The American Novel Through Fifty Years:

Ellen Glasgow

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Though passed over in silence by many present-day critics, Ellen Glasgow will always exert a secure place in American letters. She was born in the southern State of Virginia in 1860 and spent most of her tender years until her death in 1945. Her historical novels represent the deliberate equivalents of major historical and social movements in that section of the United States which produced that great Victorian age that now appears to have passed. The novel she published in 1908, "The Sheltered Life," is a sharp rapier into the cult of despotism. Ellen Glasgow's works are the very stuff of which women have been made. Ellen Glasgow saw no way to escape from the general public, which knew little and cared less about the chivalric tradition. She was a woman who knew the struggles and the sacrifices of women for the betterment of society. Her novels have been no social tradition inclusive of supernatural values. However, her books religiose always treated skeptically and ironically throughout the novel's fleshly and spiritual, as part of an ongoing social order.

While all of Miss Glasgow's novels may be classified as satiric, they are not passive before experience, but groups the early works which cover the period from 1880 to 1915, a time during which the American South fought in and lost the War between the States; went through the subsequent difficult days of political and economic reconstruction and finally entered a period of industrial development; secondly, the three comedies, already discussed which treat manners as the fruit of history; and the three final books, "Barren Ground" (1923), "Voices from the City" (1924), and "In This Our Life" (1934), in which Miss Glasgow uses her descriptive method, creates character in the mind, and broadens her theme. These last three are not novels of situation, but are her more serious works, and the separate incidents part and central relationship one to the other.

In "Barren Ground" nothing is allowed to come into the fiction except what the heroine herself may have experienced. Miss Glasgow considers this novel her greatest work. With the writing of "Barren Ground" she was seeking questions about the life she had been observing from childhood on, and creating characters who are not passive before experience, but who know and then take a hand in their own destiny. "Barren Ground" is the story of a woman who transcends all the bitter reversals of life through hard work and an enduring spirit. She bends to the race of the undefat-

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