

SYMBOLISM IN THREE NOVELS BY ELLEN GLASGOW:

THE DELIVERANCE, BARREN GROUND, AND
THE SHELTERED LIFE

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We hereby recommend that the thesis prepared under

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PREFACE

This thesis is a study of Ellen Glasgow's use of symbolism in revealing the major themes in three of her novels: The Deliverance, Barren Ground, and The Sheltered Life. Throughout her long career Miss Glasgow wrote of the South she knew so well and attacked those aspects of Southern life and culture which she believed had outlived their usefulness. Her use of symbolism of character, nature, and setting illuminates her criticism.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

PREFACE	iii
Chapter	
I. SYMBOLIC USE OF NATURE AND CHARACTER IN <u>THE DELIVERANCE</u>	1
Use of Nature and Character Symbolism in Dealing with Changes Caused by the Civil War and Reconstruction.	1
Changes in the Lives of the Blakes and the Fletchers	1
Christopher Blake	
His obsession with violence and hate.	2
His hatred of Bill Fletcher	3
Daily renewal by Mrs. Blake.	3
His bestiality	4
His self-awareness of his animalism.	4
Identification with his hounds	5
The hounds as a link to Will Fletcher .	5
His desire to reduce Will to a beast. .	6
Will symbolized by animals	7
The hare as a symbol of Will	8
His moments of doubt.	8
Light as a symbol of doubt	9
The moth as a symbol of irrevocable destiny:	

In association with Will.	10
In association with Christopher	10
Trees as Symbols	11
Christopher's associations with trees	11
Christopher and pine trees.	12
The Land as a Symbol	12
The Land and Christopher	13
Paucity of nature symbolism.	14
Mrs. Blake	
As the Southern aristocratic woman.	14
Her physical and mental blindness as a symbol of the South	15
Her life contrasted with the family's.	16
Her respect for her past life.	16
Her opinions of love and marriage.	16
Her insistence that Christopher marry	17
Criteria for Christopher's bride.	17
Criteria for Jim Weatherby's bride.	17
Her life of lies and illusions.	18
Tucker Corbin	
Acceptance of his life.	18
His past.	19
His ability to perceive others realistically.	20
Support of Lila and Jim in their plans to marry	20
Lila Blake	21

Cynthia Blake

Devotion to Mrs. Blake's deception.	21
Physical manifestations of defeat and sacrifice.	22
Her philosophy of life.	22
Importance of family pride	22
Her disapproval of Lila's marrying Jim . .	23
Irony of her life of self-sacrifices.	23
Lack of purpose after Mrs. Blake dies	23

Maria Fletcher

Family background	24
Effects of her education.	24
Her spiritual maturation.	25
Self-knowledge gained through suffering . . .	25
Belief in love as a redemptive force.	26

Bill Fletcher

As a symbol of the parvenu in the South . . .	26
His adaptation to his new position of prosperity	26
As he appears to others and himself	27
As he differs from and resembles the Blakes .	27
His gradual loss of humanity.	28

The Test of Characters in Facing Reality

and Change.	29
Maria Fletcher as a symbol of adaptation. . .	29
Characters as symbols of the South.	30

II. SYMBOLIC USE OF NATURE IN <u>BARREN GROUND</u>	31
Reciprocal Effect of Land and Characters	31
Effect of barren land on characters	31
Inhabitants' fatalistic struggle to conquer the land	32
The land as a symbol	33
Glasgow's use of the land as compared with Hardy's.	33
Significance of the Titles of the Three Divisions of the Novel.	34
Dorinda's tragedy	34
Her attempt to avenge herself	35
Sections of the Novel as Symbols of the Major Periods of Dorinda's Life	36
Broomsedge	
The plant.	36
As a psychological device.	37
As a symbol of Dorinda	37
The Pine	
Dorinda's recovery from tragedy.	38
Dorinda as the fictional descendant of Maria Fletcher.	39
As related to Joshua	40
As a symbol of strength.	40
As a symbol of Dorinda	41
Life-everlasting	
Dorinda's success in farming	41

Dorinda's self-fulfillment	42
The plant's identification with Jason. . .	42
Symbols Connected with Other Characters.	43
Jason	
Jason and the broomsedge	43
Jason's estrangement from the forces of nature	44
Joshua	
Joshua's unity with the soil	45
Significance of his soil odor.	45
Identification with animals.	46
Nathan	
His communion with the land and the people	46
His effect on Dorinda.	47
His knowledge of farming	47
As seen by Dorinda	48
His connection with the pine tree.	48
Matthew Fairlamb	
His wisdom	49
His perception of Jason.	49
His identification with an owl	50
The Owl	
As a symbol of death.	51
In relation to Dorinda's betrayal	51
Mrs. Oakley's Futile Life.	52

Her fatalistic philosophy	52
Her theories about men and marriage	53
Dorinda's resemblance to her mother	53
Storms	
As symbols throughout the novel	54
In connection with Nathan's death	55
Dorinda's Triumph Over Adversity	55
III. SYMBOLIC USE OF CHARACTER AND SETTING IN <u>THE SHELTERED LIFE</u>	57
Smell as a Symbol of Decay and Death of the Sheltered Life.	57
As a symbol of industrialism.	58
As a symbol of the inward decay in the sheltered life	58
Characters as Symbols of the Sheltered Life. . .	59
Birdsongs and Archbalds	60
Code of behavior.	60
Cult of beauty.	61
Etta Archbald	
Her problems.	61
Lack of suitors and friends	62
Her unhappiness	62
The pathos of her life.	63
Eva Birdsong	
The ideal beauty.	63
Eva and Mrs. Blake.	64
Failure of the cult of beauty	65

The perfect marriage illusion.	65
The truth of Eva's life.	65
Her admirers.	66
George Birdsong	67
As the unfaithful husband.	67
His strength during her illness.	68
Her fabrications.	69
Effect of the life of pretense.	69
John Welch	
As a symbol of revolt	70
As a part of reality.	70
The General	
As a symbol of compromise	71
His lack of happiness.	71
His conformity to the code	72
His disappointments.	73
Destruction of his life.	73
His sensitivity	74
To Jenny Blair's needs	74
To Isabella's love for Joseph.	75
His belief in the benefits of the sheltered life	75
His appreciation of truth	76
His admiration of John.	76
His flexibility	77

Cora Archbald	
As a symbol of total belief in the sheltered life	78
Her maintenance of appearances.	78
The strain of her life.	79
Her world	79
Jenny Blair	
As a symbol of the sheltered life	80
Her veneration of beauty	81
As a product of the falseness of the sheltered life.	82
As a symbol of the decay of the sheltered life.	82
As she appears to John.	83
As she evades reality	83
As an agent of tragedy.	83
Death of the sheltered life	
George's death.	84
The inevitability of the end of the sheltered life	84
Other Indications Which Forecast the Death of the Sheltered Life	
The characters.	85
Washington Street and the smell	85
Light	86
Flaws in the Sheltered Life.	86
IV. CONCLUSION	88
Unifying Themes	

Necessity for change.	88
Detriment of lives of illusion.	88
Use of Symbolism	
Immature in <u>The Deliverance</u>	89
Nature symbolism in <u>Barren Ground</u>	89
Through setting and character in <u>The Sheltered Life</u>	89
BIBLIOGRAPHY.	90

CHAPTER I

SYMBOLIC USE OF NATURE AND CHARACTER

IN THE DELIVERANCE

In The Deliverance Ellen Glasgow utilizes nature symbolism, but the major use of symbolism in this novel is that of character. Throughout her career Miss Glasgow attempted a realistic portrayal of the South. In this novel and in many others, she uses characters she considered representative of the South to show how they faced defeat and change. The period after the Civil War and Reconstruction was a very unsettled time in the South. Those who had had the most, or the least, were often the very persons who made the greatest transitions in living patterns. Middle class families, such as the Weatherbys, might become either more prosperous or less prosperous, but their social position in the community was basically unaltered by the war and Reconstruction.

In the rural area of Virginia in which the novel is set, there had been only one aristocratic family before the war, the Blakes. However after the war, the Blakes are replaced by Bill Fletcher, their former overseer, who buys the Blake estate. Christopher, the Blake heir, is changed

overnight from a wealthy aristocrat to a dirt farmer, a life he despises. To observers Christopher seems to be in harmony with the tobacco farming he follows. However, he loathes tobacco in any form, and consequently, his relationship with the soil can never be more than a bitter necessity. In mourning the loss of the Blake estate, Christopher values the land only as the basis of the family's former aristocratic status. The lost estate serves as a symbol of what he might have been. The former Blake land and Blake Hall serve to focus Christopher's attention on his plan for revenge upon Bill Fletcher, the usurper.¹

Christopher's obsessive hatred of the Fletchers dominates his inner life. Indeed, his whole life becomes dominated by a primitive violence and the unceasing need for revenge to satisfy his hatred.² He has a destructive courage which Miss Glasgow viewed as a characteristic typical of aristocrats.³ However, Christopher is unable to find any inner peace or harmony because all his attempts to revenge himself have been thwarted, and because he is unable to forget the past glory which once was the Blakes'.⁴ As a

¹Joan Foster Santas, Ellen Glasgow's American Dream (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1965), pp. 65-70.

²Ellen Glasgow, A Certain Measure (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1943), pp. 33-34.

³Allen W. Becker, "Ellen Glasgow and the Southern Literary Tradition," Modern Fiction Studies, V (Winter, 1959-1960), 297.

⁴Ellen Glasgow, The Deliverance (New York: Doubleday, Page & Company, 1904), p. 94.

child Christopher tried to murder Bill Fletcher, but was prevented from doing so by a former Blake slave, Boaz.¹

Christopher has concentrated all his emotional energies into this hatred of Bill Fletcher. His gluttony for hatred is evident even to Fletcher's lawyer, Guy Carraway.² Christopher worships a "pagan god;" and as a follower of such a deity, he has a "pagan scorn for everlasting mercy."³ He wants justice and vengeance, not love and mercy. Christopher finds a vicarious satisfaction for his vengeance in his almost nightly dreams of giving Bill Fletcher "exquisite punishments and impossible retaliations."⁴ Indeed, hatred eventually consumes all of Christopher's better emotions.⁵ His single-minded devotion to hate cripples Christopher and warps his perception. The Blake motto: "A Blake can hate twice as long as most men can love, and love twice as long as most men can live" has been modified by Christopher to "A Blake can hate twice as long as most men can love."⁶ Moreover, Christopher is frustrated by the belief that his family no longer values him and his sacrifices.⁷

Christopher's hatred of Fletcher is renewed daily by the sight of his mother. Mrs. Blake became blind before the family's removal from Blake Hall. The whole family has aided in preserving her delusion that the Confederacy won the war

¹Ibid., p. 90. ²Ibid., pp. 84-85. ³Ibid., p. 92.

⁴Ibid., p. 156. ⁵Ibid., p. 186.

⁶Ibid., p. 205. ⁷Ibid., p. 222.

and that the family is still at Blake Hall. Only constant sacrifices and falsehoods on the part of her children and servants preserve her world of illusion, and thereby her sanity and life.¹

Throughout the novel Miss Glasgow uses animal associations to depict the degradation and brutality which hatred has produced in Christopher.² He appears "savage" in comparison to the elegant and civilized Tucker Corbin.³ Moreover, Maria Fletcher notices a quality of bestiality about Christopher and calls him a "bear"⁴ at one point, and a "savage" at another.⁵ Although Tucker recognizes the animalistic qualities which Christopher possesses, the older man believes that all youth has these qualities.⁶

Christopher, in moments of reflection, recognizes the degenerate animalism in his nature. He listens to a bull's bellowing with sheer pleasure.⁷ At another point in the novel, he refers to himself as an "ox."⁸ Christopher believes he has been trained to the life of a tobacco farmer just as "a young horse is broken to the plough."⁹ Moreover, Christopher possesses a savagery which the rest of the family

¹Ibid., p. 74.

²Frederick P. W. McDowell, Ellen Glasgow and the Ironic Art of Fiction (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1960), p. 76.

³Deliverance, p. 80.

⁴Ibid., p. 129.

⁵Ibid., p. 131.

⁶Ibid., p. 167.

⁷Ibid., p. 88.

⁸Ibid., p. 158.

⁹Ibid., p. 156.

lacks. He refers to this quality as a "coarseness" and a "brutality"; and the recognition of this quality makes Christopher recoil physically from the rest of the family.¹ The shame that this awareness arouses in him awakens "the slow anger of a sullen beast."² In turn, the anger causes Christopher to want to fill his insatiable need for revenge: "to glut his hatred until it should lie quiet like a gorged beast."³ His anger and need for revenge make Christopher not only savage, but also cruel: he wants to torture the Fletchers.⁴

The animals with which Christopher is most frequently associated in the novel are his hunting hounds. He has trained the dogs not only to hunt game such as rabbit, opossum, and squirrel, but also to attack savagely any intruder on the Blake property.⁵ Furthermore, he takes pride in his dogs' savagery. Indeed, he says his is the best trained pack in the county.⁶ He even identifies with the hounds when he is depressed; he considers himself a "whipped hound" because of fate's ability to deny him his destiny.⁷

The dogs form an important and symbolic link in the association between Christopher and Will Fletcher. When Will first approaches Christopher to ask him to be a hunting

¹Ibid., p. 199

²Ibid., p. 202.

³Ibid., p. 204.

⁴Ibid., p. 240.

⁵Ibid., pp. 130, 137, 140.

⁶Ibid., pp. 140, 82.

⁷Ibid., p. 202.

companion and a trainer of Will's dogs, Christopher's pack of hounds attack Will's puppies in the same savage way that Christopher would like to destroy the boy.¹ Early in the novel, Carraway watches Christopher feed the hounds portions of cornbread.² Later on Christopher mocks Will's speech and delights in "tossing him coarse expressions and brutal oaths much as he tossed scraps to the hounds."³

Christopher reveals his own bestiality in his plan to reduce Will Fletcher to the level of a beast. He wants to lower Will to his own level of degeneracy and thus avenge himself on Bill Fletcher.⁴ However, in tampering with Will's future, Christopher himself becomes more corrupt.⁵ Christopher takes a sadistic pleasure in his revenge. He visualizes Will and his grandfather "gnawing" at each other's bones.⁶ He thinks of the blood bond between the two Fletchers as a leash holding two snarling hounds together.⁷ He realizes that Will's intolerance for alcohol makes Will change from a boy to a beast.⁸ Christopher, therefore, plays on the boy's innocence and trust in introducing him to liquor.⁹ The horror of Christopher's success in obtaining his revenge dawns on him when Will, in a drunken frenzy, confronts his grandfather and murders him.¹⁰ Christopher recognizes his

¹Ibid., p. 187. ²Ibid., p. 81. ³Ibid., p. 195.

