

Trollope, whose realism we have already seen to epitomize the ideas of many throughout the forty years, concurrently received a great deal of criticism for his failure to utilise both of these processes. London Society and the British Quarterly Review both lament his lack of a technique to transform his material aesthetically, the former comparing the pleasure of mere recognition derived from his brand of realism to that of wearing an old pair of slippers:

> "Mr. Trollope photographs the average middle-class life from which romance has been too much excluded by romancists. There is all the difference in the world between a great picture and a photograph... Yet the photograph has a personal interest which could not possibly belong to the picture."1

The British Quarterly, reviewing Ralph the Heir in 1871, continues the pictorial analogy, and regrets his lack of excitement and passion: "Mere portrait-painting is not the final cause of poetry and fiction; while life-like, it must be life-idealized."[2]

On the other hand, Trollope's success over his lowly material, in the case of Miss Mackenzie, is praised by the Dublin University Magazine and by the Athenaeum, by the former in particular for his transmuting prosaic matter into the purest poetry.[3] But the Reader's disparagement of the same book, on the grounds that its author's cleverness just saves him from the dullness that must inevitably

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1. "The Piccadilly Papers", xv (1869), 473-4.
2. liv (1871), 240-2.
3. "Another Cluster of Novels", lxv (1865), 576; and Athenaeum, 1865 (i), 455.

accompany a plot drawn from the least interesting sections of society, points to the more familiar criticism of Trollope, the a priori limitations of his subject-matter.[1]

In an age whose aesthetic theories are often held to be typified by George Eliot's post-Romantic desire to discover beauty in commonplace things, the other tendency, to pre-judge according to high or low subject-matter, reveals the continuing strength of the Neo-Classic tradition, signalized by Walter Bagehot's distaste for the grotesque and Matthew Arnold's preference for "great actions". J. Herbert Stack, for example, is writing in this tradition when he attacks Trollope's mere mirror-reflection in the belief that "no amount of skill can make common-place men and common-place incidents and common-place feelings fit subjects of high or true literary art."[2] And the Saturday Review takes a similar attitude to He Knew He Was Right, regretting the over-fidelity to "the very commonest events" of Nature which thereby precludes the heroism in the characters of a novel that is essential if they are to attract the reader's sympathy and appear something other than feeble-minded and weak-willed.[3]

Adverse criticisms of Trollope on these lines continue in considerable numbers throughout the period: the Athenaeum, in 1874, finds Phineas Redux unstimulating, un-ideal, depressing, and thoroughly life-like,[4] and the Pall Mall Gazette, in 1878, attributes the dullness it finds in Is he Popenjoy? to his novels being almost more real than reality itself.[5] In the same year the Spectator disparagingly calls The American Senator, like all his books, "leaves from the lives of respectable people",[6] and, finally, at the very end of the period,

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1. v (1865), 596.
2. "Mr. Anthony Trollope's Novels", Fortnightly, v n.s. (1869), 196-7.
3. xxvii (1869), 751-3.
4. 1874 (i), 53.
5. "Is he Popenjoy?", xxvii (1878), 1656.
6. li (1878), 1101-2.

Leslie Stephen notes the dullness of the method: "By the excision of all that is energetic, or eccentric, or impulsive, or romantic, you do not really become more lifelike; you only limit yourself to the common and uninteresting."[1]

Trollope is only one of the recipients of this kind of criticism, although so well does he represent the reportage it disliked that he is several times singled out as the grand instigator behind other offenders.[2] As in the case of Trollope, most of these attacks are based on the need for art's mirror to be selective from the start. For example, the British Quarterly significantly cites Arnold, along with Joubert, to support its contention that fiction must exclude what is painful and disgusting in life in order that it might fulfil its function of ministering to enjoyment,[3] and "manliness" and "muscularity" are the alternatives urged by the Leader on the contemporary novel a few years later, to escape from this triviality or sordidness:

> "We may live yet to read and admire novels based upon grounds more Shakespearian in their extent than those occupied by the chroniclers of the loves of bucolic curates and of the excitement of suburban tea-parties."[4]

An undefined "beauty" is often used as the factor to limit subject-matter, as when the Saturday damns Collins' Armadale for its controversial portrayal of Miss Gwilt: "The question is whether it is worth while drawing her, and what the picture comes to when it is painted. The chief flaw in it is not that it is pernicious, but that it is ugly."[5] Ruskin, when not using "Beauty" in his familiar quasi-religious way, employs the same standard in his dismissal of "Cockney literature" in general, and of The Mill on the Floss, with

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1. "Anthony Trollope " (1901), Studies of a Biographer, Second Series, 1902, iv, 201.
2. E.g., Contemporary, xiv (1870), 489.
3. "Matthew Arnold, Poet and Essayist", xlii (1865), 246-7.
4. "Tennyson and Novels", iii (1869), 277.
5. xxi (1866), 726-7.

its characters like "the sweepings-out of a Pentonville omnibus." For him, George Eliot can no more create pleasing art out of her inherently base material than can Millet out of the peasants whom that artist prefers to the nymphs and sibyls of true "Pan-Athenaic" beauty.[1]

The "slum school" of the last two decades of the century, in such writers as Moore, Gissing, Arthur Morrison, and Richard Whiteing, who so deliberately and so flagrantly sought their material far from the haunts of nymphs, came up against the same firmly-held notion that what is unpleasant or ugly in life will remain so in art - "..when this conscientious realist makes the inebriated Sarah Tucker vomit outside the Criterion, the reader is almost fain to follow her example", objects the Times to Esther Waters.[2] The Athenaeum does not disapprove of the earlier A Mummer's Wife for being immoral, but simply for being realistic to an unpleasant and boring degree,[3] and the Spectator expresses the identical view:

> "Unless it can be regarded as a pleasure to be compelled to witness the most revolting accessories of disease and debauchery, Mr. Moore's book stands condemned by the most universally accepted canon of art."4

Ian MacLaren, despairing over the new realism, in 1897, would exclude all ugliness from art as an offence against its principle of offering consolation and recreation:

> "It is the substance not the workmanship which offends and repels... One breathes throughout an atmosphere of filth, squalor, profanity, and indecency, and is seized with moral nausea. There are such things as drains, and sometimes they may have to be opened, but one would not for choice have one opened in his library."5

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1. "Fiction - Fair and Foul. V", Nineteenth Century, x (1881), 516-21.
2. May 15, 1894, p. 10.
3. 1884 (ii), 767.
4. lviii (1885), 83-5.
5. "Ugliness in Fiction", Literature, i (1897), 80-1.

In spite of numerous manifestos - such as Morrison's own, in 1897[1] - against the belief that art's mission is to minister to society's comfort, the rose-water concept of the novel continues among critics as a firm principle of limitation on its mimetic accuracy. The requirement that fiction leave "a pleasant taste", for example, never disappears. In 1882, the Athenaeum regrets the effect on the palate left by the very fidelity of Pamela Sneyd's Jack Urquhart's Daughter to "certain far from pleasant realities",[2] and the Edinburgh Review formulates the principle as late as 1896: "We believe that the surest test of a good novel is that it leaves a pleasant flavour behind" - and goes on to gather its own particular nosegay at the bottom of the Scottish Kailyard.[3]

Social attitudes, as well as more directly aesthetic considerations, underlie much of this perpetual demarcation of the artistically admissible, and at times the exclusion of common life from the novel can be seen almost as an attempt to stem the tide of Demos, as when the Athenaeum, in 1865, warns its readers that in William Gilbert's works they will find themselves in unrelieved association with the unwashed:

> "The social world displayed is not congenial to the habits and feelings of cultivated people... No workmanship can make base material worthy to endure for any length of time, nor make it capable of being formed into 'a vessel of honour'"-4

and when H. H. Lancaster, writing on George Eliot, points out, as do so many, that lower-class characters, by virtue of their position in life, can never evoke that sympathy which alone prevents tragedy

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1. "What is a Realist?", New Rev., xvi (1897), 326-36.
2. 1882 (i), 343.
3. "The New Scottish Novelists", clxxxiv (1896), 38. [By A. Innes Shand - Wellesley Index]
4. 1865 (i), 124.

degenerating from true art into the merely harrowing.[1] The attitude of young Ashenden's aunt, in Maugham's Cakes and Ale, who did not like to read in novels about characters who dropped their aitches,[2] is basically the same as those many critics who also transformed the social idealism of snobbery into an aesthetic idealism setting off the novel from the world it was supposed to mirror.

So far we have seen critics insist that art must change the nature of reality into something that gives pleasure mainly by means of omission before the act of writing properly begins. But there was also much strength in that train of thought, again geared ultimately to the audience-effect, which might be summed up in the words of an Athenaeum reviewer in 1870 about the apparently unexciting subject-matter of a Mrs. Oliphant novel: "..the goodness of a novel has little or nothing to do with the subject-matter of it, but depends exclusively upon treatment."[3]

One of the traditional methods of transforming reality was the addition of the ingredients of "humour" and "pathos". For example, the Athenaeum complains at the dullness of Culmshire Folk:

> "..it is excessively elaborated, scenery and characters detailed with the accuracy of a Dutch painting, the stage filled almost to crowding, with a multiplicity of actors; but it is almost destitute either of humour or pathos, the correlative attributes, without which fiction is less lively than fact."4

But this forms part of a more general method which receives a great deal of emphasis and favour throughout the period, and which might be called the Cheerful and Agreeable. There are many reasons why the

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1. "George Eliot's Novels", North British Rev., vi n.s. (1866), 207. [Identified Wellesley Index] See also, e.g., J. Herbert Stack on the absence of Tragedy in the lives of the poor, as in the case of Hetty Poyser ("Mr. Anthony Trollope's Novels", Fortnightly, v n.s., 1869, 191).
2. Chapter 8.
3. 1870 (ii), 78.
4. 1873 (i), 758.

Victorians should have demanded optimism in their artists,[1] but we are concerned here only with the fact that the pessimism they so widely deprecated came to be associated with artistic realism, that plain rendering of empirical experience which left unvoiced the spiritual principles latent in it that alone could provide the hopefulness and comforting coherence they sought. The Athenaeum found Joseph Hatton's Cruel London impressively realistic, but - "The main fault of the book is an absence of relief, a want of any brighter glimpses of happiness to light up the dark features of humanity."[2]

Two conventions of the novel which are used to provide this brightness so necessary for the reader's pleasure and emotional security are "agreeable" characters and the happy ending, both frequently praised or accepted by critics as a natural feature of the world of the novel, and not recognized as being as much a stylization and distortion of reality as symbol or time-compression - or, for that matter, as the devices of melodrama so many of the same critics deplored. The former is one of the most widespread clichés in reviewing, as is its obverse, the condemnation of a novel for its "disagreeable" characters. For many critics, it is as reprehensible for the figures of a novel to be unpleasant people, cads and bounders, as it is for them to be "unnatural". Both criteria are used in close juxtaposition, without any apparent sense of contradiction: for example, the hero and heroine of Holme Lee's Basil Godfrey's Caprice are praised as being natural, and at the same time as having been made pleasing and perfect by a process of idealization that shows a true conception of art.[3] "Natural" proves to be a fairly complex term, involving not only factual closeness to life and convincingness within the structure of the novel, but also the qualitative distinction

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1. See, e.g., W. E. Houghton, The Victorian Frame of Mind, 1830-1870, New Haven, 1957, pp. 27-53.
2. 1878 (ii), 76.
3. British Quar. Rev., xlvii (1868), 553-4.

that what is "natural" in art, as in life, is life's happier side- "nature" not as a mere agglomeration, but as a normative interpretation of the data of experience.

When Saintsbury complains, of Florence Marryat's How They Loved Him, that the characters are all contemptible, and that- "A man of Sir Gilbert Conroy's class does not shake his wife when he learns that she was unfit to be his wife", he is not just criticising a lack of correspondence with the normally observable facts of life (although that is important in his eyes), but is at the same time implying that fiction should portray a world where people and behaviour are to a large extent stylized in order to reassure. He goes on:

> "To say of a book that it is disagreeable is sometimes thought to be a feeble, not to say feminine, form of criticism. In truth, it is nothing of the kind, but (if the word is used in its proper sense) one of the severest and most final reprobations possible of any product of art. A book may be as pitiful or terrible as its author can make it (they are not often able to make it either, more's the pity), but if it is disagreeable it is bad."1

Later, Saintsbury makes it clear that any rose-pink sentimentalism of treatment is not what he is demanding, since he accepts Becky Sharp and Miss Bates as "agreeable" characters in an artistic sense; but he makes no more positive attempt than before to analyze the technique that produces this necessary result. Of Thackeray's Philip, he writes, in 1908:

> "It is true that, in the novel, to secure the highest artistic effect, and at the same time the greatest satisfaction to the reader, the characters must be real, and their actions must be probable in themselves, or made so. But it is not true that this is sufficient. They must be made in some way or other agreeable; and if they are made disagreeable they will not and ought not to succeed."2

Without at least some agreeable characters in a story, it is felt that the writer cannot establish the essential rapport with his readers, as when the Spectator is repelled by Stevenson's Master of Ballantrae:

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1. Academy, xxii (1882), 45.
2. A Consideration of Thackeray, 1931, p. 243.

"One feels the want of a congenial character amongst the dramatis personae on whom one's sympathies can be legitimately bestowed."[1]
And the same periodical interestingly analyzes the realistic effects of Gissing's The Crown of Life, with reference to a passage in Chapter 14 which describes Piers Otway's vision, at night, of the life of despair lying ahead of him, and which opens: "He arrived at his hotel in London late at night, drank a glass of spirits, and went to bed..." After a longer quotation, the reviewer concludes:

> "That is finely said, and yet the impression is seriously impaired by that detestable and gratuitous touch of realism at the outset about the glass of spirits. In his perfect but inartistic sincerity, Mr. Gissing insists on playing the valet to his hero, with the result of destroying any sentimental attachment on the part of the reader."2

There is more to this than an abstainer's disapproval of spirits: in the insistence that the central character of a novel must be that certain degree above life we can see at work another of the firmest principles of Neo-Classicism.

The happy ending receives less explicit comment, and can be considered a critical principle more by its tacit acceptance than by its open recommendation. The Dublin University Magazine, in 1865, is fairly representative in its praise of Sedgely Court for ending in the marrying-off of amiable characters:

> "Sedgely Court is festooned with enduring orange blossom. It is the very type of what should be the principal scene in a novel - a paradise of lovers - a soil where affairs of the heart never failed of fruit."3

And R. D. Blackmore enunciates the principle, at the end of Cradock Nowell, that the conclusion to a novel should be like the will of a good-natured man, in which tokens of regard and grateful mentions are bestowed on all the author's friends and dependents.[4] Burne-Jones,

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1. lxiii (1889), 437-8.
2. lxxxiii (1899), 661-2.
3. "A Group of New Novels", lxv (1865), 342.
4. Revised Edn., 1873, p. 459.

finally, is a typical reader of this sort in his complaint against Anna Karenina:

> "...I can't bear a tale that has in it a woman who is knocked about and made miserable and mad, and thrown away on a wretch, and is altogether heart-breaking. I like such a one, after due troublesomeness and quite bearable anxiety, to marry the hero and be happy ever after."1

Serious writers, in the later period, accept that the darkness of life must be reflected in the novel, and in the final disposition of fates that sums up the novel's attitudes, but the distrust of the tragic remains. So long as it is not an obvious absurdity, the majority of critics prefer the conclusion which savours of a happier world than this - although it should be remembered that death was often accepted in the same spirit as wedding-bells, so long as it received a treatment of pathos, beauty, and "fulfilment" that gave it a tearful kind of happiness of its own.

Finally, in this examination of non-naturalistic aspects of fiction acceptable to critics on the grounds of dulce, we must bear in mind that deliberately and self-evidently improbable novels continued to find approval throughout the period on the same simple grounds of pleasing their readers. As we have seen, unnatural incidents are always being condemned, but there is a lively and co-existent readiness to accept the opposite when it provides pleasures great enough to compensate for those of realism. For example, R. T. Calton's Mr. Carrington is an extravaganza, a mixture of Dumas and Disraeli, yet the British Quarterly is forced to recommend it for its spiritedness and fecundity: "It is impossible to criticise novels so crowded with impossible incident and extravagant sentiment, that contain all things possible and impossible."[2] Rhoda Broughton's rarified atmosphere is praised by Temple Bar as more "interesting" than real life,[3] and the Saturday admits even the

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1. Georgiana, Lady Burne-Jones, Memorials of Edward Burne-Jones, 1904, ii, 164.
2. lix (1874), 255.
3. "The Novels of Miss Broughton", xli (1874), 207.

distorted caricatures of her Not Wisely, but Too Well on the same grounds: "..the faultiest character of fiction which has the saving merit of vitality is worth any number of those vapid inanities which novelists turn out with so much ease."[1] The much-ridiculed Ouida receives her share of tributes, when the Contemporary thanks her for transporting us into regions fairer and more intense than the "every-day pettinesses" of fashionable realism,[2] and the Spectator even more unrestrainedly enthuses over her Pascarèl, which is preposterous, wild, luscious, and beautiful, without any "touch of realism, of possibility" to spoil its poetry and fascinating excess.[3] Delight and vitality win praise for Dumas and Hugo, and Henry Kingsley's wild and improbable fantasies gain approval by being rollicking and entertaining, as do the works of Lever and Mortimer Collins - although there is often some disparagement mixed with the praise, to the effect that this kind of fiction, while perfectly valid, is of a lower order than that based on observation and realism. Even "Sensation Novels" are at times justified by their pleasurable effects:

> "We have no objection to a fine bit of sensationalism worked up with good effect. It may not be the highest kind of art, but it has a certain weird power of its own, and if its light is lurid, it is exciting."4

Many of these critical encomia of the improbable also justify themselves by reference to such things as the author's imagination, or the novel's access to an Ideal world, or the non-mimetic causes of illusion, and will be examined in detail later. At this point, attention is simply being drawn to the existence of a school of thought which accepts the artist's right to transcend nature in his quest for what will please and entertain - a quest that results in fairy-tale and romance, as well as, more restrainedly, that avoidance of the trivial, the disagreeable, and the pessimistic which we have already seen.

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1. xxiv (1867), 549-50.
2. x (1869), 315-7.
3. xlvi (1873), 409-10.
4. Saturday Rev., xxxviii (1874), 833-4.

3. The Subjective Medium.

The nature of the artist himself is an obvious modifying medium, and received its share of critical attention, although, as might be expected from the embryonic state of novel-theory, there are no Coleridgean accounts of the workings of the novelist's imagination. It is generally accepted that the imagination is an essential part of the creative process in the novel, as in poetry, and that its results are not directly mimetic. The linking of imagination with out-and-out naturalism, as in the Spectator review of William Gilbert,[1] is rare, and, rather, it is seen as a power over the world of ordinary reality, forcing it into strange and wonderful shapes that impel acceptance. Some critics allow its undoubted presence in Dickens to overcome their basic distrust of his extreme unreality. G. H. Lewes, in 1872, seeking to explain the contrast between Dickens' continuing popularity and his low reputation among the cognoscenti, proposed the very force of his imagination, by which totally false and mechanical characters paradoxically affect the reader with a sense of reality, and a vividness bordering on that of hallucination. However, Lewes' theory of realism, while broad enough to embrace much of Jane Eyre and even of Moby Dick, had no place for the free play of such a distorting faculty as this of Dickens', and he firmly disparages those readers taken in by it.[2] George Stott, in 1869, emphasises that the Idealized fairyland created by Dickens is faulty in art simply because it is based on the eye, resulting in the external and the grotesque, and not on the true Imagination, which probes below the surface to the central idea of an author's conception.[3] Greater enthusiasm is shown by Robert Buchanan and Alfred Austin, the

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1. See above, pp. 53-4.
2. "Dickens in Relation to Criticism", Fortnightly, xi n.s. (1872), 144-9. For a fuller study of Lewes, see M. Greenhut, "George Henry Lewes as a Critic of the Novel", St. Phil., xlv (1948), 491-511; and R. Stang, Theory of the Novel in England, London, 1959, pp. 79-86, 171-6.
3. "Charles Dickens", Contemporary, x (1869), 210-3.

first of whom, in the same year, whimsically praises Dickens as a poet: "He was the creator of Human Fairyland. He was a magician, to be bound by none of your commonplace laws and regular notions."[1] Austin agrees with Buchanan that to call Dickens a realist, as some do, is the reverse of the truth:

> "No realistic writer can by any possibility be a great writer. He may be amazingly clever, remarkably entertaining, and even overwhelmingly popular; but the gods know him not. He is at best and highest a literary mechanic... Dickens, far from being a realistic writer, was one of the most intensely idealistic writers that ever existed."

His realism is only in the accessories of the mise-en-scène, and the key to his greatness lies in his transcendence of reality through his power of Vision.[2]

Throughout the period, a considerable body of opinion, drawn from the most conservative as well as liberal periodicals, favours the Idealism that proceeds from the subjective, imaginative treatment of the creator, especially in contrast to the objectivity urged by French writers. Thus, in 1867, the Westminster, following Schiller, defines the perfect novel as one "where incident shall be reconciled with the subjective spirit",[3] and six years later condemns the productions of its own age of drab Realism: "Our painting is mere photography, and our descriptive writing is mere topography. Mind is not seen. The play and grace of imagination are lost."[4] In 1878, J. H. B. Browne in the Westminster finds examples of the two contrasting modes in the Brontë sisters, comparing Charlotte's limited reliance on her own actual experience with Emily's greater scope:

> "There is a higher and a lower truth addressed to those whose observation is competent. There is the truth of bare repetition,

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1. "The 'Good Genie' of Fiction", Saint Pauls, x (1872), 130-48.
2. "Charles Dickens", Temple Bar, xxix (1870), 561-2. It is interesting how these few accounts presage the approach to Dickens as fantasist and symbolist current in our own day.
3. xxxi n.s. (1867), 261.
4. xliv n.s. (1873), 254.

> which might be given under the sanction of a witness-box oath; and there is the truth of imaginative recollection, which is given under the sanction and responsibility of the whole of one's high artistic nature."[1]

Arthur Symons, in the following decade, finds the imaginative effect exemplified in Meredith, who achieves true creation instead of mere reporting through "the imaginative fusion of the mass of observed fact",[2] and, in 1899, in the figure of Balzac, "a poet whose dreams were facts", and whose creative imagination achieved that quality of all great art: " .. the exuberance of creation which makes the Moses of Michel Angelo something more than human, which makes Lear something more than human, in one kind or another of divinity."[3]

Two of the best descriptions of how this divine afflatus of the artist works the required amalgam of the real and the ideal are given in the British Quarterly and the Gentleman's Magazine. The former, in its Shelleyan account of Meredith, distinguishes the creators from the mere constructors of novels by this subjectivity that assimilates all things to itself and -

> "..achieves its loftiest triumph in so moulding all conceivable relations, be they natural or supernatural, fact or dream, into the ideal form of their own all-fusing imagination, that they issue before us at once as though created by that inner fire, yet as wholly true to the essential laws of human life, and recognized by us as nature itself."4

And Garnet Smith, in the Gentleman's, arrives at a similar estimate of that true artistic balance which only the creative mind can achieve:

> "Our will is free, our character is beautiful, in proportion as they rise above nature. Nature is the material which must pass through the alembic of man's mind; a series of symbols whereby to express the workings of the human soul; the brute matter which owes all its form to art. Yet art, Antaeus-like, is ever re-invigorated by touching mother-earth; and both elements are truly requisite."5

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1. "Charlotte Brontë", liii n.s. (1878), 54-5. [Identified Wellesley Index]
2. Time, i n.s. (1885), 633.
3. "Balzac", Fortnightly, lxv n.s. (1899), 745-57.
4. "The Novels of George Meredith", lxix (1879), 413-4. [By Arabella Shore - Wellesley Index]
5. "Gustave Flaubert", cclxv (1888), 120-31.

Most criticisms based on the nature of the artist's imagination arrive at some such reconciliation of the two supposedly opposing principles of Real and Ideal which so vexed the age. The imagination is rarely allowed a free rein, and excessive subjectivity is often frowned upon, as when Frederic Harrison expresses his unease over Jane Eyre, for all its great merits: "It is true that a purely subjective work in prose romance, an autobiographic revelation of a sensitive heart, is not the highest and certainly not the widest art."[1] And Turgenev, that great favourite of the Victorians, is almost as frequently commended for controlling his poetic imagination by his accuracy to nature's models as he is for avoiding naturalism.[2]

By the 'nineties, so strongly had critics reacted against the extreme (and often misreported) ideas of impersonality reaching them from across the Channel that many were moved to show the meaninglessness of much of the debate by stressing the complete inevitability of this modified subjectivity of the creative process. For Hubert Crackanthorpe, himself a supposed disciple of Maupassant, all art is imaginative, "seen through the temperament of a single man", and Realism and Idealism are mutually dependent. The dichotomy does not exist for the artist, for whom simply "the essential is contained in the frank, fearless acceptance.. of his entire artistic temperament, with its qualities and its flaws."[3] And similarly, Gissing, for all his indebtedness to French and Russian Naturalism, and for all his early ideas on his own objectivity,[4] comes to define Realism simply as "nothing more than artistic sincerity in the portrayal of contemporary life." All material is dead until the writer's imagination and soul have breathed life into it:

> ".. what can be more absurd than to talk about the 'objectivity' of such an author as Flaubert, who triumphs by his extraordinary

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1. "Charlotte Brontë", Studies in Early Victorian Literature, 1895, pp. 174-5.
2. E.g., Academy, xxiv (1883), 179-80.
3. "Reticence in Literature. Some Roundabout Remarks", Yellow Book, ii (1894), 261, 269.
4. E.g., Letters, ed. A. and E. Gissing, 1927, pp. 128-9.

> power of presenting life as he, and no other man, beheld it? There is no science of fiction."1

In particular, Sympathy is singled out as a part of that intrusion of the author's temperament so essential to the artistic shaping of experience, and its lack is often named as the greatest single fault of the French Realists. The English are held up, in comparison, as examples of the force of authorial sympathy - Garnet Smith, in the article on Flaubert quoted above, attributes it to the latent religious feeling in the English mind - and, at times, the Russians, among whom even Dostoevsky is praised for the vast compassion with which he enfolds his abnormal and repulsive subject-matter.[2] J. M. Barrie condemns Baring-Gould for the lack of sympathy towards his lower-class characters that makes them unnatural brutes, and contrasts this with Dickens,[3] whose power of sympathy, of course, is one of his most frequently praised characteristics. A very typical example of many is, again, Frederic Harrison, whose distrust of subjectivity does not extend to this facet of it:

> "No waif and stray was so repulsive, no drudge was so mean, no criminal was so atrocious, but what Charles Dickens could feel for him some ray of sympathy, or extract some pathetic mirth out of his abject state. And Dickens does not look on the mean and the vile as do Balzac and Zola, that is, from without, like the detective or the surgeon. He sees things more or less from their point of view."4

Again, for Hugh Egerton, in the National Review, "without sympathy there can be no art",[5] and in the Spectator the "clear, correct, and dreary record" of Maupassant's Fort Comme la Mort is criticised as "totally lacking the one essential element, the raison d'être of all Art, - human sympathy."[6] This inhumanity of Maupassant is often deplored - Black and White contrasts him with Hardy, whose terrible realism is free from this

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1. "The Place of Realism in Fiction", Humanitarian, vii (1895), 14-16.
2. E.g. "Dostoiefski", Temple Bar, xci (1891), 249.
3. "Mr. Baring-Gould's Novels", Contemporary, lvii (1890), 206-14.
4. "Charles Dickens", Studies in Early Victorian Literature, 1895, pp. 141-2.
5. "Two Views of the Novelist", x (1887-8), 610.
6. lxiii (1889), 309-10.

fault on the one hand, and from rose-coloured Utopianism on the other:

> "Mr. Hardy, who has always been a rational naturalist, has now shown the ultra naturalists how to write a great naturalistic novel without sacrificing his human sympathies on the shrine of his literary theories."1

And even Arnold Bennett, an avowed Realist and admirer of Maupassant and the Goncourts, expresses this point of view, in 1896, in a famous dictum: "Essential characteristic of the really great novelist: a Christ-like, all-embracing compassion."[2]

Such sympathy is essentially more than a mere colouring of sentiment: the intense involvement of the artist in his creation that it implies, along with this whole general emphasis on his temperament and imagination, belong firmly to the Romantic tradition, and lead, as far as Vernon Lee is concerned, to the heart of the ultimate mystery of aesthetics - that "quality which affects us as truthfulness, which far surpasses in efficacy the utmost fidelity to single cases, or the highest clearness of typical diagrams", that "un-real truthfulness" which subdues our soul, and can only be called the author's "sympathy, or passionate personal interest."[3]

4. The Novel and Higher Realms.

Another way of distinguishing between the novel and reality is to see the former, not as more pleasant, or as a product of the shaping imagination, but as directly representative of a different reality, the world of the Ideal - and, in this, novel-criticism returns in part to the Neo-Classic tradition. That there is such an order of existence is, of course, implicit in the many foregoing references to the Ideal, and its superiority over the Real for one reason or another, and, above all, in discussions of the Moral Ideal, to be treated later. But there remained room for non-moral definition of this world, and we must now examine the

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1. iii (1892), 18.
2. Journals, ed. N. Flower, 1932-3, i, 19.
3. "Rosny and the French Analytical Novel", Cosmopolis, vii (1897), 690-1.

different categories, be they Beauty, or Truth, or Essence, or Symbol, by which Critics defined those truer realities than real life which it was the novel's task to discover.

At this level of debate, it is often difficult to distinguish between moral and non-moral, where the True and the Beautiful tend to coincide. However, most Victorian critics were so articulate whenever morals were concerned that they usually made clear their belief in the supremacy of moral truth, and there were few at the time who could say, like A. Eubule-Evans, in St. Pauls:

> ".. the aims of both Morality and Art are identical, viz., the True and the Beautiful. And if this be so, it is impossible for the devoted artist to sin against objective Morality, however much he may violate its conventional canons."

The novelist penetrates to this Ideal world by a "simple, loyal, loving reproduction of Nature", not in petty detail, but in its broad features, and can take lessons from the works of such German artists as Spielhagen and Auerbach, who aim at something higher and more invisible than the mere copying of externals and accidents - that is, at Essence itself.[1]

Even by those who attempt to describe these high-sounding ends of the novel, it is often felt that what they are describing is more generally ascribed to poetry. Mrs. Oliphant, enthusing over Charles Reade in 1869, sees his transcendence of realism as a sign that fiction becomes poetry for Reade, in that it "never contents itself with vulgar reproduction, but always aims at a lofty soul under the garments of individual existence."[2] And in 1873, she takes Lytton as an example of the true Idealist, compared with the too-knowing, too earth-bound George Eliot and Thackeray:

> "Only so can life be truly represented - life which is not all real, strange though the words may seem, - which finds much of its sweetness in illusion, which takes its rare draughts of joy oftenest in dreams - dreams truer than the facts, more real than flesh and blood."3

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1. "German Novelists", xii (1873), 277-89.
2. "Charles Reade's Novels", Blackwood's, cvi (1869), 514.
3. "Lord Lytton", ibid., cxiii (1873), 376. [Both identified Wellesley Index]

Even Flaubert is on one occasion singled out as coming near to "Poetic Truth" through the "romance of reality." Madame Bovary gives the impression of life itself, but in fact goes beyond observation to the world of the spirit: "Between life and a book there must always remain a great gulf fixed.. [Flaubert] is real by piercing to the essence of things, by selecting the necessary and inevitable in life."[1]

Finally, in 1885, W. E. Henley uses Diana of the Crossways to enunciate a Neo-Platonic doctrine that would hardly have sounded strange on the lips of Reynolds himself:

> "This is indeed the merit and distinction of art: to be more real than reality, to be not nature, but nature's essence. It is the artist's function not to copy, but to synthesize; to eliminate from that gross confusion of actuality which is his raw material whatever is accidental, idle, irrelevant, and select for perpetuation that only which is appropriate and immortal."2

An Idealist theory of fiction along these lines is indicated in the few critical utterances of Thomas Hardy, whose eventual abandonment of the novel for poetry can perhaps be foreseen in the high, Sidneyan aims he set for it. In spite of his basic insistence on verisimilitude and truth of representation - as seen in the rigorous time-charts, topographies, and biographies of characters he always drew up for his novels, as well as his qualified approval for the Naturalists' revolution against the artificial - fiction remained for him, like all art, something higher than life, "more true, so to put it, than history or nature can be." The modern school of "novelists of social minutiae", with their "photographic curiousness", present only "life garniture and not life."[3] Hardy

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1. "The Nemesis of Sentimentalism", Macmillan's, lx (1889), 194-5. [By W. P. James - Wellesley Index]
2. Athenaeum, 1885 (i), 339-40.
3. "The Profitable Reading of Fiction", Forum, New York, v (1888), 63-5. The general critical reaction to Hardy, then as now, reflected the dualism of his theory, critics never being sure by which standard, realist or non-realist, to appraise his stylised characters and incidents. See, e.g., W. J. Hyde, "Hardy's View of Realism: a Key to the Rustic Characters", Victorian Studies, ii (1958-9), 45-59.

continually emphasises the transcendental ends of art, writing in his notebook in 1890:

> "Art is a disproportioning - (i.e. distorting, throwing out of proportion) - of realities, to show more clearly the features that matter in those realities, which, if merely copied or reported inventorially, might possibly be observed, but would more probably be overlooked. Hence 'realism' is not Art."1

Like poetry, the novel is a mode of discovery, and its art lies in making the defects of nature "the basis of a hitherto unperceived beauty, by irradiating them with 'the light that never was' on their surface, but is seen to be latent in them by the spiritual eye."[2] And in 1886, as The Mayor of Casterbridge was appearing: "My art is to intensify the expression of things, as is done by Crivelli, Bellini, etc., so that the heart and inner meaning is made vividly visible."[3] External perception is the foundation, but the true novelist, like the poet, must always lead us into a new world through his faculties of - "A sight for the finer qualities of existence, an ear for the 'still sad music of humanity'".[4]

From such Idealist statements as these, a modern study of Hardy as a theorist concludes that, in his criticism as in his practice as a novelist, he belongs to the tradition of Melville, Emily Brontë, and Hawthorne: "He now appears to us as a realist developing towards allegory - as an imaginative artist who brought the nineteenth-century novel out of its slavery to fact."[5]

As far as Character is concerned, the Type is that reflex of the

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1. F. E. Hardy, The Early Life of Thomas Hardy, 1928, p. 299.
2. Ibid., pp. 150-1.
3. Ibid., pp. 231-2.
4. "The Science of Fiction", New Rev., iv (1891), 315-9.
5. M. D. Zabel, "Hardy in Defense of his Art: the Aesthetic of Incongruity", Southern Rev., vi (1940), 148. An Idealist credo, similar in many respects to Hardy's, appears in 1897 from one of his great successors in this task of emancipation - Conrad's Preface to The Nigger of the Narcissus.

Universal which such an Idealist author must strive to achieve. As we have seen, on sheer numerical strength, the upholders of the lifelike in character dominate reviewing, and frequently express their abhorrence of the Typical, but it is not at all uncommon to find such a criticism as Macmillan's, of Disraeli's Lothair, that its characters are mere caricatures, not because they are unnatural but because they do not show that blend of real and ideal that results in Ideal Types.[1] The most acceptable Type is this, which arises somehow out of the realistic and the particularized and maintains its roots in the everyday. For example, Saintsbury criticises Octave Feuillet for his failure to create the Type that is the natural accompaniment of strongly individualized characters,[2] and H. G. Wells in the Saturday holds up Turgenev as an example of that "highest form of literary art" by which a character is made typical and individual at the same time, a living figure lit through with symbolism - in this case (typically of Wells), the symbolism of great forces working in society.[3]

On the other hand, Mowbray Morris, in 1882, stresses alone the value of rising above the ephemeral and the everyday:

> "The fictions which paint the manners and humours of contemporary life, which deal with portraits rather than with types of humanity, with the individualities of nature rather, and not with her universal and eternal properties, must inevitably lose.. much of that which once constituted its chiefest charm."4

And even Trollope is defended by the Spectator from the frequent charge of being too like real life, and of failing to create -

> "...men and women not so much representative of average men and women, as typical of them, with something, however, of intensity and force and clearness of outline, which belongs more to exceptional than to average men and women, but which is necessary in order to furnish keys to human nature in general."5

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1. "Lothair", xxii (1870), 143-4.
2. "Octave Feuillet", Fortnightly, xxiv n.s. (1878), 117.
3. lxxxi (1896), 23-4. [Identified in Edwardians and Late Victorians, ed. R. Ellmann, New York, 1960, p. 114]
4. "Charles Dickens", Fortnightly, xxxii n.s. (1882), 769.
5. xlii (1869), 356-7.

Sterne provides an interesting example of how critics can disagree over the individual case yet agree on a fundamental principle, in this instance the same Neo-Classic preference for the Universal Nature that can be discovered through a quintessential treatment of the familiar rather than the untypical and unnatural. Walter Bagehot, in 1864, complains at the excessive singularity of Sterne's personages:

> "Though each individual character is shaded off into human nature, the whole is not shaded off into the world. This society of originals and oddities is left to stand by itself, as if it were a natural and ordinary society."1

And the Quarterly, in 1886, praises Sterne for this very achievement:

> "In a whimsical method he traces the relation of peculiarities to the universal principles from which they have diverged. He follows his anomalous characters to the border line where they imperceptibly shade off into common humanity, and shows how accident distorts natural types into abnormal exceptions, how every man is a potential oddity."2

The idea of the Symbol as an anti-mimetic convention in the novel, leading directly to the world of Universality and Ideal truth, receives some attention, though little elaboration, among critics of the later years, and reinforces the tendency against the concept of the novel as essentially a representation of manners. For example, Oscar Wilde, in "The Soul of Man Under Socialism", enlists Meredith beneath the banner of the anti-Realists in these terms:

> "His people not merely live, but they live in thought. One can see them from myriad points of view. They are suggestive. There is soul in them and around them. They are interpretative and symbolic."3

Gissing is more explicit - and ahead of his time - in his discussions of Dickens' social, philosophical, and ethical symbols in his introductions to the Rochester Edition of 1900-1,[4] and in defending the death of Little Nell for its symbolical value of the death of

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1. "Sterne and Thackeray", National Rev., xviii (1864), 539.
2. "The Growth of the English Novel", clxiii (1886), 51. [By R. E. Prothero - Wellesley Index]
3. Fortnightly, xlix n.s. (1891), 312-3.
4. Reprinted as Critical Studies of the Works of Charles Dickens, New York, 1924.

innocence in the earlier Charles Dickens (1898).[1] However, as evidence of his lack of confidence in this approach, he ends the latter book with the contradictory claim that the Universal Symbols to be found in Hugo make him something other than a novelist: "Les Misérables is not rightly to be called a novel; it belongs to the region of symbolic art."[2]

George Moore also uses the word to point to the existence of a world other than the actual to which the novelist must penetrate, as in his admiration of the fixed, symbolic attitudes given by Flaubert to the characters of Frédéric and Arnoux in L'Éducation Sentimentale, by virtue of which their lack of traditional development and apparent woodenness become part of the central "idea" to which each part of the book contributes.[3] For Moore this other world takes at times the form of the "under life", that realm of the unconscious shortly to be explored by Proust, Virginia Woolf, and many others. He praises Tolstoi, whose actual events are but -

> ".. signs and symbols, and the beauty of Tolstoi's art is that nowhere can we determine the limits of either life; so beautifully are they interwoven that they are in the book as they are in life, indivisible forms of one and the same thing. The subconscious is the real life, out of which chance has beckoned us for a while; it is the life of the ages, and through it Tolstoi enables us to perceive affinities in all things."4

Lastly, Arthur Symons' The Symbolist Movement in Literature, although mainly devoted to poetry, draws together many of these anti-naturalist themes in its acceptance, as a definition of Symbol, of "a representation which does not aim at being a reproduction", and "some embodiment and revelation of the Infinite; the Infinite is made to blend itself with the Finite." The novel is now moving away from the mere exteriority and formalism of Flaubert, Zola, and the Concourts, and, by the use of Symbol, is attaining to "ultimate essence" and "the soul of things." Taking

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1. Pp. 176-7.
2. P. 220.
3. "A Tragic Novel", Cosmopolis, vii (1897), 52.
4. "Since the Elizabethans", ibid., iv (1896), 57.

