

REALISM TO ROMANTICISM IN THE NOVELS
OF JOHN WILLIAM DE FOREST

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PREFACE

The idea which led to the exploration of realism in the novels of J. W. De Forest was suggested by Dr. Green D. Wyrick of the English Department of the Kansas State Teachers College of Emporia. The central object of this research was to trace the decline of realism in John William De Forest's novels from Miss Ravenel's Conversion, with its bold realistic elements, to his last novel, The Lover's Revolt, which covered a period from 1867 to 1898, and to determine the causes of that decline. The writer of this thesis herein presents the results of his research.

The study of De Forest's Civil War novel, Miss Ravenel's Conversion, and his later works proved to be not only fascinating but also profitable as American realism in the nineteenth century came into perspective.

I deeply appreciate the guidance of Dr. Wyrick, whose untiring assistance in the development of this thesis made its completion possible. The informal discussions we shared on this theme of common interest have been a source of inspiration.

My sincere appreciation is also extended to Professor E. Suderman, my second reader, for his helpful suggestions, and to Dr. Charles E. Walton for his stimulating interest in my progress. I wish to express my gratitude to all the

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W. G.

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CHAPTER I

A phenomenon in American letters occurred when John William De Forest (1826-1906) presented his novel, Miss Ravenel's Conversion from Secession to Loyalty (1867) to the reading public. The book was a departure from the romanticism of the period. The student of De Forest's works soon discovers the curious fact that De Forest, having distinguished himself as the writer of the first important realistic novel in America, returned in his later works to a Gothic-romantic style. The purpose of this thesis is to examine the evidences of De Forest's Gothic-romanticism, and to present plausible reasons for his departure from realism. It is essential, however, that a brief background for this study be presented in which realism will be clearly defined, and its origin, as confined to American letters, will be examined.

Mark Twain wrote in his preface to The Innocents Abroad, "I think I have seen with impartial eyes, and I am sure I have written at least honestly, whether wisely or not."¹ Although typically Mark Twain in flavor, this comment on his travel notes points in a general way to a

¹Samuel L. Clemens (pseud. Mark Twain), The Innocents Abroad (New York and London: Harper and Brothers, Publishers, 1869), p. vii.

definition of realism. It portrays men as they are; it describes the world as it is; it faithfully represents the commonplace.

The term realism as applied to literature is best understood in the light of the popular, romantic vogue which preceded it. It should be noted that realism did not emerge in revolt against romanticism, but rather that romanticists at first developed realism to give plausibility to their creations.² Mr. Lucas calls romantic literature "a dream picture of life; providing sustenance and fulfillment for impulses cramped by society or reality."³ The distinction may then be inferred: realism as used by romanticists gives a sense of reality to dream pictures, but, as used by non-romanticists, indicates real-life pictures.

Both romanticists and realists endeavored to describe the world about them. However, the romanticists insisted upon a picturesque background for the display of subjective emotions, and, in contrast, the realists directed their efforts toward an accurate objective portrayal of scene and character for its own sake. In this respect, the distinction lies in intention rather than choice of material, with

²R. E. Spiller et al., Literary History of the United States (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1948), II, p. 878.

³F. L. Lucas, The Decline and Fall of the Romantic Ideal (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1936), pp. 35, 36.

the consequent difficulty that "determining intention forbids a dogmatic classification."⁴ One authority states that Stephen Crane and Henry James, who tried to present the world without distortion, were the only nineteenth century realists concerned with the observer.⁵

The romantic novel in general was characterized particularly by its heroine who, beautiful but frail, possessed some wealth and education. Virtuous and possessing high ideals, she was ignorant of the ways of men, and therein lay her weakness. The amatory villain was attracted by her sex appeal, and, according to the literary pattern, she permitted herself to be vanquished. Usually, this tragic seduction was followed by her early death, or the reader is led to observe the gradual stages of her moral descent until at last she miserably dies.⁶

Changing social conditions modified the romantic lady. Her chances for escape from the predatory male became better, and, in turn, the villain lost his prey oftener.⁷ From this stage, the romantic lady developed from a maiden,

⁴Spiller, op. cit., p. 878.

⁵Wallace Stegner (ed.), Introduction to Selected American Prose (New York: Rinehart and Company, Inc., 1958), p. v.

⁶G. Boas (ed.), Romanticism in America (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1940), p. 63.

⁷Ibid., pp. 63, 64.

sought as a bride, to a capable wife and mother. According to some writers, she was strong, beautiful, resolute and self-determined, with an aggressive sexual quality.⁸ It is further noted that the romantic lady was one who was "seen through the eyes of a passionate male."⁹

This aspect of romanticism, which had begun in England early in the eighteenth century, became evident in America in the 1770's. About 1800, it had become a force in American letters, and a dominant literary trend by 1830, from which date until 1860 it continued to hold full sway.¹⁰ Yet, during that romantic period, some beginnings of realism may be observed. James Fenimore Cooper (1789-1851), possibly the earliest novelist of the American romantic period, revealed this in The Spy (1821) in which the setting was realistically described because it was one with which the author was familiar. However, the women are not real but quite helpless and rigid in propriety, while the men are heroes of the gentlemen class. Romantic fate decrees the destiny of Cooper's chief characters.¹¹ The Pioneers (1823)

⁸Ibid., p. 66.

⁹Ibid., p. 67.

¹⁰Louis Wann (ed.), The Rise of Realism (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1933), p. 3.

¹¹Carl Van Doren, The American Novel (1789-1939) (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1940), pp. 24, 25.

is more realistic in its representation of American manners as Cooper had observed them, while The Pilot (1823) is full of realistic detail.¹² However, romance prescribes the destiny of the tale in The Prairie (1827), and shapes the plot of the Red Rover (1828).¹³ This slight tendency toward realism in Cooper's novels was apparently affected by controversy and litigation in which he engaged with his countrymen.¹⁴

Nathaniel Hawthorne (1804-1864), another romanticist of the same period, is said to be "the consummate flower" among the romancers of the New England era.¹⁵ Among his novels, The Scarlet Letter (1850) is not only a romance of the Puritan colonial period, but it is also a psychological study relative to sin.¹⁶ This gives it a more manifest touch of realism than is found in Hawthorne's other novels. Hester Prynne, the heroine, was the first important woman in the American novel in which women were usually sentimentalized, but were not given profound consideration or understanding.¹⁷

¹²Ibid., p. 26.

¹³Ibid., pp. 30, 31.

¹⁴Ibid., p. 34.

¹⁵Ibid., p. 81.

¹⁶Ibid., p. 69.

¹⁷Ibid., p. 70.

Herman Melville (1819-1891), whether consciously or not, hinted of realism in *Moby Dick* (1851) and *Pierre* (1852). In the former, Ahab's hatred of evil, as symbolized by the white whale, revealed the profound truth, "that men, hating too much, become what they hate."¹⁸ *Pierre* is concerned with states of mind anticipatory of Freud.¹⁹ Dr. Green Wyrick points out that Melville used the romantic tradition as myth in his novels. His was a personal type of romance which does not fall under the usual definition of romanticism.²⁰

Political, economic and social changes in the United States resulted in a change from romanticism to realism. The period beginning with the Civil War and extending for at least three decades became known as "The Gilded Age," or more properly, "The Frontier Period." Those were years unfavorable to literature, particularly of the romantic type, and culture.²¹

Three causes are chiefly responsible for the introduction of The Gilded Age. The first was the frontier

¹⁸Ibid., p. 96.

¹⁹Ibid., p. 97.

²⁰Interview with Dr. Green Wyrick, Associate Professor of English, Kansas State Teachers College, Emporia.

²¹Wann, op. cit., p. 1.

which gave rise to the controversy over the admission of free and slave states. The moral problem of slavery lay in the background, but the political problem of power-balance between North and South was intensified by the extension of the frontier, and particularly whether Kansas and Nebraska should be admitted to the Union as free or slave. This controversy led at last to the second cause, the Civil War. This, in turn, and its outcome, had its reaction upon the westward movement. Scientific advance stands as the third cause which helped to introduce The Gilded Age. The advance in science and invention brought about great economic changes throughout the rapidly expanding nation.²²

As a result, there took place the exploitation of the West, radical changes in agricultural methods and the rise of a new industrial system which included the development of a great factory system and the construction of the transcontinental railroad systems. These expressions of rapid national development were attended by political corruption, unscrupulous speculation in finance and "degradation of private taste...in domestic life, architecture and the arts in general." But the exploitation and development of agricultural and other resources, and an increasing awareness of the ingredients of the American scene tended to

²²Ibid.

produce a realistic attitude. It is obvious, then, that the realistic view of life and art became firmly rooted during those years that, with the exception of the rise of the realistic temper, especially in the novel, were otherwise barren of cultural development.²³

The transition from romanticism to realism took place through what is known as "local color." First, there was the romantic viewpoint of the American scene; then through the local color of a specifically localized American scene there emerged the emphasis upon character, with the requirement that both scene and actors be realistically portrayed. In its extreme form, realism gave way to naturalism.²⁴ Hence, in three or four decades, beginning with 1860, the chief emphasis in American literature was radically changed.

The question may be raised whether the writers of that period were aware of this shifting emphasis. One authority, who calls realism a world movement, states broadly that "all the American realists were familiar with the literary trend across the Atlantic."²⁵ The view that there were realistic writers of that period who were not

²³Ibid., pp. 1, 2.

²⁴Ibid., p. 3.

²⁵G. S. Haight (ed.). J. W. De Forest, Miss Ravenel's Conversion (New York: Rinehart and Company, 1955), p. vi.

fully aware of this shifting emphasis seems more credible. It would be difficult to classify arbitrarily the writers of that period as romanticists or realists, since a writer did not do his best work by consciously adopting a romantic or realistic mode, but rather "by virtue of that writer's sincere surrender to the atmosphere of the subject."²⁶

Four main stages in the development of American literature, and the American novel in particular, may be listed. The first stage includes the decline of romanticism as evidenced by Civil War literature. Second, the foundations of realism were laid, which include the work of the Western Humorists, the Literature of the Folk, and the progress of realism and local color, first in the far West, then in the East and Middle West. The third stage consists of the contributions of three most important realists of that period: William Dean Howells, Henry James and Mark Twain. To this stage, more detailed consideration will be given farther on. Finally, there may be observed the progress toward naturalism which, by the turn of the century, would become the dominant style in American letters.²⁷

Western humor furnishes a partial explanation for the development of American realism. Several reasons for the

²⁶Wann, op. cit., pp. 3, 4.

²⁷Ibid., p. 4.

origin of Western humor may be advanced. There was the hard life of the frontier with a need for an outlet. Since there was little that was sacred and immune from ridicule, democratic irreverence became characteristic. Social life on the Western frontier was barren in contrast to social interests in the East. Therefore, any means of entertainment was welcome. Humor was also used as a forceful weapon for social criticism. This humor was characterized by gross exaggeration, sharp common sense and an element of surprise. Mark Twain, one of the leading realists of his day, was influenced by some of the Western humorists. Another phase in the development of American realism is found in folk material which unconsciously expressed the lives of cowboys, homesteaders, lumberjacks, Negroes and others. This material bore some tangible influence on the realism in the American novel.²⁸

A bridge between romanticism, which finally became known as the "Genteel Tradition in New England," and realism is what may be termed "local color." This may be defined as the result of emphasis placed upon typical scenery in which the characters are placed, upon typical costumes of those characters, or upon typical dialect by which the characters express themselves. It is when the writer's interest passes

²⁸Ibid., p. 10.

from these externals to the portrayal of character that his work may be termed realistic. Local color may be sentimental, and therefore romantic; yet the fact that it focuses attention on specific types of character, dialect, or dress places it on common ground with what a realist demands.²⁹

Samuel Langhorne Clemens (1835-1910) typified the Middle Western American of the post-Civil War period. His works demonstrate spontaneity with unlabored realism and, at times, inoffensive romanticism.³⁰ He was a realist in the sense that he held up to ridicule or scorn the follies and vices of his fellowmen. But never did he forget that he was one of them. For that reason, he did not so much hate them as pity them.³¹ Through his lectures and writings he reflected the multiform aspects of American life, and at the same time he rebelled against the commercialism, the false optimism and the shallowness of that life. He was a humorist as shown in Innocents Abroad (1869), and a romanticist as represented in Personal Reflections of Joan of Arc (1896). Unquestionably, he revealed himself a realist in Huckleberry Finn (1885). But he rose above all these classifications and in his unique way he maintains his

²⁹Ibid., pp. 10, 11.

