Realism of William Dean Howells| A Marxian interpretation

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THE REALISM OF WILLIAM DEAN HOWELS:

A MARXIAN INTERPRETATION

by

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B. A., State University of Montana, 1932

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Approved:

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PRELIMINARY REMARKS

1

It is the purpose of this study to interpret the theory of realism of William Dean Howells. To interpret one must have a 'standpoint,' 'position,' 'point of view,' or 'approach,' as it is variously called, in order to determine what is relevant to the purpose at hand and how it is to be evaluated. The approach that is used in this study is that known as the Marxian, after Karl Marx, the father of the movement which has culminated in the present social order of Russia.

At the outset of such a study as this proposes to be we are faced with the difficulty that arises from the ambiguity of the term 'realism.' It is used to denote at once a literary method involving the use of certain forms and techniques, and an attitude toward life. This ambiguity is natural inasmuch as content and form are organically related in art: romanticism, for example, as

1. So far as I am aware, only two Marxian interpretations have been offered of Howells. One is in V. F. Calverton's _The Liberation of American Literature_ ( ), and the other is in Granville Hicks' _The Great Tradition_ ( ). Owing to the extended scope of these works, neither author is able to treat Howells with much detail. Hicks' treatment is the fuller.
2. For a brief general exposition of this approach see Appendix.
a set of feelings and beliefs tends in literature to the use of highly organized and complex plot, whereas realism tends to a simple. But for the purposes of this study a division must be made between realism as a literary method and as a philosophy of life. Must, because the application of the Marxian approach to literary forms and techniques is a problem of a different order from that of its application to the ideas that the artist subscribes to. Literary forms and techniques are generally very remotely connected with the socio-economic environment at a given time; they move in a relatively isolated and autonomous tradition of their own; the artist takes them as he finds them, and generally he will differ from his predecessors and fellows not so much in technical innovations as in his skill in using traditional forms. On the other hand, ideas although as a whole they tend to lag behind changes in material socio-economic conditions are much more responsive to these conditions. Those that are widely held have a very direct bearing on the material conditions of.

5. So far as I am aware, no investigation has been made of the relation of literary forms and techniques to the socio-economic environment.

4. A fact which does much to bolster the aesthetic-bourgeois critical view of literature as a little world by itself.
the day. It is evident, then, that the Marxian analysis, which is interested in discovering the artist's relation to his socio-economic environment, will be faced with problems of differing magnitude and complexity and requiring different procedures and criteria of relevance, depending on whether it sets out to analyze the specifically formal elements of an artist's work or its ideational aspects. 

In this study I have concerned myself mainly with the ideas of Howells' realism and only as much as is inescapably necessary with his literary forms and technique. One cannot, of course, divorce ideas from form in any absolute sense.

The close rapport between Howells and the objective features of life about him makes him a good subject for the Marxian analysis: the analysis is rendered less complex than it would be if, for example, a highly individualized and introverted artist like Pater were chosen. Howells was deeply interested in the structure of society about him and its activities. His hundred-odd volumes of fiction, essays, plays, and poetry together with his numerous magazine articles are a cinematographic record of the ideas and manners of Americans in the second half of the nineteenth century, by a man with a camera-like mind.

A word in regard to the procedure of this study is pertinent. The study is divided into two sections.
Section I is given over to a presentation of Howells' theory of realism free of the special technical doctrines. Section II is given over to a treatment of the historical background of Howells' theory. In this section the literary background is dealt with first, and then follows an exposition of the class-historical background. The study is concluded with an analysis of the class meaning of Howells' theory.
CHRONOLOGICAL OUTLINE
OF HOWELLS' LIFE

1837
Born at Martin's Ferry, Ohio

1847
Went to work in his father's printshop

1851
Went to Columbus, his father being engaged
there as a legislative reporter, and became
a compositor in the office of the Ohio State
Journal. Returned at the end of the winter to
Ashtabula whence the family removed again to
Jefferson

1859-60
Became news editor of Ohio State Journal.
Went much in Columbus society. Became inti-
mate with J. J. Piatt and in the following year
published in collaboration with his first book,
Poems of Two Friends. Visited New England and
met Lowell, Hawthorne, Holmes, and others.
Wrote a campaign biography of Lincoln for which
he received the U. S. consulship at Venice.

1861-65
Consul at Venice with ample leisure to study
and write. Married in Venice in 1862 Klinor
Mead, a Vermont girl of old family, whom he
had met in Columbus. Returned to New York in
1865.

1866
Went to Cambridge as assistant editor to
Published in book form Venetian Life which
met with success.

1872
Became editor-in-chief Atlantic. Published
his first venture into fiction, Their Wedding
Journey

1881
Resigned editorship of Atlantic in order to
devote himself exclusively to writing fiction.

1885
Moved to New York

1886
Took charge of "Editor's Study" in Harper's
Magazine and for the next six years used the
"Study" to advance the cause of realism.

1892
Resigned the "Editor's Study."

1900
Took over the "Easy Chair" department in
Harper's Magazine which he held until his
death

1920
Death
A student entering on a study of Howells' doctrine of realism is met by critical confusion. There is no elaboration of a theory in a formal sense, and this is forgivable in view of Howells' lack of interest in and even aversion to the theoretic; his taste was for the concrete and practical. But, inasmuch as he was involved in a theoretical controversy with romanticism in which he was concerned to show its defects and argue the merits of realism, it was highly desirable that he come to intellectual grips with the thing he was fighting and its history, and abide by some definition of realism. He did neither. Added to the confusion resulting from this root error is the confusion that comes from a slippery, emotively charged critical vocabulary; his terms are used

5. The statement of Howells' realism is contained in his volume Criticism and Fiction, a condensation of the Editor's Study of Harper's Monthly, 1896-1892.

6. He seems to have been unaware that the equalitarian ideal, which he associates with realism, is linked historically with romanticism.

7. His definition of realism has to be inferred pretty largely from his criticism of romanticism; it is therefore negative, not positive, and varies disconcertingly.
with little precision, consistency, or restraint. Despite all the confusion, however, there is a sediment of solid meaning that circulates among the welter of eddies and cross-currents in Howells' thought, and this with no small difficulty may be precipitated into a kind of theory. We shall begin with his conception of the nature of art.

Art, according to Howells, is fundamentally moral as opposed to aesthetic. "Morality," he says, "penetrates all things; it is the soul of all things. Beauty may clothe it on, whether it is false morality . . . or whether it is true . . . In the one case the beauty will corrupt, and in the other it will edify . . . We cannot escape from this; we are shut up to it by the very conditions of our being." On this view, the essential question to put concerning a work of art is not whether it is beautiful, solely, but, if it is beautiful, is it good? "If the 'creation of the beautiful is solely the object of art,'" he says, "it never was and never can be solely its effect as long as men are men and women are women. If ever the race is resolved into abstract qualities, perhaps this may happen; but till then the finest

8. Note, for example, the confusion of the passage beginning 'We must ask ourselves' and ending 'full of divine and natural beauty' in *Criticism and Fiction*, p. 99-100.
effect of the beautiful will be ethical and not aesthetic merely." There is admission in this that the artist is concerned with the creation of beauty. But the purpose of beauty is not solely the gratification of the aesthetic sense, nor is the experience of beauty the noblest in human existence: "I do not regard the artistic ecstasy as in any sort noble. It is not noble to love the beautiful, or to live for it, or by it; and it may not even be refining." The notion of the 'amoral' or 'unmoral,' which is often a concomitant of the aesthetic theory of art, Howells condemns: "There is a kind of thing—a kind of metaphysical lie against righteousness and common-sense—which is called the Unmoral and is supposed to be different from the Immoral." The notion of the 'unmoral' had been urged in extenuation of the unconventional morality of Goethe's Wilhelm Meister, the argument being that since this work "is so far removed within the region of the ideal ... its unprincipled, its evil-principled, tenor in regard to women is ... 'unmorality', and is therefore inferably harmless." Howells will have none of this argument, and he concludes that "for the sins of his life Goethe was perhaps sufficiently punished by his final marriage with Christiana, but for the sins of his lit-

10. Idem.
12. Criticism and Fiction, p. 86
erature many others must suffer." Art, in other words, has appreciable moral effects, and this fact cannot be rationalized away by any theory of the 'unmoral.' "Art," says Howells, "is not [i. e., should not be] produced for artists, or even connoisseurs; it is produced for the general, who can never view it otherwise than morally, personally, partially, from their associations and preconceptions."

The practical orientation of Howells' moral conception of art is very marked and is seen clearly in his opinion of fiction and the theater. He says: "For my own part I will confess that I believe fiction in the past to have been largely injurious, as I believe the stage play to be still almost wholly injurious, through its falsehood, its folly, its wantonness, and its aimlessness. It may safely be assumed that most of the novel-reading which people fancy an intellectual pastime is the catchiest dissipation, hardly more related to ... the wholesome exercise of the mental faculties than opium-eating; in either case the brain is drugged, and left weaker and crazier for the debauch." He speaks of "that subtle effect for good and for evil which young

15. Criticism and Fiction, p. 93-94.
people are always receiving from the fiction they read," and the novelist's superior skill over the journalist to "fix impressions in a young girl's mind or to suggest con-
jecture." The extent to which Howells carried his be-

lief in the practical, moral effects of fiction is seen in the words (clearly his own) that he puts into the mouth of Sewell, the minister, in Silas Lapham: "I don't think there ever was a time when they (novels) formed the intel-
lectual experience of more people. They do greater mis-
chief than ever." Of himself Howells says, "I . . . wish to own that so far as I understand it, the chief part of my ethical experience has been from novels."