Huysmans as his example, and in language strongly reminiscent of George Moore, Symons shows how the novelist uses detail only in order to symbolize the "invisible life" which underlies the universe:

> "Here, then, purged of the distraction of incident, liberated from the bondage of a too realistic conversation, in which the aim had been to convey the very gesture of breathing life, internalised to a complete liberty, in which, just because it is so absolutely free, art is able to accept, without limiting itself, the expressive medium of a convention, we have in the novel a new form, which may be at once a confession and a decoration, the soul and a pattern."1

Of the various transforming lights of fiction that never were on sea or land, there remains only that of the "Aesthetic" dream, the independent world of "pure" Beauty itself - a concept which found short shrift from most novel-critics. Vernon Lee, whose Pateresque "The Value of the Ideal" stands out in the otherwise sound Tory pages of the National Review like a green carnation in the frock-coat of a bishop, defines this Ideal world largely in terms of the "aesthetic sense" of readers: "...the value of art must not be measured... by conformity to a reality which is outside us, but by conformity to these feelings within us." The realism of Zola can only appeal to faculties lower than those touched by the productions of true Idealism:

> ".. as regards life and feeling, and the men and women in whose life our feelings live, we are all artists on our own behalf, seeking to obtain, making up, a beauty that transcends reality, craving for a kind of pleasure which is the most acute and exquisite that our soul can enjoy."2

The emphasis shifts from the soul-hunger of readers to a more objective account of the world of Beauty in Wilde's "The Decay of Lying", a brilliant piece of exaggeration and rhetoric, with just enough ballast of sense to prevent it taking off on the wings of its own stylistic exuberance. Lying is the basis of true art, which has now been debased into a mere blue-book by the drabness and insignificance of contemporary

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1. 1899, pp. 3-10, 141-50.
2. vi (1885-6), 26-42.

realism, and Meredith is one of the few who has "refused to bow the knee to Baal" and kept "life at a respectful distance". Art is dragged down by the contemporary, since Beauty cannot exist in things to which we are not indifferent, as witness the tragic decline of Reade from the beauty of The Cloister and the Hearth to his later attempted social reforms: "Certainly we are a degraded race, and have sold our birthright for a mess of facts."

Wilde then establishes his main point, that Art is independent of life, "poor, probable, uninteresting human life", and the key to its existence is Beauty alone: ".. the object of art is not simple truth but complex beauty." Art is a veil, not a mirror; is greater than life, moulding it to its own purposes; and expresses only itself, having rejected reality and the human spirit. Wilde proceeds to a grotesque poetized vision of the world of dragons and basilisks that would succeed a successful revival of lying; and, coming to earth, summarises his four main doctrines. Firstly, Art only expresses itself, and not its age; and secondly:

> "All bad art comes from returning to life and nature, and elevating them into ideals. Life and nature may sometimes be used as part of art's rough material, but before they are of any real service to art they must be translated into artistic conventions. The moment art surrenders its imaginative medium it surrenders everything. As a method Realism is a complete failure, and the two things that every artist should avoid are modernity of form and modernity of subject-matter."

Thirdly, life imitates Art, and can only express its energy through Art. And lastly, lying is the aim of Art, "the telling of beautiful untrue things."[1]

Out of the blinding extravaganza of Wilde's argument emerges an evaluation of the relation of the novel to reality as fruitful as any we have yet examined. Idealism has reached its flood-mark in his creation of a wholly independent world for the novel to embody, a world

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1. Nineteenth Century, xxv (1889), 35-56.

in which Beauty is the only reality. Never was the mirror more distorted, and never was mimesis more splendidly routed.

5. The World of the Novel.

Within the formal entity of the novel itself, certain laws are recognized as prevailing that result in a necessary interference with the correspondence with external reality. These generally take the form either of ways of producing artistic illusion, a "sense of reality" that is recognized as different from reality itself; or else of conventions demanded by the very nature of the art, without specific reference to illusion as their end. In these we must limit ourselves to statements whose main burden is an explicit recognition that "life" in the novel is, by reason of the latter's verbal structures, different from "life" outside, ignoring the implicit recognition which could be deduced as underlying any description of technique.

Illusion arising out of recognition is, of course, the basis of those doctrines of simple realism that run through all criticism of the period, although, as we have seen, such critics usually mistake the illusion of fact for the fact itself. Also, the more idealistically-orientated theories of the three previous sections are likewise dependent, implicitly or otherwise, on this willing suspension of disbelief, either through a sufficient modicum of naturalism, or, more mysteriously, the author's creative force, his "bounce". However, a certain amount of attention was paid to the problem, most interesting to modern critics, of how the magic effect is achieved simply by the novel's internal devices.

The most frequent point in criticism of Defoe, for example, is his powers of illusion, and Leslie Stephen, in the Cornhill for 1868, follows the traditional pattern of admiring his sleight-of-hand, the ingenious presentation of corroborative evidence by apparently impartial witnesses and the warnings against believing too completely in his characters, by

which he wins conviction.[1] However, Stephen places little value on "the mere fact of producing a truthful narrative", and in the same issue comes down heavily against the whole idea of illusion in fiction. He defends Richardson's use of the device of narration by letters, dismissing its improbability as irrelevant:

> "It is not the object of a really good novelist, nor does it come within the legitimate means of high art in any department, to produce an actual illusion.. a novelist is not only justified in writing so as to prove that his work is fictitious; but he almost necessarily hampers himself, to the prejudice of his work, if he imposes upon himself the condition that his book shall be capable of being mistaken for a genuine narrative."2

Stephen repeats his point in 1877, disparaging the illusive realism of Defoe, and also criticising the character of Paul Emmanuel, in Villette, as being too real, being based on the "erroneous theory of art" that literature aims simply at illusion.[3]

Stephen's confusion over the word "illusion" is obvious: what he is attacking is that school of thought, such as it is, which believed illusion can only be secured by outright reality and truth to life. He does not use the word to describe the effect of belief that may result from the stylized manipulation of reality, yet it is precisely this effect that he is praising in Richardson's non-realism, in the former article:

> "There is, indeed, no reason for looking closely; so long as the situations bring out the desired sentiment, we may accept them for the nonce, without asking whether they could possibly have occurred."4

"Desired sentiment" is simply the particular illusion, in the wider sense of the word, at which the author is aiming, and towards which he is using the fictional techniques at his disposal.

The debate that follows is clearly as ancient as Aristotle's contrast of the likely impossibility with the unconvincing possibility, and, like

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1. "De Foe's Novels", xvii (1868), 294-8.
2. "Richardson's Novels", ibid., 54.
3. "Hours in a Library. XVII. - Charlotte Brontë", ibid., xxxvi (1877), 727, 733.
4. Op. cit., 66.

the Stagyrite, a preference is often expressed for the former, not on the grounds of artistic likelihood being a matter of correspondence to the familiar order of nature, but an effect due to the inner coherence of the novel's parts. For example, Mrs. Oliphant criticises certain improbabilities in the novels of Charles Reade: "Such a thing might happen in fact; but fiction is bound as fact is not." Anything at all can happen in life, but "fiction is bound by harder laws than fact is, and must consider vraisemblance as well as absolute truth."[1] And, in 1875, she attributes the unconvincingness of a marriage in Annie Thackeray's Miss Angel to the fact that the author was following the actual events of Angelica Kauffmann's life:

> "Facts are most unsatisfactory leaders in a work of fiction. They will not fit into their proper place, or admit of that dramatic treatment which art demands, but are stubborn always according to their proverbial character."2

The Westminster Review, in 1866, is not reconciled by Dickens' defence of Our Mutual Friend that it is true to life: "But how does that affect the matter? Truth is not always probable. And it is probability which is required in a novel."[3] And eight years later, it commends Leslie Stephen and urges "our new realistic school" to take note of his advocacy of the vraisemblable over the vrai.[4]

It is also suggested at times that vraisemblance, the artistically "natural", is achieved by the selection out of nature of what is most frequently to be found there, and that, in some way, the unnatural in art is also unnatural in life, even though it does demonstrably occur. The more frequently certain events are found in life, the more natural do they seem when transposed into an artistic world where the effect of naturalness is always more difficult to achieve, and every factor in favour of belief, including that of previous familiarity, must be called into play. For example:

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1. "Charles Reade's Novels", Blackwood's, cvi (1869), 510.
2. "New Books", ibid., cxviii (1875), 99. [Both identified Wellesley Index]
3. xxix n.s. (1866), 582-5.
4. xlvi n.s. (1874), 291-5.

> "In real life we accept such facts because they are facts; but in reading a novel, the whole groundwork is so necessarily make-believe, that the facts must seem very natural to make us forget their unreality."1

And, of one of those railway accidents so topical and so useful as an expedient for the Victorian novelist:

> "Such coups de théâtre may happen occasionally in real life, for fact has a wonderful contempt for the balance of events; but everywhere else it offends us... The domain of the novelist is nature under its ordinary rules; not fact, which is often irreconcilable with life. We allow that an accident is possible enough: still it has an undesirable suddenness, and is, however real, an artificial incident."2

Artistic conviction is a function of "the balance of events", and so far is the point taken that the world of reality, to this one commentator at least, seems like a bad novel.

Apart from such pre-selection of the familiar, other non-naturalistic means of achieving the "sense of reality" are examined. H. Buxton Forman, again of Clarissa, a book whose artificial conventions obviously forced the persuaded reader to an analysis of his credence, writes that mere description never places real character before us, only "the rare power of idealization - the power of so far modifying the actualities of a subject as to throw into relief the idea which it is desired to convey." And, for its achievement of this, we can accept the improbability of the letter-convention as one of the necessary modifications of art: "Art is more piquant in its results than life is by just this power of making all surrounding circumstances subservient to the central idea."[3] Here, in "idea which it is desired to convey", and "the central idea", we once again have Stephen's "desired sentiment" - that is, the defining principle of each novel's own system of reality.

Another means is that of exaggeration, as brought out in an article,

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1. J. Herbert Stack, "Some Recent English Novels", Fortnightly, ix n.s. (1871), 743.
2. "Recent Novels", Fraser's, xx n.s. (1879), 560.
3. "Samuel Richardson, as Artist and Moralist", Fortnightly, vi n.s. (1869), 430-1, 442-3.

in 1869, on the acting style of an amateur dramatic company. The writer turns to fiction, and wonders that the majority opinion of the day, which holds art's business to be faithful reproduction, does not see that when a novel convinces by its "naturalness", its artistic method is actually the very reverse: "Realism is reached by unreal means; naturalness by artificial aids; simplicity by what may be called the necessary exaggeration of art." Examples are the unavoidable selection out of real-life dialogue, and the seizing of the notable features of characters only, in order to convey the effect of life.[1] The same point is made by the Spectator, in 1888, but with a qualification that would undoubtedly be echoed by most of the critics we are examining, and which reminds us of the compromise they were all seeking:

> "One of the many points in which the art of fiction resembles the art of painting, is that in the former, as well as in the latter, a certain amount of exaggeration is often essential to effectiveness; but if it be at all overdone, the excess is more fatal than the deficiency would have been."[2]

Again, in his valuable article on Dickens, George Stott, in the Contemporary, holds that an exact copy of life, even if it were possible, would seem unlike life - as happens with the close reproduction of the Pre-Raphaelites. All art is ideal, even if its subject-matter is realistic, and every novel, to secure illusion, is written by "compression" of facts and "grouping" of characters around one another, independently of external influence. "Realists" and "Idealists" are defined simply as those who use these unavoidable conventions to a lesser or a greater extent, and Dickens is criticised not for his unreality but for his unimaginative use of these conventions.[3]

A partial defence of Dickens, on the grounds of his very un-truth to life, and due to the nature of the art, emerges from the many self-contradictions of Gissing's study, at the end of the century. He continually criticises Dickens' improbable plots and melodramatic devices,

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1. "The Exaggeration of Art", Once a Week, iii n.s. (1869), 123-5.
2. lxi (1888), 1854-5.
3. "Charles Dickens", x (1869), 205-10.

yet one part of him is ready to admit that what is effective is thereby artistically justified, and that the rules ought to be rewritten to admit it. He attacks the use of coincidences in Bleak House, obviously uneasy at Dickens' powers of persuasion:

> "Therein lies the worthlessness of the plot, which is held together only by the use of coincidence in its most flagrant forms. Grant that anything may happen just where or when the interest of the story demands it, and a neat drama may pretty easily be constructed. The very boldness of the thing prevents readers from considering it; indeed most readers take the author's own view, and imagine every artificiality to be permitted in the world of fiction."

Yet Gissing goes on to accept even the account of the death of Krook, admitting, though only implicitly, that events of a novel should be judged against the reader's total reaction to the book, as directed by this very creative boldness of the author: "No doubt the generality of readers are wise, and it is pedantry to object to the logical extremes of convention in an art which, without convention, would not exist"-[1] a quality of fiction which he had already advanced, in 1892, as a reason for preferring that art to the greater externality and objectivity of the drama.[2]

Later in the Dickens book, in a consideration of his author's characters, he again hints at convention being justified by its being vital for the production of illusion. Characters like Mrs. Gamp seem true, yet would be impossible in real life:

> "Is not the fact in itself very remarkable, that by dint (it seems) of omitting those very features which in life most strongly impress us, an artist in fiction can produce something which we applaud as an inimitable portrait?"

The process is one of the subtlest alchemy, of which humour is the chief medium, and by this idealizing process we arrive at "a sublimation of the essence of Gamp". When the process breaks down, Dickens gives us his

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1. Charles Dickens, 1898, pp. 57-8.
2. "Why I Don't Write Plays", Pall Mall Gazette, lv (Sep. 10, 1892), 3. See also his acceptance of coincidences in fiction in a letter of 1891 (Letters of George Gissing to Eduard Bertz, ed. A. C. Young, London, 1961, pp. 132-3).

melodramatic heroines and incredible children - in these cases, he has meant to exalt fact through the imagination, and has only succeeded in making fact disappear:

> "In Mrs. Gamp a portion of truth is omitted; in Alice Marlow there is substitution of falsity. By the former process, true idealism may be reached; by the latter, one arrives at nothing but attitude and sham."

Finally, Gissing defends his subject from disparaging comparisons with such Realists as Balzac, Daudet, and Dostoevsky on the grounds that every writer must follow his own mode, and that "realism" is always a merely relative term:

> "As soon as a writer sits down to construct a narrative, to imagine human beings, or adapt those he knows to changed circumstances, he enters a world distinct from the actual, and, call himself what he may, he obeys certain laws, certain conventions, without which the art of fiction could not exist."1

For all his supposed theories of realism, Gissing gives many indications elsewhere of his leanings in the same direction - Biffen, for example, makes a plea for absolute realism in New Grub Street, but the author's sympathies are clearly with Reardon, the non-Realist, as they are with Waymark, in The Unclassed, who aims at artistic transcendence, "life as the source of splendid pictures, inexhaustible material for effects."[2] Similarly, in his interpretations of Dickens he has been adjudged a firm Realist, forced into mere impressionism when faced by the Master's undoubted distortions of reality,[3] whereas, as we have seen, it would be fair to conclude that he seems at times to be stumbling towards some conception of the autonomy of the fictionist's world.

Only a few other related aspects of the modifying internal demands of the novel remain which are not explicitly linked to the arguments over vraisemblance and verisimilitude. Often, copious detail is criticised

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1. Charles Dickens, 1898, pp. 88-93, 216-8.
2. New Grub Street, 1891, Chapter 10; The Unclassed, 1884, Chapter 15.
3. See G. H. Ford, Dickens and his Readers, Princeton, 1955, pp. 245-9.

not just for its dullness, or lack of imagination, or failure to reveal some hidden truth, but simply for reflecting the confusion of life rather than the order of art. For example, Trollope's He Knew He Was Right is criticised for missing the simplification of conventional plot:

> "In real life we seldom find a plot which fulfils the proper dramatic conditions. The thread of the story is complicated and intersected by the interference of a number of secondary characters, each with an interest of their own. Mr. Trollope resolves to imitate reality in this respect also. Instead of following the fortunes of his chief actors, he plunges into all manner of episodes and digressions."1

And in an article on Italian realists, Frances Eleanor Trollope makes a similar demand for the imposition of pattern:

> "The defects of the book [Verga's I Malavoglia] consist chiefly in a too great lack of cohesion between the parts, and a certain vagueness in delineating, not persons, but incidents. Events are presented in the same fragmentary fashion in which they meet our observation in daily life. The co-ordination and assimilation - the mental digestion, in a word - of facts, which each man has to perform for himself in real life, the novelist usually does for us in his work of art."2

As for Character, Hugh Egerton uses the actual physical scale of a novel to prove the obvious limitations of the scientific method in fiction:

> ".. it is impossible for the characters of a book to behave exactly as they would in real life... The shortness of a novel or play necessitates a concentration in the dénouement of character, no less than in that of plot."3

And the Spectator, in 1868, distinguishes the novel from reality by the inner need for characters to be grouped and contrasted:

> "It is perfectly true that in life you meet with plenty of stories, and plenty of living groups, in which the characters are not so arranged as in any way to bring out each other's limits and deficiencies. But then art is more than life, if

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1. Saturday Rev., xxvii (1869), 751-3.
2. "Italian Realistic Fiction", Fortnightly, xxx n.s. (1881), 477.
3. "The Scientific Novel and Gustave Flaubert", National Rev., i (1883), 896-7.

also less. The artistic selection of groups should be more than a 'natural' selection, though it should, of course, be natural also."1

Finally, Julia Wedgwood, criticising the shapelessness of War and Peace in the Contemporary for 1887, expresses the desire for selectivity and for the aesthetic shaping of experience that in effect underlies the whole critical approach we have been studying:

"Tolstoi gives a slice of experience. He selects nothing but a certain area of vision, and leaves its contents recorded in the proportion of their actual dimensions. There is no concentration, no rapid sweep of the brush, no broad shadow, everywhere only a transcript of the bewildering variety of actual light and shade."2

6. The Impact of American and French Realism.

Of the two main "schools" of realism which critics recognized as confronting them from the late 'seventies onwards, that of James and Howells on the one hand, and that of Zola on the other, it is perhaps surprising that criticism of the former produced a more varied and on the whole more valuable series of indications as to contemporary opinion on the nature of realism. The French Naturalists produced a reaction in which questions of morality predominated, whereas the Americans, while certainly receiving their share of moral denunciation, were less obviously offensive, and hence could be examined more dispassionately and with reference to the more aesthetic modifying factors in artistic representation that are our present concern.[3]

The majority of hostile criticisms of James and Howells are aimed at their excessive realism, by critics of varying Idealist standpoints, but contradictorily, the opposite undercurrent in favour of plain

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1. xli (1868), 1164-5.
2. "Count Leo Tolstoi", lii (1887), 252.
3. For a general account of James' critical fortunes, see D. M. Murray, "Henry James and the English Reviewers, 1882-1890", American Lit., xxiv (1952-3), 1-20.

truth-to-life continues to reveal itself behind many attacks. The very subtlety and workmanship of James, which nearly all acknowledge, are seen by such critics as part and parcel of his unreality. The British Quarterly Review, which makes many commendable efforts to come to grips with the new problems presented in James' peculiarly tangential relation to real life, reluctantly takes issue with The Madonna of the Future and Other Tales in these terms:

> ".. the sense of reality is never established. He cannot invest his characters with the flesh-and-blood attributes which lay hold of simple sympathies; and airy, delicate, graceful, and refined as are his creations, they belong to a world of make-believe after all, brought into existence and controlled entirely by the intellect and conscious artistic sense of the author."[1]

Similarly, Mrs. Oliphant dislikes The Princess Casamassima because it seems manufactured, mere enamel with little of the actual in it,[2] and the Spectator prefers the "good palpable flesh-and-blood" of less artistic writers to the mere polished outer shell of character we are presented with in The Tragic Muse.[3] Rather less typically, Howells is the object of the same complaint, John Barrow Allen, in the Academy, regretting that his skill and ingenuity are vitiated by the failure to create living characters in the tradition of Colonel Newcome, Micawber, Jeanie Deans, and Dugald Dalgetty: "With Mr. Howells the type is everything, the personalities go for little or nothing."[4]

It is more usual for the advocates of simple realism to praise Howells, as his later books begin to approximate more closely to those familiar and agreeable conventions that such critics seemed to include in their concept of "realism". For example, in A Woman's Reason "the characters are all consistent creations, each one thinking, acting and

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1. lxxi (1880), 234-6.
2. "Novels", Blackwood's, cxl (1886), 786. [Identified Wellesley Index]
3. lxv (1890), 409-10.
4. xliii (1893), 434-5.

speaking as such people would in real life",[1] and Annie Kilburn is commended for portraying "recognisable flesh and blood: his people do not elude us, as was their wont in the old days; we know them, and can, as it were, grasp their hands."[2] Finally, one of the most favourable of all reviews is the Pall Mall Gazette's of The Rise of Silas Lapham, the writer of which extols his "unique photographic genius" for setting itself against the Philistine and outmoded English preference for the unusual and sensational. Howells' reliance on the complete actuality and possibility of every incident and conversation is hailed as the mark of the novel of the future:

> ".. of this tendency towards pure character-painting and ordinary incident, Mr. Howells is the furthest living exponent... The after ages will wonder that we preferred our assassins and our bigamists to the Lady of the Arcostock, just as we ourselves wonder that an age which had Colonel Newcome and Becky Sharpe before its eyes could waste its time on the false, crude, and high-flown romanticism of the first Lord Lytton and his idealistic waxworks."3

By far the most numerous and vociferous of critics of the American school are those who accept that it is realistic, and proceed to attack it on the grounds of the essential dullness, triviality and incapacity to please of its material, regardless of treatment. The London Quarterly puts the relevant question in a review of The Aspern Papers in 1889, when it asks whether a perfectly-wrought imitation of life can be judged a fine art, irrespective of the intrinsic beauty or interest of the scene described.[4] Most give a very definite answer, à propos of James, at any rate - Saintsbury, for example, as early as 1877:

> "He has read Balzac, if it be possible, just a little too much; has read him until he has fallen into the one sin of his great master, the tendency to bestow refined dissection and analysis on characters which are not of sufficient intrinsic interest to deserve such treatment."5

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1. Westminster Rev., lxv n.s. (1884), 273.
2. Spectator, lxii (1889), 371-2.
3. "A Great American Novel", xlii (Sep. 11, 1885), 5.
4. lxxi (1888-9), 382-3.
5. Academy, xii (1877), 33.

The point is followed up by W. E. Henley, who, although another keen admirer of James' artistry, regrets that his influence has made less possible the tragic development of character than ten years earlier, "before the nobodies in life had become somebodies in art," an example of which is Lucas Malet's Mrs. Lorimer:

> "There is not enough of daring and strength; and there is too much of restraint, of discrimination, of the fashionable habit of subtlety and refinement and would-be suggestiveness... the new American method is excellent as far as it goes, but.. it really does not go very far. As applied to the commonplace in character and life, it is admirably effective; so that by its operation we can be made to feel momentarily interested in such a human vulgarism as Marcia Hubbard, and to accept, for half-an-hour, such an incarnation of the ephemeral as Daisy Miller as a substitute for Hamlet himself. But, applied to the tragic, its effectiveness ceases, and its capacity is felt to be limited."1

In the following year, the Quarterly, in a hostile article, describes its boredom at James' "tea-pot style of conversation",[2] and Arthur Tilley, in the National Review, while claiming to be an admirer, regrets the persistent failure of James and Howells to follow George Eliot's example of investing the homely and everyday with romance, choosing instead human motives and situations that are essentially trivial and less vital, and incapable of giving true artistic pleasure. True realism must modify its materials by a lightness and cheerfulness of touch that will prevent the work from sinking into dullness and vulgarity, but the Americans have

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1. Academy, xxii (1882), 377. Although Henley elsewhere asserts the irrelevance of the artist's material, defending Morrison's A Child of the Jago, and emphasising the importance of Form, he nevertheless holds to this basic position that verisimilitude is worthless by itself, and that "the epic note" of Tolstoi, the "higher and better sort" of realism, is preferable to "the toothaches and the pimples of experience" of Thackeray's method. C.f. M. U. Schappes, "William Ernest Henley's Principles of Criticism", PMLA, xlvi (1931), 1289-1301, and see below, pp. 158-9.
2. "American Novels", clv (1883), 213-20. [By L. J. Jennings - Wellesley Index]

debased, not exalted, the commonplace.[1] This "true realism" is also defined by Mrs. Humphry Ward, in Macmillan's for 1884, this time, like Henley, in terms of that passion and vitality which seem to be inconsistent with the minutiae of the American method, yet are essential to the fundamentally expansive and passionate English imagination: "..realism in one form or another is the zeitgeist which will master us all, and realism means the great and the passionate things of life as well as the interesting and the piquant things."[2]

On the whole, Howells comes off more lightly than James, in spite of such criticisms on familiar grounds as the Scottish Review on A Chance Acquaintance: "Every person introduced is utterly insignificant, and when the book is closed there is positively nothing to remember. Ingenious doubtless! ingenuity misdirected!"[3] By 1890, the Scots Observer is in a minority when it ponderously belabours Howells for straying "from the highway of art, from the road that leads by Greek temples and spired mediaeval cities to the purple hills and the bountiful plains of the land of New Romance", and, instead, sitting down in the desert of Realism to "build sand-houses in the dust-heaps",[4] for in the same year the Spectator, like many others, is able to point to a "new" Howells. He has left behind the period where "the interest of the matter [was] kept in strict subordination to the interest of the manner", and now, as in The Rise of Silas Lapham and Annie Kilburn, has come to use "characters and incidents which are attractive apart from their treatment."[5] And by 1899, the same magazine is able to hold up Howells as a contrast to the inartistic subject-matter of James' The Awkward Age: ".. we never remember to have read a novel in which the disproportion between the ability employed and

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1. "The New School of Fiction", i (1883), 263-5.
2. "Recent Fiction in England and France", 1 (1884), 253-4. [Identified Wellesley Index]
3. "Letters in America", i (1882-3), 43.
4. "Modern Men. Mr. W. D. Howells", iv (1890), 194-5.
5. lxiv (1890), 342-3.

the worth or attractiveness of the characters was more glaring." Howells' Ragged Lady demonstrates how a similar method can be used to greater effect on ordinary, decent, wholesome people as characters.[1]

In addition to the unattractiveness and dullness of their material, the two Americans are continually under fire for their pessimism, and failure to provide the consolation and comfort that is one of the ends of art, especially in their blatant avoidance of the happy ending or a sense of any kind of "completion". The British Quarterly is typical: in The American, James' "strong relentless realism leaves a large amount of failure and continuing unhappiness", and imitates life too closely in its avoidance of the neat winding-up and the "happy-ever-after":

> "We are no great sticklers for conventionality in novel writing, but a novel is an ideal work of art, and we cannot help thinking that the art is defective in construction which leaves issues so loose and destinies so vague."2

J. M. Robertson's praise, in 1884, for this very lack of happy endings in the earlier, as opposed to the later, more sentimentalised Howells - ".. his faithfulness to an actual life which is full of broken threads and pathetic failures" - is an attitude highly unusual in his time.[3] The majority of critics showed in their reactions to James and Howells, as we have seen them do elsewhere, that they wished the novel to be a consolation for the deficiencies of real life, preferably a happy counterweight to life's sadness, but at least a completion and consummation of some kind. When Arthur Tilley complains that readers feel cheated by the lack of a conclusion, he is not demanding of fiction a final distribution of orange-blossom and annuities, but rather that gathering-together of the broken threads of reality which, even if tragic, gives pleasure in the world of art through the contemplation of symmetry:

> "For just as in real life it is this craving which helps to convince so many of us that there is another world, in which the tangled threads of this life will be smoothed out; so

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1. lxxxii (1899), 647-8.
2. lxx (1879), 268-9.
3. "Mr. Howells' Novels", Westminster Rev., lxvi n.s. (1884), 350-1.

> in the fictitious life of novels the same craving demands that the smoothing out, or rounding off, call it what you will, shall not be absent. For the creatures of imagination have no future life. Visibly they must realise their heritage of weal or woe."[1]

Loud complaint is also made at the lack of imagination, sympathy, and emotional involvement on the part of the authors. Temple Bar is typical in its disapproval of James' over-intellectualisation and the failure of his method to seize hold of the reader. Howells, too, is only half-real through the same lack of an emotional spark to make his pictures something other than mere stiff photographs of family groups and "small-beer chronicles of the soul."[2] A similar charge frequently levelled against James is one of imaginative and emotional cowardice: for example, in The Princess Casamassima he is constantly leading readers up to a "strong situation", then shirks it and runs away, with the result that his characters lose reality, and seem mere "aimless beings";[3] and in The Tragic Muse he is seen to work round a situation from many sides without ever confronting it, making his characters play at life.[4]

Occasionally, James receives praise from the opposite point of view, as when the Athenaeum, in 1896, finds The Other House an improvement on his recent works, in its touching at "the heart of life": "Quiet and restrained as are almost all the scenes, the thing palpitates with the emotion belonging to a work of art that has been cast and fused in one supreme effort."[5] But this reaction is rare, especially in these later years, as the reviewer himself indicates, and the Edinburgh Review's survey of the American novel, in 1891, is far more representative. It condemns "the New England school of impersonal realists" for lacking the passion and imaginativeness of Hawthorne, as well as of what it calls the School of the West and South - Bret Harte, George Cable, and Mary Murfree.

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1. "The New School of Fiction", National Rev., i (1883), 259-60.
2. "The New School of American Fiction", lxx (1884), 383-9.
3. Athenaeum, 1886 (ii), 596-7.
4. Ibid., 1890 (ii), 124.
5. Ibid., 1896 (ii), 597.

Lifelike portraiture is not enough, and art demands poetry, impressionism, sentiment, and "breadth of sympathy".[1]

The final type of adverse criticism of James and Howells is less common than any of the foregoing, most of whom pay some respect, even in passing, to their formal and constructive merits. There are those, however, who condemn their realism for its neglect of the conventions and selectivity essential to the novel. For example, the Spectator sees elements of greatness in James' Confidence, but also a failure to escape from the inartistic confusion of reality:

> "He does not much trouble himself to contrive intricate plots, or to imagine strange situations; but he cuts a slice out of life almost at haphazard, and then goes about to reveal and analyse its constituent parts" -

a method which suffers from the ultimate disadvantage that "few human lives are so completely rounded as to give opportunity for an artistic dénouement."[2] And in the following year, Washington Square is reviewed in terms which reveal the heightening and shaping effects expected of the novel:

> "...it interests him much more to paint the various aimless ways in which human beings get almost involuntarily into a sort of entanglement with each other, than to paint the course of a series of events which show the natural development of strong character, and the natural resultant of the encounter between conflicting purposes and complicated circumstances."3

Finally, in an interesting review by William Sharp of Howells' A Hazard of New Fortunes, in 1890, this selection arising out of the internal laws of the novel is seen at the same time as the workings of the essential imaginative faculty. Like Tolstoi, Howells suffers from a "radical inability to focus essential and unessential details into one quintessential picture", and his "pseudo-realism" is compared with that true Realism based on artistic and illusive compression:

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1. "American Fiction", clxxiii (1891), 31-65. [By R. E. Prothero - Wellesley Index]
2. liii (1880), 48-9.
3. liv (1881), 185-6.

> "Perhaps realism in literary art may be approximately defined as the science of exact presentment of many complexities, abstract and concrete, in one truthful, because absolutely reasonable and apparently inevitable, synthesis; this, plus the creative energy which in high development involves what is misleadingly called the romantic spirit, and minus that weakness of the selective faculty which is the dominant factor in the work of the so-called realists of the Zolaesque school. Thus regarded, realism and romance are found to be as indissoluble as soul and body in a living human being. The true artist, no doubt, is he who is neither a realist nor a romanticist, but in whose work is observable the shaping power of the higher qualities of the methods of genuine realism and the higher qualities of the methods of genuine romance."[1]

Compared with James and Howells, it is most striking how criticism of Zola is dominated by the moral issue, to the exclusion of all else. Nearly all are agreed on the squalor of his material, but only a few are able to condemn it as unpleasing, or untrue, on inartistic for various other reasons, without bringing in the question of the limits imposed on art by social morality. Some, like Andrew Lang, in the Fortnightly, are content to wrinkle their nose, deny the validity of the hideous in art, complain that Le Ventre de Paris "smells of pork and onions", and sigh for the days of good old Sir Walter.[2] Saintsbury explicitly tries to condemn the school on non-ethical grounds, pointing to his admiration for Baudelaire and Maupassant's Boule de Suif as proof that he is not squeamish, and maintains that the objection is simply to their unpleasantness and lack of amusement. Zola, for all his merits, breaks the first rule of art, to present reality not as it is, but transformed and "disrealised", and when his method descends to his followers, who lack his rude vigour, its weakness is revealed in their resultant dullness and futile pessimism.[3]

But most adverse criticisms arise out of a difference in moral

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1. Academy, xxxvii (1890), 41-2.
2. "Emile Zola", xxxi n.s. (1882), 439-52.
3. "The Present State of the Novel. II", Fortnightly, xliii n.s. (1888), 112-23.

or philosophical view-point, and the Truth or Realism which Zola is accused by such writers of failing to achieve has little relevance to any non-moral theory of the relation between the work of art and the world around it. The frequent assertions as to his falsity to "real life" are not so much part of a general trend in favour of mimetic accuracy in the novel as simply a personal denial of his ideas concerning human nature. For example, Arthur Symons' scornful attack, in 1893, could almost be taken as a realist's dismissal of all that is imaginative, subjective, and conventional in literature:

> "The art of Zola is nature seen through a formula.. He observes, indeed, with astonishing minuteness, but he observes in support of preconceived ideas. And so powerful is his imagination that he has created a whole world which has no existence anywhere but in his own brain, and he has placed there imaginary beings, so much more logical than life, in the midst of surroundings which are themselves so real as to lend almost a semblance of reality to the embodied formulas who inhabit them."1

Yet the article is obviously not aimed against Idealism in general, but against the "distorted" kind into which Zola has been led simply by his beliefs being different from those of Symons. And correspondingly, when critics attack Zola for his lack of an Ideal treatment, and not for his being simply unrealistic, even when the Moral Ideal is not explicitly mentioned, their recognition of and preference for non-naturalistic techniques in fiction are usually actuated by moral indignation.

More relevantly, the Naturalist doctrine of impersonality was also attacked on the grounds of the essentially subjective nature of the artistic process. Among Karl Hillebrand's reasons for disliking the school is its claim to create art by the methods of science, and its obvious failure to realize that art is based instead on personal intuition, the impressionism by which alone true artistic representation is achieved.[2] And part of Andrew Lang's complaint, in 1882, was that -

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1. "A Note on Zola's Method" (1893), Studies in Two Literatures, 1897, pp. 204-17.
2. "About Old and New Novels", Contemporary, xlv (1884), 391-5.

"It is part of his method to abstain from comment; never to show the author's personality, never to turn to the reader for sympathy. He is as cold as a vivisectionist at a lecture."1

However, the Westminster, in 1889, expresses the same approval of the intrusion of the creator's temperament in the form of pointing out how Zola himself was unable to fulfil the impossible objectivity of his formula: "the temperament of the writer always intervenes to prevent him from copying nature faithfully and dispassionately."[2]

This supposed betrayal by Zola of his own theories is seized on by many critics, and provides the occasion for the critical pronouncements most relevant to our present purpose - and, indeed, some of the most interesting items in the whole field of Zola criticism. The approach to Zola as a poet and Idealist in spite of himself frees such critics from the onus of condemning him morally, and allows them to expatiate on the techniques by which his paradoxical Idealism is attained.

Some of the accounts indicate little more than the characteristic desire for what is more passionate, more imaginative, more "poetic" than real life, as when Garnet Smith, no friend of the Naturalists, sees Zola as essentially a Romantic, with "epical qualities" that conflict strangely with his theories,[3] and the Westminster points to his occasional poetic description and touch of sentiment as showing the natural bent of his mistaken genius.[4] Not infrequently, he is linked with Hugo - the Scots Observer sneers at his failure to realize that he is a lyrist and Idealist: ".. he believes himself the heir and

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1. "Émile Zola", Fortnightly, xxxi n.s. (1882), 452.
2. "Naturalism", cxxxii (1889), 186. Zola always protested that such "arguments imbéciles" ignored the recognition in Naturalist theory of the modifying medium of the artist's temperament, but it is hardly surprising that his over-statement of the scientific analogy engrossed his critics' attention ("Du Roman Expérimental", Le Roman Expérimental, Paris, 1893, p. 10).
3. "Gustave Flaubert", Gentleman's Mag., cclxv (1888), 127. Even Maupassant, in 1883, had described Zola's inescapable romanticism of temperament and of method (Émile Zola, Paris, 1883, pp. 15-20).
4. cxxix (1888), 537.

successor of Balzac, and he is really the last of Victor Hugo. Such are the delusions of democracy."[1] And Vernon Lee, also an opponent on moral grounds, compares him to Hugo in his use of realistic and social material for purposes of "passionate lyrism".[2]

However, two other issues emerge which receive fuller exposition: firstly, Zola's Idealism as an achievement of the universal and the abstract; and secondly, his formal, and hence non-naturalistic, processes of selection and arrangement.

George Moore is one who sees Zola's great idealizing talent as based, in part, on his use of general truths and social ideas, and regrets that in La Débacle there are signs of his talent being submerged in excessive pictorial description:

> "He is neither a historian nor a reporter. He is essentially an imaginative writer, who reaches his highest point of excellence when his imagination builds upon a solid foundation of fact, for his imagination is of such quality that it gains strength by strict observance of the general laws which govern humanity. But the exceptional perplexes him, and he deals with it awkwardly and unsympathetically."3

In the following year, G. W. Steevens, in a very valuable article, elaborates on this aspect of Zola the non-realist. All art must be governed by an idea - perhaps an aspect of human psychology, as in Balzac and Flaubert, or, as in Zola, more abstract and philosophical. He deals not with man, but with "man in relation to the forces that fashion the world", and out of this approach comes a specific technique:

> "In the process of these widening generalities he gradually shaped a structure for the novel quite distinctive and luminously illustrative of the side the world turns towards him. While he cast the skin of Flaubert's manner of writing, he developed a framework for each story almost as rigidly formal. Taking the material in which he chose to personify his ideas - say a coal-mine and colliers - his manner was to present a long succession of pictures of it."

With all the "passion of a poet", he shows abstract and universal truths struggling to manifest themselves through his individual characters,

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1. "Modern Men. Émile Zola", iii (1889-90), 262-3.
2. "On Literary Composition", Contemporary, lxviii (1895), 418.
3. "La Débacle", Fortnightly, lii n.s. (1892), 204-10.

machines, and institutions, and the very greatness of these ideas, and the comprehensiveness of the system that contains them, often saves their material representation from mere melodrama:

> "It is this symmetry and coherence - the constant sense of massive agencies working through all casual actions to which they lend purport and explanation - that gives us leave to call Zola the most ideal of the idealists. The real subject of the Rougon-Macquart is eternal truth, its real hero indestructible force." 1

As for the idealizing process of selection and formal arrangement, George Moore again provides an example of such an insight into Zola's method. In his Preface to Piping Hot!, the translation of Pot-Bouille, in 1885, he mentions an obviously improbable situation in the book:

> "Émile Zola has then done no more than to exaggerate, to draw the strings that attach the different parts a little tighter than they would be in nature. Art, let there be no mistake on this point, be it romantic or naturalistic, is a perpetual concession; and the character of the artist is determined by the selection he makes amid the mass of conflicting issues that, all clamouring equally to be chosen, present themselves to his mind." 2

And elsewhere, he deprecates the critical emphasis on the Frenchman's realism:

> "... Zola's novels are poems, and have nothing to do with realism. If you seek a synthesis, you pass from observation into poetry and philosophy; and Zola's work is as obviously and as wholly synthetical as Victor Hugo's."

His strength lies not in description, the rendering of surface, but in creating the illusion of life through his formal power of lifting detail into intense relief.[3]

Finally, two valuable analyses of Zola's technique, by J.A. Symonds in 1891 and by Havelock Ellis in 1896, are evidence not only of his admission to the fold during the 'nineties, but also of the increasing attention being paid to such matters at that period.[4]

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1. "Zola", National Observer, x (1893), 329-31.
2. P. xiv.
3. "Le Rêve", Impressions and Opinions, 1891, pp. 122-9.
4. They also indicate that Moore's modern-seeming attention to the formal organization of Zola's novels would not have seemed totally "eccentric" in his time, as Graham Hough suggests ("George Moore and the Nineties", Edwardians and Late Victorians, ed. R. Ellmann, New York, 1960, p. 22).