³⁰Ibid., p. 12.

³¹Van Doren, op. cit., p. 156.

position in American letters as the most realistic novelist in the nineteenth century.³²

Of this same period, Henry James (1843-1916) merits a place among realistic innovators. It is a question whether he is to be classed as an American or a British writer. Longing for Old World culture he moved by gradual steps "from his frontier home to the settled home of his forefathers."³³ He preferred the realism of European writers to that of Americans whom he regarded as provincial.³⁴ The world of James was not the world of average Americans, so that few understood him. In fact, it seemed that he did not care to be understood. Nevertheless, he was a realist who dealt with the problems of the inner life of the cultured men and women of the world, his point of view being that of the aristocrat.³⁵ He wrote realistically about the upper strata of society which he knew and of which he was a part. In this lay his limitations. In a democratic age he tried to write courtly romances about people who were the prototypes of classes represented by the romantic writers of

³²Wann, op. cit., p. 12.

³³Ibid., p. 13.

³⁴Van Doren, op. cit., p. 168.

³⁵Wann, op. cit., p. 13.

the Middle Ages and the Renaissance.³⁶ Such is his Portrait of a Lady (1881), the first of his great novels. In this, as well as in The Spoils of Poynton (1897), and others, James tells his story through the sentiments rather than the deeds of his characters.³⁷

William Dean Howells (1837-1920) ranks as the prime mover of realism in that period. From childhood he exhibited a sensitive humaneness and a charitable temper which shaped the trend of his literary career. Dedicated to the simple truth in life, he quietly scorned those who tried to escape that simple truth by exaggerations and romantic dreams.³⁸ A product of the Middle West and a self-schooled journalist, he traveled to the East and later abroad from which he gained perspective. His writing was characterized by a "genteel realism" in which the coarse and vulgar side of life was avoided. In this limited field he was supreme, as attested by his three most important novels: A Modern Instance (1882), which he considered his strongest; The Rise of Silas Lapham (1885), which his readers have found his best; and Indian Summer (1886), which he regarded his best.³⁹

³⁶Van Doren, op. cit., p. 188.

³⁷Ibid., p. 180.

³⁸Ibid., p. 122.

³⁹Ibid., p. 125.

His attention to detail and his discernment of character awarded him the rank of "the first conscious realist of major proportions."⁴⁰

In a series of articles written for "The Editor's Study" in Harper's Magazine (1886-1891), Howells waged a campaign in behalf of realism. He criticized particularly the adulteration of literature with sentimentalism, false heroic attitudes, superfluous ornament and theatrical endings which betrayed romantic literature. Literary fancy which did not lay claim to fact he enjoyed and praised. Through these articles he wielded an effective influence upon the novel and drama of his day.⁴¹ Like his own work, the realism which Howells championed was gentle and unruffled by passion and drama. It was selective in the sense that the subjects were chosen under the criterion of decency.⁴² Certainly, he made scant provision for the trend toward naturalism in his struggle against the unrealities and superficialities of romanticism. He maintained that it was foolish superstition to believe that "literature and art are anything but the expression of life, and are to be

⁴⁰Wann, op. cit., p. 12.

⁴¹Van Doren, op. cit., p. 129.

⁴²Ibid., p. 136.

judged by any other test than that of their fidelity to it."⁴³ He declared that no author is an authority "except in those moments when he held his ear close to Nature's lips and caught her very accent."⁴⁴ He dared to say that "the greatest classics are sometimes not at all great," and they are profitable to us only when we measure them strictly by the common standard of the arts, "the simple, the natural, the honest."⁴⁵ By this he made it clear that even the classics should be evaluated by the rules of realism. He contributed the famous definition: "Realism is nothing more and nothing less than the truthful treatment of material."⁴⁶

The following quotation throws further light on the literary philosophy of Howells, which may be used as a valuable criterion by which to measure the works of De Forest:

It is not the prosperous or adverse fortune of the characters (of a novel) that affects one, but the good or bad faith of the novelist in dealing with them...I cannot hold him to less account than this: he must be true to what life has taught me is the truth, and after

⁴³Clara Marburg Kirk and Rudolf Kirk (eds.), Howells, Criticism and Fiction, and Other Essays (New York: New York University Press, 1959), p. 11.

⁴⁴Ibid., p. 14.

⁴⁵Ibid.

⁴⁶Ibid., p. 38.

that he may let any fate betide his people; the novel ends well that ends faithfully.⁴⁷

The reason for these lengthy references to Howells is that he enthusiastically commended De Forest for the realism in Miss Ravenel's Conversion, and he endeavored to gain public recognition of De Forest and his novels, as will be noticed in Chapter II. The various definitions of realism, as gleaned from Howells and others, possess a common denominator by which it may be stated that realism is a selected portion of life with its environment, viewed objectively and presented faithfully in its natural color.

It is the object of the following chapter to show the valid claims of Miss Ravenel's Conversion to its position as a realistic novel in respect to its characterization, descriptions of scene and action, language, and development of plot. Mr. Howells observed that De Forest, who wrote with authority, was concerned with the Civil War and its results, and Miss Ravenel's Conversion not only threw light upon the motives and morals of that struggle but showed the author's knowledge of people.⁴⁸

⁴⁷Ibid., p. 43.

⁴⁸W. D. Howells, Heroines of Fiction (New York: Harper and Brothers Publishers, 1901), II, p. 152.

CHAPTER II

The purpose of this chapter will be achieved by presenting the literary background of the author, and investigating the evidences of realism in Miss Ravenel's Conversion. William Dean Howells wrote of this novel:

Among the first books that came to my hand was a novel of J. W. De Forest, which I think the best novel suggested by the Civil War. If this is not saying very much for Miss Ravenel's Conversion, I will go farther and say it was one of the best American novels that I had known, and was of an advanced realism, before realism was known by that name.¹

De Forest, the son of a cotton manufacturer in Humphreysville (now Seymour), Connecticut, did not follow the family tradition by entering Yale, owing to his ill health. Instead, he acquired much of his education by reading and travel. In 1846, he went abroad to visit his brother Henry, a medical missionary in Beirut, Syria. After traveling almost two years in the Near East, he returned and wrote a History of the Indians of Connecticut (1851), which remains an authority in that field. He spent four more years abroad (1850-1855) in Europe where he demonstrated his literary interests in reading European authors and engaged in translation. He recorded the events of his journeys in Oriental Acquaintance (1856) and European

¹W. D. Howells, My Literary Passions (New York: Harper and Brothers Publishers, 1895), p. 223.

Acquaintance (1858), which show that he devoted himself to the study of foreign languages and character.² His wide travels in the Near East and Europe enriched his background for his literary efforts.³

Upon his return from Europe, De Forest married Miss Harriet Silliman Shepard of New Haven in 1856 and applied himself to a literary career. This career was interrupted by the outbreak of the Civil War. He with his family narrowly escaped from Charleston just before Fort Sumter was fired upon. In New Haven, De Forest, like his hero Colburne, recruited a company of volunteers, and served as their captain in the Louisiana and Shenandoah campaigns. Again, like Colburne, after three years of fighting he was mustered out a captain while promotions were given to political jobbers. He served in the Bureau of Freedmen and Refugees at Greenville, South Carolina, until January, 1868, having completed six years in the army.⁴

During this period of army service, he did not neglect his literary interests. Articles, which he contributed

²G. S. Haight (ed.). J. W. De Forest, Miss Ravenel's Conversion (New York: Rinehart and Company, 1955), p. v.

³R. E. Spiller et al., Literary History of the United States (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1948), II, p. 881.

⁴Haight, op. cit., pp. vi, vii.

to magazines, contained material which he later incorporated in Miss Ravenel's Conversion.⁵ In the 1880's, De Forest collected these articles with other material under the title, A Volunteer's Adventures.⁶ Harper's, who had bought the copyright of the novel, intended to publish it serially in their magazine before reprinting it in book form. However, Mr. Alfred H. Guernsey, the editor, had strong reservations from the beginning about its strong realism. On this account, the agreement to serialize the story was canceled, and it appeared in book form in 1867.⁷

In this novel, the author abandoned the traditional type of the romantic lady. Miss Lillie Ravenel, the heroine, is charming, but not beautiful. De Forest points out that in real life many heroines are not beautiful, and that many men fall in love with plain women. (p. 7)⁸ Contrary to the romantic type, she is not a woman of wealth. Further, Lillie does not resemble the usual submissive lady of romance, but she thinks for herself, particularly in the realm of politics.⁹ Dr. Ravenel's refusal to aid the

⁵Ibid., p. vii.

⁶Ibid., p. vii, footnote 1.

⁷Ibid.

⁸Throughout this chapter, page numbers in the text refer to Miss Ravenel's Conversion, 1955 edition.

⁹Spiller, op. cit., p. 883.

Southern cause compelled him to flee with his daughter from New Orleans to New Boston, Barataria (a pseudonym for Massachusetts), where he found congenial friends, but where Lillie maintained her rebel viewpoint. (pp. 7-9) In contrast to his description of Lillie Ravenel, De Forest showed contempt for the women of the New England aristocracy. With some exaggeration he described one of them who regarded Dr. Ravenel with suspicion:

Thin-lipped, hollow-cheeked, narrow-chested, with only one lung and an intermittent digestion, without a single rounded outline or graceful movement, she was a sad example of what the New England east winds can do in enfeebling and distorting the human form divine. (p. 17)

De Forest's realism in this earthy description of a woman constitutes a radical departure from the romantic stereotype.

When Dr. Ravenel and Mr. Colburne first met, the doctor explained that he had been associated with the Medical College of New Orleans, and commented:

An excellent place for a dissecting class, by the way. So many negroes are whipped to death, so many white gentlemen die in their boots, as the saying is, that we rarely lack for subjects. (p. 5)

Here is an attempt to establish the doctor as a surgical instructor, as well as to add a bit of sordid humor. In this social comment, De Forest offers details which are pertinent to his day.

Mr. Colburne, who at first enjoyed Miss Ravenel's favor, found himself losing ground after the appearance of Colonel Carter. It seems clear that Lillie's attraction to Carter was unconsciously physical.¹⁰ To her

there was something powerfully magnetic in the ardent nature which found its physical expression in that robust frame, that florid brunette complexion, those mighty mustachios, and darkly burning eyes. (p. 223)

An inconsistency in Lillie's attitude toward Colburne and Carter may have been deliberate on the part of the author. She did not seem to regard Carter's loyalty to the Union any barrier to their deepening friendship. However, she was irked by Colburne's decision to join the Union Army. Nevertheless, she respected him, just as she respected any man for taking up the sword. (p. 80)

Lillie never suspected the profligate character of Carter. She was quite impressed by his propriety in speech and conduct in her presence, and, particularly, his show of piety in church. She conceded that he might be "fast," but she thought that term merely applied to men who had good manners and were popular with the ladies. Her father felt a vague distrust toward Carter, but Lillie brushed this aside as unreasonable prejudice. (p. 91) Gradually, De Forest reveals Lillie's growing fondness for Colonel

¹⁰Spiller, loc. cit.

