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STOREY, James Bryan, 1943-
THE POPULAR NOVEL AND CULTURE IN THE PROGRESSIVE
ERA.

The University of Oklahoma, Ph.D., 1971
History, modern

University Microfilms, A XEROX Company, Ann Arbor, Michigan

THE UNIVERSITY OF OKLAHOMA
GRADUATE COLLEGE

THE POPULAR NOVEL AND CULTURE IN THE PROGRESSIVE ERA

A DISSERTATION
SUBMITTED TO THE GRADUATE FACULTY
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the
degree of
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

BY
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Norman, Oklahoma
1971

THE POPULAR NOVEL AND CULTURE IN THE PROGRESSIVE ERA

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to express my appreciation to the members of the committee for their help and support in the writing of this dissertation. Each of the members of this committee played an important part in the process of my intellectual upbringing, and for this I am deeply indebted. Each of the members in some way helped to make my graduate study a most satisfying and worthwhile intellectual experience.

Any weaknesses in the dissertation, however, should not reflect on the members of the committee.

I would particularly like to express my most sincere gratitude to Dr. David Levy, whose unflagging encouragement, and whose ready availability for consultation and advice at all times far exceeded the requirements of his position.

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THE POPULAR NOVEL AND CULTURE IN THE PROGRESSIVE ERA

INTRODUCTION

I

Between 1900 and 1916 America underwent an important transition. The "watershed" of the 1890's had been passed, and America entered a new stage of economic and cultural development. The century which began with the sudden rise to power of Theodore Roosevelt was very different in many crucial respects from the one which had preceded it. Whereas McKinley had epitomized the President of the Gilded Age, Roosevelt was in every way the twentieth-century President.

In terms of government, the patterns of problem-solving established by Roosevelt and Wilson, and their advisors, have persisted in many areas until the present time. Approaches to government, and the concerns of government experienced a decided shift; and governmental changes were paralleled by changes in the economy and society. The system of economic gain associated with free-enterprise capitalism was firmly and irreversibly entrenched, and business organization and methods had assumed essentially their present form. In a great many ways, the Progressive era laid the groundwork for contemporary America.

In addition to its undisputable historical significance, there is yet another reason for the contemporary historian to look at the Progressive years. The era had much in common with contemporary America. Both can be described as transition periods, and certain striking similarities are apparent in the two. For instance, in both there was an urgent crisis involving industrialism and its side-effects. These periods witnessed widespread concern with the undesirable influences of the respective industrial systems, and saw private and public attention directed toward the problem of eliminating the worst abuses of the industrial-commercial system. Second, both periods witnessed--at least on the subcultural level--powerful tides of "back to the earth" sentiment. There was a tendency to react to commercialism and materialism by reasserting a new interest in nature and the wilderness.

In the Progressive and contemporary eras, the woman was entering a new frontier. In the first she fought for and won the right to vote, and in the second she began to demand the full measure of freedom and equality implied by her enfranchisement. And finally, in both periods there was a clearly perceptible feeling, although perhaps only on the subcultural level, that the generation of the ruling class had abandoned idealism, and it was incumbent upon the young to insure its reassertion.

Obviously, any one of these generalizations may apply with equal accuracy to other times in American history. But taken collectively, they seem to characterize the Progressive

era and the contemporary period with more than a small degree of integrity. The two periods did have much in common, and it is partly because of this that the Progressive era holds significance for the historian.

II

This study, then, is based on the presupposition that the Progressive era was one of the more important periods in American history in terms of the developments in government and culture. Further, the study assumes that economic and political studies of the period do not allow the student to fully see the culture of a society as a whole any more than purely aesthetic, art-oriented studies present the culture as a whole. Henry Nash Smith, in his article in American Quarterly entitled "Can American Studies Develop a Method?", pointed to this fact when he wrote:

The social sciences seem to me to assume too hastily that value is to be found only in social experience, in group behavior, in institutions, in man as an average member of society. Current literary criticism assumes, also too hastily, that value lies outside society, in works of art which exist on a plane remote from the Wasteland of our actual experience.¹

In giving his prescription for a method in American studies, then, Smith felt that an understanding of American culture would have to emerge from some combination of "art" and "society."

This study presupposes that "art" can be used to reveal something about "society." Literature, in this case popu-

¹American Quarterly, IX (Summer, 1957), 206.

lar literature, can be a means to understand the culture of American society at any given moment in history. Literature, one may tritely observe, is an outgrowth of society, a product not merely of individual minds, but of the total culture of a given place and time.² Although literature can only reveal a certain amount of reality, the bridges between literature and experience are not so unsure as to be useless.³ One scholar noted that "fiction is one of the best sources of social data, being impersonal and detached from actual life, yet deeply personal in its connotative and empathizing qualities."⁴

There is little argument, then, with the idea that literature is an excellent means by which to discover the self-image of a society. It reveals something of the hopes, fears, aspirations, and apprehensions of a society. The artist's conception and representation of various aspects of the American experience, can and does tell something about the state of mind of the society.

Particularly in the case of the popular novel is there an identifiable connection between literature and experience.

²Walter F. Taylor, The Economic Novel in America (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1942), p. 317. See also William Van O'Connor, "The Novel as a Social Document," American Quarterly, IV (Summer, 1952), 169-75; and Louis Rubin, Jr., "Tom Sawyer and the Use of Novels," American Quarterly, IX (Summer, 1957), 209-16.

³Joseph Blotner, The Modern American Political Novel (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1966), p. 7.

⁴Dorothy Yost Deegan, The Stereotype of the Single Woman in American Literature (New York: Columbia University Press, 1951), p. 7.

Richard and Beatrice Hofstadter, in an article on the novelist Winston Churchill, pointed out that "we can assume that a popular writer's appeal is a commentary on the needs or desires of his public."⁵ The popular novelist satisfies a basic need in the society, whereas the critical, or "major" writer functions on a level which is more imaginative and complex.⁶ Popular literature is sentimental and simplistic, and more directly reflects the popular mood at a specific historical moment. Popular authors are not concerned with high aesthetic expression; they write to suit a particular taste or mood of the reading public. The popular, or hack writer, is far more preoccupied with his market than is the "great" author--although it would be foolish to maintain that the great author is oblivious to economic considerations. In fact, it can be maintained that it is because most popular literature fails as true aesthetic expression that it is more inclined to be significant as self-revelation or as a social document.⁷

The concern of this study is less with breaking new ground than with presenting the Progressive era from a perspective hitherto unused. The perspective is both sub-literary and subcultural; but I would contend that the popular novel has considerable potential for providing insights into the Am-

⁵Richard and Beatrice Hofstadter, "Winston Churchill: A Study in the Popular Novel," American Quarterly, II (Spring, 1950), 13.

⁶Leo Marx, The Machine in the Garden (New York: Oxford University Press, 1964), p. 5.

⁷Hofstadters, "Churchill," p. 13.

erican experience as a whole.⁸ Richard and Beatrice Hofstadter, in their article on Churchill, commented that reading in the Progressive era had considerably more social importance than it now holds, and that "the popular novel was probably more important as a reflection of the public image."⁹

One of the leading students of popular literature was James D. Hart. Concerning the role of the popular novelist and reading tastes, Hart wrote:

The taste of the largest number of readers is shaped by contemporary pressures more than is the taste of the highly cultivated reader, who has a deeper background of aesthetic experience and knowledge to guide him. Books flourish when they answer a need and die when they do not. The needs of the greatest reading public are various; they include clarification of ideas already in circulation; emotional statement of feelings that people are prepared to accept; popularization of desirable information heretofore obscure; satisfying appeals to forms of entertainment currently considered amusing or exciting.¹⁰

Hart pointed out that the popular author is always one who expresses the popular mind and paraphrases what people consider their inner feelings. There is another nagging matter, however; the question of which came first, the popular book that shaped the public interest, or the public interest that shaped the the book's popularity?¹¹ But perhaps more important than an

⁸See Allen Haymen, "Literature and American Studies: Some New Directions," in Ray B. Browne, et. al., (eds.), New Voices in American Studies (West Lafayette, Ind.: Purdue University Studies, 1966), p. 11.

⁹Hofstadters, "Churchill," p. 13.

¹⁰James D. Hart, The Popular Book: A History of America's Literary Taste (New York: Oxford University Press, 1950), p. 285.

¹¹Ibid.

answer to this insoluble problem is the fact that the relationship between popular books and public interests is an intimate one.

There is a further problem which should be raised in regard to a study of the subculture of popular novels. Even the most popular books, those with huge numerical sales, seldom had sales which amounted to more than a tiny percentage of the American population. Hart provided an example of this: a book selling 100,000 copies in 1949 would have sold only .07 per cent of the population of America. And this was in a population which consumed some twenty-five million comic books, and about ten million pulp magazines in the same year.¹²

One may assume that the influence of the book which sold 100,000 copies in 1949 went beyond .07 per cent of the population. Many people might read one copy of the book, perhaps; but moreover, would not ideas expressed in best sellers be socially pervasive, and be equally reflective of the ideas of people who did not read the book as of those who did? This is the question that haunts every cultural historian--the question of representativeness. How many Americans actually shared a particular belief or attitude at a particular time, and how many did not? While there can be no final answer to this, the insolubility of the problem should not be a deterrent to the study of culture.

¹²Ibid., p. 286.

III

Recognizing the inherent problem of representativeness, this study shall attempt to shed some light on the popular imagination in the Progressive era. By studying a selected group of popular novels, rather than the works of only one author, it is hoped that a collective view of the society shall emerge. By extracting common denominators from the novels, this collective view shall presumably reveal more about the social concerns of Americans as a whole than could the works of one author. An attempt shall be made to determine what the dominant concerns of the reading public were, and to see how these concerns reflected the economic and cultural transformations at work in America between 1900 and 1916. Essentially, then, this study is based on the desire to obtain a collectivized view of the society--based on the perceptions of several witnesses--rather than on the perception of a single witness.

Questions shall be raised regarding the exact extent to which novels and the literary characters they portrayed mirrored the great issues of the Progressive era. The primary concern shall be to determine what a selected group of novels may reveal about the contemporary public self-image. Primarily through an analysis of the heroes and villains, an attempt shall be made to find what images dominated the mind of the society. Hence, the orientation of the study shall be toward culture rather than toward aesthetics and criticism.

Aesthetic considerations in the popular novels can be dismissed briefly. Of the approximately thirty writers to be

considered, only one, Edith Wharton, can be considered a major novelist. The House of Mirth, which became a best seller in 1905, was in every respect consistent with Wharton's other outstanding literary creations. Excluding this author, the remainder of the novelists never really approached aesthetic expression--although there was a broad spectrum of difference among them. Winston Churchill, a writer who attracted some attention as a serious novelist in his day, was the best of these. The worst was Edgar Rice Burroughs. Between these extremes there was a great deal of variation.¹³

The approximately sixty novels used in this study obviously represent a considerable degree of heterogeneity, both in subject matter and in the literary traditions adhered to. Literary realism, which had entered the critical literature long before 1900, was slow to gain entrance in the persistently sentimental, popular literature. Again, excluding Wharton, who was a consistent realist in the Jamesian tradition, the popular novelists often reflected the confluence of realism and romanticism. Particularly in the novels written between 1900 and 1905, there were strong romantic tendencies¹⁴--although romantic influences were pervasive in most of the authors. For ex-

¹³In reviewing a work on best sellers recently, a critic from Time made the quip that best seller lists have a Gresham's law of their own: "Bad verbal coinage drives out the good" (February 2, 1968, p. 82). For a humorous analysis of Burroughs' work, see E. H. Watson Larson, "Tarzan as Literature," Fortnightly Review, CXIII (December, 1923), 1035-45.

¹⁴The romantic impulse that appeared in the early part of the Progressive movement shall be discussed at greater length in Chapter III.

ample, Rex Beach, Stewart Edward White, and Churchill, were among many authors whose subjects were decidedly realistic; but none of them could avoid introducing romantic cross-currents into their plots, and the result was a sort of sentimental realism. One of Jack London's best sellers began with forceful realism, but by mid-point had dissolved into a love story.¹⁵ Virtually all of the popular authors, then, were ambivalent toward the two literary traditions. Even when they sought to deal with realistic subjects, they tended to do so in a romantic manner.

Despite the heterogeneity of style and subject, it is easy to unravel certain common denominators and themes from the literature. Directly or indirectly, most of the novels reflected something about the dominant economic transformations of the Progressive era. For example, over one third dealt with themes related to America's commercial-industrial system. Another one third were preoccupied with themes related to nature and the wilderness--which I intend to show was another type of literary reaction to industrialism and materialism. The remainder, in various ways, give insights into the types of heroes and heroines the readers demanded, and are equally revealing. The popular novelist's treatment of heroes, heroines, and villains, provides insights into the transformations in progress during the Progressive era.

This study shall attempt to analyse five aspects of the public's interest--those aspects that seemed to be domi-

¹⁵The Sea Wolf (1904).

nant concerns of readers. While the relationship between these five aspects of the culture are not closely cohesive, they all have one thing in common. In some way, each is an expression of the literary response to industrialism--and in this they are related. Each helps to reveal something about the total self-image of society in the period.

IV

Since it would be impossible to read even a large part of the popular novels produced between 1900 and 1916, some restriction had to be placed on the books which were used. Only the most popular novels were selected--that is, only books which could be identified as best sellers. But since best seller lists vary somewhat, a basis of selection of the list had to be arrived at.

The most important published source for book sales in this period was The Bookman. This periodical printed a monthly and an annual listing of best sellers, and every eight years published a compendium of the most popular novels with their estimated sales. Largely using The Bookman's figures, Alice Payne Hackett, in Fifty Years of Best Sellers, 1895-1945, listed the ten annual best sellers for each year.¹⁶ However, lists of annual best sellers are deceptive. For example, a book published in August, which had brisk sales for ten months, might not get placed as high as a book published in February, which had brisk sales for only five months. Thus, Hackett's

¹⁶(New York: R. R. Bowker, 1946).

lists are of limited usefulness.

In addition to Hackett's book, there are two serious studies of popular literature in America. These are James D. Hart's The Popular Book: A History of America's Literary Taste (1950), and Frank Luther Mott's Golden Multitudes: The Story of Best Sellers in the United States (1947).¹⁷ Both men used a variety of sources to compile their lists, and the two lists therefore diverge slightly in their assessment of which books were indeed the most popular. There is another reason for the minor divergences: Hart was interested in those books which had large sales immediately after publication, and Mott was concerned with overall best sellers. Mott's list reflected books which may have had a delayed-action popularity, or which had fair sales over a long period, rather than excellent sales immediately.

It was determined that the best approach would be to combine the lists of the two men for the years between 1900 and 1916. Thus, the compilation used for this study reflects both those books which had good immediate sales, as well as those which did well over the long run. In effect, the compilation sought to incorporate the best aspects of both lists.¹⁸

¹⁷(New York: Oxford University Press, 1950); and (New York: R. R. Bowker, 1947).

¹⁸The following articles by Irving H. Hart were found to be useful in gaining an insight into reading tastes: "The One Hundred Best Sellers of the Last Quarter Century," Publisher's Weekly, XCIX (January 29, 1921), 269-72; "Best Sellers in Fiction During the First Quarter of the Twentieth Century," Publisher's Weekly, CVII (February 14, 1925), 525-27; "The Most Popular Authors of Fiction Between 1900 and 1925," Publisher's

Certain exclusions had to be made before the final sample was drawn up. All works by non-American authors were omitted, as well as all non-fiction, all fiction of less than novel length, and those novels which were written for a juvenile audience alone.

Other than these stated exclusions, all books listed by Hart and Mott were read, and no effort was made to arrange the lists in a way that might have given prominence to novels of a certain type. The intention was to gain an insight into the concerns of a broad group of novels; thus, the final list comprised all adult, novel-length fiction written between 1900 and 1916 by American authors, which either Mott or Hart categorized as best sellers. It is my feeling that to have increased the size of the list two, three, or four times, would not have made any serious alteration in the results of the study; the size would merely have been greater. It is my belief that the approximately sixty novels used represent the best available cross-section of popular reading tastes.

Since novels cannot be considered in a vacuum, at appropriate places in the text I have attempted to supply relevant information about developments and movements. Wherever possible, key passages and phrases are used from the books so that something of the flavor of the literature shall emerge. The primary concern is to gain an insight into the patterns of thought and behavior that characterized America in the Pro-

Weekly, CVII (February 21, 1925), 619-22. See also Fred Lewis Pattee, The New American Literature (New York: The Century Company, 1930), pp. 214-44.

gressive era. In the course of the study, the novels shall become primary sources, and shall serve as windows through which it shall be possible to gain a new perspective on America between 1900 and 1916.

CHAPTER I

THE PERCEPTION OF CAPITALISM

I

By the 1880's, American capitalism had arrived at a critical juncture. In this decade, which Henry Steele Commager called the "watershed of American history," the vast American industrial plant had been essentially established. The system of rail transportation had assumed basically its final form. Free-enterprise capitalism had created a truly nationalized America; but it had also created a nation in which effective control often rested in the hands of the monied classes, and with the agency of their creation--the corporation.

The 1890's saw the passing of an old, agrarian era committed to principles inherited from the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.¹ In its place arose a predominately urban, industrialized nation. An awareness of the fact that America was undergoing an inexorable economic transformation appeared in the Populist revolt; in a way the Populist uprising marked the last serious appeal by a large segment of the American popu-

¹Henry Steele Commager, The American Mind (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1950), p. 41. For an insight into the national mood in the period, see the Hofstadter's "Winston Churchill: A Study in the Popular Novel," p. 14-15.

lation for a reversal of the direction of American economic development. John D. Hicks described the Populist movement as the "last phase of a long and perhaps losing struggle--the struggle to save agricultural America from the devouring jaws of industrial America."² More recently, Norman Pollack wrote that the movement, in attacking the character of industrial society, sought to alter America in a truly democratic direction.³

The real significance of the Populists lay in their failure. The economic movements the Populists hoped to arrest or redirect remained unchanged. The years from 1898 to 1905 saw industrial and financial combination reach unprecedented levels with the evolution of the holding company.⁴ The most spectacular examples of this final effort by businessmen to insure economic order and rationality were the Northern Securities Company, United States Steel, and International Harvester. But perhaps even more sinister to many American minds was the growth of finance capitalism. Unlike industrial capitalism, the effects of finance capitalism were seldom visible. Thus, the dealings of the financiers were more mysterious to the public mind, and so may have assumed more suspicious proportions than facts justified.⁵

²John D. Hicks, The Populist Revolt (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1931), chapter xv.

³Norman Pollack, The Populist Response to Industrial America (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1962), p. 143.

⁴George E. Mowry, The Era of Theodore Roosevelt (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1958), pp. 7-8.

⁵Robert H. Wiebe, The Search for Order (New York:

By 1900 the bases of material America were established. America was urbanized, society stratified. Values were quantified rather than qualified, and, to many observers, the preoccupation with material gain seemed complete. It was a civilization, wrote one critic, which "destroyed the very knowledge in us of all other natural forces except business."⁶ Perhaps no previous generation, except that of the 1840's and 1850's, was so beset by perplexing problems. In the minds of many Americans, materialism had raised an overwhelming "consciousness of questions unsolved, promises unfulfilled, and certainties lost."⁷

In the Progressive era, which began shortly before the turn of the century, Americans attempted to apply modern solutions to modern problems. Unlike the Populists, the Progressives did not seek to return to a simpler life.⁸ Their

Hill and Wang, 1967), pp. 24-27.

⁶John Jay Chapman, Practical Agitation (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1900), p. 56.

⁷Commager, American Mind, p. 49.

⁸It should be noted that the Progressive movement was made up of essentially two groups of men. They have been described as "Hamiltonians" and "Jeffersonians" by some scholars, and more recently as "modernists" and "traditionalists" by John Braeman. Braeman noted that the modernists, represented by Herbert Croly, Theodore Roosevelt, George W. Perkins, and Henry Stimson, recognized the inevitability and the necessity of combination in business, and wanted to meet it with a corresponding increase in the power of government over business. The traditionalists, represented by Robert LaFollette, William E. Borah, Louis Brandeis, and Gifford and Amos Pinchot, were in a minority, but were very vocal. They were the "trust busters," and were motivated by a pervasive fear of power; they tended to be retrogressive, and looked back to an older America. When I refer to the Progressives, then, it is to the modernist group,

significance lay in their recognition of the permanence of modern industry and its by-products, and in their efforts to come to grips with the new industrial order on its own terms.⁹

Such, in brief, was the milieu of the novelists of the period from 1900 to 1916. Not all of the novelists whose books became best sellers focused on economic matters, but many did; and virtually all of the novelists studied reacted to, or reflected in some way, the dominant economic concerns of the turn of the century. Over one third of the novels considered in this study were directly concerned, either wholly or partially, with themes of an economic nature, and this is enough to indicate a very strong interest in the subject on the part of the American reading public. It is the intention of this chapter to present a brief oversight of the literary treatment of capitalism and materialism in American society as it appeared to many people in the Progressive era, before turning in the second chapter to a discussion of the villain of the era, the businessman.

which was the one whose ideas were eventually instituted. See Braeman, "Seven Progressives," Business History Review, XXXV (Winter, 1961), 581-92.

⁹My interpretation of Progressivism is based primarily on the ideas of Samuel P. Hays, Conservation and the Gospel of Efficiency (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1959); Gabriel Kolko, The Triumph of Conservatism (New York: The Free Press, 1963); Robert H. Wiebe, The Search for Order; Otis L. Graham, Encore for Reform: The Old Progressives and the New Deal (New York: Oxford University Press, 1967); and John Braeman, "Seven Progressives."

II

No best selling author of the period dealt more extensively with American capitalism and its social effects than Winston Churchill. Perhaps no other author in the period better portrayed the intellectual problems presented to America by capitalism.¹⁰ The coming of the material age and the problems it would bring was presaged by Judge Whipple, in Churchill's The Crisis (1901). On his death-bed, shortly after the Civil War, Whipple said to another character:

In the days gone by our fathers worked for the good of the people, and they had no thought of gain. A time is coming when we shall need that blood and that bone in this republic. Wealth not yet dreamed of will flow out of this land, and the waters of it will rot all save the pure, and corrupt all save the uncorruptible. Half tried men will go down before that flood.¹¹

The feeling reflected in the above passage, that spiritual values were in decline, was a common theme in the novels under consideration. Harold Bell Wright felt much the same way in The Winning of Barbara Worth (1911), when he wrote that civilization was too busy quarreling over its newly acquired wealth to acknowledge its debt of honor to the men of spiritual values who had made that wealth possible.¹²

¹⁰The Hofstadters, "Winston Churchill," p. 13. The Hofstadters made the observation that Churchill's novels were "meant to be serious inquiries into the major problems of his day, not idle fantasies." See also Warren I. Titus, Winston Churchill (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1963), which is the best short work on Churchill.

¹¹Winston Churchill, The Crisis (New York: Macmillan, 1901), p. 463.

¹²Harold Bell Wright, The Winning of Barbara Worth (Chicago: Book Supply Company, 1911), p. 98.

Spiritual values seemed to have little place in the new America. In The Turmoil (1915), Booth Tarkington wrote: "There was a spirit abroad in the land, a spirit that moved in the depths of the American soil and labored there, sweating, till it stirred the surface, rove the mountains, and emerged, tangible and monstrous, the god of all American hearts--Bigness."¹³ Without raising aesthetic questions about Tarkington's writing, we can see in the following passage what must have been the mood of many thinking Americans:

We must grow! We must be big! We must be bigger! Bigness means money! And the thing began to happen; their longing became a mighty will. . . . Get the people here! Coax them here! Bribe them! Swindle them into coming if you must, but get them here! Any kind of people. . . . Kill the faultfinders! Scream and bellow to the most high: Bigness is patriotism and honor! Bigness is love and happiness!¹⁴

The hero of Churchill's The Inside of the Cup (1913), the Social Gospel minister, Reverend Hodder, commented on the new era when he complained: "Materialism, individualism! So absorbed were they in the pursuit of wealth, of distinction, so satisfied with the current ideology, so intent on surrounding themselves with beautiful things," that they had become oblivious to spiritual values.¹⁵

The first fruit, and the most graphic symbol, of the new industrial system was the city.¹⁶ The city in the best

¹³Booth Tarkington, The Turmoil (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1915), p. 12.

¹⁴Ibid., p. 3.

¹⁵Churchill, The Inside of the Cup (New York: Macmillan, 1913), p. 116.

¹⁶See Blanche Housman Gelfant, The American City Novel

selling novels of the Progressive era was usually a sinister place. In The Pit (1903), Laura Jadwin, although not fully able to comprehend its meaning, was sure that "there was something terrible about it."¹⁷ In this case the place was Chicago, but it could be taken as a symbol for any industrial American city. Laura thought that Chicago was the spirit of America. It was gigantic, "crude with the crudity of youth, disdainful rivalry; sane and healthy and vigorous; brutal in its ambitions, arrogant in the new found knowledge of its giant strength, prodigal in its wealth, infinite in its desires."¹⁸

Laura observed that the city had about it something insensate. "In a way it doesn't seem human. It's like a giant tidal-wave. It's all very well for the individual just so long as he can keep afloat, but once fallen, how horribly quick it would crush him, annihilate him . . . with such horrible indifference." She was unable to avoid the conclusion that there was something primordial about the city.¹⁹

In The Turmoil, the presence of urban America was felt continually--usually through the smoke and the industrial fallout that never seemed to entirely disappear. The city became a symbol in the novel. It was a symbol of materialism, and was

(Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1954); and Morton and Lucia White, The Intellectual Versus the City (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1962), particularly chapters vii and ix.

¹⁷ Frank Norris, The Pit (New York: Doubleday, Page and Company, 1903), p. 58.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Ibid.

revered by the money-makers who thrived on it. "Everywhere the people shouted the power, the size, the riches, and the growth of their city."²⁰

Bibbs Sheridan, the artistic and idealistic hero of The Turmoil, was appalled by what he perceived when he was finally forced to confront the urban jungle:

I hate it! And the city itself, the city that the money-shuffle has made, just look at it! Look at it in the winter. The snow's tried hard to make the ugliness bearable, but the ugliness is winning; it's making the snow hideous; the snow's getting dirty on top, and it's foul underneath with the dirt and disease of the unclean street. And the dirt and the ugliness and the rush and the noise aren't the worst of it; it's what they mean. . . . The outward things are . . . the expression of a spirit--the blind embryo of a spirit, not yet a soul--just greed.²¹

One night while Bibbs lay awake, he listened to the urban roar and imagined that he could hear the city speak. It seemed to him that the noise was like a titanic voice, discordant, hoarse, the voice of the god of bigness. The voice was summoning its servants:

You shall be blind slaves of mine, blind to everything but me, your master and driver! For your reward you shall gaze only on my ugliness. You shall toil all of your lives, and you shall go mad with love and worship of my ugliness! You shall perish still worshipping me, and your children shall perish knowing no other god.²²

Reverend Hodder, the minister-hero of The Inside of the Cup, had his first glimpse of the city as he approached on a train. The smoke was the first sign; it was an over-spreading element that produced a symbolic effect of gloom:

²⁰Tarkington, The Turmoil, p. 323.

²¹Ibid., p. 285.

²²Ibid., p. 345.

The huge pall seemed an emblem of the city's sorrows; or again, a cloud of her own making which shut her in from the sight of heaven. Absorbed in the mad contest for life, for money and pleasure and power, she felt no need to lift her eyes beyond the level of her material endeavors.²³

In Churchill's Coniston (1906), Cynthia Wetherell, the heroine, and Ephraim Prescott, a minor character, were given their first view of New York, and their reactions were unequivocal. Ephraim, a Civil War veteran who had been decorated for bravery, "thought that city crueller than war itself."²⁴ Cynthia, a sensitive observer, looked at the riches and the poverty of the city, and that night was struck by the fact that the city epitomized the worst cruelty of all--the cruelty of selfishness: "Every man going his own pace, seeking to gratify his own aims and desires, unconscious and unheedful of the want with which he rubs elbows. . . . The girl peopled the place with all kinds of evil doers, of whose sins she knew nothing--adventurers, charlatans, alert cormorants, who preyed on the unwary."²⁵

Materialism seemed to pervade the world of the city and society in general. In Churchill's A Modern Chronicle (1910), one character remarked that there was a "spirit of selfishness and vulgarity in . . . modern New York which appears to be catching, like a disease. The worship of finan-

²³ Churchill, The Inside of the Cup, p. 24.

²⁴ Churchill, Coniston (New York: Macmillan, 1906), p. 253.

²⁵ Ibid., p. 252.

cial success seems to be in everybody's blood."²⁶ Reverend Hodder, in The Inside of the Cup, came to a similar realization when he took up life in the city. While he could ignore many of the realities at first, he was eventually forced to indict the whole system of economic gain associated with the city and urban life. He told a friend: "I began to see more and more clearly that our modern civilization is at fault to perceive how completely it is conducted on the materialistic theory of the survival of the fittest rather than on the brotherhood of man."²⁷

Later in the same novel, Eldon Parr, the businessman-villain, and one of the men who had made the city what it was, confirmed Hodder's judgments when he suggested that life was a contest, it was war. "Business is war, commerce is war, both among nations and individuals. You cannot get around it. If a man does not exterminate his rivals, they will exterminate him."²⁸

The metaphor of battle used by Parr was also present in The Pit. Laura Jadwin, on returning home from the opera late one night, viewed the financial district following a day in which a serious effort was made by a speculator to corner the wheat market. As she looked at the scene of fully-lighted, bustling financial houses, she thought:

²⁶ Churchill, A Modern Chronicle (New York: Macmillan, 1910), p. 110.

²⁷ Churchill, The Inside of the Cup, p. 322.

²⁸ Ibid., p. 343.