For Symonds, La Bête Humaine is "the poem of the railway", as a railway-engine provides "the unity of subject, movement, composition, interest, which constitutes a creation of idealizing art, and distinguishes that from the haphazard incompleteness of reality." In this "masterpiece of the constructive imagination", every incident is chosen to sustain the central idea, and complete accuracy of surrounding detail blinds us to the artistic manipulation taking place:

> "Not only does it violate our sense of probability in life that ten persons should be either murderers or murdered, or both together, when all of them exist in close relations through their common connection with one line of railway, but the short space of time required for the evolution of this intricate drama of blood and appetite is also unnatural."

The characters and their motives are completely natural and lifelike, but it is the arrangement and the workings of the author's imagination that so rightly and so perfectly modify reality into art:

> "The idealism...has to be sought in the method whereby these separate parcels of the plot are woven together, and also in the dominating conception contained in the title which gives unity to the whole work. We are not in the real region of reality, but in the region of the constructive imagination from the first to the last line of the novel. If that be not the essence of idealism - this working of the artist's brain not in but on the subject-matter of the external world and human nature - I do not know what meaning to give to the term."1

Ellis also brings out the conventional nature of the novel in order to dispose of the mistaken idea of absolute realism, which would be possible only in some combination of the phonograph and the cinematograph. All art is selection, and on this basis Zola is as much an Idealist as George Sand. The relevant questions are rather: "Has the artist selected his materials rightly? Has he selected them with due restraint?" Zola often falls down in the latter - he is too profuse in factual details: "He has left far too much of the scaffolding standing amid his huge literary structures; there is too much mere brute fact which has not been

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1. "La Bête Humaine. A Study in Zola's Idealism", Fortnightly, l n.s. (1891), 453-62. For Symonds' views of the essential ideality in all art, see his "Realism and Idealism", Essays, Speculative and Suggestive, 1890, i, 168-98.

wrought into art." However, his skill often triumphs over this ponderous method:

> "... in his most characteristic novels, as 'L'Assommoir', 'Nana', 'Germinal', his efforts to attain salient perspective in the mass of trivial or technical details - to build a single elaborate effect out of manifold details - are often admirably conducted."

Frequently, he uses the repetition of a formula, for example in the monstrous figure of Voreux, the coal-pit in Germinal:

> "It is more than the tricky repetition of a word or a gesture, overdone by Dickens and others; it is the artful manipulation of a carefully-elaborated, significant phrase. Zola seems to have been the first who has, deliberately and systematically, introduced this sort of leit-motiv into literature as a method of summarising a complex mass of details, and bringing the impression of them before the reader. In this way he contrives to minimise the defects of his method, and to render his complex detail focal."1

Even more than the Americans, Zola represented for many the extreme of unmodified realism in fiction, the Mirror grown large and fearsome, despite his own protestations to the contrary. Yet it is indicative of the strength of the Idealist tradition among English novel-critics that where he is not openly attacked for his scientific and inartistic realism, he is transformed by them, in such instances as the above, into the Romanticist and the selective artist which this tradition insisted upon.

7. The Place of the Romance.

The theoretical distinction of Romance and Novel as two separate modes within the province of prose fiction, or even as two independent genres, arises out of the eighteenth-century origins of the form, and continues throughout the history of novel-criticism. Clara Reeve's The Progress of Romance (1785) is the locus classicus:

> "The Romance is an heroic fable, which treats of fabulous persons and things. - The Novel is a picture of real life and manners, and of the times in which it is written. The Romance in lofty and elevated language, describes what never happened nor is likely to happen. - The Novel gives a familiar relation of such things, as pass every day

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1. "Zola: the Man and his Work", Savoy, i (1896), 67-71.

before our eyes, such as may happen to our friend, or to ourselves."[1] Her account of the difference forms the basis of Walter Scott's, in 1824,[2] and, in essence, of those of many modern critics, such as René Wellek and Austin Warren, Richard Chase, and, particularly illuminating, Northrop Frye, who resolves any prose fiction into a combination, in varying proportions, of four main forms, Novel, Confession, Anatomy, and Romance.[3] Such critics have always used the distinction to account for those flagrantly non-mimetic elements they have discovered in so many works of fiction, and our concern here will not be to give a history of the revival of Romance in the later nineteenth century, but to examine those Idealist traits in novel-theory which it elicited.

In 1858, J. C. Jeaffreson writes:

> "The distinction that once existed between <u>novels</u> and <u>romances</u> has for a long time been lost sight of. In general conversation the two words are now used as synonymous; but they had, at the period when novels first began to be generally read throughout Europe, and for long afterwards, a very different signification" -4

a position confirmed by Caroline Washburn, who finds no clear distinction between the terms in their use by 1860.[5] Certainly, during the first years of our period, the Romance as a separate genre is little debated, but it is too much to say that the word has lost its independent significance. For example, in 1870, Disraeli's <u>Lothair</u> is accepted by <u>Tinsley's Magazine</u>, despite the unreal, fanciful world it describes, on the grounds that it is not an ordinary novel, "dealing with ordinary people in an ordinary world", but a Romance, "couleur de rose",[6] and Mortimer Collins' <u>The Vivian Romance</u> is praised for having all the elements of unreal brilliance that its title would suggest.[7]

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1. i, 111.
2. "Essay on Romance" (1824), <u>Miscellaneous Works</u>, 1869-71, vi, 129-216.
3. Wellek and Warren, <u>Theory of Literature</u>, New York, 1949, pp. 223-4; Chase, <u>The American Novel and its Tradition</u>, New York, 1957, pp. 12-13; and Frye, <u>Anatomy of Criticism</u>, Princeton, 1957, pp. 303-14.
4. <u>Novels and Novelists from Elizabeth to Victoria</u>, 1858, i, 1.
5. <u>The History, from 1832 to 1860, of British Criticism of Prose Fiction</u> (Thesis Abstract), Urbana, 1937, p.9.
6. "Lothair", vi (1870), 565-8.
7. <u>British Quar. Rev.</u>, lii (1870), 538.

In 1872, Meredith's Harry Richmond is a dazzling, fanciful extravaganza, "not a novel, but a romance",[1] and W. G. Palgrave's Hermann Agha is that rare type, a complete Romance, totally removed from the contemporary society or reflective novel.[2] And lastly, in 1876, an article on Ouida, written with a curiously Neo-Classic air, sees the duality as part of the nature of the novel:

> "Novels may, broadly speaking, be classed as realistic and romantic. Both take nature as their starting-point, the only difference being, that the novelist proper studies to represent his little world as the great world is; whereas the romance-writer takes some striking characteristic in human nature, and builds an ideal world therefrom by the very force of his imagination, and that fact alone constitutes him the greater writer. A novel, therefore, in which imagination predominates, and realism is not wanting, would, by this combination, merit the highest rank."3

The continuous recognition of such ideal elements in the novel is also at least implicit in the many favourable accounts of such other writers as George MacDonald and William Black, but can be traced with particular clarity in the reaction to Hawthorne. The latter, whose novels could obviously be appreciated by no ordinary canon of realism, remains a firm favourite throughout the whole period, though at times he causes his critics some puzzlement. For example, "Matthew Browne" (W. B. Rands), in 1871, confesses to his unease at Hawthorne's indeterminateness, the haze of mystery over all his Romances - ".. the endless filaments of suggestion sent out in search of symbolic meanings" - but in the end accepts this as the mark of his genius. Browne admires the way in which the characters are kept human in such weird and imaginative surroundings, and how the preternatural is always kept within a natural context,[4] and it is this use of the Romance to reconcile the two traditionally opposed elements of Realism and Idealism, to set up the perfect artistic balance, that seems to win such universal praise

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1. Westminster Rev., xli n.s. (1872), 274-5.
2. Spectator, xlv (1872), 920-1.
3. "Ouida's Novels", Westminster Rev., xlix n.s. (1876), 361.
4. "Nathaniel Hawthorne", Saint Pauls, viii (1871), 157-8.

for the American.[1] Thus, Keningale Cook, examining the basis of the "sort of spiritual fairyland" in which Hawthorne lived, regards his success in achieving this balance as one peculiarly difficult for the Transatlantic writer:

> "Hawthorne is sensible of the American novelist's special difficulty in the selection of a site on which to build up the fictions of his imagination; a site which shall be solid and life-like, and yet sufficiently far removed from the day's actualities for one to throw some light of ideality upon the creations who walk thereon." 2

Another favourable article, in the North British Review, finds his use of the Romance un-American, and praises highly the extreme ideal nature of the books. Their use of mystery and the occult never jars, and, though shadowy, they are profoundly true, showing what might be and what, in essence, is - all of this being, again, allied to a power of the most minute realistic painting.[3] The latter power is again cited, in 1879, by R.F. Littledale, who regrets that Julian Hawthorne, in his The Laughing Mill, has neglected his father's practice of building his Romance on a plausible framework of realistic detail.[4]

Hawthorne understandably maintains his popularity in later years, when his Romance is seen against the less attractive background of Zolaism - or of Jamesism. For example, W.L. Courtney, in 1886, admires his consummate artistry, and the way in which he makes the realities of the world seem but shadows of deeper truths: ".. his romantic idealism.. helps us to banish the vulgar forms of realism, as possible modes of art."[5] In the Edinburgh Review's attack on the "New England School",

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1. Hawthorne was aware that his own use of the devices of Romance was limited, and that the form offered greater possibilities for transcending reality, but he was probably at one with even his most enthusiastic English readers in his deliberate moderation, his decision "to mingle the Marvellous rather as a slight, delicate and evanescent flavour, than as any portion of the actual substance of the dish offered to the public." (Preface to House of the Seven Gables, Everyman Edn., 1954, p. xi.)
2. "American Novelists. III. Nathaniel Hawthorne", Belgravia, xix (1873), 72-9.
3. "Nathaniel Hawthorne", x n.s. (1868), 173-90.
4. Academy, xv (1879), 320.
5. "Hawthorne's Romances", Fortnightly, xl n.s. (1886), 516.

in 1891, special attention is paid to Hawthorne as representing a path from which his successors have strayed: "He is not a novelist at all. Fancy, imagination, poetic vision, are his gifts. Romance is his domain." These others to-day have concerned themselves with superficialities only, and have "lost the ideal touch, which is the secret of creation, and which redeems from triviality the commonest incidents and most ordinary figures."[1] And finally, Thomas Bradfield's "The Romances of Nathaniel Hawthorne", in the Westminster for 1894, with its enthusiastic emphasis on his qualities of fancy and mystery, his unreality, his drawing of souls rather than bodies, and his arrival, through the intuitive imagination, at ultimate truth and lofty beauty, is a fitting paean to a writer who preserved his reputation over these forty years by his very eschewing of straightforward realism and his enshrining of the most time-honoured qualities of Idealism.[2]

From the 'eighties onwards, the Romance comes dramatically to the forefront of critical controversy, almost as a new genre, centered around the productions of such writers as Stevenson, Andrew Lang, Rider Haggard, Hall Caine, J.H. Shorthouse, Anthony Hope, Stanley Weyman, Conan Doyle, and A.E.W. Mason, and given impetus by the new challenge of American and French Realism. However, a most interesting preliminary - almost premonitory - discussion of the form appears in R.E. Francillon's article on Daniel Deronda in the Gentleman's Magazine in 1876. According to this, George Eliot's latest book is entirely different from her others, and cannot be compared to them by the same criteria: it is "a striking and daring, perhaps hazardous, experiment in the art of fiction", and offers considerable hope for the future of the novel. Hitherto, she has kept to that order of fiction based on probability, and on the mirroring and dissecting of the ordinary people and circumstances of this world:

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1. "American Fiction", clxxiii (1891), 47-51. [By R.E. Prothero - Wellesley Index]
2. cxlii (1894), 203-14.

> "Fiction is bound by certain rules of probability: fact by none. But this is only sound law where what is called realistic fiction - the novel of types and manners - is concerned. Applied to the Romance, it is not sound law. Romance is the form of fiction which grapples with fact upon its whole ground, and deals with the higher and wider truths - the more occult wisdom - that is not to be picked up by the side of the highway."

Accordingly, she has created, in the character of Gwendoline, as Romantic a heroine as Undine. The story is about her soul, and so requires those exceptional outward circumstances which would not be in keeping with, say, Rosamond Vincy. Her transformation is utterly unlikely, yet is legitimate in this new world of Romance, "which studies human nature in its seeming exceptions, and not in its rules". Even the figure of Deronda - usually abused by critics - is acceptable by this canon. The potentialities of human nature are limitless, and the centre of this book, the transformation of a germ into a soul, could have been described by no mere Naturalist. Unlike the novel, any forms and conventions can be used in the Romance to extract the slightest scrap of truth about human character; the effects and situations are all-important in themselves, and not the method of preliminary detail by which they are arrived at; and its guiding principle is "the complete attainment of its end by any means, by the sacrifice of anything but possibility." George Eliot has bravely gone against our common desire to see ourselves reproduced as we really are and to be told what we already know: "Our afternoon tea-tables have been photographed ad nauseam: it is time for the cover to be removed, that we may see underneath them."[1]

Five years later, Shorthouse's John Inglesant began the response to Francillon's plea, and was received with the utmost enthusiasm by readers similarly bored by Realism. The Saturday Review, while critical of its constructive flabbiness, welcomes its sufficiency of mysticism and colour, and compares it with Hawthorne. The author's use of the

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1. "George Eliot's First Romance", xvii n.s. (1876), 411-27.

term "Romance" suggests right away, as in the case of the American writer, "a greater latitude of poetic and imaginative treatment", an appeal to the few rather than the many, and to a "more subtle and unusual range of feelings", compared with "the novel proper".[1]

Robert Buchanan and Walter Besant were other popular and self-styled Romancists, and, in the same year as John Inglesant, Saintsbury, as one of the great partisans of Romance, regrets that the former's work seems to be declining back into the ordinary novel:

> "Like its predecessor, A Child of Nature is called a romance; but it hardly justifies the title according to the ordinary acceptation of the word, in which romance is taken to imply a story dealing more with adventure and with the tragic passions than with analytic character-drawing and observation of manners."2

And, in the following year, the Saturday hails Besant's All Sorts and Conditions of Men for its complete improbability and "poetical instinct": ".. he has struck an entirely new and very fascinating vein of modern romance."[3]

Later in the same volume, the Saturday points to the continuity of the taste for Romance, and urges Stevenson to place himself at the head of a revival, in order to lift contemporary fiction above the level of mere "annals of the boudoir and the tennis-lawn."[4] But Stevenson needed no urging, nor did he require a spokesman to defend his cause, being the most articulate as well as the most important of the new Romancists. His "A Humble Remonstrance", in 1884, is a public statement of the aims of the new Romance, in formal disagreement with that Realism signified, in part at least, by Henry James. The novel cannot compete with life, as James had said, but instead turns away from life: "Our art is occupied, and bound to be occupied, not so much

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1. lii (1881), 50-1.
2. Academy, xix (1881), 204.
3. liv (1882), 514-5.
4. "The Modern Novel", liv (1882), 633-4.

in making stories true as in making them typical." The young writer, "in this age of the particular", should aim to rise above material circumstance:

> "And as the root of the whole matter, let him bear in mind that his novel is not a transcript of life, to be judged by its exactitude; but a simplification of some side or point of life, to stand or fall by its significant simplicity." 1

Stevenson never recognizes the existence of the Novel and the Romance as two distinct genres: when he prescribes Ideal aims in Romantic terminology, he tends to prescribe for the whole fictional art. Realism is always a mere matter of method, which the Romancer, too, might utilise on occasion, and it is the modern school's failure to recognize this that has resulted in its downfall: "Beware of realism; it is the devil; 'tis one of the means of art, and now they make it the end!"[2] In 1893, he bewails to Henry James the realistic tendencies of the genre:

> "How to get over, how to escape from, the besotting particularity of fiction. 'Roland approached the house; it had green doors and window blinds; and there was a scraper on the upper step.' To hell with Roland and the scraper!" 3

Contemporary taste has been perverted in favour of "the clink of tea-spoons and the accents of the curate." Romance, on the contrary, offers "the poetry of circumstance", and thereby, Stevenson goes on, -

> ".. the great creative writer shows us the realisation and the apotheosis of the daydreams of common men. His stories may be nourished with the realities of life, but their true mark is to satisfy the nameless longings of the reader and to obey the ideal laws of the daydream." 4

Of course, Stevenson has much to say on the artist's great need for realism of this subsidiary kind: he praises James' Princess

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1. Longman's, v (1884-5), 139-47.
2. Letters, ed. S. Colvin, 1911, ii, 125.
3. Ibid., iv, 199.
4. "A Gossip on Romance", Longman's, i (1882-3), 69-79.

Casamassima for its greater realism than his other works- "with some of the grime, that is, and some of the emphasis of skeleton there is in nature..dirt may have dignity."[1] And he criticises Hugo for his lapses into artificiality, melodrama, and convention.[2] He frequently shows a concern for realism and authenticity in his own work: "..with all my romance, I am a realist and a prosaist, and a most fanatical lover of plain physical sensations plainly and expressly rendered; hence my perils."[3] However, his distrust of the perils is predominant, in spite of his basic Scots pragmatism, and the doctrine he continues to preach is one of Romantic modification.

What specific processes of Idealization does he recommend? Firstly, the simplifying process involved in any art, by its very nature, the unavoidable need to select and to arrange. Stevenson's famous obsession with technique and style is based on the principles of omission and organization, and in the "Humble Remonstrance" he describes how such matters are enough in themselves to set the novel apart from life:

> "Life is monstrous, infinite, illogical, abrupt, and poignant; a work of art, in comparison, is neat, finite, self-contained, rational, flowing, and emasculate... The novel which is a work of art exists, not by its resemblances to life, which are forced and material, as a shoe must still consist of leather, but by its immeasurable difference from life, which is designed and significant, and is both the method and the meaning of the work." 4

However, the modifying process inherent in the nature of the Romance most stressed by Stevenson seems to be the spirit, the

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1. Letters, ii, 251.
2. "Victor Hugo's Romances", Cornhill, xxx (1874), 184-92.
3. Letters, iv, 49. He was acutely aware of these seeming dangers - the critical outcry that in Ebb Tide he had turned to the false gods of realism was anticipated by Stevenson himself, who, in his letters, agonizes over the griminess and the un-Romantic treatment to which he seemed to have succumbed.
4. Longman's, v (1884-5), 142-3. See also "A Note on Realism", Magazine of Art, vii (1883-4), 24-8.

philosophic tenor, of the creating artist, and in this he speaks for many of his fellow-theorists of the nineteenth-century Romance: "As I live, I feel more and more that literature should be cheerful and brave -spirited, even if it cannot be made beautiful and pious and heroic. We wish it to be a green place."[1] In the finest books, "we breathe a magnanimous atmosphere of thought and meet generous and pious characters,"[2] qualities to which the age is sadly antipathetic. He writes to William Archer about Shaw's Cashel Byron's Profession:

> ".. let him beware of his damned century; his gifts of insane chivalry and animated narration are just those that might be slain and thrown out like an untimely birth by the Daemon of the epoch."3

The Stevensonian Romance, which is to do battle with this Daemon, is seen to be based on truthfulness, but above all to be infused with that vitality, sincerity, charm, and "good spirit" that lie at the very heart of the genre.

In many ways, 1887 is the year of recognition for the new Romance: Saintsbury, Rider Haggard, and Andrew Lang all issue manifestos on its behalf. The former welcomes the decline of the analytic and pessimistic method of "minute manners-painting and refined character-analysis", which can only result in superficiality and monotony, and the arrival of Stevenson and Haggard, with their concentration on the poetic features of character and incident. He goes on to propound a wave - theory of fiction, that the Romance flourishes before and during a period of social change, is succeeded by the ordinary novel, which analyses these changes after they have occurred, and there follows an inevitable flat period till Romance and social change return. The Romance is, then, the key to all social and literary dynamism: "For the romance is of its nature eternal and preliminary to the novel. The novel is of its nature transitory and is parasitic on the romance." The essence of man can

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1. Letters, ii, 172-3.
2. "Books Which Have Influenced Me", British Weekly, ii (1887), 18.
3. Letters, iii, 41-2.

only be explored through the Romance, and it is only through their borrowings from it that some novels have managed to partake of the Eternal. Great things will never be accomplished "till we have bathed once more long and well in the romance of adventure and of passion."[1]

Haggard, in the Contemporary, is much more modest, and even naive. What is needed to raise a vitiated public taste is a return to writing from the heart, not the head, and to heroism, instead of problems of good and evil:

> ".. neither our good nor our evil doing is of an heroic nature, and it is things heroic and their kin and not petty things that best lend themselves to the purposes of the novelist, for by their aid he produces his strongest effects."

The Romance he sees as a refuge for the less ambitious, a world of pure imagination which, although some may consider it a lower realm of fiction, has produced its own immortal works, from the Arabian Nights to Robinson Crusoe, and in which men will always take pleasure long after Naturalism, and Mr. Howells, have passed from memory: "Here we may weave our humble tale, and point our harmless moral without being mercilessly bound down to the prose of a somewhat dreary age."[2]

In the Contemporary's next volume, in the same year, Andrew Lang takes up his well-known stance as champion of the Romancists. In his best cricketing style, Lang disparages the present noisy and vulgar Battle of the Books, and insists that Realism has its own merits and its own place, in a necessary blend with Romance, and that his whole aim is to challenge those who believe it to be the only possible mode at the present day. However, the lofty attempt at impartiality cannot conceal his contempt for the unpleasant and ungentlemanly productions of the Realist school, and his vast enthusiasm for Haggard and Stevenson:

> "The dubitations of a Bostonian spinster may be made as interesting, by one genius, as a fight between a crocodile and a catawampus, by another genius... But if there is to be no modus vivendi, if the

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1. "The Present State of the Novel.I", Fortnightly, xlii n.s. (1887), 410-7.
2. "About Fiction", li (1887), 179-80.

> battle between the crocodile of Realism and the catawampus of Romance is to be fought out to the bitter end- why, in that Ragnarok, I am on the side of the Catawampus."1

The Westminster Review adds the name of Hall Caine to the list of the new Romancists in that year, and hails Haggard's manifesto in the Contemporary as evidence that we have left behind the flatness and the dissertations of George Eliot: "We are passing through a 'romantic revival'", and it brings high hopes for our national fiction. Hall Caine has become one of the standard-bearers, and has perfected that blend of the familiar and the unfamiliar which is the highest Romantic achievement:

> "This power of transmuting the ordinary into the marvellous by means of an imaginative manipulation which, though daring and vivid, yet keeps itself within the bounds of the truly artistic, is the main factor of differentiation between the novel and the romance. The distinction has grown to be less insisted upon than in the days of Nathaniel Hawthorne, but it is by no means a distinction without a difference; and Mr. Hall Caine has traversed the boundary with eminent skill."2

Three years later, and again in the Contemporary, Hall Caine himself comes forward and announces the advent of the Romance in a trumpet-blast of rhetoric. "The New Watchwords of Fiction" represents the extreme Idealist position, and the high-water mark of Romance theory. The moral basis of the Romance is important to Caine, and Justice and Faith are prominent among its watchwords; but he is also concerned with the Ideal of the Imagination, of Beauty, and of Passion. He pours scorn on the belief that realism is somehow the more fitting tendency in this modern age, and on Zola's lack of the Imagination and Enthusiasm vital to Idealism: "I take realism to mean the doctrine of the importance of the real facts of life, and idealism the doctrine of the superiority of ideal existence over the facts of life." To omit from the novel all that is uncommon, startling, colourful, as Zola would appear to wish, is to confuse the novelist with the historian. For the novelist, fact is only an

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1. "Realism and Romance", lii(1887), 683-93.
2. "A New Novelist", cxxviii (1887), 840-9.

aid towards the display of passion, and the truth he aims at is not that of history but of the human heart:

> "The real function of the novelist .. is that of proposing for solution by means of incident and story a problem of human life. Passion therefore, not fact, lies at the root of the novelist's art. Passion is the central fire from which his fact radiates, and fact is nothing to him except as it comes from that central fire of passion."

He is concerned with the mysteries of life, and not with the answer given to them by the world, in its ordinary doings, but by human nature at its highest development- that is, his aim is Heroism. Caine proceeds to quote Bacon, Burton, and Goethe to support Idealism:

> "And I would add for myself as the essence of my creed as a novelist: Fiction is not nature, it is not character, it is not imagined history; it is fallacy, poetic fallacy, pathetic fallacy, a lie if you like, a beautiful lie, a lie that is at once false and true- false to fact, true to faith."

After a further description of the moral grandeur of Romance, he ends in a high-sounding denunciation of Realism, which has had its day and is disgraced. France has abandoned its vile Zola, and looks for some new Messiah of Idealism; Russia has found hers in Tolstoi; even in America, Howells is turning Romantic. The whole world is waiting, and the triumph of Romanticism is at hand.[1]

Hall Caine's optimism was hardly to be borne out, and opposition to the Romance continued to grow- or, perhaps more accurately, opposition to those forms it took in the hands of Caine and his fellows.

Henry Norman, for example, in 1883, disparages the brand of fiction represented by Stevenson as that of amusement as opposed to instruction: ".. a few full-grown characters and a few bright colours laid on quickly and lightly."[2] Hostile critics of Haggard

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1. lvii (1890), 479-88.
2. "Theories and Practice of Modern Fiction", Fortnightly, xxxiv n.s. (1883), 885.

were at least as clamorous as Lang and others in his defence - in 1888, the Fortnightly bludgeoned him in "The Fall of Fiction",[1] and the Universal Review expressed its contempt at his undeserved popularity:

> ".. the literary world is not in its second childhood yet, that it should have its fiction chopped up small and soaked in the commonplaces of the 'Boy's Magazine'. We have had enough of these dignified or bloodthirsty natives, these elephant-potting squires, this farrago of sport and murder, and it is time we should leave the estimable writer who is responsible for this literary concoction to his fitting audience of youths in round jackets and turn-down collars." 2

However, such critics are less concerned with denying the basic non-mimetic principles of Romance than with lamenting the obvious inferiority of contemporary Romancists. D.F. Hannigan, in the Westminster for 1894, goes further than most in allowing his evaluation of Haggard to lead him into a dismissal of all Romance as a decadent form in an age of splendid Realism:

> "The day is gone by when the novelist can be regarded as a mere caterer for the amusement of sentimental old maids or indolent fogeys. We are sick of lying and cant and platitude. We want facts, not romantic dreams." 3

Others, more typically, admit that the serious novel of realistic psychology or portraiture of manners is more in keeping with the spirit of the times, and more likely to succeed, but that the Romance has its peculiar and valid aims that deserve better exponents.[4] Frederic Harrison, looking back with nostalgia at the literature of a previous generation, accepts the modern tendency as one that will produce true art, of a limited sort, but regrets that Socialism and a unified culture are against the passion, incident, variety, colour, and individuality that are the essence of Romance.[5] And G.S. Street,

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1. xliv n.s. (1888), 324-36.
2. i (1888), 596-7.
3. "The Decline of Romance", cxli (1894), 33-6.
4. E.g., "Novels of Adventure and Manners", Quarterly Rev., clxxix (1894), 530-52; and "Romanticism and Realism", Saturday Rev., lxxviii (1894), 615-6.
5. "Characteristics of Victorian Literature", Studies in Early Victorian Literature, 1895, pp. 22-39.

in 1898, looking at the struggles of Stevenson's successors to don the robes of Scott and Dumas, wishes sadly that the author of Weir of Hermiston had lived -

> "... to show, as he showed so often, that this noble form of imagination, which has in its time comprehended all other forms of novel from the picaresque to the psychological, and which so much genius has served, does not exclude thought and reason and beauty of speech. For our sham revivals of cloak and dagger are poor things."[1]

In spite of such reservations and attacks, the Romance had its outright supporters throughout this final decade also. The Spectator, reviewing Raleigh's The English Novel in 1894, stresses that the form can never be superseded, in its satisfaction of "the perennial, deeply-seated craving of the human mind for a broader outlook upon life than is afforded by the narrow experience of the individual".[2] And an almost hysterical enthusiasm, in the tradition of Hall Caine's panegyric, often attaches itself to the works of Stevenson, as when W. F. Barry in the Quarterly revels in his earlier creations of a pure dreamland, a Taj Mahal of prose literature: ".. they are little worlds which obey their own laws, turn on their axes with the sound of aerial music, and shine by the light which is in them."[3]

The last word must be with one of the Romance's most successful practitioners, Anthony Hope, who in 1897 gave one of the best and fairest expositions of the Idealist aims of his school. The Romance gives expression to the deepest human instincts:

> "It has no monopoly of this expression, but it is its privilege to render it in a singularly clear, distinct, and pure form; it can give to love an ideal object, to ambition a boundless field, to courage a high occasion; and these great emotions, revelling in their freedom, exhibit themselves in their glory. Thus in its most worthy forms, in the hands of its masters, it can not only

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1. "Some Opinions", Blackwood's clxiv (1898). 600. [Identified Wellesley Index]
2. lxxiii (1894). 783-4.
3. "Robert Louis Stevenson", clxxx (1895), 324-53. [Identified Wellesley Index]

> delight men, but can touch them to the very heart. It shows them what they would be if they could, if time and fate and circumstances did not bind, what in a sense they all are, and what their acts would show them to be if an opportunity offered. So they dream and are the happier, and at least none the worse for their dreams."1

The revival of the Romance in the last two decades of the century does represent to a considerable extent this yearning for the escapist dream, and as such was undoubtedly contrary to the stronger current in favour of greater seriousness in the novel, to which the realism of the French, the Americans, and the Russians made its contribution. But whatever the actual quality of the cloak-and-dagger yarns the movement produced, it also revealed in the reactions of critics the perennial desire, which it only partly satisfied, that fiction should be an instrument of the imagination, a path not just to cloud-cuckoo-land, but to the realms of Ideal truth.

In brief synopsis, and without drawing conclusions at this point, we have observed the strength and persistence among critics at all levels, and throughout the years under review, of a simple mimetic theory, in which emphasis is placed on the continuity of life and art, and on the particular closeness of the novel as an art-form to contemporary society and the familiar aspects of human nature. We have traced, further, the tendency in the other direction, sometimes revealing itself, unconscious of any contradiction with theories of "naturalness", in the search for the more pleasing side of life, the omission of what is considered unalterably unpleasant in itself for normal readers, and the positive provision of images of comfort or of the symmetry not found in ordinary circumstances; sometimes, more consciously, in the notion of the intrusion of the artist's imagination and sympathy; or again, in various ideas of art leading its

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1. Quoted in Sir Charles Mallet, Anthony Hope and his Books, 1935, p.114.

readers into some new order of reality. Also, in examinations of illusion, and the opposition of vrai to vraisemblable, we have seen that attention to the work of art as an at least partially independent and regulated structure which is essential to any awareness of the "unlifelike" techniques of fiction. In the last two decades of the century, we have watched the effects on the simple mimetic approach of the new French and American Realism, the struggles of critics to evolve theories, vaguely Idealist or more rigorously technical, with which to meet these new demands on their aesthetic responses, and, finally, the attitudes to non-realism, in the form of the Romance. Through all this, we have ignored the anti-mimetic conventions involved in most theories of the philosophic or moral content of fiction, and it is to this final important distortion in art's mirror that we must now turn.

Chapter Three

MORALS, IDEAS, AND THE NOVEL.

Of the various principles of Victorian aesthetics, that of the moral and philosophical relevance of a work of art is not only the one most rigidly adhered to, and the one allowing smallest scope for fruitful modification and refinement by critics, but is also the one most difficult for us to assess objectively to-day. Contemporary theories concerning the value-content of literature, which have in turn swung away from the emphasis in the nineteen-thirties and -forties on "not beauty, but right action",[1] tend now to dismiss *a priori* the Victorian linking of literature to ethics and thought as a betrayal of its essential autonomy. For example, René Wellek, a doyen of this school, disparages Leslie Stephen as a critic for applying a fixed standard of morality instead of analysing technique and composition, and for having only moral, not metaphysical or aesthetic, certainties:

> ".. we must admit the grave limitations of a sensibility which treats literature either as a moral statement in disguise or as a social and psychological document. It is hard to believe that Stephen's criticism can be made to speak to our time." 2

Without venturing into a personal thesis, we might at least offer as a preliminary to the following investigation the assumption that art, while it is certainly not to be equated with a moral statement or a philosophical enquiry, is just as certainly not untouched by either, a distant satellite in lonely orbit for perusal, analysis, and classification by Neo-Aristotelian astronomers. In such a study as this, the preconception is to be avoided that moral criticism of the novel is necessarily anti-criticism, and having established this, we can proceed to the more relevant question of whether Leslie Stephen and those like him speak, not to our age, but accurately on behalf of their own.

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1. Somerset Maugham, The Summing Up, 1938, p. 310.
2. "Leslie Stephen's Stature as a Literary Critic", Victorian News Letter, xi (1957), 19-22.

We will do so, firstly, by looking at those critical attitudes which urge, overtly, and without significant qualification, moral purpose and the promulgation of various fixed codes of value in the novel; secondly, by examining more detailed indications of how those ideas are to operate in novelistic terms; thirdly, by turning to those disagreements with didacticism which might be expected to lead into more cogent analyses of the nature of value in fiction; and fourthly, by considering whether any body of opinion exists, at the opposite extreme, in favour of a fiction totally independent of morality. In all of this, no clear line can be drawn between ethical and more widely philosophical interpretations of the novel. There is almost always a mixture of both - and, in any case, the same problems face the novelist of "morality", say Trollope, and the novelist of "ideas", say Butler, however much they differ in other respects. In addition, we will not be concerned with the well-covered topic of the general Grundyism of Victorian taste as it manifested itself in novel-criticism,[1] except where this plays some part in more particular accounts of the art-morality relationship.

1. The Novel as Pulpit.

At its most straightforward and undeveloped, the general insistence on moral teaching reveals itself vigorously throughout the period, as we have already seen,[2] and only a few examples need be given of one of the best-known themes of English novel-theory. Tinsley's Magazine, in 1873, defines the true function of the novel as the illustration of moral principles: ".. to show us the effect of ideas in their practical working." Particularized lessons in religion, politics, and social philosophy, "not merely in dry dissertation, but in vivid and humanised description", are the aim of the great novelist, and the artistic effect of credibility of character "is but the grammar of his art, his purpose

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1. E.g., see the accounts of C.R. Decker, The Victorian Conscience, New York, 1952; W.C. Frierson, "The English Controversy Over Realism in Fiction, 1885-1895", P.M.L.A., xliii (1928), 533-50; and M. Elwin, Old Gods Falling, 1939.
2. See above, pp.5-14, for moral utility as it affects the novel's status, rather than, as here, its inner nature.

lying beyond it and being expressed by it." Accordingly, the writer welcomes the conscious purpose he perceives to be behind Lytton's Kenelm Chillingly and George Eliot's Middlemarch, and defines the latter, with approval, as "a homily against ill-assorted marriages."[1]

In the same strain, the Saturday sets the novel the task of "elevating the character by setting before the reader great aims and ennobling conceptions of life",[2] and the British Quarterly Review, as might be expected of an organ of the Congregationalist Church, often praises direct purpose and religious didacticism, disparaging the "higher criticism" that attacks it,[3] and forever championing George MacDonald for his ignoring such minor matters as "success or failure in the construction of his plots" in favour of inspiring lessons: "The sub-dramatic form of the novel lends itself more fitly and fully than any other form of literature to the doctrines and lessons of a great preacher."[4] MacDonald also provides the clearest example of non-realism being accepted on moral grounds, as a necessary characteristic of fiction which directly embodies the Moral Ideal, as in Fraser's praise for the fantasy of Sir Gibbie, and its -

> ".. visionary presentations of that ideal which, fanciful or not, is surely better worth contemplating than the dreary pictures of universal deception, and evil meaning and motive, which are called realistic in the jargon of the moment."5

The view reaches almost its apotheosis in Trollope's lifelong devotion to the moral duties of the novelist: "I have ever thought of myself as a preacher of sermons, and my pulpit as one which I could make both salutary and agreeable to my audience."[6] With complete naivety, he conceives of no contradiction arising from the other duty of the novel, that is, to please, and confidently advances the Neo-Classic doctrine of docere cum delectatione. His sole concession to the complexities of the problem is to admit that "preaching" may be done too

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1. "The Theory of Fiction", xiii (1873), 88-92.
2. "The Uses of Fiction", xxii (1866), 323-4.
3. E.g., lx (1874), 266-7.
4. "Works by George MacDonald", xlvii (1868), 21; and lv (1872), 265-6.
5. "Recent Novels", xx n.s. (1879), 549.
6. Autobiography, 1883, i, 195.

obviously, and may destroy the naturalness of characters - the novelist must aim at being convincing and at being pleasing, but always with the ultimate object of inculcating a love of virtue. He advises Kate Field, in 1868, to avoid too overt moralizing: ".. your first object must be to charm and not to teach ... Teach, and preach, and convince if you can; - but first learn the art of doing so without seeming to do it."[1] Once the knack of sugaring the pill is mastered, little more remains to be said about morality in fiction, and Trollope is free to load his criticism with invocations to the cheek of the maiden person, and with moral exegeses like that of Jane Austen's works: ".. a sweet lesson of homely household womanly virtue is ever being taught";[2] and with such Johnsonian edicts as: "The object of a novel should be to instruct in morals while it amuses."[3]

After the time of Trollope's death, the search for a simple and direct moral message is found mainly in magazines of an obviously conservative, pietistic bent, or else in individual articles of a similar nature, though the number of these is remarkable. In 1885, the Argosy devotes an article to the lessons, private and public, which can be drawn from Dickens,[4] and Julia Wedgwood, never in the van of progress, typically defends George MacDonald in the following year from those who believe that fiction should not try to inculcate opinions, repeating the traditional point that the novel teaches more vividly than history or the sermon.[5] Part of the welcome given by the Westminster to Hall Caine, in 1887, is that "his books have the effect of a moral tonic", and that "it is reserved for writers like Mr. Hall Caine to exemplify in romance the higher and nobler teachings of moral duty",[6] and, in the same year, the Spectator points out that purpose-novels can be great, for all the dangers involved, praising a novel under review as "not only a good story, but an ethically bracing and stimulating book."[7] In 1893, F. Marion

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1. Letters, ed. B.A. Booth, London, 1951, p. 218.
2. "On English Prose Fiction as a Rational Amusement" (1870), Four Lectures, ed. M.L. Parrish, 1938, p. 105.
3. Thackeray, 1879, p. 109.
4. "The Tendency of Dickens's Works", xl (1885), 282-92.
5. Contemporary, 1 (1886), 296-7.
6. "A New Novelist", cxxviii (1887), 842, 848.
7. lx (1887), 594.

Crawford's trivial The Novel, What It Is insists that the novelist should go beyond realism "by showing men what they may be, ought to be, or can be", and that - "The foundation of good fiction and good poetry seems to be ethic rather than aesthetic."[1] And the Dublin Review, finally, offers an example of such a moral attitude at its most extreme, in C.C. Longridge's remarkable "Novelists and Novels", an article which could have been written a century before:

> "The object, therefore, which the writer of fiction should always hold in view is to exercise the phantasy in pleasant but lawful subjects, to fill it with novel and happy images, and by this indirect, as well as by a direct, appeal to the heart, so to temper and control the passions as may be most suitable to the formation of virtue and the extirpation of vice. For this reason, his representations should be chaste, his sentiments pure, and his leading characters noble-minded and virtuous."2

The "new didacticism" of the 'eighties and 'nineties, though more concerned with the dissemination of new ideas of every kind than with the upholding of any one traditional Ideal of ethical conduct, adopts for its own purposes the same general concept of the novel as a means of edification. The instance alone of Gissing will suffice to demonstrate how the artistic conscience of the later years - at its most sensitive in him - always had to exist alongside an Arnoldian belief in the artist's social responsibilities and in the novel as an appropriate vehicle of his convictions. Gissing continually denied the advocacy of any theory in his own novels, yet basically he aspired, like the artist-heroes of his own books, to be an agent of moral and social reform, writing to his brother in 1880:

> "I mean to bring home to people the ghastly condition (material, mental, and moral) of our poor classes, to show the hideous injustice of our whole system of society, to give light upon the plan of altering it, and, above all, to preach an enthusiasm for just and high ideals in this age of unmitigated egotism and 'shop'. I shall never write a book which does not keep all these ends in view."3

Sir George Douglas, who in 1897 attributed the outdatedness of George Eliot's moral earnestness to a contemporary trend in favour of

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1. Pp. 77, 86.
2. xvi (1886), 1-9.
3. Letters, ed. A. and E. Gissing, 1927, p. 83. C.f. below, p. 148. For a study of the nature and the effects of his divided allegiance, see J. Korg, "Division of Purpose in George Gissing", P.M.L.A., lxx (1955), 323-36.

light amusement in fiction, in such writers as Stevenson and Kipling,[1] seriously underestimated the new earnestness of his day. What was outdated was the particular code to which George Eliot and Trollope had subscribed. Earnestness remained undiminished; only the catchwords had changed - indeed, multiplied. And, as before, the novel was seen by many as the most convenient medium for their propagation.