Carter and her loss of interest in Captain Colburne who, in her estimation, lacked the magnetic personality of his superior officer. She saw in Carter "a pure and noble creature," an opinion her father did not share. (p. 159)

An incident occurred which illustrates the manner in which De Forest approached the romantic pattern and then concluded with a realistic turn. On one occasion, Captain Colburne impulsively kissed Lillie's hand which she had extended to him. In the days following he indulged in reveries in which he imagined the possibility of repeating the act. He featured himself in frequent interviews with Lillie until it seemed that the logical outcome would be marriage. When he called later at the Ravenels, his romantic hopes proved to be deceptive. Lillie, remembering the kiss, was not charmed at the thought of it. Instead, she treated him with cool reserve, and the captain found himself at a greater distance from her than before. (pp. 143-145) A few days later, when Colonel Carter took Lillie's hand and pressed it to his lips, she did not resent the gesture. Instead, she discovered it was the moment when she surrendered her heart to him. (p. 185)

The author describes, with some measure of sentimentalism, the thoughts and emotions of Lillie at the time of her marriage to Carter:

This man who was now her husband, her master ... would always make her happy. She did not doubt his goodness so much as she doubted her own; she trusted him almost as firmly as if he were a deity He had such an authority over her--his look and voice and touch so tyrannized her emotions that he was an object of something like terror; and yet the sense of his domination was so sweet that she could not wish it to be less ... a look from her husband, a thought of her husband, would choke her at any moment. He seemed to have entered into her whole being, so that she was not fully herself. (pp. 224, 225)

Lillie slowly became accustomed to her husband. "For some time it seemed to her amazing and almost incredible that any man should call himself by such a title and claim the familiarity and the rights which it implied." (p. 327) In contrast to the conventions of the times, De Forest showed courage by referring quite pointedly to the marriage relationship.

After Carter returned to his duties, Lillie became teacher and housekeeper as she assisted her father in a project of organizing Southern labor. She showed herself to be practical, efficient, and unafraid of work. (pp. 232-236) When Captain Colburne arrived at the plantation to convalesce from a battle-wound, Lillie plied him incessantly with questions about her husband. (p. 282) Later, the Ravenels were deeply grateful to Colburne for his leadership in the defense of Fort Winthrop in which the Ravenels had found refuge. Lillie sent a letter with Colburne to the Colonel telling him all that Colburne had done for

them. (p. 323) Her attitude toward Colburne was one of kindly appreciation. His attitude toward her is best described as a helpless and suppressed love for one who chose to be the wife of another.

De Forest exhibits a sensitive realism in his treatment of Lillie's "secret," by her revelation to her husband that she is pregnant.

She had repeatedly hinted to her husband that she had a secret to tell him Then she wondered that he should not guess it; thought it the strangest thing in the world that he should not know it. At last she made her confession; made it to him alone, with closed doors and in darkness Then for many minutes she nestled close to him with wet cheeks and clinging arms, listening eagerly to his assurances of love and devotion, hungering unappeasably for them, growing to him, one with him. (pp. 329, 330)

Any bolder treatment of this scene would have resulted in a loss of sensitivity and taste acceptable for his day.

The birth of the child to the Carters deepened the womanliness of Lillie and humbled Carter in the memory of his unconfessed affairs with Mrs. Larue. On one occasion Lillie asked her husband's forgiveness for some slight petulance he had forgotten. This penitence on her part made Carter's remorse most difficult to bear. It was the nearest he came to a confession when in self-reproach he said, "Oh! forgive me I am not half good enough for you. I am not worthy of your love. You must pray for me, my darling." (p. 379) It is difficult to believe that a roue, who was

inured to all that is pure and noble, would suddenly become the tender participant in a melodrama. It is more credible that De Forest bowed to a romantic convention, and, in so doing, placed Carter in a position incongruous to his character.

Upon learning of her husband's infidelity, Lillie fainted, which was to be expected of a woman of that period. However, her decision to leave her husband was another evidence of realism. An unhappy marriage, which resulted in the wife leaving, was contrary to the romantic spirit. Such a radically unhappy marriage was used once by Howells, and not at all by Melville and Hawthorne. Howells handled the problem in which a rake does not receive his retribution, and the victim is not ruined. This was extraordinary for that day. Although Carter was no more than an embezzling, faithless spouse, yet the fact that his wife left him was an advance over the literary conventions of those times.¹¹

During her illness and the weeks of recovery she rarely mentioned Carter. However, in contrast to the romantic heroine, she did not indulge in brooding, but soon regained her cheerfulness and interest in her environment. (pp. 412, 413) When she received news of the death of her

¹¹Leslie A. Fiedler, Love and Death in the American Novel (New York: Criterion Books, 1960), p. 256.

husband, she made a statement which is significant to the understanding of her character: "I am so sorry I quarreled with him. I wish I had written to him that I was not angry." (p. 427) De Forest uses the child as a means of restoring her hope in life and as a link in the circumstances which finally led to the marriage of Lillie and Captain Colburne. (p. 479)

It is not possible to examine De Forest's treatment of one character exclusive of the others, and for that reason it has been necessary to view Carter to a limited extent in dealing with the character of Lillie Ravenel. At this point, however, it seems logical to give attention to Mrs. Larue before continuing with a more detailed discussion of Colonel Carter.

The corrupt woman was a familiar figure in literature long before the time of De Forest, but certainly he was to sketch a candid picture of an amoral opportunist who became a popular figure in the twentieth century novel. Such is his study of Mrs. Larue, who is the nineteenth-century archetype of Faulkner's Temple Drake and Hemingway's Lady Brett Ashley. Recognizing the true character of Carter, she liked him none the less, and attempted a flirtation with him. However, since he was engrossed with Lillie Ravenel, she decided to assist the pair in their romance. She turned her attentions toward Colburne, but to no avail. She preferred

Carter, and felt that if she could "have got at him alone and often enough she might perhaps have broken him in; for she knew of certain secret methods of rareyizing¹² gentlemen which hardly ever fail upon persons of Carter's physical and moral nature." (pp. 145, 146)

Colburne was annoyed by the coquetry of Mrs. Larue, but it is made clear that she was not in love. "She never had been in love in her life and was not going to begin at thirty-three." Her chief aim in flirting with Colburne was to assist Carter in his attentions toward Lillie.

When Mrs. Larue said "flirt," she meant indescribable things, such as ladies may talk of without reproach among themselves but which, if introduced into print, are considered very improper reading. (pp. 165, 166)

She pursued her plans by treating Colburne "to certain appetizing little movements, glances and words, which led him to suspect with some vague alarm that she did not mean to let him off as a mere acquaintance."

She followed this with an explanation which displeased him, and the interview which she brought about in a back parlor resulted in a repulse of her designs by the gentleman. (pp. 166, 167) Later in the novel, after Carter and Colburne had returned to the battle field, Mrs. Larue's

¹²Taming. A word coined from a horsetamer named Rarey.

half-shut, almond eyes of dewy blackness and brightness were frequently turned sidelong upon Ravenel, with a coquettish significance which made Lillie uneasy in the innermost chambers of her filial affection. (p. 202)

She once explained her philosophy to Colburne:

"It is intended for wise reasons that man should not leave woman alone; that he should seek after her constantly, and force himself upon her; that, losing one, he should find another. Therefore the man, who, losing one, chooses another, best represents his sex." (p. 203)

Mrs. Larue was on the same boat which Carter boarded when he went to New York. Whether this was by coincidence or design, De Forest does not make it clear. If it is a lack of plotting and a reliance upon coincidence, it shows inferior writing. However, it is possible that De Forest bowed to literary convention which found a sexually aggressive woman too strong for the readers' taste. In this case, it would have been improper for De Forest to indicate that Mrs. Larue planned to be on the same boat with Carter.

Mrs. Larue took advantage of the setting, chiefly by starlight, and skillfully led Carter into her trap. Knowing that he was not only married, but had left behind him his pregnant wife, she pursued her prey with a heartless purpose. The implied meaning of her words was not lost upon Carter when she told him,

"A woman to whom the affections are forbidden is deprived of the use of more than half her being. Whatever her possibilities, she is denied all expansion beyond a certain limit The widow is less ashamed,

but she is more unhappy. She has been taught her possibilities and then suddenly forbidden the use of them." (p. 349)

Her vices and virtues are declared to be instinctive, without education or effort. Prudence, rather than conscience, guided her actions. "She was as corrupt as possible without self-reproach, and as amiable as possible without self-restraint." Her sunny disposition and flattering manner made her popular among men, but her unscrupulous use of men made her abhorred by those of her own sex. (p. 350) Again, De Forest anticipates the realistic heroine who finds the full satisfaction of her being only in the company of men.

Sometime during that journey, Mrs. Larue completed her conquest. It developed out of a petty grievance on the part of Mrs. Larue. The reconciliation which followed,

took place late at night, his arm around her waist and his lips touching her cheek From this time forward he pretty much stopped his futile rowing against the tide. He let Mrs. Larue take the helm and guide him down the current of his own emotions. (p. 351)

Afterward, she told Carter, "I never shall desire a husband ... I can now use all my heart. What does a woman need more?" (p. 352) De Forest had already been more daring in his realism than could be tolerated in a family magazine like Harpers, and placed him ahead of his time.

A further illustration is offered to show Mrs. Larue's amoral philosophy. When out of a grieved conscience, Carter declared he would be ashamed to look his wife in the

face, she replied, "My dear, why do you distress yourself so? You can love her still. I am not exacting. I only want a corner in your heart." (p. 355) A corner in Carter's heart he could no longer deny.

They returned together on the same boat to New Orleans. On that journey, Carter suffered less self-reproach. "They led a peaceable, domestic sort of life," and "were old sinners enough to feel and behave much like innocent people." What remorse Carter did feel was not derived so much from an abstract sense of right and wrong as from his affection for his wife of whom he felt unworthy. After their return to New Orleans, a private room at the rear of Carter's offices was the secret scene of many meetings with Mrs. Larue. These interviews ended when a son was born to the Carters, and Mrs. Larue turned her attention to Colburne. (pp. 383, 384)

De Forest, with some straining of the plot, managed to get one of the letters the Colonel had received from Mrs. Larue into the hands of his father-in-law, Dr. Ravenel. The Colonel had carelessly left it where Van Zandt, his aide, found and pocketed it. During a heavy rainstorm, both Van Zandt and Dr. Ravenel found refuge, by coincidence, in an abandoned shack. Van Zandt, intoxicated and voluble, and, further, not recognizing the doctor, hinted at some scandal about the Colonel. Finally, he gave the letter to

the doctor for proof. The letter referred to past assignments with the Colonel and set a time for a future date. (pp. 402-404) Again, De Forest relied upon an unbelievable coincidence to develop his story toward a climax.

As a consequence of this startling disclosure, Dr. Ravenel warned Lillie not to see Lillie any more. Mrs. Larue moved to a quiet suburb and boarded with a family who were charmed with her modest and retiring manners. It was a place to build up respectability, provided Lillie in her illness should become delirious and make disclosures. (p. 411) After the Ravenels had left for the North, Mrs. Larue returned to her home where she gained the favor of an official "in some unmentionable department of the South." To show his gratitude, he gave her a permit to trade for several thousand bales of cotton, which she sold in turn to a New York speculator. In this way she was able to rebuild her fortune. As a corrupt woman, she does not suffer retribution as in the traditional type of her character, but continues to prosper in the game of illicit love. (p. 412)

The object of the affection of Lillie Ravenel and Mrs. Larue is Colonel Carter who is presented as a Virginian, but loyal to the Union, and a widower who had been "a wasteful and neglectful husband." He was physically attractive with a "cavalier dash" in his tone and manner. (pp. 22,

23) De Forest gives more than one frank description of Colonel Carter, as illustrated by the following:

The Colonel might have known from his past experience, he might have known by only looking at his high-colored face and powerful frame in a mirror, that it was not a safe amusement for him to be so much with one charming lady. Self-possessed in his demeanor, and like most rouses, tolerably cool for a little distance below the surface of his feelings, he was at bottom and by the decree of imperious nature, very volcanic.
(pp. 164, 165)

Carter regarded himself honorable, even in his vices. He drank, but not more than the army regulation of a quart a day. He engaged in the gentleman's amusement of gambling. "It was true that he had had various ____." Here De Forest is discreetly coy, and does not make direct mention of infidelity, but Carter adds, "All men did that sort of thing at times and under temptation." Carter did not believe the Biblical story of Joseph who preferred to leave his cloak, an incriminating evidence, in the hands of his master's wife, and remain innocent, than yield to his seducer. If the story was true, Joseph, in the opinion of Carter, was not a gentleman. Ironically, this low opinion of an ancient lad who was not an adulterer was held by an active adulterer who considered himself "a tolerably good fellow."
(p. 183)

There was another side to the Colonel. He was a brave soldier and an able officer with kind impulses.
(p. 205) In his love for Lillie, Carter underwent a

noticeable change. At least he drank less, and his attentions to Lillie were so tender that even Dr. Ravenel lost his distrust of the man for the time being. (p. 201) The author shows the credulity of human nature in the fact that the father was deceived by appearances.