The fiction of his own day, Howells felt, was improving. "I have hopes of real usefulness in it . . . " "The art which in the meantime disdains the office of teacher is one of the last refuges of the aristocratic spirit which . . . is now seeking to shelter itself in aesthetics."

But if the office of art is to teach, its teaching must be "delicately and adroitly implied" not baldly.

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22. Ibid., p. 84.
stated by the author standing "about in his scene, talking
it over with his hands in his pockets, interrupting the
action, and spoiling the illusion in which alone the truth
of art resides." The quality of the moral lesson con-
veyed must be observed as well as the manner of its tell-
ing: Howells would not have the reader 'spoon-victualled'
with "a moral minced small and then thinned with milk and
water, and familiarly flavored sentimentality or religi-
osity." At all costs, however, the writer must "dis-
tinguish so clearly that no reader of his may be misled
between what is right and what is wrong . . . in the actions
and characters he portrays." He will show that evil
follows from evil and good from good in an unbreakable
chain of cause and effect, that "passion" is never a
"reason or justification" and that "suffering of one
kind can never atone for wrong of another."

What we have said thus far is to show that the
dominant feature of Howells' conception of art is its
strong utilitarian moral emphasis. We should expect this
emphasis to appear in his doctrine of realism. Such,
indeed, is the case.

25. Ibid., p. 76.
24. Ibid., p. 120.
25. Ibid., p. 95.
During the years 1885 to 1892 in which Howells wrote the Editor's Study of Harper's Monthly, he championed the cause of realism against romanticism. The controversy in which he participated and led is characterized by more heat than light. One periodical went to such lengths in a review of Criticism and Fiction (1892) -- an extract of the Editor's Study papers--as to say that many of Howells' dicta were "as entertaining and instructive as the judgments of a Pawnee brave in the galleries of the Louvre would be." Howells himself never descended to the critical level instanced in this passage, but his feelings affected his judgment. His condemnation of the 'romantic' became so inclusive as to disparage most of the great literature prior to his day, and so undiscriminating as to virtually put the romanticism of, say, an F. Marion Crawford in the same category with that of a Sir Walter Scott.

The romanticism he was fighting demanded that the novelist "imagine noble instances of self-sacrifice, of lofty aspiration and of soul-stirring passion." It glorified the impassioned and the heroic and sought man in these moods. It shunned the mediocre and commonplace and espoused the highly-idealized and extraordinary. It

28. Ibid., p. 239.
sentimentalized love. It legitimized "escape."

All of this Howells thought bad. The romantic writer's novels, says Howells, "are intended to take his reader's mind ... off himself; they make one forget life and all its cares and duties; they ... do not shame you into at least wishing to be a helpful and wholesome creature than you are. No sordid details of verity here, if you please; no wretched being humbly and weakly struggling to do right and to be true, suffering from his follies and his sins, tasting joy only through the mortification of self, and in the help of others; nothing of all this, but a great, whirling splendor of peril and achievement, a wild scene of heroic adventure and of emotional ground and lofty tumbling, with a stage 'picture' at the fall of the curtain, and all the good characters in a row, their left hands pressed to their hearts, and kissing their right hands to the audience in the good old way

29

29. Howells objected to certain types of literary form and technique which he associated with romanticism. These may be briefly summarized as, (1) the tightly knit, intricate, artificial plot; (2) evolution of character by the author's comment and analysis rather than an objective, dramatic presentation in terms of action and dialogue; (3) intrusion of the author's opinions, sympathy with certain characters, etc., into the story in an obvious manner; (4) over simplified motivation of character; (5) stilted, unnatural dialogue. Howells did not especially object to the use of chance and coincidence in fiction; he uses it himself a good deal.

30. Criticism and Fiction, p. 105-106.
Both parties to the romantic-realistic dispute accepted the idea that literature should be morally improving. Howells' realistic novel *April Hopes* was criticized on moral grounds: "*April Hopes* is in a conventional moral sense above reproach; but its tendency to blight germs of spirituality is hardly less harmful to character than is the corrupting influence of novels which describe the base or vicious sides of life. No one is the better for its trivial worldly wisdom, while the young and impressionable are apt to be worse." The romantics, however, were not inclined to strongly emphasize the moral function of literature. If a novel kept clear of tabooed sex material and blasphemous religious doctrine and was entertaining, they were satisfied. Not so Howells; readers who are satisfied with entertainment alone are "tired of thinking, and expect to find relaxation in feeling—feeling crudely grossly, merely . . . in a way there is no great harm in this. . . . We shall be so in moods and at moments; but let us not fancy that there are high moods or fortunate moments. If they are harmless, that is the most that can be said for them."

At the time Howells was fighting for realism romanticism was the dominant literary trend. Although on the decline

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its stronghold was not only the 'blood, tears, and thunder'
best-seller but also the better class literature. The great
literary figures, Hawthorne, Emerson, Longfellow, Lowell,
Whittier, and Holmes were authority for the romantic tra-
dition. They were also, particularly Longfellow, Lowell,
and Holmes, representative of the genteel tradition of the
Back Bay region. This region dictated the literary policy
of the country. Romanticism and genteelism were therefore
inevitably linked together. "The essence of the genteel
tradition," as V. L. Parrington has aptly phrased it, "was
a refined ethicism, that professed to discover the highest
virtue in shutting one's eyes to a disagreeable fact, and
the highest law in the law of convention. . . . It was the
romanticism of Brahmin culture. . . . Literature was con-
ceived of as belonging to the library and drawing room, and
it must observe the drawing room amenities. Only a vul-
garian would lug a spade there. Any venture into realism
was likely to prove libidinous, and sure to be common."
The genteel tradition had an unmistakably aristocratic
character and this character it transferred to romanticism.
Its exponents were not noted for their love of the equali-
tarian ideal; rather, their politics inclined to chiggery;
e. g., Lowell in his later period.

nothing that one has made to contemplate.

condemned existence these quantities of the knowing
that may be the duities and combustions. I think matter to
the people. Unlike the combustions he must not shy

seek to portray. It's as if the time for most

To make men know one another; better, the realization

of the

truth. It does not come
democracy in literature to have reverence of all those. It
in some constitutional and structured disguises.

be exercise to the sense of men. It seems to know them only
of one's to become the price of the piece of the unity of men. Of combustions he considered, the price

and the

time required to be satisfied, to an extinguishment who

that was general, was a lower of the extinguishment today.

New Home. Although he was in sympathy with much
is insignificant; "all tells for destiny and character."

The everyday life of the common man is not only fit material for the fiction writer to work with in the sense of being permissible, but it is, in its character of ordinariness, the exemplification of that which the sincere literary artist will seek in the lives of those distinguished from the multitude by rank, achievement or otherwise. Thus if an artist chooses to portray the life of an uncommon man, say a king, he will seek him in his slack moments when he is engaged in deciding not whether his kingdom shall go to war, but, rather, what pair of shoes he will wear; whether he will have port or champagne for dinner; or whether his wife is becoming vixenish. "The sincere observer of man," says Howells, "will not desire to look upon his heroic or occasional phases, but will seek him in his habitual moods of vacancy and tiresomeness. To me, at any rate, he is at such times very precious; and I never perceive him to be so much a man and a brother as when I feel the pressure of his vast, natural, unaffected dullness." There is a faint humor characteristic of Howells in this passage; but the distrust of life

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27. Criticism and Fiction, p. 16.
28. Vide Silas Lapham who is seen in his humdrum domestic life rather than in his financial maneuvers as a captain of industry.
in its extra normal, intense, personalized moments that it implies is not an attitude lightly held by him. His serious moral philosophy of the matter is this: "The first thing you have to learn here below is that in essentials you are just like everyone else, and that you are different from others only in what is not so much worthwhile. If you have anything in common with your fellow creatures, it is something God gave you; if you have anything that seems quite your own, it is from your silly self, and it is a sort of perversion of what came to you from your Creator who made you out of himself, and had nothing else to make anyone out of."

Besides romanticism's aristocratic abhorrence of the commonplace, Howells revolted against its moral ideas. Indeed, a good case can be made to the effect that Howells' main objection to romanticism is to the kind of morals it taught by example if not precept. Heroism, as the romantics conceived it, he felt to be a base thing; it was crude, loud, showy, and applause-seeking. At heart it was egotistical, and, set up as an ideal of life, it could only flatter human vanity. The true heroism is the silent, self-effacing heroism exemplified in the life of Jesus.

The romantic esteem for passion Howells likewise felt to be noxious. He held in "peculiar loathing the cant of critics who require 'passion' as something in itself admirable and desirable in a novel." Most of these critics who demand 'passion'," he says, "would seem to have no conception of any passion but one. Yet there are several other passions . . . [grief, avarice, pity, ambition, hate, envy, devotion, friendship] and all these have a greater part in the drama of life than the passion of love and infinitely greater than the passion of guilty love."