Yes, here was drama in deadly earnest--drama and tragedy and death, and the jar of mortal fighting. . . . It was dreadful, this labor through the night. It had all the significance of field hospitals after the battle--hospitals and the tents of commanding generals. The wounds of the day were being bound up, and the dead were being counted, while, shut in their headquarters, the captains and the commanders drew their plans for the grapple of armies that was to recommence with daylight.²⁹

Laura's husband, Curtis Jadwin, a speculator, was the central character in The Pit. His tragic flaw lay in an inability to resist the lure of easy riches; but even he was aware of the awesome aspects, and the potential for destruction present in the materialistic, commercial life he lived. Looking at the Board of Trade Building, the center of gambling in grain futures, he imagined it to be

a great whirlpool, a pit of roaring waters, spun and thundered, sucking the life tides of the city, sucking them in as the mouth of some tremendous cloaca, the maw of some colossal sewer; then vomiting them forth again, spewing them up and out, only to catch them in return eddy and suck them in afresh.³⁰

Such was the power of this potentially destructive and terrible human creation, the Board of Trade. It is easy to see here a symbol of the capitalist system in general.

The materialistic impulse was even present in the American wilderness. In Rex Beach's The Silver Horde (1909), a book about the early exploitation of Alaska, Cherry Malotte, the heroine, made the observation that "when a man fights for money, just plain, sordid money, he loses all sense of honor, chivalry, and decency, he employs any means that come handy.

²⁹Norris, The Pit, p. 36.

³⁰Ibid., p. 73.

There is no real code of financial morality, and battle for dollars is the bitterest of all contests."³¹

The strongest indictment of the profit-minded economy in the literature under consideration came from Upton Sinclair, in The Jungle (1905). The Jungle was the only best seller in the period that was proletarian in nature--that is, which dealt with the life and economic problems of the laboring classes. Sinclair's intent was polemical, hence the bitterness of the novel was extreme. He wrote of Durham's, one of the three meat processing companies which dominated "Packingtown":

Here was Durham's . . . owned by a man who was trying to make as much money out of it as he could and did not care in the least how he did it; and underneath him, ranged in ranks and grades like an army, were managers and superintendents and foremen, each one driving the man next beneath him and trying to squeeze out of him as much work as possible. And all the men of the same rank were pitted against each other; the accounts of each were kept separately, and every man lived in terror of losing his job if another man made a better record than he. So from top to bottom the place was simply a seething cauldron of jealousies and hatreds; there was no loyalty or decency anywhere about it, there was no place in it where a man counted for anything against a dollar. And worse than there being no decency, there was not even any honesty. The reason for that? Who could say. It must have been old Durham in the beginning; it was a heritage which the self-made merchant had left his son, along with his millions.³²

Here indeed was the profit motive gone mad; and the above passage was a commentary on the whole capitalist system rather than merely a commentary on only one facet of it.

³¹Rex Beach, The Silver Horde (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1908), p. 29.

³²Upton Sinclair, The Jungle (New York: New American Library, 1960), p. 63.

The perceptive Bibbs Sheridan was never able to fully understand the profit motive and the way of life it had created: "People down-town are hurrying to trains, hanging to straps in trolley-cars, weltering every day to get home and feed and sleep so they can get down-town tomorrow. And yet there isn't anything down there worth getting to."³³

In his notebook, Bibbs summed up his view of the economic system his father had helped to create. Comparing the prosperous worker and the money taker to the rooster, he wrote:

They are born, they grub, they love; they grub and love grubbing; they grub and die. Neither knows beauty, and neither knows knowledge. And after all, when Midas dies and the rooster dies, there is one thing that Midas had and the rooster has not. Midas had the excitement of accumulating what he has grubbed, and that has been his life and his god. He cannot take that god with him when he dies. I wonder if the worthy gods are those we can take with us. Midas must teach all to be Midas; the young must be raised in his religion.³⁴

This then, was the portrayal in the best sellers of American capitalism and its side-effects. It was often cruel, and often harsh; it thrived on greed, and exalted selfishness. As perceived by these authors, American capitalism and the wealth it generated seemed indeed to corrupt all save the uncorruptible, to rot all save the pure. While the portrayal was often a grim one, it will later become apparent that the economic system could have redeeming aspects. It remains now to see what effects the economic system had on the men who participated in and shaped it.

³³Tarkington, Turmoil, p. 165.

³⁴Ibid., p. 190.

CHAPTER II

THE BUSINESSMAN IN THE POPULAR IMAGINATION

I

At the turn of the century, then, America was entering a new phase of her economic and cultural development. Industry and commerce occupied a preeminent place in society and in the public mind, and there was clear evidence that many Americans despaired of the materialistic direction which the nation seemed to be taking. Consciously or unconsciously, popular novelists reflected this despair in various ways; and most commonly they did so in their portrayal of the American man-of-business--the person most directly responsible for charting the course of American economic development.

Businessmen had been the subject of popular novelists long before 1900, but never on the scale reached in the Progressive era.¹ In this period, the most dominant character type in the popular novel was the businessman. No single character appeared more frequently in the novels, and significantly, no single group was subjected to as much villification. There

¹See Walter Taylor, The Economic Novel in America; and Edward E. Cassady, "The Businessman in the American Novel, 1865-;900," Unpublished Doctoral Dissertation, Department of History, University of California, Berkeley, 1939.

were a few good businessmen represented in the novels, as I shall show in the next chapter; but on the whole, when a businessman appeared it was in the role of a villain. Generally, he was revealed as a moral scoundrel who would crush everything and everyone in his path that seemed to threaten his self-interest.

The treatment of the businessman in the popular novels is not significant to the cultural historian because of any factual information about businessmen and their methods that it may provide.² The true artist is not necessarily concerned with adherence to reality; in fact, as one scholar observed, "the better he is as an artist, the more likely it is that his imagination will have greatly transformed what he has taken from commonplace data and events."³ In an article entitled "Fiction and the Businessman," Van R. Halsey noted that novels about businessmen are largely divorced from the reality of the streets.⁴ Writers knew little about the biographical

²For analyses of the historical businessman, the following studies should be consulted: William Miller, Men in Business (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1952); Mabel Newcomer, The Big Business Executive (New York: Columbia University Press, 1955); William Miller, "American Historians and the Business Elite," Journal of Economic History, IX (November, 1949), 184-208; Frank W. Taussig and C. S. Jordan, American Business Leaders (New York: Macmillan, 1932); James Abegglen, Big Business Leaders in America (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1955); John D. Glover, The Attack on Business (Boston: Harvard Graduate School of Business Administration, 1954); one might also consult Kenneth S. Lynn, "Authors in Search of the Businessman," Harvard Business Review, XXXIV (September-October, 1956), 116-24.

³William Van O'Connor, "The Novel as a Social Document," p. 169.

⁴American Quarterly, XI (Fall, 1957), 393.

data of American businessmen, or of the actual mechanical details of business and business ideology.

Added to this ignorance of fact is the inherent conflict between the artist, literary or otherwise, and the businessman. The artist places high value on aesthetic and emotional experiences, whereas the businessman is forced to concern himself almost entirely with the practical, material aspects of life. Halsey observed that "this difference puts the artist in fundamental opposition to the business ideology. He dislikes and is essentially hostile to things that businessmen stand for."⁵

While it was always present in modern literature, the Progressive era saw the conflict between the novelist and the businessman reach crisis proportions. The widespread public concern with corporate practices, and the pervasive feeling that big business was guilty of serious misdoing, all served to intensify the inherent, preexisting antagonisms authors felt toward men of business. Criticism of the businessman became especially harsh, and perhaps more irrational at this time in American history.

In attempting to accumulate information about the businessman in the Progressive era, it must be understood that the novelist was a hostile witness. He had a dearth of facts, and a concomitant unfavorable disposition. But the overall impression of the witness is historically useful. While the perceptions may be based on erroneous assumptions, they do reveal

⁵Ibid., p. 397.

something of the mood and the fears which popular novelists felt toward this subject. Thus, the overall impression which is conveyed regarding the businessman is of value to the historian. The novelist portrayed businessmen as he perceived them, and there is no doubt that this perception, erroneous or otherwise, was shared by a large part of the reading public.

The reading public determined the popularity of the novels under consideration, and it is safe to assume that the novelists generally, and specifically in their treatment of the businessman, were striking responsive chords. It seems likely that the fears and the apprehensions expressed by the novelists were fears and apprehensions shared by their readers. Thus, a study of the literary portrayal of the businessman in the most popular novels of the period reveals more than merely the state of mind of one particular author.

Since he assumed great importance in the popular literature of the Progressive era, and since he seemed to represent so much that was wrong with America, an attempt will be made to draw a composite picture of the businessman as he appeared in the popular novels of the period. In so doing, a view will emerge of the popular perception of commerce and industry in this important phase of American history.

II

Within the fairly broad category of "businessmen," there was considerable diversity. Many occupations were represented, and the businessmen varied in importance of their position and the extent of their wealth, as well as in their

origins. A superficial sample of the types of their occupations might include James Sheridan, an industrialist, in The Turmoil; Augustus Flint, a railroad magnate, in Mr. Crewe's Career (1908); Curtis Jadwin, in The Pit, a wheat speculator; Willis Marsh, a salmon packing tycoon, in The Silver Horde; and Nelson Langmaid, in The Inside of the Cup, who was a corporate lawyer.

Some of the businessmen were self-made men, others were born to wealth.⁶ Some were wealthy, well-established captains of industry and finance, such as James Greenfield, in The Winning of Barbara Worth, who was a financier; others such as Howard Spence, in A Modern Chronicle, were emerging tycoons, who at the time of the action of the novels were aspiring to captaincy of industry or finance.

Despite this variety, however, there were a surprising number of shared characteristics between the businessmen who appeared in the fiction. For instance, all of the businessmen portrayed were ruthless and unscrupulous. Ephalet Hooper, in The Crisis, had no qualms about profiteering during the Civil War by selling worthless supplies to both Union and Confederate armies. That Hooper was devoid of scruples was clear; he openly admitted his willingness to peddle his worthless supplies to any side which was capable of paying

⁶ For example, James Sheridan, in The Turmoil, Augustus Flint, in Mr. Crewe's Career, Ephalet Hooper, in The Crisis, and Jethro Bass, in Coniston, were all self-made men. The men born to wealth included Curtis Jadwin, in The Pit, Howard Quarrier, in The Fighting Chance, Isaac Worthington, in Coniston, and Henry Guion, in The Street Called Straight.

for them. He told an associate: "I don't cal'late to take a great deal of stock in the military. But business is business. And a man's got to keep his eye on what's moving."⁷

The degree of unscrupulousness varied somewhat. A moderate sort of immorality was found in Carleton P. Baker, in Beach's The Rules of the Game (1910). Baker was a water-power monopolist, who calmly resorted to fraudulent methods of acquiring water-rights when legal means were closed to him. When an investigation was made into Baker's practices, the monopolist attempted to have the key witness against him removed permanently. An even more extreme sort of ruthlessness was represented by Willis Marsh, in The Silver Horde. Marsh was capable of going to any lengths to eliminate companies competing with his salmon fishing operations.⁸ By technically legal, but more usually by unethical and illegal means, he managed to gain control of sixty-five percent of the salmon producing companies of the Pacific coast, although he had to kill at least one man to gain this domination.⁹

One of the victims of Marsh's ruthlessness was Emerson Boyd, the hero of The Silver Horde. When Boyd told one of Marsh's backers of the schemes which Marsh had worked against

⁷ Churchill, The Crisis, p. 273.

⁸ Marsh was only one of several monopolists in the literature. The problem of big-business monopoly was perhaps the single most important public issue between 1900 and 1916. The literature on the subject is very extensive, but an introduction to the problem can be found in Mowry, Era of Theodore Roosevelt, p. 54, et passim.

⁹ Beach, Silver Horde, pp. 28. 155.

him, and asked the backer to persuade Marsh to desist, the man gave a further insight into the question of business morality. He told Boyd: "Well sir! What you have told me confirms my judgment that Willis Marsh is the right man in the right place. Mr. Marsh is pursuing a definite policy laid down by his board of directors. You have shown me that he has done his work well."¹⁰

In The Calling of Dan Matthews (1909), Judge Strong was equally ruthless. He cheated a poor widow and her son by accepting mortgage payments from them long after the mortgage had been paid in full in a transaction of which they knew nothing. Further, after accepting double payment on the debt, Strong sought to summarily evict the two unfortunate persons on the grounds that they were in arrears.¹¹ Equally depraved was Howard Quarrier, the financier in The Fighting Chance (1906). For an imagined wrong done him by Stephen Seward, the novel's hero, Quarrier resolved to destroy Seward socially and financially. He had Seward removed from two prestigious men's clubs, and then set out to destroy, by frontal attack and by treachery, the Amalgamated Electric, a company in which Seward had staked his fortune.

James Garfield, in The Winning of Barbara Worth, was one of a number of these businessmen who involved themselves in schemes that posed potential financial or other injury to

¹⁰Ibid., p. 355.

¹¹Harold Bell Wright, The Calling of Dan Matthews (Chicago: Book Supply Company, 1909), p. 325.

large groups of persons. Greenfield, as the financier of a desert reclamation scheme in California, approved the construction of an unsafe irrigation system that was potentially disastrous to the lives and property of hundreds of people. Greenfield was aware of the possibilities, but decided that company profits were paramount to the lives and property of the settlers. Like other unsympathetic businessmen, Greenfield placed private profit above the general welfare.

Other businessmen exhibited similar attitudes toward the welfare of the public where their schemes for financial gain were concerned. Eldon Parr, in The Inside of the Cup, managed to rob the public of money in an entirely law-proof manner. He was correctly accused by the hero of being guilty of "betraying [the stockholders'] trust, withholding information in order to profit thereby, buying and selling stock secretly; stock watering, selling to the public diluted values, --all kinds of iniquity and abuse of power. . . ." ¹²

Howard Spence, in A Modern Chronicle, engaged in a very similar scheme by which the public was "legally" robbed of hard-earned savings. When he told his wife the details of the financial swindle, and she responded with the comment that many honest people could get cheated, Spence replied: "Some one get cheated! Everyone gets cheated, as you call it, if they havn't enough sense to know what their property's worth, and how to use it to the best advantage. It's a case of the sur-

¹²Churchill, Inside of the Cup, p. 497.

vival of the fittest."¹³

In The Pit, Curtis Jadwin was equally oblivious to the human suffering brought about by his attempt to corner the wheat market. By almost single-handedly promoting a bull market, and so inflating grain prices, he managed to raise the price of American wheat to a level at which European peasants were unable to afford bread. Characteristically, he ignored the charge that widespread starvation in Europe had resulted from his speculation: "It's a lie! Of course it's a lie. Good God, if I were to believe every damned story the papers print about me I'd go insane."¹⁴

Every one of the unsympathetic businessmen in the literature was guilty of at least one major act of ruthlessness; but there were other similarities. None of the businessmen were even vaguely aware that what they were doing in the name of "good business" was immoral. They all avoided introspection, and in this respect were like Augustus Flint, who "was not a man given to the psychological amusement of self-examination."¹⁵ When charged with serious wrong-doing, as they all were at some point, they defended their actions on the ground of "good business," or on the grounds of Social Darwinism.

Eldon Parr justified his business activities, and his immorality on the latter ground. He told his daughter: "Life

¹³Churchill, Modern Chronicle, p. 354.

¹⁴Norris, The Pit, p. 320.

¹⁵Churchill, Mr. Crewe's Career (New York: Macmillan, 1908), p. 304.

is a contest, it is war. It always has been, and always will be. Business is war, both among nations and individuals. You cannot get around it. If a man does not exterminate his rivals, they will exterminate him."¹⁶ When questioned about the large number of honest persons he had destroyed in his effort to establish his salmon-packing monopoly, Willis Marsh also used the Darwinist argument to justify his practices: "Business, in the last analysis, is merely a survival of the fittest; only the strong and merciless hold their own."¹⁷

James Sheridan pleaded the same type of self-justification when he told his son: "I tell you there never was such a time before; there never was such opportunity. The sluggard is despoiled while he sleeps. . . . If a man lays down they'll eat him before he wakes."¹⁸

In Churchill's Mr. Crewe's Career, Augustus Flint was the powerful president of the Northeastern railroads, the corporation which controlled the state government.¹⁹ Initially,

¹⁶ Churchill, Inside of the Cup, p. 343.

¹⁷ Beach, Silver Horde, p. 156.

¹⁸ Tarkington, The Turmoil, p. 210.

¹⁹ One of the most pressing concerns of the Progressive era was the matter of corporate control of state and local government. The period saw numerous attempts, many successful, by reformers, to break the hold which corporations exerted over government. The best known of these was made by Robert LaFollette in Wisconsin; by Joseph Folk in Missouri, who became governor after his successful prosecution of political corruption cases in St. Louis; in New York, where Charles Evans Hughes represented the state in the insurance company investigations and later was elected governor; and in California, where Hiram Johnson rose from prosecutor in the trial of Boss Ruff in San Francisco to the governorship of the state. The literature on the subject of corporate corruption of govern-

he denied that his railroad "meddled unduly" in politics; but later he modified this denial when he told his daughter:

How long do you think a railroad would pay dividends if it did not adopt some means of defending itself from the blackmail politicians of the state legislatures? The railroads of which I have the honor to be president pay a heavy tax in this state. We would pay a much heavier one if we didn't take precautions to protect ourselves.²⁰

Like the other businessmen, Flint had no serious doubts about his own moral rectitude. When he learned that reform sentiment was growing for the elimination of the abuses of the railroad, he dismissed the reformers as a "lot of disappointed people who have made failures of their lives."²¹

Flint's chief counsel, Hilary Vane, echoed the same sort of self-justification.²² Vane, the man directly respon-

ment is vast, but a convenient introduction to the problem is available in Richard Hofstadter, The Age of Reform (New York: Knopf, 1955), pp. 227-256; and in Mowry, Era of Theodore Roosevelt, pp. 69-84.

In the popular fiction there were very clear reflections of this problem. It appeared in no less than eight of the novels used in this study. In addition to Mr. Crewe's Career, it was present as an important theme in Churchill's Coniston, in Chambers's The Fighting Chance, in Harrison's Queed, in White's The Rules of the Game, and in Upton Sinclair's The Jungle.

²⁰ Churchill, Crewe's Career, p. 43.

²¹ Ibid., p. 306.

²² For a good insight into the position of the corporation lawyer in the Progressive era, see Hofstadter, Age of Reform, pp. 156-64. Hofstadter discussed the crisis in self-respect brought about by the conflict between the traditional image of legal practice inherited from an earlier age of independent professionalism, and the realities of modern corporation practice. It was precisely this crisis in which Hilary Van found himself at the end of Crewe's Career.

There was one other corporation lawyer in the novels studied. Nelson Langmaid, in The Inside of the Cup, was retained by Eldon Parr for the purpose of drawing up law-proof financial swindles--something at which he was quite adept. In-

sible to the corporation for overseeing all phases of the state government, defended his activities on the ground that railroad control of the legislature was in the best interest of the whole state. He was partly sincere, and partly engaging in casuistry when he told his son:

The Republican party realizes that the Northeastern is most vitally connected with the material interests of this state; that the prosperity of the road means the prosperity of the state. And the leaders of the party protect the road from vindictive assaults on it . . . by scatter-brains and agitators. . . .²³

In addition to his ruthlessness and his tendency to mouth self-justifications, the typical businessman had a pervasive love of power. Not satisfied with wealth alone, he often strove to extend his domination into the area of politics and government. The best representatives of this characteristic love of power were Jethro Bass, and Isaac D. Worthington, two of the principal characters in Churchill's Coniston.

Bass was a likable, self-effacing New Englander who had established himself as the Boss of the state in the time of Jacksonian Democracy. He was a rustic Napoleon who had acquired political power through the devious use of mortgages. While Bass himself never spoke of his political organization or of his personal power, the evidence of these were apparent everywhere. Churchill gave this description of Bass's poli-

terestingly enough, one of the heroes to be considered later was offered \$100,000 to enter corporate practice, but he refused to leave his small, independent, and most important, legitimate practice in St. Louis.

²³ Churchill, Crewe's Career, pp. 187-88.

tical machine:

Never since the days of Pompadour and Du Barry, until modern American politics were invented, has a state been ruled from such a place as Number 7 in the Pelican House --familiarily known as the Throne Room. In this historic cabinet there were five chairs, a marble-topped table, a pitcher of iced water, a bureau, a box of cigars and a Bible, a chandalier with all the jets burning, and a bed, whereon sat such dignitaries as obtained an audience,-- railroad presidents, governors, ex-governors and prospective governors, the Speaker, the President of the Senate, . . . mighty chiefs from the North country, and lieutenants from other parts of the state.²⁴

Bass repelled several attempts to deprive him of power, then gained some measure of redemption when he voluntarily relinquished his power, after forty years of service as Boss, in order to insure the happiness of his beloved foster-daughter.²⁵ Bass's generosity, likability, and loyalty to his friends, however, did not override the important consideration that he had seriously undermined the republican process through his seizure of power.

Isaac D. Worthington was far more openly preoccupied with attaining power, and his ambitions were far more sordid than those of Bass. Worthington sought political power to insure a virtual monopoly for his railroad network. He was power-hungry, and particularly interested in building a dynasty:

²⁴Churchill, Coniston, p. 162.

²⁵As was the case in all of Churchill's novels, at least one involved love affair was woven into the plot. In Coniston, the love-affair was between Cynthia Wetherell, Bass's foster-daughter, and Bob Worthington, the son of Isaac D. Worthington. In order to gain Isaac's approval for the marriage of Cynthia and Bob, Bass made a deal with Worthington whereby he surrendered his political power to Worthington, and the latter in return gave a written statement that he would approve the marriage.

Mr. Worthington meant that his son should eventually own the state itself, for he saw that the man who controlled the highways of a state could snap his fingers at governor and council and legislature and judiciary; could, indeed, do more--could own them even more completely than Jethro Bass now owned them, and without effort.²⁶

Churchill gave an indication of what Worthington's acquisition of power portended for the state when one character remarked: "Isaac D. Worthington has very little heart or soul or mercy himself; but the corporation which he means to set up will have none at all. It will grind the people and debase them and clog their progress a hundred times more than Jethro Bass has done."²⁷

Other businessmen shared Worthington's love of power. Augustus Flint "was far from being a bad man, but he worshipped power, and his motto was the survival of the fittest."²⁸ Like Worthington, Flint sought power to insure the immunity of his railroad from governmental attack or regulation. Ephalet Hooper, on the other hand, the unattractive Yankee in The Crisis, sought power for purely personal ends. Through his underhanded money-making schemes--only one of which was profiteering in worthless army supplies--he hoped to to acquire enough power to win full acceptance in St. Louis society. Wealth and power as means to social acceptance were uppermost in his mind when he said: "Someday I'll give a party. And hark to me when I tell you that there here aristocrats'll be glad enough to

²⁶Churchill, Coniston, pp. 345-6.

²⁷Ibid., p. 356.

²⁸Churchill, Crewe's Career, p. 377.

get invitations."²⁹ Howard Quarrier, in The Fighting Chance, revealed his insidious lust for power in his war of high-finance with Beverley Plank, a good capitalist, and one of the two heroes of the novel.³⁰ Virtually all of the businessmen were preoccupied with possessing power, and with extending their respective spheres of domination.

One striking aspect of the literary tycoon was that he nearly always clothed himself in a cloak of sanctimoniousness. His assumed hypocritical holiness generally took the form of a much-flaunted church allegiance. In The Calling of Dan Matthews, the ruthless Judge Strong was an elder in the church, and was in fact the effective ruler of the members. When confronted with an exposure of his wrong-doing by the hero, he reminded Matthews of his position in the church; he said that "he had been a faithful member, and an elder in Memorial Church too long to be harmed by the charges of a stranger."³¹ True to his word, his church allegiance did save him, and did allow him to pursue his life of hypocrisy without interruption. Of Strong, Wright said: "Judge Strong has gathered to himself additional glory and honor by his continued

²⁹Churchill, The Crisis, p. 112.

³⁰The war of high-finance described by Chambers in The Fighting Chance was in some respects reminiscent of the financial wars of the late nineteenth century, such as the famous "Fight for Erie," waged between Vanderbilt on the one side, and Drew, Gould, and Fisk on the other. The fight was described in Matthew Josephson's The Robber Barons (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, Inc., 1934), chapter vi.

³¹Wright, Dan Matthews, p. 325.

activity and prominence in Memorial Church and his denomination, together with his contributions to the various funds for state and national work."³²

Eldon Parr was almost identical to Strong in his sanctimoniousness. As rector, and as ruling head of the church, the totally ruthless Parr was able to pursue his business practices while maintaining an aura of religiosity. According to one victim of Parr's financial treachery, "he gets square with God by his churches and charities."³³ The financier regarded himself as a model adherent of Christian orthodoxy, and perceived no discrepancy between his business activities and his Christian theories.

Ephalet Hooper went to great lengths to establish himself as a good church-man. He was the superintendent of his Sunday school, and was regarded by everyone (but those who did business with him) as a "pillar of the church."³⁴ His whole life-style reflected a Puritan piety that belied his immoral business dealings. In fact, it was precisely his life-style which made his villainy more striking:

As for Hooper, increase of salary had not changed him. He still lived in the same humble way, in a single room in Miss Crane's boarding-house, and he paid very little more for board than he had that first week in which he had swept out Colonel Carvel's store. He was a superintendent now, of Mr. Davitt's Sunday school, and a church officer. At night, when he came home from business, he would read the widow's evening paper, and the

³² Ibid., p. 355.

³³ Churchill, Inside of the Cup, p. 153.

³⁴ Churchill, The Crisis, p. 346.

Colonel's morning paper at the office. Of true Puritan abstemiousness, his only indulgence was chewing tobacco.³⁵

Howard Quarrier, in much the same way, sought to have a memorial chapel dedicated to his father--a man described as "the most unscrupulous old scoundrel who ever crushed a refinery or debauched a railroad. . . . A briber of judges and legislatures . . . who beggared the widow and stripped the orphan."³⁶ The ironic aspect of the businessman as a model of holiness appeared most strikingly in The Silver Horde. In the novel, Wayne Wayland, a financier, applauded the villainy carried out by Willis Marsh in the name of "good business." When he learned of the deception and harassment Marsh had brought to bear on Emerson Boyd, he was jubilant.³⁷ But when he discovered that Marsh had secretly cohabited with an Indian girl, he was incensed. The height of irony was achieved when Wayland said: "The one thing I cannot stand in a man or woman is immorality."³⁸

Another characteristic of the typical literary businessman was his commitment to the social and economic status quo. There were relatively few examples of this, but it was something that all of the businessmen would have subscribed to had they spoken on the matter. This characteristic found

³⁵Ibid., p. 186.

³⁶Robert W. Chambers, The Fighting Chance (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1906), p. 390.

³⁷Beach, Silver Horde, p. 355.

³⁸Ibid., p. 369.

its clearest expression in Wallis Plimpton, a financier in The Inside of the Cup. When first introduced, he was described as possessing an "air of sophistication, of good natured and cynical acceptance of things as they were--and plenty good enough too! Mr. Plimpton didn't want the world changed."³⁹

Plimpton saw the church as a practical tool for keeping the working classes in their places. He attempted to impose his views on the new minister of the church, Reverend Hodder, a man he suspected of harboring seditious Social Gospel ideas:

I mean you'll be practical and efficient, that you'll get the people of that neighborhood and make 'em see that the world isn't such a bad place after all. . . . That you won't make them more foolishly discontented than they are, and go preaching socialism to them.⁴¹

³⁹Churchill, Inside of the Cup, p. 111.

⁴⁰The Social Gospel movement had its origins in the late 1880's in Boston, and by the turn of the century had created something of a furor in American Protestantism. It was essentially a revolutionary doctrine first expounded by men such as Washington Gladden, Josiah Strong, Richard T. Ely, Lyman Abbott, and by more radical publicists like Walter Rauschenbusch and George Herron. The Social Gospel advocates tended to ignore the teaching of the Old Testament in favor of the New, and placed primary importance on the social mission of Christianity.

There are a large number of works dealing with the movement, but the most useful are Charles H. Hopkins, The Rise of the Social Gospel in American Protestantism, 1865-1915 (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1940); Arthur Mann, Yankee Reformers in an Urban Age (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1954), chapters ii, iii, and iv; Russell B. Nye, Midwestern Progressive Politics (East Lansing: Michigan State College Press, 1951), chapter iv; and Sidney Fine, Laissez Faire and the General Welfare State (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1956), chapter vi. See Elmer Suderman, "The Social Gospel Novelist's Criticisms of American Society," Midcontinent American Studies Journal, VII (Spring, 1966), 45-59.

⁴¹Churchill, Inside of the Cup, p. 314.

Not convinced that he had made an impression on Hodder, Plimpton reiterated his fear of any alteration in the status quo:

I repeat, you're a practical, sensible man. I'll yield to none in my belief that the Church, as a moral, uplifting, necessary spiritual force in our civilization, in my recognition of her high ideals, but we businessmen, Mr. Hodder--as I'm sure you'll agree--we have got to live on a lower plane. We've got to deal with the world as we find it, and do our little best to help things along. We can't take the Gospel literally, or we should be ruined in a day, and swamp everybody else. You understand me?⁴²

It was the same fear of social upheaval that motivated the businessmen rulers of the Memorial Church in The Calling of Dan Matthews, when they opposed Matthews' efforts to use the church for the betterment of society.⁴³ The businessman, then, was an opponent of programs which might encourage the working classes to feel that things in society were not as they should be.

Perhaps most important of all, the businessman was an incorrigible materialist. His materialistic attitude expressed itself variously, and tended to be a trait the reader sensed rather than saw exemplified in specific actions and comments. Still, it could be seen, for instance, in a preoccupation with and the idealization of material things; in frequent statements to the effect that sentiment had no place in business; and in a rejection of aesthetic values and intellectual pursuits.

James Sheridan was thoroughly materialistic, a trait

⁴²Ibid.