⁴Ibid. ⁵McDowell, p. 76.

⁶Deliverance, p. 332. ⁷Ibid., p. 281.

⁸Ibid., p. 527. ⁹Ibid., p. 195. ¹⁰Ibid., p. 531.

own responsibility in Bill Fletcher's murder and in repentance takes the blame for the crime. Will is thus allowed to escape arrest and granted the opportunity for a second chance at life.¹

As further proof that Christopher envisions Will as a beast, Miss Glasgow presents two incidents. When Will is ill with pneumonia in Christopher's barn, he gives a "sudden despairing cry as of a rabbit caught in the jaws of a hound" when he sees his grandfather.² From that time Will is under Christopher's influence and his ruin is assured. The second incident occurs when Christopher has a dream, shortly after aiding Will and Molly Peterkin in their elopement. In the dream Christopher hears the cry of a rabbit that the "hounds had caught and mangled."³ The cry of the animal is so desperate that in the dream Christopher tries to rescue the hare. However, the way to the animal is blocked by a thickly wooded labyrinth. Christopher becomes frantic in his rescue efforts and feels the "forked boughs of the trees [wrap] about him." Suddenly the hare's screams change to those of a woman. When Christopher finally reaches the animal, it has changed into Maria Fletcher. Maria opens her eyes to ask Christopher why he "hunted her to death."⁴ When Christopher awakens he reacts as if he has experienced some great physical exertion. His body is covered with a cold sweat, his heart aches, and

¹Ibid., pp. 532-533.

²Ibid., p. 232.

³Ibid., p. 326.

⁴Ibid., p. 326.

he is gasping for air. Even awake he feels that Maria is entreating him from afar.

Although one critic believes that the hare symbolizes Maria Fletcher,¹ a more feasible interpretation is that the animal represents Will Fletcher. The hare is a symbol of Will earlier in the book in opposition to Christopher's association with hounds. I believe that Christopher is the hound in his dream and Will is the hare. The transition of the animal from the hare to Maria is the means of Christopher's self-realization of his bestiality and the cruelty of his ruination of Will. Christopher realizes that Maria is good and kind. To destroy Will so completely would be to destroy Maria to some extent. The dream is an indication of how encompassing Christopher's savagery is. His cruelty all but destroys the only agent which can save him.²

Miss Glasgow prevents Christopher from seeming to be totally motivated by hatred by giving him moments of doubt concerning his planned revenge.³ At such moments, Christopher wonders what his life would have been had it not been dedicated to revenge and hatred. These humane doubts and Christopher's increasing repugnance of his destruction of Will combine to make him a credible character. However, Christopher does not act on his better impulses because he believes that his fate is predetermined. At one point he feels that he is bound to

¹McDowell, p. 77.

²Ibid.

³Deliverance, p. 218.

a "wheel of fate."¹ Christopher also believes that it is a family characteristic to allow one's life to be determined by a single incident.² Christopher is an example of Miss Glasgow's belief that character determines fate. In accordance with this belief, also characteristic of Greek tragedy, Miss Glasgow believes that suffering strips away the surface personality of a character and reveals his ability to endure.³ Although Christopher believes his course of revenge is irrevocable, Miss Glasgow indicates through his moments of doubt that Christopher may be salvable.

Recurring images coincide with Christopher's periods of questioning his life's goals. During one of his first periods of self-examination, he sees a distant light which he knows comes from Blake Hall.⁴ His thoughts turn to Maria and the knowledge that except for his course of revenge, he could love her. Later, after talking to Cynthia about the Blake motto, he sees the light in Blake Hall again. However, this time he forces himself to concentrate on his hatred of Bill Fletcher.⁵ Light serves as a connection between Maria and Christopher when Christopher saves Maria with his lighted lantern.⁶ She had been locked out of Blake Hall by her

¹Ibid.

²Ibid., p. 203.

³Blair Rouse, Ellen Glasgow (New York: Twayne Publishers, Inc., 1962), pp. 91, 95.

⁴Deliverance, p. 149.

⁵Ibid., p. 206.

⁶Ibid., p. 377.

grandfather and was wandering aimlessly in the countryside until she saw Christopher's light.

Twice in the novel there occurs a connection between Christopher's actions toward Will and the fate of a moth.

In the first incident Will requests the use of Christopher's horses to enable him and Molly to elope to Washington. As Christopher considers the request, "a big white moth flew over his shoulder to where the lantern burned dimly on the floor."¹ After granting Will's request, Christopher watches the moth circle the lantern, and in that moment he regrets his decision. He contemplates preventing the marriage by revealing Will's plans to Bill Fletcher. As he does so, the moth flies into Christopher's face and startles him from this temporary sense of responsibility.²

The moth appears again on the night of Mrs. Blake's death. It flies into the room and circles a burning candle. This time Christopher not only notices the moth, he also rescues it from the flame of the candle. As he releases the insect outdoors, Christopher sees the light in Maria's window and feels "a curious kinship with the moth that had flown in from the night and hovered about the flame."³ In this incident several themes are brought together. Christopher's feeling that he is embarked on an unalterable course resembles the moth's inability to resist the flame. The flame itself

¹Ibid., p. 322.

²Ibid., p. 323.

³Ibid., p. 485.

will destroy the moth, just as Christopher's revenge will destroy him. However, Christopher rescues the moth, showing again the possibility of his own redemption. Christopher next sees Maria's light. Maria is the only means of Christopher's salvation. Only through his love for her will he be able to renounce his life of revenge and thereby save himself.

Other nature related symbols that Miss Glasgow uses in The Deliverance are those connected with trees. However these uses are varied; therefore, the precise meaning of the symbolism is unclear. The blasted pine at the crossroads, where the stagecoach stops, is mentioned several times in the novel.¹ This pine tree links Maria and Christopher, for it is at this place that they first see each other.² Furthermore, Maria compares Christopher to the great pine tree.³ Uncle Tucker sees this pine as a "great big green cross raised against the sky."⁴ The religious symbolism is repeated when Cynthia, on her way to town, also views the pine as a cross. To her it towers "like a burnished cross upon the western sky."⁵ However, the pine is neither a clear nor a constant religious symbol.

To add to the complexity of the tree symbolism, Carraway sees Christopher as a product of the soil as much as "the great white chestnut growing beside the road."⁶

¹Ibid., p. 3.

²Ibid., p. 119.

³Ibid., p. 67.

⁴Ibid., p. 196

⁵Ibid., p. 114.

⁶Ibid., p. 12.

Christopher does not associate himself with trees, but he does connect the yellow leaves of autumn with the dispossession of the Blake family.¹ Indeed, every fall serves as a reminder of the day the Blakes left Blake Hall forever. Further tree symbolism is suggested by the fact that black cedar trees surround the Blake graveyard.²

The pine tree's dual association with Christopher and the cross suggests that the pine may symbolize the possibility of Christopher's redemption from his course of revenge and self-destruction. Pine trees, as most conifers, have associations with long life, the past, and the continuity of time.³ These associations would lend relevance to the connection of the pine tree with the image of a cross, also a symbol of redemption. Because the pine tree serves as a link between Maria and Christopher, the author may have meant to indicate not only the possibility of Christopher's redemption, but also the fact that Maria would be the means of such salvation.

Nowhere in The Deliverance is the identification of characters with land as fully developed as in Barren Ground. Nonetheless, the land itself holds the same promise of strength and redemption in The Deliverance that it does in Barren Ground. Cynthia Blake, at one point in the novel,

¹Ibid., p. 61.

²Ibid., p. 89.

³J. E. Cirlot, A Dictionary of Symbols (New York: Philosophical Library, Inc., 1962), pp. 244, 328-332.

expresses the need to lie on the ground and draw strength from the land.¹ Maria Fletcher returns to the land after the failure of her marriage and the death of her husband. She argues that the land is a source of strength and fulfillment.² After her return she can look out on the rural scene from Blake Hall and find a peace and contentment which she lacked before: "The wisdom of experience was hers now, and with it she had gained something of the deeper insight into nature which comes to the soul that is reconciled with the unknown laws which it obeys."³

Throughout the novel, Miss Glasgow stresses the idea that Christopher's success with tobacco farming is possible because he works according to the pattern established by nature.⁴ To observers, he seems to work in harmony with the soil.⁵ Moreover, Miss Glasgow indicates that his life of union with the soil gives him the possibility "of the large freedom of natural things."⁶ The land is the promise of freedom to those who will recognize this fact and work in harmony with its forces.⁷ The arrival of spring after his mother's death produces a response in Christopher to the call of the land.⁸ This response and Maria's love are to be the means of allowing Christopher to renounce hate and

¹Deliverance, p. 105.

²Ibid., pp. 338-339.

³Ibid., p. 365.

⁴Ibid., pp. 7-8.

⁵Ibid., pp. 12, 65.

⁶Ibid., p. 12.

⁷McDowell, p. 150.

⁸Deliverance, p. 337.

revenge and thus be able to recognize that his life can be fulfilled if lived in harmony with the land and its forces.

However, Miss Glasgow does not develop nature symbolism anywhere in this novel as clearly as she does in later novels of the country, particularly as in Barren Ground. Since The Deliverance was one of her earlier novels, it may be that Miss Glasgow had not mastered the technique of nature symbolism. Another possibility is that she preferred not to use such symbolism. Such use would interfere with her presentation of the types of people in the South, symbolism through character, the main purpose of this novel.¹ However, in The Deliverance, Miss Glasgow's development of the stereotyped characters, as well as nature symbolism, falls short of her later achievements.

Mrs. Blake is a symbolic representation of an aristocratic Southern lady who in her youth was a belle, married well, and lived the life of gentility. However, Christopher's blind mother functions to preserve the Southern dream world, which was always, according to Miss Glasgow, an inhibitor of true vision.² Mrs. Blake still lives the sheltered life of the Southern aristocrat, in a world which avoids reality as much as the dream world which she cherishes after the downfall of the Blakes. Mrs. Blake is compelled to live in this false world because she is unable to accept change. She

¹Certain Measure, pp. 31-39.

²Ibid., p. 31.

worships the past, not for what she has learned from it, but for her prominent role in it.

Mrs. Blake, old and blind, exists upon illusions. To Miss Glasgow, Mrs. Blake represents "Virginia and the entire South, unaware of the changes about them, clinging, with passionate fidelity, to the ceremonial forms of tradition."¹ Mrs. Blake is therefore a symbol of a past not only honored, but also sanctified.² Her dream world represents a state of mind common to many Southerners. Miss Glasgow's personal opinion of the South's inherited culture is expressed in her belief that "this inherited culture possessed grace and beauty and the inspiration of gaiety. Yet it was shallow-rooted at best, since, for all its charm and its good will, the way of living depended, not upon its own creative strength, but upon the enforced servitude of an alien race."³ Miss Glasgow maintained that the South had to recognize, as Mrs. Blake could not, that the South not only had changed, but must continue to do so if it were to survive. She also believed that as change occurred, the aristocratic tradition, of which Mrs. Blake was a part, "could survive only as an archaic memorial." This tradition, like Mrs. Blake, was "condemned to stand alone because it had been forsaken by time."⁴

¹Ibid., p. 27.

²Ibid., p. 35.

³Ibid., p. 13.

⁴Ibid.

Both the dream world and the physical surroundings in which Mrs. Blake lives contrast with the lives her children lead. The old lady spends most of her days in her parlor which is furnished with some of the elegant possessions which were hers in Blake Hall. She dresses daily in black brocade and spends her time sitting in a huge Elizabethan chair.¹ Furthermore, her meals consist of chicken and wine served on china. In contrast to Mrs. Blake, her children and brother live in rude poverty. They wear clothes of faded muslin and denim.² Her family eats in the kitchen from odd pieces of china placed on a plain pine table; their daily diet consists of cornbread and bacon.³

Since the advent of her blindness, Mrs. Blake has dwelt in the past more than in the present or future. She remembers every party, dress, and person from her youth "more distinctly every day."⁴ Furthermore, Mrs. Blake believes that the present is not a large part of life; the past is the important phase of life.

Because Lucy Blake believes herself to be the head of a powerful family, she freely dispenses advice to her family and acquaintances. She expresses strong, although often contradictory, opinions on love and marriage. She fell in love with Mr. Blake at first sight at a costume ball.⁵

¹Deliverance, pp. 267-268. ²*Ibid.*, p. 98.

³*Ibid.*, pp. 53, 58.

⁴*Ibid.*, p. 70.

⁵*Ibid.*, pp. 54, 69.

Although she admits that she was madly in love with Mr. Blake at the time, she almost seems to regret such excess of emotion as she grows older. Her consolation is that she would never have been guilty of falling in love with a man who was not a proper match for her.¹

Mrs. Blake believes strongly in the institution of marriage. She worries constantly that her son will not marry. She believes that the only burdens of her old age are her blindness and the absence of grandchildren.² She reminds Christopher that it is the duty "of every gentleman to take upon himself the provision of at least one helpless female."³ She maintains that to remain unmarried is to put one's "personal inclinations before the intentions of the Creator."⁴ Indeed, she feels that unmarried people are a burden to society.⁵

Mrs. Blake even has a list of criteria for Christopher's choice of a wife. According to Mrs. Blake, family connection and personal attractiveness are the most important qualifications that a young woman must have to be a suitable mate. Mrs. Blake reminds Christopher that small hands and feet, which all the Blakes have, are signs of good breeding.⁶

In keeping with her aristocratic stereotype, Mrs. Blake's marital advice to Christopher contrasts markedly with that which she gives to Jim Weatherby, a prosperous

¹Ibid., p. 198.

²Ibid., p. 452.

³Ibid., p. 200.

⁴Ibid., p. 161.

⁵Ibid., p. 159.

⁶Ibid., p. 478.

farmer from the middle class. She warns Jim not to marry a woman for her beauty. She advises this young man to base his marriage upon "mutual respect and industry." She tells him to choose a "wife who is not afraid of work, and who expects no folderol of romance. Love-making, I've always maintained, should be the pastime of the leisure class exclusively."¹

Mrs. Blake is a talkative, exacting, and somewhat witty woman. She has the will and spirit to remain alive and rigidly erect in her Elizabethan chair for twenty years, although she is blind throughout this period.² However, her strength depends upon lies and illusions. When she learns that she is living in the overseer's house, that the Confederacy lost the war, and that the Blake property is reduced to seventy acres of the original 2000, Mrs. Blake collapses.³ She never fully recovers. To exist at all, Mrs. Blake is forced to ignore the present completely so that she may wander in the past she reveres.⁴

Mrs. Blake's brother, Tucker Corbin, is able to accept whatever life brings him. Like Mrs. Blake he is physically incapacitated and unable to aid in providing any of the necessities of life. He also advises the family. Unlike his sister, Tucker "represents not the final contentment of one who has fought the good fight of the iron-veined

¹Ibid., p. 274.