The romantic hero and heroine were a harmful influence, according to Howells. "Without taking them too seriously, it still must be owned that 'the gaudy hero and heroine' are to blame for a great deal of harm in the world. That heroine long taught by example, if not precept, Love, or the passion or fancy which she mistook for it, was the chief interest of a life which is really concerned with a great many other things; that it was lasting in the way she knew it; that it was worthy of every sacrifice, and was altogether a finer thing than prudence, obedience, reason. . . . More lately she has begun to idolize and illustrate Duty, and she is hardly less mischievous in this new role, opposing duty, as she did love, to prudence,

41. Criticism and Fiction, p. 156.
42. Ibid., p. 156-157.
obedience, and reason. With the stock hero, too, love was and is the great affair, whether in its old romantic phase of chivalrous achievement or manifold suffering for love's sake, or its more recent development of the 'virile,' the bullying, and the brutal, or its still more recent agonies of self-sacrifice, as idle and useless as the moral experiences of the insane asylums. With his vain posturings and his ridiculous splendor he is really a painted barbarian, the prey of his passions and his delusions, full of obsolete ideals, and the motives and ethics of a savage, which the author does his best... to foist upon the reader as something generous and noble. I am not merely bringing this charge against that sort of fiction which is beneath literature and outside of it... but I am accusing the work of some of the most famous, who have... sinned against the truth, which can alone exalt and purify men."

What is this truth that exalts and purifies men? It is the truth that realism is concerned to portray. In Howells' words: "Realism is nothing more and nothing less than the truthful treatment of material." And 'truthful treatment' is not an attempt to reproduce a literal image

43. Criticism and Fiction, p. 97-98.
44. Ibid., p. 26.
of actuality as the followers of naturalism interpret the phrase, for, says Howells, "realism becomes false to itself when it heaps up facts merely, and maps life instead of picturing it." Rather realism is obligated to portray what is only to the extent that the practical effects of so doing will promote what ought to be. Thorough Victorian that he was, Howells felt that there were some facts, particularly those concerning sex, that were better not touched by the novelist. The truth could sometimes have as bad effect on the fiction reader as falsehood.

Naturalism Howells objected to not because it tended to override the canons of artistic form nor because it occupied itself pretty largely with the unhappy and joyless, nor because it was immoral (it made vice unattractive, he felt) but because it was 'indecent.' "For my own part," he says, "I think the books of Zola are not immoral but they are indecent through the facts they nakedly represent." The distinction is a fine one--too fine, in fact, for a Victorian to make. Howells' position in regard to naturalism is a hedging one. But on the whole he much preferred naturalism to romanticism, which he regarded as positively immoral. With Henry James he spoke a good word for the

45. Ibid., p. 15-16.
46. My Literary Passions, p. 246.
SUMMARY

(Readers note.)

not only of cleanliness but of neatness. For it and there can be no doubt of an untrimmed mantle.

but for what they are in whatever regards, in whatever customs, habits and reverence, for what they are, in whatever customs, habits and reverence, in their true proportions. Let it be known to the different and women as they are, accepted. By the mother and passions.

we may close this description of hornet's by the hornet of American

French influence in the 1860's when the majority of American
(2) Not beauty alone, but the conjunction of beauty and morality is the final desideratum in art. Beauty that cloaks a false morality is a painted harlot.

(3) Art, especially fiction and the drama, has positive effects, beneficent and beneficial, upon the lives of men.

(4) The function of art is to teach and to teach the truth. The truth exalts and purifies men. Realism is the portrayal of the truth. The portrayal of truth is a representation of actual facts selected and interpreted with a view to their effect on the reader's moral health and conduct.

(5) The informing spirit of literature should be democratic, not aristocratic. The aim of the realist is to make men know each other better that they may 'be humbled and strengthened with a sense of their fraternity.' He realizes this aim by taking for his material the commonplace as against either the unique, or the uncommon.

The question, what is the specific character of Howells' realism? is answered if we glance over the above propositions and mark the note of utilitarian moralism that rings through all of them. The specific character of Howells' realism resides in this: that it is conceived in terms of morality and is dominated by a practical spirit.
The thesis of this section is that Howells' realism is an ideological expression of the petty bourgeoisie, the most numerous economic class in the capitalistic order.

Before we undertake the task of establishing this thesis it would be well to have in mind the general pattern of capitalistic class society as revealed by Marxian analysis.

The petty bourgeoisie is to be distinguished from the upper bourgeoisie (the immediate ruling class) and the proletariat. Its constituency comprises the small businessman, the white-collar workers, large sections of the professional classes, the farmers, and the skilled craftsmen. It is the class of Howells' origin. In general, the petty bourgeoisie are small property holders, believers in the State, upholders of 'law and order,' advocates of democracy, supporters of education, extollers of the family, complainers of taxes; they are patriotic, nationalistic, moralistic, domestic, respectable. The morality they espouse insulates thrift, honesty, prudence, temperance, and the virtue of work. Art, they care little for.
The upper bourgeoisie comprises the large property owners, the leisure classes, the industrial magnates, the big bankers, the rich politicians, the society-goers, the intellectuals. In general, the upper bourgeoisie are more sophisticated and refined, less given to catchwords, less moralistic and more realistic than the petty bourgeoisie, owing to superior cultural advantages. As a class they are much less homogeneous than the petty bourgeoisie; in fact, the intellectuals as a rule tend to group themselves into an independent coterie suspended between the upper and lower bourgeoisie. The upper bourgeoisie is the economic class Howells rose into.

The proletariat comprises the unpropertied classes: the unskilled wage-laborers, agricultural and industrial, whose livelihood is immediately dependent upon their opportunity to sell their labor. The criminal riff-raff and scum that haunt the lower depths of society are commonly included with the proletariat. From the Marxian standpoint this is a mistake inasmuch as the criminal element is employed by capitalists against the proletariat; e.g., in strikes. The upper stratum of the proletariat, the craftsmen, merge into the petty bourgeoisie, but the lower sections led by a class conscious nucleus are definitely differentiated from the whole bourgeoisie. They are the disinherited, those for whom the bourgeois concepts of country, family, private property, marriage, morality,
democracy, and the State have no meaning save as the tags of a social order which must be uprooted. The boundary lines between the three economic classes we have described are not fixed but shifting; moreover the composition of the economic classes is in a continual state of flux. Nevertheless the classes are real entities brought into being by the historical growth of capitalist production. The historic tendency of capitalism is to squeeze the petty bourgeois into the proletariat, though the process is never fully achieved before revolution occurs. The petty bourgeois is incapable of independent political action either following the upper bourgeoisie or, as a last resort in crisis, the revolutionary proletariat. In time of revolution it wavers as the leaders of revolutionary and counter-revolutionary parties vie with each other for its hegemony. Its psychology is in keeping with its historic role: timid, conservative, irresolute.

When Howells became assistant editor of the Atlantic Monthly in 1866, the date when his literary career became assured, American capitalism was beginning an era of economic expansion which in scope and rapidity has been surpassed in history only by the phenomenal development of modern Russia. The victory of the North in the Civil War marked the victory of industrial capitalism over the semi-feudal planter aristocracy of the South. Henceforth the industrial capitalists were to have their way, subject
only to the check of the petty bourgeoisie and merchant class—a check doomed to ineffectuality owing to the fundamental economic postulates—in a word, private property—held in common by the two classes. The victory of the industrialists threw the country wide open to economic exploitation; economic activity that had its origins during the Civil War and the pre-war period underwent a rapid acceleration in tempo, and took on new forms. Communication and transportation was developed; natural resources were tapped; industrial techniques revolutionized. The corporate form of business was ushered in, and large scale industry got under way. The public domain was thrown open to the settlers and speculators by the Homestead Act (1862), and the country rapidly settled up. Urban population increased enormously, as did the total population. A high tariff was inaugurated, capital increased, and the country rapidly pushed on into the stage of imperialistic-finance capitalism.

Concomitant with the rapid development of American capitalism after the Civil War was the sharpening of the class struggle. The opening of public lands to settlement staved off trouble for some years after the War by draining off the oppressed proletariat; but by 1877 this factor had lost its effect and the class struggle had begun to manifest itself in the objective form of violence, lockouts and strikes.
to a degree sufficient to warrant a book on the topic.

During the next twenty years, the country was repeatedly shaken by profound industrial disturbances; the years 1886 to 1894 were especially severe witnessing on the average about two thousand strikes a year. No intelligent person at all in touch with events could avoid facing the ugly fact of class struggle. Howells faced the fact in 1887.

The transformation in the economic base of American capitalism had its inevitable repercussions in the field of literature. As one writer has said: "Somewhere between 1860 and 1890 the dominant emphasis in American literature was radically changed." Romanticism, which had dominated literature since 1800, began to wane, though it managed to keep up a pretty lively existence in the popular 'blood, tears, and thunder' fiction. In the upper stratum of literature romanticism began imperceptibly to merge into a kind of genteel aestheticism in the persons of Stedman, Aldrich, Stoddard and Taylor. Rising up to contest the supremacy of romanticism was a movement toward realism, forlorn, groping, and until the championship of Howells,


49. See The Life in Letters of William Dean Howells, ed. by Mildred Howells. (Garden City, N. Y. 1928) In two volumes, I, p. 553.

in 1885, voiceless. This movement is perceptible as far back as 1857 in the "Dickensian" local color stories of the newly inaugurated *Atlantic Monthly* under the editorship of the radical young Lowell. In the second number of the magazine, a review of a German work appeared which praised the German literary taste for "becoming more realistic, pure, and natural" and "turning its back on the romantic school of the French." Here, says Fred L. Pattee, "is the first time I have found the word realistic in American criticism." According to Pattee, Lowell, in his capacity as editor, gave the realistic movement some impetus; "he rejected without hesitation the mechanically literary, the artificially romantic, and the merely sentimental." But later Lowell grew conservative, and when Howells sounded the trumpet for realism he was pretty deaf.