⁴³Wright, Dan Matthews, p. 240.

which appeared in his veneration of the dirty, smoggy city. He loved the smoke-covered city, "calling it God's country as he called the smoke prosperity, breathing the dingy cloud with relish."⁴⁴ The noise and the pollution of the machines and factories were to Sheridan the embodiment of goodness. He told one of his sons: "I love this town. It's God's own footstool, and it's made money for me every day. . . . I love it like I do my own family, and I'd fight for it as soon as I'd fight for my own family."⁴⁵

The businessman's values were material and they were monetary. Eldon Parr, for example, equated goodness with the amount expended for philanthropic purposes.⁴⁶ And Parr and his counterparts assumed that everyone shared their materialistic ideas. Ephalet Hooper, in The Crisis, and Sim Rosedale,⁴⁷ in Wharton's The House of Mirth (1905), both made blatant attempts to bribe the respective heroines of the two novels into marrying them--and never saw how repellent their

⁴⁴Tarkington, The Turmoil, p. 6.

⁴⁵Ibid., p. 92.

⁴⁶Churchill, Inside of the Cup, p. 343.

⁴⁷Rosedale was the only Jewish businessman represented in the novels studied. He was virtually a twin of Ephalet Hooper, the Yankee businessman in The Crisis. Both men conformed well to William R. Taylor's description of the "transcendent Yankee" in Cavalier and Yankee (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1969). Taylor wrote: "The real Yankee . . . is an unpleasant type; hypocrite, chisler, fiend. He rarely shows his undisguised face in good company. He is an outcast of a sort, an Ishmael, whose grasping hand is turned against everyone" (p. 108). Appropriately, Hooper and Rosedale were both outsiders attempting to gain entrance to a social group which was intent on rejecting them.

proposals were to the two women.⁴⁸ Similarly, Eldon Parr attempted to draw his daughter Alison away from the cause of economic and social reform by threatening her with disinheritance, but found that his threat had little effect on her. Like his fellow businessmen, Parr had a genuine inability to comprehend the motives of persons who did not worship wealth in the way that he did.

The businessman's materialism often meant making acquisitions purely for the purpose of attracting favorable attention in society. Henry Guion, the embezzler in The Street Called Straight (1912), was strongly concerned with securing the approval of his peers through displays of extravagance which he could ill-afford. He purchased residences in America and Europe, in keeping with the dictates of fashionable society, and had an inordinate love of material things.⁴⁹ He was described as a man "with such a love of luxury, or unwaranted princeliness, and florid display."⁵⁰ In all respects, Guion was Thorsten Veblen's conspicuous consumer: "The value he set on things--in morals, society, or art--depended on their power to strike the eye."⁵¹ And Howard Quarrier revealed similar tendencies when he selected his prospective wife. She was a

⁴⁸ Churchill, The Crisis, p. 405; Wharton, House of Mirth, p. 384.

⁴⁹ Basil King, The Street Called Straight (London: Methuen and Company, 1912), p. 35.

⁵⁰ Ibid., p. 124.

⁵¹ Ibid.

woman "by virtue of appearance and presence, eminently fitted to complete the material portion of his fortune and estate."⁵²

Most of the businessmen insisted at some point that they could not consider sentiment in their affairs, and thus they were almost totally devoid of any sort of spiritual awareness. Jefferson Worth, the banker in The Winning of Barbara Worth, spoke for all the businessmen when he told his daughter:

Capitalists as individuals might, and do, spend millions in projects from which they personally expect no returns. But Capital doesn't do such things. Anything that Capital, as Capital, goes into, must be purely a business proposition. If anything like sentiment entered into it, that would be the end of the whole matter.⁵³

Businessmen consistently demonstrated a clear distaste for aesthetic values and intellectual pursuits. Hilary Vane equated literature with embroidery,⁵⁴ and James Sheridan told his son Bibbs, the hero of The Turmoil, to leave poetry to the girls: "A man's got a man's work to do in this world."⁵⁵ Sounding very much like George F. Babbitt would sound in the 1920's, Sheridan said concerning literature:

The best writin' talent in this country is right sprang in the ad business today. You buy a magazine for good writin'--look on the back of it! Let me tell you I pay money for that kind of writin'. Maybe you think it's easy. Just try it! I've tried it, and I can't do it. I tell you an ad's got to be written so it makes people do the hardest thing in this world to get them to do; it's got to make 'em give up their money. You talk about 'poems and essays.' I tell you when it comes to the

⁵²Chambers, Fighting Chance, p. 198.

⁵³Wright, Barbara Worth, p. 170.

⁵⁴Churchill, Crewe's Career, p. 162.

⁵⁵Tarkington, The Turmoil, p. 91.

actual skill o' puttin' words together so as to make things happen, R. T. Bloss, right here in this city, knows more in a minute than George Waldo Emerson knew in his whole life.⁵⁶

It was because of the businessman's pursuit of the material that he often found himself ideologically alienated from a sensitive son or daughter. This is particularly true in the Churchill novels, where every unsympathetic businessman was father to an ideological offspring. Churchill used this device to point up his belief that a "generation of ideals" was springing from a generation of commerce.⁵⁷

In Coniston, Isaac D. Worthington sought to establish a dynasty based on joint control of railroads and the state government--but he failed to take into account the moral sensitivity of his son Bob. The boy merely had to "worship the god of wealth," and all would be his; Bob refused the offer.⁵⁸ Alison Parr, in The Inside of the Cup, advised her father that she would accept no part of his wealth--since it was ill-gotten gain. Her arguments with her father were frequent and bitter, and she finally left home permanently because of the ideological barrier between them.⁵⁹ There were unbridgable gaps between Hilary Vane and his son Austen, the hero of Mr. Crewe's Career, and between Augustus Flint and his daughter Victoria in the same novel. In both cases, the alienation resulted from

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Churchill, Mr. Crewe's Career, p. 53.

⁵⁸ Churchill, Coniston, pp. 345-6.

⁵⁹ Churchill, The Inside of the Cup, pp. 123, 488.

the inevitable conflict between commerce and idealism.

Other writers used this symbolic alienation of generations for the same purpose as Churchill. Although there was no bitterness between the two men, Bob Orde, the hero of The Rules of the Game, and his father, Jack Orde, there was clear evidence of their alienation. Bob, as the member of a young, idealistic generation, was unable to find fulfillment, as his father had, in the wasteful exploitation of California's timber resources. Bob left his father's company for the National Forest Service, where he could give expression to his beliefs. And finally, Bibbs Sheridan, the sensitive and artistic son of James Sheridan, repeatedly refused to take over his father's enterprises--although in the end he was forced to.

One final point remains to be made about the literary businessman in the novels being considered: with only one exception, they never repented for the lives they had lived. They never achieved an awareness of the harm and suffering they had caused; to the end they were convinced of the righteousness of their activities. The one exception was Hilary Vane, who came to the tragic realization of what his life of service to the railroad meant. When Augustus Flint advised him that the anti-railroad reformers were gaining momentum, and cautioned him to "keep his hand on the throttle" of the legislature, Hilary was struck for the first time by his moral predicament. Slowly, he replied: "I'm that kind of lawyer. You pay me more for that sort of thing than you do for the work I do in the courts. Isn't that right Flint?" Over and over he repeated the words,

"I'm that kind of lawyer."⁶⁰

III

Here, then, is the composite picture of the popular villain of the Progressive era--the businessman. More than any other single group, it was the businessman who was responsible for the ills of society. The businessman exerted a tremendous influence in the economic sphere of society, or so the public believed; and they believed that he was very much inclined to misuse this power. He was ruthless and lacked scruples; when he was questioned about his behavior, he usually mouthed Social Darwinist arguments to justify his activities. He engaged in almost any type or moral depravity in the name of "good business," and in the name of "good business" gave private profit high precedence over the public good.

This businessman also had an insidious love of power, and when the opportunity presented itself, he cheerfully went about the business of perverting the democratic process in order to serve his own commercial ends. With good cause, he feared the possibility of social upheaval, and strongly defended the preservation of the status quo. He reflected an assumed hypocritical holiness by which he either covered up, or hoped to gain redemption for his business practices. His values were solidly materialistic; he venerated worldly goods, and showed scorn for intellectual matters--and because of this he found himself alienated from an idealistic, younger gen-

⁶⁰ Churchill, Mr. Crewe's Career, p. 376.

eration whose approbation he dearly wanted.

In sum, the villain of the Progressive era was a depraved scoundrel. But, it should be cautioned, while villain and businessman were almost synonymous in the novels, there were some examples of good businessmen. Wealth and power were infinitely corrupting, but good men could, and did, resist the temptations confronting them, as will become apparent when "the hero" is considered in the next chapter.

CHAPTER III

THE POPULAR HERO IN THE PROGRESSIVE ERA

I

One of the best ways to gain an insight into the popular mind of a society is through an analysis of its heroes, as John William Ward--an outstanding practitioner in the field of American studies--has clearly shown.¹ The hero is a symbolic figure, and a direct creation of his times; he can be a mirror of his age, and as such reflect the dominant concerns of the society which created him. The popular selection of heroes, and the attraction for certain types of heroic characteristics, reveal something important about the popular imagination.

A study of the popular novels of the Progressive era reveals that there were two large and fairly distinct groups of heroes. In the early part of the period, most of the best sellers were either historical romances or historical novels;²

¹ See Andrew Jackson: Symbol for an Age (New York: Oxford University Press, 1955); and "The Meaning of Lindbergh's Flight," American Quarterly, X (Spring, 1958), 3-16.

² By historical romances I mean novels with purely fictional characters placed in historical settings. By historical novels I mean those in which the central characters were based on actual historical figures and events. Since the latter took very considerable liberties with the facts of history, they too may best be considered as historical romances.

hence, before about 1905, there was a preponderance of older, traditional, romantic heroes who represented the persistence of nineteenth century literary conventions. However, these traditional heroes were rapidly giving way to new, twentieth-century heroes who characteristically reflected twentieth-century concerns and attitudes.

These two character types shall be described as the hero of the historical romance, and as the modern hero of the Progressive era. The latter at times exhibited romantic tendencies, but he was essentially quite distinct from the hero of the historical romance. By examining these two broad groups of heroes, the student of American studies can see one more aspect of a society in transition--a society rapidly accommodating itself to the facts of modern industrialism.

Before considering the differences between the two types of heroes, something should be said regarding the similarities between them. The modern hero of the Progressive era, and the hero of the historical romance did have a number of shared characteristics. On the most superficial level, they were all of approximately the same age. All were in their mid-twenties, or about thirty.³ They had unmistakable physical

³Very few of the characters I shall consider here diverged much from this general age. Ralph Percy, in Mary Johnson's To Have and to Hold (1900), and Nathaniel Plum, in James Curwood's The Courage of Captain Plum (1908), were slightly older men, perhaps in their forties. But in terms of their physical attributes, they were no different from their younger counterparts. Jefferson Worth, a banker in Wright's The Winning of Barbara Worth, was perhaps in his fifties, but also exhibited great physical vigor and hardiness.

characteristics. Usually they were vigorous and strong; or if their strength was of a spiritual nature, they wore the aura of a messiah.⁴ Often they arose out of a life of poverty and obscurity; but when they were born to wealth, it did them no harm. While the hero was a person with strong moral qualities, he often needed the help of an inspirational woman to maintain his moral direction. As we shall see in a later chapter, the woman played an important role as moral guide and spiritual uplifter to the hero. Significantly, when the hero did stray from righteousness, he was able, usually with the woman's help, to return to his accustomed path of morality.

If the hero was usually a man of considerable physical or spiritual power, his power was always tempered in its use by his keen moral awareness. Frequently, if not invariably, he used his power to combat evil--whether it were a tyrannical monarch (as was the case in Johnson's To Have and To Hold), or a monopolistic corporation (as was the case in White's The Blazed Trail). He had a pervasive aura of resourcefulness, and was seldom dependent on any other person for his livelihood. In sum, the hero was an independent figure, and a man who was truly the master of his own destiny.

It can be seen that the characteristics of the hero of the historical romance, and those of the modern hero of the Progressive era were generally very similar--as indeed are heroic characteristics in any period.⁵ What does change, how-

⁴See Blotner, Modern American Political Novel, p. 18.

⁵Excluding, of course, the contemporary phenomenon of

ever, and what holds significance for the cultural historian are the concerns of the hero, the problems he deals with, and the solutions he poses to the difficulties he faces. Thus, the principal importance of examining the hero lies in what he reveals about his environment--that is, the environment of the author. Again, the hero was a symbolic figure who usually confronted problems which had serious meaning for his readers. He normally provided clarification for ideas already in circulation, and emotional statements of feelings that large numbers of people were prepared to accept.

II

Before considering the hero of the historical romance as he appeared in the Progressive era, some remarks should be made regarding literary developments in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Obviously, Romanticism was the dominant literary tendency in American literature, both popular and critical, until about 1870. After this time, realism began the slow process of asserting itself in the work of the major writers, and to some extent reading tastes adjusted to the new realistic literature. For instance, Mark Twain, William Dean Howells, Bret Harte, Thomas Hardy, and Gustave Flaubert all enjoyed considerable popularity in America during the Gilded Age. But popular tastes still gravitated toward novels which owed more to the first half of the nine-

the anti-hero, who exhibits a totally different set of characteristics. The question of the literary hero is discussed at length in Victor Brombert, (ed.), The Hero in Literature (New York: Fawcett Publications, 1969).

teenth century than to the second.⁶

The period from 1894 to 1904, however, saw a dramatic resurgence of interest in historical romances and novels. Carl Van Doren described this period as the most productive period for historical romance in American history.⁷ Fred Lewis Pattee, a literary historian, observed that "romance never dies. It flames up in special brilliancy because of some dominating creator, but always it is present."⁸ Pattee credited Robert Louis Stevenson with much of the responsibility for provoking the resurgence of romanticism between 1894 and 1904, but other factors were influential. The outpouring of romance, and the public interest in literature of romantic escape, came at one of the most troubled times in American history. The "gay" nineties" was depression-ridden. The panic of 1893, and the resulting economic woes confronting America were grave.⁹ Labor troubles, political insurgency, and protests seemed to many Americans to be leading to a major social upheaval in America.¹⁰

⁶One of the best recent studies of serious literature in the Gilded Age and the Progressive era is Jay Martin's Harvests of Change: American Literature, 1865-1914 (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice Hall, 1967). The study is culturally oriented, and contains a vast number of valuable footnotes.

⁷Carl Van Doren, The American Novel, 1789-1939 (New York: Macmillan, 1940), p. 248.

⁸The New American Literature (New York: The Century Company, 1930), p. 85.

⁹See Harold U. Faulkner, Politics, Reform and Expansion (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1959), chapter viii.

¹⁰See Goldman, Rendezvous, chapter iv.

In this milieu, it was not surprising that American readers wanted novels of distant times and places. The Spanish-American war, although it blunted class strife, further spurred the interest in historical romances, with their emphasis on chivalry, pageantry and adventure.¹¹ The period from 1894 to 1904 saw best sellers made of such novels as S. Weir Mitchell's Adventures of Francoise (1898), Charles Major's When Knighthood was in Flower (1898), Paul L. Ford's Janice Meredith (1899), and George Barr McCutcheon's Graustark (1901), among many others of this type.

While this literature of escape is not as directly revealing culturally as the realistic literature which reasserted itself after 1904, something should be said, nonetheless, about the hero of the historical romance who preceded the modern hero of the Progressive era in order to reveal what was unique in each. In the juxtaposition of the old and the new heroes, an idea can be gained about the changing social concerns of Americans, and an insight can be had into a society emerging ideologically from the nineteenth century to the twentieth.

III

In addition to the generalizations about heroic characteristics already discussed, the hero of the historical ro-

¹¹For brief analyses of the influence of events on the popular movement toward romance in the period, see Hart, The Popular Book, pp. 198-200; Mott, Golden Multitudes, p. 207; Pattee, New American Literature, chapter vii; and Earnest E. Leisy, The American Historical Novel (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1950), pp. 3-5.

mance had certain other predictable character traits. Most conspicuously, he was nearly always concerned with some great event. He was almost always a military officer at some point in his career, and never failed to exhibit courage in battle. He was an opponent of injustice, and was always willing to risk life and liberty in his efforts to correct the injustice he saw. Further, he had a well defined spiritual awareness, and this led him to engage his powers in the service of his country. He was a vigorous supporter of national honor and glory. Thus, the hero of the historical romance was seldom a man of mundane concerns--his attention centered upon matters of great moment.

Whether the heroes were purely fictional characters, or based upon real historical figures, they were all involved in some momentous event. Nicholas Trist, the hero and narrator of Emerson Hough's Fifty-Four Forty or Fight (1909), was portrayed as a secret agent employed by John C. Calhoun, and was credited with securing Oregon from Great Britain. Trist's dealings with the adventuress, Helena Von Ritz, eventually persuaded that lady to force the British diplomat, Sir Richard Pakenham, to surrender Oregon to the United States. Ramon Bell, in Irving Bacheller's D'ri and I (1901), was largely responsible for defeating the British in the area of the St. Lawrence Valley during the War of 1812. This feat was accomplished with only the support of Bell's confederate, the backwoodsman, D'ri. Chad Buford, in John Fox's The Little Shepherd of Kingdom Come (1903), a Kentuckian who enlisted in the

Union army during the Civil War, was largely responsible for defeating the last pockets of rebel resistance in Kentucky. Buford was also entrusted by General Grant with carrying messages to Lincoln.

Stephen Brice, the hero of Churchill's The Crisis, played an equally important role during the Civil War. He served General Sherman in the same capacity as Buford served Grant. And Brice and Buford were not the only heroes who knew and had the respect of a president.

A slightly different example of the hero's involvement with great matters appeared in Thomas Dixon's The Clansman (1905). The hero, Ben Cameron, was portrayed by Dixon, sympathetically, as a highly moralistic Southern nationalist during Reconstruction. He was dedicated to the ideal of Anglo-Saxon domination of the insolent freedmen who were in control of the Southern governments as a result of Radical Republican policy.¹² Cameron became one of the men directly responsible for the establishment of the Ku Klux Klan, the agency by which "civilization was saved, and the South redeemed from shame."¹³ In terms of the novel's purpose, the formation of the Klan was a great event indeed, perhaps, to the author, one of the great-

¹²See Leisy, The American Historical Novel, p. 185. Dixon was a Baptist minister whose emotional outlook was colored by some of the worst experiences of Reconstruction. All of his novels were bitter racist polemics (The Leopard's Spots, The Traitor) which took great liberties with historical fact. For a balanced account of Reconstruction, see John Hope Franklin, Reconstruction: After the Civil War (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1961).

¹³Thomas Dixon, The Clansman (New York: Grosset and Dunlap, 1905), p. 374.

est events in American history.

Naturally, when the hero of the historical romance confronted evil, it was evil on a grand scale. Ralph Percy, the hero of Johnson's To Have and to Hold (1900), stood in open defiance of King James I of England because of his unwillingness to tolerate the King's treatment of Jocelyn Leigh, a royal ward. Percy successfully defied Lord Carnal (the King's villainous court favorite), the royal governor of Virginia, and the King himself to win the freedom of the heroine.¹⁴

Nathaniel Plum, in James Curwood's The Courage of Captain Plum (1908), was involved in an effort to depose a merciless, unscrupulous, and licentious Mormon chief who ruled a colony on Beaver Island in Lake Michigan. James Jesse Strang, a self-proclaimed king, exercised a magnetic and mesmeric hold over his followers. He led piratical raids on Lake traffic, and as a result was brought into contact with the courageous Plum--who went to the island to right a grievance Strang had done him. On his arrival at the island, Plum was quickly plunged into the thick of a revolt against Strang--a revolt which eventually succeeded because of the presence of Plum.

In his peculiar way, Ben Cameron felt that he was attacking evil of a pervasive and widespread nature when he began assisting in the establishment of the Klan. He told the

¹⁴ Percy was not the only hero who defied a sovereign. Equally fearless in the cause of righteousness was John Law, in Emerson Hough's The Mississippi Bubble (1902). Law risked the loss of life and liberty when he administered a heated tongue-lashing to the Regent of France, Philippe de Orleans, for an injustice done him by the Regent.

heroine: "I'm fighting the battle of a race on whose fate hangs the future of the South and the nation. My ruin and shame will be of small account if they are saved."¹⁵ Dixon described Ben's mission, and his efforts on behalf of the nation in glowing terms:

As the young patriots of 1812 had organized the great struggle for their liberties under the noses of the garri-sons of Napoleon, so Ben Cameron had met the leaders of his race in Nashville, Tennessee, within the picket lines of thirty-five thousand hostile troops, and in the ruins of an old homestead discussed and adopted the rit-ual of the Invisible Empire.¹⁶

Stephen Brice, in The Crisis, in a different manner, openly confronted the evil of Negro slavery--although he displayed considerable naivete in so doing. On moving West to St. Louis on the eve of the Civil War, his first gesture was to invest nearly all of his financial resources in the humane purchase of a woman slave he saw being sold at auction.¹⁷ La-ter, he showed more sophistication in his anti-slavery ideas and methods.

In Vaughn Kester's The Prodigal Judge (1911), the co-mic hero, Judge Slocum Price, was responsible for thwarting the plans of a gang of villains who sought to unleash a slave insurrection in the South for the purpose of making financial profit. Price, a corpulent and drunken Quixote, bore the cred-it for averting a blood-bath in the South. Thus, it can be

¹⁵Dixon, The Clansman, p. 334.

¹⁶Ibid., p. 342.

¹⁷Churchill, The Crisis, p. 40.

seen that the hero of the historical romance involved himself in the elimination of evil on a large scale. His were not the everyday concerns of the modern hero of the Progressive era.

The hero of the historical romance almost invariably entered military service, and fought with great honor for his country at some point in his life. Willie Brower, in Bachelor's Eben Holden (1900), volunteered for service in the Union army well before the Fort Sumter incident, and in the course of the war repeatedly proved his heroism. On several occasions he ordered charges while the troops were retreating, and his bravery earned him a personal visit (he was hospitalized because of wounds) and commendation by Lincoln. Ramon Bell, in D'ri and I, enlisted in the service of the United States at the time of the War of 1812, and rapidly rose to the rank of colonel because of his valor and heroism. As with virtually every hero of the historical romance, Bell undertook many perilous adventures, and knew the excitement of many hair-breadth escapes--any one of which might have brought death to a more realistic hero.

Chad Buford, in The Little Shepherd of Kingdom Come, and Stephen Brice, in The Crisis, both served in the Civil War with honor, and rapidly rose through the ranks to high commissioned rank. Buford enlisted as a private, and before the end of the war was a major; Brice left the service with the rank of captain. Thus, the hero of the historical romance was a natural leader of men, and his youthful age was no impedi-

ment to the high position he finally attained. But the hero was not the sort of man who made a career of military service; once the respective crises were over, each of the men returned to civilian life and went on to higher rewards and fresh struggles in government or politics.

This hero, then, exhibited a selfless dedication to his nation. He seemed to satisfy a need for national homogeneity--for national and cultural solidarity. The hero appeared frequently as an expression of devoted patriotism and Americanism. This was seen clearly in the character of Chad Buford, who was portrayed as the spirit of Americanism. As a resident of Kentucky at the time of the Civil War, he was forced to decide where his loyalties lay. Despite the wholesale defection to the Confederate side of his peers and adopted family, he felt that the moral course was to sacrifice his worldly friendships and enlist in the Union army. Rejecting a commission in the Confederate army, he enlisted on the side of the North.

Fox described Buford's state of mind at the time the decision was made:

Chad had little love of state, and only love of country --was first, last, and always, simply American. It was not reason, it was instinct. . . . The boy was an unconscious reincarnation of that old spirit, uninfluenced by temporary apostacies in the outside world, untouched absolutely by sectional prejudice or the appeal of slavery.¹⁸

Fox, whose style was often mawkishly sentimental, described the

¹⁸John Fox, Jr., The Little Shepherd of Kingdom Come (New York: Grosset and Dunlap, 1903), p. 239.

selfless hero as the "embodiment of pure Americanism."¹⁹ For Chad, righteousness could neither be negotiated nor compromised. "I can't do otherwise than I must," was Chad's final assessment of his predicament.²⁰

Similarly, one found the same sort of expression of nationalism in Hough's Fifty-Four Forty or Fight, and in Churchill's The Crossing (1904). In the former, Nicholas Trist renounced his own interests and personal aspirations in his effort to secure American acquisition of Oregon. In the latter, David Ritchie served his country without thought of reward when he insured the failure of the Burr-Wilkinson plot of 1806 to sever the western part of the United States and deliver that section to France. Both Trist and Ritchie were firmly committed to the ideal of America, and to American democracy.

This selfless dedication to the nation recurred frequently, but nowhere did it appear more forcefully than in Gertrude Atherton's The Conqueror (1902), a fictional biography of Alexander Hamilton. Hamilton was portrayed as a faultless hero, bent only on securing the establishment and the preservation of the American nation--although his efforts to do so were frequently harassed by self-seekers like Jefferson and Washington.²¹ Atherton, who allowed her hero to embark on fre-

¹⁹ Ibid., p. 240.

²⁰ Ibid., p. 252.

²¹ Jefferson particularly was treated with pronounced contempt by Atherton. In describing the differences of opinion between Jefferson and Hamilton while they were in Washington's cabinet, the author described Jefferson as a vicious and vindictive trouble-maker. She wrote that Jefferson, finding him-

quent soliloquys, expressed the romantic tendency to emphasize selfless devotion to national honor. Shortly before his anticipated death in the fatal duel, Hamilton reflected:

To the last I am but a fool. No man was ever so little his own master, so thrust upon a planet for the accomplishment of public and impersonal ends alone. . . . I conquered, not to gratify my love of power and to win immortal fame, but that I might accomplish the part for which I was whirled here from an almost inaccessible island fifteen hundred miles away--to play my part in the creation of the American empire. It has been a great part. . . . I am nothing but a genius, encased in such human form as would best serve its purpose; an atom of the vast creative Being beyond the universe, loaned for an infinitesimal part of time to the excrecence calling itself the United States of America, on the dot called earth. Now the part is played, I am to be withdrawn.²²

Briefly, then, this was the hero as he appeared in the historical romance in the early part of the Progressive era. This hero did not provide direct revelations about social concerns as did the realistic hero who shall be considered next. But the considerable vogue romance and historical romance enjoyed, and the large quantitative outpouring of these novels between 1894 and 1904 did reveal something about the mind of society in the period.

The smouldering social and political unrest of this transition period no doubt exerted an influence on popular tastes and interests. Leisy points out that readers find his-

self "fooled and played with by a young man of thirty-three, relegated by him to a second place in the cabinet and country . . . meant in those days . . . hate of the most remorseless quality. Jefferson was like a volcano with bowels of fire and a crater which spilled over in the night. He smouldered and rumbled, a natural timidity preventing the splendor of fireworks. But he was deadly" (p. 359).

²²Gertrude Atherton, The Conqueror (New York: Macmillan, 1902), pp. 513-14.

torical novels and romances a good means by which to go back to a period or an event that is fixed and stable--a means to "rest one's soul in an age in which the problems and the perplexities of our day play no part." The historical novel, he observed, eases strained nerves for the simple reason that whatever happens in it is over. There is nothing that can be done about it. And further, the historical novel shows that other Americans, in earlier periods, had overcome and survived great national crises for which solutions at the time seemed impossible.²³

IV

By about 1904 the impulse toward historical romance was spent. Popular realism reasserted itself, and a new hero entered the American literary scene.²⁴ In contrast to the traditional hero of the historical romance, who was characteristically preoccupied with great events and with matters which often had little connection with everyday life, the hero of the Progressive era was very much concerned with mundane affairs. Almost always he was involved directly or indirectly with one of the important economic or cultural movements of his day. He was used by the author as a symbolic figure who illuminated and articulated feelings and ideas which were gaining importance in American society. In fact, the modern hero of the Progressive

²³Leisy, The American Historical Novel, p. 3.

²⁴The Hofstadters pointed out that Churchill, perhaps the most representative popular author, turned away from romance in 1903 or 1904. See "Winston Churchill," p. 19.

era was commonly used by novelists for didactic purposes; in very many instances he was intentionally designed to convey some moral lesson to the reading public.²⁵

The modern hero of the Progressive era usually fell into one of two fairly broad groups. Either he was a businessman or lawyer, or he fell into a category which can be described as that of reformer or social critic. In either case he was a product of his age, and a direct reflection of the dominant concerns of his day. In all important respects, he was a negative expression of the villain of the period--the unsympathetic businessman. And so he revealed a great deal about the aspirations and hopes of the age, whereas the businessman-villain reflected popular fears and apprehensions.

A generalization which applies to all of the modern heroes is that they always managed to retain a high degree of individuality in an age when machines were subordinating and displacing men, and when modern corporations seemed to subsume individuals. In a mass society, where forms of economic organization and patterns of urban living had become highly complex, in the public mind the hero represented a reassertion of individuality and a glorification of the singular over the plural. But while the hero was able to function comfortably in

²⁵Most of the authors to be considered in this section (excluding Edith Wharton, and perhaps Basil King) were conscious pedants. By far the most obtrusively pedantic was Harold Bell Wright, a minister turned author. Rex Beach and Stewart Edward White embarked on sermons often. Churchill was often pedantic, but his ability as a literary craftsman was usually sufficient to make his pedantry unobtrusive.

modern society, and had no thought of leaving it, he almost invariably showed dissatisfaction with American economic morality or with some aspect of social injustice.

As a businessman or lawyer himself, he opposed accepted but unethical, business methods, and adhered to a rigid moral and ethical code of his own. While not openly critical of free-enterprise capitalism as it existed in America, he consciously or unconsciously endeavored to improve the system. When the hero appeared in the role of a reformer or social critic, he tended to make direct rhetorical attacks on economic or social abuses of free-enterprise capitalism; but even here he did not feel that the system was beyond repair. Thus, whether through his life-style, or through his rhetoric, the hero was intolerant of immorality carried out in the name of "good business," and he showed dissatisfaction with the dominant business ideology of the age.