When Colburne learned of Lillie's engagement to Carter, he was grieved. Although he was loyal to his superior officer, he expressed his opinion of Carter's character:

"How could she choose such a husband, so old, so worldly, so immoral?.... The love of such a man is a calamity. The tender mercies of the wicked are unintentional cruelties." (p. 212)

The marriage of Lillie and the Colonel took place suddenly. "The tropical blood in the Colonel's veins drove him to demand it, and the electric potency of his presence forced Miss Ravenel to concede it." (p. 223) De Forest is again evidencing realistic treatment of his theme by crediting to his heroine a normal sex drive. It should be further noted that at a time when marriages were planned by parents, Lillie asserted her independence by overriding her father's advice.

The scene described in Chapter 25 climaxes all that has been said before about the Colonel's propensity for hard drinking. Colburne, upon arrival with the letter from Lillie, found the whole camp celebrating the fall of Port

Hudson. He was shocked and humiliated to find Carter in an advanced stage of intoxication. The Colonel's flushed face, his leering, bloodshot eyes, his slovenly dress and his incoherent speech were not in keeping with his dignity as an officer. Nor was the presence of the two grinning slatterns in the background any assurance that Carter had been loyal to his adoring wife. (pp. 321, 322)

In contrast, the Colonel became a model of sober conduct after he established his wife near his encampment. He no longer drank, but was "strongly loving and noisily cheerful." He loaded her with attentions and presents and demonstrated to his best ability his affection for her. (p. 326) De Forest makes it clear that despite Carter's philandering, he was sincerely in love with his wife. This variant from the romantic philanderer indicates further departure by the author from the romantic tradition.

De Forest does not employ the traditional reaction of bitterness and revenge on the part of a losing rival toward the winner. Instead, he sketches a curious relationship which existed between Captain Colburne, the diffident lover who lost, and Colonel Carter, the magnetic lover who won. The Colonel would detail Colburne to take Mrs. Carter riding when he could not go himself. Carter knew of Colburne's adoration of Lillie, yet trusted "the purity and humility of the adoration." (p. 328)

De Forest alternates black and white in depicting the character of Carter. The reader may be convinced at this point that Carter's devotion to his wife has quite transformed him. Not only has he achieved sobriety, but his loving devotion to Lillie seemed to place him beyond the boundaries of moral deviation. However, the state of domestic peace could not continue for Colonel Carter. He made a fatal decision to go to Washington to seek a merited promotion which would bring financial assistance to his mismanaged affairs. Out of a sense of gratitude, he planned also to seek a promotion for Captain Colburne. (p. 344)

After bidding his wife farewell, Carter went to New Orleans where he became intoxicated to the point of exhilaration. In that state he was not alarmed upon boarding the Creole to find Mrs. Larue. When he had become sober by the next morning, he saw his danger and tried to treat her with reserve. Yet, he could not ignore the woman. Their state-rooms opened on the same narrow passage. He was her only acquaintance on board, and the fact that she was related to his wife made him feel he owed her some consideration. Moreover, Mrs. Larue convinced him she could not properly appear on deck unless he escorted her. By natural and devised circumstances, the snare was laid. Carter recognized his danger, resisted and made resolutions which he soon broke. (pp. 345-347)

It has been previously mentioned how the episode ended with shame and remorse on the part of Carter. These emotions were genuine only to the extent that he felt a sense of obligation to the woman who loved him purely and regarded him as being noble. Further, because he did truly love his wife, he felt, perhaps for the first time in his life, a threat to his low moral standards of life. He had regarded himself as being good, but the discovery that he was not as good as he should be, that his badness would injure one he truly loved, resulted in emotions quite foreign to his temperament.

The ethics of Carter were contradictory. He justified his weaknesses for women and wine, but he abhorred political corruption. The governor who played politics he regarded with contempt. Failing in his mission to secure promotions for Colburne and himself, he returned to New Orleans. He detested the hypocrisy forced upon him when Lillie eagerly greeted his return while Mrs. Larue looked on. (pp. 365, 366)

De Forest describes Carter's irregular handling of government money and property to bolster his finances. In a cotton swindle, Carter invested government money with the hope of paying it back and having a sizable balance for his own pocket. Walker, the swindler, disappeared and left Carter almost paralyzed for what he had done. (pp. 384-389)

A scheme, involving government river steamboats which included a timely fire, enabled Carter to recoup his losses, but filled him with deep remorse for "the only ungentlemanly act of my life," when he received immediately afterward his commission of Brigadier-General. (p. 396) Through these incidents, De Forest reveals the code of ethics of Colonel Carter, a code by which Carter pays lip service to the conventions of his day. In reality, Carter's code is one of convenience. His transactions are morally right as long as they are not discovered. Whatever reluctance he may have displayed before entering into a corrupt bargain may largely have had its origin in the risk of failure and discovery involved. All of this adds to the whole picture of realism.

General Carter never saw Lillie after she had discovered his illicit relations with Mrs. Larue. The author uses the technique of premonition by which the reader is made to feel that a tragedy is impending. Carter had received a letter from Dr. Ravenel explaining that Lillie had learned of her husband's infidelity, and, as a result, was very ill; that, as soon as she could travel, she would be leaving for the North. The thought of the misery Carter had caused his wife seemed to him "like a foreboding ... it seemed to have a menacing arm which pointed him to punishment, calamity, perhaps a grave." (p. 419) Entering into

battle, Carter told his aide, "If I shouldn't come back, give the General my compliments for his plan." (p. 420)

With stark realism, De Forest sketches the last hour of General Carter, who rode into battle shouting with profane exultation. (p. 423) At that moment,

a Minie-ball struck him in the left side, just below the ribs, with a thud which was audible ten feet from him in spite of the noise of battle. He started violently in the saddle and then bent slowly forward, laying his right hand on the horse's mane. He was observed to carry his left hand twice toward the wound without touching it, as if desirous, yet fearful, of ascertaining the extent of the injury. The blow was mortal, and he must have known it, yet he retained his ruddy bronze color for a minute or two. With the assistance of two staff officers he dismounted and walked eight or ten yards to the shade of a tree, uttering not a groan and only showing his agony by the manner in which he bent forward and the spasmodic clutch with which he held to those supporting shoulders. But when he had been laid down, it was visible enough that there was not half an hour's life in him. His breath was short, his forehead was thickly beaded with a cold perspiration, and his face was of an ashy pallor stained with streaks of ghastly yellow. (pp. 423, 424)

When the Chaplain tried to turn the attention of the dying soldier to the benefits of Christianity, Carter fixed his stern eyes on the Chaplain and answered, "Don't bother! --Where is the Brigade?" Upon being informed that the Brigade had carried the position, "Carter smiled, tried to raise his head, dropped it slowly, drew a dozen labored breaths, and was dead." (pp. 424, 425) The author denied his hero a dying repentance, by which he kept the narrative of Carter's last moments above the level of sentimentalism.

Each movement is described so precisely as to make this scene possibly the most vivid in the novel.

De Forest expresses with restraint his opinions regarding the abolition of slavery. This is surprising, in view of the fact that he wrote much of the material while he was still active in military service. He knew Negroes before the war, and with impartiality he depicts their virtues and vices.

Major Scott, a Negro, in contrast to Mrs. Stowe's Uncle Tom, not only became confused in telling the truth, but also held a loose interpretation of the Seventh Commandment. Yet, he maintained his self-appointed spiritual leadership over the other Negroes who were also committed to his industrial charge.¹³ Deep penitence marked his restoration, but he rationalized his error by blaming his lapse in morality to a marriage that "wasn't done strong." He hoped that his being married over again would keep him in the path of virtue. (p. 247)

One easily forgives Major Scott's moral irregularities in his sublime loyalty to the Ravenels and in the triumph of his death.

In that same moment Major Scott, wild with a sudden madness of conflict, shouted like a lion, bounded beyond the angle of the house, planting himself on two feet set

¹³Haight, op. cit., p. viii.

wide apart, his mad black face set toward the enemy and his gun aimed. Both fired at the same instant and both fell together, probably alike lifeless. The last prayer of the Negro was, "My God!" and the last curse of the Rebel was "Damnation!" (p. 292)

In the study of De Forest's battle scenes, it will be profitable to examine first his actual descriptions collected in his A Volunteer's Adventures, previously mentioned. He observed details which he usually set down in simple language. On one occasion he studied the faces of his men:

They had by this time lost the innocent, pacific air which characterized them when they entered the service. Hardened by exposure and suffering, they had a stony, indifferent stare and an expression of surly patience, reminding me of bulldogs and bloodhounds held in leash.¹⁴

His candid statement on his reaction to military service foreshadows the realism in Miss Ravenel:

Skirmishing is not nearly so trying as charging or line fighting. ... Now to fire at a person who is firing at you is somehow wonderfully consolatory and sustaining; more than that, it is exciting and produces in you the so-called joy of battle.¹⁵

He states his frank opinion in a later paragraph:

The thoughtful among my readers ... will ask me if I liked the business ... I reply that I did not like it, except in some expansive moments when this or that stirring success filled me with excitement. Certain military authors who never heard a bullet whistle have

¹⁴James H. Croushore (ed.). J. W. De Forest, A Volunteer's Adventures (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1946), p. 108.

¹⁵Ibid., pp. 111, 112.

written copiously for the marines, to the general effect that fighting is delightful. It is not; it is just tolerable; you can put up with it; but you can't honestly praise it.¹⁶

During one phase of the battle at Cedar Creek, the Union forces faced defeat. De Forest described it in the following concise language with poetic power:

Barring these partial efforts, the left of the Nineteenth Corps was now drifting rearward, followed by a worrying shower of musketry and a gathering cannonade. Belated stragglers were running from our camps, bearing the havresacks or blankets for which they had risked their lives, and leaving behind the helpless wounded and the dead who needed no succor. Random bullets tossed up whiffets of dust from the hard trodden earth, and their quick, spiteful whit-whit sang through an air acrid with the smoke of gunpowder. Here and there were splashes of blood, and zigzag trails of blood, and bodies of men and horses. I never on any other battlefield saw so much blood as on this of Cedar Creek. The firm limestone soil would not receive it, and there was no pitying summer grass to hide it.¹⁷

These illustrations clearly establish the fact that De Forest was at his best in his descriptions of scenes of war. He pictured concisely, bluntly, and without romantic phrasing, the scenes of his own experiences. By incorporating these descriptions in Miss Ravenel's Conversion, he gave to it its strongest claim to realism. For example, a Union brigade is marching toward Fort Hudson:

¹⁶Ibid., p. 123.

¹⁷Ibid., pp. 214, 215.

The perspiration which drenched the ragged uniforms and the pulverous soil which powdered them rapidly mixed into a muddy plaster; and the same plaster grimed the men's faces out of almost all semblance to humanity, except where the dust clung dry and gray to hair, beard, eyebrows, and eyelashes. (pp. 255, 256)

Elaborate description would have exaggerated the scene with loss of effect.

Observe the picture of a coward:

One abject hound, a corporal with his disgraced stripes upon his arm, came by with a ghastly backward glare of horror, his face colorless, his eyes projecting, and his chin shaking. Colburne cursed him for a poltroon, struck him with the flat of his sabre, and dragged him into the ranks of his own regiment ... he only gave an idiotic stare with outstretched neck toward the front, then turned with a nervous jerk like that of a scared beast and rushed rearward. (pp. 259, 260)

Stephen Crane wrote of a similar episode:

The lieutenant of the youth's company had encountered a soldier who had fled screaming at the first volley of his comrades The man was blubbery and staring with sheeplike eyes at the lieutenant, who had seized him by the collar and was pummeling him. He drove him back into the ranks with many blows. The soldier went mechanically, dully, with his animal-like eyes upon the officer He tried to reload his gun, but his shaking hands prevented. The lieutenant was obliged to assist him.¹⁸

Crane's metaphorical effort in his description stands in contrast to the straightforward clarity of De Forest.