The specific nature of these moral or philosophical effects is only allusively hinted at, in, for example, such rudimentary and ubiquitous phrases as "moral tone" and "respect for moral values". The former and its synonyms, "healthy", "bracing", "wholesome", "not morbid", and the like, occupy such a large place in the critical vocabulary that they seem at times to constitute an entire aesthetic canon, especially for such sectarian magazines as the British and the London Quarterly Reviews, and above all during the 'sixties and early 'seventies. Even the Saturday ends a notice of Georgiana Craik's Sylvia's Choice, in 1874: ".. and for the sake of this healthiness of moral tone all else that is less than artistically admirable in Miss Craik's book will surely receive condonation."[2] However, ten years later, the same magazine implies clearly that the phrase, "a healthy book", is old-fashioned,[3] and though the phraseology of which it is part continues to be used widely in reviewing right through the 'nineties, it ceases to be the dominant, almost the determining characteristic.[4]

"Respect for moral values" and observance of "good morality", typical of further clichés of criticism, provide a more obvious lead into the basic questions which underlie this whole problem of "moral"

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1. Bookman, xii (1897), 12-13.
2. xxxvii (1874), 822-3.
3. lviii (1884), 788.
4. Reviewers apparently still find the term useful to-day. For example, John Davenport, in the Observer for April 19, 1959, says of John Knowles' A Separate Peace: "Its strength lies in the wholesomeness of the tone; there is not a trace of smut or sloppiness."

criticism - what values is the novel to observe? and how, since the novel is an arrangement of words and not a morally responsible agent, is it to do so?

In the majority of criticisms, the implication is simply that right and wrong have an almost material existence which it is part of the novel's mimetic nature to reflect faithfully. The St. James' Magazine, on Clarissa, is typical: ".. the moral of the story is thoroughly healthy. Vice is painted in its true colours, made hateful and revolting."[1] The colours of vice and virtue must always be distinctly and unambiguously contrasted, as Florence Marryat, according to the Athenaeum, fails to do in her Woman Against Woman, in which "all principle of duty and perception of the difference between right and wrong are wanting",[2] and as Daudet's novels succeed in doing, according to Blackwood's, when compared with Zola's failure to observe the only true moral realities:

> "The world they deal with is not a virtuous world, yet virtue lives in it, and struggles, and is not always beaten; and evil, if it often triumphs basely, is never more than base, and wears no gloss of fictitious delicacy or beauty."[3]

The frequent analogy with painting sometimes gives a misleading impression that the problem of value is being approached from a more technical point of view - but again the method recommended to the novelist is seen to be the same one of "moral realism", observance of generally-assumed "true values." For example:

> ".. composition is not all. We require moral perspective and moral chiaro-oscuro as well. What is trivial and incidental must not be drawn too large. What is important must not be drawn too small. And further, the lights and shades, or, if we like to add a new metaphor, the colours, must be properly harmonised and distributed. Everything must not be made an unrelieved darkness by vice or sorrow, or a flat and even brightness by joy or virtue. The novelist and the painter have each of them a kindred artistic effect to produce with shine and shadow, and with various combinations of colour."[4]

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1. "Richardson's 'Clarissa'", ii n.s. (1868-9), 252.
2. 1866 (1), 233.
3. "The Novels of Alphonse Daudet", cxxv (1879), 94.
4. "Impressions of Theophrastus Such", Edinburgh Rev., cl (1879), 558. [By W.H. Mallock - Wellesley Index]

The same terms are used much later by Frederic Harrison, to voice his reluctant dissatisfaction with Thackeray's moral picture, in which a deep-seated bitterness led to a false emphasis on the lower side of human nature: "His creative imagination fell short of the true equipoise, of that just vision of chiaroscuro, which we find in the greatest masters of the human heart."[1] And Ruskin similarly demands that a novel be - "'Balanced symmetrically' - having its two sides clearly separate, its war of good and evil rightly divided. Its figures moving in majestic law of light and shade."[2]

Very often, the moral or philosophic "purpose", by which "black" and "white" are to be defined, is seen in vague, transcendental terms, as in Arabella Shore's panegyric on Meredith for his fulfilment of the novelist's high duties of penetrating to the "truth of things", and aiding in "the great task of social regeneration" by uncovering the "noble ideal" and "the eternal moral code" that lie beneath the mere phenomena of life.[3]

Meredith's own ideas as to the place of values in the novel are similarly high and cloudy. He is, of course, an enemy of the prudery and conventionalism implied by the word "morality", and uses instead such words as "philosophy", "thought", "problems of life", "the Spirit", and "Idea" to indicate his treatment and the nature of his code. Thus, his novels aim at that "discernment of the laws of existence",[4] the probing beneath reality to "the destinies of the world", which he realises must cause unpopularity.[5] The novel, as an instrument of civilization and the Comic Spirit, must oppose Scientific Materialism, mediating between the "rose-pink" of unreal Sentimentality and the "dirty drab" of false Zolaism,[6]

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1. "W.M. Thackeray", Studies in Early Victorian Literature, 1895, pp. 132-4.
2. "Fiction - Fair and Foul. V", Nineteenth Century, x (1881), 516.
3. "The Novels of George Meredith", British Quar. Rev., lxix (1879), 411-25. [Identified Wellesley Index]
4. Letters, ed. W.M. Meredith, 1912, ii, 398.
5. Quoted in L. Stevenson, The Ordeal of George Meredith, New York, 1953, p. 193.
6. Diana of the Crossways, 1885, Chapter 1 (Memorial Edn., 1910, pp. 15-20).

and will work in a manner "pointed with examples and types under the broad Alpine survey of the spirit born of our united social intelligence."[1] This application of ideas and values to fiction can be achieved by direct didacticism, as is evident from his loquacious defences of open dissertation in his books,[2] and from his warnings to Gissing against excessive dialogue and insufficient allusive and reflective passages,[3] but Meredith has nothing more detailed to say as to the method of his philosophical transfiguration of reality.

George Moore is another reputed banner-bearer of Aestheticism who reveals a very distinct inclination at times to this belief in the existence of certain moral absolutes which are inseparable from the nature of art. Always the chameleon of letters, his well-known crusade against Grundyism and moral censorship,[4] and his rhetorical proclamations of the superiority of Art over Life, conceal the fact that he was usually attacking the narrow restrictions of his time rather than denying the place of a morality of any kind. His demands in the novel are for "seriousness", "depth of life", and "thought", meaning not only a freer choice of subject-matter and a profounder psychological analysis, but also the saying of "profound things on profound subjects", and the use, as in Tolstoi, of characters for their moral as well as their social significance.[5] In praising Turgenev, also, for giving us ideas rather than mere things, Moore shrugs aside the whole problem of how didacticism is to be accommodated to art:

> "Whether the writer should intrude his idea on the reader, or hide it away and leave it latent in the work, is a question of method; and all methods are good. What I wish to establish here is that it is a vain and fruitless task to narrate any fact unless it has been tempered and purified in thought and stamped by thought with a specific value."[6]

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1. "Prelude" to The Egoist, 1879 (Memorial Edn., 1910, i, 3).
2. E.g., Sandra Belloni, 1864, Chapter 44 (Memorial Edn., 1909, ii, 482-4).
3. E. Clodd, "George Meredith: Some Recollections", Fortnightly, lxxxvi n.s. (1909), 27.
4. E.g., in Literature at Nurse, 1885, and "A New Censorship of Literature", Pall Mall Gazette, xl (Dec. 10, 1884), 1-2.
5. "Since the Elizabethans", Cosmopolis, iv (1896), 42-58.
6. "Turgueneff", Fortnightly, xliii n.s. (1888), 238.

In spite of characteristically inconsistent attacks on moral purpose,[1] he continues to apply his own moral standard in criticising Flaubert's "odious pessimism",[2] and in disapproving of Kipling for his "attitude towards life"[3] and because "the anecdote that does not represent a moral idea, however curious, however exciting, can never rise to the height of great literature."[4]

The nature of the moral order which Moore recognized as overshadowing more "aesthetic" matters is not gone into, nor, again, is the method of its application. His energies (perhaps more profitably) are directed to urging the proposition that this morality of art, whatever its details, is at least a different code from that of British Matrondom and the prosecutors of Henry Vizetelly:

> "That there are great and eternal moral laws which must be acted up to in art as in life I am more than ready to admit; but these are very different from the wretched conventionalities which have been arbitrarily imposed upon us in England."5

Two final examples of Transcendental and Idealist moral theories of fiction are Edward Dowden's, in 1886, that -

> ".. literature is more than an interpretation of external nature and of human life; it is a revelation of the widening possibilities of human life, of finer modes of feeling, dawning hopes, new horizons of thought, a broadening faith and unimagined ideals"-6

and, in 1885, W.S. Lilly's, very typical of his period, that the duty of art is to contradict Science and Materialism by presenting "that image of a fairer and better world, the desire of which springs eternal in the human breast." The novelist must present the Good, observe the "great ethical principles of reserve, shame, reverence", and concentrate on the soul:

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1. E.g. on Tolstoi, in Avowals, 1919, pp. 152-64.
2. Confessions of a Young Man, 1888, p. 297.
3. Avowals, p. 167.
4. Preface to Dostoevsky's Poor Folk, 1894, p. vii. For one account of Moore as a basically conventional moralist, see W.C. Frierson, "George Moore Compromised with the Victorians", Trollopian, i (1947), 37-44.
5. Preface to Zola's Piping Hot! (Pot-Bouille), 1885, p. xv.
6. "The Interpretation of Literature", Contemporary, xlix (1886), 702.

".. the true value of any work of art is its ethical value, and ... the measure of its ethical value is its correspondence with the truth of things. But the true is the ideal; the phenomenal is not the real, but its perpetual antithesis."1

More empirical accounts of the novelist's moral code are centred on the notion of an unchanging community of shared ethical belief - the sanction here being Society, not the "truth of things." Again, attention proves to be focussed on the nature of the ideas rather than the method of objectivising them. J.M. Robertson's excellent essay on W.D. Howells emphasises the importance of a novelist's View of Life, its soundness, delicacy, width, clearness, and minuteness, and by this standard compares the modern American school unfavourably with George Eliot and Turgenev. The nature of this accuracy of moral outlook that is so essential to the novelist is defined by reference to Society:

".. his effects depend on a general harmony between his views of life and those of his readers. A certain moral code is understood between them and him, and this code is really part of his material. This being so, it is scarcely possible that he should be without ethical purpose."2

Similarly, Arthur Waugh, in the Yellow Book, defines the limits of the morally permissible in art as those observed in the cultured conversation of the day, steering between "the prudery of the manse" and "the effrontery of the pot-house". We must judge as to the presence or absence of the essential moral idea by whether the work makes for "that standard of taste which is normal to wholesomeness and sanity of judgment", by whether it encourages us to the line of conduct recommended "by the experience of the age", and whether it does so in language and example not offensive to "that ordinarily strong and unaffected taste which, after all, varies very little with the changes of the period and development."3

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1. "The New Naturalism", Fortnightly, xxxviii n.s. (1885), 240-56.
2. "Mr. Howells' Novels", Westminster Rev., lxvi n.s. (1884), 357-75. The idea is expanded in his "Science in Criticism", in Essays Towards a Critical Method, 1889, pp. 2-148 (where the essay on Howells also appears).
3. "Reticence in Literature", i (1894), 201-19.

The demand for exclusion, on the grounds of social convention, often expresses itself in its most crass form in the 'nineties, when many critics reacted against the evident widening of the frontiers of art. Walter Besant, who speaks at times as the very mouthpiece of Philistine and insular England, puts this viewpoint bluntly. He erects "Average Opinion" into a complete artistic authority, whose attitude to the Family, Free Love, and the like, is simply based on undisputed facts:

> ".. let us not forget that the cultured class of British women - a vast and continually increasing class - are entirely to be trusted. Rare, indeed, is it that an Englishman of this class is jealous of his wife: never does he suspect his bride."

For the novelist to treat of illicit love is not just to be destructive of society, but is, according to Besant's myopic assertion, to be unrealistic: "This is not a law laid down by that great authority, Average Opinion, but by Art herself, who will not allow the creation of impossible figures moving in an unnatural atmosphere."[1]

James Ashcroft Noble, in 1895, calls his authority "civilization", and compares the rule of reticence it imposes on art in sexual matters to the custom, in "civilized" society, of putting toilets in distant parts of the house,[2] and Temple Bar, in the same year, adduces as evidence of the total moral depravity of contemporary fiction such an obvious contravention of normal social decorum as the portrayal of characters discussing the legs of ballet-dancers in mixed company.[3] Noble, more broad-minded than many, gives Tess as an example of a properly reticent handling of Sex, but Mrs. Oliphant applies the same standard only to condemn Hardy's "grossness, indecency, and horror" and to attribute the growing shamelessness of young women to such open discussions as Hardy's and Grant Allen's of subjects hitherto properly regarded as taboo in art

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1. "Candour in English Fiction", New Review, ii (1890), 6-9.
2. "The Fiction of Sexuality", Contemporary, lxvii (1895), 494-8. See also his Morality in English Fiction, 1886, which, in its adulation of George Eliot, is one of the clearest instances of ethical idealism as a principle of Victorian novel-criticism.
3. "The Modern Novel", cv (1895), 248.

as in society.[1] And lastly, in a largely favourable review of Jude in the Academy, John Barrow Allen nevertheless insists that the limits of ordinary decent conversation in real life should indicate where art must draw its own line.[2]

Such, then, explicitly or implicitly, was the basic sanction behind many - perhaps most - of the moral theories of fiction at the time: an appeal to the absolute nature of current social conventions.

Sometimes, a code that is openly Christian, rather than Idealist or Pragmatic, is set up as the criterion, as when the Spectator prefers Daniel Deronda to the pessimistic Middlemarch because it shows a reassuring faith in a Guiding Power, "a faith which is the condition .. of finding any true significance in art", and allows this new inspiring tone to "make up for many faults of execution".[3] W. F. Barry in the Quarterly faults both contemporary Realism and Romance for their neglect of the Christian Ideal that alone can lift prose literature to the heights. Meredith, for all his merits, fails at last through his earth-bound philosophy of Stoicism, and Stevenson for his lack of earnestness. Christian principles alone can provide "a pure transparency of perfect sky, to be spread over the Darwinian earth", and we must condemn -

> ".. the Realism that, for want of belief in the Highest, fails to be true and human romance: and .. the Romanticism which is but sentimental or artistic fancy, divorced from life and business because it can touch neither with a heavenly glow."[4]

Similarly, a Spectator broadside against Hardy and Grant Allen, although at one point it acknowledges that the revelation to be gained from the artist is "a thing independent of, though not antagonistic to, the testimony of the moralist", makes it clear that the real objection to the "New Hill-Top Morality" is that all great literature must "have a sound moral at the heart of it" that is fundamentally Christian:

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1. "The Anti-Marriage League", Blackwood's, clix (1896), 135-49.
2. xlix (1896), 134.
3. "The Strong Side of 'Daniel Deronda'", xlix (1876), 948, and 1131-3.
4. "English Realism and Romance", clxxiii (1891), 468-94. [Identified Wellesley Index]

> ".. it is quite impossible to write a great poem or a great novel without a clear and true perception of the moral and spiritual laws of God as manifested in the life of the world he has created."1

At other times, a vaguely humanistic ethic is proposed, which purports to be wider in scope than the Christian Ideal, and to appeal to a greater tribunal than Average Opinion, as when Walter Raleigh praises the "wise and beautiful morality" of Stevenson:

> "A novel cannot, of course, be moral as an action is moral; there is no question in art of police regulations or conformity to established codes, but rather of insight both deep and wide ... The romancer is not bound to display allegiance to particular moral laws of the kind that can be broken; he is bound to show his consciousness of that wider moral order which can no more be broken by crime than the law of gravitation can be broken by the fall of china - the morality without which life would be impossible; the relations, namely, of human beings to each other, the feelings, habits, and thoughts that are the web of society. For the appreciation of morality in this wider sense high gifts of imagination are necessary."2

Creeds, however, based on this "wider sense" are rarely formulated by the novel-critic of the time. Whatever freedom may have been granted to poetry, in the style of Eneas Sweetland Dallas' outline of a "natural" morality, based on the heart's affections rather than conscience or duty,[3] the novel was obviously felt to be bound by different rules, due to its more influential position in society, and also to its greater use of subject-matter drawn from the everyday world of moral situations and decisions. The "Moral Ideal", or the Christian Ideal, or, most frequently, the respect for the social code, as seen above, continue to dominate most accounts of the relationship of fiction to ideas, and underlie such entirely typical moral criticisms of the later years as, for example, the Athenaeum's, that Ouida disbelieves "in an essential difference between right and wrong, or in the ultimate ascendency of the

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1. "'Hill-Top Novels' and the Morality of Art", lxxv (1895), 722-4. Allen explains his controversial phrase in The British Barbarians, 1895: ".. a Hill-Top Novel is one which raises a protest in favour of purity." (Introduction, pp. vii, xvi-xxiii).
2. Robert Louis Stevenson, 1895, pp. 62-4.
3. The Gay Science, 1866, ii, 192-3.

better side of human nature";[1] the Spectator's, that Moore is saved from the trough of Zolaism by having "the faith of a Christian and the instincts of a gentleman";[2] and Julia Wedgwood's, of James' The Princess Casamassima, that it does not contain "a glimmer of a conviction or a moral standard."[3] The national sense of outrage aroused by the apparent moral inversion of French Naturalism arose quite naturally out of this belief in literature's attachment to certain eternal ethical verities, the overthrowing of which would result in such anarchy as filled Rider Haggard, for one, with old-maidenly horror:

> "Lewd, and bold, and bare, living for lust and lusting for this life and its good things, and naught beyond, the heroines of realism dance, with Bacchanalian revellings, across the astonished stage of literature."[4]

And similarly, the continuous critical outcry against "pessimism" is simply aimed at the failure of novelists to embody the Moral Ideal towards which the age must strive: "Art should not mirror the futility of experience", complains Julia Wedgwood again, in 1884.[5] Right until the end of the century, critics struggle against the growing tide of pessimism that accompanied moral uncertainty, and are vociferous in their complaints against, for example, James, Hardy, Gissing, and the early Wells and Conrad. Among the Russians, Tolstoi is widely preferred to Dostoevsky for his message of hope,[6] and he is singled out by Edmund Gosse, in 1890, for manifesting the optimism and faith in humanity that are essential to lasting literature.[7] The last word will be with James Payn, asking a plain man's question in 1899 which might be taken as the question addressed by the age as a whole to literature, and above all to that fictional form of it which touched most closely on the aspirations, the

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1. 1882 (i), 410.
2. lvi (1883), 1069.
3. Contemporary, 1 (1886), 899-901.
4. "About Fiction", Contemporary, li (1887), 176-7.
5. Contemporary, xlv (1884), 450.
6. E.g. "Two Russian Realists", London Quar. Rev., lxx (1888), 55-73.
7. "Count Lyof Tolstoi" (1890), Critical Kit-Kats, 1896, pp. 130-1.

fears, and the doubts of their ordinary lives:

> "What right has a man to pen a story like Turganieff's On the Eve to make generations of his fellow-creatures miserable? What lesson is there to be learned from it save the inscrutable cruelty of Fate? Who is the better - or even the wiser - for it?"[1]

Literature's task was not only to reflect passively what was best in the values of contemporary society, but to lead men hopefully and without questioning towards the attainment of moral perfection on the prospects of which these values were built.

2. How the Novel's Values Operate.

So far, the moral criticisms of fiction we have seen have shown little sign of passing beyond general moral dissertation to a more detailed explanation of the various devices by which the novel is to convey its message or its loyalty to some code. However, it is possible to discern at least four directions by which contemporary criticism might be expected to come closer to definition of the art-value connection: these are: by its examination of the effect on the reader; of the nature of the artist; of the use of Character; and of the convention of Poetic Justice. Only the last two qualify as technical devices; but the first two approaches are also potentially illuminating, in that each chooses an area where common ground obviously exists from the first between art and value, and whence a plausible theory of their interfusion might emerge.

In discussions of audience-effect, constant reference is made to the "moral sense" as a quasi-independent faculty, and to the close relation between Imagination and man's moral nature, usually as accepted facts with credentials already established.[2] It is assumed almost everywhere that pictures of vice corrupt, unless thoroughly draped and disguised in the various robes of evident moral purpose. The defence offered on behalf of French novels, that their portrayal of evil in part deters, is

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1. "The Compleat Novelist", The Backwater of Life, 1899, pp. 155-6.
2. The belief is firmly in the eighteenth-century tradition, going back in part to Shaftesbury's use of the "moral sense" as the link between intellect and sensation, and hence, since it is identical with the "sense of beauty", as the instrument of didacticism in art. See also above, pp. 10-12.

scorned by, for example, Blackwood's, in 1879, which claims their real aim to be those immoral sensations inevitably provoked by seeing "the sins and sorrows of feeble nature" without the intervention, on the author's part, of "idealising operations in moral chirurgery."[1] And the Spectator, in 1885, while recognizing the special moral teachings in Moore's A Mummer's Wife, points out that he achieves this by sacrificing "something still more precious":

> ".. this something assuredly is sacrificed when, for the sake of enforcing a mere ethical proposition, the moral nature is exposed to contamination by prolonged imaginative companionship with the very evil against which the moral warning is directed."

Moore may claim that unflinching veracity to life produces its own lessons, but propinquity with evil things deadens the moral sensibilities.[2]

Vernon Lee, as an early investigator of psychology in aesthetics, goes further. Baldwin, her spokesman in "A Dialogue on Novels", also disagrees with the idea that life, accurately presented, will inevitably provide moral instruction, on the grounds that the reader's faculties of "the intellect, the imagination, the imaginative emotions" respond differently, more sensitively, to art, and that the effects on these faculties of reading about evil are magnified because they do not occur as part of the multifarious effects of life. Pictures of the physical side of love are below the range of the "intellectual emotions", and stimulate the lower side of our nature, as in the case of Maupassant's Une Vie:

> ".. like nine out of ten French novels, it dragged the imagination over physical details with which the imagination has no legitimate connection, which can only enervate, soil, and corrupt it."3

The existence of a "moral sense" which is always reacted on by art, as by all other human activities, is argued for by William Archer, in a heated rejoinder to Oscar Wilde, in the Scots Observer. Usually, the faculty does not interfere with our aesthetic response, but when it does assert itself it is supreme: "We cannot by an effort of the aesthetic

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1. "Contemporary Literature VI, French Novels", cxxv (1879), 682.
2. lviii (1885), 83-5.
3. Contemporary, xlviii (1885), 390-401.

will, so to speak, close our nostrils to moral putrescence."[1] And Emily Crawford is typical of many in her concern for the health of this faculty when it is at its most delicate, in the young:

> "The best protector of youth from those vices which cause immediate degeneration is modest feeling and the instinctive shrinking from what is lewd. How can we expect the young to escape from spring blights if that beautiful and natural guard against them, the sense which calls the mantling blush to the cheek, is broken down by literature that is wantonly prurient?"[2]

Emily Crawford goes on to make many familiar points about the differences in social customs between France and England, particularly with regard to the peculiar dangers facing English children in their greater freedom and their access to the unlocked bookcase.[3] This emphasis on the Young Person as the reader most to be considered with regard to the effects of fiction on its audience is a well-known constituent of English Grundyism, and that it is to be regarded seriously as forming a part of novel-criticism, and not merely the carpings of latter-day Jeremy Colliers, is borne out by the favour it receives from many intelligent and thoughtful writers - even though by the later years the principle is obviously outmoded. Two examples of its support must suffice. Frederic Harrison, in 1895, praises the purity of Dickens: ".. in forty works and more you will not find a page which a mother need withhold from her grown daughter."[4] And seven years earlier, Saintsbury, certainly no hidebound Puritan, uses the principle, in a fairly enlightened way, to show the unhealthy condition of the contemporary French novel:

> "As a literary cause of inferiority I do not think that any deserves to be ranked higher than that opposite of the cause which, according to some good people, has weakened our own novel - the absence of consideration for the young person. Doubtless it is not good to write always in the fear of Mr. Podsnap, but it is a great deal worse to live in a perennial state of saying, 'Who's afraid of Mr. Podsnap?'"[5]

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1. iv (1890), 280-1.
2. "Émile Zola", Contemporary, lv (1889), 113.
3. E.g., J. Herbert Stack, in the Fortnightly, writes, in 1871: "Novels in England are written to be read by girls and boys; novels in France are not."
   ("Some Recent English Novels", ix n.s., 1871, 736).
4. "Charles Dickens", Studies in Early Victorian Literature, 1895, p. 143.
5. "The Present State of the Novel. II", Fortnightly, xliii n.s. (1888), 122.

No great friend of the idea of the Young Person as a yardstick to literary merit, Thomas Hardy provides a different example of a moral theory of the novel based primarily on audience-effect - this time not from the point of view of how corruption is to be avoided, but more positively, how those lessons which are properly to be expected from literature are to be conveyed. The method arises out of the actual nature of the values he held, and which appear in his novels, values for the most part intuitive and non-intellectual, based on his belief in the more instinctive qualities in life. The moral effect of fiction should therefore form part of the total impression of the book, and argumentative disquisitions <u>on</u> life cannot affect readers like that appeal to their intuitions made by representations of life "construed, though not distorted, by the light of imagination". A truly dramatic presentment in a novel, which avoids the pitfalls of unnaturalness in conventional "moral purpose", will appeal to the whole nature of the reader, to his non-logical "intuitive conviction", and "must have a sound effect, if not what is called a good effect, upon a healthy mind."[1]

In spite of the great differences in their ethical beliefs, there is an obvious parallelism with George Eliot here, who also based her theory of the morality of fiction on the whole sensibility of the reader:

> "My function is that of the <u>aesthetic</u>, not the doctrinal teacher - the rousing of the nobler emotions, which make mankind desire the social right, not the prescribing of special measures, concerning which the artistic mind, however strongly moved by social sympathy, is often not the best judge."2

The moral nature of the artist, considered directly, as distinct from the effect of his work on readers, underlies many moral criticisms, but is often inextricably entangled with other moral issues. For George Stott,

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1. "The Profitable Reading of Fiction", <u>Forum</u>, New York, v (1888), 57-70. See also above, pp. 14.
   Hardy always distrusts pure cerebration and theorizing, hence his indignation at the supposed "theories" embodied in his books, and his claim that in <u>Tess</u> "the contemplative [parts are] oftener charged with impressions than with convictions". (Preface, Wessex Edn., 1912, p. xviii).
2. <u>George Eliot Letters</u>, ed. G. S. Haight, New Haven, 1954-5, vii, 44.

every artist is to some extent a moralist, and every work of art achieves a moral influence as well as artistic beauty, because the work necessarily springs from the whole personality of its creator, including his moral nature. The greatest artists do not shape incidents for a conscious moral effect, but this comes naturally if the artist is writing properly, as a complete man.[1] The Saturday Review, in 1874, also traces aesthetic and moral effect back to a common origin, in order to make a plea for greater freedom in art:

> "The difference between moral and immoral art is not in the subject-matter, but in the mode of treatment; it is not that one writer deals with bigamy, and another never suggests a breach of the marriage laws; but that one possesses a healthy, and the other a morbid, mind."[2]

And even Ruskin, for once, sees beyond the sordidness of subject-matter in allowing that Balzac triumphs over such material by his possession of this faculty: "The moment the moral sense really fails, all genius is dead; in its vitality, all genius revives."[3]

J. H. B. Browne, in 1878, prefaces an article on George Eliot with a statement of his principle of criticism, which is that a work is to be judged by the moral and intellectual nature of the artist behind it, which reveals itself by the selection of the good or the bad out of the data available to him -[4] a general position that is summed up in the phrase that is the key to Leslie Stephen's theory of morality, and to the practice of criticism by the majority of his contemporaries: ".. I measure the worth of a book by the worth of the friend whom it reveals to me."[5] Even for that slowly-emerging strain of criticism which was leaving behind the spiritual-biography approach, and concentrating more on the work-in-itself, the novelist's moral nature remained an attractive ultimate criterion, as Henry James was to admit:

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1. "Charles Dickens", Contemporary, x (1869), 204-5.
2. "Sensationalism", xxxvii (1874), 614-5.
3. Draft version of Fors Clavigera, Letter 79 (1877), Works, Library Edn., 1903-12, xxix, 588.
4. "George Eliot as a Novelist", Westminster Rev., liv n.s. (1878), 105-7. [Identified Wellesley Index]
5. "The Moral Element in Literature", Cornhill, xliii (1881), 41.

> "The question comes back thus, obviously, to the kind and the degree of the artist's prime sensibility, which is the soil out of which his subject springs .. this enveloping air of the artist's humanity - which gives the last touch to the worth of the work."1

Discussions of moral purpose in the novel from the point of view of Character are usually directed by the simple principle that there should be some good, and, if necessary, some bad characters, and that value-labels should be very clearly affixed to them - by what means exactly we are not told. The moral reasons for building a novel around virtuous characters are brought out by the Westminster, in 1876:

> "There should always be one or more great and true characters, on which the reader may rely, not only as the touchstone of the moral purpose, but as a means of affording a commentary on the actions of base persons" - 2

and, in 1889, by R. Y. Tyrrell, who compares Trollope unfavourably with Jane Austen and W. E. Norris for his failure to provide "an ideal of human conduct and aspiration":

> "There is nothing elevating or even improving in fiction which presents us with characters which are never on a higher or larger scale than ourselves, of a more generous or loftier cast than the persons one meets at a dinner party or in a club smoking-room. The types of character should be presented to us in such a way as to stimulate our imagination, and kindle our admiration and love."3

As regards the distribution of good and evil tags, the attractive villain, or, at least, the backsliding character who receives some condonation, is the object of innumerable attacks. The British Quarterly wishes that Arthur Donnithorne had been given a blacker mark, in Adam Bede,[4] and its moralistic comrade-in-arms, the London Quarterly, wishes that Mrs. Henry Wood would not waste her opportunity to enforce sound moral lessons by her creating figures of nobleness and virtue who are fools at the same time, and villainesses who are more striking than the

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1. Preface to The Portrait of a Lady, in The Art of the Novel, ed. R. P. Blackmur, London, 1935, p. 45. See also "The Art of Fiction", Longman's, iv (1884), 520.
2. "Ouida's Novels", xlix n.s. (1876), 361-2.
3. "Mr. Norris's Novels", Quarterly Rev., clxviii (1889), 434-5. [Identified Wellesley Index]
4. "George Eliot", xliv (1867), 165.

heroines.[1] More significantly, the Athenaeum, in 1868, takes issue with the portrayal of a homicidal clergyman, agreeing that his deed might be forgiven in real life, but demanding from art a more clear-cut morality than the everyday:

> ".. most persons who feel strongly with respect to the influence and responsibilities of art will agree in thinking that novelists should be no less disinclined to mitigate the blackness of sin than to obscure the brightness of virtue, and that they invite reprehension when they present us with cases of crime so modified by extenuating circumstances that whilst the extenuating circumstances cover the criminal with sympathy and admiration, his evil act rouses no abhorrence."2

According to the Contemporary, in the same year, this artistic world of a more black-and-white morality should contain characters which are themselves transfigured beyond reality, in order that "our belief in the Good is recovered even against the deliverances of our observation." The theory of Types is here placed in a specifically moral context:

> "It has been said that history is philosophy teaching by examples. If that be true, the novel - which is but crystallized history, or human nature in the deeper truth of idealization - should be philosophy teaching by still higher examples, inasmuch as the novelist has the 'blessed prerogative' of choosing characters that more nearly reveal that ideal type in which, artistically, the individual vanishes."3

The comments of a practising novelist on his methods of moralizing through characters are of interest here. Charles Reade, whose hoarse denunciations of critics and the Press resound throughout the first twenty years of our period, is continually defending himself from charges of immorality by reference to his careful treatment of character. For example, in 1866 he defends Griffith Gaunt: "In my double character of moralist and artist ... I fill my readers with a horror of Bigamy, and a wholesome indignation against my principal male character, so far as I have shown him."[4] And, in 1871, he takes the same attitude to the controversial figures of Sir Charles Bassett and Rhoda Somerset in A Terrible Temptation, saying, of the former:

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1. "Recent Novels: their Moral and Religious Teaching", xxvii (1866), 105-6.
2. 1868 (ii), 13-14.
3. vii (1868), 466-7.
4. "The Prurient Prude", Readiana, 1883, p. 316.

".. I have openly disapproved his early life - have represented him as heartily regretting it, so soon as the virtuous love dawned on him; and yet I have shown some consequences of his early frailties following him for years. If this is not fiction teaching morality in its own unobtrusive way - what is?"1

Of Rhoda Somerset:

"Do I whitewash the hussy, or make her a well-bred, delicate-minded woman, as your refined and immoral writers would? I present her illiterate, coarse, vain, with good impulses, a bad temper, and a Billingsgate tongue. In close contrast to this unattractive photograph I am careful to place my portrait of an English virgin, drawn in the sweetest colours my rude art can command, that every honest reader may see on which side my sympathies lie, and be attracted to virtue by the road of comparison."2

Any possibility of moral confusion, caused by slight falls from grace in otherwise attractive and virtuous characters, is pounced upon, as when the Spectator notes, of The Child of Stafferton, by W. J. Knox Little: ".. we regard the first marriage of Lady May, so soon after the supposed death of her betrothed, as a mistake, both ethically and from the point of view of literary art."3 Mrs. Craik, too, in 1882, offers an extreme example of such a Manichaean notion of characterization. Good characters in real life, she admits, may have faults, but to show this in fiction is to "produce a blurred and blotted vision of life, which, to those just beginning life, is either infinitely sad, or infinitely harmful." To affect readers with sentiment on behalf, say, of some unhappily married person in a novel who falls in love with another, is the height of immorality. In such books - "Instead of white being white, and black, black, both take a sort of neutral tint - the white not so very pure after all, and the black toned down into an aesthetic grey." This is no way to provide youthful readers with the necessary armour for the Battle of Life.4

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1. "A Terrible Temptation", ibid., p. 284.
2. "Facts Must be Faced", ibid., p. 323.
3. lxi (1888), 1267.
4. Plain Speaking, 1882, 177-81.

Other accounts avoided this simplicity of moral tag in the drawing of characters - for example, an article in the Westminster for 1892 praises Hardy's delicate moral shading of character as being likely to "bewilder those accustomed to draw a sharp line between the sheep and the goats". Yet, like most others, this writer at the same time praises the way in which "unselfish conduct is pointed out with admiration, and meanness and self-seeking are shown to be unlovely and disastrous."[1] And once again, the means by which this evaluation is achieved are left unexamined.

The notion of Poetic Justice, in its most simple form, also continues to show itself throughout the period, and it is obviously felt that there is little need to re-define or examine an effect so well-known to readers and so hallowed by usage. The Athenaeum praises the sound moral and close observance of Poetic Justice in Trollope's Can You Forgive Her?, in which "people reap the things they sow",[2] and, contradictorily London Society objects to his "uniformly low ethical tone. We look in a novel for something that shall satisfy the instinct for poetic justice. Mr. Trollope never gets beyond the average humanity of us poor worldlings."[3] The British Quarterly's stern line with H.M. Cadell's Ida Craven, in 1876, reveals the uncompromising nature of the Justice it seeks, as well as providing a more concrete example of the convention. A loveless marriage is portrayed, and at the end of the book, some hope for it is held out:

> "But the whole conception and the delineations are unhealthy. Such marriages are a mistake, almost a moral wrong, and a novel which should be an ideal of life should have nothing but reprobation for them. They have no right to come right."[4]

In the Westminster's interesting attempt, in the same year, to answer the question "What is a novel?", plot is described as "a war not of interests, but of principles", and accordingly, since the latter have a

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1. Janetta Newton-Robinson, "A Study of Mr. Thomas Hardy", cxxxvii (1892), 157.
2. 1865 (ii), 305-6.
3. "The Piccadilly Papers", xv (1869), 474.
4. lxiv (1876), 549.

true growth and aim in life, justice must always be shown to triumph, even if the immediate results of good actions involve unhappiness, as they might in real life.[1]

In the following year, there appears, from Ruskin, what was perhaps the most outright and high-sounding defence which this particular convention ever received. In Letter 83 of Fors Clavigera, Ruskin names as the greatest sign of divinity in the works of the masters their enshrining of the Moral Law, which occurs in its highest imaginative form in Poetic Justice:

> "And this so-called poetical justice, asserted by the great designers, consists not only in the gracing of virtue with her own proper rewards of mental peace and spiritual victory; but in the proportioning also of worldly prosperity to visible virtue; and the manifestation, therefore, of the presence of the Father in this world, no less than in that which is to come. So that, if the life-work of any man of unquestioned genius does not assert this visible justice, but, on the contrary, exhibits good and gentle persons in unredeemed distress or destruction, - that work will invariably be found to show no power of design; but to be merely the consecutive collection of interesting circumstances well described, as continually the best work of Balzac, George Sand, and other good novelists of the second order."

That Ruskin goes on to point to Desdemona's earlier treachery to her father as the explanation of her tragic and just fate, is an example of the solecisms in which the convention results, when so slavishly applied.[2]

Henry James, of course, does not satisfy this desire, and the way in which evil seems to overcome the good in his works results in a sense of failure that the British Quarterly, on behalf of many, calls "false to epical art",[3] and the Spectator contrary to the "providences of fiction", which demand instead a sense of the "moral equities of life".[4] C. E. Dawkins, in 1885, marks the growth of this regrettable tendency in modern fiction, taking Lucas Malet's Colonel Enderby's Wife, where the wicked are left to their spoils, as an example of "the total absence of anything like

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1. "Ouida's Novels", xlix n.s. (1876), 363-4.
2. 1871-84, vii, 355-7.
3. lxx (1879), 529-30.
4. liv (1881), 185-6.

an indication of poetic justice",[1] while the Spectator takes a highly moral view of Hardy's The Woodlanders, in 1887, and indicates that the moral judgment so lacking in the book should have been passed by a reversal of the material fortune of Fitzpiers, the sinning character in question: "It is a picture of shameless falsehood, levity, and infidelity, followed by no true repentance, and yet crowned at the end with perfect success."[2]

Part of the moral reaction in the 'eighties and 'nineties against French degeneracy and in favour of the revival of the Romance was centred on the latter's greater admission of those unlikely events which constitute Poetic Justice, and Hall Caine, whose lecture on "Moral Responsibility in the Novel and the Drama" describes his "dream of a greater novel than we have ever yet seen, that shall be compounded of the penny newspaper and the Sermon on the Mount",[3] indicates how this dream might be fulfilled by making Poetic Justice one of "The New Watchwords of Fiction". The Romance is the natural vehicle for that Moral Idealism which always shows moral degradation to befall the wicked, even if they prosper materially, and though endings can be sad, they can still be just, as in Macbeth.

Indeed, all imaginative art must end in justice:

> "The incidents of life are only valuable to art in degree as they are subservient to an idea, and an idea is only valuable to man in the degree to which it helps him to see that come what will the world is founded on justice ... Justice is the one thing that seems to give art a right to exist, and justice - poetic justice, as we call it - is the essence of Romanticism."4

Four years later, Amelia Edwards, in the same magazine, makes a similar plea for Romance, drawing her examples widely, from Egyptian papyri, Malory, Scott, and Thackeray:

> "Now the world of fiction, whether it be the fiction of the novelist, or the fiction of the dramatist, is a world governed by the law of poetical justice; and herein lies the secret of its eternal fascination. It satisfies our inborn sense of right; it transports us into a purer atmosphere; it vindicates the ways of God to Man."5

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1. Academy, xxvii (1885), 434.
2. lx (1887), 419-20.
3. Reported in "The Art of Fiction", Saturday Rev., lxxviii (1894), 530-1.
4. Contemporary, lvii (1890), 486-7.
5. "The Art of the Novelist", ibid., lxvi (1894), 225-6.

3. Attacks on Didacticism.

So far, we have been concerned mainly with criticisms in which the advocacy of moral purpose is fairly unqualified and untroubled. But an interesting theme is to be discerned running alongside this, that of opposition to didacticism in certain forms. This does not necessarily mean an opposition to moral purpose per se, but rather to morality manifesting itself in a way somehow disruptive of the true art-morality union which remained the central belief of almost all critics. Consequently, what emerges most often from such reproofs against didacticism is itself also an emphasis on morality - but one from a different angle, more suspicious, perhaps less naive, certainly one with more possibility of a detailed examination to support it.