The heroic businessman differed considerably from the tycoon pictured earlier. The tycoon was an older man, and a product of the business ideology of the Gilded Age; the hero was youthful, and reflected the ideals of a new era.²⁶ Again, there was a reflection of the belief that a generation of commerce was giving way to a generation of ideals. These young businessmen, while engaged in capitalist ventures, were incap-

²⁶ There were a few evil businessmen who were relatively young. Howard Spence, in Churchill's A Modern Chronicle, was only slightly older than most good businessmen, but in terms of his appearance he was much older (see p. 108). Ephraim Hooper, in The Crisis, another Churchill novel, also appeared much older than he actually was (see p. 404).

able of subordinating principle to personal gain. They represented a chaste generation of capitalists; and clearly, they satisfied a need in American culture for heroes who were free from corruption--for heroes free of the qualities which seemed to typify bad businessmen.

The heroic young businessman was, then, uncorrupted by his access to wealth and power. Whether he was self-made, or born to wealth, he was equally moral. Far more often than the tycoon discussed earlier, the hero was self-made; very frequently, however, he had been born into a family which had at one time been socially prominent.²⁷ Peter Erwin, in Churchill's A Modern Chronicle, was just such a hero. He was the grandson "of a gentleman who had fought with credit in the Mexican war, and had died in misfortune."²⁸ As an orphan, Erwin worked as a messenger in a bank while attending law school; eventually he would argue cases with distinction before the Supreme Court of the United States.

Harry Thorpe, in White's The Blazed Trail (1902), came from a respectable family which had lost its wealth through a financial swindle. Thorpe, penniless but determined, left for the Michigan peninsula, where he rose from chore-boy in a logging camp to become one of the biggest loggers in Michigan.

²⁷Usually the idea of the self-made man was treated as a myth in regard to unsympathetic businessmen, but as a fact where the hero was concerned. See Irwin Wyllie, The Self-Made Man in America: The Myth of Rags to Riches (New York: The Free Press, 1954).

²⁸Churchill, A Modern Chronicle, p. 23.

Peter Devenant, the hero of King's The Street Called Straight, was the orphaned son of highly respected missionary parents who had lost their lives in China. Davenant rose from obscurity to become a wealthy investor in mining operations. Similarly, Emerson Boyd, in Beach's The Silver Horde, was a penniless but ambitious entrepreneur who eventually succeeded through hard work and strict adherence to an ethical code.²⁹

The businessman-hero, then, was typically self-made, and had emerged from a life of relative poverty to a position of commercial or professional prominence at an early age. Characteristically, the hero was pitted against the forces of business monopoly, or some other agency of corrupt business in the course of the novel. The theme of the hero resisting big business monopoly was recurrent. Harry Thorpe, in The Blazed Trail, conducted a one-man campaign to break a monopoly which the lumber firm of Morison and Daly exerted over the eastern portion of Michigan. Emerson Boyd, in The Silver Horde, also attempted, successfully, to destroy the monopolistic hold which Willis Marsh had established over the salmon packing and fishing industry of the Pacific coast. Both Thorpe and Boyd were subjected to the most oppressive sort of harassment by the companies they sought to challenge--but both eventually won by maintaining moral and ethical methods of operation.

In The Winning of Barbara Worth, the banker, Jefferson Worth, sought to counteract the blatantly exploitative and unscrupulous financial policies of James Greenfield by initiat-

²⁹Beach, Silver Horde, p. 66.

a desert reclamation project of his own. Worth's project, which succeeded in eliminating the ruthless Greenfield, placed primary consideration of the safety and well-being of the prospective settlers of the reclaimed area. Beverley Plank and Stephen Siward, in Chambers's The Fighting Chance, engaged in and won a protracted battle of high-finance with Howard Quarrier, a ruthless tycoon who had long lorded power over both the legislative and judicial branches of the state government.

The businessman-hero was never obsessed with gaining wealth in the way that his villainous counterpart was. Lawrence Selden, in Wharton's The House of Mirth, rejected the conventional tendency to equate wealth with success. He told the female protagonist, Lily Bart, that his idea of true achievement was attaining personal freedom. Freedom "from everything-- from money, from poverty, from ease and anxiety, from all the material accidents. To keep a kind of republic of the spirit-- that's what I call success."³⁰

Peter Erwin, in A Modern Chronicle, was described as a man "whose standards simply take no account of money, a man who holds everything else higher."³¹ Peter Davenant, in The Street Called Straight, a man who had earned a fortune at a very early age, found himself unsuited to a "life of elegant leisure," and bored with money.³² When an opportunity pre-

³⁰Edith Wharton, The House of Mirth (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1905), p. 108.

³¹Churchill, A Modern Chronicle, p. 307.

³²King, Street Called Straight, pp. 21, 137.

sented itself to give his fortune away in a good cause, he accepted it happily.

The hero was never corrupted by the business ideology and the methods of the bad businessmen. Generally, the hero reacted strongly to the immorality of the generation of businessmen he was replacing. In The Blazed Trail, Harry Thorpe's honesty and strong sense of business ethics sprang largely from his bitter experiences with his paternal uncle, Amos Thorpe, "an unscrupulous man who had grown unscrupulously rich."³³ Amos was the man responsible for the financial destruction of Harry's father, and the business methods of Amos and Harry were carefully juxtaposed by the author.

Bob Orde, in White's The Rules of the Game, was motivated in his actions by what he regarded as abusive and wasteful lumber extraction by his father's generation. The author gave an insight into both Bob's rejection of the methods of his father's generation, and into the popular feeling that a generation of ideals was springing from a generation of commerce when he described Bob's intellectual awakening:

He was dissatisfied because this was not his work. The other honest and sincere men--such as his father and Welton--had been satisfied because it was their work. The old generation, the one that was passing, needed just that kind of service, but the need too was passing. Bob belonged to the new generation. He saw that new things were demanded. The old order was changing. The modern young men of energy and force and strong ability had a different task from that which their fathers accepted. The wilderness was subdued; the pioneer work of industry was finished; the hard battle to shape things ef-

³³ Stewart Edward White, The Blazed Trail (New York: Doubleday, Page and Company, 1902), p. 235.

ficiently was over. It had become necessary to perfect the means and methods of doing. Lumber must still be cut, streams must still be dammed, railroads must still be built; but now that the pioneers, the men of the line, had blazed the way, others could follow. Methods were established. It was all business, like the selling of groceries. The industrial rank and file could attend to details. The men who thought and struggled and carried the torch--they must go beyond what their fathers had accomplished.³⁴

In marked contrast to the businessman-villain, the hero adhered to a rigid code of personal and business ethics. He never transgressed this code in the interests of financial gain. In The Blazed Trail, Harry Thorpe preferred to see the results of an entire season's cutting washed irretrievably down river rather than risk the loss of a single human life--although in so doing he seriously jeopardized his logging company's financial future.³⁵ Emerson Boyd, in The Silver Horde, although frequently threatening to take desperate measures to protect himself from the ruthless Willis Marsh, in fact never lost his commitment to principle--even though at times his survival seemed to demand it. Never did Boyd descend to the moral level of his oppressor. Peter Davenant, in The Street Called Straight, was typical: "It had been a matter of satisfaction, amounting to pride, that he had made his bit of money without resorting in any single instance to methods that could be considered shady."³⁶

³⁴Steward Edward White, The Rules of the Game (New York: Doubleday, Page and Company, 1910), p. 378.

³⁵White, The Blazed Trail, p. 380.

³⁶King, Street Called Straight, p. 38.

A slightly different manifestation of the heroic tendency to maintain a strict moral code was seen in Norris's The Pit. Here, Charles Cressler, one of the novel's principal protagonists, was a spokesman against the evil of grain speculation. Once a speculator himself, by the time the novel began Cressler had firmly committed himself never to speculate again--since he felt to do so would be harmful to the interests of many unseen persons. His personal code of morality, derived from a keen social consciousness, led him to his opposition of speculation and speculators: "The world's food supply should not be at the mercy of the Chicago wheat pit. . . . They call it buying and selling, but it is simply betting."³⁷ Speculators either deflated or inflated wheat prices artificially, and in either event, someone was harmed. Inflation of the price brought prosperity to the American farmers, but starvation to European peasants and hardships to American workers. Deflation of the price made it easy for European peasants to buy bread, but the American farmer suffered financially. By the end of the novel, however, Cressler did diverge from his moral course, and met irreversible financial destruction on the wheat exchange.

Another example of the hero's adherence to principle appeared in Peter Erwin, a lawyer engaged in private practice. He showed something of his code of morality when he refused an offer of \$100,000 per year to enter corporate practice.³⁸ Erwin

³⁷Norris, The Pit, p. 14.

³⁸Churchill, A Modern Chronicle, p. 299.

saw the moral problem which corporate practice raised for the lawyer who believed in the traditional ideal of independent, private practice. He could not accept the prevalent business view that it was justifiable for "great legal brains . . . to devise means by which . . . laws could be eluded."³⁹ He felt that a lawyer "who hired himself out to enable one man to take advantage of another prostituted his talents."⁴⁰ Principle, then, prevented him from leaving private practice for the lure of corporate wealth.

One of the distinguishing characteristics of the hero was his capacity to perceive when he had embarked on a course that could not be reconciled with righteousness. When he diverged from morality, and the instances of this were rare, he soon corrected his course.⁴¹ John Hale, in John Fox's The Trail of the Lonesome Pine (1908), exemplified this characteristic. Hale, an entrepreneur with a scheme for the development of a section of the Cumberland mountains, declined both physic-

³⁹Ibid., p. 305.

⁴⁰Ibid., p. 306.

⁴¹This was as true for the businessman as for those heroes with other occupations. In Wright's The Winning of Barbara Worth, Willard Holmes was a civil engineer initially employed by James Greenfield to direct the desert reclamation project. When Holmes came to the realization that Greenfield was interested only in profits, not in the safety of the settlers, he severed his connection with the company. Similarly, in another Wright novel, The Eyes of the World (1914), Aaron King was an artist who realized that he was commercializing his art in order to earn a comfortable living. He too quickly corrected his course, and began producing honest art without thought of financial considerations. No hero, then, would knowingly subordinate principle to financial gain for long.

ally and spiritually in his attempt to secure the success of his enterprise. His recognition of his degeneration finally caused him to withdraw to a life which emphasized spiritual rather than commercial values.⁴²

In his origins, his resistance to vested (and corrupt) interests, in his rigid moral code and spiritual awareness-- in general, in his complete rejection of the undesirable elements in the dominant business ideology, the businessman-hero was an ideal which had a powerful attraction for many Americans. If the businessman-villain represented all that was wrong with American economic life, and was an expression of popular fears, the idealized businessman was a reflection of popular hopes for the future. He did not reject free-enterprise capitalism, but he did seek to elevate it to a higher moral plane, at least in his own life. Usually, the businessman-hero represented a new generation of businessmen who responded to a far different set of motives than had their predecessors.

V

While he was most commonly a businessman or lawyer, the modern hero of the Progressive era often appeared in the role of a reformer or social critic. In this role he made frontal, rhetorical attacks on aspects of business life and methods, and on the social conditions to which they had given birth. But significantly, the social critic or reformer, true to the Progressive mind, seldom sought to escape civilization,

⁴²John Fox, Jr., The Trail of the Lonesome Pine (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1908), p. 416.

or to restore America to a more simple type of society. He recognized the inevitability of capitalism, but wanted to see it made more compatible with the traditional American ideals of Jefferson. He wanted to see America bring justice to its economic system, and concern for humanity to its social life.

In the popular literature several social critics or reformers were portrayed.⁴³ Of these, none evoked the ethos of Progressivism more clearly than Austen Vane in Churchill's Mr. Crewe's Career. No single character better reflected the ideology and guiding beliefs of the Progressive movement; and no single character better expressed the popular feeling that a generation of ideals was springing from a generation of commerce. Since he was the best literary expression of the meaning of the Progressive era, Vane merits more than a superficial examination.

Austen was the son of Hilary Vane, the corporate lawyer who controlled the state government for the Northeastern railroads, the company presided over by Augustus Flint. Austen rejected everything that his father and the railroads stood for. In a manner reminiscent of Theodore Roosevelt,⁴⁴ he spent part of his early manhood living in the West. When he returned to

⁴³Only those characters who occupied central positions in their respective novels were considered. For instance, Tommy Hinds, the reformer in The Jungle, did not occupy a prominent position in that novel, and so was not considered.

⁴⁴The Hofstadters believed that Austen Vane, with his instinctive talent for leadership, and his out-of-doors personality, might have been consciously modeled on Roosevelt. See "Winston Churchill," p. 15.

the East, he quickly enlisted in the cause of reform, and immediately came into conflict with the interests of the railroads. When offered a railroad pass by Flint, his response to the magnate's statement that the gift represented a significant sum, was predictable, and provided an insight into one of the serious concerns of reformers in the Progressive era. He told Flint:

Any sum is insignificant when it restricts a lawyer from the acceptance of just causes. . . . As I understand the matter, it is the custom of your railroad to send these passes to the young lawyers of the state the moment they show signs of ability. The pass would prevent me from seeing clients who might have righteous claims against your railroads, and--permit me to speak frankly--in my opinion the practice tends to make it difficult for poor people who have been injured to get efficient lawyers.⁴⁵

In response to an expression of incredulity on the part of Flint, Vane clarified his meaning: "I mean that I would not engage, for a fee or a pass, to fight the political battles of a railroad, or undertake any political manipulation in its behalf."⁴⁶ Commenting on Austen, another character in the novel later remarked: "It's kind of rare in these days to find young lawyers with brains that won't sell them to the railroad."⁴⁷

On another occasion, Austen attacked one more aspect of corrupt business practice--the adherence to the code of the survival of the fittest. Once again, he reflected the mood of

⁴⁵ Churchill, Mr. Crewe's Career, p. 43.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Ibid., p. 179.

Progressives when he told his father:

How do you define 'the fittest'? Are they the men who have the not unusual and certainly not very exalted gift of getting money from their fellow creatures by the use of any weapons that may be at hand?, who believe that the acquisition of wealth is exempt from the practice of morality? Is Mr. Flint your example of the fittest type to survive, or Gladstone or Wilberforce, or Emerson or Lincoln?⁴⁸

Austen, in a characteristically Progressive fashion, denounced the fact that the corporations had virtually destroyed republicanism in the state. For Hilary's frequent attempts to justify this corporation domination on the grounds that the public welfare and the material prosperity of the state demanded it, Austen had only scorn:

It's no use Judge. If material prosperity alone were to be considered, your contention would have some weight. The perpetuation of the principle of American government has to be thought of. Government by a railroad will lead in the end to anarchy. You are courting destruction as it is.⁴⁹

One character concisely described the symbolic alienation of the generations that existed between Hilary and Austen, and also gave an insight into the belief that a new generation was arising when he said:

I don't want to blame Hilary too much. I know Austen don't. Hilary's grown up with that way of doing things, and in the old days there was no other way. Hilary is the chief counsel for the Northeastern, and he runs the Republican organization in this state for their benefit. But Austen made up his mind that there was no reason why he should grow up that way. He says that a lawyer should keep to his profession, and not become a lobbyist in the interests of his clients.⁵⁰

⁴⁸Ibid., p. 57.

⁴⁹Ibid., p. 188.

⁵⁰Ibid., p. 291.

In the novel, Austen was skilfully juxtaposed with Humphery Crewe, a terribly naive reformer with no real perception of either the extent of corporate domination, or of the ways to combat it.⁵¹ In contrast to Crewe, Austen recognized that there were no simple solutions nor easy explanations for the problems which existed. He told Victoria Flint, the heroine, that "if politics are not all they should be, . . . we must remember that they are nobody's fault in particular, and can't be set right in an instant by any one man, no matter how powerful."⁵² Later he told a meeting of reformers:

Conditions as they exist are the result of an evolution for which no one man is responsible. That does not alter the fact that the conditions are wrong. But the railroads, before they consolidated, found the political boss in power, and had to pay him favors. The citizen was the culprit to start with, just as he is the culprit now, because he does not take sufficient interest in his government to make it honest. We must not blame the railroads too severely, when they grew strong enough, for substituting their own political army to avoid being blackmailed. Long immunity had enforced their belief

⁵¹In addition to Crewe, there were two other negative portrayals of the reformer. Hamilton Tooting, also in Mr. Crewe's Career, was an opportunist who wished to tie his fortunes to any movement which he felt would be successful in the long run. Hence his association with the reform forces represented by Austen Vane. Tooting, who retained his position with the railroad while giving surreptitious aid to the reformers, told Vane: "I believe bucking the railroad's going to pay in a year or so. I got on it as soon as you did, I guess, but when a feller's worn the collar as long as I have, it ain't easy to cut loose--you understand" (p. 67). Charles Gardiner West, in Henry Harrison's Queed, left a lucrative business to enter politics, but was politically naive, and not really sincere. When the city's political boss encouraged West to abandon the reform for which he was working, and held out the offer of a political office, West quickly altered his reformist views to suit the boss (pp. 318-23).

⁵²Churchill, Mr. Crewe's Career, p. 127.

that they have but one duty--to pay dividends. I am afraid that they will have to be enlightened somewhat as Pharoah was enlightened.⁵³

In reference to these corporate practices, Austen said later: "I believe such practices are not necessary now. A new generation has come--a generation more jealous of its political rights, and not so willing to be rid of them by farming them out. A change has taken place even in older men . . . who simply did not think about these questions ten years ago."⁵⁴ Thus, Austen himself reflected the popular feeling that a new, more idealistic generation was gradually entering the American scene.

The novel clearly expressed Churchill's belief that the new generation would indeed succeed in its efforts to reassert democratic and spiritual values in American life. At the end of the book, Austen announced with no equivocation: "The era of political domination by a corporation, and mainly for the benefit of the corporation, is over."⁵⁵ Churchill's outlook, then, was optimistic.

Austen Vane responded to one group of problems associated with modern industrialism. At the same time, other fictional reformers reacted to other problems of modern life. The Social Gospel movement, which must be viewed as the religious response to modern industrialism, was one of the important social concerns of the Progressive era. The best representative in the literature of the popular interest in the So-

⁵³Ibid., p. 53.

⁵⁴Ibid., p. 329.

⁵⁵Ibid., p. 477.

cial Gospel movement was Reverend Hodder, in Churchill's The Inside of the Cup. At the start of the novel, Hodder was invited to leave his rural pastorate and become the minister of a large urban church composed of wealthy members. At first he was unaware of any serious conflict between his principles and those of the congregation he served--a congregation led by the unscrupulous Eldon Parr. Slowly, with the moral guidance of Alison Parr, Hodder came to an awareness of his predicament. The church was shunned by the poor, and Hodder "preached to the rich as if from behind a glass. They went on with their carnival."⁵⁶

Increasingly, Hodder was struck by the image of a church composed of the "most decorous families," placed in a decaying working-class ghetto that showed signs of poverty and privation everywhere. The members of the congregation were oblivious to the suffering surrounding the church, and seemed unable to take their minds off individualism, materialism, and the pursuit of wealth.⁵⁷ Hodder told a friend that he had finally come to see how completely society was "conducted on the materialistic theory of the survival of the fittest rather than that of the brotherhood of man, and that those who mainly support this church are, consciously or unconsciously, using it as a bulwark for the privilege they have gained at the expense of their fellow citizens."⁵⁸ He felt that the captains

⁵⁶Churchill, A Modern Chronicle, p. 105.

⁵⁷Ibid., p. 116.

⁵⁸Ibid., p. 322.

of industry and commerce, in effect his congregation, had created serious social and economic abuses, and as such had a responsibility to undertake the eradication of the worst of these abuses.

Finally, Hodder recognized the need to fully accept the Social Gospel, which he described as "the extreme Protestant position."⁵⁹ His efforts to bring his congregation to an acceptance of the principles of the Social Gospel met stiff resistance, and even the loss of many members. But once again, Churchill was optimistic; the implication was that the ideals of the new generation would be accepted in religion as they would be in economics and government.

Hodder was not the only Social Gospel minister in the best selling novels of the Progressive era. Dan Matthews, in Wright's The Calling of Dan Matthews, went through a very similar spiritual awakening--also with the moral guidance of a woman--and reached conclusions identical to those reached by Hodder. The congregation Matthews served adamantly opposed his efforts to institute Social Gospel principles, and eventually the congregation secured his dismissal; but once again, there was an expression of the fact that American society would eventually triumph over materialism. The implication seemed to be that religion would accommodate itself, in a humane manner, to the economic changes of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

⁵⁹Ibid., p. 323.

One of the best examples of the hero as a social critic was seen in Bibbs Sheridan, in Tarkington's The Turmoil. Bibbs was the artistic son of James Sheridan, the highly materialistic industrialist whose personality dominated the novel. Bibbs had a tragic awareness of the pointlessness of modern commercial life. When his father forced him to leave his reclusive, literary life, to enter Sheridan's business, Bibbs was bitterly resentful. In attempting to make his son socially "useful," Sheridan put him to work in one of his factories as a machine operator. When Bibbs proved successful at this, his father sought to elevate him to a top level position in the company. Again, Bibbs objected strenuously: "I'm living exactly the right life. I'm earning my daily bread, and I'm happy doing it. My wages are enough. I don't want any more money, I don't deserve any."⁶⁰

As a machine operator, Bibbs had the freedom to think, but he realized that this would be impossible in the new job. He told his father that he would not accept the life that had been planned for him:

I don't want to live a business life--I don't want to be drawn into it. I don't think it is living. I have the healthful toil--and I can think. In business as important as yours I couldn't think anything but business. . . . I don't think making money is worthwhile.⁶¹

Finally forced to accept the dreaded position, and the life he feared would destroy him spiritually, he was totally despond-

⁶⁰Tarkington, The Turmoil, p. 255.

⁶¹Ibid., p. 256.

ent. He hated the "temple of bigness," where "the changing of money was the holy worship and the true religion." In his new position he saw each man serving for his own sake and for what he would get out of it, "but all united in their faith in the benevolence of the glory of their god."⁶²

Bibbs's fundamental objection to the commercialism of modern society derived from his awareness of its meaninglessness, its complete lack of self-examination and spiritual consciousness. He had a perception of people down town "hurrying to trains, hanging to straps in trolly-cars, weltering every day to get home to feed and sleep so they can get down town tomorrow. And yet there isn't anything down there worth getting to."⁶³

To Bibbs it was a society bent on perpetuating and propogating a system of profit for profit's sake. Commenting on this system, he told his father in one of their frequent confrontations:

You think this city is rich and powerful--but what's the use of its being rich and powerful? They don't teach the children any more in school because the city is rich and powerful. They teach them more than they used to because some people--not the rich and powerful people--have thought the thoughts to reach the children. And yet when you've been reading the paper I've heard you objecting to the children being taught anything except what would help them make money. You said it was wasting the taxes. You want them taught to make a living, but not to live.⁶⁴

⁶²Ibid., p. 321.

⁶³Ibid., p. 165.

⁶⁴Ibid., p. 256.

But again, the novel ended on an optimistic note. Despite the feeling of two of the principal characters that Bibbs' spiritual qualities would be destroyed by his life of commercialism,⁶⁵ the implication was that this would not happen. And further, one was led to believe that the generation represented by Bibbs would eventually overcome the sordid materialism of their fathers. The conclusion was inescapable that "the system" would adjust to Bibbs, and his generation, rather than Bibbs and his generation adjusting to "the system."

VI

The hero of the best selling novel of the Progressive era, then, appeared in many roles. Early in the period he was most commonly a romantic historical figure involved in some important event in American history. Later in the period he was more commonly a businessman or social critic of some type. The juxtaposition of the old and the new heroes is significant in that it underscored the transition America was undergoing in the Progressive years. Nineteenth-century attitudes and assumptions were giving way to twentieth-century thinking. Increasingly, readers in the early twentieth century were demanding heroes who reflected the great concerns of contemporary society rather than heroes placed in distant times and places.

A study of the hero in the Progressive era also suggests that economic and political developments were not merely the concerns of a few politicians and intellectuals--they were

public issues in a very real sense. Their frequent recurrence in the best selling novels of the time makes this conclusion inescapable.

CHAPTER IV

THE HERO AS A MAN OF NATURE

I

The preceding discussion did not take into account a large group of heroes who can be aptly described as "men of nature." That they occupied a prominent place in the literature, and so in the public imagination, was revealed by the fact that the "men of nature" were only slightly exceeded numerically by the businessmen. In the literature under consideration, "nature" took several forms, and so the "men of nature" were portrayed in differing ways. "Nature" in the popular novels may be the American West--the region referred to by Walter Prescott Webb as the "cattle kingdom"; it may be a savage, primitive wilderness; or it might be a pastoral retreat. But always, it was a setting in which the dangers of civilized, cultured society were literally or virtually absent.

In approximately one third of the best sellers. "men of nature" dominated the action. As in the case of the novels with economic themes, where businessmen dominated, this proportion seems high. A good analysis of the American concern, amounting almost to a preoccupation, with nature, primitivism, and the frontier in the Progressive era is found in an article by Roderick Nash, entitled "The American Cult of the Primi-

tive."¹ Nash observed that in the years prior to the 1890's, Americans, with the exception of a few writers and artists, had little interest in the wilderness. Historically, Americans had devoted their energies to destroying the wilderness in the name of progress. The wild country tended to be seen in anything but sympathetic terms; more often than not, it was the enemy.

Nash pointed out that in his travels in America, De Tocqueville was fascinated by the wild, unsettled parts of the American continent; but the Frenchman found no such fascination expressed by his American hosts. De Tocqueville came to the conclusion that persons who were removed from the wilderness valued it most. Thus, it was not until the decade of the 1890's, when the nation first became aware of the passing of the frontier, and with it the wilderness, that popular interest in nature began to appear on a large scale.²

¹American Quarterly, XVIII (Fall, 1966), 517-37.

²See Charles W. Eliot, "The Need of Conserving the Beauty and Freedom of Nature in Modern Life," National Geographic, XXVI (July, 1914), 67-73; Frank Norris, "The Frontier Gone at Last," World's Work, III (1902), 1728-31; and George Evans, "The Wilderness," Overland Monthly, XLIII (January, 1904), 31-3.

It is worth noting that the only two best sellers in the Progressive era which described the wilderness without idealizing it were both published by authors who did most of their publishing before 1900. Mary Johnson's To Have and To Hold (1900), and Maurice Thompson's Alice of Old Vincennes (1900), were the only two novels which presented stark, realistic views of the terrible human suffering which the wilderness could inflict. Thompson described the wilderness (in this case the southern part of Indiana before the settlement of that state) as rife with disease: "Malaria loaded the air, and the most efficacious drugs now at command were either undiscovered or could not be had. . . . Men drank to prevent contracting ague, drank again, between rigors to cure it, and yet again to brace themselves against convalescence" (p. 19). Johnson, in describing the Virginia wilderness shortly after the arrival of the first

Nash's assessment that popular concern with nature and the wilderness first gained significance around 1900 is questionable. Nature occupied an important place in the Romantic literature of the 1840's and 1850's. Both the critical authors, represented by Thoreau, Hawthorne, and Emerson, and the popular writers, such as Cooper and Charles W. Webber, were very much interested in various ways with nature and the wilderness.³ Some degree of concern with this subject could probably be found at any point in the history of serious and popular American literature. But as with romance, it seems to assert itself vigorously at certain times, and then subside into periods of relative dormancy. A complex cycle, then, seems to influence popular and serious concern with nature, and Nash would have been more nearly correct had he described the Progressive era as merely one (perhaps the second) such resurgence in America.

It is impossible to account precisely for the recurrence of interest in nature in the Progressive era, although

settlers, emphasized its frequent and ferocious Indian attacks, the horror of pestilence, the blacker horror of widespread starvation, and the bitter disputes among the settlers of the colony (p. 10).

No other popular authors who dealt with the frontier or the wilderness did so without romanticizing them. In terms of Nash's thesis, it might be argued that these two novelists represent the older literary approach to the American wilderness. They were authors who had not yet come to glorify the wilderness.

³See Henry Nash Smith, Virgin Land (New York: Random House, 1949), chapters vi, vii; F. O. Matthiessen, American Renaissance (New York: Oxford University Press, 1941); and Leo Marx, Machine in the Garden (New York: Oxford University Press, 1964).

as Nash observed, the disappearance of the frontier must have had a bearing. Widespread fear of industrialism, commercialism, and the preoccupation with materialism probably exerted an influence. These, together with slums, and immigrants from Southern and Eastern Europe, seemed to characterize urban society. Increasingly, all the ills of American society seemed to be centered in the cities. In the perplexity of urban life, Americans began to feel that the wilderness, which was associated with America's past, was responsible for the desirable qualities in the national character.⁴ Defense of the primitive existence attracted many Americans as a means of protesting the sordidness and commercialism they saw in the nation. In effect, the resurgence was a response to "too much civilization."⁵

People seemed fascinated, following the turn of the century, by the way of life described by one fictional character who compared the city to the frontier: "We may not be very handsome to the naked eye, and we may not wear our handkerchiefs in our shirt cuffs, but there ain't no widows and orphans doin' our washin', and a man can walk away from his house, stay a month, and find it there when he comes back."⁶

Within a relatively short time, the American reading

⁴Frederick Jackson Turner, "The Significance of the Frontier in American History," in the Annual Report of the American Historical Association (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1893), pp. 199-227.

⁵See Nash, "Cult of the Primitive," p. 522.

⁶Rex Beach, The Barrier (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1908), p. 145.

public had begun to exhibit a strong interest in "men of nature," of the type described by Stewart Edward White: "They had the independence, the unabashed eye, the insubordination even, of the man who has drawn his intellectual and moral nourishment at the breast of a wild nature. They were afraid of nothing alive."⁷

The abuses of free-enterprise capitalism brought a new urgency to public interest in primitivism, the frontier, and pastoralism. Clearly, the American people, or part of them, were coming to feel as one Zane Grey character did: "Here is the promised land--the fruitful life--Nature as it was created by God."⁸ The same longing was apparent when a heroic frontiersman in a Churchill novel explained: "I've been in the mountains, living a pure life."⁹ It was also seen in the statement of a Rex Beach character: "Indeed I do [love Alaska]! It calls to a fellow in some strange way that a gentler country never could. . . . It means health and equality and unrestraint. That's what I like best, I dare say--the utter unrestraint."¹⁰ To many Americans, nature alone seemed to be free of contamination; and at the same time, only nature seemed to be capable

⁷The Blazed Trail, p. 250.