Realism, however, was not a phenomenon localised in America. It was an international nineteenth century phenomenon, as a rapid survey of literary names will show. In France there were de Koech, Stendhal, Balsac, Flaubert, Jules and Edmond de Goncourt, Zola, de Maupassant; in Russia, Pushkin, Golgo, Turgenev, Dostoyevsky, Tolstoy, Ostrovsky; in Spain, de Pereda, Galdos, Valdes, in Germany

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52. Idem.
in the late eighties, Kretzer, Sudermann, Hauptmann; in
Sweden, Alquist and Strindberg; in Norway, Bjornson and
Ibsen; and in England, Jane Austen, Thackeray, Dickens,
Reade, Eliot, Meredith, and Hardy. Not all these writers
were consistent realists, but all have been dubbed realistic
as opposed to romantic, conventional, idealistic, sentimental,
make-believe.

Nor was realism an entirely new phenomenon introduced
into literature in the nineteenth century. Realism in
its fundamental sense—i.e., the effect of concrete, in-
dividuated actuality produced by the effective and ac-
curate use of detail taken from life—is as old as lit-
erature itself. Parts of the Bible are realistic, as are
parts of the comedy of Aristophanes. Realism is found in
the fableaux and the picaresque literature of the middle
ages. It assumes sizable proportions in Chaucer and is
found in Elizabethan drama. As the novel developed, realism
moved into the new quarters. Bunyan employed realism in
his allegorical semi-novel Pilgrim's Progress. Defoe and
Fielding used it in their novels to a marked degree.

But if realism as a literary practice was not a nine-
teenth century contribution to literature, realism as a theory

54. Interesting in this connection is the fact that the
term 'reality' first began to be used in American
and English criticism in the latter part of the
eighteenth century, and was used with increasing
frequency from then on. See J. W. Bray, A History
was. Realism as a theory developed after the 1850's in France. In 1856 three young Frenchmen established a periodical called Le Realisme for the express purpose of ventilating a new theory of art. Zola says of them: "You cannot imagine with what vigor these young men flung themselves into the fight. They were then twenty or twenty-five years old; they slept with boots and spurs on, whip in hand and lived in a devil of noise . . . the most astounding thing is that these young men brought on a revolution. . . . They had the astonishing foresight to raise the flag of realism before the dying agony of romanticism had commenced; before anyone had yet foreseen the great naturalistic movement which was about to take place in our literature after Balzac and Stendhal had set the example. They were critical forerunners . . . and they were so audacious that . . . the whole literary press . . . hurled thunderbolts at them." The magazine, however, expired from financial anemia at the end of six months. Doubtless the venture first gave the term 'realism' wide currency.

The realism expounded by the young editors of Le Realisme was definitely bourgeois according to Zola and

restricted the artist to the portrayal of the middle class and its virtues. An advance was made by the Goncourt brothers who broached the idea of naturalism in the preface to their novel *Germinal* (1861). They gave realism a definitely scientific cast, recognizing no restrictions on the material the novelist was to deal with: "the novel has assumed the studies and duties of science; it may claim the liberty and frankness of science." Zola became the disciple of the Goncourts, and soon the leader of the naturalistic movement. By 1880 the movement was in full swing.

Prior to the advent of Zola's radical realism, which we will turn to later, there had been a good deal of foreign realistic fiction entering America. Howells in his capacity of magazine editor and reviewer read a surprising amount of it.

First of all was the English realism of Dickens, Thackeray, Reade and George Eliot all of whom were widely read in America in the forties, fifties and sixties. Dickens seems to have been the most influential, his effect being noticeable in the local colorists of the

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57. Quoted by Ernest Boyd in *Studies from Ten Literatures*. (New York, 1925) p. 12.
early Atlantic Monthly. Howells read all these English
realists in his formative years and admired them. As
his own artistic ideas matured, however, he strongly
qualified his admiration; he condemned Dickens for his
"stage-carpentering and lime-lighting," Thackeray for
his "deliberate and impertinent moralizing," Reade for
his "knowing nods and winks," and George Eliot for her
"clumsy exegesis." George Eliot influenced him con-
siderably by her ethics. He speaks of her as "that great
intellect for which I had no passion, indeed, but al-
ways the deepest respect . . . and which has from time
to time profoundly influenced me by its ethics."

Through the medium of George Eliot Howells made one of
his closest contacts with the nineteenth century sci-
entific determinism. He took from her if not the cause-
effect idea at least emphasis on the idea applied in the
domain of morals; that is, the idea that punishment fol-
lows sin as inevitably as day follows night. To Howells
an artist portraying a sinner at ease in his own sin was

58. See My Literary Passions.
59. Ibid., p. 280.
60. Ibid., p. 185.
61. See, for example, Waters' Speech to Colville in Indian
Summer, p. 375. Note also in Silas Lapham how
Silas is punished for his selfishness by loss
of wealth and mental suffering.
violating truth, and therefore unrealistic.

Norwegian realism touched American shores in the late sixties in the work of Bjornson. Howells welcomed this author joyfully and gave a lengthy review of the novels, *Arne*, *The Happy Boy*, and *The Fisher-Maiden* in the *Atlantic Monthly*, April, 1870 praising these works and pointing out their superiority to American fiction. From Bjornson, he said, "we can learn that fulness exists in brevity rather than in prolixity; that the finest poetry is not ashamed of the plainest fact; that the lives of men and women, if they be honestly studied, can, without surprising incident or advantageous circumstance, be made as interesting in literature as are the smallest private affairs of the men and women in one's own neighborhood; that telling a thing is enough, and explaining it too much; and that the first condition of pleasing is a generous faith in the reader's capacity to be pleased by natural and simple beauty." (Italics mine.) The italicized phrase strikes a note which Howells was to sound hard in the *Editor's Study* in the eighties. At this time, however, he was mainly concerned with craftsmanship, as the balance of emphasis in the passage incidentally shows. The 'plain fact' had not yet taken on a moral and social significance;

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It was rather a challenge to the skilful craftsman's ability to take it and make it interesting.

Russian realism entered America in the early seventies in the fiction of Turgenev. Tolstoy's writing entered in the late seventies. The Cossacks being translated in 1878. Howells had the book on his shelves for several years, but only dipped into it; and it was not until 1885 when a friend lent him a copy of Anna Karenina that he came under the influence of Tolstoy. The works of Gogol (1809-1852), the father of Russian realism, were translated in the eighties, as were Dostoyevsky's. Turgenev's Smoke and Lisa appeared in 1872 and 1873 and were both reviewed by Howells in the Atlantic Monthly. Lisa made the most impression on him; he gave it a long review in which he said: the book "is life; nothing more, nothing less; and though life altogether foreign to our own, yet unmistakably real. Everything is unaffected and unstrained." Howells became a

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65. It was on reading Bjornson that Howells first became aware of the 'dramatic method,' i. e., presenting character and situation in terms of action and dialogue with a minimum of comment and explanation. But he came to full consciousness of it in reading Turgenev. See My Literary Passions, p. 230.

64. For an account of Howells' first acquaintance with Tolstoy's works see Howells' article on Tolstoy in the North American Review, CLXXVIII, p. 852.

great admirer of Turgenev: "Smoke, and Lise, and On the Eve and Dimitri Roudine and Spring Floods, passed one after another through my hands, and I formed for their author one of the profoundest literary passions of my life." Howells was particularly impressed by Turgenev's method in which "the persons are sparsely described, and briefly accounted for, and then . . . left to transact their affair . . . with the least possible comment or explanation from the author."

The introduction of French realism, a realism which as we have observed, had come early to critical consciousness in the fifties, insulted the American moral sensibility. French realistic fiction appeared in America in the late seventies. Zola's L'Assommoir made its appearance in French in 1877 and in translation two years later. Balsam had been translated as early as 1860, but his work created no such disturbance as Zola's. The reviewer of the French version of L'Assommoir (probably T. S. Perry) in the Atlantic Monthly, June, 1877, probably showed the

67. Idem.
68. For a detailed account of Zola's reception by the American critics see an article by Herbert Edwards in the American Literature, Vol. IV, pp. 114-129.
reaction of learned and catholic American taste to Zola's realism when he said among other things in his long, caustic review: "all this diving down into unutterable defilement does not belong to fiction." A less sophisticated reaction is seen in a Harper's Magazine review of the English translation: "Of Emile Zola's L'Assommoir the less said the better. A revelation of some of the most revolting phases of low Parisian life, its atmosphere is loaded with moral contagion. Its impure pictures may be life-like, but so would be the reproduction of a cancerous sore, or of a scrofulous ulcer. We would as soon introduce the smallpox into our homes as permit this unclean volume to come into contact with the pure-minded maidens and ingenuous youth who form their chiefest ornament." The novel was widely read in spite of hostile criticism. The appearance of Nana in 1880 provoked the critics anew, and Pot-bouille (1882) was reviewed under the caption of "Zola's Stink-Pot."