The simplicity of style in the following strengthens its realism:

¹⁸Stephen Crane, The Red Badge of Courage (Cleveland and New York: The World Publishing Company, 1951), Ch. 5, p. 64.

Turning to a soldier who had mounted a log and stood up at the full height of his six feet to survey the fortifications, Colburne shouted, "Jump down, you fool. You will get yourself hit for nothing."

"Captain, I can't see a chance for a shot," replied the fellow deliberately.

"Get down!" reiterated Colburne; but the man had waited too long already. Throwing up both hands he fell backward with an incoherent gurgle, pierced through the lungs by a rifle-ball. (p. 263)

The following is another example of simple, unobscured realism:

When Colburne came to himself he was lying on the ground in rear of the pieces. Beside him in the shadow of the same tuft of withering bushes lay a wounded lieutenant of the battery and four wounded artillerymen. A dozen steps away, rapidly blackening in the scorching sun and sweltering air, were two more artillerymen, stark dead, one with his brains bulging from a bullet-hole in his forehead while a dark claret-colored streak crossed his face, the other's light-blue trousers soaked with a dirty carnation stain of life-blood drawn from the femoral artery. None of the wounded men writhed, or groaned, or pleaded for succor, although a sweat of suffering stood in great drops on their faces. (pp. 266, 267)

The Confederate assault on Fort Winthrop is a typical De Forest battle scene, and is quoted here at some length:

The assailing brigade, debouching from the woods half a mile away from the Fort, had advanced in a wide front across the flat, losing scarcely any men by the fire of the artillery, although many, shaken by the horrible screeching of the hundred-pound shells, threw themselves on the ground in the darkness or sought the frail shelter of the scattered dwellings. Thus diminished in numbers and broken up by night and obstacles and the differing speed of running men, the brigade reached the Fort, not an organization, but a confused swarm, flowing along the edge of the ditch to right and left in search of an entrance. There was a constant spattering of flashes as individuals returned the steady

fire of the garrison; and the sharp clean whistle of round bullets and buckshot mingled in the thick warm air with the hoarse whiz of Minies. Now and then an angry shout or wailing scream indicated that some one had been hit and mangled. (pp. 310, 311)

When Captain Colburne and Van Zandt reached the field hospital, they found a large number of wounded men in all conditions of mutilation, each stained with his own blood, and lying under the shade of the trees. In the center of the group stood several operating tables, underneath which "were great pools of clotted blood ... amputated fingers, hands, arms, feet and legs." The surgeons "were daubed with blood to the elbows; and a smell of blood drenched the stifling air, overpowering even the pungent odor of chloroform." (p. 269) The scene is sickening, but as real as only one who has experienced it could record it.

In regard to the soldier's vocabulary, De Forest veiled the profanity of his characters by putting "by this and by that" in their mouths, and usually substituted "Jove" for the sacred name of Deity. (pp. 176, 177) This practice was usually followed in the fictional parts of the story. However, in battle scenes, which were derived from his experiences, De Forest stated without the aid of dashes and substitutions what was actually said.

In conclusion, it may be said that Miss Ravenel's Conversion is, in general, unprejudiced, without affectation,

and quite free from sentimentality. In this novel is found "American feeling and thought and history as the war expressed them," and as viewed from both sides.¹⁹ De Forest described war in its sordid reality and frankly exposed inefficiency and corruption, which delayed Union success. He told also about the cowardice of soldiers before the battle.²⁰ In the characters of Lillie Ravenel and Mrs. Larue, De Forest displayed considerable understanding of the nature of woman, and with commendable skill he unfolded the conflict of good and evil in one man, Colonel Carter.²¹ Relative to the portrayal of characters, Mr. Howells offered the criticism that De Forest revealed a "New England ethicism ... (which) leaves him, if not a partisan of the better, a censor of the worse."²²

Representative novels of De Forest, following the publication of Miss Ravenel's Conversion, will be investigated

¹⁹Clarence Gordon, "Mr. De Forest's Novels," Atlantic Monthly, XXXII (November, 1873), 614, 615.

²⁰Arthur Hobson Quinn, American Fiction (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, Inc., 1936), p. 168.

²¹Ibid.

²²W. D. Howells, Heroines of Fiction (New York: Harper and Brothers Publishers, 1901), II, p. 153.

in Chapter III to discover in what ways he departed from the realistic temper, and whether there is a steady regression, chronologically, from his Civil War novel.

14 show

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CHAPTER III

It was to be expected that De Forest, after his achievement in Miss Ravenel's Conversion, should show further development of realism in succeeding works. He had the commendation of W. D. Howells who wielded an influence in American letters. As an admirer of realism in European literature, De Forest was undoubtedly aware of the distinction paid him of having written an American novel of advanced realism.¹ That he did not continue, not to say refine, his workmanship in the realistic style may be proved by an examination of his works which followed his Civil War novel.

The next important novel De Forest wrote was Kate Beaumont,² which Howells considered his best work.³ In this work may be discovered a noticeable trend toward romanticism, although some fine realistic passages enhance its literary quality. The plot, familiar in fiction, is concerned with a feud between two families by which two young people are kept apart. (p. 24) With some exaggeration, De Forest describes his heroine as a romantic type. In appearance

¹W. D. Howells, My Literary Passions (New York: Harper and Brothers Publishers, 1895), p. 223.

²J. W. De Forest, Kate Beaumont (Boston: James R. Osgood and Company, 1872).

³R. E. Spiller et al., Literary History of the United States (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1948), II, p. 883.

The young lady's face was handsome, and, what is more, it was interesting.... Quite young; not more than eighteen apparently; maidenly purity there, of course. But this purity was so remarkable, it amounted to something so like a superior intelligence, that it almost imposed upon the beholder, at the same time that it attracted him. In short, this was one of those rare countenances in which girlish innocence rises to the nobleness of matronly dignity, without losing its own appealing grace. (p. 4)

As an illustration of other romantic sentiments, De Forest gives importance to a trivial exclamation:

"I am so glad to get on deck once more!" she said, her face lighting and coloring, like an eastern sky under the rising of the sun. "O, how beautiful the ocean is!" (p. 4)

Further, the language is often sentimental as, "darkling deck." (p. 15)

A measure of realism is present in the description of the sinking ship. While the drunken sailors were seeking their own safety, and were in a state of near-mutiny, Captain Brien, with Frank McAlister and a few other sober passengers, restored order by the flourishing of pistols and revolvers. (pp. 27, 28) But the romantic strain is obvious again when McAlister rescued Tom and Kate Beaumont from the sea. (p. 28)

The author, in the following passage, may have intended to convey humor, but his style gives it a touch of realistic description.

Stung by her brother's charge that she was no true Beaumont, conquered by his inconvenient obstinacy, and still more by his loud, overbearing voice, she suddenly

and petulantly gave up her hopeless contest ... and marched off with short, spunky stampings Her hips had become of late years an inch or so too wide to permit her to locomote thus with grace or dignity. They gave her skirts a quick, jerking swing, which, as seen from behind, was more farcical than majestic. The fat washerwoman or chambermaid of low comedy walks by preference in this manner. (p. 61)

Realism is prominent in the description of Nellie

Armitage:

This young lady ... bore a certain resemblance to her father. She was of a medium height, with a figure more compact than is usual in American women, her chest being uncommonly full, her shoulders superbly plump, and her arms solid Barring that the cheek-bones were a trifle too broad and the lower jaw a trifle too strong, her face was a handsome one, the front view being fairly oval and the profile full of spirit. (p. 62)

This is not the description of a romantic lady but of one whom De Forest obviously sketched from life.

Humor is intended in a scene which took place in the backroom of a store. Wilkins, Duffy, and other men of the village, had been drinking and

all these men, excepting the prudent and strong-hearted Wilkins, were solemnly and genteelly the worse for liquor. Jacobs, notwithstanding that he sat there so quietly, was to that extent elevated that he had insisted on saying grace over the last "drinks around," taking off his broad brimmed hat, and raising his fat hand for the purpose. General Johnson had been so far from seeing any impropriety in the act, that he had reverently bowed his head and dropped a tear upon the floor, muttering something about "pious parents." (p. 80)

De Forest possessed skill in portraying a drinking scene, which would not appeal to lady readers of that day.

The friendship, which had seemingly been established between the Beaumont and McAlister families, ended when Frank McAlister, stung by the insolence of Tom Beaumont, had tied up the young man to a chair and left him. In a rage, Peyton Beaumont, the father, declared that the insult had canceled their friendly relations, and wondered what sort of fighting would avenge it. At this point, he suffered an attack of the gout which De Forest clearly described:

He straightened himself, threw his head slowly backward, grasped the arms of his chair with both hands, and remained silent for a few seconds, his forehead beaded with perspiration, and his eyes fixed in agony. As the transport passed he drew another low sigh, this time a deep breath of relief, and resumed the conversation. Not a complaint, not an explanation, not even a groan. (p. 84)

This minor bit of description indicates that De Forest was a student of detail, and had possibly observed one undergoing the agony of an attack of gout.

Frank McAlister is presented as a strong and admirable character. However, it is just to charge the author with violation of his hero's manly qualities, as shown in the following incident. Frank on horseback met Kate in a carriage. During a brief interval, she wounded his feelings and drove on. He rode away toward a wood near the Beaumont place to find a stile over which he had once helped Kate pass.

Finding it, he dismounted and stood for a long time contemplating the worm-eaten rail, repeatedly kissing the spot on which he remembered her foot had rested. (p. 92)

This typically romantic scene was likely designed to appeal to feminine emotions. It belongs to the imagination, not to the world of reality.

The domestic rift between Nellie, Kate's sister, and her husband, Randolph Armitage, supplies a secondary and carefully developed plot, which is, in the main, realistic, but in places overdrawn. The rift was first indicated when Kate discovered that her sister and Randolph occupied separate bedrooms. (p. 95) De Forest gives a detailed description of Randolph in a drunken stupor, and of his hatred for Nellie who slapped him while he was in that condition. (p. 101) Later, a sensational scene occurred when Randolph, in a maniacal rage, broke up the furniture and beat his brother. Over against this violence the author describes the grim courage of Nellie. (pp. 103, 104) Further realism, suggestive to the reader, is shown in the description of Randolph threatening Nellie with a knife in her bedroom, as seen from Kate's viewpoint. (p. 105)

The author again retreats to unreality. At the hotel, Frank McAlister, for no other than apparently a literary reason, appeared and groveled before Kate in penitence for having tied Tom to a chair. Frank betrays further

unmanliness in his worshipful attitude toward Kate. She told him,

"If I was angry, it is over."

"Is it possible?" he asked, so grateful for what he esteemed unmerited pardon, that he wanted to fall on his knees, as if to a forgiving deity. (p. 116)

One of the obvious coincidences of the novel occurred at this point when Nellie Armitage appeared just as Frank raised Kate's hand and kissed it. (p. 116) In a sequel to this episode, De Forest uses romantic language to describe Kate's discovery of Frank on the train. "When she sat down again her cheeks were rose-beds of blushes, and her hazel eyes were full of flashes which blinded her." (p. 119)

Something of realism lurks in the decision of Peyton Beaumont who realized that the political contest between himself and Judge McAlister is keeping Kate and Frank apart.

Peyton Beaumont remained alone in a state of profound depression. After awhile he exploded in a torrent of profane invective against Judge McAlister, making him alone responsible for breaking the peace between the two houses by his attempt to sneak into Congress,--the sly, perfidious, rascally old fox, the humbugging possum, the greedy raccoon! Finally, making a strong effort at self-control, an effort to crush his proudest aspirations, he exclaimed, "Hang the House of Representatives! I won't run for a seat. Let him have it. For once." (p. 123)

Peyton Beaumont seemingly felt that the judge's chances for election were quite sure. The effort by Peyton to give up the race rather than be humiliated by the impending defeat places this passage in the class of realism.