⁸Zane Grey, The Spirit of the Border (New York: A. L. Burt, 1906), p. 30.

⁹Winston Churchill, The Crossing (New York: Macmillan, 1904), p. 19.

¹⁰Rex Beach, The Spoilers (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1905), p. 28.

of measuring an individual's true worth.¹¹

Heroes existing in nature, in the wilderness, on the frontier, or in pastoral settings, seemed to satisfy some urgent cultural need in industrial America. The variety of these heroes was considerable; they included Owen Wister's western cowboy, the Virginian; Edgar Rice Burroughs's jungle-bred ape-man, Tarzan; Jack London's primitive superman, Wold Larson; and Irving Bacheller's rustic forest-dweller, Eben Holden.

Although they took many forms, they all revealed a conscious or unconscious retreat from the civilized world; and all upheld the idea that the good life--the life of physical and spiritual health--could best be pursued outside of modern society. More importantly, the books, considered as a whole, form an implicit or explicit indictment of a society that had seemingly gone awry.

II

A significant fact about the popular concern with nature in the Progressive era is that authors, while agreeing on the desirability of escaping civilization, were not agreed on the question of why one entered nature--on why it was an ideal state. Authors either placed their heroes in nature, or had their heroes escape into nature, for essentially quite different reasons. Some authors saw nature as a state in which to find repose; others saw in it a place to find exertion, struggle, and physical testing. Those authors who saw nature as an

¹¹ See Beach, Silver Horde, p. 32.

ideal state of repose, felt that civilized society represented struggle and strife; hence, their characters left civilization, or were set in nature, for the purpose of attaining a life free of confrontation and combat. The other group of writers felt that it was the very absence of confrontation and combat in civilization which made nature desirable; hence, their heroes left, or were set outside of civilization, specifically to engage in the strenuous life, to struggle and conquer, in order to achieve true manhood.

The authors who saw repose in nature were obviously in the romantic tradition, and reflected an older approach to nature. Essentially, these authors represented a recurrence of pastoralism, a literary tradition with long antecedents. However, those who saw nature as a place to find struggle seem to represent an approach to nature that was essentially a departure in American literature. The idea of the hero escaping into a wilderness environment for the purpose of doing battle with the forces of nature appears to be a peculiar development of popular literature in the Progressive era. Further, there were far more instances of authors placing their heroes in nature to enter its struggles than to enjoy its repose. This newer approach to nature, then, was in the ascendancy.

Expression of the idea that nature represented repose took essentially two forms. It appeared in novels dominated by pastoral settings and heroes, and it also appeared in instances of heroes physically abandoning the conflicts of civilized society. The instances of physical escape were preva-

lent enough to indicate more than a casual interest in the subject on the part of authors and the reading public. In each case, the hero retreated into nature following some painful experience resulting from the turmoil of civilization. Whether it were faithlessness, disloyalty, or injustice, all of these characters felt injured by society; and like Huck Finn, who retreated to the river, they too fled society. Some eventually made a reconciliation with civilization, but were permanently changed by their exposure to nature. Others were never able to make such a reconciliation.

A good example of escape for repose was seen in Upton Sinclair's The Jungle. After the central character, Jurgis, lost his child and was alienated from his wife and relatives because of the cruel economic system represented by Packingtown, he jumped a train leaving Chicago. The decision to go was a tortured one: "He fought a battle with his soul. He gripped his hands and set his teeth together--he had not wept, and he would not--not a tear! It was past and over, and he was done with it--he would fling it off his shoulders, be free of it, the whole business, that night."¹²

Out in the country, where for the first time in years he saw something other than the man-made, artificial world of the city, a new mood infused Jurgis. When the dawn came, "he was peering out with hungry eyes, getting glimpses of meadows and woods and rivers. At last he could stand it no longer,

¹²Sinclair, The Jungle, p. 210.

and when the train stopped, he crawled out."¹³ In all the time he had been in the city, he had never seen a single tree. Now nature was all around him.

Symbolically, Jurgis bathed himself in a deep pool, "sheltered and silent."¹⁴ In removing the filth of the city, he established contact with nature:

The water was warm, and he splashed about like a boy in his glee. Afterward he sat down in the water near the bank, and proceeded to scrub himself, soberly and methodically, scouring every inch of him with sand. While he was doing it, he would do it thoroughly, and see how it felt to be clean.¹⁵

He then carefully washed his clothing, removing from it the last traces of the dirt and grease of the city. Physically and spiritually, he was cleansed of civilization and its contamination. As he wandered through the country, in contact with nature, he regained some of his youthful vigor. He discovered once more the joy and power that he had known when he tilled the European countryside, but which had been stolen by the merciless city.

The same theme is apparent in Rex Beach's The Barrier. In this novel, Poleon Doret, a product of the Alaska frontier was bitterly hurt in a romantic entanglement. The incident which caused Doret the psychological injury brought him to an awareness of the encroachment of civilization, and its harmful potentialities; and like Jurgis, he felt it was time to abandon society:

¹⁴Ibid., p. 212.

¹⁵Ibid.

"De blood in me is callin' for travel, John. I'm livin' on dis here place five year dis fall, an' dat's too long tam' for voyager. I'm hongry for hear de axe in de woods an' de moose blow at sundown. I want for see the camp-fire t'rough de brush w'en I come from trap de fox an' dem little wild fellers. I want to smell smoke in de dust. My work she's finish here, so I'm paddle away to-day, an' I'll fin' dat place dis tam', for sure--she's over dere." He raised his long arm and pointed to the dim mountains that hid the valley of the Koyukuk, the valley that called good men and strong, year after year, and took them to itself, while in his face the trader saw the hunger of his race, the unslaked longing for the wilderness, the driving desire that led them ever North and West, and seeing it he knew the man would go.¹⁶

The closest approach to a Huck Finn character was seen in Chad Buford, the central character in Fox's The Little Shepherd of Kingdom Come. Chad was a homeless orphan and child of the woods. He left several prospective homes because of the inhumanity shown him by adults. He was represented by the author as a pioneer type--living off the forests and sleeping under the trees and stars. He experienced hardship in nature, but only in society did he experience cruelty. His reaction to the unpleasantness which civilization caused was to escape; one such escape was described by the author:

Chad was moving around. First, by the light of a candle, he laboriously dug out a short letter to the major--scalding it with tears. Then he took off his clothes and got his old mountain suit out of the closet--moccasins and all--and put them on. Very carefully he folded the pretty clothes he had taken off . . . and laid them on the bed. Then he picked up his old rifle in the one hand and slipped noiselessly down the stairs in his moccassined feet, and out the door into the starlit night. From the pike fence he turned once to look back in the dark, at the silent house amid the dark trees. Then he sprang down and started through the fields--his face set toward the mountains.¹⁷

¹⁶Beach, The Barrier, p. 297.

¹⁷Fox, The Little Shepherd of Kingdom Come, p. 149.

Fox employed the same theme in The Trail of the Lonesome Pine. In this novel, John Hale, the hero, was a businessman and entrepreneur who attempted to develop a section of the Cumberland mountains. After two years of work which brought success and then failure, Hale had degenerated both mentally and physically. When he recognized his degeneration, he abandoned civilization with the heroine, June Tolliver. Fox described Hale's decision to escape civilization--a decision made with the help of June:

"I'll stock the river with bass again."

"Yes."

"And I'll plant young poplars to cover the sight of every bit of uptorn earth along the mountain there. I'll bury every bottle and tin can in the Cove. I'll take away every sign of civilization, every sign of the outside world."

"And leave old Mother Nature to cover up the scars," said June.

"So that Lonesome Cove will be just as it was."

"Just as it was in the beginning," echoed June.

"And shall be to the end," said Hale.¹⁸

The idea of retreat from civilization for repose was nowhere presented more obviously than in Zane Grey's The Riders of the Purple Sage (1912). Here, Bern Venters, one of the central characters, had been unjustly harassed and victimized by members of a Mormon community. He discovered a hidden valley far from civilization which had been the home of primitive cliff-dwelling Indians. "The valley was a golden, sunlit world. It was silent. The sighing wind and the twittering quail and the singing birds, even the rare and seldom-occurring hollow crack of a sliding weathered stone, only thickened and deep-

¹⁸Ibid., p. 416.

ened that insulated silence."¹⁹

Venters and Bess, one of the two heroines, had both been badly used by civilization. Circumstances brought them to the isolated valley, and they were forced to decide whether to reenter the civilized world that had abused them or to remain in Surprise Valley:

"Have you thought that we may make our way out to civilization, or we may have to stay here--alone--hidden from the world all our lives?"

"I never thought--till now."

"Well, what's your choice--to go, or to stay here, alone with me?"

"Stay!" New-born thought of self, ringing vibrantly in her voice, gave her answer singular power.²⁰

Later, Bess commented upon their life in the hidden valley, and expressed her ambivalence regarding society: "I want to go out into the big world and see it, yet I want to stay here more. What's to become of us? Are we cliff-dwellers? I'm happy when I don't think."²¹

For Venters, the valley provided total peace of mind:

He discovered that he hated to take up the broken threads and delve into the dark problems and difficulties. In this valley he had been living a beautiful dream. Tranquility had come to him, and the joy of solitude, and interest in all the wild creatures and crannies of this incomparable valley--and love. Under the shadow of the great stone bridge God had revealed himself to Venters.²²

As long as he remained in the isolated retreat, he was in a

¹⁹Lane Grey, The Riders of the Purple Sage (New York: Grosset and Dunlap, 1912), p. 148.

²⁰Ibid., p. 117.

²¹Ibid., p. 152.

²²Ibid., p. 160.

"primitive, childlike mood, like a savage's, seeing yet unthinking," seldom giving in to a civilized thought.²³

Bess and Venters did leave, but Lassiter and Jane With-
ersteen, the primary hero and heroine of the novel, chose to
isolate themselves permanently in the valley to escape a society
that seemed totally evil. The valley could be entered only by
a narrow entrance, in front of which the primitive cliff dwell-
ers had suspended a huge boulder. By dislodging the stone, it
was possible to permanently block the valley to other humans.
With Jane's encouragement, Lassiter dislodged the boulder, and
the outlet to deception pass closed forever. The decision was
irrevocably made to abandon civilization for good.²⁴

For some of these characters, return to civilized so-
ciety would be impossible; these characters reflected the feel-
ing of Huck Finn at the conclusion of that novel:

I reckon I got to light out for the territory ahead of
the rest, because Aunt Sally she's going to adopt me and
sivilize me, and I can't stand it. I been there before.

III

Another expression of the idea that nature was an ideal
state of repose appeared in popular interest in pastoral set-
tings and heroes. These novelists, in varying ways and often
by implication, all revealed the belief that man in nature--
that is, man untouched by the strife of civilization--was su-
perior to man in society. Nowhere did the idea that society

²³Ibid., p. 151.

²⁴Ibid., p. 280.

represented war and nature repose appear more conspicuously than in the novels of Harold Bell Wright, a man whose literary output attested to his deep fear of civilization. Wright was an extremely popular author, who in the period from 1900 to 1925 was second only to Winston Churchill in terms of book sales.²⁵

Wright's pastoralism, and his preoccupation with the conflict between civilization and nature emerged clearly in The Shepherd of the Hills (1907), a novel about the Ozark mountains before the settlement of that region began in earnest. The two central characters were perfect, unspoiled products of nature. Young Matt was a physical giant, a fearless man, but gentle, kind, and with honest eyes. Of young Matt, Wright said: "Such men are seldom seen."²⁶ His female counterpart was Sammy Lane, "one of those rare young women whose appearance is not to be described."²⁷ She was ideally beautiful: "It may be said that her face was a face to go with one through the years, and to live in one's dreams when the sap of life is gone."²⁸

Like Matt, Sammy knew nothing of civilized society, but was completely in harmony with the nature that surrounded

²⁵See Mott, Golden Multitudes, chapter xxxiii, for a brief but informative discussion of Wright and his novels; see also Irving H. Hart, "The Most Popular Authors of Fiction Between 1900 and 1925," Publishers' Weekly, CVII (February 21, 1925), 619-22.

²⁶Harold Bell Wright, The Shepherd of the Hills (Chicago: Book Supply Company, 1907), p. 28.

²⁷Ibid., p. 29.

²⁸Ibid.

her:

Her splendid young womanhood was not the product of the social traditions and rules that kill the instinct of her kind before it is fairly born. She was free and as physically perfect as any of the free creatures which lived in the hills. And, keenly alive to the life that throbbed and surged about her, her woman's heart and soul responded to the spirit of the season. The droning of the bees in the blossoms that grew in a cranny of the rock; the tinkle tinkle of the sheep bells, as the flock moved slowly in their feeding. The soft breathing that stirred her hair came heavy with the sweet smell of growing things.²⁹

When Sammy asked Dad Howitt, the cultured minister who had abandoned the city for the life of the hills, to educate her, Dad had misgivings. Howitt remembered the "women in the cities, pale, sickly, colorless, hot-house posies, beside this mountain flower. What would this beautiful creature be, had she their training? What would she gain? What might she not lose."³⁰

But Howitt's fears about bringing civilization to the girl were groundless. Sammy's intellectual development under the leadership of Howitt was remarkable. Sammy's education advanced in such a way that she remained ignorant of the "false standards, and the petty ambitions that are so large a part of the complex world."³¹

She never lost the innocence of nature, as her rejection of the materialistic, city-trained Ollie Stewart revealed. When Stewart spoke of the material rewards she would

²⁹Ibid., p. 72.

³⁰Ibid., p. 121.

³¹Ibid., p. 200.

have in the city, Sammy responded: "But can all this add one thing to life itself? Is not life really independent of all these things? Do they not indeed cover up the real life, and rob one of freedom?"³² She told Stewart that while she might well find some worthwhile things in the city, they could never compensate for what she would lose by leaving the hills. "I fear that I should lose the things that after all are, to me, the really big things. . . . There is something here that can bring happiness without what you call the advantages of the world to which you belong."³³

Sammy rejected the over-civilized Ollie for the unspoiled Matt. Matt was a primitive giant, but had a keenly developed moral sense. He told Dad Howitt: "I ain't no gentleman, I can't never be one. I'm just a man, I'm a savage, a damned beast, and I'm glad of it."³⁴ He had survived in the woods, "face to face with life," where education and money counted for nothing. Like Sammy, he was an uncorrupted product of nature--a superior human type.

With the inevitable union of Matt and Sammy, the author saw the fullest achievement of the repose of nature and the good life. "Two splendid creatures they were--masterpieces of the creator's handiwork; made by Him who created man, male and female, and bade them have dominion over 'every living

³²Ibid., p. 249.

³³Ibid., p. 250.

³⁴Ibid., p. 208.

thing that moveth upon the earth."³⁵

The child of this union was Dan Matthews, the hero of The Calling of Dan Matthews. Predictably, Dan too was an ideal type--and very characteristic of Wright's protagonists. Dan was "the first born of this true mating of a man and a woman who had never been touched by those forces in our civilization which so dwarf and cripple the race, but who had been taught to find in their natural environment those things that alone have the power to truly refine and glorify life."³⁶

In Wright's The Eyes of the World (1914), a novel about art and materialistic society, Conrad Lagrange was an author who found repose and solace in nature. Speaking of the American West, he told Aaron King, an artist, that the land must always remain in its primitive naturalness. "It will be easier here, than in the city crowded East, for a man to be himself." Concerning art and the West, he went on to say:

There is less of that spirit which is born of clubs and clans and schools--with their fine-spun theorizing, and their impudent assumption that they are divinely commissioned to sit in judgment. There is less artistic tea-drinking, esthetic posing, and soulful talk; and more opportunity for that loneliness out of which great art comes. The atmosphere of these mountains and deserts and seas inspires to a self-assertion, rather than to a clinging fast to the traditions and cultures of others.³⁷

Lagrange understood and heeded the call of nature. When he made one of his frequent trips into the mountains with

³⁵ Ibid., p. 345.

³⁶ Wright, The Calling of Dan Matthews, p. 32.

³⁷ Harold Bell Wright, The Eyes of the World (Chicago: Book Supply Company, 1914), p. 41.

King, he said they must go on foot:

The mountains . . . are not seen by those who would visit them with a rattle and clatter and rush and roar--as one would visit the cities of man. They are to be seen only by those who have the grace to go quietly; who have the understanding to go thoughtfully; the heart to go lovingly; the spirit to go worshipfully. They are to be approached .³⁸ . in the mood of one about to enter a great cathedral.³⁸

To Lagrange, the man of nature, understanding the message of the mountains was a mark of "true greatness of soul."³⁹

Not unlike Sammy Lane was the figure of Mrs. Hilary Vane, in Churchill's Mr. Crewe's Career--although she was a representative of what Sammy might have become had she left the hills and entered materialistic society. Mrs. Vane was dead when the action of the novel began, but her presence was felt throughout the novel in her son, the idealistic Austen Vane. Mrs. Vane was a child of nature. "She loved all nature. There wasn't a living, creeping thing that wasn't her friend," said Euphrasia, the housekeeper. Mrs. Vane would "wander off and spend whole days in the country,"⁴⁰ and she knew every path and hill-top, every brook and spring.

Of this totally unmaterialistic pantheist, Euphrasia remarked:

She'd go when the mountains called her, it didn't make any difference whether it was raining--rain never did appear to do her any hurt. Nothin' natural ever did her any hurt. When she was a little child flittin' about like a wild creature, and she'd come in drenched to the skin,

³⁸ Ibid., p. 177.

³⁹ Ibid., p. 41.

⁴⁰ Churchill, Mr. Crewe's Career, p. 410.

it was all I could do to catch her and make her change her clothes. She'd laugh at me. "We're meant to be wet once in a while," she'd say; "that's what the rain is for, to wet us. It washes some of the wickedness out of us." It was the unnatural things that hurt her--the unkind words and makin' her act against her nature.⁴¹

Mrs. Vane found perfect peace of mind in nature. She was incapable of accepting the realities of modern civilization, and was in fact brought to a premature death by the railroad--an explicit symbol of modern life. Her husband's total identification with the railroad destroyed her spiritually, and led to her tragic and early death.

Irving Bacheller's Eben Holden (1900) was strongly pastoral, and at least implicitly reflected the idea that nature was an ideal state of repose. While the novel was a biography of the narrator, Willie Brower, the central figure was Eben Holden--a hired hand, man of the forest, and rustic philosopher. The novel was set in the Adirondak wilderness before its settlement. Eben, as a natural man, was incapable of acting from evil motives.

Eben was able to adjust to civilization, but he could never be comfortable in society. He seemed too aware of the struggle society represented, and of the potential civilization contained for evil. He disliked the artificiality of cultured society. Given the choice between life in the woods and life in the city, he chose the latter. To Eben, with his apprehensions about society, man was the only animal to be feared. "Men are the mos' terrible of all critters and the meanest.

⁴¹Ibid., p. 411.

They're the only critters that kill for fun."⁴² Later, when he accidentally poured some water on a bumble bee, killing it, he remarked to Willie: "Jes' look at his velvet coat . . . an' his wings all wet and stiff. They'll never carry him another journey. It's too bad man has to kill every step he takes."⁴³

When asked by Willie what Heaven would be like, the man of the woods described a perfect state of tranquility:

To my way o' thinking it'll be a good deal like Dave Brower's farm--nice smooth land and no stun on it, an' hills an' valleys an' white clover a plenty, an' wheat an' corn higher'n a man's head. No bull thistles, no hard winters, no narrer contracted fools; no long faces, an' plenty of work.⁴⁴

Eben, in his complete identification with nature, and in his lack of sordid ambition, represented man at his best--man free from the struggle and corrupting influences of civilization. He represented a type of character in which the American reading public seemed to be becoming increasingly interested.

IV

The important new development in the best selling novel as it related to nature was the idea of escape from civilization for the purpose of entering into a conflict with the forces of nature. The idea that true manhood came only from personal confrontation with nature was expressed primarily in two ways. It appeared in novels dealing with the savage wild-

⁴²Irving Bacheller, Eben Holden (Boston: Lothrop Publishing Company, 1900), p. 34.

⁴³Ibid., p. 48.

⁴⁴Ibid., p. 212.

erness and the primitive existence; and it appeared in novels dominated by heroes who were frontiersmen or men of the cattle kingdom. The net effect of both approaches was the same; both sought to convey an idea of the type of manhood that was produced by an environment totally free of the degenerative and stultifying aspects of civilization. Although often the criticism of civilization these novels contained was only implied, a study of the heroes of these novels leaves little doubt about where the good life was to be found--and where it was not to be found.

One of the first of these novels dealing with the wilderness and the primitive existence was Stewart Edward White's The Silent Places (1904). The setting for the novel was the far northern regions of Manitoba. Throughout, the presence of a savage, primitive wilderness was felt; the wilderness seemed like a supreme being--a being that capriciously held the power of life and death over man.

The heroes of the novel, and indeed all of the men who appeared in it had one thing in common: their contact with the savage Northland. All of the men were possessed of "lean, wiry hardness of muscle and frame; a hawk-like glance of the eye, and almost emaciated spareness of flesh on the cheeks."⁴⁵ They had all been exposed to a "great enemy, a powerful enemy, an enemy to be respected and feared [and which had] hardened them to the unyielding. The adversary could almost be measured, the bit-

⁴⁵ Stewart Edward White, The Silent Places (New York: McClure Publications, 1904), p. 5

terness of the struggle almost gauged from the scars on their spirits, the hardness of it, the wonderful immensity of it that should so fashion the souls and the flesh of men."⁴⁶

The landscape was the dominant factor in the novel. Sam Bolton, one of the heroes, contemplated its immensity: "Here was the trackless country, large as the United States itself, with its great forests, its unmapped bodies of water, its plains, its barren ground, its mountains, its water courses wider even than the Hudson river."⁴⁷

Bolton had spent forty years in the wilds of the Northland, and was continually aware of the "old inimical presence" that was forever making itself felt:

The wilderness, calm, ruthless, just, terrible, waited in the shadow of the forest, seeking no combat, avoiding none, conquering with a lofty air of predestination. . . . Men's efforts against her would tire; the mechanics of her power remained constant. What she lost in the moments of her opponent's might, she recovered in the hour of his weakness, so that at last she won, poised in her original equilibrium above the bodies of her antagonists.⁴⁸

To survive in their great trek across the wilderness in pursuit of an Indian outlaw, Bolton and Dick Heron were forced to wrest their daily sustenance from the stubborn grasp of the North. "Winning that, anything was possible; failing that, nothing could follow but defeat."⁴⁹ As the two men became more and more isolated from civilization, they began to take on the color of their surroundings. Their souls became

⁴⁶Ibid., pp. 5-6.

⁴⁷Ibid., p. 16.

⁴⁸Ibid., p. 17.

⁴⁹Ibid., p. 38.

"laved by the great natural forces."⁵⁰

The novel traced the spiritual transformation of the young Dick Heron. When the trek began, he had all of the physical qualities required for survival in the hostile environment--yet he was spiritually immature. "In every respect he seemed to be especially adapted to the rigors of Northern life," but he lacked the deeper awareness of nature that was apparent in Bolton. At the start, Heron had no understanding of the "inimical presence," but in the course of his struggle with nature he gained it.

The effect of the wilderness on the men was the novel's main theme:

The woods life affects men in various ways, but all in a manner peculiar to itself. It is a reagent unlike any to found in other modes of life. The moment its influence reaches the spirit, in that moment does the man change utterly from the person he has been in other and ordinary surroundings; and the instant he emerges from its control he reverts to his accustomed bearing.⁵²

Dick learned, however, that once the spirit was influenced by this savage nature, the man was indelibly marked.

Increasingly, Dick saw the emergence of the "inimical presence," the calm, ruthless, terrible enemy--the wilderness. As Dick came closer to death by starvation and freezing, the oceans of snow around him seemed to speak:

"Is it done?" they asked him insistently. "Is it over? Are you beaten? Is your stubborn spirit at last bowed

⁵⁰Ibid., p. 110.

⁵¹Ibid., p. 8.

⁵²Ibid., p. 126.

down, humiliated, crushed? Do you relinquish the prize --and the struggle? Is it done?"⁵³

It was there, on the threshold of death and defeat, that Dick achieved his spiritual awakening.

The mission into the far northern area of Manitoba occupied more than a year. Somehow the two men survived--they found their sustenance somewhere "in the depths of their indomitable spirits."⁵⁴ But the two men had undergone deep spiritual transformations--particularly in the case of Heron. The dead vision of the North had left in their spirits a "residuum of its mysticism. Their experience of her power had induced in them a condition of mind when it would not have surprised them to discover the world shaken to its foundations, as their souls had been shaken."⁵⁵

Dick Heron lost his immaturity during his struggle with nature; he became uncharacteristically laconic; and he had a new, unspoken commitment to humanity. Because of his near-defeat at the hands of nature, and because of his new appreciation of the meaning of the North, he could never again conduct himself as if he were the focal point of the universe. "Never now could he live with his fellow beings in such blindness of their motives and the passions of their hearts."⁵⁶ Heron only achieved true manhood, and true wisdom, through his

⁵³Ibid., p. 282.

⁵⁴Ibid., p. 267.

⁵⁵Ibid., p. 295.

⁵⁶Ibid., p. 287.

deep, personal contact with the North American wilderness.

In Edgar Rice Burroughs's Tarzan of the Apes (1914), a book which had a vast appeal for the American reading public, the struggle of the primitive state seemed to be primarily productive of good. Tarzan was born in the primitive West African jungle, free of all civilized influences. Tarzan's father, Lord Greystoke, contemplated the plight of his marooned family when they were set ashore in this wilderness: what would be "the hardships and grave dangers of a primeval world"; what would be the "hideous reality which awaited them in the grim depths of that gloomy wood?"⁵⁷

Tarzan's father and mother soon died in the jungle, leaving Tarzan to grow into a physical superman. The young child, who was raised by apes, showed remarkable abilities for adaptation. "As Tarzan grew he made more rapid strides, so that by the time he was ten . . . he was an excellent climber, and on the ground could do many wonderful things which were beyond the powers of his little brothers. . . ."⁵⁸

The primitive existence had remarkable effects on the ape-man:

A personification, was Tarzan of the Apes, of the primitive man, the hunter, the warrior.

With the noble poise of his handsome head upon those broad shoulders, and the fire of life and intelligence in those fine, clear eyes, he might readily have typified some demigod of a wild and warlike bygone people of his ancient forest.

⁵⁷ Edgar Rice Burroughs, Tarzan of the Apes (Racine, Wisc.: Whitman Publishing Company, 1964), p. 23.

⁵⁸ Ibid., p. 45.

The young Lord Greystoke was indeed a strange and warlike figure, his mass of black hair falling to his shoulders behind and cut with his hunting knife to a rude bang upon his forehead. . . .⁵⁹

Jane Porter, who later joined Tarzan in the jungle, noticed that he far surpassed trained athletes in his strength and ability.⁶⁰ He also showed considerable intellectual ability; his deductive powers were very well developed--more so than even the most intelligent civilized man's. Primitive nature, then, provided Tarzan with more than merely a perfect body.

When Tarzan was brought into civilized society, and was housed and clothed in a civilized manner, he sensed society's stultifying atmosphere. Given a temporary opportunity to return to his accustomed habitat, he was exhilarated. Symbolically shedding his tailored clothes, he ran into the dark jungle:

This was life! Ah, how he loved it! Civilization held nothing like this in its narrow and circumscribed sphere, hemmed in by restrictions and conventionalities. Even clothes were a hindrance and a nuisance.⁶¹

Significantly, it was not until Tarzan came into contact with civilization that he discovered the phenomenon of evil. Materialism, cruelty, deception, and treachery, which he found in large supply in society, were not a part of the life he had known in the jungle. Only in the wild was evil truly absent--and only in the wild, and in the struggle with nature, could true morality be learned.

⁵⁹Ibid., p. 114.

⁶⁰Ibid., p. 231.

⁶¹Ibid., p. 253.

In The Call of the Wild (1903), Jack London was concerned with the theme of escape from the debilitating influences of a complex, industrialized America. In this novel, the central figure was the great dog Buck--but the story's lessons were clearly for man. The novel centered around Buck's involuntary removal from civilization, and his consequent transportation into saving nature.⁶²

Buck was stolen from a tranquil California ranch, and put into service as a sled dog in the Klondike. He found himself in a savage, primitive environment--one far removed from that of the "Southland", the symbol of civilization. "No lazy sunkissed life was this, with nothing to do but loaf and be bored. Here was neither peace, nor rest, nor a moment's safety. All was confusion and action, and every moment life and limb were in peril."⁶³

Quickly, Buck learned what was required for survival in the hostile environment of the Northland. Failure to adapt himself to the changing conditions would mean swift and terrible death. Gradually, he shed his moral nature, "a vain thing, and a handicap in the ruthless struggle for existence. It was all well enough in the Southland, under the law of love and fellowship, to respect private property and personal feelings; but in the Northland, under the law of club and fang,

⁶²See Raymond Benoit, "Jack London's The Call of the Wild," American Quarterly, XX (Summer, 1968), 246-8.

⁶³Jack London, The Call of the Wild (New York: Macmillan, 1903), p. 39.

whoso took such things into account was a fool."⁶⁴ Surrounded by dogs of the most savage nature, "the domesticated generations fell from him." He began an atavistic regression to the state that had characterized his breed before their domesticity--to the time the wild dogs ranged in packs through the primeval forests and killed their meat as they ran it down.⁶⁵ The old tricks of survival which had been stamped into the breed by heredity came to him, "as though they had been his always."⁶⁶ In savage nature, Buck harked "back through the ages of fire and roof to the raw beginnings of life in the howling ages."⁶⁷

Increasingly, Buck established his mastery over the savage dogs with whom he was thrown. He was "chemically propelled" by the blood lust to conquer and to kill. He had to master or be mastered--"mercy had no place in this primordial life. Kill or be killed, eat or be eaten was the law."⁶⁸

Once the spirit of the wild transformed Buck, he was permanently changed. While he could accept domestication temporarily, and could for a while be loyal to a kind master, "the strain of the primitive which the North had aroused in him remained alive and active."⁶⁹ Each day the claims of man-

⁶⁴Ibid., p. 54.