French realistic theory as embodied in Zola's essay Le Roman Experimental arrived in America in 1881 (trans-

69. Atlantic Monthly, XXXIX p. 761-762. (June, 1877)
lated 1893). With but one exception—The Critic, which doubtfully admitted Zola's claim to a scientific ethical purpose—Zola's essay was generally condemned. "Whenever a French novelist claims to have a purpose with a large P," said the Atlantic Monthly, "it is safe to assume that he intends to be particularly indecent."

Howells was in contact with the Zolaistic criticism. The Atlantic Monthly under his editorship published the denunciatory review of L'Assommoir in 1877 which we have quoted. The first reference we find to Zola in Howells' letters, however, is in a letter to John Hay in 1882:

"I am a great admirer of French workmanship, and I read everything of Zola's that I can lay hands on. But I have to hide the books from the children!"

Henry James and Howells until 1886 were the only American critics to publicly manifest any tolerance for Zola. In an article on Turgenev in the Atlantic Monthly, January, 1884, Henry James spoke sympathetically of the liberal views of the Flaubert group regarding the relation of art and morality, and in February wrote Howells:

72. Atlantic Monthly, XLVIII, p. 482. (Sept. 1881)
73. Life in Letters, I, p. 311.
74. Atlantic Monthly, LIII, p. 46.
"I have been seeing something of Daudet, Goncourt, and
Zola; and there is nothing more interesting to me now than
the effort and experiment of this little group, with its
truly infernal intelligence of art, form, manner--its in-
tense artistic life . . . in spite of their ferocious
pessimism and their handling of unclean things, they
are at least serious and honest . . . Read Zola's last
thing: La Joie de Vivre . . . the work is admirably solid
and serious." In the May issue of the Atlantic Howells
published an account, favorable in tone, of a meeting of
the naturalistic group, Zola, Goncourt, and Daudet, at the
house of the latter in Paris. His attention was focussed
mainly on the stylistic efforts of the group: "The pro-
found and delicious enjoyment that invades you in the
presence of certain pages and certain phrases does not
come simply from what those phrases say; it comes with an
absolute accordance of the expression with the idea . . .
They are perpetually toiling and moiling and racking their
brains to find the word, the one and only word, verb,
epithet, or phrase that is the perfect and absolute ex-
pression of the thing." Howells concludes his account:
"The preoccupation of style is laudable in the highest

75. Letters of Henry James ed. by Lubbock. (New York, 1920)
7, p. 104-105.
76. Atlantic Monthly, LIII, p. 726. (May, 1884)
degree. . . . Only it is to be feared that with their close Chinese life [they lived to themselves], their tendency to study the sarts rather than the beauties of man, their neglect of large classes of contemporary life, and above all their absorbing care for form, the modern French novelists are not getting hold of that large humanity which is alone eternally interesting.

From the context of this passage, the 'large humanity' Howells speaks of is restricted to the life of polite society. Howells was still at this time inclined to look at the world from the genteel standpoint. At this time, too, Howells can say, "the preoccupation with style is laudable in the highest degree;" four years later in reviewing a book he can speak of "the literary merit of the book which to our present thinking is always the least merit of a good book."

We have said enough now to indicate that there was an influx of foreign realism into America before Howells began his fight in the Editor's Study in 1886 with the romanticists and that Howells was in close touch with this realism. As far as the specific character of Howells' 

77. Ibia., p. 727.
realism is concerned, the influence of the realists we have mentioned is imperceptible. Dickens, Thackeray, and Reade never expounded any realistic theory definite enough to swing Howells away from his youthful, imitative romanticism, if indeed he was aware of their artistic theories; and their fiction, after he had begun to develop his own critical ideas, influenced him by way of example only negatively and in the sphere of technique: Dickens, Thackeray, and Reade gave him illustrations of faults of technique which spoiled the "illusion in which alone the truth of art resides." Even George Eliot served him likewise. If there was any group against which Howells was in purely literary revolt, it was these English realists; his revolt against romanticism broadens out into the realm of moral and political ideas. And as we have seen in the first section, Howells' realism is conceived in terms of morality and shot through with a social, utilitarian (not in the Benthamistic sense) point of view. There is very little connection between the developed realistic theory of Howells and the realism of the English novelists he read early in his career.

Although Howells deprecated George Eliot's "clumsy

79. That is, they stimulated him not to do what they were doing.
exegesis," he testified to the influence of her ethics. Since he formulated his realism in terms of morality, and since her doctrine therefore naturally to some extent entered into it, George Eliot's ethical determinism is present in Howells' theory. But it is present tacitly rather than explicitly: it occupies no central position; it is not an organizing principle. A glance at the propositions we formulated at the end of Section I will show this to be true. Realism, according to Howells, is the portrayal of truth, and the truth is that which attests itself to the conscience. That is as far as he goes. And that was as far as it was necessary for him to go, inasmuch as romanticism did not enthrone truth in a central position in its theory. To ascertain what Howells' conception of truth is, is a task properly belonging to a study of his ethics, a task we are not directly concerned with. All that we need to know here is that George Eliot's influence on Howells was mainly in the realm of ethics and that, as far as his theory is concerned, this influence was not significant.

The influence on Howells of Bjornson and Turgenev, like that of the English realists, is not particularly

80. This, I believe, can be said to be generally true of romanticism. The romantic critics whom Howells was fighting were adherents to the emotional "exaltation theory" of art: the theory which holds that a piece of literature, for example, must inspire, elevate, and enoble the reader. On this view, of course, the truth (in any of the various senses of the word) of a literary work is not a prime consideration.
significant, if we look at his finished theory. Bjornson and Turgenev influenced him mainly in the sphere of technique, but positively not negatively as was the case with the English realists. A close study of Howells' realistic method would probably show some indebtedness to these continental writers. Although the moralism of Bjornson and Turgenev doubtless added pleasure to Howells' reading of them, it seems to have affected him little, certainly not anything like that of George Eliot and Tolstoy.

French realism can be ruled out as negligible in its influence on Howells' theory. Naturalism he eschews both in practice and theory. His tolerance of the frankness of French novelists when the host of American critics were condemning them can only be accounted for by his great regard at that time for good workmanship, i.e., realistic technique, in and for itself. Here he was akin to James, though James, of course, was given much more to aestheticism than was Howells.

Although French realism did not directly affect Howells' theory, it probably helped stimulate him to an awareness of his own theoretical position. There is not much evidence on the point, but it is a reasonable conjecture. In 1895 he says of Zola: "Every literary theory of mine was contrary to him, when I took up L'Assommoir."
though unconsciously I had always been as much of a realist as I could, but the book possessed me with the same fascination that I felt the other day in reading his *L'Argent*.

Zola's novel stirred up the critics in general, and it probably stirred up Howells too. It was after Zola's naturalism entered America and England that conscious realistic movements were begun in these countries. In the early years of the movement realism and naturalism were interchangeable terms in criticism.

In our discussion of the influence of foreign realists on Howells we have left Tolstoy to the last, because his influence on Howells' theory outweighs that of all the others. Let Howells speak: Tolstoy's "literature both in its ethics and aesthetics, or in its union of them, was an experience for me somewhat comparable to the old-fashioned religious experience of people converted at revivals. Things that were dark or dim before were shone upon by a light so clear and strong that I needed no longer grope my way to them. . . . The voluntary and involuntary allegiance I had been paying to the truth which is beauty and beyond art, and to an ideal of goodness and loveliness in the commonest and cheapest lives, was here reasoned and exampled in things beyond refutation or comparison. What

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I had instinctively known before, I now knew rationally."

"Tolstoy awakens in his reader the will to be a man; not effectively, not spectacularly, but simply, really. He leads you back to the only true ideal, away from that false standard of the gentleman, to the Man who sought not to be distinguished from other men, but identified with them, to that Presence in which the finest gentleman shows his alloy of vanity, and the greatest genius shrinks to the measure of his miserable egotism. I learned from Tolstoy to try character and motive by no other test, and though I am perpetually false to that sublime ideal myself, still the ideal remains with me, to make me ashamed that I am not true to it." 

"The ethical works of Tolstoy . . . are of the first importance to me, but I think that his aesthetical works are as perfect. To my thinking they transcend in truth, which is the highest beauty, all other works of fiction that have been written, and I believe they do this because they obey the law of the author's own life. His conscience is one ethically and aesthetically; with his will to be true to himself he cannot be false to others. I thought

the last word in literary art had been said to me by the novels of Turgenev, but it seemed like the first, merely, when I began to acquaint myself with the simpler method of Tolstoy. . . . Tolstoy has not only Turgenev's transparency of style, unclouded by any mist of the personality which we mistakenly value in style . . . but he has a method which not only seems without artifice, but is so. . . . His novels . . . with their vast variety of character and incident, are alike in their single endeavor to get the persons living before you, both in their action and in the peculiarly dramatic interpretation of their emotion and cognition.

"Artistically, he has shown me a greatness that he can never teach me. I am long past the age when I could wish to form myself upon another writer, and I do not think I could not insensibly take on the likeness of another."

Concluding his eulogy of Tolstoy in My Literary Passions, Howells says: "The supreme art in literature had its highest effect in making me set art forever below humanity."