Throughout the story, realism and romanticism mingle and alternate. Emotions are exaggerated, women faint, and frustrated lovers demean themselves. On the other hand, the characterization of Peyton Beaumont is executed with realism. He blusters with profanity, loves as a devoted father, zealously upholds the honor of his family, and forgives magnanimously. Kate upholds the romantic ideal of a maiden who does little for herself, yet is set forth as a strong character. Nellie Armitage is realistically faithful to her husband until there is no ground left for faithfulness. She is bold in her decisions, and sensibly understanding of the problems in her father's home. The weight of the story is on the side of realism, but the elements of romanticism are too obvious to ignore.

Honest John Vane,⁴ the next novel De Forest wrote, is mediocre in characterization. Olympia Smiles, whose mother operates a boarding house, is superficially beautiful. Her beauty is obscured, however, when, as the wife of congressman John Vane, who is revealed as a shallow, selfish lover of "society." She did not understand, nor was she concerned with, the financial problems of her husband.

⁴J. W. De Forest, Honest John Vane (serialized in Atlantic Monthly, Vol. XXXII, July-November, 1873).

Because she was ambitious to attain the highest social level at any price, John Vane departed from his policy of honest politics. Further, she is portrayed as being flirtatious in her social relations with other men. The development of the character of Olympia Smiles resulted in an exaggerated and often ludicrous characterization.

John Vane merits more serious study. He took pride in being known as Honest John Vane for the position it gave him in society, but he had never been beneficent and unselfish. (p. 446) "The fiber of his soul was coarse, and it had never been refined or purified by good breeding, and very likely it was not capable of taking a finish." His good traits sprang from selfish motives. Honesty was not a virtue he prized for its own sake, but he sought the honor derived through its name. "In truth, his far-famed honesty had thus far stood on a basis of decent egotism and respectable vanity." (p. 439)

He tried to resist the temptation to engage in dishonest politics, but the foundation of his character was too weak to maintain his resolution. Because of this defect in his character, there is a gradual decline from honest conduct to political corruption. He finally arrived at that stage in his career when he is re-elected on the now ironic title of "Honest John Vane." (p. 574) "His disintegration of moral sentiments had gone farther than that stage of

indifference which simply allows things to take their own course." (p. 579) Similar to his wife Olympia, his conversation and actions at times seem unreal, although his characterization held possibilities of realistic treatment.

Playing the Mischief⁵ has for its purpose the exposure of corrupt government, and demonstrates more careful construction than Honest John Vane.

Mrs. Josephine (Josie) Murray is not a model heroine. She was a young widow, gracious, well-read and well-traveled, and gifted with a coquettish disposition which attracted men. Her flirtations always appeared to be love at first sight. (p. 7) She went to Washington to open up a previously settled claim against the government for the destruction of a barn during the War of 1812. The amount of this claim she increased from time to time. Josie's campaign had for its goal the conquest of important men whom she molded into servants that they might obtain for her what she could obtain in no other way. That was money.

She was impartial to men, young or old.

She seemed to have none of that instinctive aversion which youthful women generally feel toward the near proximity of elderly gentlemen who show a disposition

⁵J. W. De Forest, Playing the Mischief (New York: Harper and Brothers Publishers, 1876).

to smuggle. A male creature was to her a male creature, and therein attractive enough, or at least bearable.
(p. 55)

De Forest is here expressing himself in his familiar candid manner. However, to mention here what will be emphasized at the end of this particular discussion, he is using realistic techniques to enhance a basically romantic story.

No one was immune as a possible prey of Josie's quest for a man and his money. She had a way of disarming men with their high ideals, including Colonel Murray, one of Josie's amorous targets. He, with his brother, the rector, decided to pay Josie a sum of money if she would leave the city. As he went to present the proposition to her he "said to himself that she was an unprincipled adventuress, a beguiler of souls into the ways of fraud and perjury, and a disgrace to the Murray name." But as soon as she greeted him, he stood disarmed of all his intentions and bitter feelings. "How could it be that one so agreeable to look upon would persist in wrong-doing knowingly and against wise remonstrance?" It was her deliberate purpose not only to disarm him but also, if possible, to win him to her cause. It even occurred to her that he would make a suitable husband, especially since he had money. (pp. 135, 136) The proposition, however, was not generous enough, and the requirement that Josie drop her claim was too great. Her fleeting regard for the Colonel as a possible husband turned

to hatred and the interview ended in a quarrel. (pp. 137, 138) As a portrait of an ambitious and unscrupulous woman, the scene is realistic in our terms of reference.

Josie revealed to Mr. Hollowbread, the vulnerable congressman, the first time they met, that she was a claimant for twenty thousand dollars. (p. 16) From that first meeting, Hollowbread was madly in love with her, although he recognized that her claim was a fraud.

He gazed down upon her with almost as much of astonishment as of admiration and affection. He had never before seen a so exorbitant and seemingly unscrupulous claimant who was so young in years and had the air of being so guileless. (p. 53)

De Forest has combined in Josie an appearance of charm and innocence which she has learned to use as tools to gain her unworthy objective. There is in this a touch of realism.

The man toward whom Josie had the most serious thoughts of love and marriage was Bradford, the Congressman from her own district, who had made love to her when her husband was still living. However, he did not fall prey to Josie's flirtations, although he admired her. (p. 94) He did demonstrate an affection toward Josie which to her meant love leading to marriage, but to him it meant nothing. When at last it dawned upon her that Bradford was playing with her affections,

she was full of shame, grief, anger, love, too, agitations of all sorts, a tumult of emotions....
Indeed, her power of flirtation arose largely from the

fact that she really had the susceptibilities which some flirts only counterfeit, and that these susceptibilities were easily moved. (p. 127)

In this comment, De Forest shows an interesting insight in the psychology of flirtation, and a demonstration of realism in ideas.

Josie's trifling with men finally led to the dilemma of being engaged to two men at the same time.

Engaged as she was, and engaged to two men at that, Josie went to sleep crying about a third man, ready to kiss the darkness whenever she thought of his name. (p. 165)

An ingredient of romanticism appears in the weeping of a woman rejected in love, and in the expression, "to kiss the darkness." The fact that she has been the aggressive seeker bars her from being the wholly romantic type.

De Forest traces the development of Josie's character from a flirt, cloaked with charming innocence, to an unscrupulous and heartless woman.

When she awoke in the morning from a sleep of turmoils, her head aching, and her nerves crawling, and her face so pallid that she hated to look at it, she was not an even-tempered, genial Josie, and for once she wanted to wreak a vengeance. (p. 165)

When the bill for her claim passed, she immediately canceled her promises. She broke her engagements to Hollowbread and Drummond, who had worked untiringly for her, and she refused to pay Jacob Pike, her agent, the sum agreed upon if he secured her claim. Finally, she fell into the

hands of a banker who promised to show her how she could best invest her one hundred thousand dollars, but who really planned to divest her of her wealth.

In comparing Josie with Mrs. Larue, it may be observed that Josie sought men and trifled with their affections with money as an object. Mrs. Larue paid less attention to wealth, possibly because she never felt too much the want of it. Her game with men was the game of love, with love as the sole reward. Mrs. Larue is abhorred for her moral degradation. Yet Josie, who did not cross the forbidden boundary, takes her place alongside of Mrs. Larue in guilt.

Viewed in perspective, the novel is marked by the unreal. The ease with which Josie wins men to her cause by appealing to their romantic nature is an incredible feature of the plot. The one exception is Bradford who, although not wholly admirable, appears in a realistic light. The novel indicates better workmanship than Honest John Vane, but its improbable situations and characterization place it below the level of Kate Beaumont.

The story of Irene the Missionary⁶ concerns a minister's daughter who, upon the death of her father, is

⁶J. W. De Forest, Irene the Missionary serialized in the Atlantic Monthly, Vols. XLIII, XLIV, (1879).

befriended by an old acquaintance of the family, Mr. Payson. He and his wife are missionaries to Syria. Mr. and Mrs. Payson took Irene back with them where she planned to be a missionary for the remainder of her life. Her resolution is tested by three suitors. Mr. De Vries, a wealthy young archaeologist, whom the party met on the journey, is a non-religious, worldly young man who does not understand the spiritual dedication of a charming young woman like Irene. (XLIII-427) She in turn was attracted to him, but sensed that the development of a serious friendship would constitute a threat to her career. Mr. Porter Brassey (XLIII-595), an American consul, is depicted as a crude, hard-drinking official who donated funds for a new church, by which act of beneficence he hoped to win Irene's love. The medical missionary, Dr. Macklin, appears as an eccentric bachelor who assumed a possessive attitude toward Irene, and hoped to win her by teaching her the Arabic language. (XLIII-762) He was easily offended by the frequent calls of De Vries upon the Paysons to visit Irene. (XLIII-601)

De Vries confessed to himself that he was in a hypocritical position. Clearly aware of the social values of his time, he had conducted himself before the members of the mission so discreetly that they never suspected his real character. However, De Forest does not lead his reader

to believe that the man is immoral. De Vries felt himself unworthy of Irene, whose affection he was winning, and condemned himself for flirting with her. Yet, he could not resist the attraction she imposed on him. (XLIV-64)

On one of his departures for an archaeological exploration,

De Vries wrung Irene's hand with no uncertain pressure, and hers clung to his for a moment all unintentionally, as if it had a longing and a purpose of its own, quite apart from her will. Their eyes met in a grave gaze of mutual inquiry, as though each asked the other, "What do you wish of me?" But to that earnest, timorous questioning no response was possible there; and they parted in a silence which each thought of and marveled at for long afterward. (XLIV-67)

This passage illustrates the romantic sentimentalism frequently employed throughout the story.

The narrative in some parts is didactic with extensive moralizing, the purpose of which, De Forest explains, is to describe "the kind of society which surrounded Irene."

(XLIV-69) This phase of his writing gives the impression that De Forest is drawing upon the memory of his travels some thirty years before for material to fill out the story.

De Forest introduced into the novel the characters of the Felix A. Brann family, whose inclusion seems to have no bearing on the story.

The proposal scenes in the novel, which are quite farcical, are reproduced here in part. Mr. Brassey, the

consul, approached Irene on the subject of marriage. After some vague remarks, he finally came to the point:

"In short--Miss Grant--I love you," continued the consul, beginning to stammer a little. "I want you--for my wife," his voice shaking in a way which was a credit to him. "That's what I want, Miss Grant, Irene! What do you say? What's to be my--my fate?"

Irene refused, and, when he persisted, asked him to leave. His parting words were:

"Good night, Miss Grant. You won't think hard of me?"

"No, never," promised Irene, panting to have him depart, yet all the while most piteous. "Good night." (XLIV-175)

Upon the encouragement of Mrs. Payson, Dr. Macklin made an effort to speak to Irene regarding marriage, and of that interview, the following high points are given. "I know your good qualities, Irene. And you don't even guess how much I admire them." She suspected what would follow but was unable to divert him in his purpose.

"I have loved you ever since I saw you, Irene.... I shall love you all my life," Macklin went on. "I wish--oh, I wish--"

She told him that they could only be friends, to which he replied,

"What do you mean? Nothing but your friend? Never anything dearer than a friend?"

"Oh, yes,--that's it. My truest and dearest friend."

She was "confused in mind and shaken in body" so that she did not know what to say next.

"Is it all over?" he asked, like a patient who wakes out of a chloroformed sleep, and cannot believe that his limb is really off. "Have you refused me?"

"You didn't offer," was the girl's feeble evasion. "Oh, doctor, don't do it!"

As a consequence, the doctor was stricken with one of his malarial chills, and he prescribed for himself red-pepper tea. (XLIV, pp. 184-186)

The third and most important of the proposals De Forest treats at some length. De Vries commenced by saying to Irene, "I think you are charming." At her protest to this compliment, De Vries added,

"But, Irene, I am quite in earnest.... I am entirely in earnest when I call you charming.... I believe, in truth I know, that I like you very much,--better than anybody else in the world."