⁶⁵Ibid., p. 56.

⁶⁶Ibid.

⁶⁷Ibid., p. 79.

⁶⁸Ibid., p. 153.

⁶⁹Ibid., p. 152.

kind seemed to slip further from him: "Deep in the forest a call was sounding, . . . mysteriously thrilling and living."⁷⁰

When his master was killed by Indians, Buck no longer had a reason for remaining in civilization. He no longer needed to repress the sense that he was a savage beast. He could follow his instincts: "He was a killer, a thing that preyed, living on the things that lived, unaided, alone, by virtue of his own strength and prowess, surviving triumphantly in a hostile environment where only the strong survived."⁷¹

His formal initiation into nature, and into the primitive life, came when he singly defeated a wolf pack. Following a savage battle, the pack of wolves backed away; some lay on the ground with heads alert, and others stood watching him from a distance:

Then an old wolf, gaunt and scarred, came forward. Buck writhed his lips into the preliminary of a snarl, but sniffed noses with him. Whereupon the old wolf sat down, pointed noses at the moon, and broke out the long wolf howl. The others sat down and howled. And now the pack crowded around him, sniffing in half-friendly, half-savage manner. The leaders lifted the yelp of the pack and sprang away into the woods. The wolves swung in behind, yelping in chorus. And Buck ran with them, side by side with the wild brother, yelping as he ran.⁷²

There is no doubt that Buck, in escaping civilization, and in entering forever the combative, primitive existence, attained a life that approached the ideal.

In London's The Sea Wolf (1904), Wolf Larson was a

⁷⁰Ibid., p. 154.

⁷¹Ibid., p. 191.

⁷²Ibid., pp. 208-9.

representative of the primitive superman, in much the same way that Buck was. Larson must be seen as a villain in the novel; but he had established himself as one of the fit. He had adapted and survived on the sea, in ships engaged in the sealing trade, with men of the most savage type. Being the supreme product of struggle, Wolf was more powerful, and more savage than the men he commanded. The cultured intellectual, Humphery Van Weyden, the narrator, observed that Larson was a "magnificent atavism--so purely primitive that he was of the type that came into the world before the development of the moral nature."⁷³

Wolf was consistently represented in animal terms by the narrator. He was splendidly muscled, and heavy, but there was nothing heavy about his stride. "The jungle and the wilderness lurked in the uplift and the down-put of his feet. . . . I likened him to some great tiger, a beast of prowess and prey. . . . In his eyes was the same piercing glitter that I had observed in the caged leopards and other preying creatures of the wild."⁷⁴

As a perfectly primitive man, Wolf was totally lacking in viciousness, wickedness, or sinfulness--his was the face of a man who did no wrong. "It was the face of a man who either did nothing contrary to the dictates of his conscience, or who had no conscience."⁷⁵ Wolf would readily kill or mutilate any

⁷³ Jack London, The Sea-Wolf (New York: Grosset and Dunlap, 1916), p. 87.

⁷⁴ Ibid., p. 188.

⁷⁵ Ibid., p. 87.

living thing that seemed to threaten his existence. He made frequent references to the serious abuses of the industrial systems of England and America, and one was led to believe that Wolf's perception of the wrongs of modern industrialism were partly responsible for driving him to his atavistic state.⁷⁶

To the primitive Wolf, life was a mess. "It's like a yeast, a ferment, a thing that moves and may move for a minute, an hour, a year, or a hundred years, but that in the end will cease to move. The big eat the little that they may continue to move, the strong eat the weak that they may retain the strength. The lucky eat the most and move the longest, that is all."⁷⁷

For the effete, civilized life of repose represented by Van Weyden, Wolf had the utmost scorn. To Wolf, "might is right. Weakness is wrong."⁷⁸ In Larson's world, one man could not wrong another man. "As I see it, I do wrong always when I consider the interests of others. . . . How can two particles of the yeast wrong each other by striving to devour each other."⁷⁹ It was when a man ceased to strive and devour that he sinned, in Wolf's opinion. He recognized no artificial, soci-

⁷⁶ See Gordon Mills, "Jack London's Quest for Salvation," American Quarterly, VII (Spring, 1955), 3-14. The best study of London's social views is Philip Foner's Jack London: American Rebel (New York: The Citadel Press, 1947).

⁷⁷ London, The Sea-Wolf, p. 44.

⁷⁸ Ibid., p. 70.

⁷⁹ Ibid., p. 71

ety-created modes of behavior. "A living dog is better than a dead lion, I say with the preacher. My only doctrine is the doctrine of expedience, and it makes for surviving."⁸⁰

In the narrator, Van Weyden, London presented a juxtaposition with Larson; the primitive Wolf was brought face to face with the civilized literati. Van Weyden, like the dog Buck, was suddenly removed from civilization and thrown into the savage world of Wolf and the sailors. Like Buck, he had to learn the rules of the struggle and adapt--to become like Wolf--if he were to survive. Larson summed up Van Weyden's plight: "You havn't any lawyer or business agent now, so you'll have to depend on yourself."⁸¹ Quickly, Van Weyden made the necessary adjustments. He learned to suppress his moral nature, and began to assume the color of his surroundings. When threatened by the ship's cook, he revealed something of his transformation. "He [the cook] even ventured to raise his fist to me, but I was becoming animal-like myself, and I snarled in his face so terribly that it must have frightened him back. . . . A pair of beasts is what we were, penned together and showing our teeth."⁸² Eventually, Van Weyden established his supremacy over the cook, and brought him into "cur-like" subjection.

Van Weyden never lost his moral nature; but he was

⁸⁰Ibid., p. 100.

⁸¹Ibid., p. 43.

⁸²Ibid., p. 77.

aware of his descent to life on a primeval level. "The continual brutality around me was degenerative in its effect. It bid fair to destroy for me all that was best and brightest in life."⁸³

When Maud Brewster, shipwrecked and afloat in a dinghy, was picked up by the Ghost, Humphery told her that she would have to shed her civilized values: "You bring with you certain fine conceptions of humanity, manhood, conduct and such things; but here you will find them misconceptions."⁸⁴ When Maud spoke of moral courage, and its ability to sustain, Van Weyden was emphatic:

Moral courage is a worthless asset in this little floating world. Leach, one of the men who were murdered, had moral courage in an unusual degree. So had the other man, Johnson. Not only did it not stand them in good stead, but it destroyed them. And so with me if I should exercise what little moral courage I may possess.⁸⁵

His advice to Maud was that she dispense with all the moral courage she could.⁸⁶ In the end of the novel, however, Van Weyden was unable to kill the unarmed, unresisting, but totally treacherous Wolf because of the persistence in him of a moral nature. The narrator was incapable of making the complete regression to the primitive level that characterized Wolf and the dog Buck.

Both Buck and Wolf were products of London's response

⁸³Ibid., p. 106.

⁸⁴Ibid., p. 183.

⁸⁵Ibid.

⁸⁶Ibid., p. 184.

to a complex, often unjust industrial society that seemed to harbor more evil than good. Both characters were embodiments of life on the most primitive, elemental level, and as such were diametric opposites of civilized persons. They were supreme products of the struggle. Both had abandoned society, and had attained their status of super-figures through contact and confrontation with saving nature. Even Van Weyden, who did not completely make the transition to primitivism, but who had briefly participated in the struggle, would be a better man because of his exposure to that hardy and demanding existence.

V

The popular concern with nature as war also found expression in the novels of the American West.⁸⁷ The West provided a means for authors to oppose their ideal of the strenuous life of nature against the artificial, effete, and flabby life of civilized society. The West was a setting in which men could be judged directly by what they were and what they could do--and not by artificial social distinctions. In nature, these heroes found struggle, self-development, and a true spirit of manhood. The contest with nature both cleansed and revitalized the hero. As one scholar noted: "Boys became men; men, on their own, gain strength and wisdom."⁸⁸

⁸⁷The term "American West" is used here in a generic rather than in a specific sense. The term may apply to the shifting American frontier as well as to the area of the trans-Mississippi West and the cattle kingdom.

⁸⁸Karolides, The Pioneer in the American Novel, p. 176.

In a speech delivered in Chicago on April 10, 1899, Theodore Roosevelt summed up the philosophy which shaped his life, and in so doing gave an insight into the philosophy which he shared with so many of the novelists to be considered in this section:

I wish to preach, not the doctrine of ignoble ease, but the doctrine of the strenuous life, the life of toil and effort, of labor and strife; to preach that highest form of success which comes, not from the man who desires mere easy peace, but to the man who does not shrink from danger, from hardship, or from bitter toil, and who out of these wins the splendid ultimate triumph.⁸⁹

The speech was in fact a call for America to pursue an active policy of imperialism abroad--coming as it did in the wake of the Spanish American war. But it also revealed Roosevelt's perception of a commercial, urban society growing increasingly flabby and effeminate.⁹⁰ While no such specific

⁸⁹Theodore Roosevelt, The Strenuous Life: Essays and Addresses (New York: The Century Company, 1918), p. 1. See also Fred Pattee, The New American Literature, chapter viii; and Edwin H. Cady, "The Strenuous Life as a Theme in American Cultural History," in Browne, New Voices in American Studies, pp. 59-66.

⁹⁰The influence of evolutionary thought on the popular novelists who spoke for the strenuous life is inescapable. The belief, derived from Darwin and Spencer, that struggle and competition produced the best national and individual qualities had a great deal of currency around the turn of the century--even among men who had ceased to accept the economic and political implications of laissez-faire. The idea of universal struggle, and the belief that natural selection insured the survival of the best men and societies, found implicit or explicit expression in all of the best selling western novels. Like Roosevelt, the authors of these novels felt that nations and men who had grown accustomed to lives of isolated ease were certain to be submerged by other nations or other men which had not lost their masculine and adventurous qualities. There is a very definite connection, then, between the ideas of Darwin and Spencer, and the literary exponents of the strenuous

reference was made, the speech upheld the idea of the vigorous life of the frontier--the area which still seemed devoid of "scrambling commercialism" and that "base spirit of gain and greed" that were so apparent in society.⁹¹ The speech may be taken as an endorsement of the vigorous life of the pioneer, of the Westerner, and of the American cowboy--types with whom Roosevelt could easily feel identification.

The sentiments expressed in Roosevelt's speech found a reflection in a number of best sellers in the Progressive era. Novels concerned with the West gained a popularity they had not known since the time of Cooper.⁹² They seemed to satisfy a desire on the part of the American reading public for settings and persons isolated from the worst aspects of modern civilization. The fictional westerners, in their simple, strenuous lives, represented a conscious reaction on the part of authors to the passing of an agrarian society and the establishment of one that was commercial and industrial. Authors portrayed the characters who developed physically and mentally on the outermost fringes of civilization as ideal human types, and readers provided an enthusiastic reception for such novels.

⁹¹Roosevelt, The Strenuous Life, pp. 6, 8.

⁹²Philip Durham made the observation that it was not until immediately following the turn of the century, with the publication of The Virginian (1902), that the genre of the western novel became clearly identifiable. The scholar noted that before 1900, little or no attention was paid to the western cowboy. "Somewhere between 1902 and 1912, the western story became a type with characteristics which have not changed significantly during the half century since." See "Riders of the Plains," Neuphilologische Mitteilungen, LVIII (November, 1957), 24. See also James K. Folsome, The American Western Novel (New Haven: College and University Press, 1966).

In an article entitled "Ten Gallon Hero," David B. Davis made the observation that the literary frontiersman was "represented as escaping civilization, turning his back on the petty materialism of the world, . . . and seeking the unsullied true values of nature."⁹³ The westerner was a product of the struggle with nature, and was preoccupied with neither material nor social success; he seemed to represent all that had been good in American culture, and his portrayal was idealized:

Resourceful, self-reliant, bold; adapting himself with fluidity to diverse circumstances and conditions; meeting with equal cheerfulness of confidence and completeness of capability both unknown dangers and the perils by which he had been educated; seizing the useful in the lives of the beasts and men nearest him, and assimilating it with marvellous rapidity; he presents to the world a picture of complete adequacy which it would be difficult to match in any other walk of life. He is a strong man, with a strong man's virtues and a strong man's vices. In him passions are elemental, and the dramas epic, for he lives in the age when men are close to nature, and draw from her their forces. He satisfied his needs direct from the earth.⁹⁴

The frontiersman was portrayed as free of institutional restraints, as the hero of Rex Beach's The Spoilers showed: "I love to wrestle with nature; to snatch, and guard, and fight for what I have. I've been beyond the law for years and I want to stay there, where life is what it was intended to be--a survival of the fittest."⁹⁵

The western hero was precisely what the hero of The Spoilers said--he was a man who had confronted nature and life

⁹³American Quarterly, VI (Summer, 1954), 113.

⁹⁴White, The Blazed Trail, p. 3.

⁹⁵Beach, The Spoilers, p. 31.

and had survived. In these novels of the West, the hero was normally already in the setting of nature when the novel began, although the heroes were seldom born in these areas. Like the Virginian, they were often men who had left the East in their early manhood. Thus, the reader usually did not see the actual transformation which the West worked on the hero. All that was seen in most instances was the finished product--that is, the hero after he had established his supremacy over his environment.

However, there were a few cases in which the reader was given an insight into the actual changes which the West was capable of producing in an individual. Perhaps the best such example was in Wright's When a Man's a Man (1916).⁹⁶ The novel was concerned with the escape from urban society of Lawrence Knight, who at the start of the book was a typical product of over-civilization. By his own admission, Knight was a "useless idler, a dummy for the tailors, a superficial chatterer of petty nothings to vain, shallow women."⁹⁷ His manhood had been dwarfed by the "weakening atmosphere of an over-cultured, too conventional and too complex environment."⁹⁸

⁹⁶ Wright himself was ambivalent about whether nature was an ideal state of repose or struggle. In The Shepherd of the Hills (1907), and The Eyes of the World (1914), nature represented repose. In The Winning of Barbara Worth (1911), and When a Man's a Man (1916), it represented struggle. However, there was no ambivalence about Wright's belief that there was a great deal wrong with modern civilization.

⁹⁷ Harold Bell Wright, When a Man's a Man (Chicago: Book Supply Company, 1916), p. 271.

⁹⁸ Ibid., p. 24.

Knight escaped to under-civilized Arizona in order to enter the struggle and regain his manhood. In so doing, he hoped to find spiritual values which the city was incapable of providing. One character expressed Knight's reason for going West when he remarked: "They just don't make [men] outside of Arizona. It takes a country like this to produce real men. A man's got to be a man out here."⁹⁹ It was the unproductive repose of the city that knight escaped, and he knew well the potentially destructive effects of civilization. He told a friend: "It seems to me . . . that education . . . is a benefit only when it adds to one's life. If schooling or culture, or whatever you choose to term it, is permitted to rob one of the fundamental and essential elements of life, it is most certainly an evil."¹⁰⁰

In Wright's opinion, the West, which was without the deleterious effects of civilized society, was productive of the best human existence. In cultured society, artificial measurements were made of a man's worth; there, men and women were rated "not for strength, but for culture; not for courage, but for intellectual cleverness; not for sincerity, but for manners; not for honesty, but for success; not for usefulness, but for social position, which is most often determined by degree of uselessness."¹⁰¹

⁹⁹Ibid., p. 60.

¹⁰⁰Ibid., p. 84.

¹⁰¹Ibid., p. 118.

In less than a year, the free western environment produced remarkable changes in Knight:

The months of active outdoor life had given his tall body a lithe and supple strength that was revealed in every movement, while wind and sun had stained his skin that deep tan which marks those who must face the elements every waking hour. . . . His fringed chaps, shaped by many a day in the saddle, to his long legs, expressed experience, while his broad hat, soiled by sweat and dust, had acquired individuality, and his very jumper . . . disclaimed the tenderfoot.¹⁰²

His physical transformation merely reflected his spiritual transformation. He was vigorous, moral, and self-reliant.

Similarly, in The Riders of the Purple Sage, Bern Venters underwent a marked physical and spiritual improvement after he was forced to live on his own resources in the desert. Before his encounter with nature, Venters was an unimposing figure, and had most of the earmarks of an ineffectual. The new Venters was

Wild, rugged, unshorn--yet how splendid! He had gone away a boy--he had returned a man. He appeared taller, wider of shoulder, deeper-chested, more powerfully built. . . . Was the change only one of spirit? He might have been absent for years, proven by fire and steel, grown like Lassiter, strong, cool and sure.¹⁰³

The West, then, had a capacity for producing superior physical types. The physical qualities of the heroes of When a Man's a Man, and Wister's The Virginian (1902), were striking. Of Phil Acton, in the former, Wright observed:

As he sat there on his horse, so alert, so ready, in his cowboy garb and trappings, against the background of Granite Mountain, with its rugged, primeval strength, the

¹⁰²Ibid., p. 200.

¹⁰³Grey, The Riders of the Purple Sage, p. 9.

rider made a striking picture of verile manhood. Of some years less than thirty, he was, perhaps, neither as tall nor as heavy as the stranger; but in spite of a certain boyish look on his smooth-shaven, deeply-bronzed face, he bore himself with the unmistakable air of a matured and self-reliant man. Every nerve and fiber seemed alive with that vital energy which is the true beauty and glory of life.¹⁰⁴

Owen Wister's *Virginian* was very much the same:

Lounging there at ease against the wall was a slim young giant, more beautiful than pictures. His broad, soft hat was pushed back; a loose knotted, dull scarlet handkerchief sagged from his throat; and one casual thumb was hooked in the cartridge-belt that slanted across his hips. He had plainly come many miles from somewhere across the vast horizon, as the dust upon him showed. His boots were white with it. His overalls were grey with it. The weather-beaten bloom of his face shone through it duskily, as the ripe peaches look upon the tree in a dry season. But no dinginess of travel or shabbiness of attire could tarnish the splendor that radiated from his youth and strength.¹⁰⁵

On closer inspection, the narrator found the *Virginian* to be less than a giant--"but in his eye, in his face, in his step, in the whole man, there dominated a something potent to be felt . . . by man or woman."¹⁰⁶

Zane Grey's *Lassiter*, in *The Riders of the Purple Sage*, was another imposing figure--and a man with an aura of mystery.

Jane, greeting him, looked into a face that she trusted instinctively and which riveted her attention. It had all the characteristics of the range rider's--the leanness, the red burn of the sun, and the set of changelessness that came from years of silence and solitude. But it was not these which held her; rather, the intensity of his gaze, a strained weariness, a piercing wistfulness of keen, grey sight, as if the man was forever looking

¹⁰⁴Wright, *When a Man's a Man*, p. 24.

¹⁰⁵Owen Wister, *The Virginian* (New York: Grosset and Dunlap, 1902), p. 4.

¹⁰⁶*Ibid.*, p. 9.

for that which he never found.¹⁰⁷

Lassiter, the reader learned twelve pages later, "was born without fear."¹⁰⁸

In Grey's The Spirit of the Border (1906), a novel of the Ohio frontier rather than the cattle kingdom, Lew Wetzel was the hero with the now familiar characteristics.

Wetzel stands as straight as the oak over there. He'd hev' to go sideways to get his shoulders in that door, but he's as light of foot an' fast as a deer. An' his eyes--why lad, ye kin hardly look into 'em. If you ever see Wetzel, you'll know him to onct.¹⁰⁹

The reason for the physical superiority of the westerner lay primarily in the fact that he insisted on a high standard of excellence in all aspects of his life. Mediocrity had no place in his life, as Wister's Virginian revealed:

In the East you can be middling and get along. But if you go to try a thing in this western country, you've got to do it well. You've got to deal cyards well; you've got to steal well; and if you claim to be quick with your gun, you must be quick, for you're a public temptation, and some man will not resist trying to prove that he is quicker.¹¹⁰

In addition to their physical attributes, nature and the struggle had also provided these men with great inner strength. In When a Man's a Man, Phil Acton represented unspoiled manhood. Living as he did, a life as vigorous as that of the wild horses of the desert, he was incapable of immoral-

¹⁰⁷Grey, The Riders of the Purple Sage, p. 9.

¹⁰⁸Ibid., p. 21.

¹⁰⁹Zane Grey, The Spirit of the Border (New York: A. L. Burt, 1906), p. 25.

¹¹⁰Wister, The Virginian, p. 402.

ity. "His simple and primitive views of life--as natural as the instinct which governs all creatures in his God-cultivated world," were refined, noble, and elegant. He had an intellectual awareness that allowed him to "observe closely and think with clean-cut directness."¹¹¹

While Phil had never been "broken and educated," or civilized in the usual manner, he had read considerably; the heroine was surprised by the extent of his knowledge. She learned

of his observations and thoughts of nature, and of the great world movements and activities that by magazines and books and papers were brought to his hand; she learned to her surprise that even as he lived amid the scenes that called for the highest type of physical courage, he lived an intellectual life that was marked for its strength and manly vigor.¹¹²

The Virginian, also untutored in the formal sense, showed a keen intellect. He had a driving curiosity: "Scarcely ever would he let drop a thing new to him until he had got from you your whole information about it."¹¹³ He had an appreciation for Walter Scott and Shakespeare, and told the heroine: "As soon as I got used to readin' it, I knowed for certain that I liked readin' for enjoyment."¹¹⁴

Like the other western heroes, the Virginian was ambitious for neither wealth nor social position--although he

¹¹¹Wright, When a Man's a Man, p. 120.

¹¹²Ibid., p. 333.

¹¹³Wister, The Virginian, p. 151.

¹¹⁴Ibid., p. 142.

eventually attained both of these. Early in the novel, when he unexpectedly became foreman of a cattle shipping operation, he accepted his new position with reluctance. "I don't know about promotion. The boys have been used to seeing me one of themselves."¹¹⁵

In every respect, the Virginian and Phil were products of Roosevelt's program for the strenuous life.¹¹⁶ They were men who did not shrink from danger or hardship or bitter toil. The Virginian was typical: "I have earned my living since I was fourteen, and that's from old Mexico to British Columbia. I have never stolen or begged a cent."¹¹⁷

At all times the frontier hero was totally self-reliant. He shaped his own destiny, and was strong. In When a Man's a Man, one character typified this attitude:

One thing the Dean will not, cannot tolerate, is weakness in one who should be strong. Even bad men he admires, if they are strong--not for their badness, but for their strength. Mistaken men he loves in spite of their mistakes--if only they are not weaklings. There is no place anywhere in the Dean's philosophy of life for a weakling. I heard him tell a man once--nor shall I ever forget it--"You had better die like a man, sir, than live like a sneaking coyote."¹¹⁸

¹¹⁵Ibid., p. 153.

¹¹⁶Roosevelt and Wister were life-long friends. In fact, when The Virginian first appeared in serial form in 1894, Roosevelt objected to a certain part of it which he found "sickening" because of its presentation of stark brutality. When the novel appeared in book form in 1902, the offensive passage was missing. See Don D. Walker, "Wister, Roosevelt and James: A Note on the Western," American Quarterly, XII (Fall, 1960), 358.

¹¹⁷Wister, The Virginian, p. 265.

¹¹⁸Wright, When a Man's a Man, p. 44.

Later, Lawrence Knight, the cultured Easterner who had adapted and been transformed in the West, was strongly critical of men who lacked strength and self-reliance:

I mean the sort that never do anything of their own free wills; the sort that have someone else to think for them, and feed them, and take care of them, and take all the responsibility for what they do or do not do. I mean those who are dependents, and those who aspire to be dependent.¹¹⁹

An example of the vigorous, self-reliant man in unspoiled nature was seen in Churchill's The Crossing, in the character of David Ritchie. He was brought up by his father totally isolated from civilization:

I learned to skin a bear, and fleece off the fat for oil with my hunting knife; and cure a deerskin and follow a trail. . . . I learned to endure cold and hunger and fatigue and to walk in silence over the mountains.¹²⁰

Davy's father chose to raise the boy in nature, in the pure life of the mountains.¹²¹ When his father died, and Davy was brought into civilization, he was distressed: "A longing came upon me for the old backwoods life, with its freedom and self-reliance, and a hatred for this steaming country of heat and violent storms, and artificiality and pomp. And I had a desire, even at that age, to make my own way in the world."¹²²

Not unlike other western characters, Davy never experienced real fear until he entered civilization and slept

¹¹⁹Ibid., p. 170.

¹²⁰Churchill, The Crossing, p. 3.

¹²¹Ibid., p. 19.

¹²²Ibid., p. 59.

for the first time in a house:

I had never known real fear in the woods at night. But now I trembled as I felt my way down the ladder, and groped and stumbled through the dark attic for the stairs. Every noise I made seemed louder an hundred times than the battle had been, and when I barked my shins, the pain was sharper than a knife.¹²³

Another product of the struggle with nature was Abe Lee, in Wright's The Winning of Barbara Worth. He was a surveyer rather than a cowboy, but his contact with life in its natural state had its effect on him. He was not unlike the other characters considered previously:

Abe was born and raised in the wild, uncivilized parts of the country and has a natural ability for his work that amounts almost to genius. With a knowledge of nature gained through his remarkable powers of observation and deduction, I doubt if Abe Lee has an equal as what might be called a 'surveyer scout.' I believe he is made of iron. Hunger, cold, thirst, heat, wet, seem to make no impression on him. He can out-walk, out-work, out-last and out-guess any man I ever met. He has the instinct of a wild animal for finding his way and the coldest nerve I ever saw. His honesty and loyalty amount almost to fanatism.¹²⁴

Characteristically, he had a sense of morality that demanded his disengagement from a land development scheme that was blatantly exploitative. He could not sacrifice his integrity to financial gain.

A final aspect of the western hero which is worthy of mention was his attitude toward the Judeo-Christian God. While it was a charactersitic which did not apply in every case, there was a marked tendency for the hero to reject the idea of the conventional God. Usually, the hero had evolved a peculiar per-

¹²³Ibid., p. 26.

¹²⁴Wright, The Winning of Barbara Worth, p. 81.

sonal theism from his experiences. As a man who had succeeded in the struggle, the hero was too much of a god himself to have need of the conventional one.¹²⁵

Lew Wetzel, in Grey's The Spirit of the Border, expressed something of the hero's peculiar theism when he said: "I ain't a Christian, an' I am a killer of Injuns. I don't know nothin' much 'cept the woods an' fields, an' if there's a God fer me, He's out thar under the trees an' grass."¹²⁶ The Virginian, in discussing his views of the conventional God, told a friend that he would not attempt to impose orthodox religion on his offspring. He said: "If ever I was to have a son or somebody I set store by, I would wish their lot to be to know one or two good folks mighty well--men or women--women preferred."¹²⁷

Later the Virginian elaborated on his ideas of the supernatural to the narrator. Reporting the conversation, the narrator wrote:

"As for salvation, I have got this far: somebody," and he swept an arm at the sunset and the mountains, "must have made all that, I know. But I know one more thing I would tell him to his face: if I can't do nothing long enough and good enough for eternal happiness, I can't do nothing long enough and bad enough to be damned. I reckon He plays a square game with us if He plays at all, and I ain't bothering my haid about other worlds."¹²⁸

¹²⁵See David B. Davis, "Ten Gallon Hero," p. 120.

¹²⁶Grey, The Spirit of the Border, p. 179.

¹²⁷Wister, The Virginian, p. 214.

¹²⁸Ibid., p. 221.

While the religious views of Lassiter, in The Riders of the Purple Sage, and Knight, in When a Man's a Man, were not stated explicitly, it is safe to assume that had they done so, they would have expressed views very similar to those of Wetzel and the Virginian. The western hero, then, was not a man who had a need for intellectualized religion.¹²⁹

The frontier environment did produce villains as well as heroes; every one of these novels had a villain. Nature did not make men good, or bad, as much as it brought out existing potentialities within them. The West, then, did not necessarily produce moral improvement in an individual--but clearly, it was far more likely to bring out the best in a man than was the urban environment.

The capacity of the West for regeneration lay in the fact that it made men self-reliant in a way that was not possible in the complex city. Social position and artificial distinction amounted to nothing in the West, as Rex Beach noted in The Spoilers:

The frontier is capable of no finer compliment than this utter disregard of one's folded pages. It betokens that highest faith in one's fellow man, the belief that he should be measured by his present deeds, and not by his past. It says, translated: "This is God's free country where a man is a man, nothing more. Our land is new and pure, our faces are to the front. If you have been square so much the better; if not, leave behind the taints of

¹²⁹These western heroes can probably be considered as genuine Christians, but without a formal church or creed. They represented a critique of overly-formalized, rationalized, and sophisticated Eastern religion. Thus, authors who created these heroes, in effect, were reacting to yet another aspect of civilized society.

artificial things and start again on the level--that is all."¹³⁰

Wright echoed this opinion in The Winning of Barbara Worth. He considered the West and nature as the final test of a man's character. "The concealing habits of civilization were lost. Face to face with the unconquered forces of nature, nothing remained but the real strength or weakness of the individual himself."¹³¹

VI

Novels about nature, in the sense that it has been employed in this chapter, were not peculiar to the Progressive era. The debate over whether the good life could best be found within civilization or outside of it had antecedents which long predated the industrial revolution.¹³² The western novels of Cooper, in the early nineteenth century achieved very considerable popularity--although it must be noted that the western novel entered a dormant period between the time of Cooper and the time of Wister and Grey. It is clear that the first sixteen years of the twentieth century saw a dramatic and marked increase in the number of best selling novels dealing with nature, and nature-related themes.¹³³

¹³⁰ Beach, The Spoilers, p. 24.

¹³¹ Wright, The Winning of Barbara Worth, p. 140.

¹³² See Hoxie Neale Fairchild, The Noble Savage: A Study in Romantic Naturalism (New York: Columbia University Press, 1928).

¹³³ An insight into reading tastes in the decade following World War I can be found in Irving Hart, "The Most Popular Authors of Fiction in the Post-War Period," Publishers' Weekly, CXI (March, 1927), 1045-53.