These passages were written in 1895 or later, after Howells had come under the ascendancy of Tolstoy. Although they indicate the nature and extent of Tolstoy's influence,
they must be explained and qualified.

In the first place, the moral experience almost akin to a religious conversion that Howells underwent in reading Tolstoy was not as simple and instantaneous as his remarks might indicate. On the contrary it was the resultant of the interaction of two factors operating in Howells' consciousness: Tolstoy's ideas and Howells' own growing perception of the gulf between the rich and the poor caused by the mounting violence of the class struggle. And the 'regeneration' was a rather protracted affair. He received his first definite impression of Tolstoy in the last quarter of the year 1885 when he read Anna Karenina. In January, 1886 he began the Editor's Study in Harper's Magazine and in April gave a review of Tolstoy's My Religion and Anna Karenina. This review was lengthy and favorable in tone but withal quite noncommital as far as Howells' acceptance of Tolstoy's moral ideas is concerned; its point of view was explanatory and introductory as if to say to the public: Here is an author with ideas worth thinking over. Vising with Tolstoy's doctrine in Howells' mind was the realism of the Spanish novelist Valdes whose novel Marta y Maria he had just read and was reviewing in the same Study.

85. Howells' reaction to the class struggle is taken up in detail later in the study beginning with page 58.
86. Life in Letters, I, p. 272. The letter dated to T. S. Ferry, October 20, 1885, establishes the time.
Valdes' realism was a derivative of French naturalism, definitely moralized, however, and in its emphasis on the aesthetic was closer to Goncourt than to Zola. It is safe to say that Valdes' realism (briefly formulated in a foreword to his novel) was more meaningful to Howells at this time than Tolstoy's doctrine, first, because it was close to the actual literary practice of Howells, and second, because Howells was still dominated by a literary outlook, semi-aesthetic in character. It was not until late in 1867 that Howells became definitely aware of the contemporary economic situation; and it was then that Tolstoy's doctrine attained its full significance with him.

Howells' statement that he came in Tolstoy to a realization of the true moral ideal as being life as it was lived by Jesus is borne out by the facts. He was brought up in the Swedenborgian faith, but in his young manhood dropped his belief in the theological accoutrements of religion. He retained a somewhat wavering belief in immortality and a good deal of the Swedenborgian moral theory, which appears frequently in his fiction. He was not much of a church-goer and had little taste for theological writings except those of Swedenborg. The fact is, that from 1860 until his moral 'reawakening' in the eighties, literature was his religion. During this period he, of course, carried with him the customary Victorian moral
luggage, indeed an unusual amount if we measure him by his contemporaries. But he was not inclined to draw his moral inspiration from the Bible or the Church, though he was typically Victorian in his respect for these. It was Tolstoy's return to the simple precepts of primitive Christianity in theory and practice as contrasted with the scholastic creedal distinctions and ritual of organized religion that appealed to Howells. More to the point is the fact that the Swedenborgian Howells was taught in his youth emphasizes the divinity of Christ, though it preaches the simple Christian virtues of brotherly love, humility, and good works. In Tolstoy's doctrine Howells saw the Swedenborgian virtues he had remained a firm believer in identified with a Christ stripped of the theological trappings in which he had lost his belief. Here was something he could rest his faith in. "There was but one life ever lived upon earth which was without failure, and that was Christ's... There is no other example, no other ideal, and the chief use of Tolstoy is to enforce this fact in our age, after nineteen centuries of hopeless endeavor to substitute ceremony for character, and the creed for the life."

That Howells was not influenced by Tolstoy's realist...
method is pretty certainly true. He was forty-nine years of age when he first read Tolstoy and had already perfected his own method. He had written twelve novels, among which were *A Modern Instance*, *The Rise of Silas Lapham* and *Indian Summer*, three of his strongest novels and typical of his realistic method. Tolstoy's influence, in contradistinction to that of most of the other foreign realists Howells had read before he enunciated his doctrine, operated almost wholly in the sphere of moral ideas.

Yet Howells' statement that Tolstoy made him "set art forever below humanity," while it indicates the realm in which Tolstoy's influence affected him, needs qualification in view of the fact that it was not Tolstoy alone who was responsible for this. As we shall see it was the immediate economic situation of the eighties quite as much.

We have given some attention now to the relevant foreign literary influences that form the background of Howells' theory of realism. Tolstoy's effect on Howells we have not fully explicated, since to do so involves a discussion of Howells' relation to the socio-economic environment. We are concerned here only with literary influences. The foreign literary influence, except in the cases of George Eliot and Tolstoy, we have seen does not amount to much as far as Howells' theory is concerned; it affected Howells' method of realism. If we turn to the American literary influence for light on Howells'
theory, we get even less than is furnished by the foreign
influence. Howells, in his position as editor of the Atlantic
Monthly had ample opportunity to come in contact with American
literature. Even after his resignation of the editorship
he maintained a lively interest in native writers and
helped them whenever he could. But he was singularly im-
pervious to the influence of American writers. The great
majority of his literary passions were foreigners; of the
forty-five writers he deals with in My Literary Passions
only seven are Americans. And among these seven the only
writer significant in influence is Hawthorne, a definite
romantic. Howells was struck by Hawthorne's artistry,
and also by his preoccupation with the problem of evil.
Whatever Hawthorne's influence on Howells may prove to
have been precisely, it does not help us to explain Howells'
theory inasmuch as it affected him, if at all, mainly in
the domain of literary craftsmanship.

Henry James, of all the contemporary writers Howells
was in touch with was closest to him in purely literary

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88. Howells' attitude toward evil, one which regards it as
a kind of mysterious entity rather than an attribute
of certain human acts--i.e., an hypostatized view--
may be derived from Hawthorne, although the Sweden-
borgian theology fosters it. For an example of
Howells' attitude see the dialogue p. 226-227 in
Indian Summer.
ideals. They met in 1866 the first year of Howells' official connection with the Atlantic and had many talks together on literature. Both were fired with a zeal for fine writing and a love of literature for its own sake. The future lay before them, and they were engrossed in developing their literary theories and technical proficiency.

James, six years younger than Howells, had already taken truth as his leading principle: truth in the analysis of human nature, and truth in the portrayal of external details or the faithful recording of facts. Howells had not begun to write prose fiction yet and apparently had not formulated any definite ideas on the subject. James probably helped to switch Howells from the writing of poetry of a romantic character to realistic prose sketches, whence he graduated into the novel. Unquestionably James had some influence on Howells' theories as Howells had some on his; but just what this influence was will only be revealed by a painstaking analysis. It can be stated categorically, however, that James' influence affected Howells mainly on narrowly aesthetic questions. Making due allowance for their inherited moralism, Howells and

James were heart and soul in the pursuit of literature in and for itself.

If a close examination were made of the interacting influence of Howells and James, it would not be surprising if the results turned out largely negative as far as Howells is concerned. There were divergences between the two almost from the beginning. When Howells got under way in fiction he began to differ from James on the question of method. Howells preferred the dramatic to the analytic presentation of character, whereas James inclined heavily to the latter. To the end of his days Howells felt that James used too much analysis, though he admitted that James used it skilfully. Again, Howells did not have the genteel aversion to the commonplace as literary subject matter that James had. He began promptly to incorporate the commonplace in his sketches. James, on the other hand, denounced the commonplace and severely belabored the novelist Trollope for his use of it. "Why," he asked, "should we stop to gather nettles when there are roses blooming under our hands?" To the end of his days James felt that Howells made a mean application of a fine style.

As the two men developed, their disparity increased.

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90. See his Suburban Sketches collected in 1872.
91. Notes and Reviews Collected by Pierre la Rose (Cambridge, Mass., 1921) p. 76.
Howells welcomed sprawling, post-Civil War America. James recoiled and retreated to Europe in 1875. Howells gradually fell away from the aesthetic position he held at the beginning of his career until he ended in his theory of realism in forsaking aestheticism for a humanitarian moralism. James increasingly consolidated his initial aesthetic position, slackening his emphasis on the moral, and finally ended in a delicately poised and subtly blended combination of the moral and aesthetic—a kind of moral aestheticism. As a final result we have two very different realistic theories: James' conceived in terms of technique, and Howells' conceived in terms of morality.

James and Howells were the two outstanding leaders in American realistic fiction. But realism was not confined to them. The local color movement beginning in earnest with Bret Harte in 1868 began to shift the emphasis of American literature away from romanticism and prepared the way for a more thoroughgoing realism. Eggleston's realistic fiction appeared in the seventies, and that of E. W. Howe in the eighties. And there were a number of lesser women writers touched more or less by the realistic spirit: writers like Rebecca Harding Davis, Mary Wilkins Freeman, Rose Terry Cooke, Harriet Beecher Stowe, and Sarah Orne Jewett. Howells was aware (as early as 1882) of the new spirit abroad of which he, of course, was a very significant part. He came upon
E. W. Howe's realistic novel *The Story of a Country Town* in 1884 and immediately wrote an open letter to the *Century*, directing the attention of the East to it and praising it highly. Confusingly enough he dealt with E. W. Bellamy's romantic novel *Miss Ludington's Sister* in the same letter, using it along with Howe's story as an illustration of the new realism in American fiction. This confusion indicates the unsettled character of Howells' conception of realism at this late date; and his comment on the term realism in the following indicates that it was probably a recent acquisition with him: "I have lately read two novels—
or rather two fictions, for one of them, strictly speaking, 92 is a romance rather than a novel—which struck me as being . . . uncommonly interesting. Not the least interesting thing about them was the witness they bore of the prevalence of realism in the artistic atmosphere to such a degree that two very differently gifted writers, having really something to say in the way of fiction, could not help giving it the realistic character. This was true no less of the romance than the novel; and I fancied that neither the romancer nor the novelist theorized much, if at all, in regard to the matter. Realism—the name is not particularly good [probably

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92. Howells abided by Hawthorne's distinction between the novel and the 'romance.'
because of unsavory French connotations] -- being almost the only literary movement of our time that has vitality in it, these two authors, who felt the new life in them, and were not merely literary survivals, became naturally part of it. . . . It would be easy to multiply instances on every hand of the recognition of the principle of realism in our fiction. The books of Mr. Howe and Mr. Bellamy happen to be the latest evidences."