Many of these critiques, however, merely present us with the enigmatic assertion that preaching in fiction is bad, but the conveying of moral lessons good. For example, the British Quarterly is distinctly Janus-like in this matter: in one article in 1867, it conceives of the novel as having no business to inculcate a moral lesson, yet defines the highest kind of novel as the one that expounds important truths and exhibits moral earnestness - Scott had no clear ethical purpose, but fills his readers with truth and instruction.[1] And in the same issue, it praises Gilbert Rugge for not being "a novel of purpose" yet at the same time for the way in which "the rewards and punishments are dealt out with keen discrimination".[2] Similarly, the Saturday Review praises Turgenev: "Mr. Turgenef aims at more than mere story-telling in his works. His style is not in the least didactic, but his writings generally convey a useful lesson to his countrymen."[3] "Goody" is a frequent term of reproach, often combined with a firm approval for moral purpose, as when London Society praises the earnestness and good teaching of the school of MacDonald

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1. "George Eliot", xlv (1867), 143.
2. Ibid., pp. 250-1.
3. xxiv (1867), 322-3.

and Charlotte Yonge, while also granting that a novel's function is never to be "goody" or obtrude a sermon,[1] and when the Athenaeum writes, in 1870, of My Little Lady: "There is nothing morbid or 'goody' about the story, though its aim is high and its moral excellent."[2] Walter Besant is similarly unhelpful, in 1884, insisting that for a novelist to start out with a conscious moral purpose has by now become almost a law of fiction-writing, but that he must avoid preaching.[3]

Such contradictions are widespread, and cast little light on the problem - but they do indicate a current of unease running through even the most moralistic of magazines and writers, an incipient readiness to recognize at least some difference between the mode of representational art and the mode of dialectic.

When critics come to advance reasons for their dislike of such "preaching", the awareness of the difference of modes becomes more explicit. A prominent place is occupied by complaints that it is contrary to the pleasure-giving function of the novel, and also to what constitutes its proper subject-matter. The Westminster expresses this succinctly, in an attack on the pretentiousness of Lytton, in 1865:

> ".. a novel ceases to be a novel when it aims at philosophical teaching. It is not the vehicle for conveying knowledge. Its business is to amuse, and give us that insight into human affairs which is obtained by the observation of character."4

In the same year, the youthful Edward Dowden expresses indignation at the novelist "who would entice us into listening to his homily under pretence of amusing us; we see the sulphur in that treacle, pah! and will none of it",[5] and even the North British Review finds the philosophic purpose of German fiction excessive, and urges the novelist to abandon high-flown theories as to the philosophic duties of his art:

> "Let him study the nature which lies before him, and try to reproduce that .. The knowledge wanted by a novelist is that of man and the heart of man, and style is more essential to him than even to an historian or a philosopher."6

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1. "The Piccadilly Papers", xv (1869), 475.
2. 1870 (ii), 800.
3. Art of Fiction, 1884, pp. 24-5.
4. "Modern Novelists: Sir Edward Bulwer-Lytton", xxvii n.s. (1865), 482-3.
5. "Fiction and its Uses", Fraser's, lxxii (1865), 759. [Identified Wellesley Index]
6. German Novelists: Freytag, Auerbach, Heyse", iv n.s. (1865), 324-5. [By E. Wilberforce - Wellesley Index]

By the 'seventies, similar protests are heard everywhere: the Saturday, in 1871, confesses that to find a novelist being so false to his proper function as to urge a moral or a political lecture on us is enough to prompt the indignant reader to adopt a contradictory theory,[1] and, in the following year, the didacticism of Middlemarch provides an occasion to point out the proper concerns of fiction:

> "No talent, not genius itself, can quite overcome the inherent defect of a conspicuous, constantly prominent lesson, or bridge over the disparity between the storyteller with an ulterior aim ever before his own eyes and the reader's, and the ideal story-teller whose primary impulse is a story to tell, and human nature to portray - not human nature as supporting a theory, but human nature as he sees it."[2]

Another common ground of complaint - one arising out of the mimetic and illusionary concept of the novel - is that didacticism causes an "unnaturalness" of character and event. Mrs. Oliphant, for example, though regretting Hugo's failure to show the existence of God, also praises his avoidance of the unreality of the orthodox English writer's poetic justice,[3] and a writer in Tinsley's Magazine, for 1877, acknowledging reluctantly that in the controversy of the day the current of opinion is swinging against novels with a purpose, accepts that moral purpose should not be achieved by subordinating the characters to it, or outraging "truth of Nature."[4] Similarly, William Minto admires the lack of moral obtrusion in Mrs. Gaskell, commending her for being a moralist who was not a preacher, and for her consequent greater realism: "[Mary Barton] is shaped and coloured by the author's good-natured wisdom, but it is not stiffened and distorted as a work of art by any hard specific moral purpose."[5] George MacDonald finds short shrift from the Pall Mall Gazette in 1882, which attacks the sermonizing that destroys the naturalness of the characters as well as the proper development of plot:

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1. xxxii (1871), 404-5.
2. xxxiv (1872), 733-4.
3. "Victor Hugo", Blackwood's, c (1866), 768-9. [Identified Wellesley Index]
4. "Novel-writing as an Art", xx (1877), 327-8.
5. "Mrs. Gaskell's Novels", Fortnightly, xxiv n.s. (1878), 366-7.

> "They are not personages, but merely, like the figures on the slides of a magic-lantern, illustrations of the author's lecture. They come like shadows, and so depart. And it is much the same with the story. It moves in a shifting, intermittent way, and in a series of crude pictures, one pausing before us till it has served the lecturer's purpose, and then shifted to make room for another."1

And Mrs. Humphry Ward's didacticism comes under the same attack ten years later for resulting in puppet-like characters, and falsifying the true aim of the artist, which should be "the evolution of natural results from a natural plot by natural characters."[2]

Lastly, Gissing, in an article in 1900, describes the dangers resulting from the new movement towards using the novel as an organ of philosophical and political ideas, which has arisen in spite of the revival of the Romance and the reaction against the earlier type of "novels with a purpose". This use of the novel to disseminate opinions often produces unnatural and inartistic fiction:

> "Its common characteristic is a lack of the novelist's prime virtue, the ability to create and present convincing personalities. In the argumentative and exhortative novel we are not concerned with persons, but with types."3

The alternative to such unnaturalness and distortion, it is usually implied, is some means of indirect suggestion, as when the Saturday, in an obituary of Mrs. Gaskell, praises her development away from the open didacticism of her earlier works:

> "Mrs. Gaskell wisely perceived, before she had written many novels, that the highest end and aim of novel-writing was not to improve the outside world into a juster sense of the rights of the operative or any other special class, but to produce a picture of some phase of human life which should be intrinsically true. She gained the knowledge that the power of the novelist to impress a lesson lies in the perfection of the art with which the lesson, whatever it may be, is kept out of sight."4

Again without going into any detail at all, Hubert Crackanthorpe, in his reply to Arthur Waugh's plea for Reticence and the "Moral Idea",

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1. "Dr. MacDonald's New Novel", xxxvi (Oct. 28, 1882), 4-5.
2. "David Grieve", Edinburgh Rev., clxxv (1892), 519-20. [By R. E. Prothero - Wellesley Index]
3. "The Coming of the Preacher", Literature, vi (1900), 15-16.
4. "Mrs. Gaskell", xx (1865), 638-9.

argues tantalisingly that "art is moral in the wider and the truer sense of the word", and that to the Philistine "the subtle, indirect morality of Art is incomprehensible,"[1] while Walter Raleigh provides an example of such an indirect method of moralising by his re-defining the morality itself in vague, humanistic terms, as we have seen.[2] Naturally, on the basis of Raleigh's belief, "moral purpose" is not only inartistically overt but is contrary to the "true" ethic of literature, which cannot possibly be embodied in any other way than by indirect suggestion. He derides those "artless readers" who do not see that the moral is an inseparable part of the imagination, expression, and style of a novel: "Let virtue be rewarded, and they are content though it should never be vitally imagined or portrayed."[3] And he criticises the predominance of the moral in Maria Edgeworth: "Her morals are simple, clear, and hard, and the characters that she puts in action are stiffened to fit them."[4]

Some kind of dramatization of belief is obviously what such critics have in mind: "principles in action" is a familiar phrase, even among the outright supporters of didacticism, but the emphasis now is laid on the preposition. If character, plot, scene, symbol and all the other devices of the novelist are taken as the objectivisation of his own subjective experience, then values and beliefs, too, must be made in some way to partake of the same objective nature, to become an indissoluble part of the novel's structure. When the "values" in a book fail to achieve this, the book is condemned as falling into dissertation. Continually, it is being urged by critics that disquisition is contrary to the novel's essential unity and inner coherence. George Eliot adduces this offence against artistic unity and the dramatic nature of the art to support her lifelong opposition to didacticism. In 1873, she tells Blackwood:

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1. "Reticence in Literature. Some Roundabout Remarks", Yellow Book, ii (1894), 264-5. See above, p. 129.
2. See above, p. 132.
3. Style, 1897, p. 83.
4. The English Novel, 1894, pp. 268-9.

> "I have always exercised a severe watch against anything that could be called preaching, and if I have ever allowed myself in dissertation or in dialogue [anything] which is not part of the structure of my books, I have there sinned against my own laws ..
>
> .. My books are not properly separable into 'direct' and 'indirect' teaching."1

And even Wilkie Collins, who bore the Dickensian flag of Social Purpose bravely right up till his death in 1889, hopes to keep all subservient to artistic unity:

> "I hope the reader of these pages will find that the purpose of the story is always an integral part of the story itself. The foremost condition of success, in a work of this sort, is that the fact and the fiction shall never be separable one from the other. I have wrought hard to reach this end; and I trust I have not wrought in vain."2

The Saturday takes a particularly firm stand on this principle. In 1872, it reviews two novels where the evident moral purpose has wrecked the stories as dramas and as works of art:

> "A novel with a purpose, to be in any way interesting, ought to be subtle and suggestive rather than direct. It should convey its meaning by character and action rather than by avowed teaching; and because its aim is didactic, care should be taken to keep its method dramatic."3

In the following year, the same magazine rebukes Lytton's The Parisians for its failure to observe this dramatic principle and to "crystallize into artistic form". Didactic purpose in fiction is only admissible where the author's imagination has been intense enough to fuse his abstract principles into artistic symbols and not to leave them as "raw masses of sermon ... interspersed in the middle of story-telling."[4] And in 1875, Scott is cited as an example of this successful use of "symbols" to impress on us, unconsciously and undidactically, his "psychological, moral, and aesthetic views."[5]

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1. George Eliot Letters, ed. G. S. Haight, New Haven, 1954-5, v, 459.
2. Preface to Man and Wife, 1870, pp. xi-xii. The dual "purpose" here was to attack the Scottish Marriage Laws and athleticism in the English Universities.
3. xxxiii (1872), 193-4.
4. xxxvi (1873), 815-6.
5. "Novel-Reading as a Vice", ibid., xl (1875), 452-3.

By the same criterion of the organic unity belonging to the work of art, George Eliot is defended by Edward Dowden and (more typically) criticised by Sidney Colvin - an example of how critics may show significant agreement on some theoretical principle of novel-writing while disagreeing completely over the nearness of an individual writer to fulfilling it. Dowden claims that George Eliot is as much an artist as a teacher:

> "There is not a hard kernel of dogma at the centre of her art, and around it a sheath or envelope which we break and throw away; the moral significance coalesces with the narrative, and lives through the characters."1

And Colvin, writing later with the example of Daniel Deronda before him, makes a partly unfavourable comparison with George Sand, in whose writings -

> ".. every image is conceived in relation to the whole, nothing comes to jar or distract us. In the work of George Eliot, moral and philosophical problems do not clothe themselves, with the same certainty of instinct, in appropriate artistic forms. We have passages of first-rate art side by side with passages of philosophy; and sometimes the philosophy comes where we want the art, and gives us a character like Daniel Deronda himself, who seems constructed rather than created."2

In 1880, the British Quarterly Review demonstrates its gradual shift away from the excessive pietism of the 'sixties by its strictures upon the didacticism of Charlotte Yonge and of Jean Ingelow, their failure to recognize the "higher unity" of the work of art, which requires that "the lesson must be suggested and subordinated."[3] And lastly, Arthur Symons, in his article on Balzac in 1899, discusses that writer's vision of humanity, and praises him as an abstract thinker who has always resolved his philosophy into dramatic scenes, into the life-like terms which are suited to art, and which are evidence of "the quality proper to the novelist."[4]

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1. "George Eliot", Contemporary, xx (1872), 404.
2. "Daniel Deronda", Fortnightly, xx n.s. (1876), 615.
   Dowden found nothing to make him change his mind when the widely-criticised Deronda appeared, and in fact preferred it to Middlemarch (See "'Middlemarch' and 'Daniel Deronda'", Contemporary, xxix (1876-7), 348-69).
3. lxxi (1880), 521.
4. "Balzac", Fortnightly, lxv n.s. (1899), 752.

In conclusion to this examination of those opponents of didacticism who still believed fundamentally in art's moral duties, we will look in more detail at two representative figures, George Saintsbury and Leslie Stephen. The former, as befits "the High Pontiff of Criticism",[1] is continually pronouncing against the inartistic embodiment of values - for example, in the Academy, his most familiar hunting-ground, he writes of George MacDonald's Malcolm:

> "It is certainly a very safe assertion that no good novel as such ever yet dealt or ever will deal intentionally with principles, and that any goodness which may be found in a novel so planned is in spite, not in consequence, of its planning."2

And in the following year Daniel Deronda is criticised for its author's excessive sententiousness and failure to allow her characters to develop themselves without her interference:

> ".. perhaps she has also once more illustrated the immutable law that no perfect novel can ever be written in designed illustration of a theory, whether moral or immoral, and that art, like Atticus and the Turk, will bear no rival near the throne."3

Morality must be regarded as part of the subject treated - that is, one of the factors that regulate men's relations with one another, and not a superimposition by the author's personality:

> "The novel has nothing to do with any beliefs, with any convictions, with any thoughts in the strict sense, except as mere garnishings. Its substance must always be life not thought, conduct not belief, the passions not the intellect, manners and morals not creeds and theories."4

For all his wavering attachment to Art for Art's Sake in his poetry-criticism, and, for example, in his championing of Flaubert - significantly, he criticises a possible lapse into moral didacticism even in Madame Bovary[5] - Saintsbury, in his general attitude to the novel, never lost sight of the

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1. So called by the Times Lit. Supp., 1907, p. 321.
2. vii (1875), 34.
3. Ibid., x (1876), 253-4.
4. "The Present State of the Novel. I", Fortnightly, xlii n.s. (1887), 416.
5. "Gustave Flaubert", ibid., xxiii n.s. (1878), 582.

artist's moral responsibility: "The truth is, that the novel is, while the poem is not, mainly and firstly a criticism of life."[1] Though extremely liberal for his time, he often reveals his basic kinship to it - for example, his reply to the charge of indelicacy in Gautier is that, though writing for adults, he is basically moral: ".. his ardent admiration for beauty preserved him from all the uglier faults of immorality, and often led him back to the accepted code, though by a somewhat roundabout way",[2] and, in a similarly enlightened article on Feuillet: "He proceeds distinctly upon the lines of religion and morality; .. and in his descriptions he very carefully avoids undue complaisance and undue luxuriance of language."[3] The later essay on Maupassant, though liberal in the extreme, and calling its subject "probably the greatest writer of the last quarter of the nineteenth century in France", also contains the key to both Saintsbury's condemnation of didacticism and his recognition of the importance of some quasi-moral standard. Excessive conventional morality is seen as an obsession, and, as such, it is exactly the same as excessive immorality. All obsession is inartistic, and the obtrusion of <u>any</u> philosophy, even if it is the negative one of the modern French school, is fatal to art. The root of the evil is the artist's imagination, on which art depends, and which must enjoy freedom in its operations, both from dogmatic theology on the one hand and from Pessimism on the other:

> "[The artist] is to see life whole as far as he can; and it is impossible that he should see it whole if he is under the domination of any 'ism to the extent that Maupassant was under the domination of this."4

"Wholeness of vision", for all the problems it skirts, is still perhaps the most widely-accepted principle of the value-content of art.

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1. "The Present State of the English Novel, 1892", <u>Miscellaneous Essays</u>, 1892, 417. For Saintsbury's aestheticism, c.f. Dorothy Richardson, "Saintsbury and Art for Art's Sake in England", <u>P.M.L.A.</u>, lix (1944), 243-60.
2. "Théophile Gautier", <u>Fortnightly</u>, xxiii n.s. (1878), 431.
3. "Octave Feuillet", <u>ibid.</u>, xxiv n.s. (1878), 102.
4. "Guy de Maupassant", <u>National Rev.</u>, xxi (1893), 822-6.

The attacks on conventional didacticism by Leslie Stephen are no less pronounced, but are launched from a more deeply-entrenched position of positive morality. He dislikes, for instance, Richardson's direct moral exhortations, and his use of Poetic Justice:

> "When Richardson kills off his villains by violent deaths, we know too well that many villains live to a good old age, leave handsome fortunes, and are buried under the handsomest of tombstones, with the most elegant of epitaphs. This very rough device for inculcating morality is of course ineffectual, and produces some artistic blemishes."[1]

Similarly, the self-conscious philosophising of Lytton is his greatest fault, because of the resultant artificiality,[2] and Poetic Justice - "that a villain is hanged and a good man presented with a thousand pounds" - is again dismissed in "Art and Morality" as being both silly and immoral. The latter argument, that the convention fails, after all, to teach virtue, indicates that Stephen is really more concerned with morality being properly upheld in art than with the details and the dangers of the process. The essay in question is a defence of the part played by morality in all literature, consciously in dispute with what it calls the growing theory that the two inhabit different worlds. Prudery is to be avoided, and, above all, as even some of the greatest writers have forgotten, preaching: "That is a blunder in art; but the blunder is not that they moralised, but that they moralised in a wrong way" - the right way being the expression of morality in "vivid imaginative symbols", not "abstract logical formulae". Fundamentally, the question is one of the soundness of the artist's personality: if art teaches, it is by our being "put _en rapport_ with a great and good man."[3]

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1. "Richardson's Novels", _Cornhill_, xvii (1868), 52-3.
2. "The Late Lord Lytton as a Novelist", _ibid._, xxvii (1873), 348.
3. "Art and Morality", _ibid._, xxxii (1875), 91-101.
   Stephen's own prudery was very real, and underlies much of his theory of morality. He found most French novels "prurient and indecent", preferring the restrictions of English fiction, and showed his conservatism continually as editor of the _Cornhill_. He rejected _The Return of the Native_, and wrote to Hardy concerning _The Hand of Ethelberta_: "I may be over particular, but I don't quite like the suggestion of the very close embrace in the London churchyard." (F.W. Maitland, _Life and Letters of Leslie Stephen_, 1906, 266-7; and 274-7). For an account of extenuating circumstances, c.f. Oscar Maurer, "Leslie Stephen and the Cornhill, 1871-82", _Univ. of Texas Studies in English_, xxxii (1953), 67-95.

Stephen remained fairly consistent in his opposition to inorganic didacticism, though the flexibility in his position, due to his greater emphasis on the validity of some moralising, allows him to accept, for example, many aspects of Kingsley's Yeast and Alton Locke that are inseparable from the propagandizing that he at the same time regretted.[1] Similarly, his lecture, "The Moral Element in Literature", in 1881, decries the stupidity of the usual "novel with a purpose", in the style of Dickens, with its absurd caricatures for characters, yet accepts the moral purpose that is instinctive in the artist, and is consistent with his spontaneity and inspiration, so that all together form that unified personality which is the secret of artistic creativity and the final criterion of worth.[2]

To link in this way the moral issue with the very nature of the artist's imaginative process is to hint at such a comprehensive theory of value in art as was achieved by few novel-critics of the time. It is similar to Saintsbury's, as we have seen, though more clearly stated and developed. Stephen's belief can be seen at work in the essay on Richardson, already noted for its disapproval of that writer's excessive moralising, where he concedes that Richardson's moral earnestness, for all the artistic flaws that resulted from it, has the one great advantage that it seems to become part of the novelist's imagination, "and leads to a certain intensity of realization which we are apt to miss in the novelist's without a purpose."[3] His criticisms of George Eliot are also built around this idea. The Cornhill essay, on her death, regrets, like so many critics, the growing analysis and abstraction of her later work, and the lack of imaginative fusion of what her reflective faculties have produced.[4] His George Eliot (1902), in the English Men of Letters Series, discusses more fully the problem of morality in the novel, agreeing that she sometimes forgets the

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1. "Hours in a Library. No. XV. - Charles Kingsley", Cornhill, xxxv (1877), 435-42.
2. Ibid., xliii (1881), 34-50.
3. "Richardson's Novels", ibid., xvii (1868), 53.
4. "George Eliot", xliii (1881), 164.

"fundamental distinction between the literature of the imagination and the literature of science", and yields to "the danger of constructing her characters out of abstract formulae instead of reversing the process." Theories can become shackles, and so threaten "the spontaneity which marks a true imaginative inspiration." However, an intelligent writer cannot ignore his own beliefs, if they have modified his whole "microcosm", for "fiction must be applied psychology"; and Stephen makes clear - here and elsewhere - his firm conviction that certain beliefs are more suitable for the writer's microcosm than others, an accepted code based on "the chivalrous and manly virtues."[1]

However, his relation of ethical content and effect to the nature of the writer - "from reading George Eliot's novels we are influenced in the same way as by an intimacy with George Eliot herself"[2] - leads him at times away from such moral conventionalism into a wider, more relativistic account of the novelist's moral duties, similar to his earlier acceptance of Richardson's didacticism for the sake of its catalytic effect on the writer:

> "It does not matter so much why a writer should be profoundly interested in his work, nor to what use he may intend to apply it, as that, somehow or other, his interest should be aroused, and the world which he creates be a really living world for his imagination."[3]

Stephen does not escape the confusions and fogs which seem particularly to rise around this subject. Although undoubtedly he believes in the universality of certain objective moral values, which will inevitably be reflected on the moral nature of the great writer, his criticism moves towards an interesting combination of this with the essentially subjective nature of the creative process. The basic theory, though never completely formulated or adhered to, is founded on the quality of vision operative in the novelist and inherent in the finished work, and achieves a valuable mean between the rigidity of an established code and the anarchy of complete moral subjectivity.

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1. Pp. 112-7.
2. P. 205.
3. P. 118.

4. Aesthetes and Rebels.

Advocates of anarchy are difficult to find in the novel-criticism of the century: it is remarkable how impervious it remains to the more extreme doctrines of Aestheticism which manifested themselves in the theory of the other arts. The moral-utilitarian strain in English thinking was ineradicable, and the greater reliance of the novel on ordinary life-in-society for its material meant that this strain could reveal itself above all in criticism of fiction. Even Pater, the Grand Master of Aestheticism, in the famous volte-face of the last paragraph of "Style", prefers Henry Esmond to Vanity Fair not because of any of the virtues of Flaubertian Form that he has just described but because of "the greater dignity of its interests" - great art, as opposed to good art, is in the end defined by its subject-matter, its "alliance to great ends", and its "largeness of hope."[1] Swinburne, too, another early champion of the amorality of Art, provides no such criticism of the novel. His ecstatic A Note on Charlotte Brontë (1877), denounces George Eliot's "disloyalty to clear moral law" and outrage on the ideals of Chivalry and Womanly Honour in her portrayal of the Maggie - Stephen Guest relationship in The Mill on the Floss;[2] Zola's L'Assommoir, in a letter of 1879, is "the most loathsome and horrible book that ever got into type";[3] and Wuthering Heights is saved from the "sickly symptom of a morbid ferocity" only by an atmosphere that is "high and healthy", and a "general impression of noble purity and passionate straightforwardness."[4] And Saintsbury, as we have seen, forced to apply one standard to poetry and another to the novel, exemplifies as clearly as anyone the difficulties of the Aesthetic critic in the realm of prose fiction.[5]

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1. Fortnightly, xliv n.s. (1888), 743. Pater also admired such an obvious piece of didacticism as Robert Elsmere ("Robert Elsmere", Essays from 'The Guardian', 1910, pp. 55-70), and his own Marius was a prominent contribution to the Problem Novel.
2. Pp. 32-45.
3. Swinburne Letters, ed. C. Y. Lang, New Haven, 1959- , iv, 73. See also "Note on a Question of the Hour", Athenaeum, 1877 (i), 768.
4. "Emily Brontë", Athenaeum, 1883 (i), 762-3.
5. See above, pp. 152-3.

As far as the novel is concerned, then, there is little or no critical application of Wilde's dicta that - "The sphere of art and the sphere of ethics are absolutely distinct and separate",[1] and - "There is no such thing as a moral or an immoral book. Books are well written, or badly written. That is all."[2] Leslie Stephen's fears, in 1875, at the "growing theory" that art is amoral are certainly not borne out as regards novel-criticism.[3] What does exist, of course, as can be seen throughout the evidence cited above, and elsewhere, is a movement between greater and less emphasis attached to the demands of morality, a decline in restriction and prudery, as well as a new emphasis on technique, considered independently of moral value - yet, as we have seen, this is more often due to re-definition of "moral" than to a claim for art's total autonomy.[4] Typical of this development is W. E. Henley, who is one of the loudest opponents of contemporary restrictions on art. His defence of Maupassant, for example, is liberal in the extreme, claiming that the great realist's limitations are technical, not moral:

> ".. the merit of a book is neither lessened nor enhanced by the morals of its hero; and when you begin to apply to art the standards of life, from that moment your criticism becomes worthless and impertinent. A novelist is neither a preacher nor a policeman."

However, Henley is inclined to draw the line at Bel-Ami, which is largely "written from a sheer love of caddishness";[5] and it is found in his literary criticism as a whole that behind his vigorous assaults on the hypocrisy and sentimentality of conventional morality, and his protestations of artistic freedom, is his own firmly-held "activist"

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1. St. James Gazette, xx (1890), 4.
2. "A Preface to 'Dorian Gray'", Fortnightly, xlix n.s. (1891), 480-1. Elsewhere, Wilde gives a more moderate account of the place of morals in fiction (See "Balzac in English", Pall Mall Gazette, xliv, Sep. 13, 1886, 5).
3. See above, p.154.
4. An account of the movement of the novel towards many of the ideals of Aestheticism, laying more emphasis on the parallels and less on the conservatism in novel-theory, is found in Louise Rosenblatt, L'idée de l'art pour l'art dans la littérature anglaise, Paris, 1931, pp. 207-41.
5. "Modern Men. Guy de Maupassant", Scots Observer, iv (1890), 582-3. [Attributed to Henley by M.U. Schappes, "William Ernest Henley's Principles of Criticism", P.M.L.A., xlvi (1931), 1294]

ethic, a mixture of Ruskinism and Outward Bound.[1]

In a heated controversy in the correspondence columns of Henley's own Scots Observer, sparked off by an indignant article against his supposed theory of the amorality of art, a reply by Charles Whibley, one of the few contributors not to toe the traditionalist line,[2] is interestingly Pateresque in its attempt to explain the undoubted flaws in Bel-Ami and similar works, like Daudet's Sapho, in terms of Style alone, denying the relevance of a moral objection to art, and insisting on a faulty treatment and "lack of proportion" as the only possible basis of aesthetic condemnation. By such a canon, composed of harmony, arrangement, selection, and the like, Dostoevsky, often criticised on moral grounds, is totally exculpated, and "has justified by his grandeur of treatment the selection of hideous types and squalid incidents", while Wilde himself, in Dorian Gray, is to be criticised not for "immorality", which is meaningless, but for an inartistic lack of proportion in style.[3]

It must be repeated, however, that such an account as Whibley's is almost unparalleled. Much more typical of the "radical" novel-critics of the 'nineties is Havelock Ellis, who never dismisses the relevance of morality even though he is one of the main pioneers of the movement towards opening up the frontiers of the novel. His plea is simply and continually that this morality be not the Juggernaut of Grundyism:

> "In modern literary language, indeed, man scarcely exists save in his extremities. For we take the pubes as a centre, and we thence describe a circle with a radius of some eighteen inches - in America the radius is rather longer - and we forbid any reference to any organ within that circle, save that maid-of-all-work the 'stomach'; in other words, we make it impossible to say anything to the point concerning the central functions of life. It is a question how far any real vital literature can be produced under such conditions."4

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1. See above, p.91 ; and J. H. Buckley, William Ernest Henley, Princeton, 1945, 162-80.
2. See William Archer's contribution above, pp. 135-6.
3. iv (1890), 226-7. Whibley expands this attack on the "confusion of literature with its material" in Studies in Frankness, 1898, pp. 1-25.
4. "Zola: the Man and his Work", Savoy, i (1896), 78.

Accordingly, Zola is to be praised chiefly for his great expansion of the realm of experience open to the novel, and the groundless charges of immorality brought against Jude the Obscure are simply those that could be made against every great novel. The novelist, Ellis admits, cannot be said to have nothing to do with morals, because the human passions that are his material are at their most profound when in conflict with traditional morality: ".. his art lies in drawing the sinuous woof of human nature between the rigid warp of morals." And, as regards any obligation acting upon him in his treatment of this material, the most that can be said is that he should never be dominated by any purpose, either moral or immoral:

> "An artist's private opinions concerning the things that are good and bad in the larger world are sufficiently implicit in the structure of his own smaller world; the counsel that he should make them explicit in a code of rules and regulations for humanity at large is a counsel which, as every artist knows, can only come from the Evil One."1

Many other voices are raised along with Havelock Ellis'. D. F. Hannigan's is shriller, and his lack of argument or balance is overshadowed by the remarkable fact of such opinions as his appearing in the Westminster Review at all, in which we find Jude, Tess, Esther Waters, and The Woman Who Did lauded to the skies, and the votaries of Mrs. Grundy loaded with contemptuous abuse. Hypocritical Philistines like Andrew Lang and J. A. Noble are dismissed - "there is a recrudescence of Puritanism in England" - and the freedom of art enthusiastically hymned.[2] More and more praise is accorded to Zola in the 'nineties for the liberation and the greater seriousness his Naturalism has brought to fiction: "It has cleared the air of a thousand follies, has pricked a whole fleet of oratorical bubbles ... The public has

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1. "Concerning Jude the Obscure", ibid., iii (1896), 42-9.
2. See, e.g., "The Latest Development of English Fiction", cxxxviii (1892), 655-9; "Sex in Fiction", cxliii (1895), 616-25; and "Mr. Thomas Hardy's Latest Novel", cxlv (1896), 136-9.

eaten of the apple of knowledge, and will not be satisfied with mere marionettes."[1] And even pessimism, and the tragic sense of futility, as in the case of Flaubert, are singled out for praise as being in keeping with the mood of the time and a characteristic of all great artists: "It is the sign and token of the supreme artist that his works have this appearance of universality; and the most universal expression of experience is the mood of calm, indulgent irony."[2]

Such critics as these pay less attention to morality than those we have examined in preceding sections, and their attitudes have been grouped here because they typify one aspect of the changing scene in criticism at the end of the century. Yet to this change also belong many of those authors and critics on whose more conservative - and no less significant - side we have concentrated before: such moral emancipators of the novel as Moore and Hardy, and a host of others, named and anonymous. Some of them condemn the traditional reliance of fiction upon the established ethical code, others focus attention on the structure and internal necessities of the form, and though none of them - or almost none - deny the relevance of moral values in creation and criticism, they liberalized novel-criticism and at the same time prepared the way towards a more precise examination of the artistic methods and devices by which values have always been expressed. The dualism of their position, which often broke down into divided loyalties and inconsistency, is due in part to the transitional nature of their period, and Stevenson, in so many ways a child of the time,

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1. Edmund Gosse, "The Limits of Realism in Fiction" (1890), Questions at Issue, 1893, pp. 152-3. W. C. Frierson, pointing out that Gosse significantly published his article in America first, sees 1893 as the "pivotal year" in the battle for Realism against Prudery in England ("The English Controversy Over Realism in Fiction, 1885-1895", P.M.L.A., xliii, 1928, 545).
2. Ernest Newman, "Gustave Flaubert", Fortnightly, lviii n.s. (1895), 826-8.

may be used, finally, to typify the problem. Continually opposed to didacticism, to the traditional "novel with a purpose" in which "we see the moral clumsily forced into every hole and corner of the story, or thrown externally over it like a carpet over a railing",[1] beset by the "poison bad world" of Anglo-Saxon prudery,[2] and always inclined to emphasise the Romance's prime duty to entertain, to enchant, its "furlough from the Moral Law",[3] Stevenson nevertheless paid more than a passing obeisance to a moral standard of his own devising, that of the "spirit of magnanimity". The moral code of the day is an enemy of art, but the author's criticism of life, his sincerity, vitality, his synoptic view of the world of humanity, are still vital matters. The majority of his fellow-critics whom we have examined, caught up in the movement of the novel towards greater moral freedom, yet still convinced of certain basic ties which exist between art and the life of society, and which they are unable satisfactorily to analyze, would have subscribed to Stevenson's understandable, though question-begging cry: "There is no quite good book without a good morality; but the world is wide, and so are morals."[4]

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1. "Victor Hugo's Romances", Cornhill, xxx (1874), 192.
2. Letters, ed. S. Colvin, 1911, iv, 10.
3. Ibid., ii, 174.
4. "A Gossip on a Novel of Dumas's", Memories and Portraits, 1887, p. 238.

Chapter Four.

THE TECHNIQUE OF THE NOVEL.

It was inconceivable to the majority of Victorians that a novel-critic might legitimately limit his discussion to the means by which any novel produces its particular "statement" or effect, instead of the actual content of this statement and how it is to be evaluated against various external criteria. Yet such an approach is not only a familiar feature of modern criticism of fiction, but has come to be seen by many as the only valid activity of the critic, leading him to the discovery of what that total "statement" is through analysis of the verbal techniques of which it in fact consists, and in terms of which alone it can be judged:

> "When we speak of technique, then, we speak of nearly everything. For technique is the means by which the writer's experience, which is his subject matter, compels him to attend to it; technique is the only means he has of discovering, exploring, developing his subject, of conveying its meaning, and, finally, of evaluating it."1

The obvious essential differences between such a manner of proceeding and that of most Victorian critics leads to the assumption that the latter had nothing at all to say on formal, structural matters in the novel, and contented themselves with discussing an author's criticism of life, or relating the adventures of their souls among masterpieces.[2] In fact, a vociferous concern for workmanship is one of the most notable features of all reviewing, even in the more

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1. Mark Schorer, "Technique as Discovery", Forms of Modern Fiction, ed. W. Van O'Connor, Midland Books Edn., Bloomington, 1959, p. 9.
2. E.g., Miriam Allott tells us that Victorian critics were preoccupied with the criteria of verisimilitude, good morality, and correctness of style to the exclusion of all technical matters, and that "the conception of artistic structure" was only established in our own century, by such pioneers as Percy Lubbock (Novelists on the Novel, 1959, pp. 162-3).

conservative and tendentious periodicals, and continues without diminution throughout our period.[1] We will now endeavour to trace the major principles behind this awareness as they revealed themselves in the form of generally-accepted laws or of disputing opinions. We will begin with a dispute, that between the novel of "character" and the novel of "plot", which is based on a concept of each as a more or less separate component of fiction; then pass to what is almost a law, that of the organic unity of a novel's structure, in which plot and character come closer to coalescence; and end with various disputes over the actual manner of narration - the "Point of View", and the relation between author, characters, and reader - one of the objects of which is the maintenance of this organic unity. The implied simplicity of this pattern will not conceal that the various critical opinions it contains are as constantly interrelated, each qualifying the other, and as irreducible to exact formulae, as the techniques of fiction themselves.

1. Plot versus Character: the First Phase.

The relation between "Character" and "Action" is one of the most ancient debating-points in the history of dramatic and epic theory, and it was appropriate that the novel, as in some ways the offspring and supplanter of both drama and epic, should inherit the dispute. The terms "Character" and "Plot" are generally left undefined, it being assumed that any reader knows what is referred to, but the attempt to arrive at a definite estimate of which is superior, and why, lent an effective dynamism to contemporary critical discussion, and results in much light being cast from the side on these two central concepts.

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1. See also above, pp. 29-37.

The dominance of character, the interest in human motives and psychology, has often been held to typify mid- and late-Victorian thinking about the novel, and, indeed, over the earlier years of our period, this belief is borne out. Through the 'sixties and 'seventies, as the melodrama and Sensation of earlier Victorian fiction are gradually superseded by the new school of George Eliot and Trollope, the persistent identification by critics of "plot" with those incidents and conventions used by older writers results in ceaseless vilification. The Westminster, for example, praises Miss Thackeray for avoiding "the meretricious aids" to which popular novelists resort: "Plot-interest, after all, is but of comparatively little value when compared with the power of drawing character",[1] and, by the familiar application of a double standard, confines its demands for "plot-interest" to those novels inevitably belonging to a class less than great: "We want more action. Only great novelists, like Thackeray and Miss Austen, can afford to dispense with plots."[2] James Hannay, in Broadway, also sees Thackeray's powers of character-creation as evidence of his belonging to a superior tradition of novel-writing: "A talk over the fire between Mr. Shandy and Uncle Toby is worth a whole volume of adventures by Dumas."[3] Wilkie Collins becomes a symbol of the old régime, and at times a martyr to the change in critical - though not public - taste. The "Chinese puzzles" of his plots are constantly derided, the Athenaeum, typically, criticising his naive psychology and lack of "analysis of human nature": "Mr. Wilkie Collins is a very clever mechanist, and a very inferior novelist",[4] and the Westminster denying that any high merit resides in Armadale's having an ingenious plot, which should always be

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1. xxxi n.s. (1867), 574-5.
2. Ibid., xxxv n.s. (1869), 293.
3. "Studies on Thackeray", i n.s. (1868-9), 41.
4. 1872 (i), 202-3.

considered merely as a frame to the picture of characters: "Character alone should be the central object of interest for a novelist."[1] R. F. Littledale, in the Academy, uses Collins as the touchstone of that literary inferiority which is inherent in "plot-interest", in his review of Evelyn Campbell's Fair, but Not False:

> "The story is not very skilfully pieced together, nor is the machinery for its evolution very happily contrived; but this defect is one which practice will remedy, as the art of constructing plots, where there is any genuine literary faculty, becomes after a time a pure matter of knack, altogether inferior in value and interest, as Mr. Wilkie Collins has satisfactorily established, to the power of drawing character or writing good conversation."2

As if uncomfortably aware of his reputation as a novelist of "pure plot", and of the insecurity of his position in such a critical climate, Collins always insisted that Character was a major concern in his writing. In the Preface to The Woman in White, he attempts to show how "story", which is a novelist's first object, is necessarily dependent on the human interest attached to its characters:

> "It may be possible, in novel-writing, to present characters successfully without telling a story; but it is not possible to tell a story successfully without presenting characters: their existence, as recognisable realities, being the sole condition on which the story can be effectively told."3

And by 1883, when his particular brand of plot-interest was even more obviously outmoded, he addresses his readers, half-complainingly, half-reassuringly, to the effect that their misguided preference for the novel of Character and Humour, no matter how plotless and undramatic, will here be satisfied by his deliberate attempt to meet their wants.[4]

On the whole, however, critics remained unconvinced by Collins' arguments, and the striking incidents and complications represented by his novels are generally implied to be typical of all "plot", and, as

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1. xxx n.s. (1866). 269-71.
2. viii (1875), 216.
3. 1861 Edn., p. viii.
4. Preface to Heart and Science, 1883, pp. vii-ix.

such, crude and old-fashioned. For example, the Saturday finds the intricacy of plot in Lytton's The Parisians to be "one of those conventional entanglements which properly belong to an earlier stage of novel-writing",[1] and the British Quarterly dismisses another novel of complex plot and melodramatic incident as resembling "a romance of sixty years ago more than a character novel of the present day."[2] From the same standpoint of modern superiority, Keningale Cook disparagingly accords praise to Fenimore Cooper for being a pioneer in the art of fiction. His impossibly entangled plots, without any depth or delicacy of character-drawing, are recommended ironically as a model for study by the anachronistic Sensation-writers of the present day, and since "the novelist's function is the creation of a prose drama where characters are a primary object, he can scarcely be said to have entered upon art at all in any high sense."[3]

Apart from its lack of modernity, the objections to "plot" are based on its supposed immorality; the unintellectual quality of the interest it evokes; and its "unnaturalness" - all three again being obviously dependent on a definition of "plot" in terms of a specific kind of subject-matter and a specific manner of its arrangement. Thus, Tinsley's Magazine, in 1873, like many others at the time, equates plot with the doubtful morals of that school which seems to make particular use of it, in the form of intrigues and scenes of violence, and condemns all novels which do not give pride of place to "character": ".. from their very nature, truth, purity, and reverence are too often sacrificed for the sake of the raciness of falseness, pruriency, and profanity."[4]

The excitement and curiosity on which such a conception of plot

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1. xxxvi (1873), 815-6.
2. lix (1874), 571-2.
3. "American Novelists. 1. James Fenimore Cooper", Belgravia, xviii (1872), 386.
4. "The Theory of Fiction", xiii (1873), 89.

depends is also disparaged as appealing to inferior faculties in the reader, compared with the mental and imaginative powers required to follow an exposition of human motives and psychology. The Saturday claims that the obviousness of this makes the question of the relative merits of plot and character easy to answer:

> "A combination of intricate convolutions of circumstance, a series of traps set by fate to which men and women play puppets, may excite a breathless excitement once; but there is no depth of interest in it. When its impression has once been conveyed to the mind, no further interest or excitement can be derived from it. When characters, on the other hand, are depicted skilfully and forcibly, the attention aroused by the book wherein they have their being is of a more permanent if of a less violent kind. There is a more vital interest in the natures than in the circumstances of men."1

More significantly, perhaps, concentration on plot is regarded as prejudicial to that "naturalness" of character which, as we have seen, is one of the main traits of novel-theory at the time. The Saturday, admitting, as do so many, the superior skill of the French in plot and construction, also notes the sacrifice of character which this necessarily entails, as in the case of Balzac and Hugo, whose figures are forced into unnaturalness by the need for effect, and contrasts the digressiveness of English novelists, which allows them more scope to develop their characters. The writer concludes: "As we are of opinion that the highest triumph of the novelist is in the skilful display of character, we should say that English writers have so far the balance of superiority."[2] And the Eclectic, in its bombardment of Miss Braddon, attributes the falsity of her characters to their "having been made to meet the requirements of the story; they are themselves evolved from it, and not the story from them."[3] Collins, again, is seen as a leading offender in this respect. The incredible

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1. xxxviii (1874), 774-5.
2. "French Novels", xxi (1866), 615-6.
3. "Miss Braddon. The Illuminated Newgate Calendar", xiv n.s. (1868), 32-3.

behaviour of characters, in his Man and Wife, is attributed by Mrs. Oliphant to the mishandling forced on him by the demands of a complicated plot,[1] and the Saturday explains the unnaturalness of character in James Payn's The Best of Husbands by the fact that it belongs to that class of novel, based on a riddle, of which Collins is the master:

> "Stories which depend for their interest upon the unravelment of a carefully constructed puzzle are of course despised by the more sublime critics, and it is true that they seldom gratify us by any delicate delineation of character and sentiment. When the puppets have to be worked exclusively with a view to conceal the secret springs which pull them, the performer is naturally tempted to overlook the demands of nature and probability."2

Apart from its effect on the characters, plot is also felt to be devalued through an intrinsic unnaturalness of its own. The Westminster, in 1876, places it last of the three components of fiction, after Character, the "all-ruling element", and scenery: "While character and scenery may be said to unfold a mystery, it is the purpose of the plot to create one. It is the most artificial portion of the work, and, therefore, the furthest removed from nature."[3] And Tinsley's Magazine, in the following year, maintains that in serious novels "a plot is certainly not necessary to artistic perfection", because no plot, no pattern, can be determined in ordinary human lives, except at a level too deep for the ordinary novelist to perceive. Artificiality is bound to be the result, especially as it is difficult to avoid conventional devices in this imposed pattern.[4]

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1. "New Books", Blackwood's, cviii (1870), 628-31. [Identified Wellesley Index]
2. xxxviii (1874), 507-8. James Payn himself modestly defers to this opinion of "sublime critics", holding that plot is vital to most writers, but not to the great: "..their humour, their pathos, and their delineation of human nature are amply sufficient, without any such meretricious attractions." ("Story-Telling", Nineteenth Century, viii, 1880, 91)
3. "Ouida's Novels", xlix n.s. (1876), 363.
4. "Novel-writing as an Art", xx (1877), 329.