The very obvious quantitative change in best sellers toward subjects concerned with the West, primitivism, and pastoralism, cannot be easily attributed to any one factor. As Nash showed, the advent of modern industrialism, with its implications of sordid commercialism and materialism, was only a contributing cause. It may be argued, however, that industrialism, and the public awareness of the passing of an agrarian world, were important factors in the shift in popular literary tastes.¹³⁴

There were differences among the authors concerning the reason that nature was an ideal state; but there was complete agreement on the fact that something was fundamentally wrong with society, and that society had become visibly oppressive. One group of novelists, the smaller group, reverted to romantic pastoralism for their means to express dissatisfaction with a society which seemed to represent war; the larger group expressed the newer idea that one had to leave civilization to find war, and that only when one engaged in struggle could he find true manhood. But both groups expressed deep-seated apprehensions about civilization, and in this we find a revelation about the popular mood of the Progressive era.

¹³⁴See Nash, "Cult of the Primitive," pp. 520-21.

CHAPTER V

THE PERCEPTION OF THE WOMAN

I

The period from 1900 to 1916 had considerable historical significance for the American woman. The economic changes which swept the nation in the late nineteenth century, and seemed to climax in the 1890's, affected Americans without regard for sex. As America moved from the farm to the city, the traditional (and perhaps mythical) role of the woman was inexorably transformed. Increasingly, the woman was deserting the home and the family; more and more her days were spent in the factory and the mill--although after 1900 it was more often in the store or the office.¹ As one scholar has recently shown, it was the years from 1900 to 1910, rather than the period from 1910 to 1930, which saw the great leap forward in women's participation in American economic life.² As the woman's position

¹See Harold U. Faulkner, The Quest for Social Justice (New York: Macmillan, 1931), chapter vii; and Henry Steele Commager, The American Mind, pp. 23, 64. For an insight into the status of the woman in the Progressive era, see also Anna Spencer, Women's Share in the Social Culture (New York: M. Kennerley, 1912); Charlotte Gilman, The Man-Made World (New York: The Carlton Company, 1911); and Susan B. Anthony, "Woman's Half Century of Evolution," North American Review, CLXXV (December, 1902), 800-810.

²James R. McGovern, "The American Woman's Pre-World

in the home became altered by economic developments, the groundwork was laid for her emancipation; very obviously, her changed economic status altered her degree of dependence on the men around her.

Factors other than economic ones also pointed in the direction of the woman's eventual emancipation. One was the advance of medical knowledge, and the efforts of various individuals and groups to disseminate information regarding birth control.⁴ Smaller families gave the woman either more leisure time, or more time at work, and in either case her traditional function in the home and society underwent modification. At the same time, political developments had their effects; woman suffrage was a legal fact in five states before the turn of the century, and by 1914, the number of states with full woman suffrage had increased to thirteen. Before the nineteenth amendment passed Congress in 1919, nearly thirty states had exten-

War I Freedom in Manners and Morals," Journal of American History, LV (September, 1968), 320.

³By emancipation I mean more than merely woman suffrage.

⁴The movement to disseminate birth control information on a large scale began in earnest in the second decade of the century. The first periodical established for this purpose was Woman Rebel, published for the first time in 1914 by Mrs. Margaret Sanger, a nurse who had worked on the East Side of Manhattan. The publication was immediately barred from the mails, and Mrs. Sanger's subsequent efforts were directed toward the formation of the American Birth Control League. After she was arrested and convicted for mailing another publication, Family Limitation, she largely withdrew from the movement, but was followed in her efforts by other like-minded women. See Emily Douglas, Margaret Sanger: Pioneer of the Future (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1969).

ded the vote to women by legislative fiat.⁵

Perhaps less vital to the change in the woman's status, but worthy of note, were the effects of Freudian psychology. The influence of Freud became most apparent after 1920, but even before the war it was being felt. Concerning the influence of Freud on women's rights, one scholar observed that the woman was "still physiologically--and to a lesser extent psychically--different from man, but she was no longer simultaneously inferior and superior to him in the way she had once been. She had her id and her libido, as he did. Her infantile eroticism may have been expressed differently from his, but it was there all the same, and her dreams drew their symbols from the same common bank."⁶

The conditions and developments which ensured the woman her emancipation following World War I, then, were fully functional in the Progressive era. Scholars such as George Mowry, William Leuchtenberg, and Frederic Lewis Allen, who felt that the woman's position in society was altered sharply and dramatically following World War I, have given too little consideration to the transformations of the Progressive era.⁷ The

⁵For information on woman suffrage in the Progressive era, see Mowry, The Era of Theodore Roosevelt, p. 80; Faulkner, The Quest for Social Justice, pp. 172-76; and Arthur Link, American Epoch (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1967), p. 234.

⁶Blotner, The Modern American Political Novel, p. 169. See also Frederick J. Hoffman, Freudianism and the Literary Mind (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1945).

⁷Mowry, The Urban Nation (New York: Hill and Wang, 1965), p. 23; Leuchtenberg, The Perils of Prosperity (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958), chapter ix; and Allen, Only Yesterday (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1931), chapter v.

emancipated, liberated woman of the 1920's was the product of gradual social change, and owed a great deal to visible departures from the past which appeared in the Progressive era.⁸ Examination of the popular novel of the period shows that the Progressive era was the critical period in terms of the woman's eventual emancipation.

If social developments between 1900 and 1916 prefigured the emancipation of women, the experiences of World War I, and the cultural transformation of the immediate post-war period were decisive. The war brought a marked increase in the number of women engaged in gainful employment and service work, and this heightened existing tendencies in the economy and in society.⁹ The post-war period saw the widespread introduction of closed cars; the growing professionalization of women; the phenomenon of prohibition--which made women law-breakers alongside men; and the further entrenchment of Freudian ideas.

Illustrations of the changes wrought by the Progressive era, World War I, and the immediate post-war period are provided in two examples. In 1904 a woman was arrested for smoking in public in New York City; in 1929, railroads dropped their regulations against women smoking in dining cars.¹⁰ A second example is seen in the female protagonists of Dreiser's Sister Carrie (1900), and Hemingway's The Sun Also Rises (1926).

⁸ See McGovern, "The American Woman," p. 333.

⁹ Leuchtenberg, The Perils of Prosperity, pp. 159-60.

¹⁰ Ibid., p. 159.

Carrie was a fallen woman, but never promiscuous; Lady Brett cohabited with any man that struck her fancy. The number of years separating Carrie and Lady Brett was not great; but the social and cultural transformations which occurred in the interim were very considerable.

The woman's image in the Progressive era was in a state of transition; it was Janus-faced. She was not yet as emancipated as Brett Ashley, nor as liberated as the "flapper" of the 1920's--but she was no longer the characteristic Victorian. The popular literature of the period portrayed a preponderance of female protagonists who conformed well to the conventional nineteenth-century requirements for the woman; but at the same time it presented a relatively large number of female protagonists who were striving toward emancipation, or who were on the verge of achieving it. The literature, then, reflected that fact that what it meant to be a woman was undergoing an important transition between 1900 and 1916. Afterwards, she could never appear quite the same as she once had.

For the sake of convenience, I shall use the terms traditional or conventional, and "new" to describe the two dominant types of women in the popular novels. The terms traditional or conventional woman applies to one who was typically Victorian, and who exhibited a willingness to play the role society had traditionally assigned to women. The "new" woman, on the other hand, was one who rejected this traditional social position; she sought to bring herself into the concerns and the interests of men. The "new" woman can obviously

be found at earlier periods in American literature, but it was in the Progressive era that she became a standard literary type rather than an exception.

The examination of the traditional and "new" women as they appeared in the best selling novels of the Progressive era provides a number of insights into how the reading public saw, or wanted to see its heroines. It therefore says something important about the mind of American society in this period. A number of significant questions can be raised concerning the novelists' portrayal of the woman: What types of women seemed to have the most appeal? What role did the woman play in relation to the other characters? What were her aspirations, ambitions, and her views on society? In effect, an attempt might be made to discover how much was traditionally Victorian in the fictional woman, and how much was peculiar to the twentieth century. It is to be hoped that such an examination will provide some insights into American culture as a whole in the transitional years from 1900 to 1916.

II

Although the traditional and the "new" women were basically very different, there were certain points which all authors agreed were mandatory for all heroines. For instance, all of the heroines were strikingly feminine. They all had a very keenly developed moral awareness, and were usually anti-materialistic. All served as moral uplifters and guides for the male characters. After considering these similarities be-

tween the two groups of women, it will be possible to analyze both to see exactly what was unique in each.

The heroine's femininity and beauty were too manifestly apparent in the novels to merit detailed consideration here. Her femininity was a quality which all authors made frequent reference to. Whether traditional or "new," she was uniformly tall and lithe, with considerable dignity and stature. Lily Bart, in Wharton's The House of Mirth, was characteristic. The hero, Lawrence Selden, observed on one occasion that "it was one of those days when she was so handsome that to be handsome was enough, and all the rest--her grace, her quickness, her social felicities--seemed the overflow of a bounteous nature. . . . She detached herself, by a hundred undefinable shades, from the persons who most abounded in her own style."¹¹ The heroine, then, was a woman who stood out in a crowd.

While all authors emphasized her femininity, they went to special lengths to do so when the heroine was placed in a setting, or had an occupation, which might have been expected to produce hardness or callousness. On these occasions, authors were repititious in their assurances to the reader of the heroine's femininity. This was particularly the case with the "new" women, and with traditional women in frontier or western settings. Cherry Malotte, the "new" heroine in Beach's The Silver Horde, struggled for her livelihood on the Alaska frontier, but showed no signs of masculinity. The hero was sure

¹¹Wharton, The House of Mirth, p. 346.

that "he had never seen a more womanly woman. Everything about her was distinctly feminine."¹²

Molly Wood, the traditional heroine of The Virginian, was a New Englander who went to Wyoming as a school teacher. Despite her voluntary relocation to the masculine West, the reader was assured that she occupied most of her time, when not actually teaching, by embroidering handkerchiefs and making preserves.¹³ Polly McChesney, in Churchill's The Crossing, despite the hardness of her frontier life, epitomized femininity. Churchill wrote of Polly: "Did man, woman, or child fall sick, it was Polly Ann who nursed them. . . . She was deft too, . . . and spun from nettle bark many an article of linen that could scarce be told from flax."¹⁴ The author characteristically pointed out that Polly was a woman "upon whose eternal freshness industry made no mar."¹⁵ The heroine, then, in the city or in the wilderness, traditional or "new," was totally feminine.

Both groups of heroines showed a very keenly developed spiritual awareness, and reflected a sense of strident moral responsibility. In some cases, when this spiritual awareness appeared in the "new" woman, it took the form of a commitment to a Progressive reform, as I shall show later; but otherwise,

¹²Beach, The Silver Horde, p. 30.

¹³Wister, The Virginian, p. 94.

¹⁴Churchill, The Crossing, p. 135.

¹⁵Ibid., p. 253.

the expressions of this moral sensitivity varied little between the two groups.

Among the traditional women, this characteristic was seen clearly, for example, in King's The Street Called Straight, in Olivia Guion's insistence that she bear the full burden of guilt for her father's embezzlement. She felt that since she had assisted, albeit unknowingly, in spending the pilfered funds, she too should pay the penalty for the crime. "I've had my share of the--of the wrong, so I ought to take my share of the reparation."¹⁶ When her father informed her that she could not be punished for his crime, she responded: "No; but they can't keep me from sitting outside the walls. I shall want to do that, papa, if you're within. I'm not going to separate myself from you--or from anything you're responsible for."¹⁷

It was the same sort of ethical consciousness that made her oppose Peter Davenant's offer to make restitution for the stolen money. She could not countenance the idea of a virtual stranger paying what she felt were her own obligations. Acceptance of public exposure, and submission to the legal consequences, were more suitable to her; "It will be paying for what we've had--if not on one sort of coin, then in another. But whatever it is, we shall be paying the debt ourselves; we shan't be foisting it off on someone else."¹⁸

¹⁶King, The Street Called Straight, p. 131.

¹⁷Ibid., p. 132.

¹⁸Ibid., p. 131.

Although desperate for a means of recouping at least part of her squandered inheritance, so as to regain her social position, Lily Bart, another traditional heroine, would not marry the unattractive Sim Rosedale in Wharton's The House of Mirth. Nor would she expose certain letters that would have given immediate assurance of restoring her to a position of affluence and social status since the disclosures would have embarrassed Lawrence Selden. She could not sacrifice Selden merely to buy her own redemption.

The same sort of impulse motivated the traditional Diane Eveleth, in King's The Inner Shrine (1909). After her husband mismanaged and lost his inheritance, and then ended his life in a duel, Diane's economic plight was precarious. Still, she refused gratuities, and even turned over the tiny annual income that remained to her mother-in-law, preferring instead to make a living as best she could. In a slightly different vein, idealism and self sacrifice were revealed in the character of Kate Mercy, in Churchill's The Inside of the Cup. Kate entered a life of deprivation and ultimately of prostitution rather than endanger the career of the man she loved.¹⁹

The conventional heroine in White's The Blazed Trail, Hilda Farrand, was strongly motivated by moral concerns. She saw the male protagonist, Harry Thorpe, the aspiring lumber magnate, and his work, as the embodiment of good: "To Hilda the lumbermen . . . were self-conscious agents of advance. They

¹⁹Churchill, The Inside of the Cup, pp. 245, 484.

chose hardship, loneliness, the strenuous life because they wished to clear the way for a higher civilization. To her it seemed a great and noble sacrifice."²⁰ Her moral naivete made her oblivious to the fact that the endeavors of Thorpe and the lumbermen were influenced primarily by greed--and she chose to see his endeavors on a higher plane. "She recognized but two sorts of motives; of which the ideal, comprising the poetic, the daring, the beautiful, were good; and the material, meaning the sordid and selfish, were bad. With her mere money-making would have to be allied with some great and poetic excuse."²¹

The "new" woman also revealed this characteristic moral sensitivity in various ways. Cherry Malotte was interested in financial gain, but not to the extent that she would violate her personal code of morality to earn it. When Emerson Boyd, the hero of The Silver Horde, said that he was desperate, and that he would sacrifice anything to insure the success of his salmon-fishing enterprise, Cherry responded: "You don't mean what you say. The success of this venture, with any happiness it may bring you, isn't worth a human life; nor is it worth what you are suffering."²² She decried the lack of financial morality in commerce, and was particularly bitter about the tendency of business to stifle competition by any means avail-

²⁰White, The Blazed Trail, p. 301.

²¹Ibid.

²²Beach, The Silver Horde, p. 205.

able."²³

Similarly, Alison Parr, the daughter of Eldon Parr, in Churchill's The Inside of the Cup, and one of the heroines directly concerned with a Progressive reform, was stridently moral and unmaterialistic. Like Cherry Malotte, she was highly critical of business immorality, and was contemptuous of her tycoon father and of the fortune he had made unscrupulously. Typically, she refused to have any part of Parr's legacy, since she considered it nothing more than ill-gotten gain.²⁴

Sharlee Weyland, in Henry Harrison's Queed (1911), was a "new" woman who showed her ethical consciousness by refusing to accept for herself a large sum of money of which her father had been defrauded. To Sharlee, acceptance of the money would somehow have constituted an impediment to her independence. She told Queed: "Perhaps it is unreasonable, but I could never have any pleasure in it--never feel it was really mine."²⁵ She decided that she would take the money and "give it to the state. I thought I should like to give it to--establish a reformatory."²⁶

At times the heroine revealed a pronounced commitment to an ideal which derived from her characteristic ethical consciousness. This was seen in both Virginia Carvel, the heroine

²³Ibid., pp. 27, 30.

²⁴Churchill, The Inside of the Cup, p. 487.

²⁵Henry S. Harrison, Queed (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company), p. 420.

²⁶Ibid.

of Churchill's The Crisis, and in Helena Von Ritz, the heroine of Hough's Fifty-Four Forty or Fight. Both were literally placed in the nineteenth century, but were ideologically among the "new" women. Virginia Carvel revealed an exaggerated altruistic commitment to the ideal of Southern nationalism. On one occasion she told her aunt that the leaders of the South would have to forget their preoccupation with caste, honor, and gentility, and begin the process of developing the South's natural resources:

It was all very well to be gentlemen in the days of my great-grandfather. But now we have railroads and steamboats. And who builds them? The Yankees. We of the South think of our ancestors, and drift deeper and deeper into debt.²⁷

Her solution was education--but of a sort that would produce a supply of Southern technologists rather than gentlemen.

Helena Von Ritz was committed to the ideal of American democracy. She felt that her life's work was to assist in the extension of America's democracy, since she was convinced that "opportunity must exist, open and free, for all the world. . . . When I came to America--out of pique, out of love of adventure, out of sheer daring and exultation in imposture--then I saw why I was born, for what purpose!"²⁸ In the novel she was the vital link in the diplomatic manoeuvring which eventually resulted in American annexation of Oregon.

All heroines acted in the vital role of moral uplift-

²⁷ Churchill, The Crisis, p. 71.

²⁸ Emerson Hough, Fifty-Four Forty or Fight (New York: A. L. Burt, 1909), p. 342.

ers and guides for the male protagonists. The supplied encouragement, advice, direction, and generally served to elevate the hero's values when it seemed necessary. In The Blazed Trail, it was the traditional heroine Hilda Farrand who finally convinced Harry Thorpe that his pursuit of profit was becoming obsessive and sordid; her ideals and her presence were responsible for elevating his values to a higher plane.

Likewise, Laura Jadwin, in The Pit, a woman who preferred the simple values and derived no pleasure from having large amounts of money at her disposal, played an important part in bringing her husband to an awareness of the materialistic life he was leading--even though his financial disaster was the more immediate cause of his change of heart.²⁹ A further example of this female ability to infuse idealism can be seen in The Riders of the Purple Sage, when Jane Withersteen persuaded the gunfighter, Lassiter, to give up his obsessive mission to avenge the death of his sister.³⁰

Hope Farwell, in The Calling of Dan Matthews, and Alison Parr, in The Inside of the Cup, were typical examples of the "new" woman's ability to act as moral uplifter and guide. It was because of Hope that Dan Matthews came to accept the

²⁹Norris, The Pit, pp. 239, 338.

³⁰Grey, The Riders of the Purple Sage, p. 233. Western and frontier women conformed in all important respects to the characteristics of the traditional woman--although they did exist in a very different environment and often tended to be more useful and productive persons. Still, they too were very much dependent creatures, and very much bound to convention. See Karolides, The Pioneer in the American Novel, chapter iv.

Social Gospel, and because of Alison that Reverend Hodder was similarly brought to an awareness of the social mission of Christianity. In these novels, Matthews and Hodder would probably have been unable to articulate the causes of their dissatisfaction with traditional religion had it not been for the presence of the two women.

Amy thorne, another "new" woman, in The Rules of the Game, convinced Bob Orde that he should leave the forest service and accept the task his father had offered of experimenting with profitable, and wasteless, forest exploitation. "It's your chance, it's our chance. It's the one thing we've lacked, the opportunity of showing lumbermen everywhere that the thing can be made to pay."³¹ The reform-minded Sharlee Weyland, in Harrison's Queed, persuaded the hero to leave his elevated theoretical plane, and begin to face the real problems of society. It was largely because of the influence of Barbara Worth that Willard Holmes, the civil engineer, broke his connection with the blatantly exploitative company of James Greenfield; and it was Cherry Malotte who constantly strove to elevate the ideals of Emerson Boyd--and who eventually made him see the error of his preoccupation with financial success.

The efforts to infuse morality were normally successful, although there were examples of failure among both groups of women. In Churchill's Coniston, the traditional Cynthia Ware, one of the two female protagonists (and a classic stereotype of the romanticized, idealized woman), tried to prevent

³¹White, The Rules of the Game, p. 640.

Jethro Bass from taking political control of the town of Coniston by devious means. She implored him to abandon his political schemes, since they would result in a perversion of democratic government, but met with no success.³² Similarly, in The Virginian, the transplanted Eastern heroine, Molly Stark, failed in her effort to persuade the Virginian not to engage in a gun-fight with Trampas, the villain. But more commonly, such efforts to uplift met with success.

As with the traditional women, the effort by "new" women to infuse idealism did not always work. In A Modern Chronicle, Honora Leffingwell was unable to bring her husband to a realization of his depravity. Victoria Flint, in Mr. Crewe's Career, gave Austen Vane moral support, but never succeeded in convincing him that he should enter politics. And Virginia Carvel, in The Crisis, was unable to influence Clarence Colfax and her fellow Southerners with her prescription for the reconstruction of the Southern value system.

To emphasize the character of both the "new" and the traditional heroines, authors normally juxtaposed an unsympathetic woman with the heroine. In Wright's The Eyes of the World, the flawless heroine, Sybil Andres, was contrasted with Louise Taine, a character who reflected a negative expression of the heroine's virtues. Louise Taine was wanton, selfishly cruel, and represented the spirit of intellectual and spiritual degeneration which seemed to dominate America.³³ To-

³²Churchill, Coniston, pp. 66-7.

³³Wright, The Eyes of the World, pp. 256, 446.

tally lacking in principle or ideals, she engaged freely (although discreetly) in adultery while she waited for her decrepit husband to die. Above all else, she "maintained appearances," and publically conformed to all the required conventions.³⁴ In every respect, she was depraved and bent on her own self-gratification.

Lillian Colfax, in The Crisis, was used by the author to present a contrast with the heroine, Virginia Carvel. She revealed conspicuous tendencies toward materialism and self-interestedness. During the Civil War, when Virginia was making great sacrifices for the cause of the South, Mrs. Colfax refused to voluntarily reduce her customary style of living, and bitterly resented the infringements on her social life caused by the war.³⁵

Helen Thorpe, in The Blazed Trail, and Mildred Wayland, in The Silver Horde, were both spoiled young ladies who lacked any spiritual qualities, and who, in contrast to the heroines, were preoccupied with their own well-being. They were oblivious to the aspirations and the interests of the respective heroes, and were incapable of acting as moral guides. Similar tendencies appeared conspicuously in Sybil Sheridan, in The Turmoil, and in the woman referred to as Mercedes, in London's The Call of the Wild.³⁶ These were by no means the

³⁴ Ibid., p. 59, 156.

³⁵ Churchill, The Crisis, pp. 317, 348, 374, 433, 446.

³⁶ Tarkington, The Turmoil, p. 239; and London, The Call of the Wild, p. 132.

only examples of this type of character, but they are sufficient to show that authors felt it necessary to reinforce the characteristics of the heroine by showing, with very little subtlety, what she was not.

III

The popular literature of the Progressive era provides a unique opportunity for the student of American cultural history to watch an older, slowly disappearing female protagonist placed side by side with the "new" emerging heroine who typified the social and economic transformations of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. This "new" woman was in every essential respect the prototype of the emancipated woman of the post-World War I period.

The "new" heroine displayed a number of characteristics that were quite different from those displayed by her traditional counterpart. In effect, she represented a conscious or unconscious revolt on the part of authors against the traditional literary woman. Since she represented a revolt of sorts on the part of many authors, an attempt must be made to determine exactly what was being revolted against. What characteristics were the "new" heroines leaving behind in their ideological departures from the past; in short, what was the profile of the traditional woman--the object of the revolt?

The situations, backgrounds, and circumstances of the traditional woman varied a great deal, but a few tendencies recurred frequently enough to be considered characteristic.

Above all, and most important in terms of distinguishing her from the "new" woman, the traditional woman conformed cheerfully to conventional patterns of female behavior--whereas the "new" woman was often a rebel. The traditional woman had no quarrel with the role society had assigned to her, and this, perhaps more than any other single factor, separated her from the "new" woman who shall be considered later.

Virtually all of the traditional women were satisfied with their conditions of domesticity; they did not resist the dictum that the woman's place is in the home. The central character in Kathleen Norris's Mother (1911), was typical of many of the women in the literature in her total selflessness and her acceptance of domestic life. Mrs. Paget "was a simple woman; so absorbed in the hourly problems attendant upon the housing and feeding of her husband and family that her own personal ambitions, if she had any, were quite lost sight of, and the actual outlines of her character were forgotten by everyone, herself included."³⁷

Polly McChesney, in The Crossing, Fanny Brice, in The Crisis, and Myra Willard, in The Eyes of the World, were all nearly identical to Mrs. Paget in both character and disposition.³⁸ Like Mrs. Paget, these women lived lives of domesticity and self-sacrifice in which "care, fatigue, responsibi-

³⁷Kathleen Norris, These I Like Best (New York: Book League of America, 1941), p. 571.

³⁸See Churchill, The Crossing, p. 135; and The Crisis, pp. 253, 365.

bility, and hard long years of busy days and broken nights had left their mark."³⁹

By no means were all of the traditional women this domesticated, but they all adapted willingly to the customary role demanded of the woman. Betty Malroy, the heroine of Vaughn Kester's The Prodigal Judge, aspired only to establish an elegant household; "She would be the mistress of the most splendid place in west Tennessee. She secretly hoped to be a brilliant hostess."⁴⁰ In Rex Beach's The Barrier, Necia Hale longed for nothing more ambitious than to live and dress as a "fine lady."⁴¹ And in The Crisis, Lillian Colfax, the unsympathetic protagonist, paid little attention to matters other than keeping her household beautiful and her wardrobe fashionable.⁴² By their training and upbringing, then, the traditional woman was prepared for little except directing the affairs of a household.

One of the most striking facts about this group of women was their absolute commitment to convention. They displayed no independence or willingness to act without regard for the social consequences. Lily Bart, in Wharton's The House of Mirth, provided the best example of the female adherence to convention. She was the best fictional creation in the liter-

³⁹Norris, These I Like Best, p. 571.

⁴⁰Kester, The Prodigal Judge, p. 89.

⁴¹Beach, The Barrier, p. 62.

⁴²Churchill, The Crisis, pp. 433, 446.

ature under consideration, and in most essential respects was one of the most typical female protagonists in the novels. She was described as a "victim of the civilization which had produced her." She was not a free person, and recognized the fact.⁴³ Bred to a life of convention, she seemed to have lost the ability to act on her own initiative. She grew up in a house

in which no one ever dined at home unless there was company; a door-bell perpetually ringing; a hall table show-ered with square envelopes which were opened in haste; . . . French and English maids giving warning amid a chaos of hurriedly-ransacked wardrobes and dress clothes; precipitate trips to Europe . . . ; [and] semi-annual discussions as to where the summer should be spent.⁴⁴

In effect, Lily was fully committed to a conventional social life which emphasized "the stupid costliness of the food and the showy dulness of talk; . . . the freedom of speech which never arrived at wit and the freedom to act which never made for romance."⁴⁵ Even when only a pittance remained in her possession, she continued to dine at places and reside at addresses which the convention of her social group demanded.⁴⁶ So acclimated was she to the life of following social dictates, that when her finances were irreversibly lost, and she could no longer live her accustomed life, she was destroyed, and ended her life with suicide.

⁴³Wharton, The House of Mirth, p. 10.

⁴⁴Ibid., pp. 44-5.

⁴⁵Ibid., p. 347.

⁴⁶Ibid., pp. 363, 367.

The only unconventional act Lily was guilty of was her suicide. In all other respects, she was a creature of convention, and was typical of most of the traditional female protagonists. Olivia Guion, in The Street Called Straight, underwent an upbringing much like Lily's. "Her inclinations, carefully fostered by her parents, had always been for the solid, and the well-ordered, evolved from precedent to precedent till its conventions were fixed and its doings regulated by a code of etiquette."⁴⁷ Her father set greatest value on things which had the power to strike the eye, and Olivia inherited this tendency.⁴⁸ Characteristically, her planned marriage to an English Army Colonel was more desirable for its social appropriateness than for any love relationship between the two participants.⁴⁹

Sylvia Landis, in Robert Chambers's The Fighting Chance, was little different from either Lily or Olivia, although at the end of that novel she was finally able to shed partially her dependence on social convention. She displayed her attitude toward convention most clearly in her planned marriage to Howard Quarrier, the unscrupulous financier. The marriage was purely one of mutual convenience, as she explained to a friend: "He cares no more for love than I do. I happen to be the one woman in New York whom he considers absolutely

⁴⁷King, The Street Called Straight, p. 147.

⁴⁸Ibid., p. 134.

⁴⁹Ibid., pp. 185-86.

suitable for him; by race, breeding, virtue appearance and presence, eminently fitted to complete the material portion of his fortune and estate."⁵⁰ Through most of the novel, Sylvia had virtually no quarrel with this arrangement.

The traditional woman adhered to convention tenaciously. That she frowned on unorthodoxy was apparent in The Silver Horde, when the cultured Mildred Wayland tried to induce Emerson Boyd to relinquish his salmon fishing interests and start a conventional life of urban commerce: "Why don't you build a railroad or something such as father does? He makes a great deal of money out of railroads."⁵¹ In very much the same way, Helen Thorpe, in The Blazed Trail, asked her brother to renounce his life as a lumberman in the wilds and "try a clerkship or something in the city."⁵²

On the whole, most of the traditional women fit perfectly the description of Laura Jadwin in The Pit. She was described as a woman "who adjured society and the formal conventions."⁵³ They were women who by training and inclination could scarcely conceive of flaunting a social requirement.⁵⁴

⁵⁰Chambers, The Fighting Chance, p. 198.

⁵¹Beach, The Silver Horde, p. 151.

⁵²White, The Blazed Trail, p. 89.

⁵³Norris, The Pit, p. 239.

⁵⁴Although it was an isolated case and in no way typical, it was in fact commitment to convention that caused Marion Lenoir to throw herself off a cliff in The Clansman because she had been raped. "This shame I can never forget, nor will the world forget. Death is the only way" (p. 307). And the same sort of conventional emotional response led Melissa Turner to commit suicide in The Little Shepherd of Kingdom Come because her love for the hero was unrequited.

As if to insure that the traditional woman would not jeopardize her moral spotlessness, her life was circumscribed in various ways. She was not allowed to engage in certain activities, and the male character usually insulated her from the realities of life. It was to protect her moral nature that the traditional woman was not allowed to involve herself in matters that properly constituted the concerns of men.