²Ibid., p. 256.

³Ibid., p. 334.

⁴Ibid., p. 349.

for his convictions, but the permanent inertia of one old and gray and full of sleep who has realized at last the futility of struggle and has given up all pretense of resisting his fate."¹ Tucker accepts life, both past and present. He has the flexibility which his sister lacks to remember the past, but to avoid revering it or living in it. Tucker, like Matthew Fairlamb of Barren Ground and General Archbald of The Sheltered Life, is one of Miss Glasgow's "civilized" souls.² Although Miss Glasgow felt that Tucker was an immature example of this type of character,³ he is by no means an insipid one.

Tucker entered the Confederate forces to fight in the Civil War as a young aristocrat, full of spirit, who was noted for being the best shot in the community. He ended his military career as a hopeless cripple. Shortly after his return home, the Blakes were reduced from the wealthiest family in the community to one of the poorest. However, Tucker is able to accept all these misfortunes with equanimity. Unlike Christopher, Tucker is not embittered at the loss of the aristocratic life. Instead, Tucker has developed courage in the form of a rare and gentle humor; he has learned to laugh at his own failure and therefore has learned to laugh at "universal joy or woe."⁴

¹Santas, pp. 68-69.

²Certain Measure, p. 38.

³Ibid., p. 39.

⁴Deliverance, p. 57.

Tucker's acceptance of life enables him to evaluate people and situations without the prejudices of the past and the Blakes' former social position, factors which limit the perceptions of Cynthia, Mrs. Blake, and Christopher. Tucker openly approves of Jim Weatherby's industry and efficiency.¹ He is the only member of the family who admits that the Weatherbys are in a better economic position than the Blakes. He also suspects that the Weatherbys have always been better people than the aristocratic Blakes.² He pronounces the Blake name a "relic" unworthy of the sacrifices of the younger generation.³

Consistent with his assessment of individuals for their own merit rather than family connection and social position, Uncle Tucker openly supports Jim Weatherby's desire to marry Lila. He does not agree with the rest of the family that Lila must remain single in order to protect Mrs. Blake's world of illusions. Furthermore, he understands that Lila and Jim earnestly love each other.⁴ Tucker realizes that Lila is the type of person who can live a full and happy life anywhere, under any circumstances, so long as she is loved and is able to love.⁵ He knows that Lila is free of the fetters of family pride and can therefore have a good life even "buried alive all her days between . . . muddy roads that lead to heaven knows where."⁶

¹Ibid., p. 77. ²Ibid., pp. 111-112. ³Ibid., p. 245.

⁴Ibid., pp. 245-246. ⁵Ibid., pp. 265-266.

⁶Ibid., p. 266.

Lila and Christopher, born twins just before the war began, are Janus-like in their attitudes. Christopher looks to the past and regrets that he cannot live the role to which he was born. Although he has been able to adapt to the changing fortunes of his family well enough to provide a living for them, he hates his present life. Lila, on the other hand, can scarcely remember Blake Hall and the life there. She is not unhappy in her present life. Her only desire is to marry Jim Weatherby, even though the family regards him as an unacceptable suitor because in the past his family's position was beneath that of the Blakes. Lila must wait to marry Jim until Christopher believes Mrs. Blake will be unaware of the marriage.¹

Cynthia's devotion to her mother's deception is perhaps more pitiful than Mrs. Blake's life in a dream world. Indeed, the reverence with which the family preserves the dream world is one of the major criticisms of the sheltered life in this novel.² Cynthia serves as a symbol of one who consciously prefers the artificial world in which her mother lives; and despairs when her dedication to a dead fantasy is no longer necessary. She, like her mother, is a disinherited aristocrat who has lost herself in a dream rather than be awakened by the reality of the aftermath of the Civil War and Reconstruction.

¹Santas, pp. 66-67.

²Ibid., p. 66.

Cynthia's attempt to maintain a life of illusion while being forced to live in reality has physical manifestations. She is a tall, thin woman about forty years old with squinting eyes and a face "whose misshapen features stood out like the hasty drawing for a grotesque."¹ Her eyes have a look common to "over-worked farm animals."² Cynthia's only purpose in life is the maintenance of the illusion which is necessary for Mrs. Blake. Her life is therefore made of constant sacrifices and lies. Cynthia sews continuously for people in town, but tells her mother the constant sewing is decorative work.³

Cynthia believes that life is "something to be endured rather than enjoyed."⁴ She despises the household work she does with such energy; and her pride makes the situation even more painful. She dislikes the daily diet of cornbread and bacon; and she finds the eagerness with which Lila and Christopher consume the rough fare to be disgusting.⁵

Cynthia's only source of strength is her family pride.⁶ This pride forces her to disapprove of Jim Weatherby as a suitor for Lila. Cynthia "would have crucified her happiness with her own loyal hands rather than have dishonored by so much as an unspoken hope the high

¹Deliverance, p. 48.

²*Ibid.*, p. 223.

³*Ibid.*, p. 49.

⁴*Ibid.*, p. 97.

⁵*Ibid.*, pp. 58-59.

⁶*Ibid.*, p. 109.

excellencies inscribed upon the tombstones of those mouldered dead" of her family.¹ The older sister feels the family position and name must be venerated since it is all the family has left of value.

Cynthia considers Lila's wish to marry Jim nothing but selfishness.² Cynthia can never forget that Jim's father had been a common laborer at Blake Hall.³ On the one hand she admits to herself that Jim speaks well, has benefited from his schooling, and has "an aristocratic profile." However, even with these admissions, she only barely acknowledges "that a man might exist as a well-favoured individual and yet belong to an unquestionably lower class of life."⁴

The irony of Cynthia's lifetime of sacrifices is that her effort is unappreciated. As Mrs. Blake is dying she enjoys the company of Jim Weatherby better than that of anyone else. After the years of Cynthia's work for her mother, the old woman has grown to dislike her elder daughter. There are times when Mrs. Blake refuses to allow Cynthia to enter her room.⁵ Cynthia is a pathetic figure, rather than a tragic one, for "she had never existed as a distinct personality even in the minds of those who knew and loved her."⁶

After her mother's death, Cynthia has no purpose in her life.⁷ Her life's work is done and she is lost in her

¹Deliverance, p. 118.

²*Ibid.*, p. 245.

³*Ibid.*, p. 119.

⁴*Ibid.*, p. 263.

⁵*Ibid.*, p. 443.

⁶*Ibid.*, p. 444.

⁷Rouse, p. 59.

new-found freedom. She is surprised to learn that she has lied so long that she not only misses the fabricating, she also has developed an abhorrence of truth. The stories she invented to fill her conversations with Mrs. Blake gave Cynthia an escape to a world of fantasy which was as enjoyable to her as it was necessary to Mrs. Blake.¹

Ellen Glasgow intended the character of Maria Fletcher to exemplify a superior product from an "inferior type."² Bill Fletcher's rise in the community was that of the parvenu in the Reconstruction era.³ However, in Maria's emergence as atypical of her family, she fails as a true test of the idea Miss Glasgow had in mind.⁴ Maria's mother was of better stock than the Fletcher side of the family and Miss Glasgow traces the better qualities in Maria as having come from her mother.⁵ Tucker acknowledges to Christopher that Mrs. Fletcher was unlike her husband. He considers Maria's mother to have been honest and hard-working, unlike her husband who was a drunkard and a scamp.⁶

Maria spent most of her childhood and early womanhood away from Blake Hall at school.⁷ Her education enables

¹Deliverance, pp. 445-446.

²Certain Measure, p. 39.

³McDowell, pp. 69-70.

⁴Edward Mims, "The Social Philosophy of Ellen Glasgow," Journal of Social Forces, IV (March, 1926), 499.

⁵Certain Measure, p. 39.

⁶Deliverance, p. 426.

⁷Ibid., pp. 27, 37.

her to have different ideas from the rest of her family. She prefers antique to contemporary furniture, appreciates good manners, and dislikes the rural area in which the Fletchers live.¹ She contracts a loveless marriage with Jack Wyndham to escape the life she leads with her family.²

Maria does not mature until after her marriage. Miss Glasgow felt that she needed the "severe discipline of unhappiness, as well as the enlightenment of passion, to reveal the finer grain of her nature."³ The lawyer, Carraway, regards Maria as one of those people who would come into her "spiritual heritage only through defeat."⁴ From this standpoint, Maria is the fictional predecessor of Dorinda Oakley in Barren Ground. Both characters are descended from inferior fathers and above average mothers. Also, in both characters the tragedy of defeat reveals untapped inner strengths that make life worth while, and both women return to the land.

Maria returns from Europe a widow.⁵ Most of her money is gone and she has suffered through the tragedy of nursing her insane husband for over a year before his death.⁶ However, Maria now has an inner harmony which she previously lacked, and she has learned to appreciate rural life.⁷ Indeed, her new philosophy is based on life in rural areas.

¹Ibid., pp. 27, 29, 127.

²Ibid., p. 133.

³Certain Measure, p. 40.

⁴Deliverance, p. 180.

⁵Ibid., p. 307.

⁶Ibid., pp. 360-363.

⁷Ibid., pp. 338-339.

She maintains that what really counts in life is: "the places in which we take root and grow, and the people who teach us what is really worth while--patience, and charity, and the beauty there is in the simplest and most common lives when they are lived close to Nature."¹

Prophetically, she argues that a great love can be the means of a great deliverance.² Maria serves as the catalyst for Christopher's redemption from an animal consumed with hate, to a sensitive human being. She was in Europe when Christopher accomplished his destruction of Will Fletcher. However, whether present or absent, Maria acts as an "elusive emblem" of Christopher's better nature.³

Bill Fletcher, Maria's grandfather, who is the object of Christopher's hatred, is a more complex character than Christopher perceives. Fletcher represents the rise of the working class person after the Civil War,⁴ and serves as the archetype of the parvenu. While Fletcher has an evil nature, Miss Glasgow leaves open the possibility that he was not simply a bad man, but a victim of "prolonged social injustice and the functional derangement of civilization."⁵

Of the Fletchers, only Bill and his sister Sadie have to change their style of living with his new position in life. Both Will and Maria are ignorant of the lower

¹Ibid., p. 345.

²Ibid., p. 394.

³McDowell, p. 77.

⁴Certain Measure, p. 37.

⁵Ibid.

position the Fletchers once occupied in the community. Bill Fletcher approaches his new position with hope. He is ambitious for his grandson and well-intended toward his granddaughter. However, a streak of authenticity in Fletcher's character prevents him from adapting aristocratic pretensions in his conversation or in his life style. His main change is manifested in his new wealth and his hope for his grandson, Will.

Bill Fletcher's outward appearance is that of a coarse and vulgar farmer,¹ with an unusual ability to prosper.² He enjoys his tobacco, is proud of his rise to prosperity, and attends church as a way of insuring the security of his afterlife.³ Fletcher sincerely loves his grandson, Will, and spoils him through every possible means.⁴ Although he does not lavish the love on Maria that he displays for Will, Fletcher recognizes her worthiness after her return from Europe and wills Blake Hall to her.⁵

Bill Fletcher simultaneously differs from and resembles the Blakes. He has more energy to be a successful and prosperous man than his aristocratic antagonists have. The Blakes expend their strength in preserving illusions, whereas Fletcher channels his energies into more effective areas. In this respect, Fletcher serves as a

¹Maxwell Geismar, Rebels and Ancestors: The American Novel 1890-1915 (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1953), pp. 230-231.

²Deliverance, p. 24.

³*Ibid.*, pp. 35-38.

⁴*Ibid.*, p. 176.

⁵*Ibid.*, p. 406.

critique of the decadence of the aristocratic Blakes. In contrast to Christopher, Fletcher's insensitivity is somewhat compensated by his refusal to allow tradition to interfere with his life.¹ On the other hand he resembles Christopher in that two passions consume him: cruelty and greed.² Fletcher allows his irritation at the Blakes' presence on seventy acres of what he believes should be his land to develop into a fury.³ After failing to purchase the land, Fletcher attempts to foreclose a note on the farm.⁴

Fletcher is human enough to be grateful to Christopher for saving Will's life. He even attempts to reward Christopher with money.⁵ However, he never quite likes or trusts Christopher. Nevertheless, he contains his wrath until Will becomes dissipated through Christopher's influence.⁶ Fletcher retreats from human contact and concentrates on his money as solace.⁷ He writes his grandson out of his will and refuses to see the boy again, giving him a small worn-out farm as a farewell gift.⁸ Greed and cruelty steer Fletcher toward his own destruction. The former object of his love, Will, becomes the object of his hatred. In the end, Fletcher is murdered by the only person he ever loved, Will.⁹

¹Ibid., p. 73.

²Certain Measure, p. 37.

³Deliverance, p. 42.

⁴Ibid., pp. 83-84, 146.

⁵Ibid., p. 179.

⁶Ibid., p. 210.

⁷Ibid., pp. 353, 395.

⁸Ibid., pp. 373, 425.

⁹Ibid., p. 518.

The major characters of The Deliverance are thrust into a world which requires new living patterns if they are to survive.¹ The extent to which this adaptation takes place measures the success or failure of the individuals involved. Throughout the novel some characters serve as symbols to illustrate their inability to change, while others show the possibility of adaptation. Mrs. Blake serves as a symbol of the decadent aristocrat who can neither accept nor live in reality. Moreover, her physical blindness parallels the blindness of her world of illusion. In contrast to his sister, Tucker Corbin, as the symbol of the civilized Southern gentleman, not only accepts reality, but also enjoys it. Lila Blake symbolizes a rebellion against the standards of the sheltered life. Indeed, her happiness depends on her rejection of those standards. Cynthia Blake is a symbol of the complete acceptance of the values of the sheltered life. Yet, it is the strain of pretense demanded by this life that physically disfigures and mentally warps her. Christopher Blake is a forceful statement of how regret for the loss of the aristocratic life can inhibit a normal life. Only when he recognizes the promise of fulfillment of a life lived in harmony with the land and rejects the standards of the sheltered life can he fully accept Maria's redemptive love.