When she did not reply, he said, "I think, Irene, that you ought to love me in return.... What do you think?" Her only thought was to answer, "Yes." But she felt obligated to consult Mr. Payson before making a final commitment. Having obtained his fervent consent, she returned to De Vries,

put out both her hands, looked imploringly in his face, as if she were begging him to be merciful, and said in a tremulous whisper, "Did you ask me to love you? I do. I have." (XLIV, pp. 607, 610)

These three scenes, briefly sketched, evidence the farcical sentimentalism which De Forest injected into the novel. If De Forest was serious, he had descended to his

lowest level of sentimentalism. There is a suggestion here that De Forest might be burlesquing the romantic scene. The author knew what realism was and had made it integral to Miss Ravenel's Conversion. However, he was trying to write novels which would sell, and at the same time it is possible that he injected a subtle satire. In regard to the novel in general, realism is present chiefly in the description of places to which the imagination had added some luster.

De Forest in The Bloody Chasm⁷ withdraws farther into the romantic mode, with strong traces of the Gothic. The term "Gothic" is used here to refer to the Nineteenth Century style of fantasy and romance toward which the Gothic novel had moved. "This gothic movement towards fantasy and romance especially gave a fresh lease of life to the whole race of story-spinners and story-readers."⁸

The Gothic novel with its romantic unrealities, its strange and sensational beauties, its far flights of extravagance, was not only the Novel of Adventure but also the novel of Happy Escape for spirits uneasy or terrified before the menace of the future.⁹

⁷J. W. De Forest, The Bloody Chasm (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1881).

⁸Devendra P. Varma, The Gothic Flame (London: Arthur Barker, Ltd., 1957), p. 220.

⁹Ibid., p. 229.

The plot of The Bloody Chasm is framed with such sentimentalism as to repel all but the most credulous reader. Miss Virginia Beaufort is a romantic character, but as a type of an "unreconstructed rebel," she presents a "ludicrous combination of tragic affectation with repellant insolence."¹⁰ She is discovered living in former slave quarters by Mr. Silas Mather who has come South to aid surviving relatives of his deceased wife. After being rebuffed by Virginia, his niece, he returned North and died shortly afterward. In his will Mr. Mather left to Virginia Beaufort a large portion of his wealth with the condition that she marry his nephew, Colonel Harry Underhill, who is also his heir, and whom Miss Beaufort had never met. Extreme poverty finally drove her to accept the terms of the will, provided that the wedding take place in a darkened church, so that neither the bride nor groom will see each other, and that she will not be obligated to live with her husband after the wedding. These terms were met.

Immediately after the ceremony, Virginia with her aunt and servants departed for Europe. Harry Underhill, vowing that he would win the love of his wife, followed her to Paris. In disguise and under an assumed name he achieves his purpose.

¹⁰A. G. Sedgwick, reviewer: J. W. De Forest, The Bloody Chasm (The Nation, XXXIII, November 10, 1881), p. 377.

The mysterious atmosphere of the wedding and the fantasy of a disguised husband winning the love of his wife supply the Gothic element. Romanticism is prominent in the characterization. An example is furnished in a conversation which took place between Colonel Underhill and Norah MacMorran, with whom he had been in love.

Underhill had the air of being completely humiliated. "You noble young lady!" he murmured. "I wish I could fall down and worship you."

"Oh, no, sir!" softly protested Norah.

There were tears in the young man's eyes at this moment. Neither of them could look the other in the face. (pp. 247, 248)

The following passage is quoted as an example of extreme romantic-sentimentalism. Colonel Underhill had written the verses for a song, commemorating Pickett's charge at Gettysburg. After Virginia had sung the song, the tears were in her eyes and Mrs. Dumont was sobbing like a child, while the wooden-legged Confederate General and the Yankee Colonel in his disguise of gray were hiding their faces. It was half a minute--it seemed to be several minutes--before any one spoke. Then Underhill murmured, "I am crying over my own verses--well, they are poor enough for it."

The General turned his moist eyes upon him, and took him gravely by the hand. "Poor!" he said. "Colonel, I don't know whether you are poor or not; but what you write breaks my heart. Ah, those sublime regiments! How grandly they went to destruction!" (pp. 258, 259)

It is scarcely necessary to say that the speech and behavior of these characters are not to be found in real life.

About the only realism in the novel is found in De Forest's familiar portrayal of the flirtatious widow, Mrs. Fitz James. The author seems to possess a masculine insight into the psychology of the coquettes of his time. Mrs. Fitz James is enamoured by the disguised Underhill, who, of course, is not attracted to her. She reluctantly introduced him to Virginia, and later caused a temporary rupture of friendship between them. By her tale-bearing she was responsible for other misunderstandings. She appeared to be immune to rebuke and was intellectually shallow. Social appointments she maneuvered for greatest advantage to herself. Her inquisition of Norah is a typical example of the flirtatious busybody who must trifle with truth to further her interests. (pp. 249-254)

The novel on the whole needs little additional comment, except that it marks a farther decline from the mode of realism established in Miss Ravenel's Conversion.

The last novel De Forest wrote was A Lover's Revolt¹¹ which, according to some authorities, does not seem to mark further development in his realism.¹² More properly, it

¹¹J. W. De Forest, A Lover's Revolt (New York: Longmans, Green and Company, 1898).

¹²Spiller, op. cit., p. 884.

could be said that the novel does not mark any farther retreat into romanticism.

The story takes place at the outbreak of the American Revolution with the scene placed in Boston. Upon the eighteenth birthday of Hulda Oakbridge, a dinner was given to which Asahel Farnlee, Hulda's childhood lover, and Captain Moorcastle of the British Army were invited. She was so charmed by Moorcastle that she at once became a Tory and rebuffed "Ash" Farnlee. Moorcastle, a man of low moral principles, kissed Hulda upon his departure, but he had in mind nothing more than to keep up an acquaintance with her for whatever pleasure it would give him.

When the British retreated from Concord, Ash captured Moorcastle, saved him from being shot by a sharpshooter, and released him. In payment of the debt, Moorcastle decided to drop Hulda, although in a later conversation with her she revealed that she had nothing more to do with Ash. Nevertheless, Moorcastle lost all interest in her. Her grief over being spurned by Moorcastle was so great that she gradually became mentally unsettled. She had consented to marry British Lieutenant Eastwold, but soon after she slipped away and made a futile effort to board a boat to follow Moorcastle, who had returned to England. Irrationally, she wandered into the Colonial lines, and later was found dead on the beach. This is the plot in substance. It is the

romantic story of a rejected heroine who tragically died while in search of her faithless lover.

De Forest showed some psychological insight as he described Ash Farnlee's emotions while awaiting the approach of the British. This passage seems to reflect the mellow-ness of the old soldier who recorded those emotions and expressed them without romanticism.

Ash Farnlee was as serious as were his comrades. To his surprise (and it frightened him with the idea that he might be a coward), his feelings inclined to tenderness. He had lost his vindictiveness, he did not desire to hurt any Englishman, however arrogant toward Americans; he even thought of Moorcastle and Huldah without anger. He was, as it were, on his deathbed, and must forget the little bitternesses of earth, and be forgiving to his fellow-creatures. (p. 73)

De Forest seems to be speaking out of the reality of his Civil War experiences when he wrote:

A soldier's life is so full of violent emotions that he cannot keep any one emotion long; a ball which has passed is instantly forgotten, and a comrade who has fallen is forgotten likewise. (p. 122)

The author relates the inexperience and blunderings of the provincial soldiers, who were fierce in their ambushments of the British.

Then the strangest imaginable truce drifted into this half-meant conflict. The Americans were even more perplexed than Captain Laurie. They had recovered their bridge; they had stood fire and proved to themselves that they were not cowards; and now their impulses and provocations to fighting seemed to have vanished.

"If the British would 'a' kep' on shooting, we'd 'a' knowed what to do," said a ruddy, hard-featured farmer to a comrade. He spoke in the vague, depressed fashion of a man who has suddenly lost his purpose in life. (p. 109)

De Forest expresses realistic insight in this passage as well as in the following description of the Battle of Bunker Hill.

In vain did Abercrombie and other gallant officers exhort, plead, push, and in every way strive to force a charge. Retreating men, whom they caught by the arm or collar, fell dead before they could be faced about. The officers, too, and the war-tried sergeants, even while shouting "Forward!" would groan and drop. The pitiless blast of bullets and slugs hissed steadily into the clamorous, disorderly, reeling groups which had taken the place of those lately aligned and obedient companies.

At last human nature could bear the torment no longer. The gigantic might of discipline suddenly lost its hold, and some hundreds of the best troops in the world burst rearward on a run, leaving hundreds of their comrades lifeless, or disabled, or crawling feebly after them. Sir William Howe (what divinity could have saved him?) walked off the field alone, his white silk stockings dabbled with the blood of his grenadiers, for every tuft of grass near the dead line bore its witness to the slaughter. (pp. 250, 251)

This seems to be the most realistic part of the novel and compares favorably with De Forest's battle scenes in Miss Ravenel's Conversion.

Earlier in The Lover's Revolt, De Forest deals with a familiar theme as he reveals the thoughts of the low-principled Moorcastle.

Then in a random way, and mainly because he was a very masculine male, he called to mind that other provincial, that little yellow-headed thing, that

Huldah. What a darling, fresh little posy she was, and how sweetly she had let him steal that kiss! He must go and see her (a yawn), and kiss her again (another yawn) and the rest of it. (p. 137)

There is the suggestion of Colonel Carter in the person of Moorcastle, whose characterization is not fully nor quite realistically developed.

The drinking episode, which is another one of De Forest's favorite themes, bears some elements of realism. Abner Sly, a Colonial soldier, who was a captive of the British, was assigned by General Gage to the charge of a grenadier who was to get Abner drunk and thus verify the story Abner had told the General. At the inn, Abner and the grenadier were joined by another British soldier, and all three became hilariously drunk.

At last the landlord (they could see no reason for his behavior) ordered them to leave the house, and threatened to call the patrol, whereupon they upset the table and departed.

They went off arm in arm, Abner in the middle. It was a wonderful reconciliation between the colonies and the mother country. Our provincial thought that he had never so loved anybody in his life as he loved these two British lobsters, who perhaps had bayoneted some of his fellow-townsmen during the expedition to Lexington and Concord. Every few steps he unlocked arms and shook hands with them both, and invited them to come and see him....

But John Higg and Blue Peter did not care one straw whether he were a good loyalist, or a soldier in the rebel army, or the great Mogul. They swore that he was the best fellow in the world, and toppled against each other in grasping at his vacillating hand, and then reeled on again with their arms around his neck. (p. 204)

This incident bears no relation to the story except for its contribution of humor. General Gage's order to the grenadier is scarcely credible, as it certainly would be beneath the dignity of the distinguished British general.

A third favorite theme of De Forest is that of the corrupt woman and her relationships with the typical roue. In this story she is Mrs. Loreleigh, an "experienced and reckless flirt." As De Forest's memories of love and war had fallen under the spell of romanticism, so also had the author's character of the corrupt woman become less pitiless. Moorcastle had arrived at the home of Mrs. Loreleigh:

He began his interview with Mrs. Loreleigh by squeezing her hand as he said good-day. She perfectly understood the pressure as a continuation of their last previous conversation, and as a prelude to suggestions whose nature she could divine from his flushed face and turbid eyes. She drew her hand away, stepped back a pace, and stood looking at him without asking him to sit.

In a few words she blamed him for Huldah's mental condition. He turned pale, bowed and left the room without a word. (p. 376)

Relative to the novel as a whole, De Forest seems to have made a love story merely the background for his battle descriptions. He employs fewer "by this and by that" expressions, although some asterisks are used to imply unprintable language. Huldah fills the role of a romantic lady in her affections, with apparently no strength of mind or character. An unjustifiable coincidence is used when

Moorcastle found Farnlee, the spy, in an abandoned house. By this contrivance in the plot, De Forest succeeded in having Moorcastle spare Farnlee, and thus repay the debt he owed the Colonial soldier. In this respect, one must judge De Forest here of poor plotting.

In comparing this novel with *Miss Ravenel*, which De Forest had written more than thirty years before, certain striking differences may be observed. He found it necessary to ignore a war he knew, and write of one that took place fifty years before he was born. He described the scenes of one war from life as he participated in those scenes on the battlefield, but, in the other, he drew from imagination for his description. In the one novel the heroine appeared as a real person who loved the rogue who sought and married her. She faced tragedy with courage, and resumed her place in life. In the other, the heroine sought the rogue, and was spurned. As a consequence, she lost her reason, wandered away, and finally, in a romantic fashion, died on the beach. De Forest reconstructed the old themes of the battle, the roue and his mistress, and the low drinking comedy, and, in so doing, his workmanship lost the realistic touch.