The best example of this was seen in the area of commerce and finance. The traditional woman was kept scrupulously innocent of money matters by the men around her. In The Silver Horde, Emerson Boyd told his fiance, Mildred Wayland: "I don't think you would care to know the details, dear. This is so entirely a business matter. It is so sordidly commonplace, and you are so far removed from sordid things that I don't think you would care to hear of it. My mind won't associate you with commercialism."⁵⁵

Other male protagonists did not express it as clearly, but they too often endeavored to keep their female counterparts ignorant of money matters. Diane Eveleth, the central character in The Inner Shrine, was kept in perfect ignorance of her husband's financial crisis; and in The Street Called Straight, Olivia Guion was only informed of the particulars of her father's embezzlement when it could no longer be withheld, and only after all the male characters had been fully appraised of the matter. Even the women who wanted to be told the truth

⁵⁵Beach, The Silver Horde, p. 150.

about financial matters that concerned them were refused the information. At least two "new" women, Barbara Worth and Honora Leffingwell, demanded to be told certain financial details, and received no satisfaction.⁵⁶ Money seemed to have an almost unlimited potential for corruption, and while a man could dabble in such matters with impunity, it was best if the woman refrained.

As a corollary, the traditional woman was almost never forced to resort to the necessity of earning a living. It was as if contact with the real world would somehow rob her of her moral nature, and impair her ability to uplift men. All of the traditional women were well provided for. In The Pit, Laura Jadwin and her sister were typical examples: "A large sum had been set aside which was to be made over to them when the father died. . . . When Laura and Page faced the world, alone, . . . they had the assurance that, at least, they were independent."⁵⁷ Virtually all of the traditional women were either independently or otherwise wealthy, and so were further freed from involvement in unpleasant financial matters. Hilda Farrant, in The Blazed Trail, had a sizeable fortune, as did Betty Malroy, in The Prodigal Judge.

Intentionally or unintentionally, authors who employed traditional heroines described women who were vestiges of an earlier society. At times, authors went to some lengths to em-

⁵⁶Wright, The Winning of Barbara Worth, p. 357; and Churchill, A Modern Chronicle, p. 378.

⁵⁷Norris, The Pit, p. 39.

phasize that the traditional woman was an anachronism. This revealed itself most clearly in the inability of the conventional woman to support herself effectively when changes in her fortune demanded it. As a woman who was trained to rely on the male for her livelihood, she lacked the resourcefulness to become economically productive.

Mary Vertress, in The Turmoil, whose father lost everything because of his financial mismanagement, gave the clearest expression of the traditional woman's economic uselessness when she admitted to Bibbs Sheridan that she was unsuited for any sort of gainful employment:

You might wonder why I didn't 'try to be a stenographer' --and I wonder myself why, when a family loses its money, people always say the daughters 'ought to go and be stenographers.' It's curious!--as if a wave of the hand made you into a stenographer. No, I'd been raised to be either married comfortably or a well-to-do old maid. . . . I didn't know how to do anything except be a well-to-do old maid or somebody's wife--and I couldn't be a well-to-do old maid.⁵⁸

In Basil King's The Inner Shrine, Diane Eveleth was totally unprepared for productive self-support after the death of her husband. For the first time in her life she would have to make her way in the real world: "The knowledge that she must make such a place or go without food and shelter, only served to paralyze her energies and reduce her to a state of nervous inefficiency."⁵⁹ She was able to do no more than eke out a marginal and insecure existence as a governess, and was quietly

⁵⁸Tarkington, The Turmoil, p. 307.

⁵⁹King, The Inner Shrine, p. 68.

resentful of the loss of her old, secure life.⁶⁰

Even less successful at the business of earning a living was Lily Bart. As a cultured ex-socialite who had exhausted her finances, she found herself unable to earn a living when circumstances demanded it. Her upbringing had prepared her for a life of ease: "It was the life she had been made for; every dawning tendency in her had been carefully directed toward it, all her interests and activities had been taught to center around it. She was like some rare flower grown for exhibition, a flower from which every bud had been nipped except the crowing blossoms of her beauty."⁶¹ When shorn of her money and social status, she proved her inability to survive on her own by failing at a succession of jobs before eventually committing suicide. Her suicide symbolized her inability to come to terms with the modern world.

Although the traditional heroine was a possible heroine, she was presented by authors, consciously or unconsciously, in an unfavorable light. She was revealed as uncomplainingly domesticated and tied to a life of drudgery. She was totally convention-bound and lacking in independence. And the authors showed that she was an anachronistic figure who was unequipped to deal with the exigencies of modern industrial society. In all these things, she was in marked contrast to the "new" woman.

⁶⁰ Ibid., p. 122.

⁶¹ Wharton, The House of Mirth, p. 512.

IV

While authors exalted the "new" woman indirectly by revealing her traditional counterpart unsympathetically, they also did so directly by presenting the "new" woman in a highly favorable manner. In contrast to the traditional woman, the "new" woman was not home-oriented, not useless, and quite able to be self-supporting. A typically twentieth-century creation, she was self-reliant, resourceful, and independent. Usually, she was socially unconventional, although as shown earlier, she never lacked femininity, and had a strong sense of moral probity. Further, in many instances she was used by authors to mirror one or more of the pressing concerns of the Progressive era, such as conservation, business control of government, or the failure of religion to adjust to modern industrial society.

Above all, the "new" woman knew her own mind, and followed the dictates of her conscience regardless of the social opprobrium. It is important to note, however, that this same woman was almost always willing eventually to accept marriage, and consequently some measure of domesticity at the end of each novel. In short, she was not entirely emancipated--she was a prototype of the emancipated woman rather than a bona fide product of emancipation.

One of the most conspicuous character traits of the "new" woman was her unwillingness, at least initially, to accept domesticity. This was combined with a pervasive aura of resourcefulness and relative independence. In these respects, the figure of Alison Parr, in The Inside of the Cup, was typi-

cal. Early in life she informed her father that she would not tolerate the condition of domestic slavery that her mother had accepted.⁶² She was assertive, unconfined, and an enigma to her father, Eldon Parr. "She seemed to have developed a sort of philosophy of her own even before she went away to school, and to have certain strongly defined tastes."⁶³ Alison was one of the best representatives of the emerging twentieth-century woman; she ignored convention, and determined to "make something of her life."⁶⁴ She insisted strenuously on her right to individual freedom and self-assertion.⁶⁵ In an effort to earn her right to independence, she left home for New York "I wanted to succeed," she said to a friend, "to be able to confound all those who had doubted and ridiculed me."⁶⁶

Margaret Paget, in Kathleen Norris's Mother, also resisted the life of domestic servitude in which her mother had existed. She came to the conclusion that "while there may have been a time when a woman could keep a house, tend a garden, sew and raise twelve children, things were different now; life is more complicated. You owe your husband something. I want to get on, to study and travel. . . . I don't want to be a mere upper servant."⁶⁷ With this she left her country vil-

⁶² Churchill, The Inside of the Cup, p. 88.

⁶³ Ibid., p. 86.

⁶⁴ Ibid., p. 87.

⁶⁵ Ibid., p. 88.

⁶⁶ Ibid., p. 485.

⁶⁷ Norris, These I Like Best, p. 570.

lage for a career as a private secretary in the modern world of the city.

In The Clansman, Elsie Stoneman, the daughter of the Radical Republican leader of Congress, voiced much the same feeling: "I dream of a life that shall be larger than the four walls of a home. I have never gone into hysterics over the idea of becoming a cook and housekeeper without wages, and snuffing my life out while another grows, expands, and claims the lordship of the world. . . . My ideal is an intellectual companion who will inspire and lead me to develop all that I feel within to its highest reach."⁶⁸

In Rex Beach's The Silver Horde, Cherry Malotte was described as an "unconventional creature," unwilling to accept a conventional life. She elected to seek her fortune on the Alaska frontier, following the mining camps. She learned to survive, and she developed cunning and skill--but there is no indication that she was ever a woman of easy virtue. She said of herself: "I cast my lot with the people of this country; I had to match my wits with those of every man I met. Sometimes I won, sometimes I did not," but in either case she demonstrated her desire and her ability to determine her own destiny.⁶⁹

Cherry was feminine in every respect, but still, she showed the effects of her life of self-sufficiency: "She appeared . . . to have become prematurely hard and worldly. . . ."

⁶⁸Dixon, The Clansman, p. 127.

⁶⁹Beach, The Silver Horde, p. 363.

Yet it was unbelievable that this slip of a woman should possess the determination, the courage, the administrative ability to conduct so desperate an enterprise. [Boyd] could understand the feminine rashness that might have led her to embark on it in the first place, but to continue in the face of such opposition--why, that was a man's work and required a man's powers."⁷⁰

Rejection of the conventional woman's role and the desire to achieve individual freedom were particularly apparent in Churchill's "new" women. Virginia Carvel, in The Crisis, although literally placed in the nineteenth century, was intellectually and emotionally a twentieth-century creation. That she aspired to independence and self-determination was clear. She told her father: "I don't want to go to balls all my life. I want to go to boarding school and learn something."⁷¹ She resented the masculine tendency to view women only as love-objects: "You believe that women were made to look at and play with--not to think," she told one of the male protagonists.⁷² Similarly, Honora Leffingwell, in A Modern Chronicle, felt that "education, improvement, growth," were all as necessary for a woman as for a man. She resented her husband's relegation of women to a position of intellectual and emotional inferiority.⁷³

⁷⁰Ibid., p. 30.

⁷¹Churchill, The Crisis, p. 80.

⁷²Ibid., p. 71.

⁷³Churchill, A Modern Chronicle, p. 245.

The "new" woman had little regard for social convention and niceties, and at least implicitly, was contemptuous of the traditional woman. Victoria Flint, in Mr. Crewe's Career, was seen by her female contemporaries as "hopelessly unconventional."⁷⁴ She was indifferent to the matter of marriage, and to the problem of getting herself "well placed in life."⁷⁵ When she was given the chance to enter a conventional marriage of convenience that any traditional woman would have leapt at, she rejected it without a second thought."⁷⁶

Alison Parr, like Victoria Flint, also ignored convention. A character in the novel remarked that "very few women with her good looks could have done what she has without severe criticism, and something worse, perhaps. The most extraordinary thing about her is her contempt for what her father has gained and for conventionalities."⁷⁷

Cherry Malotte freely admitted that her past had been questionable by conventional standards. She had no regrets: "I made some mistakes--what girl doesn't who has to fight her way alone? My past is my own; it concerns nobody but me."⁷⁸ The double standard of morality was unacceptable to her, as she revealed in no uncertain terms to Emerson Boyd: "You know the world now; you have tasted its wickedness. Would you change

⁷⁴ Churchill, Mr. Crewe's Career, p. 399.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ Ibid., p. 396.

⁷⁷ Churchill, The Inside of the Cup, p. 98.

⁷⁸ Beach, The Silver Horde, p. 363.

your knowledge for your earlier innocence? You know you would not, and you have no right to judge me by a separate code."⁷⁹ She asserted her right to do "wild, impulsive things," and prided herself on her lack of artificiality.⁸⁰

Honora Leffingwell's unconventionality, and her desire to shape her own destiny, took a somewhat different form. When she discovered that her marriage to Howard Spence was intolerable, she decided to seek a divorce--although she realized a severe penalty would have to be paid in social ostracism. Rather than accept a life with one whom she regarded as unsuitable--and so retain her social acceptability--she followed her conscience, and sought a modern solution to her matrimonial problem--a divorce.⁸¹ One character articulated Honora's feelings: "We are no longer in the dark ages. Everyone, man or woman, has the right to happiness. There is no reason why we should suffer all our lives for a mistake."⁸² Honora herself declared: "I have the right to make of my life what I can," and further justified her action on the ground that "the world is changing."⁸⁴

Barbara Worth, on the whole, came closer to conform-

⁷⁹Ibid.

⁸⁰Ibid., p. 319.

⁸¹William L. O'Neill, "Divorce in the Progressive Era," American Quarterly, XVII (Summer, 1965), 203-17.

⁸²Churchill, A Modern Chronicle, p. 357.

⁸³Ibid., p. 370.

⁸⁴Ibid., p. 371.

ing to the pattern of the traditional woman than any of the other "new" women; but even she rejected the conventional affairs of the woman, and instead involved herself in the concerns of men. In The Winning of Barbara Worth, this took the form of her preoccupation with the desert reclamation scheme of her step-father.⁸⁵ Like the other "new" women, her femininity was unquestionable, but she was bored by the social role that convention demanded: "Her friends protested that they never saw her now at their little social affairs, for she was always off somewhere with some engineer."⁸⁶ She was another example of a woman growing restless with a life of domestic subservience.

Parenthetically, the highly unconventional Helena Von Ritz should be mentioned. She was the heroine in Hough's Fifty-Four Forty or Fight--a highly romantic novel about the acquisition of Oregon. Again, this was a case of the heroine being literally placed in the nineteenth century, but who was a very obvious product of the twentieth-century mind. Miss Von Ritz lived by her wits as a paid spy, and was the secret agent of Great Britain. For the love of adventure she engaged in intrigue with Mexico, England, and the United States, and she was described by one character as a "born adventuress, eager devourer of any hazardous and interesting intellectual offering, any puzzle, any study, any intrigue. . . ."⁸⁷ Not surprising-

⁸⁵Wright, The Winning of Barbara Worth, pp. 46-8.

⁸⁶Ibid., p. 133.

⁸⁷Hough, Fifty-Four Forty or Fight, p. 213.

ly, her virtue was a negotiable item. Von Ritz was atypical of the "new" heroine in most respects; but she still reflected something of how the literary mind in the Progressive era conceived of the woman, and the woman's role in society.

Churchill's female protagonists tend to best show the transition which American women were undergoing in the period from 1900 to 1916. More of Churchill's heroines were working toward emancipation than those of any other author. Virtually all of Churchill's women expressed the desire to cast off the traditional, domesticated existence. They aspired to a life of social and economic usefulness, and almost all of them revealed a longing to be a man. Honora Leffingwell expressed such a desire no less than six times. She resented her sex-determined role, and said to her aunt: "If I were a man, I shouldn't rest until I became great."⁸⁸ Later she said: "If I were a man I shouldn't stay here. I'd go to New York--I'd be somebody--I'd make a national reputation for myself."⁸⁹

Alison Parr's father said of his daughter: "She should have been a man," since she would not accept the conventional woman's role.⁹⁰ The altruistic Virginia Carvel told her aunt: "If I were a man, and going into a factory would teach me how to make a locomotive or cotton press, or build a bridge, I should go into a factory. We shall never beat the Yankees

⁸⁸ Churchill, A Modern Chronicle, p. 14.

⁸⁹ Ibid., p. 55.

⁹⁰ Churchill, The Inside of the Cup, p. 87.

until we meet them on their own ground."⁹¹ And Victoria Flint told Austen Vane, the reformer, that she would enter politics in a good cause if she were a man.

Cherry Malotte, the Rex Beach character who was the heroine of both The Spoilers and The Silver Horde, shared the sentiments of these Churchill women. She told Emerson Boyd: "I wish I were a man. I'd like to engage in a business of this sort, something that would require ingenuity and daring. I'd like to handle big affairs."⁹² Like the others, she reflected dissatisfaction with the limitations placed on the woman by society.

The "new" woman was often gainfully employed; about half of the women of this type had a productive job. In Queed, Sharlee Weyland was mildly indignant when Queed responded to the news that she worked: "Why, I thought you were a lady!"⁹³ Sharlee gave an insight into a changing American society when she replied:

It might astonish you to know how many females of gentle birth and breeding are engaged in gainful occupations on this one block alone. It was not ever this way with them. . . . The females, ladies in the essential sense, must either become gainful or starve. They have not starved.⁹⁴

Sharlee, a career girl, was Assistant Secretary of the State Department of Charities, and described her job as clerk, book-

⁹¹ Churchill, The Crisis, p. 72.

⁹² Beach, The Silver Horde, p. 283.

⁹³ Harrison, Queed, p. 74.

⁹⁴ Ibid., p. 75.

keeper, stenographer, and office girl.⁹⁵

Alison Parr was engaged in a gainful career before the action of The Inside of the Cup began. As a highly fashionable and successful landscape gardener, she proved to her own satisfaction her ability to succeed and be self-sufficient. Cherry Malotte engaged in a number of occupations on the Alaska frontier--from dealing cards at faro tables to prospecting for minerals and salmon fishing. Hope Farwell, in Wright's The Calling of Dan Matthews, was a professional nurse. She was self-supporting, fiercely independent, and followed her conscience regardless of the opinion of society. In Mother, Margaret Paget was a private secretary; and in The Rules of the Game, Amy Thorne assisted her brother in various phases of his work in the Forest Service. Not surprisingly, the "new" women who had occupations, and who were self-supporting, were the most nearly emancipated heroines in the literature.

In their spiritual awareness, as we have seen, the "new" woman was not unlike her traditional counterpart. However, the "new" woman often served the additional function of elucidating some particular problem of the Progressive era. Almost all of the women in some way reacted to the apparent preoccupation of American society with materialism and material values, and many of the heroines had Progressive approaches to the problems they saw in society.

The concern with moral values and Progressive issues appeared in a number of ways. Amy Thorne, for instance, in

⁹⁵Ibid.

The Rules of the Game, had a commitment to the conservation of America's natural resources--a problem which aroused widespread interest in the Progressive era. Amy deserted the refined life of the city for the forest reserves of California when her brother was made a supervisor in the Forest Service. When Bob Orde commented on the poor salary of a forest supervisor, Amy responded with the statement that "a money wage isn't the whole pay for any job that's worth doing."⁹⁶ Her Progressivism, and moral qualities were clearly evident when she told Orde:

Those tasks in life which give a high monied wage generally give just that. Part of our compensation is that we belong to the Service; we're doing something for the whole people, not just ourselves.⁹⁷

Amy represented a new generation resisting the wasteful pillage of natural resources by an older, less scrupulous generation of robber barons. She was very much a twentieth-century woman, and was used by White to elucidate a problem which had considerable social and economic significance between 1900 and 1916.

In The Calling of Dan Matthews, Wright used the ethical consciousness and character of Hope Farwell to illustrate some of the problems confronting established religion early in the twentieth century. Hope rejected the established church because of its hypocrisy and control by predatory capitalists. She was an outspoken advocate of the Social Gospel.⁹⁸ Regard-

⁹⁶White, The Rules of the Game, p. 339.

⁹⁷Ibid., p. 340.

⁹⁸Charles Hopkins, The Rise of the Social Gospel in American Protestantism, chapter xii.

ing the irrelevance of organized religion, she told Dan Matthews: "What right have you or your church to be ignorant of these everyday conditions of life? Our teachers, our legal and professional men, our public officers, our mechanics and laborers, must all know and understand their work. The world demands it of us, and the world is beginning to demand that you and your church know your business."⁹⁹ This was essentially the criticism of the Social Gospel advocates.¹⁰⁰ A Social Gospel publicist of the Progressive era, Shailer Matthews, expressed an attitude very much like Hope's when he wrote that many ministers were "cooperatively sustained private chaplains of well-to-do cliques."¹⁰¹

Churchill's The Inside of the Cup was another Social Gospel novel; and here the reformist sentiment was expressed through Alison Parr. Like Hope, Alison's spiritual awareness partly took the form of an attack on the hypocritical businessmen who identified themselves with the church while they continued their unethical practices. In one of her frequent arguments with her father, Alison said:

The social system by which you thrive, and which politically and financially you strive to maintain, is diametrically opposed to your creed, which is supposed to be the brotherhood of man. . . . Your true creed is the survival of the fittest. You grind these people down into

⁹⁹Wright, The Calling of Dan Matthews, p. 167.

¹⁰⁰See Hopkins, The Rise of the Social Gospel in American Protestantism, chapter xiii.

¹⁰¹Shailer Matthews, The Church and the Changing Order (New York: Macmillan, 1907), p. 122. See also Mowry, The Era of Theodore Roosevelt, pp. 28-29.

what is really an economic slavery and dependence, and then you insult them and degrade them by inviting them to exercise and read books in your settlement house.¹⁰²

The strikingly modern Alison, however, went beyond most Social Gospel reformers to practical atheism. She told the hero: "I don't pretend to be a Christian,"¹⁰³ and that in her opinion "nothing could be more insipid than the orthodox view of the hereafter."¹⁰⁴ But she wanted to see the church put into practice its theories of the brotherhood of man for the improvement of life "here and now."¹⁰⁵ The abolition of private property was one of her principal concerns: "If only we could get rid of this senseless system of government that puts a premium on the acquisition of property. . . . We are breeding a million degenerate citizens by starving them. . . . There is no reason why that fear [of poverty] should not be removed. . . ."¹⁰⁶ She was aware of the incendiary nature of her reformist ideas, but felt that they were no more than the practical application of Christian teaching.

Barbara Worth's spiritual qualities revealed themselves in her commitment to her step-father's desert reclamation project. This was a scientific resource management scheme of a type which greatly concerned a large number of

¹⁰² Churchill, The Inside of the Cup, pp. 122-3.

¹⁰³ Ibid., p. 122.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., p. 225.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., pp. 221, 225.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., p. 221.

important Progressives.¹⁰⁷ Barbara sounded not unlike these Progressives when she praised the project as a service to humanity: "It is great work . . . to change the desert into a land that supports farms and homes for hundreds of people." She felt that it was "great work and means so much to the world."¹⁰⁸

Victoria Flint, in Mr. Crewe's Career, was used by Churchill to elucidate the early twentieth-century fear of corporate control of state governments. Like Alison Parr, she was alienated from her father, Augustus Flint, the president of the Northeastern railroads. She confronted him at several points with knowledge of his manipulation of the state government for the benefit of his corporation,¹⁰⁹ and on more than one occasion encouraged him to resign and return to the simple rural life he had once known.¹¹⁰

Similarly, Honora Leffingwell, in A Modern Chronicle, was the means through which Churchill exposed another problem of concern to Progressive reformers. This was the common tendency of corporations to use deceptive methods to sell worthless securities to an unsuspecting public. It was through the sensitive mind of Honora that the reader learned of her hus-

¹⁰⁷Such as Theodore Roosevelt, Gifford Pinchot, and Frederic H. Newell. See Hays, Conservation and the Gospel of Efficiency, pp. 15, 66, et. passim.

¹⁰⁸Wright, The Winning of Barbara Worth, pp. 169, 172.

¹⁰⁹Churchill, Mr. Crewe's Career, p. 208.

¹¹⁰Ibid., p. 309.

band's financial skulduggery. She was incensed by the manipulations through which he extracted money from the citizens in the name of "good business." Honora, who had the characteristic spiritual awareness of the heroine, was driven to divorce her husband precisely because of his lack of morality.

V

As far as the woman was concerned, the "new" heroine was the important development in the best selling novels of the Progressive era. She reflected the changes taking place in America, and mirrored actual transformations in the woman's traditional place in society.¹¹¹ As was noted earlier, the "new" woman had predecessors before 1900; but in the Progressive era she became a literary type rather than merely an exception. The "new" woman may be seen as the link between the Victorian woman, and the "flapper" of the 1920's. She serves to show that the "flapper" was the product of inexorable social change rather than a phenomenon which lacked visible antecedents.

While the "new" heroine represented a literary revolt of sorts, it should be emphasized that she diverged from the traditional heroine only within set limits. She never lacked femininity or moral propriety, had an acute ethical sensitivity, and always acted in the role of guide for the male protagonists. In many important respects, she was no different from the traditional woman; but it is significant that many authors

¹¹¹See McGovern, "The American Woman," p. 320.

were willing to make the departure, since it reveals a great deal about the life and the mind of America in the Progressive era.

CONCLUSION

I

Economically and culturally, the Progressive era was one of the most important periods in American history. As one scholar has noted, in the Progressive years "American civilization was no longer becoming; it had become."¹ The frontier had disappeared, and the nation was rapidly being transformed from an agrarian to an urban society. The direction of American economic development was irreversible--as the failure of Populism signified. Big business had become a permanent, if not universally accepted, fact of American life. In politics and economics, the Progressive era saw important departures from practices and theories of the preceding decades. The ascendancy of Theodore Roosevelt, and the formation of United States Steel, both dramatically symbolized the arrival of twentieth-century America.

Intellectual developments also underwent a marked transformation in the period. Morton White, in The Revolt Against Formalism, has described the emergence of new approaches to social philosophy taken by the leading intellectuals of the Progressive era.² Philosophical formulations of the

¹Roderick Nash (ed.), The Call of the Wild (New York: George Braziller, 1970), p. 3.

²(Boston: The Beacon Press, 1968).

nineteenth century were discarded, and replaced with new styles of thinking. William James's pragmatism, Charles Beard's economic determinism, Oliver Wendell Holmes's legal realism, John Dewey's institutionalism, Thorsten Veblen's behaviorism, and James Harvey Robinson's "new history" all represented a direct repudiation of the formal abstractionism of nineteenth century social philosophy.

At the same time, Henry F. May has shown, in The End of American Innocence, that the cultural revolution which was generally thought to have begun after 1919, in fact was initiated in the last years of the Progressive era.³ The rebellion of the intellectuals, which was commonly considered to have been produced by post-war disillusionment, was fully shaped before the war began. Thus, in the spheres of government, economics, thought and culture, the era saw the demise of nineteenth-century formulations and traditions. In sum, the Progressive era can be seen as the first stage in the development of contemporary America.

II

This study has attempted to reveal something of the popular mood in this important phase of American history. It sought to show, through an analysis of the most popular novels of the period, what the dominant concerns of Americans were in the first stage of the evolution of contemporary America. It has tried to determine the extent to which the public mind was

³(New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1959).

preoccupied with the important developments and transformations in the culture as a whole at this time.

It is clear that the great issues of the Progressive era were mirrored directly in the popular novels. The economic and political problems which concerned publicists and serious thinkers were obviously of considerable importance to the reading public as well. Big business, monopoly, corporate control of government, the failure of religion to adjust to modern society, and economic and social injustice were all present in the literature in varying ways and degrees. The novels showed significant insights into public apprehensions about capitalism, as well as into the extent to which modern society wrought changes in the traditional role of the woman.

One of the most striking revelations of the novels was the perceptible feeling that there was something seriously wrong with American society. The popular novels clearly revealed the presence of public doubts and fears about American capitalism. Significantly, only one of the novels, The Jungle, appealed for the abandonment of free-enterprise capitalism; but many emphasized the abuses of the system, and consciously or unconsciously stood for reform. The novels were seldom polemical in the way that bona fide muckrake novels were, but they very frequently reflected disenchantment with modern industrial civilization.

This disenchantment was expressed in various ways. At times it could be seen in direct attacks by novelists on aspects of American society--such as the materialistic preoccu-

pations of Americans. Many novelists saw in America a culture which had abandoned all spiritual values in a relentless pursuit of wealth. Often these authors revealed a belief that spiritual values, at an earlier time in the nation's history, had exerted powerful forces for the good of society. The material wealth of the Gilded Age, and the pervasive business ideology, the authors felt, had destroyed these values, leaving America without spiritual direction.

The villification of the businessman was another manifestation of public uneasiness with American capitalism. This villification appeared to a greater extent than in previous years, and perhaps was not equalled again until the 1930's. The businessman, and particularly the big businessman, became the principal scapegoat for the evils that Americans seemed to find in their nation.

Equally revealing was the fact that the modern hero of the Progressive era was a negative expression of the character of the evil businessman. The hero was young, and consistently resisted the abuses and injustices of American capitalism. Frequently, he entered directly into confrontation with corrupt or tyrannical business--in very much the same way that the hero of the historical romance confronted other foes and other evils which were apparently invincible. When he was a businessman himself, as was most often the case, the modern hero typically fought monopoly, strove to attain the highest moral standards in his own endeavors, and generally represented a literary reaction to evil business. At other

times he appeared in the role of social critic or reformer who stood directly in opposition to social and economic injustice.

Whether he were a businessman or social critic, he was revealed as a member of an idealistic generation whose moral awareness would eventually triumph over the sordid materialism which his elders had carried over from the Gilded Age. Typically, the novelists were optimistic, and usually did not feel that the system of American capitalism was totally beyond repair.

The popular feeling that modern industrial society had become visibly oppressive also revealed itself in the great popularity of novels about nature and the wilderness. Pastoralism was present as the legacy of an older literary tradition; but the era saw a dramatic increase in the number of novels in which heroes escaped civilization, or were removed from it in other ways by authors, for the purpose of confronting saving nature. Novelists, and their readers, reacted against the industrialization and urbanization of America by seeking vicarious retreats into wilderness environments. Here the petty concerns, the artificiality, the injustice, and the immorality were absent, and man, unencumbered by the restrictive aspects of civilization, could combat nature and so gain true manhood. Whether authors saw nature as a pastoral retreat, and as a state of perfect repose, or as a place in which to confront the grim struggle for survival and manhood, they all agreed that the ideal life was not attainable in society. The retreat into nature and the wilderness, then, represented an-

other sort of criticism of modern civilization.

It was perhaps inevitable that novels which described modern industrial society would introduce an essentially new heroine. The "new" heroine was a logical product of the economic changes which had been taking place since the Gilded Age. The new industrial order virtually forced women into strange economic roles, and it was not surprising that she became more assertive, and more independent as she entered spheres of activity traditionally reserved for men. The "new" woman of the Progressive era was an important link between the Victorian woman and the "flapper" of the 1920's. Above all, the "new" woman was a product of intrinsic and inexorable economic and social changes which reached a culmination in the Progressive period.

In summary, the popular novels of the years from 1900 to 1916 revealed a society attempting to adjust to the realities of industrialism. There were other such periods in American history, both before and after this time. The response to industrialism is a recurrent theme in American history; and the Progressive era had things in common with the 1830's and 1840's as well as with contemporary America. But the responses to industrialism made between 1900 and 1916 were unique, and the uniqueness of the Progressive response was expressed to a very great extent within the medium of the best selling novel.

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