Maria Fletcher symbolizes what must actually be done, in Miss Glasgow's opinion. She attempts to escape into

¹McDowell, pp. 71, 73, 81.

the sheltered life, but encounters reality through pain and suffering. Eventually she finds reality more viable than escapism. Bill Fletcher is a symbol of the parvenu in the post-Reconstruction South. His success and his love for his grandson modify his coarseness and vulgarity. Moreover, he accepts reality and lives comfortably within it.

In this novel, as in the other two novels discussed in this study, Miss Glasgow portrayed, through the characters in the books, the path the South had to take. It either encountered reality, and therefore change, or accepted the "doctrine of evasive idealism."¹ In The Deliverance all the characters can do is to attempt to adapt themselves to the changing world in which they live. In Barren Ground the chief protagonist eventually initiates change rather than merely adapting to change.

¹Certain Measure, p. 61.

CHAPTER II

SYMBOLIC USE OF NATURE IN BARREN GROUND

Barren Ground, by Ellen Glasgow, is set in rural Virginia during the years 1894 to 1924.¹ Throughout the novel, Miss Glasgow utilizes the setting to demonstrate the reciprocal effect that the land and people have on each other in an agricultural community. Indeed, the deeper meanings of characterization, plot, and tone of the novel are found only in relation to the rural setting. Moreover, many of the characters are identified with the land or the plants and animals which inhabit the area. Miss Glasgow uses these devices to develop and illuminate the personalities of the people who inhabit Pedlar's Mill. She also demonstrates, through these images, the relationship of the past to the present, as well as to the future.

The novel opens with a description of the barren and desolate land, much of which has been reclaimed by nature because of the neglect and poor management of the farmers.² Indeed, the land is described as an over-worked animal which

¹McDowell, pp. 153-154.

²Ellen Glasgow, Barren Ground (New York: Hill and Wang, 1962), pp. 3-5.

man has "forced into sullen submission."¹ The land, its elements, and the forces of nature seem to have an ominous and omniscient power over the inhabitants. This power produces a fatalistic spirit in the people. In its omniscience, the land takes all, and gives nothing in return.²

The people reflect the fatalism of the land in their statements. Matthew Fairlamb is the most perceptive citizen of Pedlar's Mill. He contends that the land must be conquered by those who live from it, or the land will enslave its human inhabitants.³ The power of the land to shape the souls, the lives, and the moods of its inhabitants is recognized by the protagonist, Dorinda Oakley; but she is unable to ascertain whether this power works for good or evil.⁴ Even the most prosperous farmer near Pedlar's Mill, James Ellgood, recognizes the strength of the land and man's weakness in his struggle against nature. Ellgood believes that "the rain and frost and drought, not the farmer, do most of the farming."⁵ However, the people continue their ceaseless struggle against nature. The land has an ability to give hope to the farmers even after they have been disappointed repeatedly by the soil's failure to fulfill its promise. The land is the "birthplace and burial ground of hopes, desires, and disappointments."⁶

¹Ibid., p. 9.

²Ibid., p. 31.

³Ibid., p. 14.

⁴Ibid., pp. 31, 98.

⁵Ibid., p. 57.

⁶Ibid., pp. 190, 211.

In Barren Ground, as in The Deliverance, Miss Glasgow intended the land to have a living personality of its own.¹ The characters in both novels were to be seen in relation to the land. However, Miss Glasgow's depiction of the land is not so successful in The Deliverance as in Barren Ground.² The major reason for the differences in the two novels is that Christopher in The Deliverance hates the land he tills and his only love for the land is that of aristocratic possession. Dorinda in Barren Ground relates to the land in a way that Christopher is unable to because he is consumed with hatred and plans for revenge. Miss Glasgow views the land as possessing the power to make an individual suffer and also to endow him with a lasting tranquillity.³ Because Dorinda is aware of the land around her and also because she is aware of the world beyond Pedlar's Mill, she succeeds in her struggle with the soil and is amply rewarded.⁴ Because of Dorinda's relation with the land, nature symbolism is abundant in Barren Ground.

Miss Glasgow's symbolic use of the land as a determining factor in the action and characters in Barren Ground closely resembles Thomas Hardy's use of the land to influence characters in his novels, especially The Return of the Native and Tess of the D'Urbervilles. The degree to which the characters in Barren Ground can adjust to the pervasive influence

¹Certain Measure, p. 31.

²Santas, p. 19.

³McDowell, p. 150.

⁴Santas, p. 150.

of their rural environment determines their success or failure in life.¹ Miss Glasgow's novel also shares with Hardy's novels a "Calvinistic fatalism" which influences the main characters. This fatalism either gives them the strength to endure, or, combined with the destructive influence of the environment, drives them to despair.²

Barren Ground is divided into three parts: "Broomsedge," "Pine," and "Life-everlasting." These three names refer to the three successive native growths on barren land at Pedlar's Mill. Most of the soil in the area has been depleted by the poor farming methods, the tenant system, and dependence upon either tobacco or corn as the main crop.³ The depleted areas are abandoned to nature, and the native plants reclaim the land.⁴

The novel depicts the life of Dorinda Oakley, the protagonist, from young womanhood through middle age. As a young woman, she falls in love with Jason Greylock, son of a derelict doctor at Pedlar's Mill.⁵ Jason plans to remain at Pedlar's Mill until his father's death, which seems imminent.⁶ He and Dorinda plan to marry and, after his

¹McDowell, p. 147.

²George O. Marshall, Jr., "Hardy's Tess and Ellen Glasgow's Barren Ground," Texas Studies in Literature and Language, I (Winter, 1960), 517, 521.

³Barren Ground, pp. 15, 16, 21.

⁴*Ibid.*, pp. 184, 187.

⁵*Ibid.*, pp. 83, 88, 89.

⁶*Ibid.*, p. 85.

father's death, to return to the city where he studied medicine.¹ However, the week before the wedding, Dorinda learns that she is pregnant.² On that same day, she learns that Jason has married another woman, Geneva Ellgood.³ Dorinda spends the rest of her life trying to gain some meaning from mortal existence other than that derived from love or any other emotional attachment.⁴

When Dorinda realizes that Jason has actually abandoned her for Geneva, she reacts violently.⁵ Indeed, at this time the pain of her betrayal consumes her very much as the hatred of Fletcher had consumed Christopher in The Deliverance. Both protagonists attempt to avenge themselves on their betrayers in similar ways. Whereas Christopher is prevented from shooting Fletcher by a former Blake slave, Dorinda is thwarted in her attempt to shoot Jason by her lack of skill with firearms.⁶ Unlike Christopher, the animal savagery that accompanies Dorinda's attempt to kill Jason vanishes as soon as she fails to kill him. She is free then to suffer from her hurt and develop a life free from the hate that nearly destroys Christopher. Indeed, failure to kill Jason liberates her from all the bonds of her prescribed role in the existing life pattern of the community and is thus the means of her triumph over life and the land.⁷

¹Ibid., pp. 25, 84. ²Ibid., p. 108. ³Ibid., p. 122.

⁴Ibid., pp. 155, 183, 191, 250-251, 274-276, 408.

⁵McDowell, p. 148. ⁶Barren Ground, p. 128.

⁷Ibid., pp. 130-131, 141-152.

The titles of the three sections of the novel symbolize the three major periods of Dorinda's life. Before she meets Jason, she feels her inner self to be "barren ground."¹ Her love for Jason resembles the luxuriant growth of broomsedge on barren ground. However, after her betrayal by Jason, she again feels empty in her soul. She concludes that life itself is a barren ground: a denuded and infertile field in which humans have to "struggle to make anything grow."² Dorinda's conclusion is the major theme of the novel.

Broomsedge, as a weed, is ever present. It is a growth that reflects the mood of the elements. In sunlight it is cinnamon red; in cloudy weather, ivory colored; in the spring rainy season, yellow-green; and in the autumn, the red of a living flame. During the stormy weather, the broomsedge reflects the uncertain and frightened mood of the land and the people.³ Whenever the farmers relax their efforts to till the soil, the broomsedge encroaches on the cultivable land.⁴ Broomsedge flourishes in places laid waste by drought and disease.⁵ However, the broomsedge is the very plant that the farmers must fight constantly, even though they realize the futility of their efforts. Indeed,

¹Ibid., p. 10.

²Ibid., p. 150.

³Ibid., p. 3.

⁴Ibid., p. 4.

⁵Ibid., pp. 90, 95.

the broomsedge is a symbol of the fatality against which all men must struggle.¹

Concomitant with its physical power over the land, broomsedge has a mystical power and a psychological effect on the people in the area. The power of the plant is a "kind of fate"²; it has the strength to destroy human will.³ Once the plant has penetrated the will of the individual, it never releases itself. Indeed the individual begins to decay mentally or physically, if not both.⁴ Its dominance over the individual, like its dominance over the land, is strong and not easily removed.⁵

The broomsedge is the major symbol of the first third of the novel and is used to develop the life of Dorinda Oakley. The broomsedge which grows in Dorinda's empty soul after her meeting with Jason symbolizes many things. The plant represents Dorinda's youth, idealism, romantic longings for the exotic, impetuosity, and freedom of spirit. For Dorinda, both love and life create a "burning sensation" within her which is similar to the "living-flame" appearance the broomsedge has in the autumn.⁶ Like the broomsedge, her love grows during a drought.⁷ Later, she feels that the

¹McDowell, p. 147.

²Barren Ground, p. 4.

³Ibid., p. 14.

⁴Ibid., p. 95.

⁵Ibid., p. 98.

⁶Ibid., pp. 3, 19, 90.

⁷Ibid., pp. 89, 90, 97, 98.

broomsedge somehow represents desolation. Just as the plant is the wild and free element of nature against which the tillers of the soil must constantly struggle, the broomsedge in her soul is the wild and free part of the human spirit which must also be combatted or it will gain dominance.¹ After her betrayal, Dorinda believes that the broomsedge in her spirit is not only under control, but actually burned out: "The area of feeling within her soul was parched and blackened, like an abandoned field after the broomsedge is destroyed. Other things might put forth; but never again that wild beauty."² However, in equating the broomsedge with her tragedy, Dorinda fears that her unhappiness, like the plant, may not be removed permanently from her life. Her pain, like the broomsedge, may reappear.³ Her only hope is to attempt to fill her life with "something better than broomsedge."⁴

The second symbolic stage in Dorinda's life is the period when the pine grows. Immediately after learning that Jason has married Geneva Ellgood, Dorinda travels to New York, where she works for a medical doctor.⁵ The two years she lives in the city provide an emotionally fallow period; her spirit lies dormant while she recovers both physically and psychologically from her impetuous love affair with

¹Ibid., p. 98.

²Ibid., p. 133.

³Ibid., pp. 202-203.

⁴Ibid., p. 184.

⁵Ibid., pp. 155, 171.

Jason. Gradually her ability to feel returns. As Dorinda begins to have emotional responses again, she senses that the farm is bidding her to return, and that eventually she will have to return to Pedlar's Mill.¹

Dorinda is the fictional descendant of Maria Fletcher of The Deliverance. Their lives and beliefs are similar. Maria wants romantic happiness and longs to experience a life beyond the tobacco farms her grandfather owns. She marries to escape her life, and her unwise marriage initiates a period of suffering in which she reassesses her goals in life. She returns to Blake Hall convinced that the best life is that of one close to nature. She sees the promise of a life of fulfillment in farming.² Similarly, Dorinda's pursuit of happiness and escape bring tragedy. Through suffering she acquires the same sort of self-awareness as Maria. Both Dorinda and Maria view the land as the only hope of personal fulfillment. However, Dorinda feels a physical and spiritual kinship with the land that enables her to "attain permanent liberation of spirit."³ In Dorinda Miss Glasgow depicts the satisfaction of a life in harmony with nature, an ideal stated in the character of Maria, but not convincingly developed.

¹Ibid., pp. 188, 192, 195.

²Deliverance, p. 345.

³Barren Ground, p. 236.

The occasion for Dorinda's return to Pedlar's Mill is the message that her father, Joshua, is dying.¹ She returns to stay at the farm, bringing with her some experimental farming ideas and enough borrowed money to implement her plans.² While her father is dying, his only comfort is watching the harp-shaped pine tree that grows in the graveyard.³

The pine is identified with strength, endurance, and success. Early in the novel Miss Glasgow points out that only the Scotch-Irish have the fortitude to rise "above the improvident crowd of black and white tenants, like native pines above the shallow wash of broomsedge."⁴ It is from her mother's Scottish heritage that Dorinda finds the strength to struggle against the broomsedge. The pine tree serves as a forecast of her life. The pine in the graveyard has weathered many storms with the capacities of destruction, yet survived. Both actually and figuratively, this pine has its roots in the past, lives in the present, and will survive into the future. Dorinda is like the pine in that she does not divorce herself from her past, but instead has learned from it. She has modified her plans for her life and attempts to use new methods on the exhausted farm land. She can look forward to the future with hope. Indeed, the pine depicts the only hope of success evident in the area. It

¹Ibid., p. 195.

²Ibid., p. 208.

³Ibid., pp. 207, 211, 220.

⁴Ibid., p. 5.

has been modified by time and experience, yet displays the strength necessary to endure the forces of weather, nature, and the land.¹

Like the pine, Dorinda possesses an inner strength and a will to survive. It is this "vein of iron" which saves her from ever admitting defeat.² As the pine tree is the symbol of her strength and endurance during these middle years,³ it is also the symbol of Dorinda's successful farming. The butter from her dairy is stamped with a harp-shaped pine and the name "Old Farm."⁴

The third part of the novel is entitled "Life-everlasting." This is the best period of Dorinda's life. She has made a success of her farm with her new agricultural ideas.⁵ In addition, she is comforted by the heroic image that Nathan Pedlar, her husband, acquired in his death.⁶ Nathan's son, John Abner, is also a great comfort to her because he is wise in the ways of experimental farming and enjoys his work.⁷ Finally, it is in this period of her life that she conquers her fears that Jason yet may be able to hurt her.⁸

¹Ibid., p. 211.

²Ibid., p. 133.

³Becker, "Ellen Glasgow and the Southern Literary Tradition," p. 301.

⁴Barren Ground, p. 240.

⁵Ibid., p. 369.

⁶Ibid., p. 365.

⁷Ibid., pp. 331, 365.

⁸Ibid., p. 369.