The investigation of the works of De Forest has revealed the evidence that he gradually reverted from the strong realism of Miss Ravenel's Conversion to a reliance upon the romantic mode. Exception must be made for The

Lover's Revolt in which there seems to be a slight resurgence of his powers of realistic writing, the conspicuous defects of the novel notwithstanding. Whether this attempt to return to more realistic writing was evidenced in A Daughter of Toil, which De Forest commenced in 1886, one can only speculate. He noted that Howells' serialized story, The Minister's Charge, was pursuing the same theme of economic problems. Shortly afterward the manuscript disappeared.¹³ The following chapter is concerned with theories relative to De Forest's defection from realism, with an examination of possible reasons for that defection.

¹³Spiller, op. cit., p. 884.

CHAPTER IV

The purpose of this chapter is to present for consideration several reasons for De Forest's withdrawal from realism at a time when Howells, Clemens, James and other writers were developing the realistic novel. These reasons will be more distinct in the light of the influence of De Forest on American literature. It cannot be said with certainty that he is the instigator of realism in the American novel. Slight evidences of realism preceded De Forest in the writings of Cooper, Hawthorne, Melville and others, especially the writers of short fiction.¹ It has been observed, by citations from authorities of his day, that De Forest's Miss Ravenel's Conversion was considered the first American realistic novel.

An interesting evidence of De Forest's influence upon realistic writing concerns Stephen Crane. T. F. O'Donnell assumes that Crane's The Red Badge of Courage shows the influence of De Forest's Miss Ravenel's Conversion. However, no factual link could be discovered. This connection now seems to be clear in the person of the Reverend John B. Van Petten, who was Crane's history teacher at Claverack College in 1888 and 1889. This is the same Van Petten who

¹A. H. Quinn, American Fiction (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, Inc., 1936).

was Lieutenant-Colonel of the 160th New York Volunteers. He and De Forest were regimental comrades for twelve months. De Forest mentioned Van Petten several times in his book of war experiences.² Although evidence is lacking that the two ever met again, it would seem incredible that Van Petten was unfamiliar with De Forest's account of battles in which Van Petten participated, as published in Harper's New Monthly, January, 1865, or with the novel, Miss Ravenel's Conversion. At the time Miss Ravenel's Conversion was published in 1867, Van Petten was principal at Fairfield Academy in New York. Later at Claverack as history teacher, his knowledge of De Forest's writings would be relevant to his teaching subject and to his wartime reminiscences for which he was noted. It would be at Claverack where Stephen Crane would first hear of De Forest.³

One reason which may be suggested for De Forest's reversion to romantic writing was the fact that Miss Ravenel's Conversion did not win popularity. Howells explained this as follows:

²J. W. De Forest, A Volunteer's Adventures. James H. Croushore (ed.) (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1946), pp. 101, 137, 182, 188.

³T. F. O'Donnell, "De Forest, Van Petten and Stephen Crane," American Literature 27:578-580, January, 1956, pp. 579, 580.

A certain scornful bluntness in dealing with the disguises in which women natures reveal themselves is perhaps at the root of that dislike which most women have felt for his fiction, and which in a nation of women readers has prevented it from ever winning a merited popularity.⁴

Howells further commented, "He is distinctly a man's novelist, and as men do not need novelists so much apparently as women, his usefulness has been limited."⁵

For his day De Forest wrote with startling boldness. He wrote candidly about the passions of men, and the flirtations of women who exploited those passions. He referred frankly to the most intimate relationships between man and woman, in language that was not obscured with romanticism. He described with unromantic candor the vices and virtues of his characters. His Colonel Carter, morally corrupt, fought courageously on the battlefield, yet loved his wife tenderly and recognized his unworthiness. Mrs. Larue, despite her lack of moral principles, was amiable, charming and sorrowful at the last that she had injured Lille. The heroine herself displays a lack of good judgment, and is realistically naive. De Forest's characters loved, fought, swore, swindled and debauched themselves. Carter did not reform and become a model husband. He was shot and his widow soon recovered and assumed her place in life as no

⁴William Dean Howells, Heroines of Fiction, II (New York and London: Harper and Brothers Publishers, 1901), p. 153.

⁵Ibid., p. 162.

romantic lady had ever done before. De Forest's scenes of battle were revolting with putrifying corpses and amputated members of bodies. For all this, the book was offensive to women, who constituted the great majority of readers in his time, as well as unsuitable for family fireside reading.

De Forest commented almost thirty years later that it was the first book he had written with which he was satisfied.⁶ Despite his opinion of the book, he seemed to have yielded to the desire of the public which he recognized when he said in the same interview:

"In my younger days everything was romance. A writer was praised very highly when it was said of him that he had a great imagination. Novelists were expected to draw upon their fancy for their characters. The great body of novel readers preferred to have their characters fictitious and to believe that they could never really exist. Mr. Howells made a great mistake when he wrote on this point and told his readers flatly that they didn't know what they did like."⁷

It is obvious from this statement that De Forest knew what people wanted, and, therefore, he wrote fiction that would sell, and, hence, the kind that people would read.

It is evident from an examination of his works that De Forest relied much upon the reconstruction of the strong

⁶Edwin Oviatt, "J. W. De Forest in New Haven," New York Times, Saturday Review, December 17, 1898, p. 856. Microfilm.

⁷Ibid.

characters and episodes of his Civil War novel. Colonel Carter has his milder counterparts in Randolph Armitage, Congressman Drummond, Hubertsen De Vries, and Captain Moorcastle. Mrs. Larue is reflected in Mrs. Josie Murray, Mrs. Fitz James, Mrs. Loreleigh, and, in a limited way, in Mrs. John Vane. Lillie Ravenel may be seen in Kate Beaumont and Irene Grant. Battle and drinking scenes, as well as illicit interviews between dissolute characters and their mistresses, are re-enacted, but usually with less vigor. Although names and places are changed, the familiar types are easily recognized. Because these elements are repeated, romanticism comes in to replace the fresh originality which was lost, either by a natural principle, or by direct will of the writer, or both.

This would suggest that De Forest had lost intimate contact with his environment and had failed to keep his observations of life up-to-date. This observation is founded upon a part of the interview referred to. Mr. Oviatt explained that De Forest, a wanderer all his life, was consistently spending his last years in hotel apartments. De Forest told the reporter that was the way he liked to live--away from the world.⁸ He referred repeatedly to "his day." He said that writing was being done differently than

⁸Ibid.

in his day, and that it was easier "to get published" than in his time. De Forest spoke of the recently published Red Badge of Courage and thought Crane's prose style was "short, sharp, jerky; a style that never would have been tolerated in my day." It may be seen from this that he was no longer living in the present; the past was his day. It is true that he wrote about reconstruction in the South and corruption in the government, but, when he did, he masked his characters and scenes.

As a result, realism in De Forest's characters and scenes is present with diminished force. His works following Miss Ravenel's Conversion represent the efforts of a writer who, living in the past, lost personal contact with his environment, and, consequently, that power of writing which is marked by the vitality of realism. It is the story of a man who, failing to win popular acclaim for a good book, endeavored to win that acclaim by reassembling the ingredients of that book into a more acceptable romantic form.

Another theory, which may explain in part De Forest's return to the romantic mode, is closely related to what has just been said. His works hint of a lack of discrimination in vocabulary and of propriety in description. There is the suggestion in these defects that De Forest was not given to self-criticism and scrupulous revision of his writing. Howells undoubtedly had this in mind when he wrote,

It seemed reasonable that he should be lastingly recognized as one of the masters of American fiction; and I for one shall never be willing to own him less, though I cannot read many pages of his without wishing he had done this or that differently.⁹

Possibly, Howells was referring to such cliches as "amused rage"¹⁰ and "darkly pale"¹¹ along with coarse descriptions, previously referred to, which lessened the quality of his writing. An example which illustrates the absence of careful workmanship was related by De Forest to Mr. Oviatt. Mr. Howells in 1871 needed a novel and asked De Forest to write one. De Forest wrote the first few chapters of Kate Beaumont and sent it to him, and, after recuperating from an illness, sent Howells a rough plot of the book. He continued writing, not knowing how the novel was going to end. When De Forest read the first four chapters of his book as they appeared in the January issue of the Atlantic Monthly, in 1872, he did not believe the work was his own. He said that he had written those chapters so hastily he had forgotten them and later thought that Howells was imposing his own ideas in the story.¹²

⁹Howells, Heroines of Fiction, op. cit., p. 162.

¹⁰J. W. De Forest, Kate Beaumont (Boston: James R. Osgood and Company, 1872), p. 61.

¹¹J. W. De Forest, Playing the Mischief (New York: Harper and Brothers Publishers, 1876), p. 71.

¹²Oviatt, loc. cit.

One may only conjecture that De Forest shunned the tedious aspect of writing which would have given symmetry and polish to his works. It is possible that what he judged good he did not consider it worthwhile to make better. Again, at this point, his lapse into the romantic mode appears. He may have found the romantic style easier. More imagination involves less observation. Books and memories of the past are useful sources of supply for the imagination. But it requires greater effort to observe life, to interpret its meanings, and translate them into realistic literature.

This is not to say that imagination has no part in realism. Rather, it must be a controlled imagination, alerted to the present. Wherever imagination is related to the past, it must make that past as though it were the present and bring into reality its images and symbols. The danger lies in an uncontrolled imagination in which romanticism gains the advantage, and, through its deceptive luster, creates an unreal world.

A difficulty faced at this stage is that De Forest stated that his works were in the realistic style. After he had written his last novel he declared in the above interview: "From my Miss Ravenel on I have written from life, and I have been a realist. I have taken my personages

from real life."¹³ Without doubt, De Forest said this in all sincerity. Yet, the grotesque figures of Squire Nancy Appleyard and Mr. Drinkwater¹⁴ and Miss Biffles¹⁵ cannot be ignored; nor can unreal situations and unnatural speech, examples of which have been presented, be overlooked.

The question arises whether De Forest mistook the subjective world of his writing for the objective world of life. At least one time in his career he knew the value of writing about life as it is. He told reporter Oviatt,

"In that book (Miss Ravenel's Conversion) for the first time in my life I came to know the value of personal knowledge of one's subject and the art of drawing upon life for one's characters."¹⁶

What De Forest possibly overlooked was what has been mentioned previously: that a character carefully drawn from life may be realistic, but when reconstructed, although ever so carefully, the result may be either romantic, or unreal, or both. The scenes and incidents which were once freshly realistic may lose their force, to emphasize a previously expressed principle, when used over.

¹³Ibid.

¹⁴De Forest, Playing the Mischief, op. cit.

¹⁵J. W. De Forest, Irene the Missionary (serialized in the Atlantic Monthly, Vols. XLIII, XLIV, 1879).

¹⁶Oviatt, loc. cit.

In fairness to the author who claimed to be the proponent of realism, another theory, which was suggested in reference to Irene the Missionary may be briefly mentioned here. It is that De Forest was aware of his grotesque characters and his romantic excursions. In departing from the realistic style in order to please a romantic-minded reading public, he caricatured his characters and scenes as a means of subtle ridicule of a literary type which he disliked. There appears to be some evidence in De Forest's later work that he caricatured and burlesqued certain romantic elements, which would seem to reflect his disgust with his loss of integrity as a realistic writer. However, in the light of the above interview, in which he insisted that he took his material from real life, this theory seems indefensible.

The thesis proposed here is that, of the reasons given, several combine to explain De Forest's return to romanticism. The unpopularity of Miss Ravenel's Conversion with the women readers, because of its blunt realism, influenced him to bow to public demand and give his readers what they wanted. He apparently wrote with haste since he was more ambitious to sell than to contribute to enduring literature. Further, he rebuilt his characters and scenes repeatedly, and depended upon favorite episodes to give

each novel its popularity. These trends directed him toward romanticism, which became dominant in his style, although he never lost complete touch with realism.

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