It was Howe's novel that pleased Howells the most, and of it he said: "The book is full of simple homeliness, but it is never vulgar. It does not flatter the west, or paint its rough and rude traits as heroic. " Particularly interesting in this passage is the dominating genteeel attitude: Howells had moved a long way from his Western origins. Not so genteeel, however, and indicative of a gradual inner growth in Howells toward the later non-aesthetic humanitarian position into which Tolstoy and the industrial strife of the eighties was to precipitate him.

is another passage: "I do not care to praise his [Howe's] style, though as far as that increasingly unimportant matter goes, it is well enough; but what I like in him is the sort of mere open humanness of his book."

93. Century VI, p. 622-624 (Aug. 1884)
94. Ibid., p. 623.
95. Ibid.
The realization that the new tendency in American fiction was in the direction he was going, and the added realization that there existed a body of foreign literature in which the realistic spirit had achieved itself operated to assure Howells that he was, if not quite the prophet, at least the spokesman of a new era in American literature. There was an added incentive for his taking the field for realism, and that was the fact that he had a score to pay off with the English and American critics who had thundered down on him for saying in a review of Henry James in 1882: "The art of fiction has . . . become a finer art in our day than it was with Dickens and Thackeray. We could not endure the confidential attitude of the latter now, or the mannerisms of the former, any more than we could endure the prolixity of Richardson or the coarseness of Fielding. These great men are of the past--they and their methods and interests; even Trollop, and Reade are not of the present." This mainly technical criticism was taken as a personal insult by the lovers of Dickens and Thackeray. The storm evoked was all out of proportion to the offense, and though Howells did not reply to his critics, he was ready to do battle when an opportunity came.

96. Century, XIV, p. 28 (Nov., 1882).
The occasion for ventilating his literary ideas and pushing the realistic movement presented itself when the Editor's Study was inaugurated by Harper's and Howells was invited to its occupancy. He began with the announcement that "The editor comes to his place after a silence of some years in this sort, and has a very pretty store of prejudices to indulge and grudges to satisfy, which he will do with as great decency as possible." He reviewed a number of new forgotten works of fiction in which he professed to find "a disposition to regard our life without the literary glasses so long thought desirable, and to see character, not as it is in other fiction, but as it abounds outside of all fiction." He took one of these works to task for a lapse into romanticism, struck a glancing blow at Dickens, praised the localistic character of American fiction and pooh-poohed the idea of The Great American Novel, advised young writers to seek to instruct rather than merely entertain, and bade them not to worry themselves about purist English but to concern themselves with catching the accent of living American speech in their writing.

In the next issue he spoke of "that barbaric survival, the 'hero,'" and in reviewing a new translation of Balzac's

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98. Ibid., p. 322.
Le Pare Goriot condemned heartily the romanticism of this book. He referred to the universal impulse toward realism which was giving the world the books of Zola, Tolstoy, Turgenev, Bjornson, Valera, and Verga, and closed the Study with a pitying remark about the tribe of critics. In the third Study he exploded the romantic idea of 'genius', reducing this phenomenon to talent and plain hard work. Grant's Memoirs, which he had under review, he cited as a piece of great literature and lauded its artlessness and unaffected, non-romantic spirit. Would the critics, he asked, call Grant a genius?

Something of the nature of the Editor's Study is indicated by the brief synopsis we have made of the first three numbers. Later numbers became more radical as Howells' social consciousness awakened. The third number (March, 1886) finds him as yet conservative on the social question as the character of a reference he makes to socialism indicates. September finds him saying "in a land where journeymen carpenters and plumbers strike for four dollars a day the sum of hunger and cold is compara-

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99. Howells would not call Grant a genius, but his conception of the man is romantic (idealized) to the last degree and is on a plane with the "hatchet and cherry tree" conception of George Washington.

100. Harper's Monthly LXXII, p. 647. The Studies were probably written a month or two earlier than they appeared.
tively small, and the wrong from class to class has been almost inappreciable." This statement evidences his awareness of the strike situation. A great strike had begun on May Day in Chicago for the eight-hour day. Out of the strike grew the Haymarket Riot on May 4 and the Chicago Anarchist Case on which Howells, a year later, took a courageous, public stand.

In the April, 1887, Study Howells speaks of "socialism and the question of richer and poorer, which grows ever more burning in our day." The May, July, and August Studies carry comments on Tolstoy. That of July takes up Tolstoy's Que Faire about which Howells says, "Work, equality, brotherhood are his ideals; and whatever may be said in ridicule or argument, it cannot be denied that the life he is living is in literal fulfillment of the teachings of Jesus Christ." Tolstoy's ideals were beginning to take hold of Howells. In the August Study Howells offers a semi-Tolstoian panacea for the social evils of American capitalism which are beginning to press on his conscience: "We are still far from just-
ice in our social conditions, but we are infinitely nearer it than Russia, and we have but to recognize that equality and fraternity in everything are the sole hope of the race 

in order to approach justice more and more." He does not feel the solution of the social problem to be a whole-

sale reversion of the masses back to the actual, primitive way of life that Christ pursued, and takes exception to Tolstoy's statement that actual Christianity has never been tried as a solution to the maladjustments of modern society: he points to the Quakers and Moravians as ex-

ponents of Christ's "religion and political economy" which had produced in them a "high type of rather colorless and unpicturesque goodness." Yet he is in thorough sympathy with the Tolstoian ideals of work, equality, and brotherly love, and, like Tolstoy, conceives the solution of the economic and political problem to lie in the realm of the moral conscience.

The September and October Studies show an increased radicalism in Howells' thinking. The following passage is characteristic: "Neither arts, nor letters, nor sci-

ences, except as they somehow, clearly or obscurely, tend to make the race better and kinder, are to be regarded as serious interests; they are all lower than the rudest crafts

103. Ibid., LXXV, p. 478.
104. Idem.
that feed and house and clothe, for except they do this
office they are idle; and they cannot do this except from
and through the truth."

On September 25 Howells wrote to Judge Roger A. Pryor
the leading counsel for the eight "Chicago Anarchists"
who, as victims of class hatred had been condemned to
death and long imprisonment on palpably insufficient evi-
dence and were now appealing their case before the U. S.
Supreme Court. A bomb had been thrown at the Haymarket
meeting May 4, 1886 when workers had gathered to protest
the violence police had used against picketing strikers.
Sixty-seven persons were wounded and eight policemen killed.
The country, panic-stricken by the general industrial
disturbance (a new phenomenon in America), hysterically
demanded a bloody vengeance. Howells had been following
the case. He said to Pryor: "I am glad you have taken
the case of the Chicago Anarchists, and that you see some
hope for them before the Supreme Court, for I have never
believed them guilty of murder, or of anything but their
opinions, and I do not think they were justly convicted.
I have no warrant in writing to you except my very strong
feeling in this matter." Pryor replied, voicing his
grave doubt as to the justice of the conviction of the

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105. Ibid., LXXV, p. 632. This passage is used to con-
clude Criticism and Fiction.
106. Life in Letters, 1, p. 293.
Anarchists and suggesting that "a temperate claim on behalf of the Anarchists . . . under the imprimatur of your name cannot but be of wholesome and happy effect."

Howells declined to act on the suggestion. But when the Supreme Court affirmed the sentence of the Anarchists, November 2, 1887, Howells, after first trying to get Whittier and George William Curtis to undertake the work, acted on another suggestion of Fryer which was to appeal to the Governor of Illinois for clemency. In an open letter to the editor of the New York Tribune he said: "I have petitioned the Governor of Illinois to commute the death penalty of the Anarchists to imprisonment and have also personally written to him in their behalf; and I now ask your leave to express here the hope that those who are inclined to do wither will not lose faith in themselves because the Supreme Court has denied the condemned a writ of error. That court simply affirmed the legality of the forms under which the Chicago court proceeded; it did not affirm the propriety of trying for murder men fairly indictable for conspiracy alone; and it by no means approved the principle of punishing them because of their frantic opinions, for a crime which they were not shown to have committed. . . . The men sentenced to death are still alive, and their lives may

107. Ibid., p. 394.
be finally saved through the clemency of the Governor.

... I conjure all those who believe that it would be either injustice or impolicy to put them to death, to join in urging him by petition, by letter, through the press, and from the pulpit and platform, to use his power in the only direction where power can never be misused, for the mitigation of their punishment."