Symbolically the land has passed into the third phase of its growth, in that Dorinda has reclaimed most of it. Likewise, Dorinda has entered the third, and culminating, period of her life. Her success in her farming gives her great comfort and she does not fear the future or the inevitability of death.¹ However, as a symbol, life-everlasting is the least developed of the three major symbols in the novel. Indeed, as a plant, it is never fully described. The only definite feature about the plant, given in the novel, is that it is silver-colored.²

Life-everlasting also has identifications, for Dorinda, with Jason and the past. During her stay in New York, Dorinda dreams of the plant. In her dream she is back at Old Farm plowing a field covered with "the ghostly scent of life-everlasting." The plant then transforms itself into thousands of replicas of Jason's head.³ Moreover, when Jason is dying at Old Farm, he stares unceasingly at the plant each day that he sits outside.⁴ In its connection with Jason the plant has a combined association with Dorinda's past and her dependence upon the human emotions of love and religious fervor. She remembers her mother's flowered band-box, which has "the aroma of countless dead and forgotten Sabbaths" in connection with life-everlasting.⁵ Dorinda has

¹Ibid., pp. 408-409.

²Ibid., p. 369.

³Ibid., p. 189.

⁴Ibid., p. 398

⁵Ibid., p. 189.

attempted to rely on love and religion as important parts of her life and both have failed her. Emotional dependence on these two aspects of life have been rejected as sources of strength; Dorinda relies on her fortitude and intelligence alone.

Miss Glasgow uses more symbolic devices to describe Dorinda than any other character. However, throughout the novel, Miss Glasgow connects many of the major characters with one or more symbols which help to illuminate both their personalities and their actions. Symbols are explanatory devices for the personalities of Jason Greylock, Joshua Oakley, Nathan Pedlar, and Matthew Fairlamb.

Jason's life is a total failure; in this connection he is identified with the broomsedge. Matthew Fairlamb accurately predicted that Jason could not thrive in the area; that the power of the broomsedge would overtake the young doctor's spirit.¹ Jason is weak-willed² and lacks the moral fibre necessary to determine his own destiny.³ Moreover, he is such a puppet that he became a doctor only to please his father.⁴ Jason does not lack intelligence, but he believes that it is futile to apply it. He is knowledgeable of modern farming methods, but despairs of ever teaching them to his fellow citizens after only one

¹Ibid., p. 14.

²Ibid., p. 11, 318.

³Becker, "Ellen Glasgow and the Southern Literary Tradition," p. 297.

⁴Barren Ground, p. 71.

unsuccessful attempt.¹ In addition, he fatalistically believes that he is unable to achieve any goal.² Throughout the novel he is manipulated by the land or other people, especially his father and the Ellgoods.³

Jason might have succeeded had he left Pedlar's Mill. However, he has no defense against the forces of the land or the broomsedge. His weakness to protect himself from the forces of nature is determined by his inability to identify with them in any way. He returns to the land from which he came, but only as a stranger. Because of this estrangement, "there could be no sympathetic communion between him and the solitude. Neither as a lover nor as a conqueror could he hope to possess it in spirit."⁴ On the other hand, Jason realizes that the land can be made to serve those who toil it by a change to new farming methods.⁵ However, he is powerless to effect these changes himself and is unwilling, or unable, to experiment with new ideas on the Greylock farm. In view of his weaknesses, the only way Jason could be a successful farmer would be to have either a great deal of money or an industrious wife to implement the modern methods of farming he advocates.⁶ Jason, however, acquires neither of these assets. Both the state of decay at Five Oaks, the Greylock farm, and Jason's own

¹Ibid., pp. 49, 50.

²Ibid., p. 51.

³Ibid., pp. 71, 89, 116-117, 130.

⁴Ibid., p. 26.

⁵Ibid., p. 87.

⁶Ibid., p. 13.

awareness of the malignant power of the broomsedge attest to his weaknesses. Indeed Jason predicts his own fate:

" . . . I want to get away, not to spend my life as a missionary to the broomsedge. I feel already as if it were growing over me and strangling the little energy I ever had. That's the worst of it. If you stay here long enough, the broomsedge claims you, and you get so lazy you cease to care what becomes of you. There's failure in the air."¹

Joshua Oakley, like Jason, is dominated and eventually conquered by the soil he tills. However, Joshua's relationship with the land is one of unity. Joshua, Dorinda's father, is from the poor-lower-class element of the area and has "the aptitude of the poor for futility."² However, his failure to prosper is in no way related to the amount of effort he expends in his work.³ He labors in vain partially because he is unwilling, if not unable, to change his farming habits.⁴ As a result, he feels that he is a slave to the land and is driven by its forces.⁵ However, Joshua is resigned to his fate; he never rebels against his lack of success. He is like the earth he tills in that he accepts whatever happens to him with a patient resignation.

Joshua further resembles the land in that his body is covered with the soil he tills and therefore emits its odor.⁶ Indeed, Dorinda observes that there is nothing human about her father "except his fine prophet's head and the

¹Ibid., p. 88.

²Ibid., p. 7.

³Ibid., p. 196.

⁴Ibid., pp. 43, 91.

⁵Ibid., pp. 32, 96.

⁶Ibid., p. 33.

humble dignity of one who had kept in close communion with the earth and sky."¹ However, his identity with the soil fails to prevent the land from conquering him.² Joshua's life and labor are his human sacrifices to the land, yet neither his life nor his death makes any impression on the farm.

In addition to his identification with the land, Joshua also has a resemblance to animals. His eyes have a certain innocent and melancholy quality to them that is common to the eyes of dogs or horses.³ Moreover, like these farm animals, he is always patient and willing to perform whatever is required of him. Physically he is large and slow-witted; he eats and drinks like a horse. Joshua understands horses better than people and talks to horses although he is silent and undemonstrative toward his family. The relationship between Joshua and his family is reciprocal. He has as little importance to the family as do the work horses.⁴ Joshua's horse imagery is furthered when Dorinda visualizes her father as being "harnessed to the elemental forces, struggling inarticulately against the blight of poverty and the barrenness of the soil."⁵

Nathan Pedlar, the storekeeper at Pedlar's Mill, is like Joshua in that he works unceasingly. However, unlike

¹Ibid., p. 90.

²Ibid., p. 215.

³Ibid., pp. 32, 38.

⁴Ibid., p. 32.

⁵Ibid.

Joshua, Nathan prospers. Nathan also differs from Joshua in that as the storekeeper he is in communion with both the land and its people. Indeed, Nathan knows "everything about everybody."¹

Nathan's life is intertwined with Dorinda's throughout the novel. In the first section of the book, Nathan is Dorinda's employer; and in the second section, he becomes her husband.² Nathan is less attractive than Joshua. Indeed, his physical unattractiveness borders on the grotesque.³ On the other hand, his physical ugliness is a decided contrast to his good nature.⁴ Moreover, he is a good man with a deep moral integrity and magnanimity which aids Dorinda in liking and respecting him.⁵

Nathan is one of the few people in the area who realize the value of agricultural experimentation. His vision is always in the future.⁶ Indeed, he foresees mechanical inventions which will make life and farming easier for the inhabitants of Pedlar's Mill.⁷ He understands the land and the methods necessary to make it productive for the men who till it. Nathan is aware that the one-crop system of farming must be abandoned in exchange for programs of rotation of crops, heavy fertilization, and adoption of dairy farming.⁸

¹Ibid., p. 202.

²Ibid., pp. 28, 291.

³Ibid., pp. 15, 25, 210.

⁴Ibid., p. 200.

⁵Ibid., pp. 15, 329.

⁶Ibid., p. 327.

⁷Ibid.

⁸Ibid., pp. 15, 16, 213.

Dorinda sees Nathan in relation to animals, her father, and the pine tree. Nathan's laugh reminds Dorinda of a horse's neigh.¹ As she leaves for New York, Nathan reminds Dorinda of her father.² A further link between Joshua and Nathan is that she compares both men to the pine tree.³ Mr. Oakley has hands like the roots of a tree and derives great comfort from seeing the pine in the graveyard as he is dying.⁴ Both men value the pine trees and are unwilling to cut them as timber for cash.⁵ The two men differ in that Nathan has the fortitude necessary to control the forces of nature whereas Joshua does not. Indeed, Dorinda compares her father in his illness and death to a pine tree that has been uprooted by the elements.⁶

In the second section of the novel, Nathan is further identified with the pine image because he is able to help Dorinda in her farming and to give her personal comfort as a friend. The dominant pine image of this section is that of the harp-shaped pine tree in the graveyard. It is in this particular context that Nathan is especially symbolized by the pine image. Dorinda believes that Nathan rises to dignity only when he is arranging funerals.⁷ Like the harp-shaped pine, Nathan calls forth dignity, respect, and

¹Ibid., pp. 210-211.

²Ibid., p. 152.

³Ibid., p. 15.

⁴Ibid., pp. 33, 220.

⁵Ibid., p. 211.

⁶Ibid., p. 206.

⁷Ibid., p. 266.

endurance at a time of death. Indeed, in his own death he becomes a hero to the community.

Old Matthew Fairlamb acts as a pivotal character in Barren Ground in a manner similar to Nathan Pedlar. He has the wisdom and patience exhibited by Tucker Corbin in The Deliverance and General Archbald in The Sheltered Life. Matthew is a vigorous old man nearing ninety who has spent his life as a carpenter and an observer of life at Pedlar's Mill.¹ He has developed a shrewd understanding of human nature and a keen perception of the people in his community. He functions as both a prophet and a philosopher.² Dorinda tries to ignore his many pronouncements, but subsequent events force her to recall them.³ Matthew, like Nathan Pedlar, realizes that the land responds to good treatment.⁴ He also acknowledges that man is challenged by the forces of the land. If the human is unequal to these forces, he will be defeated by them.⁵ Moreover, it is Matthew who recognizes the psychological power that broomsedge possesses.⁶ Matthew's knowledge of the land and its forces gives him an acute perception as to how these powers will affect the people at Pedlar's Mill.

Matthew accurately predicts that Jason will be unable to resist the power of the broomsedge.⁷ He also doubts that

¹Ibid., p. 12

²McDowell, p. 157.

³Barren Ground, pp. 256, 408. ⁴Ibid., p. 5.

⁵Ibid., p. 14. ⁶Ibid., p. 4. ⁷Ibid., pp. 13, 14.

Jason's father will die quickly.¹ Since Jason has stated that he will remain at Pedlar's Mill as long as his father lives, Jason's fate is clear to Matthew. Matthew believes that Jason lacks the resilience necessary to survive in the area. Matthew tries to warn Dorinda of Jason's true nature, but she will not listen to him.² She fails to heed him even when the old carpenter hints that Jason and Geneva may be getting married in New York.³ Dorinda dismisses all of Matthew's statements in the first section of the novel as the pratings of a gossipy old man.

Matthew reminds Dorinda of an owl. To her, he even sounds like an owl.⁴ This identification with an owl functions as a symbolic coupling of the legendary wise old owl with the owl as the omen of night, darkness, and death.⁵ Functioning as a death omen, or omen of doom, Matthew attempts to warn Dorinda of the futility of her love for Jason. Jason is not worthy of her love and is too weak to prevent himself from hurting her. Indeed, Dorinda feels that she has placed her life in Jason's care only to have him ruin it.⁶ After her betrayal, Dorinda feels dead emotionally and never wants to have anything to do with love again.⁷

¹Ibid., p. 14.

²Ibid., p. 12.

³Ibid., p. 104.

⁴Ibid., pp. 14, 105.

⁵Cirlot, A Dictionary of Symbols, pp. 87, 175.

⁶Barren Ground, p. 130.

⁷Ibid., p. 176.

Aside from the connection with Matthew Fairlamb, the owl symbol appears in the novel in relation to other ominous circumstances. It appears several times as a death omen. For example, Dorinda hears owls when she is running through the rain-soaked woods, intent on finding Jason and killing him. However, she is not sure whether the owls are real or merely an echo of an inner voice which encourages her to avenge her betrayal.¹ Dorinda again hears the owl when Rufus, her brother, is taken into custody for questioning in connection with Peter Kittery's murder.² Dorinda realizes that Rufus is probably guilty, but knows that her mother's perjury will save him. In this instance, the owl also serves as the omen of Mrs. Oakley's death. Although she continues to live for almost a year after the incident, she is never herself after her perjury.³

The owl recurs as a symbol in relation to Dorinda's betrayal and Jason's death. After not thinking of him for years, Dorinda dreams that Jason is pursuing her. In the dream, Jason appears as the man she believed him to be in her youth. When she awakens she hears an owl and shudders.⁴ The owl is a reminder of her lost youth and damaging love affair. The owl last appears when Jason, dying of tuberculosis at Old Farm, hears an owl during his first night at the Oakley residence. He dies soon afterward and is buried

¹Ibid., p. 129.

²Ibid., p. 247.

³Ibid., pp. 260, 264.

⁴Ibid., p. 274.

at Five Oaks. With him is buried the last reminder of Dorinda's wasted youth.¹

Mrs. Oakley, unlike Joshua, has no dominant symbol. However, her life resembles that of her husband in that she works continually with no visible results. The lives of Mrs. Oakley and Dorinda also resemble each other in important respects. Mrs. Oakley, the granddaughter of a Presbyterian missionary, yearned in her youth for the exotic.² She was engaged to marry a missionary to the Congo and thus leave Pedlar's Mill forever. However, her fiancé, Gordon Kane, died before they could be married, and she married Joshua Oakley instead.³ The dream of the Congo returns to haunt her in later years. To escape these thoughts, Mrs. Oakley has resorted to hard work.⁴ However, the physical effort she has expended has taken its toll. She, like her husband, feels driven; and indeed, her nerves and her manias for thrift and hard work control her.⁵

As a result of her own experiences, Mrs. Oakley develops a fatalistic philosophy about life and the land. In her opinion, life offers no happiness. The land will be served by the people who toil on it; and it will give nothing in return.⁶ Mrs. Oakley's only pleasure, her only emotional outlet, and her only source of strength is her religion.

¹Ibid., pp. 403, 303.

²Ibid., pp. 6-7.

³Ibid., pp. 7, 14.

⁴Ibid., p. 94.

⁵Ibid., pp. 31, 42.

⁶Ibid., pp. 31, 35, 36.