The argument, however, was not completely one-sided. Even during these earlier years, when the reaction against an older kind of novel was at its most extreme, the new favour given to character did not blind all critics to the essential part played in fiction by incident and a contrived pattern of situations. Dallas' The Gay Science (1866) contains a brief and very unusual defence of the "Novel of Plot" as being consistent with the decline of the hero in modern fiction - its view of man as a puppet of circumstance is at least as justified as that of the "Novel of Character", which sees man as moulding his own fate. The flaw of Sensation novels is not that they belong to one type rather than the other, but that they mix the genres, intruding into their own Novel of Plot one central figure from the heroic tradition of the Character Novel.[1] More typical of the favourable approach, however, is the British Quarterly's review of Fernyhurst Court, in 1871, which calls the story the novel-writer's first concern, like composition in a painting, and urges the authoress to create an evolving movement and a structure tight enough to sustain her characters.[2] The Spectator, in 1875, goes so far as to say that "one of the first qualifications of a novelist is to understand the art of telling a story", and that without this art, which is as essential as colour to a painter, a novel cannot wholly succeed, even if it contains "subtle delineations of character, exquisite descriptive passages, pregnant thoughts, and witty dialogue."[3] G. H. Lewes, in 1865, also accepts that - "The distinctive element in Fiction is that of plot-interest. The rest is vehicle."[4] But, as Lewes makes clear, and as is implicit in most other such statements, recognition of the necessity of a plot, or of the primacy of story-telling among the technical skills of the novelist, is far from according it primacy among the "higher interests" by which literature is judged.

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1. ii, 292-5.
2. liv (1871), 546.
3. xlviii (1875), 407-9.
4. "Criticism in Relation to Novels", Fortnightly, iii (1865-6), 354.

Out of this opposition of Plot and Character, then, which is seen at its most abrupt in the first ten years or so of our period, there emerges a clear belief in the separability of these two elements of the novel. The former, when it is not identified simply with unlikely and highly exciting events, is seen as an ingenious pattern of varied incidents, leading, after various evocations of suspense and surprise, to a final resolution - and designed mainly as an ancillary, a framework for "character" to display itself. "Character" itself is seen in the same light as before - a "living" being, acting consistently and naturally, and engrossing our attention simply through the revelation of those characteristics which make it human, one of us. Trollope sums up the principle most accurately and fairly, in his continual insistence that plot, although necessary, is only a vehicle for that realistic portrait-gallery which is the true end of fiction.[1] His definition of plot is a "contrived arrangement of incidents by which interest is excited",[2] and though he is always ready to criticise an insufficient construction, as in Vanity Fair, which is "vague and wandering, clearly commenced without any idea of an ending",[3] or an excessively contrived plot, as in Collins[4] and in Hawthorne's House of the Seven Gables,[5] Trollope always considers such faults venial if the prime criterion of fiction is achieved: "I think that the highest merit which a novel can have consists in perfect delineation of character, rather than in plot, or humour, or pathos."[6] There is no attempt by most critics of the earlier years to proceed beyond this to any closer examination of the nature of the relation between the two:

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1. Autobiography, 1883, i, 169-70.
2. Letters, ed. B. A. Booth, London, 1951, p. 217.
3. Thackeray, 1879, p. 95.
4. Autobiography, ii, 81-2.
5. "The Genius of Nathaniel Hawthorne", North American Rev., cxxix (1879), 213-4.
6. Autobiography, i, 222.

at most, it is urged that action should "proceed" or "evolve" out of character, but this is usually just a way of confirming the greater value of the latter. One example, however, is outstanding - a review of W.G. Wills' The Three Watches in the Spectator for 1865, which gives a clearer and much more valuable picture of the relationship than most, in its account of the effect upon plot of inferior characterization:

> "Perhaps it is on the progress of the story itself that the want of graduation in the conceptions, the want of the finer shades, the absence of reflected lights, the singleness, or at most duality of attitude in all the characters tells most injuriously. The result is that the story moves on by fits and starts rather than continuously, and the dénouement is arrived at almost unfairly by a sharp and almost treacherous rebound from the previously indicated ending. The cause probably is that there is no preparation for movement in the characters, no subtleties which change of circumstances is wanted to bring out. For the most part the circumstances change alone, without developing new aspects in the actors. The result is that the joints in the story are almost as awkward as the public shifting of scenes in the theatre. The side-views of character contribute materially to the easy development and graduations of a story; and Mr. Wills gives no side-views of character." 1

2. Plot versus Character: the "Inner Life."

Around 1880, the Plot-Character controversy enters quite dramatically into a new phase, when the technique of "analysis", the extended examination of personality and motive in the characters of a novel, often admired in the earlier years, is felt by critics to have exceeded itself, and a strong reaction consequently occurs in favour of a return to "plot". Very largely, the new recommendation of plot offers no advance on the old conception of striking incident and interesting complication, but the actual strength of its recrudescence is often overlooked by the tendencies of a later age

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1. xxxviii (1865), 17-18.

to see only the germs of its own dominant theories in the past. Also, the varying attitudes towards the "inwards" direction of characterization are an important factor affecting the concept of a character's "naturalness."

Once again, it is remarkable how the arrival of the novels of James and Howells (and not their criticism, which had less immediate influence) acts as a catalyst to critical discussion, and even, in this case, as a sign for revolt. We shall examine, in this section, the favourable and unfavourable accounts of the method of "analysis" which, rightly or wrongly, critics saw as represented at its most extreme in the new American novel; and, in the following section, those objections which concentrated on the demerits of "plotlessness" and turned eagerly to the rival school of the Romance.

The suspicions aroused by the method of probing deeply into the hearts of characters in fiction can be traced through the earlier part of the period, often co-existent with reluctant admiration of the "force" of such characters, or the knowledge of human nature displayed by the analyser. George Sand, for example, is often felt to have gone just too far, to have become too pitiless, in her close study of character,[1] and the Quarterly, like many, sees this as particularly characteristic of the French:

> "The English novelist sketches living and self-determining persons; the French novelist either creates an ideal being or dissects some shuddering human specimen, whom he holds, soul and body, at the mercy of his sharp and torturing pen."[2]

This makes it clear that such critics are not opposing "character" in the novel, but, on the contrary, a method that seems to them to destroy their particular concept of character. It is peculiar how persistent, and even how impassioned, is this feeling that the novelist must show a self-abnegating respect towards his creatures, and that to reveal too much of their "inner" nature is the same as a moral offence against the person and the privacy of living people. "Living and self-determining persons" indicates that

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1. E.g., "Society", Broadway, ii n.s. (1871), 479.
2. "Middlemarch: a Study of Provincial Life", cxxxiv (1873), 359. [By R. Laing - Wellesley Index]

extreme development of the theory of "naturalness" which lies behind this reaction, and which we have already examined elsewhere.[1]

The results of the process are also regarded with some unease as being contrary to some sort of imaginative or "expressive" truth, which alone is the domain of art. The Westminster reviews Bayard Taylor's John Godfrey's Fortunes, in 1865:

> ".. a novel ought not to be only or chiefly a work on exceptional psychological phenomena. If it goes too deeply into the secret springs of action and feeling, the effect is too much that of a painting in which the attention is challenged more by the scientific drawing of muscles than by the expression to which the play of those muscles should be subordinate; and the artistic effect is proportionably impaired." 2

The use of the word "scientific" is significant, and indicates the widespread fear of the Materialism that seemed to lurk behind the method.

However, in the first years, before the puzzling young heroines had crossed the Atlantic to precipitate latent misgivings more clearly, the close scrutiny of motives was more often praised than not, and "moral anatomy" had not yet become a term of abuse. For example, Leslie Stephen saw Defoe's lack of psychological analysis as indicating a lack of imaginative creativity,[3] and the Athenaeum, reviewing The Claverings, makes a not uncommon criticism of Trollope, that he 'omits all the psychology, and merely touches the external appearances" - though the never-distant suspicions reveal themselves in the enigmatic conclusion that with such "deeper studies in human nature" the book "might not have been so pleasant to read."[4] Greater confidence is expressed elsewhere in the technique, many critics hailing it as an advance in the art of fiction, and the most significant feature of modern writing. The Westminster, in 1870,

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1. See above, pp. 47-9.
2. xxvii n.s. (1865), 335-6.
3. "De Foe's Novels", Cornhill, xvii (1868), 302-3.
4. 1867 (i), 783.

describes the "external" methods of R. L. Johnson's Brilliant Prospects as being in the outmoded tradition of Dickens, and points to character-analysis as the sign of the times,[1] while the London Quarterly, in 1873, similarly sees novels of the "inner life", as opposed to mere superficial pictures of man in society, as characteristic of the period, and the true instinct of the modern novelist as one leading him to trace the hidden springs of action, the inner mystery of the human consciousness.[2] Two leaders of this movement particularly admired are George Eliot and Hawthorne - both of whom Howells, significantly,was later to hold up as the progenitors of the new school. George Barnett Smith, in 1875, credits the latter with the discovery of the method: "..psychological interest was first exhibited in a very high degree by Hawthorne. His deep study of the soul had scarcely been equalled before by writers of fiction."[3] And "H. Lawrenny" (Edith Simcox) ascribes the same historical importance to Middlemarch, in the Academy:

> "Middlemarch marks an epoch in the history of fiction in so far as its incidents are taken from the inner life, as the action is developed by the direct influence of mind on mind and character on character, as the material circumstances of the outer world are made subordinate and accessory to the artistic presentation of a definite passage of mental experience, but chiefly as giving a background of perfect realistic truth to a profoundly imaginative psychological study." 4

By the early 'eighties, a drastic change of emphasis makes itself evident: "analysis" is now attacked widely (not just sporadically, as before) as having transgressed the limits imposed on it both by art

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1. xxxvii n.s. (1870), 316-7.
2. "The Writings of Berthold Auerbach", xxxix (1873), 344.
3. "Nathaniel Hawthorne", New Quarterly Mag., iii (1875), 286-7.
4. iv (1873), 1-4.

and society. It was a rearguard action, of course, and a losing one at that, as far as modern estimates of the changes in the late-Victorian novel go. In few other spheres during our period is there so clear a case of the consensus of critical opinion having backed the wrong horse.

The reaction to James' characterization showed some cautious approval at first. The British Quarterly, in spite of its distaste for his "painfulness", and the "morbidness" of his subtlety, bravely admires the power of his "rare faculty of moral analysis, his keen penetration of moral causes" in Roderick Hudson.[1] And as if unaware of the viper in its bosom, the Athenaeum places before a brief and unenthusiastic notice of Daisy Miller one of Lizzie Alldridge's The World She Awoke In, in which the superficiality of characterization is criticised:

> "From one who has the capacity of writing, to begin with, the present generation requires more than mere word painting; it wants the analysis of thought and motive. One of the highest modes of fiction is divination, and those who appear capable of wielding the rod must be urged to do it."2

Within a few years, however, most critics had recovered from their indecision. Karl Hillebrand, in 1884, takes up the charge of using the methods of Science and applies it to the detailed psychological methods of the moderns. The reader's intuitive impression of character, he claims, can alone arrive at that whole cohesion which makes up a man's personality - psychological qualities do not exist in themselves, but only as intellectual abstractions. Art convinces by producing a disposition in its audience, whereas Science produces knowledge: "True art cares little about the genesis of character; it introduces man as a finished being, and lets him explain himself by his acts and words."[3] In the following year, H. D. Traill regrets that the objective novel of "manners", of the type of Fielding, Jane Austen, Thackeray, and Trollope, seems to have passed away and to have been succeeded by a return to the analytic

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1. lxx (1879), 529-30.
2. 1879 (i), 275-6.
3. "About Old and New Novels", Contemporary, xlv (1884), 392-5.

tradition of Richardson. The former, at its best, unites an imaginative discovery of the inner being of characters with its general implications and a social survey; but the latter has no advantages at all, and, in the dismal "analytical" school of the day, tends to degenerate into Science instead of art, "disembodied emotions" instead of a true representation of human nature.[1]

Julia Wedgwood, in 1886, waxing virulent over The Bostonians, also uses Science as the whipping-boy. To be taken into the inmost recesses of a novelist's personages is, to her, an experience as unseemly as it would be in real life, "a violation of every conceivable rule of literary good breeding", and the reason for the spread of this deplorable method is not far to seek:

> "The mistake is a result of that obsequious deference which Literature has in these days shown to triumphant Science; an instance of that obliteration of all reserve which the new lawgiver demands and she abhors."2

The complaints of Vernon Lee and Oscar Wilde are rather less common - that the analysis of human nature cannot result in the beautiful because that nature itself is incapable of beauty, and the deeper the analysis the deeper the revelation of ugliness: "..artistic aims are only partially compatible with psychological aims, and ..the more the novel becomes psychological the less also will it become artistic."[3] As Wilde laments, in the ironical hyperboles of "The Decay of Lying", it is externals alone which make men interesting and individual: "The more one analyses people, the more all reasons for analysis disappear. Sooner or later one comes to that dreadful universal thing called human nature."[4]

Much more common, and often linked to the "Science" denunciation by images of vivisection, anatomy, and the like, is the criticism that analysis offends against the "heart" and the "natural emotions", and that

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1. "The Novel of Manners", Nineteenth Century, xviii (1885), 561-76.
2. Contemporary, 1 (1886), 300-1.
3. Vernon Lee, "A Dialogue on Novels", Contemporary, xlviii (1885), 384-6.
4. Nineteenth Century, xxv (1889), 40.

it appeals to the intellect rather than that faculty of intuition so beloved of English writers and critics. Because of this basically false appeal to the wrong faculties, in James and Howells, as well as the resultant unreality of their pictures, Temple Bar lugubriously detects in the new school the germs of decay, and the death-knell of the modern novel:

> "'Will the reader be content to accept a novel which is an analytic study rather than a story?' We answer emphatically, no. The first function of the novel is pleasurably to engage the attention. Its truths must be conveyed to us by means not only of the intellect but the emotions. There are certain finer ethical points which can be understood emotionally as they never could be understood intellectually.
>
> The skilful manipulation of emotional and intellectual machinery, so that one shall help and perfect the other, is the highest triumph of the novelist's art."1

And "Maxwell Gray" (M. G. Tuttiett), in 1894, rises to a height of outraged abuse in denouncing analysis of character as "a leprous growth over the fair face of fictive art", since it denies the existence of the soul and the organic "life" of the novelist's creatures:

> "Human character is to this Paganism as the rapidly decomposing corpse under the knife and microscope.... it is this which fills European fiction with unsavoury studies in morbid anatomy in place of wholesome, vivifying pictures of living and growing character."2

Meredith, too, seemed a heartless vivisectionist to many. W. L. Courtney regretted the growth of his analytic power, and the over-refined public taste that favoured it (Meredith would have laughed hollowly at the idea of an encouraging Public). The talent for analysis in a novelist, he holds, is essentially unspontaneous, introverted, and destructive, and is inevitably accompanied by cynicism. Synthesis is the true mark of the artist, and the appeal to the heart, to both of which analysis is by definition opposed: "..the joy of living expires in the sustained effort to disclose the springs on which it depends."[3] Similarly,

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1. "The New School of American Fiction", lxx (1884), 389.
2. "On the Development of Character in Fiction", On the Art of Writing Fiction, 1894, pp. 69-72.
3. "George Meredith's Novels", Fortnightly, xxxix n.s. (1886), 771-2.

in 1891, W. F. Barry, in the Quarterly, condemns his "motive-grinding" as fatal to art, which must be, instead, "simple, sensuous, and direct", based on the heart rather than the head, and on recognition of the fact that life itself is beyond analysis.[1]

Stendhal is sometimes seen as the first transgressor in this respect, and Arthur Symons, at the end of the century, regrets that the modern novel should have followed his example rather than that of Balzac, who respected the "life" of his creations, leaving much of their natures secret, and not, like so many novelists since, avoiding all passion, all life of the heart, in favour of over-intellectualized subtleties, murdering in order to dissect.[2] But, in contradiction, Vernon Lee gives the name of "the School of Stendhal" to those who are opposed to the extremes of analysis, finding in Tolstoi its greatest representative. His method of sympathy and spontaneity, catching the very vagueness and lack of solidity which is life itself, is contrasted to the false definiteness of the analytical school, who do not write about people as they affect them, but in such a way as to present the neatest diagram. The novel does not give us knowledge of the individual, but love, through the intuitions, and an awareness of the mystery of other people - unlike Natasha, Levin, or Julien Sorel, we understand Madame Bovary and Cousine Bette too well. For the novelist to lay bare the soul of his heroine is to convey pain to the reader, and turn "the poor girl into a sort of walking physiologico-psychologic demonstration."[3]

Many critics show an interesting dichotomy between their admiration for what the method can achieve and their strong emotional distaste for its "morbidity" and its inhuman intrusiveness. Some attempt to resolve this in terms of a racial difference, as when the Westminster praises the

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1. "English Realism and Romance", clxxiii (1891), 473-6. [Identified Wellesley Index]
2. "Balzac", Fortnightly, lxv n.s. (1899), 753-5.
3. "Rosny and the French Analytical Novel", Cosmopolis, vii (1897), 674-87.

"moral and mental analysis" of Howells' The Minister's Charge, in 1887, at the same time as remarking that such introspection in characters is acceptable only if they are American, but would be unhealthy if attributed to the more animalistic Englishman.[1] At other times, the ambivalence is left clearly in sight: the same magazine praises Howells again for the interest of his method, in April Hopes and A Hazard of New Fortunes, but makes the reservation that on the whole it is hardly desirable or "wholesome", although "every walk in fiction is admirable, if it is but well done."[2] A summing-up of Paul Bourget, who is often classed with the Americans in this, might be taken as typical not only of this kind of adverse reaction to the offences of analysis against the heart, but also of the bewildered attempts of many critics to be fair to the merits they perceived behind so much that was new and antipathetic to them:

> "We have no liking for analytical fiction in general; to us it seems painful and unwholesome - not fulfilling the best function of fiction, which is to take one out of oneself, but, on the contrary, leading to morbid introspection. But, as we have often said before, every style is good when at its best; and analysis in the hands of M. Paul Bourget is at its best."3

Lastly, a less emotional objection to character-analysis is to be found in the repeated complaints that the method is "over-elaborate". Critics recognise that the dissection of motive has always played some part in fiction, but only an auxiliary part, as one means among many to a greater end, and see the modern development of it as a perverse exaggeration of a minor technique into an end in itself - like, say, the proliferation of natural description to the extent that a novel becomes a piece of topography. As before, little attempt is made to examine the fundamental nature of the change in method, or to find out whether the end to which it is directed is different from that of the traditional novel. It is obvious that condemnation of this kind is all that can

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1. cxxviii (1887), 262.
2. cxxix (1888), 124; cxxxiv (1890), 89-90.
3. cxxxiv (1890), 693.

result from the application of the criteria of the Trollope or even the George Eliot novel to the new fiction of the 'eighties. Thus, the Athenaeum, like most others, can find only tedium in The Bostonians, seeing its "subject" as a thing apart from its method and, in fact, unnecessarily obscured by it:

> "..he has to fill page after page with long analysis of feelings, or minute descriptions, whether of character or scenery, which, subtle and delicate as they often are, produce at last in the reader's mind the same kind of irritation as results from an over-elaborated picture of a subject which might be sufficiently indicated by a few bold strokes."1

And, in the following year, the same magazine objects that in Howells' April Hopes -

> "His total effect in the presentation of a character does not justify the elaborate account of its ingredients. He seems to invert the proper method by setting to work to analyze before he has got the matter to work on."2

The point is put most fully by Saintsbury, in 1888, whose heart-felt complaint against analysis - "which the New World has sent with the Colorado beetle, and the phylloxera, and a hundred other plagues, to punish the rashness of Columbus" - is again based on the assumption that it is being used - or ill-used - for the same purposes as underlie older novels, with the additional condemnation this time that by being so elaborated, the method has now changed its very nature, not just exceeded its proper degree, and has become a thing entirely foreign to art:

> "The analyst, as he is understood by the American, French, and to some extent Russian schools, who derive at farther or nearer stages from Balzac and Stendhal, is in this worse off than the naturalist pure and simple, that instead of mistaking a partial for a universal method, he takes for a complete method what is not strictly a method at all.

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1. 1886 (i), 323.
2. 1887 (ii), 671-2.

> The painful copying of an actual scene or action sometimes results in something that is at least an integral part of a story. The elaborate dissection of motives and characters can only result in something that stops short of being even part of a story - that is only preliminary to part of a story."1

3. Plot versus Character: the Return to Plot

The resurgence of approval for "plot" and "incident" is an essential part of the critical movement against the "internal" method of characterization. As indicated in the first section, the importance of plot, though certainly overshadowed, was never completely lost sight of in the years before this reaction, and some critics gave premonitory warnings of the dangers of analysis when not properly supported by a clear and developing pattern of action and suspense. The Saturday, reviewing Mrs. Biloart's Out of her Sphere in 1872, makes clear the qualities which these critics looked for, and which they would not find in the novels to come:

> "There is no careful leading up to that climax; no gradual deepening of the colours, or further entanglement of the threads; no well-graduated crescendo passages preparatory to the final burst. It is all on the one string; repetition, not increment or growth... Nothing is more interesting, if well done, than a psychological novel of careful analysis; but then it must be well done, and it must give the reader the impression of growth."2

Similarly, Turgenev, who was often to be associated with the new writers of America and France, is suspected by T. E. Child, in 1877, of being more a psychologist than a novelist because of his failure to give us that progressive and organised plot, like a drama, which is the first condition of a novel's success.[3] And in 1878, the Saturday detects

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1. "The Present State of the Novel. II", Fortnightly, xliii n.s. (1888), 116-8.
2. xxxiii (1872), 348-9.
3. "Ivan Turgenieff", Belgravia, xxxiii (1877), 215-6.

that the fashion among young writers is for the analysis of character at the expense of "carefully thought out and well developed story", warns them of the inevitable public disapproval that will follow, and urges the example of Gaboriau's minutely-plotted mystery-stories.[1]

The storm really broke around Howells' essay on James in the Century for 1882, which laid down the principles of the new school as the conscious abjuration of "the moving accident" in favour of "the operation of lighter but not really less vital motives" - "an analytic study rather than a story" - combined with an attitude to the classic writers of the English tradition that could not fail to draw the fury of conservative and patriotic critics.[2] As might be expected, the Quarterly is in the van of the attack, with the banner of Sir Walter nailed to the masthead, and pouring scorn on any writing "based upon the principle that the best novelist is he who has no story to tell." The result, as in Portrait of a Lady and A Modern Instance is the apotheosis of unimaginativeness and dullness - two qualities inevitably deriving from the absence of that regular development of incident and "conclusiveness" of characters' fates which for this writer, as for most others, is a definition of "plot": "There is to be no beginning, no middle, and no end. It is like a lucky-bag at a bazaar - you thrust your hand in anywhere and take out anything you can find."[3]

Arthur Tilley, in the National Review in the same year, professes to disagree with much in the Quarterly's attack, but his more moderate disapproval is based on the same points. He sympathizes with the generality of English readers who demand that a novel be "rounded" - that is, that the future destinies of the characters be made known at the end -

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1. "Modern Novels", xlv (1878), 619-20.
2. "Henry James, Jr.", iii n.s. (1882-3), 25-9. His facetious contempt for "those poor islanders", in Criticism and Fiction, in 1891, brought a further apoplectic reaction.
3. "American Novels", clv (1883), 201-29. [By L. J. Jennings - Wellesley Index]

and that its narrative "goes forward" without dawdling, both of which conditions the new school fails to fulfil. "For we all have what Mr. James calls 'a weakness for a plot'; which the wise novelist will humour if he can." The Americans have great merits, but break down through their concentration on uncreative and unimaginative analysis, and their self-destroying contempt for the "time-honoured machinery" of catastrophe and accident.[1]

Reviewers reveal the strength of the effect made by the "new novel" on the literary scene by their comments in favour of more traditional and congenial writers. Any merit as regards plot-contrivance or "strong situations" is emphasised and held up as an example of heroic resistance to the foreign invasion. This is illustrated by the Saturday, which, in 1883, regrets an apparent touch of internal analysis at the beginning of William Black's Yolande - "a fashion led or fostered by those ingenious American authors who contemptuously dispose of the masters of fiction of a past time" - but goes on to praise him for his opposition in other respects, his "good story", and, on the whole, his avoidance of "the shallow pretence of what is called 'analysis'."[2] And in the same year it fully accepts the suggestive method of Turgenev, even though this is seen as the antithesis of Trollope's, by comparing it to the exaggeration it suffers when used by Henry James and others:

> "The want of conclusion was in [Turgenev's] hands striking, not irritating. In the hands of his imitators it is irritating, and by no means striking. His minute treatment of detail was masterly; it all contributed to a general effect. His imitators have all the minuteness, nothing of the effect. They want, to use a common and expressive phrase, backbone."3

Finally, in the following year, a new and anonymous American novelist is hailed with pleasure for daring to provide a well-evolved plot and

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1. "The New School of Fiction", i (1883), 257-68.
2. lv (1883), 770-1.
3. "Ivan Turgénieff", ibid., lvi (1883), 306.

"ingeniously-contrived incidents": "..it has a beginning, a middle, and an end; it has a plot, a catastrophe, a climax; it is not a mere echo of 'the hum of the smallest of talk', without form and void."[1]

Not surprisingly, many critics turned to the Romance explicitly for the contrast offered by its reliance on incident and plot, and among the various reasons that have been offered for the revival of the Romance in the later part of the century not sufficient place has been given to the fact that critical opinion as a whole, disillusioned by the development of the "Character" novel, was more than ready to encourage the new form.

Stevenson himself points the way ahead, in a review of Jules Verne in the Academy, in 1876, in which he welcomes an author whose work is to be justified solely by the legitimate interests of the fable and its suspense:

> "Of human nature it is certain he knows nothing; and it is almost with a sense of relief that one finds, in these sophisticated days, a good trotting-horse of an author who whistles by the way and affects to know nothing of the mysteries of the human heart."2

The first two important manifestos of the new Romance, Stevenson's "A Gossip on Romance" and "A Humble Remonstrance", come at the height of the attack on the analytical school, in 1882 and 1884 respectively, and signify clearly the confrontation in debate of the two radically opposed tendencies of fiction. In the former, Stevenson regrets that the taste of contemporary writers seems set against the novel of incident, since this form woos the reader out, and gives him a greater sense of identification with life than the more objective response he feels to character-studies. The striking and passion-filled scene, the incident embodying a crisis, are the very centre of art.[3] "A Humble Remonstrance",

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1. Ibid., lvii (1884), 154-5. The novelist was John Milton Hay, and the reviewer in this case Brander Matthews (see M. M. Bevington, The Saturday Review, 1855-1868, New York, 1941, p. 324).
2. ix (1876), 532.
3. Longman's, i (1882-3), 69-79.

taking its point of departure from James' recent credo in "The Art of Fiction", differentiates between the Jamesian "novel of character" and Stevenson's own "novel of adventure" and "dramatic novel": "...nice portraiture is not required; and we are content to accept mere abstract types, so they be strongly and sincerely moved." Rather misleadingly, he claims that - "The novel of character... requires no coherency of plot", and that, though its characters are embodied in incident, as James says, "the incidents themselves, being tributary, need not march in a progression."[1] On the definition of "incidents" and "progression" alone - both of which James would as strongly claim to be on his side - the two schools are a world apart.

The Saturday, in 1882, sides with Stevenson's "Gossip" in deploring the absence of incident in contemporary fiction, and sees a challenge to combat in Howells' essay, in which the New World snaps its fingers at the Old.[2] The Arabian Nights gives the eternal lie to the American's claim that the value of pure incident and complication has passed away:

> "There is room, of course, for analysis, for study of character, and such studies if excellent will always find an audience, though not a really popular audience. A 'penny dreadful', ideally speaking, has more that satisfies the deathless human thirst for a story than the most subtle exposition of every half shade of dubious emotion in the mind of an American 'young girl', like 'Dr. Breen.' It would be ruinous to the art of fiction if the opposite theory ever became commonly held by novelists."3

And the Westminster, in its enthusiasm at Hall Caine's Messianic effect on English fiction and his revival of "plot", bids a premature farewell to the methods of "long-spun mental anatomizing" of which it sees George Eliot as a major instigator.[4]

The same critical attitude prevailed through the 'nineties, as if

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1. Longman's, v (1884-5), 143-6.
2. "The Modern Novel", liv (1882), 633-4.
3. Ibid., 609.
4. "A New Novelist", cxxviii (1887), 840-1.

in subconscious resistance to that imminent break-down of "the old stable ego of the character"[1] which, notwithstanding, was to dictate the interests and the technique of novelists in the following decades. The rapid dislodgement of George Eliot from her former pedestal was only partly due to a new dislike for her values and her didacticism - the movement in favour of plot also used her as a symbol of what it was reacting against, and T.E. Kebbel, for one, beats her with the well-used stick of Walter Scott for giving us "diffuse moral analysis" instead of the primary interests of any story, plot and action - "the rapid movement, the quick sequence of cause and effect."[2] However, the hostility to "plotlessness" in general never approached the urgency of the mid-eighties, largely because James had partly retired from the scene and Howells, amid general plaudits, was evidently returning to the fold. The Spectator condemns James' Terminations, in 1895, for the familiar reasons that it lacks "a natural movement of incident" and "violates all the natural traditions of narrative art",[3] but, in 1890, Howells' A Hazard of New Fortunes is praised for marking its author's progress from his first analytical essays in virtuosity - harmfully erected by his admirers into something more permanent than mere tentative experiment - to his second phase, one more in keeping with traditional qualities, and characterized by "the very thing which the youthful critics treated with lofty contempt as a vulgar sop to the Philistine Cerberus, - an orderly narrative movement towards a definite goal or dénouement."[4]

So far, we have seen only the negative reaction to analysis and lack of "action", and it remains finally to be asked whether there were

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1. D.H. Lawrence's phrase, Letters, ed. A. Huxley, 1932, p. 198.
2. "The Waverley Novels", Quarterly, clxxx (1895), 454-6. [Identified Wellesley Index]
3. lxxv (1895), 405-6.
4. Ibid, lxiv (1890), 342-3.

any favourable critics alert to the full implications of the method. In fact, there were almost none, even in the 'nineties. There is unstinted praise for the cleverness and subtlety of writers in the new tradition, but some radical qualification swiftly follows, on the lines we have already noted. The later Howells, of course, is a safer object for those critics who admire analysis within limits, and several accept that he has defined the "novel of the future" by jettisoning the old stock-in-trade of incidents and dramatic situations, and by ignoring the ancient superstition among English readers that "the story's the thing."[1] But this is really evidence that a great deal of Howells' characterization appealed to the same traditional responses as Mrs. Proudie or Mrs. Poyser, and that such praise for his avoidance of "plot" is in some ways a throwback to the concept of the un-melodramatic "character-novel" of the 'sixties and 'seventies, rather than evidence of an acceptance of the more revolutionary features of his earlier work and theories.

James, whose development was the reverse of Howells', received little criticism that showed any insight into his methods of characterization and narrative. Even Lena Milman's laudatory article in the Yellow Book concedes that his method is too analytical for anything larger than the short-story, in which he excels.[2] The Academy's unreserved praise for the subtle nuances of The Awkward Age is all the more remarkable by its rarity:

> ".. holding aloof as he does, yet without affectation of prudery, from the frank image of an act-in-itself, and dwelling with the thought behind it, he presents a more significant idea of both thinker and doer than were otherwise to be obtained." 3

Quite unexpectedly, it is James Ashcroft Noble, one of the most conservative of critics, who shows some faint signs of grasping that a

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1. E.g., Academy, xxxvii (1890), 147; and "A Great American Novel", Pall Mall Gazette, xlii (Sep. 11, 1885), 5.
2. "A Few Notes Upon Mr. James", vii (1895), 72.
3. lvi (1899), 532-3.

totally new idea of character and of plot underlies the strangeness of James' work, as in the case of The Portrait of a Lady:

> "..nothing in this book or in its predecessors is more remarkable than the masterly painting of moral and intellectual atmosphere - the realisable rendering not of character itself, but of those impalpable radiations of character from which we apprehend it long before we have data that enable us fully to comprehend it."1

And in the following year, he praises another American novel, The Price She Paid, for belonging to a school -

> "..characterised by a certain allusiveness of presentation which contrasts not unpleasantly with the directness of the ordinary English treatment, and enables us to apprehend a character by what may be called its aroma rather than its outline."2

However, Noble's reservation, in 1881, that "plot interest is not altogether contemptible", though mildly expressed, never disappears from his critiques of the new school, and by 1885 he can show some sympathy for those readers who are "pining for nutriment a little more savoury than the long-drawn-out analyses of Messrs. Howells and James."[3] Noble's conclusion, that the necessary "sense of imaginative satisfaction" can only come from a boldly-defined plot "with a fore-ordained and inevitable close",[4] clearly indicates that rock upon which the English critic's faith was founded, and where Henry James' subtle vessel came to grief.