She attends church regularly and leads the family in nightly prayers. She also welcomes any evangelist, missionary, or itinerant minister to her home as a guest, even though such invitations create more work for her.¹

From her personal experiences, Mrs. Oakley derives her own theories about men and marriage. She believes that a woman should not let any man ruin her life. She also maintains that a woman falls in love only because she is ready for such an experience. The object of the love is any man who happens to be available when the woman is ready to love. She therefore dismisses the idea that a woman loves a man for his particular physical, mental, or moral characteristics. Moreover, marriage is often an attempt to escape life as it is.²

After Jason's betrayal Dorinda's life parallels that of her mother in that she turns to a modification of her mother's fetish for work. She is horrified to realize that she has become "dirt crazy" because she recognizes this symptom as being a part of her mother's mania.³ However, the basis of Dorinda's satisfaction with life in later years is activity.⁴ Nonetheless, her habit of working to fill her days is unlike her mother's in that Dorinda's efforts result in some accomplishment. Unlike either of her parents,

¹Ibid., pp. 8, 37, 38, 47, 73, 79.

²Ibid., pp. 79, 81.

³Ibid., p. 327.

⁴Ibid., pp. 42, 137, 237.

Dorinda has an audacious courage which enables her to change life-long work patterns.¹ Moreover, she possesses the fortitude and vision to persevere.²

Storms are another force of nature which Miss Glasgow uses symbolically. Throughout the novel storms occur at times of disaster or chaos for the characters. For Dorinda, rain storms are an indication of emotional chaos. She learns that she is pregnant at the end of a long drought when a terrifying rain storm is imminent.³ As the storm breaks, she finds shelter at Five Oaks, where she learns that Jason has married Geneva Ellgood.⁴ Later, when she confronts Jason, after failing to kill him, Dorinda discovers that she has an inner storm of "pain and bitterness" that is unendurable.⁵ While in New York, she mentally sees a storm developing at Old Farm when she hears her first concert of classical music.⁶ However, this particular storm has positive characteristics; it acts as a force to reawaken her inner self. Her physical response to the music is one of fatigue, but this experience convinces her that she must return to Old Farm.⁷ For the first time since her betrayal, Dorinda is able to take some positive action on her own

¹Louis D. Rubin, Jr., No Place On Earth: Ellen Glasgow, James Branch Cabell and Richmond-in-Virginia (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1959), p. 25.

²McDowell, p. 158.

³Barren Ground, p. 108.

⁴Ibid., pp. 113, 116.

⁵Ibid., p. 130.

⁶Ibid., p. 184.

⁷Ibid., p. 186.

initiative: she plans to study modern methods of farming.¹ The storm motif recurs when she dreams of Jason and again after his burial.² These climatic storms always parallel emotional crises in Dorinda. Dorinda must bring some order to her emotional life or she cannot survive. The order she imposes upon herself is the "vein of iron."

The worst storm described in the novel is a snow storm which coincides with Nathan's death. Nathan has been ill for some time with an abscessed tooth, but delays leaving for Richmond to get it treated. By the time he departs, the weather has turned bitterly cold and the heavy snow continues. In interludes between the snowfall, Dorinda and John Abner learn first of the bad train wreck and then of Nathan's heroic death.³ In contrast, on the day of Nathan's funeral, the weather changes dramatically to spring.⁴

Miss Glasgow's use of images throughout the novel makes Barren Ground a powerful story of one woman's struggle to surmount the obstacles which attempt to control her life. The images themselves set the tone and mood for this struggle: an atmosphere of bleakness and human frailty. Dorinda succeeds in living a productive life because she becomes an ascetic who does not depend on human emotion or relationships for her strength.⁵ She draws her strength from the

¹Ibid., pp. 187, 189-190.

²Ibid., pp. 274, 407.

³Ibid., pp. 322, 333, 342-344.

⁴Ibid., p. 354.

⁵Ibid., p. 191.

land, and she concentrates her energy and her intelligence on it.¹ Her single-minded concentration on the land and its needs results in her conquest of it. She eventually realizes the reward of her efforts in that the land will "stay by her."² She has the courage and determination to enable her to persevere.³ She meets life on her own terms and thus wins the struggle to conquer the barren ground of her life and her land.⁴

¹Ibid., p. 362.

²Ibid., p. 408.

³Ibid., pp. 216, 213, 228.

⁴Ibid., pp. 216, 218.

CHAPTER III

SYMBOLIC USE OF CHARACTER AND SETTING

IN THE SHELTERED LIFE

Each character in Ellen Glasgow's The Sheltered Life, at least partially symbolizes the life of manners and morals of Southern urban society. In this novel Miss Glasgow uses a wider range of Southern stereotypes than she employed in either The Deliverance or Barren Ground. This novel further differs from the other two in this study in that it has an urban setting. Because of its setting there is a paucity of nature symbolism. However, Miss Glasgow's use of Washington Street to symbolize the parallel between the decay of the setting and the decay of the sheltered life takes the place of nature symbolism.

Throughout the novel the smell which issues from the new chemical factory in Queenborough symbolizes the gradual decay and eventual death of the sheltered life.¹ It is not a strong smell, yet it has the ability to spoil "the delicate flavour of living" for the residents of once exclusive Washington Street.² Indeed, it has made Washington Street

¹Ellen Glasgow, The Sheltered Life (Garden City, New York: Doubleday, Doran & Company, Inc., 1932), pp. 5-6.

²Ibid., p. 6.

into a row of boarding houses except for the homes of the Birdsongs and Archbalds. The dozen old families who settled on Washington Street after the Civil War are scattered into more fashionable neighborhoods by nothing more "tangible than a stench."¹

The stench symbolizes changing times in general, and the rise of industrialism in particular. However, those in the sheltered life have immunized themselves to anything that threatens their life by ignoring it. They will never surrender to the conquest of industrialism if they can continue to be oblivious to it.² As the years pass, the smell becomes stronger and Washington Street loses even the last vestiges of grandeur. The stately elms are cut, the streets become littered with trash, the brick of the street is replaced by asphalt, noise and dust dominate the street, and the gardens disappear.³

The chemical odor is not merely a symbol of modern industrialism encroaching from without; it is also a symbol of the inner decay of willful blindness that exists within the sheltered life.⁴ Miss Glasgow thought that the sheltered life was "the whole civilization man has built to protect

¹Ibid.

²Ibid., p. 6.

³Ibid., pp. 6, 7, 42-43, 178, 179, 267.

⁴Louis Auchincloss, Ellen Glasgow (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1964), p. 32. This monograph is reprinted in the same author's Pioneers and Caretakers: A Study of Nine American Women Novelists (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1965).

himself from reality."¹ However, Miss Glasgow did not view modern industrialism as a panacea for the South. Indeed, by the time she wrote this novel she was quite disappointed with industrialism's inability to revitalize the South.² On the other hand, she was not a worshiper of the past. In this novel she effectively details the failure of an older genteel tradition to be a viable pattern of life.³ The effectiveness of Miss Glasgow's ironic commentary and criticism is enhanced by the fact that she not only understood the sheltered life, she was also a part of it.⁴

The major characters in the novel serve as symbols of the sheltered life. The artificiality of this life demands that its inhabitants be symbols rather than individuals. One character in the novel depicts the beautiful Southern belle as a young wife. The Sheltered Life also portrays the genteel Southern matron who has become a good wife and mother and whose façade of brightness rarely is broken. In addition, there are three types of Southern gentlemen in the novel: the civilized old man, the vigorous and amorous sportsman, and the young rebel who rejects the life society offers him.

¹Ellen Glasgow, Letters of Ellen Glasgow, ed. by Blair Rouse (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1958), p. 124.

²Ibid., p. 127.

³John M. Bradbury, Renaissance in the South: A Critical History of Literature, 1920-1960 (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1962), p. 44.

⁴C. Hugh Holman, Three Modes of Modern Southern Fiction (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1966), p. 80.

Furthermore, Miss Glasgow includes one character, Etta Archbald, who can never adapt to the standards of her prescribed role in the sheltered life and thus is defeated. Etta serves as a conspicuous criticism of the aristocratic code of behavior.¹

The central characters in the novel are members of the Birdsong and Archbald families of Queenborough. The title of the novel illustrates the characters' efforts to avoid the realities of life. Both families participate in lives of illusion. Miss Glasgow defined the sheltered life as "the effort of one human being to stand between another and life."² To reveal the sheltered life to the reader, she employs the technique of dual viewpoint: every incident and character in the novel is presented through the views of age and of youth. General Archbald, who presents the viewpoint of age and experience, is a kind, civilized man who is able to see both the illusion and the reality of life.³ In direct contrast with his vision is that of Jenny Blair Archbald, the General's granddaughter, who sees life as she wants it to be.⁴ Through the spectrum of these two viewpoints the life of illusion is depicted and the tragic impossibility of such a life is emphasized.

The conformity and rigid code of behavior of the sheltered life stifle the happiness of its participants.

¹Rouse, p. 109.

²Certain Measure, p. 205.

³Ibid., pp. 200-201.

⁴Ibid., p. 201.

Only those who rebel against it find any kind of contentment. Only John Welch and Isabella Archbald Crocker defy the code of the sheltered life; and only these two characters have the promise of fulfilled lives.

One of the major emphases of the life of illusion is its dedication to ideal beauty, epitomized by the Southern belle. Miss Glasgow uses several characters to show the futility of a life dedicated to this illusion, especially Etta Archbald and Eva Birdsong. According to the ideal, the beautiful belle has a quiet and genteel childhood. Her entrance into the adult world is marked by a debut, a series of parties and balls, at which she is courted by many proper young men, followed by a suitable marriage.

Miss Glasgow uses the character of Etta Archbald to symbolize the injustice of the sheltered life to a plain, commonplace individual. Etta was denied all the possibilities of being a belle. Her debut was postponed for two years because of a death in the family. By the time she was presented to society, her health had broken.¹ Etta, even as a woman in her twenties, is not a pretty woman.² Her long plain face, "tinged with the greenish pallor of the chronic invalid," breaks out in purple splotches when she is excited.³ She suffers from chronic headaches,⁴ and is frequently awakened from her sleep by spells of near hysteria.⁵ She fears the

¹Sheltered Life, p. 342. ²*Ibid.*, p. 8.

³*Ibid.*, p. 22.

⁴*Ibid.*, p. 35.

⁵*Ibid.*, pp. 83-84.

dark and often prowls for food in the middle of the night.¹ Etta has no pride and values only love and beauty, the two things she can never have. Consequently, Etta envies her sister-in-law, Cora Archbald, because Cora once had love.²

At the age of twenty-five, Etta has to suffer the indignity of attending the Peytons' Ball with her own father for her escort.³ She dresses as attractively as she can for the party and even rouges her cheeks in an attempt to be beautiful.⁴ At the ball, she sits by her father fabricating fantasies that someone may ask her to dance, or even fall in love with her.⁵ However, nothing exciting happens to Etta on this night or on any other. She not only lacks suitors, she also lacks friends of either sex.⁶ Her social life is limited to her family and the Birdsongs: Etta's life indeed is sheltered.⁷

The purpose of the sheltered life is to prevent its participants from having to see the pain and ugliness of reality. However, it fails to protect Etta. Even Cora admits that all unsheltered people are happier than Etta.⁸ Etta's life revolves around her two vices: risque reading and smoking. In the privacy of her room, Etta reads yellow-covered French novels in the original language, and blows

¹Ibid., pp. 86, 97.

²Ibid., pp. 84-86.

³Ibid., pp. 95, 97.

⁴Ibid., pp. 95-96.

⁵Ibid., p. 104.

⁶Ibid., p. 103.

⁷Ibid., p. 95.

⁸Ibid., p. 314.

the smoke from her cigarettes up the chimney to avoid detection.¹

Part of the pathos of Etta's life is that she believes her lack of beauty makes it difficult for people to love her.² Moreover, she is correct in that beauty is essential to women of the sheltered life. In addition, she always falls in love with people who can never return the affection. She had made "being disappointed in love a habit."³ The realities of her life are impotent desire, ineffectual self-pity, and disappointment.⁴ She believes that she is probably the most unhappy person in Queenborough. Etta maintains that she could have had a different life; and almost any different life would have been better than the one she has lived. However, Etta's perception of life is limited to the confines of the sheltered life. In such a society she could never be happy. Etta forgets "that she had been a failure before she was born."⁵ Miss Glasgow implies that Etta's lack of beauty is not only physical, but an outward manifestation of her self-centeredness and hypochondria.

Whereas Etta symbolizes the frustration of a plain person in a life in which beauty is venerated, Eva Birdsong symbolizes the ideal beauty, the Southern belle. Through Eva's life we also see the destruction of this symbol by the

¹Ibid., pp. 10, 212, 127.

²Ibid., pp. 87, 95-96.

³Ibid., p. 309.

⁴Ibid., pp. 22-23, 237-238.

⁵Ibid., p. 342.

very code which was created to protect it.¹ As a young woman in the 1890's Eva reigned as the celebrated belle of Queenborough.² Her very appearance could change an ordinary event into a pageant.³ Eva resembles Mrs. Blake in The Deliverance in that both women were belles.⁴ However, unlike Mrs. Blake, Eva cannot progress from a belle to a domineering old lady. Eva differs from Mrs. Blake in that she has no children or land in which she can perpetuate her heritage.⁵ Eva is a woman born out of her time, an embodiment of ideal beauty wasted on the remnant of a dying society.⁶

Eva and Mrs. Blake both reveal the tragedy of lives shaped by the code of genteel behavior and the pretenses necessary to maintain a cult of beauty.⁷ The two women believe in the worth of the sheltered life. However, Mrs. Blake's confrontation with reality kills her. Eva differs from Mrs. Blake in that Eva knows the truth about the falseness of her life; her disintegration begins only when she is forced to admit this truth. The disintegration occurs after her operation, when she periodically leaves the house to wander about Queenborough. These flights of escape are attempts to evade the inevitability of reality.⁸

¹Rouse, p. 110.

²Sheltered Life, p. 7.

³Ibid., p. 19.

⁴Rouse, p. 62.

⁵Santas, p. 194.

⁶Frederick J. Hoffman, The Modern Novel in America (Chicago: Regnery, 1951), p. 67.

⁷Rouse, p. 108.

⁸Geismar, p. 271.

Eva dedicates her life to beauty, and it brings her pain.¹ Moreover, Eva's beauty and her need to act within the code of perfect behavior prevent meaningful human relationships.² Her role and her beauty inhibit her humanity. Eva appears to others only as something to be venerated: "always the glow of her loveliness would come, in some strange way, between her and life."³

As part of the code of the sheltered life, the beautiful belle must make and preserve, at least outwardly, the perfect marriage. Thus, Eva feels a constant need to justify her marriage to herself and to the world.⁴ Indeed, Eva deludes herself into the belief that her marriage exemplifies a perfect love, a love so perfect that she and George are sufficient unto themselves.⁵

Only once does Eva admit the truth of her sacrifices to a life built on illusions and self-delusions. After her surgery, she tells Jenny Blair that Jenny must plan to marry because marriage brings happiness. However, her voice changes to a "note of broader humanity" and she refutes this advice. Eva admits that marriage and happiness are not always synonymous.⁶ She states that beauty can bring unhappiness because with beauty come jealousy and "worse

¹Rouse, p. 110.

²Santas, p. 190.

³Sheltered Life, p. 72.

⁴*Ibid.*, p. 28.

⁵Santas, p. 189.

⁶Sheltered Life, p. 282.

things than jealousy."¹ Furthermore, in this moment of revelation, Eva admits that nothing is more exacting than a life based on a reputation, especially one of beauty. She confesses to Jenny Blair that

" . . . you are still a slave to fear. Fear of losing love. Fear of losing the power that won love so easily. I sometimes think there is nothing so terrible for a woman . . . as to be loved for her beauty. You are a darling child, and I wish I could tell you the way to feel a great love and still be happy. But I cannot. I have never learned how it can be. I staked all my happiness on a single chance. I gave up all the little joys for the sake of the one greatest joy. Never do that, Jenny Blair . . . Never do that."²

Immediately after this confession, Eva hears her canary answer a bird outside the window and wonders if the canary's imprisonment is justifiable. She knows that if the bird were released it would fly away never to return, but it would be free.³ Eva, like the bird, seeks freedom from the restraints and falsehoods of her life in her flights of escape from the house. What she does not seem to realize is that there can be no permanent escape from reality.

Eva's admirers strengthen her resolve to remain dedicated to her beauty all her life. To General Archbald, Eva is the triumph of beauty.⁴ He believes that life can never again "melt and mingle into the radiance that [is] Eva."⁵ John Welch, Eva's young cousin, worships Eva, even though he is the character who is most critical of the

¹Ibid., p. 283. ²Ibid., p. 284. ³Ibid., p. 285.

⁴Ibid., p. 387. ⁵Ibid., p. 377.

falseness of the sheltered life.¹ Cora, Etta, and Isabella Archbald believe in and admire Eva's beauty.² However, the most important supporter of the myth of beauty is George Birdsong. He fell in love with Eva because she was an ideal, and to him she must remain so all her life.³

Superficially, Eva's marriage appears as perfect as her beauty. George symbolizes one type of Virginia gentleman. He is the stereotype of the amorous Southern gentleman who is also a sportsman.⁴ As such, he is a handsome, charming man.⁵ He is part of an honorable profession, law, but is not financially successful. Moreover, he promptly wasted his small inheritance.⁶ Because of their straitened circumstances, the Birdsongs can maintain only one servant; so Eva must do most of the housework.⁷

The major flaw in the picture presented of Eva's ideal marriage is that George is an unfaithful husband. Everyone knows of George's infidelity, but Eva is protected from any direct encounter with this knowledge.⁸ George is devoted to Eva,⁹ but is incapable of being the ideal husband she needs to make the appearance of a perfect marriage a reality. George is a man whose love for his wife has had no effect on his character. He repeatedly forgets his

¹Ibid., p. 189. ²Ibid., p. 271. ³Ibid., p. 25.

³Geismar, p. 270. ⁵Sheltered Life, pp. 28, 20.

⁶Ibid., p. 20. ⁷Ibid., p. 28.

⁸Ibid., p. 29. ⁹Ibid., p. 80.

promises to Eva.¹ He believes that he was born with a roving nature.² George is generous, sympathetic, and unstable.³ Furthermore, he lacks endurance and has courage only in crises,⁴ an aspect typical of Miss Glasgow's portrayal of this type of Virginia gentleman.⁵ George regrets that he is incapable of being what Eva thinks he should be; but he believes that she expects too much of him. He, like his predecessor Jason Greylock in Barren Ground, realizes that one of his weaknesses is his inability to face things which are "too much" for him. Whenever he encounters such things as "beauty, goodness, [and] unhappiness" his inner courage crumbles. At these times he must escape to "sport, women, [and] drink."⁶ Both he and Jason are typical of Miss Glasgow's portrayal of decadent aristocratic gentlemen.

George attempts to fulfill Eva's estimation of him, but succeeds only at the time of her illness. Although he wants to indulge in both tobacco and alcohol at the time of this crisis, he refrains.⁷ However, as soon as Eva is out of surgery, George's resolve disappears. He rushes from the hospital to smoke and drink.⁸ The same night he goes to

¹Ibid., p. 64.

²Ibid., pp. 137, 208.

³Ibid., pp. 189, 265.

⁴Ibid., pp. 250-251.

⁵N. Elizabeth Monroe, The Novel and Society: A Critical Study of the Modern Novel (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1941), p. 144.

⁶Sheltered Life, p. 251.

⁷Ibid.

⁸Ibid., p. 258.

another woman, after which he returns home with a furtive air.¹ George epitomizes the comfort-loving Southern gentleman at the pinnacle of mediocrity.²

Eva, for her part, pretends not to recognize George's weaknesses. She must maintain the appearance to others that George is the perfect husband. Eva exudes a radiance which is motivated by pride, but which she prefers that other people attribute to her happiness.³ Maintaining her illusion of beauty and happiness is not just a habit with Eva; it is a "second nature."⁴ Somewhat like Mrs. Blake in The Deliverance, Eva seems compelled to relive the moments of her youth with an audience. She spends many afternoons regaling Jenny Blair with stories of her past.⁵ While Eva needs an audience, she talks more to herself than to Jenny Blair of the "glorious occasions when she had reigned as a belle."⁶

When Eva faces the operation from which she may not recover, the strain and exhaustion from her life of pretense become evident.⁷ She knows that she will be an invalid even if she survives the surgery.⁸ Since George has a horror of "maimed women,"⁹ Eva secretly hopes that she will die during

¹Ibid., p. 274.

²Geismar, p. 270.

³Sheltered Life, p. 20.

⁴Ibid., pp. 46-47.

⁵Ibid., p. 73.

⁶Ibid., pp. 74, 76-77.

⁷Ibid., pp. 202, 2-4, 244.

⁸Ibid., p. 256.

⁹Ibid., p. 130.

the operation. What she fears most is not death, "but life with its endless fatigue, its exacting pretense."¹

John Welch is a symbol of revolt in The Sheltered Life. His rejection of the standards of the sheltered life enables him to see its flaws. John, Eva's young cousin, is a physician. Consequently, he recognizes the serious physical and mental strain her life has produced. John believes that Eva's medical chances of survival are even.² He maintains that if she dies during surgery, the strain of her "unnatural life" of pretense will be the actual cause of death. In pondering George's place in Eva's code of beauty, John concludes that Eva has expended more effort in preserving the façade of a perfect marriage than most people use in keeping up socially.³ In John's opinion, George is not worth such super-human effort.⁴

John is atypical of those who live in the sheltered life. He, more than any other character in the novel, admits reality to others as well as to himself. He has the ability to love those in the sheltered life, such as Eva, and to respect them, as with the General: yet John can be critical of the sham and hypocrisy inherent in the code of the sheltered life. Even when Jenny Blair will not admit it to herself, John perceives that she is infatuated with George.⁵ John also realizes that Jenny Blair's avoidance of truth, a

¹Ibid., p. 245.

²Ibid., p. 206.

³Ibid., p. 207.

⁴Ibid., p. 196.

⁵Ibid., pp. 291, 227.

characteristic of the sheltered life, is potential trouble.¹ He criticizes her for her "sparrow vision," and tries to shake her from her life of self-concern.² John believes that such self-centeredness is especially characteristic of young girls reared in the sheltered life. Jenny has matured physically without ever encountering the world of reality. She is so ingrown that her "imagination has turned into a hothouse for sensation."³

Just as John serves as the novel's only symbol of the total acceptance of reality, General David Archbald is a symbol of compromise. He does not maintain complete commitment to the sheltered life, although he is totally bound by it. The General has never felt a part of any time, place, or group of people.⁴ He and Tucker Corbin of The Deliverance are civilized Virginia gentlemen. The General and Tucker also resemble each other in that each is crippled, one spiritually and the other physically. Whereas Tucker is prevented from living a normal life because of his war injuries, the General is prevented from pursuing the life he would like by the rigid rules of the sheltered life. Indeed, the General accepts the incompleteness of his life "as a man accepts bodily disfigurement."⁵

The General recognizes that he has allowed the sheltered life to defeat his attempts to attain happiness.⁶

¹Ibid., p. 293.

²Ibid., p. 296.

³Ibid., p. 338.

⁴Ibid., p. 31.

⁵Ibid., p. 163.

⁶Ibid., p. 33.

Before his years in Europe, the General deviated from the Archbald tradition and defied convention. In his early youth, he had visions at night, felt the emotion of pity, and read poetry--none of which was acceptable to his family.¹ Moreover, blood and violence disgusted him; he therefore incurred his grandfather's wrath by refusing to hunt with the old man.² David Archbald further differed from his family in that he worked in the 1850's to abolish slavery. As a child he even aided in the escape of a slave.³ Indeed, it was this rebellious act which caused young David to be sent abroad to be educated at the age of sixteen. He went to Europe a sensitive young man who abhorred killing, cruelty, and violence. Here he fell in love with a married woman. When he lost this first love, the poet and rebel in him died.⁴ After his disappointment in love, David returned to fight in the Civil War, and became a general, the antithesis of all his youthful beliefs and aspirations. He felt, as a result, that "he was crippled in spirit, that there was a twisted root, an ugly scar, at the source of his being."⁵ The sheltered life closed about him, and from this moment he rebelled against his life only in thought.

The General conforms to the code of the sheltered life and in so doing perpetuates it. He had compromised

¹Ibid., pp. 138-139.

²Ibid., pp. 149-151.

³Ibid., p. 161.

⁴Ibid., pp. 149-151.

⁵Ibid., p. 161.

Erminia by keeping her out overnight because their sleigh had broken down. According to the code, the only honorable thing for him to do was to marry Erminia, although she suffered no loss of innocence from the experience. Thus, he began a thirty-year marriage to a woman he did not love.¹ After his wife's death, the General wanted one brief period of happiness. He wanted to remarry, and even had the woman in mind. However, the sheltered life demanded that after so long a marriage, one could only mourn for the departed, and the General has remained a widower.²

The purpose of the sheltered life is to provide comfort and security. Yet the compromises the General must make to others in order to adhere to the sheltered life have filled his life with disappointments and constant irritants. For forty years he has tried in vain to use the library in his home as his private study. However, the fear that a closed door might insult some member of the family has taken precedence over the General's need for privacy. Only his favorite chair lacks signs of female occupation.³

The General realizes that he has "put an end to himself," i.e., his individual aspirations and desires. However, this conformity is demanded of those who remain in the sheltered life.⁴ He thus acts as a symbol of the sheltered life even though he does not believe in that life. Although

¹Ibid., pp. 31-35.

²Ibid., pp. 227-228.

³Ibid., p. 283.

⁴Ibid., p. 163.

he is periodically haunted with the feeling that something meaningful is missing from his life, outwardly he appears to be a success. He is a "prosperous attorney, and a member in good standing, so long as one did not inquire too closely, of the Episcopal Church" ¹

Nonetheless, the demands of the sheltered life have not made the General callous to the needs and feelings of others. His material success enables him to support his daughters, widowed daughter-in-law, and granddaughter. No man ever needed less protection than David Archbald, but he realizes that even at eighty-three he must function either as an object of protection or a pillar of strength for the females who surround him. ² General Archbald would like to talk about himself occasionally, of his life, his thoughts, and his observations. However, he recognizes the fact that there is no one to listen to him. ³

The General can sympathize with the need of the young to revolt. Jenny Blair opposes her mother's plans for her to be a debutante, because Jenny wants to leave Queenborough and be something different from the role that is prescribed for her. The General remembers his own youth and his longings to escape as Jenny wants to do now. ⁴ Although the General's "prejudices were always on the side of society," he does believe that one cannot always do what one is supposed to. ⁵

¹Ibid., pp. 164, 134-135.

²Ibid., p. 202.

³Ibid.

⁴Ibid., p. 173.

⁵Ibid., p. 102.

The General further demonstrates his sympathies with youth's revolt against conformity when Isabella marries Joseph Crocker, a carpenter. The General applauds her deed because it makes her happy.¹ Moreover, the General has long admired those few Archbalds who rebelled against family tradition.² He considers Isabella's marriage an act that brings the "family skeleton out of the closet . . . and clothe[s] it in flesh and blood."³

In spite of his streak of rebellion and his perception, David Archbald believes that the sheltered life provides security for its participants. It offers protection from suffering and pain to young girls like Jenny Blair.⁴ On the other hand, the General realizes that the temptations of life can infiltrate even the sheltered life.⁵ However, the code does provide protection in two ways for all the families who live within it. One may live a life of pretense, but one knows how to act and react in any situation.⁶ The other protective factor is put into action whenever any individual of the sheltered life is involved in scandalous behavior. The General relies on this protectiveness, for he has seen it in operation. When one of the Goddards murdered his own uncle, the good families closed around the Goddards and smothered the scandal and thus saved the family honor.⁷

¹Ibid., p. 225.

²Ibid., pp. 100-103.

³Ibid., p. 132.

⁴Ibid., p. 224.

⁵Ibid., p. 182.

⁶Ibid., p. 207.

⁷Ibid., p. 174.

Under the code the General would benefit from the same treatment if he stole or murdered,¹ and can therefore depend on it when Isabella marries a man below her social position.² It is this protective aspect of the sheltered life that has caused the General to compromise his "true self."

However, the very protectiveness of the sheltered life, which the General appreciates, is the aspect of that life which excludes truth and reality. The General has lived long enough to value truth, even when it is brutally ugly and painful. He finds the truth about Eva's illness to be painful, yet he resents the evasive idealism of his family's attempts to shield him from knowing the reality of her condition.³ He understands the strategy of this evasive idealism, especially as employed by Cora, but it does irritate him.⁴ Indeed, he wonders how Cora can be such a good woman and disregard the truth so totally. She only speaks the truth "by accident, or on one of those rare occasions when truth is more pleasant than fiction."⁵

David Archbald greatly admires John Welch's ability to see and deal with the truth comfortably. Even when John is brutally frank, as when he refers to Eva's internal organs as if "they were blocks of wood," the General recognizes the frankness as a part of the younger man's realism.⁶ Although the General and John do not always agree, they are the only

¹Ibid., p. 103.

²Ibid., p. 102.

³Ibid., p. 134.

⁴Ibid., p. 15.

⁵Ibid., p. 234.