4. Unity of Structure.

Underlying the opinions which we have examined in the preceding three sections is the idea of the novel as a structure of detachable parts and a belief in the validity of what James calls, mockingly, "a geography of items" - such as character, plot, scenery, and dialogue. The contrary theory exists concurrently with this from the earliest years

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1. Academy, xx (1881), 397-8.
2. Ibid., xxii (1882), 394.
3. Ibid., xxvii (1885), 147.
4. Ibid., xxx (1886), 24.

of our period, often in a kind of peaceful coexistence which is based largely on the failure of critics to uncover, by examination, the implicit contradictions between them. James' own words are the best description of the theory which, in its more latent as well as its developed forms, will be our next concern:

> "..this odd, literal opposition of description and dialogue, incident and description, has little meaning and light. People often talk of these things as if they had a kind of internecine distinctness, instead of melting into each other at every breath and being intimately associated parts of one general effort of expression... A novel is a living thing, all one and continuous, like every other organism, and in proportion as it lives will it be found, I think, that in each of the parts there is something of each of the other parts."[1]

The belief that Plot and Character are separable always contains the germs of dissolution within itself, though, as we have seen, it retains its vigour to the end of the century.[2] For example, without consciously challenging the principle of "living" characters, critics who note such technical points as "grouping" or "balance" of the persons of a novel are obviously tending towards a concept of character as a structural, "internal" quality, existing not by virtue of some Pygmalian miracle, but, in part at least, by its dependence on every other section of the unified verbal system that makes up the book. Without any explicit reference to the doctrine of unity, they nevertheless indicate the half-formed assumptions which only the eventual formulation of the organic

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1. "The Art of Fiction", Longman's, iv (1884), 511.
2. Most critics since have retained the separability, at least to the extent of continuing to use both words, but no unanimity has ever been reached on the meaning of each, or the precise nature of their relationship - except, perhaps, that these are not as simple as most Victorians would imply. See R. S. Crane, "The Concept of Plot and the Plot of Tom Jones", Critics and Criticism, ed. R. S. Crane, Chicago, 1952, pp. 616-47, for a survey of how the belief in the external, discrete existence of such schematic devices as "plot" and "character" developed after Aristotle, and also for his own brilliant attempt to resolve them into the one synthesis which is the central principle of any novel's existence and meaning.

principle could fully justify. The points are elementary, but are widely insisted on. For example, minor characters should not be allowed to dominate those designed to be more important; the stage, or the canvas, to use two very common metaphors, should not be over-crowded with figures; there should be a careful use of characters as foils to each other; and those intended to be the agents of some important action at a later stage in the book should not have greatness thrust upon them without being "worked up" in interest beforehand. Such points are very typical, but are never expanded, and in fact are only hinted at indistinctly in such reviewers' shorthand as "ingeniously grouped", "carefully posed", and the like. The Spectator's comparison of the technique of Trollope's Ralph the Heir to that of his other works is a sample of this:

> "..we doubt whether we could name any in which the studies of widely different types of character are so well adapted reciprocally to bring out, by similarity or by contrast, the force and significance of the other sketches."[1]

And in 1894 the same magazine interestingly faults Meredith's novels for a lack of "organic integrity", revealed by the fact that his powers of "character" are all in the Theophrastan sense rather than that of the true novel. An admittedly unimportant novel is contrasted with Meredith, and is found to be superior from the strictly formal point of view, and more truly a novel, since every character in it is a vital part of the whole action. The heroine "is a striking creation, but she does not exist for her own sake alone; she is not a 'character' in the special literary sense of the word, apart from the drama in which she takes the lead."[2]

Similarly unconscious of the full implications of what he is saying, Stevenson, whom we have seen before to treat "character" and "incident" in the traditional way, and who always stresses the need for vital and "living" figures in novel-writing, on at least two occasions refers to the technique of characterization in a non-mimetic way, recalling his famous reverence

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1. xliv (1871), 450-2.
2. "Mr. George Meredith, and Others", lxxiii (1894), 146-7.

for the purely aesthetic pattern that constitutes "Style". He complains to Henry James, in 1884, that the Public do not realise what produces the effect of "life" in a character:

> "They think that striking situations, or good dialogue, are got by studying life; they will not rise to understand that they are prepared by deliberate artifice and set off by painful suppressions."[1]

And in "Some Gentlemen in Fiction", he points out, in a manner highly untypical of his age, that characters -

> "..are only strings of words and parts of books; they dwell in, they belong to, literature; convention, technical artifice, technical gusto, the mechanical necessities of the art, these are the flesh and blood with which they are invested."[2]

However, the growth of the organic principle outlined above by Henry James is not to be observed merely by indirect inference: one of the most striking and unappreciated features of criticism of fiction in our period is the importance openly attached to constructive unity and coherence of one kind or another. The terms, "design", "proportion", and "interdependence" were no doubt applied less rigorously than by those in the Jamesian mould, but the scorn of post-Victorians for their predecessors' entire disregard of the formal virtues is quite unjustified, and ignores the fact that there is a clear line of continuity and development between the theories of both ages.[3]

The notion of strict relevance and connection of parts is evidently a major principle, in support of which novel-critics from the earliest years are banded together in a perpetual punitive expedition against the

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1. Letters, ed. S. Colvin, 1911, ii, 216-7.
2. Scribner's Mag., iii (1888), 767.
3. C.f. Ford Madox Ford's idiosyncratic dismissal of all that had gone before Conrad: "...what the Typical English Novelist had always aimed at - if he had aimed at any form at all - and what the Typical English Critic looked for - if ever he condescended to look at a novel - was a series of short stories with linked characters and possibly a culmination." (Return to Yesterday, 1931, p. 208)

"large loose baggy monsters" deplored by James,[1] and, for example, the system of serialization and three-volume publication which so notoriously fostered them. So ubiquitous is this that each illustration must be taken as representative of a host of others. According to the Westminster, for example, in 1868 - "Subordination or Proportion" is the quality essential to all art,[2] and Hawthorne is criticised by the North British in the same year for a deficiency in "architectural structure", and for treating each of the elements of his story in detail, instead of all together: "There is a want of the converging unity which is the condition of every perfect work of art."[3] A common offence against this quality of unity is "the intervention of a crowd of extraneous persons and trivial incidents which lead to nothing",[4] and the Contemporary criticises an irrelevant incident in Mrs. Oliphant's The Minister's Wife which is inserted for its historical interest alone, without any influence on the main action or regard to the essential close interdependence of all the parts of a novel.[5] James Payn's Walter's Word is held up, in 1875, as an example of proper construction:

> "...each separate portion of the plot fits into the rest, each successive situation arises naturally out of the others, and the further we read the more we are satisfied that the author has kept his work in hand and never lost sight of his original design."6

This progressive relationship between each situation and each scene is often conveyed by the image of a chain, or of weaving. In 1867, for example, the Westminster holds that - "Each chapter in a novel should be a link in the chain",[7] and in 1868, the Spectator laments: "Incidents, indeed, there are in plenty, but they are loosely strung together, not woven

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1. Preface to The Tragic Muse, in The Art of the Novel, ed. R. P. Blackmur, London, 1935, p. 84.
2. xxxiv n.s. (1868), 576.
3. "Nathaniel Hawthorne", x n.s. (1868), 191-2. [By "Bell" - Wellesley Index]
4. Athenaeum, 1865 (1), 455.
5. xiii (1870), 156-8.
6. Saturday Rev., xl (1875), 438-9.
7. xxxii n.s. (1867), 597.

into any sort of a plot."[1] Two later examples, indicative that the same points are made ceaselessly throughout the period, are, in 1887, that R.D. Blackmore's Springhaven "has many threads which are not properly interwoven, but dangle loosely about",[2] and, in 1891, that in the craftsmanlike novels of F.W. Robinson "the story unfolds itself coil after coil with a logical steadiness that nothing disturbs."[3]

A frequent test of the unity of development in a novel is to suggest that the removal of any one part will be fatal to the whole. The Saturday gives a good example of this, as well as illustrating the great concern felt for constructive standards in general:

> "No scene should be given in a novel which has not a direct relation to the conduct of the story, or the development of the characters. A novel should be like a puzzle, in so far that each smallest portion should have both its relative and absolute value; and it should be so closely welded that it would lose meaning, completeness, and consecutive interest, if only one of the smallest portions was taken away. But the great mass of novels are knocked up anyhow, obeying no rules of art worth speaking of, and certainly in complete disregard of this rule of interdependence. One might prune them of whole chapters and leave no gap; on the contrary, the story would be made more compact by the excision and brought into closer line."4

The use of textile imagery, and of "welded" in the last quotation, reveals the continual need of the critic to find analogies to compensate for the insufficiency of vocabulary that has always been the bane of novel-theory. Other terminology widely used to embody this same concept includes "dramatic ensemble" - in which, for example, Shorthouse's novels are lacking[5] - "architectonics" - which Meredith only partly observes[6] - and a neologism of Saintsbury's, "clip",

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1. xli (1868), 76-7.
2. Spectator, lx (1887), 391-2.
3. Athenaeum, 1890 (ii), 93.
4. xxxi (1871), 346-7.
5. Saturday Rev., lxii (1886), 725-6.
6. "The Novels of George Meredith", Quarterly, clxxxvi (1897), 160-1. [By W. Macneile Dixon - Wellesley Index]

invented to describe that peculiar unity which -

> "...keeps the characters of a novel together, and makes them fit into their places.... Without it, everything becomes episodic and vague, and one is constantly wondering why A appears, why B speaks, and why the book itself begins or ends as it does."[1]

All of these accounts, with their varying vocabulary, contain elements pointing back to that specifically "organic" theory which was one of the characteristic modes of Romantic aesthetics, and which has, in somewhat etiolated form, reappeared in so much modern criticism.[2] But before examining some clearer illustrations of those elements, it might be remarked here that the frequent appearance of the word "organic", and of biological and botanical analogies, should not be taken to imply that the idea of unity, as applied to the novel, was of purely, or even predominantly Romantic origin. In fact, the principle originates with the repeated claims of Fielding and his coevals that their productions were distinguished from the old Romance by their observing the Aristotelian unity of the Epic. Traits from both traditions, Romantic and Classical, appear through the body of criticism before us. In particular, to the older might be attributed the overwhelming critical emphasis on that kind of unity characterized by a novel having a clear beginning, middle, and end, with a definite sense of conclusiveness; and Romantic theory might be held to have influenced not only the actual terminology used to describe this, but also the other, less noticeable, preference for a "natural" unity of development, which would permit some digressiveness, some imaginatively-justified disorder, rather than have an over-mechanical form imposed upon such an organic growth. The former, Aristotelian concept is "overwhelming" only in the expressed opinions of critics - the actual novels of the period, most of which fall far

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1. Academy, xi (1877), 113.
2. See, e.g., M.H. Abrams, The Mirror and the Lamp, New York, 1953, pp. 218-25.

short of a later generation's stricter application of the same concept, might perhaps be said to justify themselves by their adherence to the other, looser formalism of the Romantic organism.

Whatever their origins, references to some kind of organic structure abound in the middle and later years of the period, from, in 1873, the Westminster's praise for Miss Thackeray's grasp of "that which is the art of all arts, an organic fusion of the incidents into one living whole",[1] to the Spectator's account of Conan Doyle's The Refugees, in 1893:

> "..Dr. Doyle has the happy art of so imagining each situation as to make it a nidus containing the germ of the situation that is to follow, so that the sequence is not mechanical and arbitrary, but vital and inevitable."2

Some critics, anxious to scotch the Romantic ideas of unconscious spontaneity in the artist that seem to lurk behind the organic theory, add a similar analogy from painting, considered to be one of the more "conscious" of the arts. Thus, the Saturday, in 1876, compares the novel to a "growth" and also to a "mosaic", both of which would lose their harmony and completeness if a part were removed,[3] and in 1882 Mrs. Craik makes use of the dual analogy more explicitly for this purpose. She recommends that in novel-writing a central but unobtrusive "idea" should give unity to the whole, like the spine of a human being or the trunk of a tree, holding together plot, characters, incidents, and conversation: "All are sequences, following one another in natural order; even as from the seed-germ results successively the trunk, limbs, branches, twigs, and leafage of a tree." Yet this simile from the world of nature should not conceal that the novel is a deliberate work of art, in which each effect, like the painter's, must be consciously achieved:

> "Every part should be made subservient to the whole. You must have a foreground and background, and a middle distance. If you persist in working-up one character, or finishing up

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1. xliv n.s. (1873), 258.
2. lxx (1893), 811.
3. xli (1876), 564-5.

> minutely one incident, your perspective will be destroyed, and your book become a mere collection of fragments, not a work of art at all. The true artist will always be ready to sacrifice any pet detail to the perfection of the whole."1

In 1894, Lionel Johnson uses a further image, admiring at length Hardy's "architectural feeling for constructive unity", his Palladian sense of proportion, and "spacious order of design." Each of his best books -

> "..has its orderly movement towards its end predestined: there is no wantoning with chance attractions by the way: phrase and scene and dialogue, incident and narrative and meditation, like the members of a body, do their part in their several places, for the general and common good."2

Hardy himself, in his "The Profitable Reading of Fiction", in 1888, writes in the same figurative terms: ".. to a masterpiece in story there appertains a beauty of shape, no less than to a masterpiece in pictorial or plastic art, capable of giving to the trained mind an equal pleasure." And - "Briefly, a story should be an organism." It becomes clear that Hardy's organic conception here is limited to some quality of narrative from which "character-drawing" is still distinguished,[3] but elsewhere he shows signs of conceiving some all-subsuming principle of organic unity in the novel by which character and action are brought together. Thus, the geometrical construction of Jude was necessitated by the characters: "The rectangular lines of the story were not premeditated, but came by chance: except, of course, that the involutions of four lives must necessarily be a sort of quadrille."[4] And in 1878 he defines plot in a way that hints at how the old concept of the separability of plot and character must break down in any consideration of artistic unity:

> "A Plot, or Tragedy, should arise from the gradual closing in of a situation that comes of ordinary human passions, prejudices, and ambitions, by reason of the characters

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1. Plain Speaking, 1882, pp. 166-9.
2. The Art of Thomas Hardy, New Edn., 1927, pp. 42-3, 65-6.
3. Forum, New York, v (1888), 66-7.
4. F. E. Hardy, Later Years of Thomas Hardy, 1930, pp. 40, 43.

> taking no trouble to ward off the disastrous events produced by the said passions, prejudices, and ambitions."1

More specifically, the doctrine of structural unity reveals itself behind criticisms of two familiar conventions of the Victorian novel, natural description and manifold plot. The excess of the former was an obvious object for attack by those most conscious of the doctrine. Enthusiasts on the other side quote "gems" of description by such favourites as William Black and R. D. Blackmore till the page resembles a botanical text-book, but with great persistence many critics insist that such passages must be made closely relevant to the whole book, and that sunsets over the Hebrides, in the Black style, are of no strictly artistic merit. The Westminster, for example, using "scenery" as one of the accepted component parts of the novel, superior to Plot, holds that it must be used in sympathy or in contrast with the characters and actions - as an instance, the usual sort of love-scene is more effective in an autumn landscape than in the midst of a storm.[2] Also, Howells' use of it is praised as being practical and unsentimental, as in the case of natural scenes on a journey being employed to reveal the reactions, and hence the personalities, of those engaged on it,[3] and the Westminster, again, admires how "the laws of poetic biology" and "moral and artistic necessity", which George Eliot observes in her creation of unified characters, are likewise applied to her descriptions of place: "...the correspondence between the material scenery, and the mental configuration, is a witness to the unity and genuineness of the creative impulse."[4]

George Eliot fares less well in the critics' insistence that sub-plots,

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1. F. E. Hardy, Early Life of Thomas Hardy, 1928, p. 157. Hardy gives no indication here of how, as regards his own novels, the partial determining of the action by a President of the Immortals is to be reconciled with such a notion of Character-as-Destiny.
2. "Ouida's Novels", xlix n.s. (1876), 362-3.
3. Mrs. Sutherland Orr, "International Novelists and Mr. Howells", Contemporary, xxxvii (1880), 743.
4. "George Eliot: Her Life and Writings", lx n.s. (1881), 175. [By M. W. Call - Wellesley Index]

if allowable at all, should be very closely linked to the main action, and Middlemarch, foreseeably, is singled out for its apparently disparate construction. Earlier, Felix Holt is criticised by George Venables, in the Edinburgh Review, for the fact the figure of Esther Lyon is the only liaison between the affairs of the hero and those of the Transommes: "The story has the defect of running in two parallel lines with only an occasional and arbitrary connexion." And the author has failed to realize that "art compensates for its inability to copy the multiplicity of Nature by deliberate attention to unity."[1] The contemporary practice of having two or even three plots "linked together by some unspeakably slender thread" is contrasted with the "strict unity of story" in Clarissa, by the Saturday, in 1868,[2] and one of the few technical points in Arnold's critique of Anna Karenina is that its two trains of events are insufficiently joined, as well as that each contains characters and incidents which do not contribute to its own development.[3]

Trollope is another frequent offender, and is often tasked with endangering the wholeness of his novels by his habit of spreading the interest over several plots. The Saturday condemns The Vicar of Bullhampton for "showing no connexion whatever between the two trains of events and two groups of characters which occupy its pages",[4] and the Dublin Review expresses disapproval for his manner of tearing the reader away from the main thread of the story to other figures only slightly connected with it.[5] Whether or not he always observed his theory, Trollope's own words on this matter are, as always, fair and reasonable, and indicate well how the Victorian novel's effect of comprehensiveness was considered to be perfectly compatible with the laws of unity:

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1. "Felix Holt, the Radical", cxxiv (1866), 442-4. [Identified Wellesley Index]
2. xxvi (1868), 230-1.
3. "Count Leo Tolstoi", Fortnightly, xlii n.s. (1887), 785.
4. xxix (1870), 646-7.
5. "The Novels of Anthony Trollope", ix (1883), 327.

> "There should be no episodes in a novel. Every sentence, every word, through all those pages, should tend to the telling of the story... yet it may have many parts... There may be subsidiary plots, which shall all tend to the elucidation of the main story, and which will take their places as part of one and the same work. - as there may be many figures on a canvas which shall not to the spectator seem to form themselves into separate pictures."1

One final device of the critics' vocabulary - analogy with music - will lead us now, and finally, towards one writer who sums up many of the fragments of a theory of unity which we have noted so far, and expands them into as vital a conception as the age produced. Music, of course, is a perfect image for that ideal proportion which so many sought in the novel, and references to harmony and rhythm are not uncommon. Stevenson, for example, laments the inability of novelists to sustain their main design: "Our little air is swamped and dwarfed among hardly relevant orchestration: our little passionate story drowns in a deep sea of descriptive eloquence or slipshod talk."[2]

And Vernon Lee, at the end of her "The Craft of Words", in 1894, takes up the image:

> "...the construction of a whole book stands to the construction of a single sentence as the greatest complexities of counterpoint and orchestration stand to the relations of the vibrations constituting a single just note."3

This brings us to George Moore, one of the most interesting of all the theorisers of the time in matters of structure. Almost all his pronouncements on the technique of fiction revolve around this idea of organic unity and the equivalence of this unity to the quality of harmony in a piece of music He marvels at the complex interweaving of L'Éducation Sentimentale, at the continual subordination of the casual and particular phenomenon to the general conception, the avoidance of any banal sense of completion at the end of an episode or chapter: "The texture is woven as closely as the music of 'Tristan' -

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1. Autobiography, 1883, ii, 56-8.
2. "A Note on Realism", Magazine of Art, vii (1883-4), 27.
3. New Rev., xi (1894), 580.

echoes, transformations, modulations, never a full close, always a suspended cadence."[1] Again, in criticising the disjointed structure of Olive Schreiner's Story of an African Farm, in the Confessions of a Young Man (1888), he defines art in a novel as "rhythmical sequence of events described with rhythmical sequence of phrase", and cites the tragic sense of inevitability that unifies The Mill on the Floss: "..that rhythmical progression of events, rhythm and inevitableness (two words for one and the same thing)."[2] By emphasising at length the necessity for the synthesis of all parts of the novel, Moore succeeds admirably, and almost uniquely, in effecting a reconciliation of Plot, Character, Dialogue, Description, and all the other supposed elements of the novel which the average novel-critic, as we have seen, drew out singly, as though from a lucky-dip. Plot and Character are inseparable:

> "...the sublimation of the dramatis personae and the deeds in which they are involved must correspond, and their relationship should remain unimpaired... In the novel the characters are the voice, the deeds are the orchestra."

In the romance of Scott and Lytton, this is maintained - the chords are simple but perfect - but the modern Romancers, the Haggards, Besants, and Christie Murrays, combine the modes of Realism and Romance in such a way that the balance breaks down, and Trollopean characters are placed in Hugoesque situations:

> "...the result is inchoate and rhythmless folly, I mean the regular and inevitable alternation and combination of pa and ma, and dear Annie who lives at Clapham, with the Mountains of the Moon, and the secret of eternal life."3

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1. "A Tragic Novel", Cosmopolis, vii (1897), 49-50. See also his use of "instrumentation" to describe the novelist's device of blending physical phenomena from the outer world with the inner feelings of characters at some moment, as in Flaubert and Turgenev - "des questions de métier, but very interesting to those who would look behind the scenes and understand a little of the art of fiction." ("Turgueneff", Fortnightly, xliii n.s., 1888, 244)
2. Pp. 278, 280.
3. Ibid., pp. 271-4.

The inability to maintain this unity of all elements results often in false conclusions, a speciality of the English novelist:

> "A sequence of events - it does not matter how simple or how complicated - working up to a logical close, or, shall I say, a close in which there is a sense of rhythm and inevitableness is always indicative of genius."

The end of Far from the Madding Crowd is beneath contempt by this standard, and Hardy is never able to weld all the disparate lumps of his material into one unity, like Silas Marner,[1] while the falsely happy conclusion to Miss Thackeray's Story of Elizabeth is a "dissonance", because it cannot, by any ingenious "chords", pass from the dominant and inevitable "key", which is that of tragedy.[2] An example of a perfect ending is in Dostoevsky's Poor Folk:

> "And to maintain a sensation in vibration to the last page is surely genius. The mere act of concluding often serves to break the spell; the least violence, the faintest exaggeration is enough; we must drop into a minor key if we would increase the effect, only by a skilful use of anti-climax may we attain those perfect climaxes - sensation of inextinguishable grief, the calm of resignation, the mute yearning for what life has not for giving. In such pauses all great stories end."3

Further than this, Dostoevsky's book is an example of another kind of unity which Moore cannot find in English or in French fiction, one in which the method of plot-contrivance is totally submerged in the finished work, and the operation of the various threads and colours is kept from our scrutiny, and is to be detected only by the unified impression given by the whole:

> "The vulgar mechanism of preparatory scenes is withdrawn, is concealed in the things themselves, and so inherent and so complete is the logical sequence, that we are unconsciously prepared for each event; vulgar foreshadowing is unnecessary, and we watch the unfolding of the story as we watch the unfolding of rose leaves."4

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1. Ibid., pp. 266-70.
2. Ibid., pp. 280-1.
3. Preface to Poor Folk, 1894, pp. xv-xvi.
4. Ibid., pp. xii-xiii.

In such a felicitous phrase as the last, we have a clue to Moore's strength and to his weakness as an exponent of novel-theory. His perceptions are acute and original, but they are never worked out with the rigorous self-examination demanded of a critic. He is a novelist, responding with great sensitivity to the practice of other novelists, and his comments are often better suited to stimulate his fellow-practitioners to emulation of the effects he describes than to form part of a fully coherent theory of fiction. The imagery of rhythm and harmony certainly hints at a concept of great significance in aesthetics, but the concept is evoked rather than defined. However, Moore's analysis of L'Assommoir in his favourite musical terms is a final illustration not only of the tantalising indirectness of his critical method, but also of the richness and real significance it can achieve by implication:

> "I had read the 'Assommoir', and had been much impressed by its pyramid size, strength, height, and decorative grandeur, and also by the immense harmonic development of the idea; and the fugal treatment of the different scenes had seemed to me astonishingly new - the washhouse, for example: the fight motive is indicated, then follows the development of side issues, then comes the fight motive explained; it is broken off short, it flutters through a web of progressive detail, the fight motive is again taken up, and now it is worked out in all its fulness; it is worked up to crescendo, another side issue is introduced, and again the theme is given forth. And I marvelled greatly at the lordly, river-like roll of the narrative, sometimes widening out into lakes and shallowing meres, but never stagnating in fen or marshlands."[1]

Although there were not a few in late-Victorian England who were prepared to apply to poetry the doctrine of all art aspiring towards the condition of music, Moore was alone in carrying it so fully into the realm of prose fiction. In his worship of the melodic line, both in his critical theory and, more doubtfully, in his later novels, the organic conception of fiction in England received one of its fullest expressions.

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1. Confessions of a Young Man, 1888, pp. 119-20.

Views such as Moore's are often taken to be typical of the 'nineties, which some see as a period characterized by the rapid acceptance of Flaubertian theories of form and unity, and by an upsurge of technical discussions to which the advent of Conrad and Ford came as a fitting climax,[1] but the element of truth in this should not be allowed to conceal the fact that, apart from James and Moore, the major authors of the period show in their criticism only sporadic signs of an awareness of the new ideas, and that, among critics and reviewers, older conceptions of form continue to predominate. However, one indication of the slow change that was taking place is the beginning of a counter-movement - as if the critics were slowly realizing that the old idea of unity which they had nurtured for so long was undergoing some alarming change in the hands of a minority. Thus, Arthur Symons, no staunch conservative, defends Balzac's lack of "symmetry, subordination, the formal virtues of form", in 1899:

> "I have often considered whether, in the novel, perfect form is a good, or even a possible thing, if the novel is to be what Balzac made it, history added to poetry... Human life and human manners are too various, too moving, to be brought into the fixity of a quite formal order."2

Some others express agreement with Symons, and in their suggestions as to what constitutes an alternative kind of unity in the novel, they illustrate that acceptance of a looser, less limiting concept, which, as we have indicated, always existed, incipiently, alongside the other throughout the period, and which became articulate only now, when the development of the latter seemed threatening and excessive.[3] Thus, the Bookman suggests, in 1895, that the "harmony of tone and temper and spirit" in

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1. See, e.g., D. Pacey, "Flaubert and his Victorian Critics", Univ. of Toronto Quar., xvi (1946-7), 83.
2. "Balzac", Fortnightly, lxv n.s. (1899), 753.
3. See above, pp.195-6.

Thackeray is more important than his admitted formlessness in terms of mere "external plan and arrangement",[1] and Arthur Davidson, in 1898, claims that Daudet, like Scott, Dickens, and Thackeray, achieves an effect of charm on the reader which overcomes the supposed technical deficiency of loose plots and irrelevant incidents: "..the inconsequence cannot be very glaring, and .. the writer must have qualities which create amid multiplicity a sense of unity stronger than any which comes from technical virtue."[2]

This reaction grew, as did the contrary theory, and their conflict finds its classic formulation after 1900, in the skirmishing between the two main representatives of each, Henry James and H. G. Wells.[3] But in the years under review, the extent of the gulf between the two conceptions of artistic order is not yet fully apparent, and those who seek their definition, like Moore, James, Stevenson, and the others, within the work, in terms of its structural parts, still hold the field by virtue of their continuity with and development of the ideas of the critics who had gone before.

5. Narrative Method: the Omniscient Author.

Our consideration of theories of technique is obviously incomplete without attending to what has become one of the shibboleths of modern criticism, the Point of View. Norman Friedman, who has traced the history of this critical concept after James, Joseph Warren Beach, and Percy Lubbock made it a commonplace and an article of faith, admits that it can be found in embryo in many places before the time of James' Prefaces,[4]

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1. viii (1895), 50.
2. "Alphonse Daudet", Macmillan's, lxxviii (1898), 181.
3. See Henry James and H. G. Wells, ed. L. Edel and G. N. Ray, 1958. Arnold Bennett, it should be added, was another who rallied to Wells' journalistic banner, after an early flirtation with formalism. For their differences and underlying similarity, see Arnold Bennett and H. G. Wells, ed. H. Wilson, 1960.
4. "Point of View in Fiction: the Development of a Critical Concept", P.M.L.A., lxx (1955), 1160-84.

while Richard Stang claims that it had been "discussed quite fully" before the first volume-publication of James' essays in 1878.[1] That the discussion had been far from conclusive is evident from the variety of the opinions expressed throughout the later years, and, on the other hand, that the idea was not merely an embryo is seen in at least one instance where its exposition is more clear and more comprehensive than in any one critical work of James himself. However, it must be emphasised that the importance placed by Victorian critics on this aspect of the novel can be over-estimated. The awareness of the issues it involves is certainly there, but is almost always fragmentary and subordinate to other matters considered more vital. It is fatally easy to provide a false picture of the period by picking out only those traces of modern ideas that can be found there, and also by reading them into the vague or ambiguous words which were all the Victorian reviewer had at his disposal.

The critics generally conceive of only three possible categories of narrative-method: that of the omniscient author, who uses predominantly third-person narration, with some commentary of his own, in the first person; the directly autobiographical method; and the epistolary method.[2] Such a triad is traditional, and is outlined clearly by Mrs. Barbauld in 1804.[3] However, one of the very few examples during our period of a full statement of this same scheme is Walter Raleigh's, in 1894, which contains a notably early use of the phrase "point of view" in its modern application, and which will introduce our subsequent examination of critical attitudes towards each of the three methods.

The first device, according to Raleigh, is that of the narrating author, as in Fielding, Scott, Dickens, and Thackeray:

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1. Theory of the Novel in England, 1850-1870, London, 1959, p. 135.
2. C.f. the more varied categorization of modern critics - e.g., Norman Friedman's division into Editorial Omniscience, Neutral Omniscience, "I" as Witness, "I" as Protagonist, Multiple Selective Omniscience, Selective Omniscience, Dramatic, and The Camera, op. cit., pp. 1168-79.
3. Correspondence of Samuel Richardson, ed. A. L. Barbauld, 1804, i, xxiii - xxviii.

> "He is invisible and omniscient, a sort of diable boiteux, who is able to unroof all houses and unlock all hearts... At a slight sacrifice of dramatic force the events of the story are supplied with a chorus, and at any time that suits him the author can cast off his invisible cloak and show himself fingering the 'helpless pieces of the game he plays'."

The second is to place the story in the mouth of a principal character, which gives to the book a dramatic centre and unity, but brings obvious hazards and problems, such as the omniscience that must be given to the narrator, the necessity of his describing past events and thereby losing his own present reality, and also, "although the single point of view is valuable to evoke sympathy, it takes from the novelist the privilege of killing his hero."

Third is the device of letters, amply justified in Richardson's use of it as a vehicle for his powers of detailed analysis:

> "This constant repercussion of a theme or event between one or more pairs of correspondents produces a structure of story very like The House that Jack Built. Each writer is narrating not events alone, but his or her reflections on previous narrations of the same events."1

Raleigh's diable boiteux, and, in general, the relations of an external author to his characters in the process of narration, are given much more attention by critics than the problems of internal narrative. Authorial intrusion, another of the conventions of the Victorian novel loudly scorned as primitive by our own century, and by Henry James as "a terrible crime",[2] was, it is perhaps surprising to find, a matter of considerable dispute among the Victorians themselves. We shall first examine defences offered on its behalf; then pass to the three main lines of attack.

A number of critics accept the "dear reader" technique as one of the legitimate devices, and even attractions, of the novel-form. For example, the North British Review, in 1866, lists George Eliot's habit of commentating,

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1. The English Novel, 1894, pp. 147-52. In 1913, Saintsbury repeats the same threefold division, and claims that "a hundred critics" have attested to its comprehensiveness (The English Novel, 1913, pp. 89-90).
2. "The Art of Fiction", Longman's, iv (1884), 504.

like a Greek chorus, as one of her great strengths, which, as in the case of Thackeray, gives her work its breadth and power,[1] and George Barnett Smith, in 1873, mentions Thackeray's continual presence at our elbow as one of the main reasons for the success of Vanity Fair.[2] Leslie Stephen, after taking a similar pleasure in Fielding's interpolations,[3] later gives one of the most enthusiastic of all defences of the method, arising naturally out of his principles that illusion is a fallacy and that the nature of the author is a central concern. He dissociates himself from the common attitude to George Eliot's intrusions:

> "We are indeed told dogmatically that a novelist should never indulge in little asides to the reader. Why not? One main advantage of a novel, as it seems to me, is precisely that it leaves room for a freedom in such matters which is incompatible with the requirements, for example, of drumatic writing. I can enjoy Scott's downright story-telling, which never reminds you obtrusively of the presence of the author; but with all respect for Scott, I do not see why his manner should be the sole type and model for all his successors. I like to read about Tom Jones or Colonel Newcome; but I am also very glad when Fielding or Thackeray puts his puppets aside for the moment and talks to me in his own person."4

There is a glimmering of an idea, based, like Stephen's, on a denial of illusion, behind one very characteristic example of the kind of intrusion under discussion - at the end of Chapter 15 of Barchester Towers (1857). There, Trollope explains his appearance - which has been to reassure the readers openly that Eleanor Bold with not marry Mr. Slope or Bertie Stanhope - as having been necessary in order to restore the "proper confidence between the author and his readers" and prevent that artificial suspense as to the outcome of events on which most novels rely. Trollope is being largely facetious, no doubt, but he touches on an

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1. "George Eliot's Novels", vi n.s. (1866), 214. [By H. H. Lancaster - Wellesley Index]
2. "The Works of Thackeray", Edinburgh Rev., cxxxvii (1873), 102.
3. "Hours in a Library. XIV. - Fielding's Novels", Cornhill, xxxv (1877), 157.
4. "George Eliot", ibid., xliii (1881), 154-5.

important point which, if he had realized it and developed it, would have been a possible theory in support of his own narrative method. By sharing his own omniscient view-point with the readers - and thereby destroying "suspense" of this kind - he achieves an individual effect which is perhaps as defensible on aesthetic grounds as that achieved by the "dramatised" point of view. And certainly, as he indicates (again tangentially) these grounds would exclude the law of illusion:

> "Our doctrine is, that the author and the reader should move along together in full confidence with each other. Let the personages of the drama undergo ever so complete a comedy of errors among themselves, but let the spectator never mistake the Syracusan for the Ephesian; otherwise he is one of the dupes, and the part of a dupe is never dignified."1

Rather less convincingly, Peter Bayne, in 1883, accepts the "padding" of authorial comment not just on the grounds of its charm or its sagacity, but because "a certain amount of padding is indispensable. No cake can be good as cake that is all fruit."[2] And William Watson, looking round angrily at the contemporary scene in 1889, opposes himself to the current reaction against George Eliot's choric performance by praising the very quality of the comments she makes.[3] Finally, H. G. Wells takes a similar stand against the fashion in his anonymous review of Gissing's The Paying Guest, in 1896. He congratulates the author for abandoning his earlier theories of objectivity in favour of the ironic commentary which is the charm of his latest work, and disparages the "colourless" theory of fiction:

> "Let your characters tell their own story, make no comment, write a novel as you would write a play. So we are robbed of the personality of the author, in order that we may get an enhanced impression of reality, and a novel merely extends the purview of the police-court reporter to the details of everyday life. The analogous theory in painting

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1. Oxford Edn., 1953, i, 143-4.
2. "Studies of English Authors. Anthony Trollope", Literary World, xxvii n.s. (1883), 136.
3. "Fiction - Plethoric and Anaemic", National Rev., xiv (1889-90), 168.

would, of course, rank a passable cyclorama above one of Raphael's cartoons."[1]

However, there is not a great deal of weight behind this attitude, and the majority opinion throughout the period is undoubtedly unfavourable to the author as commentator, sometimes revealing itself haltingly, in a reluctant acceptance of, say, Thackeray's manner, with many cautionary provisos. For example, the Spectator criticises George Eliot, as well as W. G. Wills, for the falsetto tone caused by following Thackeray's method of a running commentary: "..it was a weapon the use of which was proper only for a satirist, and, even for a satirist, proper only in moderation."[2] And, in 1891, Lionel Johnson, arguing that the question of impersonality in art is a mere matter of words, and accepting Thackeray's remarks because they enlighten the reader and do not occur during the actual scenes, in the end temporizes: "At least, let us call these passages of personal meditation a wrong thing done exquisitely; beyond that we refuse to go."[3]

Most critics show less hesitation than this, and a note of outright condemnation sounds continually. Often, from the earliest years, the intrusion of the author, either in the buttonholing, first-person manner of Thackeray, or the more distant choric style of George Eliot, is simply called "disagreeable" or "a defect in a work of fiction",[4] but more specific reasons emerge for this dislike, and must now be considered separately. These are firstly, the widespread belief that a novelist should stand to his work in the same relation as the dramatist, observing the independence of his characters; secondly, that the essential illusion of fiction is shattered by intrusion; and thirdly, the "intrusive author"

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1. Saturday Rev., lxxxi (1896), 405-6. [Identified in Edwardians and Late Victorians, ed. R. Ellmann, New York, 1960, p. 116]
2. xxxviii (1865), 1090-1.
3. Academy, xxxix (1891), 227.
4. E.g., Saturday Rev., xxi (1866), 238-9; and Academy, iv (1873), 163.

is sometimes discovered to mean any generally subjective treatment, in which the characters, although apparently conducting their own affairs, reveal obvious and excessive traits of the author's personality.

The dramatic rights of characters are upheld in the frequent insistence that they be allowed to reveal their own natures by action and dialogue, instead of the author describing these at length for us. Very typical of this are, in 1865, the Dublin University Magazine's praise of a writer for investigating character and motive by "the presentation of both in the attitude and through the colloquies of the dramatis personae",[1] and the British Quarterly's criticism that - "The authoress errs in not allowing her men and women to act their parts so vividly as to save her the necessity of describing their characters."[2] The emphasis on "presentment" - similar to James' on "rendering" - often combines with those objections to "analysis" from a different view-point which we have already examined. For instance, in 1871, the Saturday takes strong exception to psychological analysis not only on the familiar grounds of it being painful and inhuman but also because it involves the author stepping forward and adopting "the showman method of treatment", like a phrenologist pointing out the bumps on a stucco head, instead of letting the characters declare themselves: ".. simple studies in psychology, however accurate, require a setting of flesh and blood, and talk and action, to make them attractive to a novel-reading generation."[3]

In 1876, the Westminster declares: "..it is the novelist's highest art to carry on the story by allowing the different characters to develop themselves, especially in dramatic dialogues",[4] and in the following year - "We do not require to be told that so-and-so is a good

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1. "Another Cluster of Novels", lxv (1865), 573.
2. xlix (1869), 580-1. See also William Archer's "Björnstjerne Björnson as a Novelist", ibid., lxi (1875), 391-2.
3. xxxii (1871), 216-7.
4. 1 n.s. (1876), 573.

man or a witty man; we want to feel his goodness and to hear his wit."[1]

The Saturday adds the interesting suggestion that this dramatic method is the best way of preserving consistency of characterization:

> "One of the chief difficulties in writing a novel is to make the sayings and doings of the characters in it consistent with what is set forth about them at starting. They are apt to be one thing when the author speaks of them in the third person, and quite another when they speak for themselves in the first... For this reason we have always thought Miss Austen's method of simply announcing a character and leaving him to describe himself, not only the most artistic way of proceeding, but the safest rule for an inexperienced writer to adopt."2

The dramatic method of Charles Reade, with regard to his characters, is another object of admiration - the Saturday praises him for replacing with self-revelatory dialogue the long descriptions of development of character employed by the usual novelist,[3] and Walter Besant sees such a presentation as appealing to higher faculties in the reader:

> "The forcible-feeble writer describes his characters 'from the inside'; that is, he tells you beforehand what he wants you to think of them. This method helps the folk whose imaginative powers are weak."4

Reade himself, a dramatist manqué,[5] always emphasises the virtues of scene and dialogue, and in various places throughout his novels he appears, rather contradictorily, to warn the reader against expecting that any of the fashionable dissection and analysis will be applied to his characters.[6] But Reade also provides a warning against another type of infringement on the dramatic integrity of characters, the

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1. Ibid., lii n.s. (1877), 274.
2. xxiv (1867), 24-5. Jane Austen is often singled out for such praise - see, e.g., ibid., liv (1882), 827-8; and H. D. Traill, "The Novel of Manners", Nineteenth Century, xviii (1885), 572.
3. "Mr. Charles Reade's Novels", liv (1882), 180-1. See also British Quarterly Rev., lxxvi (1882), 482-6.
4. "Charles Reade's Novels", Gentleman's Mag., ccliii (1882), 202. See also Besant's Art of Fiction, 1884, pp. 22-3.
5. "..my talent, whatever it may be, is rather for the drama than the novel." (C. L. and C. Reade, Charles Reade, A Memoir, 1887, ii, 160)
6. E.g., Griffith Gaunt, 1866, ii, 148; and A Perilous Secret, Library Edn., 1896, p. 42.

intrusion of the author to philosophize over their heads, which is without even the excuse of the "descriptive" method, that it at least adds to our knowledge of the persons. He describes the faults of a manuscript novel submitted to him by a friend of the authoress:

> "Since preaching and moralising and discussing in their own persons is the foible of bad novelists, let her pass all such passages through a sieve, excise what is not new and good, and if she has uttered a gem or two, let her look and see whether she can't make this or that character say it."1

Such a criticism is almost as common as that against authorial description of character, and is often expressed as a specifically technical objection (usually, again, in dramatic terminology), even apart from the familiar dislike for the didacticism the custom involved. George Eliot, in spite of her own insistence on the importance of "the power of dramatic representation",[2] is often understandably found wanting in this respect, as in R. Monckton Milnes' notice of Middlemarch:

> "Strictly speaking, the writer should be as little seen in person in a novel as he would be in a modern drama, where he only gives the stage directions; but here the Chorus is too continually present, calling us away from the excitement and anxiety of the piece to the consideration of the eternal moralities and humorous contrasts of life."3

And Jane Austen is again contrasted as a sterling example of self-denial: ".. the writer never gets in the way of her characters, they are never interfered with by unnecessary reflections, the business of the scene is never disturbed by useless interjections from the dramatist."[4]

The novels of Meredith are clearly written according to a very different principle from this, and inevitably pay the price of much

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1. Léone Rives, Charles Reade, sa Vie, ses Romans, Toulouse, 1940, p. 223.
2. See, e.g., her reviews in the Westminster, x n.s. (1856), 259, 574.
3. "Middlemarch", Edinburgh Rev., cxxxvii (1873), 262-3. [Identified Wellesley Index]
4. "Jane Austen", Saint Pauls, v (1870), 632.

critical abuse - in spite of the very few at the time whose conception of fiction can embrace his unrestrained commentaries. Nevertheless, it is significant that Meredith, too, was always aware, in theory at least, of the importance of the dramatic scene, and the problems of reconciling it with philosophic aims - as witness, for example, his criticisms of others while reader for Chapman and Hall.[1] And in Sandra Belloni (1864), he hints at that unease over speculative interjection on the part of an author which we have seen the critics of his time express more positively. He indirectly apologises by addressing "this garrulous, super-subtle, so-called Philosopher" who has become his master:

> "He maintains that a story should not always flow, or, at least, not to a given measure. When we are knapsack on back, he says, we come to eminences where a survey of our journey past and in advance is desireable, as is a distinct pause in any business, here and there... In vain I tell him that he is meantime making tatters of the puppets' golden robe - illusion: that he is sucking the blood of their warm humanity out of them."2

Thus far, we have considered objections to the omniscient and intrusive author made specifically in terms of the "dramatic" relation of novelist to characters which is endangered by unnecessary analysis and by irrelevant generalisation. It is surprising how few openly, like Meredith, go on to the simple observation that illusion is a major principle which is broken by this convention. Of course, it can be taken as underlying many of the foregoing "dramatic" criticisms, but the doctrine is rarely made explicit. One of the first mentions is in 1875, in a Spectator review of Mrs. Oliphant's The Story of Valentine and his Brother, and there is a significant lack of urgency in the criticism:

> "Too fond also is she of writing of her characters as if she stood apart from them and was criticising their motives,

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1. See R. A. Gettmann, "Meredith as Publisher's Reader", Journal of Eng. and Germ. Phil., xlviii (1949), 54-6.
2. Chapter 44 (Memorial Edn., 1909, ii, 483-4).