⁶Ibid., p. 206.

two characters in the novel who can discuss things apart from the sheltered life. John, who is optimistic about the future, wants the world to display the realism of science because he believes that science may be the source of perfectibility of mankind.¹ The General denies that "exact knowledge and precision of language" have really improved mankind. Moreover, David Archbald's belief that mankind cannot be improved is inconsistent with his admiration for John for having the strength to try.² Although the General often recoils from John's harsh reality and lack of sentiment, he concludes that John will perhaps benefit from these durable qualities: "Whenever there is softness, life is certain to leave its scar."³

The General realizes that his life is passing and with it his era. Yet he does not fear time and change.⁴ He finds a certain calmness with age which comforts him.⁵ Furthermore, he envisions the possibility that "character may survive failure. Fortitude may be the last thing to go."⁶ His statement is a frequent theme in Glasgow's work and especially in Barren Ground. Both his confidence of age and his fortitude of experience enable David Archbald to view the future and its changes with interest. He thinks that class consciousness may be doomed to decay, a thought which

¹Ibid., pp. 145, 147.

²Ibid., p. 145.

³Ibid., p. 206.

⁴Ibid., p. 377.

⁵Ibid., p. 378.

⁶Ibid., p. 379.

does not horrify him. Indeed, he thinks that "new blood, new passions, and new social taboos [are] the only salvation of a dying order."¹

In contrast to the General who symbolizes partial acceptance of the sheltered life, Cora Archbald spends her life assiduously avoiding truth, and thus symbolizes complete belief in the sheltered life. When she realizes that Isabella is seeing Joseph Crocker, a carpenter, Cora declares that Isabella is merely "amusing" herself.² For Isabella to entertain serious thoughts about a man in overalls who is so beneath her in social station would be unthinkable, so Cora refuses to admit the possibility. However, when Isabella elopes with Joseph, Cora can no longer evade the issue. Instead, she transforms the Crockers.³ She hires genealogists to prove that the Crockers are of aristocratic, and possibly noble, lineage.⁴

Cora's difficulty lies not in her inability to see reality, but in her persevering efforts to maintain proper appearances. She understands Isabella's temperamental outbursts when her engagement with Tom Lunsford was broken, but she is indignant that Isabella displayed her feelings in the presence of young Jenny Blair.⁵ Cora, moreover, believes it impolitic to admit that Isabella is partially the cause of the broken engagement. Consequently, Cora coaches Jenny

¹Ibid., p. 102. ²Ibid., p. 26. ³Ibid., p. 133.

⁴Ibid., pp. 232-234. ⁵Ibid., p. 14.

Blair to tell anyone who asks that Isabella broke her engagement because she was "not sure of her feelings."¹

The strain of maintaining the image prescribed for her by the sheltered life has taken its toll on Cora. When she relaxes her effort, she is immediately a tired, and almost disagreeable, middle-aged woman.² The brightness of her constant smile when she is in control of her self is a reflection of her persevering hypocrisy. Only the General notices that there are times when her "artificial resources" are inadequate.³ Cora finds it a relief "when a pleasure is over," for the sheltered life brings her neither happiness nor unhappiness.⁴ Her personal philosophy is that "It is only by knowing how little life has in store for us that we are able to look on the bright side and avoid disappointment."⁵

Cora's world is a "smiling region of phantasy [sic]."⁶ She has developed the patience to "believe anything and nothing." She has settled into the protection of this life and her energy comes from her "earnest but unscrupulous benevolence."⁷ Moreover, her world is a "small, enclosed province, peopled by skeletons of tradition and governed by a wooden theology."⁸ From this inflexible world Cora emerges as a "living triumph of self-discipline, of inward poise, of the

¹Ibid., p. 92.

²Ibid., pp. 92, 324.

³Ibid., p. 243.

⁴Ibid., pp. 210, 341.

⁵Ibid., p. 325.

⁶Ibid., p. 24.

⁷Ibid., p. 243.

⁸Ibid., p. 98.

confirmed habit of not wanting to be herself." She has found her reward in the code of perfect behavior in that she believes that she has always been in control of her life and its circumstances.¹

Jenny Blair is what Miss Glasgow called "the perfect flower of Southern culture."² She serves as a symbol of one whose outward behavior indicates acceptance of the sheltered life, but whose personal aspirations violate its code of perfect behavior. A major tenet of her upbringing has been that the more ignorant a girl is about the realities of life, the better prepared she is to face adulthood. Therefore, Jenny Blair is motivated by her uncontrolled nature and the evasive morality of the sheltered life.³ When, at the age of nine, she discovers George Birdsong at the house of Memoria, his mistress, Jenny Blair willingly agrees not to mention the incident to anyone, thus becoming a part of the duplicity of the sheltered life.⁴ Jenny Blair is so protected within the confines of the sheltered life that even when she is exposed as an agent of evil, all the people around her unite to act as if nothing has happened.⁵ This portrayal of sheltered innocence precipitating evil is Miss Glasgow's most forceful

¹Ibid., p. 243.

²Certain Measure, p. 90.

³McDowell, p. 190.

⁴Josephine Lurie Jessup, The Faith of Our Feminists: A Study in the Novels of Edith Wharton, Ellen Glasgow, Willa Cather (New York: Richard R. Smith, 1950), p. 411.

⁵Rouse, p. 111.

criticism of the sham and hypocrisy that is the sheltered life.¹

Because of the cult of beauty which the aristocratic code values, Jenny Blair, even as a nine-year-old child, fears that she may grow to adulthood unattractive. More than anything else, she wants to be beautiful.² Although she is told occasionally that character is more important than beauty, she is perceptive enough to know that this statement is not true. Indeed, throughout the novel Jenny Blair perceives the reality behind adult statements.³

In the end, Jenny Blair becomes a true product of the falseness of the code of the sheltered life. She thinks she can love George, encourage his attentions, and remain Eva's friend.⁴ Moreover, Jenny Blair believes that she is incapable of doing anything which would be improper.⁵ All Jenny Blair wants is happiness, a life of parties.⁶ Her desires echo Miss Glasgow's definition of the characteristics of the participants in the sheltered life: "happiness-hunters, who lived in a perpetual flight from reality, and grasped at any effort-saving illusion of passion or pleasure."⁷

However, Jenny Blair serves to illustrate the method by which the sheltered life would die. The code of perfect

¹McDowell, p. 190.

²Santas, p. 190.

³Sheltered Life, pp. 110, 175, 344.

⁴Rouse, pp. 108, 112.

⁵Auchincloss, p. 33.

⁶Sheltered Life, p. 103.

⁷Certain Measure, p. 203.

behavior conceals the ugliness and violence which exist under its surface.¹ Although Jenny adheres to the code vocally, she lacks the judgement and restraint to be a true part of the code.² Jenny Blair displays the outward grace and behavior of the code, but her inward selfishness is a manifestation of the inner decay of the sheltered life.³

Jenny Blair's self-centeredness is apparent to John Welch and he tries to awaken her to the consequences of such a life. John realizes that Jenny feels more than benign affection for George Birdsong, and the young physician tries to make her recognize this reality.⁴ Jenny Blair feels uncomfortable in John's presence because of his acute perception; so she tries to avoid him. However, she feels fear and guilt whenever she thinks someone suspects her true feelings for George.⁵ A further indication of suppressed guilt is Jenny's recurring nightmare after she thinks she is in love with George. In this nightmare she runs in circles in a dark forest, attempting to escape a pursuer she can only hear. No matter how long or how fast she flees, she

¹Ibid., p. 221.

²Robert Holland, "Miss Glasgow's 'Prufrock,'" American Quarterly, IX (Winter, 1957), 436.

³Becker, "Ellen Glasgow and the Southern Literary Tradition," p. 302.

⁴Auchincloss, p. 34.

⁵Sheltered Life, pp. 305, 337, 364, 365.

not only fails to escape her pursuer, but also returns to the very place from which she started.¹

Only twice does Jenny approach admitting that she is merely infatuated with George, not in love with him. The first occurs when she takes a summer vacation and almost falls in love with someone her own age, a relationship which, had it developed, would have been "vocal and unafraid."² The second incident occurs when she sees George's clothes hanging on the line to dry:

And then, with a start of surprise, she realized that while she looked at these swinging shirts and pyjamas, so helpless, so grotesque, yet in some way so much a part of him, she was no longer in love. For an instant only her passion yielded to the shock of reality. Then the blow passed and was gone; the faint sting of aversion faded out of her mind.³

Jenny Blair's self-centeredness and lack of prudence in her pursuit of George precipitate violence. She visits the Birdsongs on the day when George has returned from his annual duck-hunting trip.⁴ George is a sportsman of the same caliber as David Archbald's grandfather, a slaughterer. Although George brought back twenty-five mallards, he admits with pride that he shot three times that many.⁵ George is never so happy as when "he had just killed something beautiful."⁶ It irritates Jenny Blair to see George paying more

¹Ibid., p. 241.

²Ibid., p. 344.

³Ibid., p. 350.

⁴Ibid., p. 268.

⁵Ibid., p. 382.

⁶Ibid.

attention to dead ducks than to her.¹ Consequently, she tempts George into demonstrating his affection for her.² This appeal to George's vanity succeeds; however, Eva sees them embrace. It is the first time Eva has not been able to ignore George's infidelity. It is the final blow for Eva and her cult of beauty. Just as he killed the ducks, George's embrace with Jenny kills Eva's life of illusion.

Eva shoots George, and Jenny Blair rushes out into the garden and lives the nightmare of being pursued. She circles the lily pond in her flight from fear and reality until called back into the house by John to face the tragedy which she has helped to create.³ In that moment she falls into a chair and screams "with the thin sharp cry of an animal caught in a trap."⁴ After being shaken out of her hysteria by John, she rushes to her grandfather crying, "I didn't mean anything . . . I didn't mean anything in the world!"⁵

Although Jenny Blair is the catalyst for the disintegration of the old order, Miss Glasgow believed that the destruction of the sheltered life was inevitable: "The shelter for men's lives of religion, convention, social prejudice, was at the crumbling point, just as was the case with the little human figures in the story"⁶ The

¹Ibid., pp. 382-383.

²Ibid., p. 390.

³Ibid., pp. 391-392.

⁴Ibid., p. 394.

⁵Ibid., p. 395.

⁶Certain Measure, p. 205.

code of perfect behavior is no longer a valid plan for life. It is a moral and social code cut off from its base.¹

The destruction of the sheltered life is indicated in two ways. As the characters crumble so does the setting of Washington Street. Cora, who symbolizes complete acceptance of the tenets of the sheltered life, believes in the code of perfect behavior and acts upon it. The General, who serves as a symbol of partial acceptance of the sheltered life, does not believe in it, but conforms to it and in doing so perpetuates it. Jenny Blair, who serves as a symbol of the falseness of the code, does not believe in the sheltered life, but conforms to its outward standards. In doing so, her individual aspirations and inward beliefs are hidden until she precipitates the tragedy of George's death. Isabella and John are symbols of revolt. Their quest of individualism symbolizes their rejection of the sheltered life, and it is this quest which promises fulfilled lives for them.

As the sheltered life begins to decay, the appearance of Washington Street and its grandeur diminishes. The stench from industry increases in strength and appears more frequently as the sheltered life erodes. After Eva sees George with Jenny Blair, Jenny escapes to the Birdsongs' garden. While she is there "that evil odour poured up from the hollow below and tainted the air."² Miss Glasgow's use of the

¹Monroe, p. 142.

²Sheltered Life, p. 392.

stench at this point effectively relates the symbols of encroaching industrialism with the inner decay of the characters in the sheltered life.

Besides the smell of industry, Miss Glasgow uses several other ways to indicate the death of the sheltered life. In the beginning of the novel, the characters are optimistic and cheerful; and Washington Street is flooded with sunlight.¹ As the novel progresses, there is less hopefulness on the part of the characters and the light from the sun grows dim and tarnished as the grandeur of Washington Street diminishes.² Furthermore, the personal signs of suffering and decay are best seen in Eva's personal pain and loss of beauty. She is the major personification of what the sheltered life values; yet she is also the victim of its defeated tradition.³ However, it is important to note that both the Archbalds and the Birdsongs can only regret the changes occurring; they can in no way prevent them.⁴

The virtues of the sheltered life originated in the past; its strengths lay in legends, not in reality.⁵ The grace and dignity which this life once possessed are gone. The sentimental evasion of reality symbolized by the Archbalds and the Birdsongs is an impossibility. Conventional evasions can protect them for only a limited time. The fatal

¹Geismar, p. 272.

²McDowell, p. 198.

³Hoffman, p. 68.

⁴Ibid.

⁵Holman, p. 24.

flaw in the sheltered life is its demand that individuality be sacrificed in order to protect the unity of the society. Therefore, the sheltered life dies as a way of life; and as it does both the setting and characters crumble with it.

CHAPTER IV

CONCLUSION

There are a number of unifying themes present in each of the novels in this study. A repeated idea in each of the novels is the necessity of adapting to change. Throughout her career, Miss Glasgow attacked the static customs and stagnating conformity of the South. She believed change to be inevitable and impossible to resist. Attempts to resist change created lives of illusion and an avoidance of reality which, as used in her novels, produced disastrous consequences. The result of the "evasive idealism" practiced by those living lives of illusion appears in all three of the novels in this study, but is especially prominent in The Deliverance and The Sheltered Life.

In all three of the novels Miss Glasgow maintains that the self-illusion practiced by the South produced weakened individuals. The individual with character, the "vein of iron," could break with custom only by renouncing the false values of his society and by facing reality. Such a transition was never without pain to the individual; however, the freedom and self-knowledge gained by the individual more than compensated for the pain he suffered.

Miss Glasgow develops both these individual and societal themes through the use of nature and character symbolism. Her use of symbolism is least effective in The Deliverance. However, she admitted that her themes were not fully developed in that work. Her attempts to use nature and character symbolism are also an immature example of what she wrote later. In The Deliverance, the themes and the symbolism intended to develop the themes are stated rather than skillfully incorporated into the fabric of the novel.

Barren Ground is an example of Miss Glasgow's effective use of nature symbolism to develop all the major and most of the minor characters. She also employs nature symbolism to develop her basic themes concerning adaptation to change. Moreover, she demonstrates through nature symbolism the relationship of the individuals to the need of broad societal changes.

Since The Sheltered Life is a novel depicting urban life, nature symbolism is limited to the setting and is used to emphasize the decay of the genteel tradition. Furthermore, Miss Glasgow forcefully depicts her themes of adapting to change through the use of symbolic character stereotypes. She again illustrates the tragedy of lives which adhere to outworn custom.

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