> a defect which is also conspicuous in Mr. Trollope. When the reader is absorbed in a story, the obtrusion of the author's comments destroys something of the illusion. But these are trivial faults."1

James Payn, in 1880, gives a stronger warning against the loss of naturalness that occurs when the showman reveals himself,[2] but it is the Westminster, eight years later, which makes the elementary but vital point most clearly, in its welcome for those developments in fiction signalized by Maupassant's Pierre et Jean. Using "subjective" in the same sense as Maupassant, to describe the analysis and purportedly "psychological" investigation of characters which inevitably consists of the author's self-projection, the writer argues for the superiority of the opposite, "objective" method:

> "In our opinion, the subjective is less telling and less artistic, not only because it makes the fictive scene less like real life, as M. de Maupassant justly observes, but because it seems as if the artist were displaying the machinery of construction, which it is the instinct of true art to conceal. It is as though an architect left up the scaffolding by means of which he had reared his building. The novelist should, no doubt, as it were, enter into his puppets, and work them from the inside, but it should seem to the spectators as if they worked themselves. In fact, illusion, not reality, is, as M. de Maupassant has perceived, the true aim and end of the novelist."3

The application of this principle of objectivity to the psychology of the novelist's creation of character brings us to the final way in which an author is held to have abused his omniscient position - by insufficiently dissociating his own nature from that of his personages, an intrusion as fundamental, if not as direct, as that of personal commentary. The London Quarterly Review interestingly faults Dickens in this respect, complaining that David Copperfield "reiterates too constantly the personality of the author", and making the point that an

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1. xlviii (1875), 407-9.
2. "Story-Telling", Nineteenth Century, viii (1880), 94.
3. cxxix (1888), 538.

author must feel himself into the independent life of his characters so closely that, paradoxically, his own private personality becomes excluded from them.[1] And the Spectator makes a similar complaint about Far From the Madding Crowd, very often heard against Hardy, that the rustic characters speak and think too obviously with the author's own subtlety: "Mr. Hardy seems...constantly to be shuffling his own words or tone of thought with those of the people he is describing." Not only does he comment in his own person, like George Eliot, but, as she never did, he blends "a good deal of this same style of thought with the substance of his drawings."[2]

The same double complaint is made about Alice Corkran's Latheby Towers, in 1879, that the characters are interfered with both from without, by the author acting as "guide, philosopher, and friend", and also internally, in the dialogue: ".. the illusion of different voices and of different styles is not very successfully maintained; it is too evidently the author speaking through different mouthpieces."[3] And in the 'nineties, Kipling and James receive this criticism also - the former's characters, in The Light that Failed, are photographed autobiographically, rather than evolved imaginatively,[4] and James' characters, in The Spoils of Poynton, though they have some life of their own, "know all the time that Mr. Henry James is looking; they are not sufficiently disengaged and projected."[5]

On these various grounds, then, the convention of the self-revealing author came under continuous fire. In spite of the few who favour it, its critics increase through the 'eighties and 'nineties, and find their most extreme representatives in that vociferous minority who had listened

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1. "Dickens", xxxv (1871), 283-4.
2. xlvii (1874), 1597-9.
3. "Latheby Towers", Pall Mall Gazette, xxix (1879), 1380.
4. Spectator, lxvi (1891), 174.
5. Academy, li (1897), 256.

sympathetically to the new gospels of Flaubert and the Naturalists, and who could only regard the device as a relic of barbarism, its faults too evident to merit discussion. In 1896, the young Arnold Bennett describes how E. M. Symonds ("George Paston") has lamented in conversation the decline of the novel since Thackeray and George Eliot:

> "She regretted the lapse of that custom which made it lawful for authors to intersperse their narratives by personal reflections, opinions, moralizings. In the case of a great author, she said, these constituted for her frequently the chief charm of a novel.
>
> Which shows that sensible people are capable of holding the most bizarre views."[1]

6. Narrative Method: the First Person.

The dangers and abuses of the Omniscient Point of View are well known to critics, but there are no detailed accounts of its advantages - of the "panoramic" effects, say, as described by Lubbock.[2] Also, it is difficult to glean, from the many vigorous pronouncements in favour of some "dramatic" method, any clear description of an alternative mode of narration. Generally, what seems to be preferred is still an omniscient narrator who avoids first-person interjections, keeps his own "description" and "analysis" in the third person to a minimum, and makes free use of dramatic scene and dialogue within this narrative setting. The device, convenient to such an end, of the "indirect and oblique view" afforded by the author centering his third-person narrative around the consciousness

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1. Journals, ed. N. Flower, 1932-3, i, 11. For criticism in the same key, rejecting the method as outdated, without any clear technical reasons why, see the praises of Flaubert in "The Art of Fiction", Saturday Rev., lxxviii (1894), 530-1; in D. F. Hannigan, "Gustave Flaubert", Westminster Rev., cxliv (1895), 383-92; and, with reservations, in Ernest Newman, "Gustave Flaubert", Fortnightly, lviii n.s. (1895), 823.
2. E. g., The Craft of Fiction, 1921, pp. 93-109.

of a limited number of the characters is only indicated in a few places - as we shall see in the next section - and remains largely the particular achievement of Henry James.[1] Almost the only "dramatised" Points of View conceivable to the Victorian critic are the two which complete Raleigh's survey of the possible kinds of narration - the autobiographical and the epistolary, both told in the first person by one of the characters - and critics are again more concerned to point out the disadvantages of these than to suggest that they offer an alternative to the intrusions of the Omniscient method.

The "large ease of 'autobiography'", as James reprovingly described it,[2] won its share of appreciation amid the criticisms. The British Quarterly, for example, sees its advantages in Mrs. Craik's choice of a character like Phineas Fletcher, the invalid Quaker, to tell the story of John Halifax, Gentleman. His feminine characteristics and deficiencies of insight suit perfectly the nature of the author, who, herself lacking in close knowledge of such a masculine figure as John Halifax, the hero, not only conceals her own lack thereby, but, in the actual effect she conveys, makes it good: "..the reader knows that he sees the life of John Halifax through the mind of Phineas Fletcher, and therefore pictures it as fuller and stronger and more manly than it is." Such a success is contrasted with the later Lord Erlistoun, where a sentimental story comes to us quite incongruously through a rough and commonplace narrator.[3]

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1. The phrase occurs in the Preface to The Golden Bowl, in The Art of the Novel, ed. R. P. Blackmur, London, 1935, p. 327.
2. Preface to The Ambassadors, in ibid., p. 321.
3. "The Author of John Halifax", xliv (1866), 43-4, 49. Stang cites this reviewer's remark that the first book could not have been told "from another point of view" as the only accredited use of these significant words in the years he has covered - but this, perhaps, is to strain what appears here to be the simple, idiomatic use of the phrase (Theory of the Novel in England, London, 1959, p. 107). It should be noted that this ordinary sense of attitude or outlook is the meaning given to the term most often by James himself, who arrives at the concept, as it is now understood, by more devious expressions.

This advantage for a woman-novelist of choosing a persona with the limitations of her own position in society is also recognized by Frederic Harrison, à propos of Jane Eyre:

> "The plain little governess dominates the whole book and fills every page. Everything and every one appear, not as we see them and know them in the world, but as they look to a keen-eyed girl who had hardly ever left her native village. Had the whole book been cast into the form of impersonal narration, this limitation, this huge ignorance of life, this amateur's attempt to construct a romance by the light of nature instead of observation and study of persons, would have been a failure. As the autobiography of Jane Eyre - let us say at once of Charlotte Brontë - it is consummate art."1

It is frequently recognized that among the difficulties of placing on one character the burden of telling an entire story is the necessity to give him a personality that will be attractive in itself, and to prevent him from imposing himself too completely over the other characters and events. The Spectator, in 1870, criticises the hero-narrator of William Black's Kilmeny because he becomes a free outlet for the author's subjectivity and sentimentality, and thereby is himself mawkish, unattractive, and too obtrusive:

> "The hero, we are told by Mr. Black, is a mere 'lens', through which the scenes of the story are surveyed; and let us add that he is very far indeed from an achromatic lens, and that the phenomena known as those of diffraction are exceedingly well marked in his case.... but that he is made the 'lens' for some passages of beautiful and thoroughly poetical description, we cannot say we like the object-glass through which the image of the story is focussed for us at all."2

The problem that a character-narrator must be made more than ordinarily pleasant, and that this is often incompatible with the self-exposition and continual presence forced on him by the convention, is often alluded to in terms of a book becoming "egotistic." The Spectator,

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1. "Charlotte Brontë", Studies in Early Victorian Literature, 1895, pp. 162-3.
2. xliii (1870), 469-70.

in 1874, points out the faults of Queenie: "It is the most difficult of arts to write an autobiographical story without seeming to be egotistical, without straining probabilities, and without getting into awkward postures."[1] And again, three years later, the combination of first-person narrative with the present tense brings a strong criticism:

> "It is an essentially bad style; it destroys the perspective which is as essential to a work as to a picture, and it makes it impossible for the narrator of the story to steer clear of the utter egotism the avoidance of which must always be the chief test of the skill with which an autobiographical novel is written."2

Trollope, in a letter of 1868, elaborates on this effect of "egotism", or its no less irritating obverse, which so easily attaches to the first-person convention:

> "..it is always dangerous to write from the point of 'I'. The reader is unconsciously taught to feel that the writer is glorifying himself, and rebels against the self-praise. Or otherwise the 'I' is pretentiously humble, and offends from exactly the other point of view. In telling a tale it is, I think, always well to sink the personal pronoun. The old way, 'Once upon a time', with slight modifications, is the best way of teeling a story."3

A more particular point is that the autobiographical method always presupposes a certain attitude and outlook on life in the author, and that some may adopt it mistakenly. The Spectator, in 1886, objects that W. E. Norris' use of the method in My Friend Jim runs directly

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1. xlvii (1874), 1399-1400.
2. Ibid., 1 (1877), 762-3.
3. Letters, ed. B. A. Booth, London, 1951, pp. 216-7. What Trollope and others probably had in mind by both of these offences is well illustrated in Esther Summerson's clumsy establishment of her own necessary virtues, in Chapter 3 of Bleak House: "I have mentioned that, unless my vanity should deceive me (as I know it may, for I may be very vain, without suspecting it - though indeed I don't), my comprehension is quickened when my affection is. My disposition is very affectionate..." And in her simpering modesty: "It seems so curious to me to be obliged to write all this about myself! As if this narrative were the narrative of my life! But my little body will soon fall into the background now." (New Oxford Edn., 1948, pp. 16, 26)

counter to the general impression that otherwise emerges from the book:

> "Mr. Norris cannot identify himself sufficiently with any of his characters to act simply as his or her mouth-piece. He looks upon humanity from a standpoint that is not quite Goethe's, that is nearer Thackeray's than Goethe's; but in any case, he sits up aloft somewhere, seeing his world go. It is a dangerous experiment for the master of a show of marionettes to identify himself with any one of them in particular."[1]

Saintsbury, admonitory as always, is particularly alert to the dangers of the method, especially where the reconciliation of the narrator's vraisemblance with his necessary omniscience is concerned. Cherbuliez, for example, is usually successful in those instances where he prefers "what may be called the indirect forms of narration, to the ordinary straightforward narrative of the supernaturally omniscient novelist" - in his use, say, of such devices as confessions by a character to a friend, or a letter to a confidant. But at times, he slips, as when he resorts to making the narrating hero or heroine eavesdrop, and thereby forfeit our sympathy and credence.[2] And the problem is illustrated even more clearly for him by that familiar convention of the governess-narrator in Philip Sheldon's Woman's a Riddle, in 1874:

> "Only by a never-failing employment of the most ingenious artifices, is it possible to make personal narrative at once probable and interesting... The spokesman in a novel should either be the central figure, or else should be supposed to know everything. Miss Rudd neither is the one, nor does the other. Consequently we are deprived of the necessary details and circumstances without which a story, unless it be in very exceptional hands, is sure to languish."[3]

The use of multiple internal narrative, "a sort of illegitimate descendant of the old device of telling a story by means of letters", is also frowned upon, except in those cases where an intricate plot

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1. lix (1886), 1309-10.
2. "Victor Cherbuliez", Fortnightly, xxiii n.s. (1878), 257.
3. Academy, vi (1874), 479.

requires to be looked at from varying view-points, or else where the interest of the book is centered on bringing out the characters of the different narrators - without such a reason, the result, as in Dutton Cook's Doubleday's Children, is dullness and fragmentation.[1]

Finally, Stevenson, who leant heavily on the autobiographic method in his novels, provides the occasion for one interesting favourable account of it, in a review of Catriona, and a typical reservation by Saintsbury, over The Master of Ballantrae, as well as giving some valuable clues himself, both in his "Note" to the latter book and elsewhere. The review of Catriona, in the Athenaeum for 1893, contains one of the few wholly laudatory discussions of first-person narration. The writer points out that the device often gives a greater "organic vitality" to a story than would have been achieved by the usual cohesion of a constructed plot. In the case of Kidnapped and Catriona, varied and even discordant matter has been given a perfect "unity of impression" simply by the imposed continuity of the teller's own life and character:

> "By the historic method material so disparate as that contained in the story and its sequel could hardly have been held together, howsoever skilfully the working characters might be kept revolving round the hero as centre; but by the use of the autobiographic method the hero's own personality prevents that solution of continuity which is so fatal to a work of art."2

Such possible advantages are ignored by Saintsbury, favourably reviewing The Master of Ballantrae in 1889, and he mentions only those difficulties, which the author had acknowledged in the Dedication, of using such a stolid, unimaginative narrator as Mackellar, steward to the Master's brother. Saintsbury - in polar contrast to James, who saw "difficulty" of method as the artist's salvation - cannot understand an author's burdening himself in this way: "Scott knew that constant

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1. Ibid., xii (1877), 404.
2. 1893 (ii), 375-7. Kidnapped was one of the few specimens of the autobiographic novel to overcome James' distaste - and then only by virtue of its being a Romance (Letters, ed. P. Lubbock, 1920, ii, 188-9).

attention to a 'problem' of this kind is apt to impede the march of the story."[1]

Stevenson, of course, is perfectly aware of what he can gain by the method. He tells Gosse, in 1893: "..the difficulty of according the narrative and the dialogue (in a work in the third person) is extreme. That is one reason out of half a dozen why I so often prefer the first." And he describes how such a third-person narrative in The Ebb Tide has resulted in "strain between a vilely realistic dialogue and a narrative style pitched about (in phrase) 'four notes higher' than it should have been."[2] The use of Mackellar as narrator in The Master of Ballantrae has other merits - particularly, as Stevenson modestly confesses, that of concealing deficiencies in the author:

> "..the device enabled me to view my heroine from the outside, which was doubly desirable. First, and generally, because I am always afraid of my women, which are not admired in my home circle; second, and particularly, because I should be thus enabled to pass over without realisation an ugly and delicate business - the master's courtship of his brother's wife."

The demerits, Stevenson admits, were that the melodrama of the conclusion came awkwardly through such a medium as Mackellar, and that there was a loss of "large dramatic rhythm." But the verisimilitude that the point of view brings is its greatest virtue:

> "The realism I love is that of method; not only that all in a story may possibly have come to pass, but that all might naturally be recorded - a realism that justifies the book itself as well as the fable it commemorates."3

Not surprisingly, the epistolary form receives little attention, except as one of the traditional narrative-methods, chiefly of historical interest. Any attempt to revive it is treated as anachronistic:

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1. Academy, xxxvi (1889), 284.
2. Letters, ed. S. Colvin, 1911, iv, 179.
3. "Note to 'The Master of Ballantrae'", Works, Vailima Edn., 1922-3, xxvi, 480-1.

> "With all reverence to the memory of Richardson, and not forgetting George Sand's incomparable Marquis de Villemer, and other five or six of her best works, we cannot help thinking that the epistolary form of romance has had its day."1

Most references to the method occur in articles on Richardson, especially at the time of the publication of Eneas Sweetland Dallas' abridged edition of Clarissa, in 1868, and can be divided into those which disapprove on the expected grounds of the convention's "unreality", and those which find, like the St. James' Magazine, that "this epistolary style constitutes one of the chief charms of the book."[2] Harry Buxton Forman not only accepts the improbability of the method as part of the nature of art, but he also points to the positive advantages of the method in its allowing for greater psychological analysis and in its purification of the disgusting aspects of the story by bringing them to us "polarised through the medium of Clarissa's noble and lucid mind."[3] Leslie Stephen, as we have seen before, is similarly unconcerned with illusion, and praises the effects of the multiple points of view in this book, by which we hear the characters reveal themselves, without analysis or description, and see them, and the events around them, from many angles instead of one, as usual. Thereby, the reader arrives at an intimate knowledge of both, built up with the minute accuracy of a blue book or a Dutch painting. Among the obvious disadvantages of the method is the necessity of having characters trumpet their own virtues, which can be only partly overcome by the expedient of admiring confidants, and least successfully in Sir Charles Grandison.[4] The same balanced view, finally, is taken by the Westminster in the following year, which detects the

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1. Linda Villari, "Novelists and Novel Writing in Italy", Macmillan's, xxxviii (1878), 23.
2. "Richardson's 'Clarissa'", ii (1868-9), 252.
3. "Samuel Richardson, as Artist and Moralist", Fortnightly, vi n.s. (1869), 433-4. See above, p. 83.
4. "Richardson's Novels", Cornhill, xvii (1868), 55-7. See above, p. 81.

improbabilities and incongruities that follow in the train of Richardson's epistolary method, but praises it as -

> "..precisely the proper vehicle for his minute Prae-Raphaelitism in descriptive narration. To show the same characters and the same events in several lights, according to the personal quality of the narrator, was one of the leading principles of his method."1

7. Narrative Method: "Indirect and Oblique."

The perfect angle of narration lay, for Henry James, somewhere between the two we have seen, the dramatised view-point of the autobiographer or letter-writer on the one hand, and, on the other, the totally undramatised "mere muffled majesty of irresponsible 'authorship'" - that is, James aims at an account in the third person, still dependent on the impersonal author, but in which the latter is himself rigidly subjected to "the register, ever so closely kept, of the consciousness" of a limited number of the participants in the novel's action.[2] The situation of the Point of View in any novel is therefore, for James, determined mainly by the centre of cognition, and, for most other critics, by the centre of articulation - that is, whether the words on the page proceed directly from a character or from the author.

Only two accounts present themselves which seem to show a recognition of what is involved in James' important concept of narration. One of these, an article by Paul Bourget in the New Review for 1891, provides a clear example of the phrase "Point of View" three years earlier than Raleigh's use of it, but in some other ways is confusing. Bourget dislikes the objective method of Flaubert and Turgenev, which he sees as consisting in the author "effacing himself behind his hero, so that his own impression does not influence the reader's; his own

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1. "Richardson's Clarissa", xxxv n.s. (1869), 55-7.
2. Preface to The Golden Bowl, in The Art of the Novel, ed. R. P. Blackmur, London, 1935, pp. 327-9.

views are not mixed up with his narrative; he is like a watchmaker who has made a watch." Yet his description of the "subjective" method which he prefers reveals that this can include not only the familiar commentating novelist, like Stendhal and Balzac, but also, in apparent contradiction of what he has said before, the completely dramatised vantage-point, situated within one character. Perhaps by "effacing himself behind his hero" Bourget is referring not to the technical detail of a sunk Point of View, but to that imaginative failure of an author not sufficiently involved with his characters on which, at a profound level, even the completely dramatised and fixed Point of View depends. His disapproval of Tolstoi's avoidance of a central figure leads to a less ambiguous description of the point of technique which is our concern:

> "He does not reflect that those events would not be the subject of a narrative if they were not known, and that they can only be known by the intellect which classifies them in becoming acquainted with them. Hence is derived that great principle which the classical masters have never disregarded, the subordination of the characters, and the central position given to one of them, from whose point of view all the others are seen."[1]

The other article is not only one which contains a full exposition of this idea of Point of View as centre of awareness rather than speaking narrator, but is in many other respects one of the most remarkable of all late-Victorian pronouncements on the craft of fiction - and one that appears to have gone unnoticed. Vernon Lee's name has appeared often enough through the preceding chapters to show the range of her critical interest in the novel, but her "On Literary Construction", in the Contemporary for 1895,[2] is, much more fully than anything else she wrote, the work of one who has thought deeply about the specifically technical problems of the novelist's art. Many partial anticipations of Henry James' later criticism are obvious - and, as regards the various

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1. "The Science of Fiction," iv (1891), 306-7.
2. lxviii (1895), 404-19.

obscurities and contradictions in the article, it should be remembered that James himself never evolved a completely consistent theory of fiction, and that his own treatment of Point of View, "Scene", "Picture", and the like, involves many inconsistencies and Mandarin ambiguities which Lubbock and others clarified and even emended.[1]

For the first time, we find a critical essay which starts with the simple but vital proposition that the art of the novel consists in manipulating the reader's mind through the arrangement of words, in large or small units, and we must follow in some detail the stages by which Vernon Lee proceeds from this to what she recognises as the supreme question, that of angle of narration. Her original conception of the novel as a construction of devices is illustrated at once by an analysis of Stevenson's use of a small gruesome episode near the beginning of Catriona as a qualifying adjective on a large scale, to establish a certain state of mind in the reader rather than to advance the "events", and she goes on to take up that analogy with music which we have seen her make earlier.[2] A novel is written as a series of interacting themes in a symphony or opera, each description, or line of argument, or character, producing a planned and related effect in the reader. A diagram drawn to illustrate the progress of any novel's complex of thoughts, moods, groups of facts, etc., should fulfil the perfect, uninterrupted circle or ellipse which will alone master the reader's mind and lead him

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1. See, e.g., Sister K. Morrison, "James's and Lubbock's Differing Points of View", Nineteenth Century Fiction, xvi (1961), 245-55; and R. W. Short, "Some Critical Terms of Henry James", P.M.L.A., lxv (1950), 667-80.
   "Vernon Lee" (Violet Paget) and James met in the 'seventies or 'eighties, and enjoyed a fairly close acquaintance until the former caricatured James in a short story in 1892. For details of the relationship, see C. J. Weber, "Henry James and his Tiger-Cat", P.M.L.A., lxviii (1953), 672-87; and B. Gardner, "An Apology for Henry James's 'Tiger-Cat'", ibid., 688-95.
2. See above, p. 200.

unquestioningly, by the organic inevitability of its development, along the intended path.

Based on these fundamental principles of organic unity and the reader's responses as the target of this unity, Vernon Lee then examines the question of narration, by which that unity and that effect are to be achieved. She criticises the confusion that results from fragmented narration, as in the opening of Wuthering Heights, and also the mechanical facility of the old autobiographical method, which she sees as an easier, less mature way of imposing unity on characters and events than by arranging them as in real life and changing the point of view from one figure to the other. One method of third-person narrative is also strongly criticised, one which she holds to be most typical of the English three-volume novel, and which, as we have seen, is a great favourite of critics and reviewers - "the dodge of arranging the matter as much as possible as in a play, with narrative or analytic connecting links." This scenic method fails, basically, because the play, unlike the novel, is essentially non-naturalistic, and, in detail, because the self-assertion and introspection necessarily implied in characters who are brought before us frequently en scène alters, and often contradicts, the intended notion of them as conveyed to us by the narrative portions. "Scenes", as in the case of Tolstoi, should be ancillary and infrequent, always dependent on the primary motive power of "the force of accumulated action."[1]

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1. She shows some confusion here over the definition of "scene." In her praise of Tolstoi's economy, it clearly means simply the big scène à faire of passionate dialogue and critical action - "dramatic" in the idiomatic sense. Before that, she seems to apply the word, more originally, to include all those analyses of motive and feeling made by the author at the same time as the character concerned is "objectivised" and clearly present before us, as distinct from the more general "analytic connecting links" where the author himself predominates, and the individual character is not seen to think and feel. And this "scenic method", which she disparages, is plainly the method of Anna Karenina.

Other problems associated with the dramatic method are the working-in of background description by narrative, and, above all, the invention of unnecessary minor characters in order to elicit the main characters' qualities, and the proliferation of scenes to embody episodes purely for this purpose:

> "..meanwhile the real action stops; or, what is much worse, the real action is most unnaturally complicated by such side business, which is merely intended to give the reader information that he either need not have at all, or ought to get in some more direct way."

After further criticism of the devices of "retrospects" and "foreshortening" made necessary by the scenic method, and all destructive of the unity of effect she extols, Vernon Lee arrives at the crux of the matter, and elaborates the question of Point of View, in a passage which must be quoted at length to illustrate how fully the idea, usually regarded as James' brain-child, delivered and nursed by Lubbock, was developed by this critic twelve years before the Prefaces to the New York Edition of the former, and twenty-six before The Craft of Fiction:

> "There is yet another constructive question about the novel - the most important question of all - whose existence the lay mind probably does not even suspect, but which, I am sure, exercises more than any other the mind of any one who has attempted to write a novel; even as the layman, contemplating a picture, is apt never to guess how much thought has been given to determining the place where the spectator is supposed to see from, whether from above, below, from the right or the left, and in what perspective, consequently, the various painted figures are to appear. This supreme constructive question in the novel is exactly analogous to that question in painting; and in describing the choice by the painter of the point of view, I have described also that most subtle choice of the literary craftsman: choice of the point of view whence the personages and action of a novel are to be seen. For you can see a person, or an act, in one of several ways, and connected with several other persons or acts. You can see the person from nobody's point of view, or from the point of view of one of the other persons, or from the point of view of the analytical, judicious author. Thus, Casaubon may be seen from Dorothea's point of view, from his own

> point of view, from Ladislaw's point of view, or from the point of view of George Eliot; or he may be merely made to talk and act without any explanation of why he is so talking and acting, and that is what I call nobody's point of view."

The latter is usually the case in adventure stories, where the chief interest is in incident rather than psychology; but beyond that level, the question of Whose point of view? becomes unavoidable.

Although declining to express a preference for one point of view over another, Vernon Lee hints at where her own taste lies by investigating the psychological process involved in the creation of characters, and dividing novelists into the synthetic, who feel their characters intuitively, and mysteriously give "birth" to them, and the analytic, whose characters are reasoned, studied, "built up." The former (pace Paul Bourget, above) will prefer the shifting point of view of "straightforward narrative", which is really the complete temporary self-identification of the author with each personage, and the latter the fixed point of view, either his own, or that of one or two of his characters at most. An example of the former is again Tolstoi, "who in his two great novels really is each of the principal persons turn about; so much so, that at first one might almost think there was no point of view at all", and of the latter, George Eliot, Balzac, Flaubert, and Zola, "whose characters are not so much living and suffering and changing creatures, as illustrations of theories of life in general, or of the life of certain classes and temperaments." The implications of superiority are evident.

Her observation that Point of View seems to disappear in Tolstoi should, one is left to assume, emphasise "seems", since "nobody's point of view" was previously given as the characteristic of the mere adventure story. The effect she is attributing to Tolstoi is a tribute paid by, for the moment, a bemused reader, rather than the technical analyst who has so far been addressing us. What has disappeared in Tolstoi, according to her account of him, is really the obtrusive Point of View - a multiple

"view" has, indeed, been conveyed successfully, through the Protean activities of the author, but it is the scaffolding which provided the vantage-point that has disappeared. Her basic conception of what constitutes the device, then, is similar to James', who differs mainly in his preference for one particular application of it - its restriction to a small number of the characters.

The limitations and occasional obscurities of Vernon Lee's investigation are much less significant than its originality, its reasonableness, its calm insistence on certain technical issues which it recognizes as central to the art of novel-writing. The article, of course, is as unusual in its time as it is in Vernon Lee's own oeuvre, but her concern for artistic unity and above all for the novelist's best use of the means peculiarly at his disposal - for construction as a discovery of what precisely he "can afford and cannot afford to do" - might fairly be taken as a quintessence of all that was most scrupulous and most alert in Victorian novel-criticism. Her final plea is that which Percy Lubbock was also to make in palliation of the apparent analytical excesses of his method,[1] and which was the justification of those many critics who stood around her, assessing the nature and the quality of the novel in their time:

> "..the small fragments of literary or artistic faculty which we all are born with... can be increased and made more efficient only to a limited degree. What we really have in our power is either to waste them in cumbering the world with work which will give no one any pleasure, or to put them to the utmost profit in giving us the highest degree of delight from the work of those who are specially endowed. Let us learn what good writing is in order to become the best possible readers."

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1. The Craft of Fiction, 1921, pp. 22-5.

CONCLUSION.

There is, of course, no one theory of fiction in England between 1860 and 1900 any more than between 1900 and the present day. Nevertheless, out of the multiplicity and confusion of critical statements on the novel certain clear tendencies have emerged - certain self-advertised schools of thought, certain unconscious parallelisms and antinomies, violent reactions and quiet revolutions. No simple diagram was expected, and none has been discovered; but each individual contribution to novel-criticism which we have noted has found its place in the wider context of some trend of opinion, and a general map to one of the undiscovered areas of criticism has been the result.

Our survey of factors determining the status of the novel, in the first chapter, has been confirmed and amplified in the detailed theories that followed, and we have also seen how the uncertainty of that status affects the theory itself, providing, for example, a stimulus to accounts of the value-content of fiction and to demands for the novel's observance of the unity and technical proficiency common to the other arts. The genre's climb to moral respectability after the doubts of the first two decades, and to aesthetic and intellectual self-confidence after 1880, has been clearly marked out. But, as always, the tendency in the other direction must be allowed its place in our chart. The continuing suspicions and often unconscious derogation on various grounds obviously provide little basis in themselves for an insight into fiction, but they exercise a catalytic as well as an obstructive influence on critics and on novelists throughout our period, and, indeed, down to the present day.[1] The novel has obviously gained considerably in stature by 1900, but the image we have traced in the eyes of the literary public is far from steady.

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1. See, e.g., the complaints of Margaret Kennedy in The Outlaws on Parnassus, 1958.

The study of attitudes to Realism in fiction, apart from the intrinsic interest revealed in many of the criticisms, has pointed to the need for a major revaluation in the usual estimate of Victorian aesthetics. The age of Pre-Raphaelitism and the daguerreotype is generally held to have been characterised in its thought about the novel by a "passion for the exact imitation of nature",[1] and this has certainly been borne out as regards the naive mimetic theory which we have observed at all times, but especially in the first ten or fifteen years of our period. The significance of this realist tendency cannot be ignored: Trollope's acclamation, both in his own day and afterwards, as the most typical English novelist contains a large measure of truth, in spite of the libellous simplifications contained in all national symbols. But on the other hand, as should be evident alone from the wide opposition to Trollope, the empirical criteria which presided over the novel's birth in the eighteenth century did not go unchallenged by the various transcendental leanings of the nineteenth, and when a modern critic picks out those Victorian concepts of fiction based on - "Truthfulness with regard to facts and truthfulness with regard to character", and casts all others beyond the pale as being merely bogus and evanescent intrusions of Romanticism (akin to Conservatism and Fascism!), then a totally false and subjective picture is presented.[2] The simple belief in the "slice of life", and even those more developed theories of realism which took some account of the conventions by which it is produced, were opposed by strong tendencies, at times Neo-Classic in origin, at times Romantic, in favour of an artificial decorum of subject-matter, determined by the necessity of pleasing; a subjectivity of treatment, stressing the medium of the Artist's mind; and a penetration beyond the phenomenal to la belle

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1. G.S. Haight's phrase, in "George Eliot's Theory of Fiction", Victorian News Letter, x (1956), 2.
2. Frank O'Connor, The Mirror in the Roadway, London, 1957, p.10, and passim.

nature. "Realism", of course, is one of the most elusive of words, and attempts to define it usually lead into an epistemological morass. But most reasonable working-definitions of the criteria of realism as a literary method include such points as accuracy of detail based on observation and documentation, a concentration on the familiar rather than the exceptional, and as objective and un-ideal a view of life's data as the artist can achieve.[1] And Victorian criticism, we can now see, patently contains a body of theory which directly contradicts each of these three requirements. Realism, thus defined, is opposed quite overtly and articulately - for example, when it reaches its climax, in the abuse of the French and American schools in the 'eighties, and the eager acceptance of the ideality of Romance - but it can also be detected in disguise, as it were, in those many instances throughout the forty years where "real" or "natural" are clearly used to describe a fictional representation that is far from the norm of experience. The regular development and interplay of these two divergent opinions about the relation of the novel to life provide one of the most valuable dialectics of novel-criticism - and the notable failure of realism to predominate adds a new frontier to our chart of the time.

The critics' conceptions of morality in the novel are more unanimous and more limiting. The moral nature of the artist, his duty to avoid exciting our baser instincts, his guidance of our sympathies towards certain characters and away from others, his use of poetic justice, the general observance of "moral tone", the avoidance of pessimism and uncertainty as to mankind's destiny, are all consistently examined and prescribed, and that the novel must observe some kind of value-system is admitted by even the most radical. The restrictive effects of this ethical idealism are clearly realized, and are one of the most obvious modifications in fiction's "realistic" mirror-image. The strength of

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1. See, e.g., C.J. Becker, "Realism: an Essay in Definition", Mod. Lang. Quar., x (1949), 184-97.

opinion against obtrusive didacticism is unexpected and of considerable significance. It results in little detailed analysis of what constitutes obtrusiveness, and hence of how exactly art is to translate ethics, but even to-day there have been few attempts to explain how moral and philosophical values are to be articulated in strictly aesthetic terms, and the nature of a literary idea is still unclear.[1] The Victorian critic's hesitant advocacy of some kind of dramatization of attitude and belief is at least one step towards a more exact demarcation of the novel's operations, and eventually towards that recognition of the form's existential autonomy which is preliminary to any fruitful examination of its true relationship to the life it portrays.

Our investigation of the moral-philosophical aspects of novel-criticism, however, yields considerable disappointment at its lack of flexibility, and on the whole the results are less interesting than from our final enquiry, that into questions of technique. Even more than in the other sections, much of the interest in the latter has lain in the insight and originality of the individual criticisms, but general lines of development are equally visible and equally important. The balancing of "Character" against "Plot", and the reasons adduced for and against them at different times, cast light on the conception of each as one of the structural constituents of fiction, and also on the notions of realism, idealism, and even of morality which have already been studied. The mid-Victorian liking for "natural" character as being closer to reality than a patterned plot, though often thought to dominate the whole age, has in fact been seen to decline

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1. John Holloway's The Victorian Sage, 1953, contains some hints as to how a novelist's view of life is expressed in the elements of his work, and a valuable recent attempt has been Ian Gregor and Brian Nicholas' The Moral and the Story, 1962. See also Lionel Trilling, "The Meaning of a Literary Idea", The Liberal Imagination, London, 1951, pp. 281-303; and R. S. Crane, "Literature, Philosophy, and the History of Ideas", Mod. Phil., lii (1954), 73-83.

rapidly as novelists in the train of George Eliot proceed, by analysis, beyond the merely external "life" of normally observable phenomena which constitutes naturalness for most critics. The "series of gig lamps symmetrically arranged" is generally preferred to the "luminous halo" that was Virginia Woolf's aim,[1] and reactions to James and Howells once again provide a barometer to this sharp critical change. Throughout this debate, the exact connection of character and plot has remained tenuous, but another remarkable tendency of criticism, that in favour of the novel's structural unity, a unity like that of the organism or of music, is seen to be moving gradually towards a conception of the vital interrelation of all parts, including character and plot - and eventually towards the same recognition of autonomy that we have indicated above. Unity of this kind is one of the most unchallenged of all the principles we have examined: in spite of a few cavillers, its observance by Victorian critics is unremitting, and by itself is sufficient to rebut the charge that in their criticism they consistently betrayed the novel into the hands of anarchic life.

This partial awareness that the novel's existence is through its particular techniques rather than its being any part of the fabric of human life might be used, finally, to illustrate our earlier insistence that every part of this study supplements and qualifies another, like the relation, on a map, of sea to coast, mountain to plain, and of each detail to the whole panorama. Firstly, any theory of technique, or any analysis of a single technical device - such as Vernon Lee's of the Point of View - affects the status of fiction by indicating that its creation is not simply instinctual but as deliberate and as complex as the other arts. Then, it affects the theory of the novel's representation, since the fact that even one of its effects is demonstrably contrived, through a technique, suggests that all "realism" finds its origins in artifice, and points towards the conclusion that a proper

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1. The Common Reader, 1925, p. 189.

approach to fiction must inevitably, like Alice, pass beyond the looking-glass. And lastly, a theory of technique affects any concept of the novel's values, since it posits - though dimly - that these, too, do not belong purely to an "outside" world, the world of cognitive ideas and social judgments, but at least in part to the verbal structures of fiction which create and contain them.

Our purpose has been exploratory and cartographic - and some of the uses to which our map might be put on ventures of a different kind can only be hinted at here. The connections with the intellectual history of the age need not be stressed - with the Idealism of late-Victorian philosophy,[1] with the traditional counter-tendencies of Pragmatism, with the age's quest for Meliorism and its opposition to Scientific Materialism, with the rise of Socialism and the reaction of Georgianism, Mysticism, and so on. Perhaps more relevantly, not only does our data force a re-assessment of many of our ideas about Victorian novel-criticism, both the nature of its precepts and its scope, but it also suggests some modification in our approach to the Victorian novel itself, and even to the very nature of the genre. For example, the strong idealist elements of novel-theory may be a further clue to the validity of the part played in the novels of the period - and of all periods - by convention, Romance, and melodrama. Is it fair to attribute the Gothicism of Sensation novels, and its reflection in such major writers as George Eliot and Hardy, merely to some unsophisticated desire for cheap effect and easy escapism? Should the Happy Ending, the Coincidence, and the Ideal Hero be summarily dismissed, or should not some attempt be made to evaluate them against the non-naturalistic aims that were expressed by novelists and by their most literate readers? Much modern criticism, of course,

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1. A connection neatly exemplified in T.H. Green, who was in the van of the English Transcendentalist movement of the 'seventies, and who also attacked the realist tendencies of the novel in 1862 ("An Estimate of the Value and Influence of Works of Fiction in Modern Times", in Works, ed. R.L. Nettleship, 1885-8, iii, 20-45).

has investigated this mythic and symbolic content of Victorian fiction, but generally from its own contemporary, and somewhat narrow standpoint, and rarely with the Victorians' own ideas of convention in mind. Not only should such modern formalist treatments be enlarged to include the Victorian concept of realism-within-convention, but the other counter-belief of our own day, that the novel in general is strictly governed by particularity and verisimilitude,[1] needs a corresponding modification.

Again, the emphasis on the novel as a structure of values that must at the same time be artistically self-contained might caution us against too ready a dismissal of their works as mere pietism or unintegrated philosophising, and encourage a closer examination of how their values, and all novel-values, are embodied. And lastly, the contrast between, on the one hand, the Victorian novel's apparent diffuseness and personal digressiveness, and, on the other, the perpetual concern of its critics for unity and for the most effective angle of narration, should make us more suspicious of that rigid notion of unity which has led us to reject out of hand the Victorian novelist's expression, in form, of his more synoptic, encyclopaedic vision.

These clues are apart from the purpose of this study. But our indication of them here has been a gesture towards that truth which must emerge finally from any history of novel-criticism, just as it must suffuse the activity of the critics themselves: that the ultimate use of theoretical enquiry is to lead back to the work of art itself.

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1. As expressed, for example, by Ian Watt, The Rise of the Novel, 1957, pp. 9-34, 290-301; and by Mary McCarthy, "The Fact in Fiction", Partisan Rev., xxvii (1960), 438-58.

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(It is obviously impracticable to name here all the articles utilised in this study, even though they form the bulk of its material, and the names alone are given of those English periodicals in which they have been found. A highly selective list of other primary sources includes some of the period's more significant publications of novel-criticism in volume-form, although many of these contain or consist of articles referred to in footnotes in their first published form.)

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Academy
All the Year Round
Argosy
Athenaeum
Belgravia
Black and White
Blackwood's Mag.
Bookman
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British Weekly
Broadway
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Cornhill Mag.
Cosmopolis
Dublin Rev.
Dublin University Mag.
Eclectic Rev.
Edinburgh Rev.
Fortnightly Rev.
Fraser's Mag.
Gentleman's Mag.
Humanitarian
Leader

Literary World
Literature
London Quarterly Rev.
London Society
Longman's Mag.
Macmillan's Mag.
Magazine of Art
Murray's Mag.
National Rev.
New Monthly Mag.
New Quarterly Mag.
New Rev.
Nineteenth Century
North British Rev.
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