This was a courageous act; courageous first, because of the violence of public opinion on the matter, and second, because Howell sincerely believed that he risked his reputation and livelihood in publicly advocating clemency for the anarchists. He was heartily abused by some of the press.

Howells was deeply moved by the event. He wrote to a Chicago friend: "I don't know yet what the governor has done. While I write that hideous scene may be enacting in your jail yard -- the thing forever damnable before God and civilized men. But while I don't know, I can still hope. Miserable Lingg! [One of the Anarchists who either committed suicide or was murdered during the trial] I'm glad he's out of the story; but even with his death, it seems to me that humanity's judgment of the

108. Ibid., p. 298.
109. See Mildred Howells' statement. Ibid., p. 293.
110. See, for example, Howells' letter to his father. Ibid., p. 402.
111. It probably was; Parsons, Fischer, Engel, and Spies were hanged the day Howells wrote this letter.
law begins. All over the world people must be asking themselves, what cause is this really, for which men die so gladly, so inexorably? So the evil will grow from violence to violence! . . . The last time we met I remember we disagreed about a man named Blaine and a man named Cleveland. How trivial the difference between them seems in this lurid light." (Italics mine.)

The stressed words in this passage indicate Howells' dim perception of the fact of class struggle and his reaction to that fact. He sees the Anarchists dying bravely and gladly in the cause of the workers, but prominent in his mind is a fear that the heroism of the condemned men will set an incendiary example for the people.

After he had heard of the execution of the anarchists Howells wrote his father: "All is over now, except the judgment that begins at once for every unjust and evil deed, and goes on forever. The historical perspective is that this free republic has killed five men for their opinions." Shortly after, he wrote his sister: "The last two months have been full of heartache and horror for me . . . Annie, it's all been an atrocious piece of

112. Life in Letters, I, p. 402. Howells knew something of the revolutionary calibre of the Anarchists from the speeches they had made on being sentenced which Pryor had sent to him.
113. Ibid., p. 402.
frenzy and cruelty, for which we must stand ashamed forever before history. But it's no use. I can't write about it... I'm busy with another story which will deal rather with humanity than with love. I think I shall call it The Upper and the Lower Millstone, and the hero to be a minister who preaches the life rather than the doctrine of Christ. Have you read Tolstoy's heart-searching books? They're worth all the other novels ever written."

This passage gives us the key to the understanding of the Tolstoian influence on Howells. The growing violence of the class struggle had begun to obtrude itself on Howells' attention and brought him an awareness of the cleavage between the rich and the poor. Tolstoy's doctrine in the meantime had quickened his conscience to a heightened sense of his obligation to his fellowmen. The Anarchist Case coming along at this psychological moment and exemplifying in striking fashion a most high-handed abrogation of the elementary principles of bourgeois justice, constituted a challenge that Howells' awakened moral conscience could not evade. Prepared to risk everything, he entered the lists of an extremely unpopular cause and met defeat. The experience shook his bland American optimism and convinced him that there was something radically

114. Ibid., pp. 404-405.
wrong in the existing social order. The vision of the poor began to haunt his thoughts, and he settled more firmly into his Tolstoian convictions as to the solution of the problem. If men would only live more as Christ had lived, he thought, the evils of present society could not help but vanish.

Howells' participation in the Anarchist affair had the effect of widening his interests. "You'll easily believe," he wrote to Hamlin Garland not long after, "that I did not bring myself to the point of openly befriending those men who were civically murdered in Chicago for their opinions without thinking and feeling much, and my horizons have been indefinitely widened by the process. . . . I am reading and thinking about questions that carry me beyond myself and my miserable literary idolatries of the past." He immediately set about writing a novel, as we saw above, of which the theme was to be humanity, and he followed with four more that concern themselves more or less with the social question. The last of these was the utopian work *A Traveller from Altruria* (1894) which portrays a society organized on semi-Tolstoian lines. And he became interested in the various petty bourgeois devices for social amelioration (national control of telegraphs, railways, and

But Howells suffered a reaction after the first flush of his moral enthusiasm, which is seen in the words, "Helen and I both no longer care for the world's life, and would like to be settled somewhere very humbly and simply, where we could be socially identified with the principles of progress and sympathy for the struggling mass." He did not, of course, become socially identified with the struggling mass; he was too genteel for that, and besides, he probably felt that such a course would avail little. In the intellectual realm, as distinguished from that of action, he floundered. He had neither the insight nor the experience to enable him to see what were the important issues in the social question. His The Upper and the Nether Millstone (the title evinces some recognition of class issues) significantly enough became Annie Kilburn, a feeble work in which the social unacceptability of the manners of the poor appears as a fundamental obstacle to the relief of poverty. The class struggle turns out to be a clash between refinement and vulgarity. The minister who was to preach the life rather than the doctrine of Christ appears as an austere, lifeless figure unable to

116. Ibid., p. 408.
117. Ibid., p. 404.
content in the reader's mind against the flesh and blood reality of other subordinate characters in the book. He is finally run over by a train to get him out of the way so that Annie Kilburn is left free to marry a conventional country doctor. The incidents of the story are drawn from the life of the wealthy or comfortably circumstanced stratum of society; the poor hover in a shadowy background. The ineptitude of fashionable charity is gently satirized. As a whole the book reflects the intellectual impasse that Howells came to in attempting to treat a social phenomenon which his genteelism effectively prevented him from ever seeing clearly. The poor were good souls, but, heavens, how unsewth! How could the cultured be expected to establish with them that brotherly relationship without which the incubus of poverty could not be done away with? As Howells commented in Silas Lapham two years before: "It is certain that our manners and customs go for more in life than our qualities. The price we pay for civilization is the fine yet impassable differentiation of these. Perhaps we pay too much; but it will not be possible to persuade those who have the difference in their favor that this is so."

118. Silas Lapham, p. 509. Howells is speaking of the difference between Penelope Lapham and the Coreys.
Howells' experience in the Anarchist episode together with his reading of Tolstoy transformed him into a humanitarian. The humanitarian attitude entered into his theory of realism and gave it its final form. His mature conception of realism is seen in the following: "The recognition of all the facts in the honest daylight about us is the service which humanity demands of the humanities, in order that what is crooked may be made straight, and that what is wrong may be set right. The humanities are working through realism to this end, not consciously for that is not the way of art, but instinctively."

We have given some account now of the literary background and development of Howells' realism. It is apparent that the literary background per se did not play a major part in forming Howells' theory. In the case of Tolstoy's influence, the most significant element in the background, it was necessary in order to understand the influence, to take account of factors in the socio-economic background. The influence of other writers, we have seen, is not of much importance to his theory.

For more light on Howells' realism we need to consider his class status. Indeed, from the Marxian standpoint, any explanation of the writer which neglects his class status is superficial, inadequate, and, in the final

analysis, bourgeois because consciously or unconsciously it denies the existence and fundamental role of economic classes, the full recognition of which is one of the objective conditions upon which hangs the revolutionary overthrow of the bourgeoisie. Our procedure, therefore, will be to fix Howells' class status and then to analyze his realism for the purpose of discovering its class meaning.

First, let us take a broad view of the historical situation of the country as a whole at the period when Howells was a youth. He was born in 1837, a date which falls well within the mercantile-agrarian period of American capitalism. Industry was in its infancy; whatever large scale enterprise there was, was operating either in the field of commerce or agriculture. There was no proletariat, nor was there any finance-capitalist class. In general, these classes came into being during and after the Civil War. Capitalism, of course, was in full force only in the North; the South supported a belated feudalism. The historic-economic contradiction of these two systems manifested itself in a political struggle which was settled finally by a resort to armed force. The bourgeoisie came out victorious by virtue of its superior economic power, and henceforth was free to work out its historic destiny.

120. These classes presume an advanced stage of industrial development.
The Civil War was not only a victory of capitalism over feudalism, it was the prelude to a new transformation within capitalist society itself. Industry received a powerful impetus from the war demands and the rising class of big manufacturers profited enormously as well as increased in numbers. The influence of this class had already been felt in the formation of the Republican Party in 1856; now they were in power. With a relatively virgin country to exploit and no effective opposition to trammel them they fell to with great gusto. The history of post-Civil War graft and corruption is well known. The law, originally adapted to and interpreted according to the needs of an isolated petty bourgeois republic was found cramping at some points, totally lacking at others; it was reinterpreted, twisted, amended, circumvented or disregarded as circumstances dictated. A class of flunky politicians and lawyers paid to do the bidding of their capitalist masters arose to meet the new need, and politics and law, hitherto highly respected callings, suffered an eclipse in the esteem of the masses. From time to time the small business men and farmers, economically oppressed by the new regime, rose up in rebellion, but their attacks on entrenched big capital got them little; the concentration of capital proceeded inexorably. They were fighting not only against the power of wealth but against the laws of capitalism itself, so that they were placed in the im-
possible position of wanting to saw off the limb which the big capitalist was sitting on—but which they were sitting on too.

Because of their moralistic ideology the petty bourgeoisie supported the reform movements that spawned during the period. Reform in fact is a specific petty bourgeois attitude; the big capitalists are uninterested in it—in fact, are generally found fighting it; and the proletariat, after they have become class conscious and have shaken off their petty bourgeois leadership, think in terms of revolution. The petty bourgeoisie resented the flagrant disregard of their cherished ideals (democracy, respect for the law, morality, etc.) by the big capitalists and instituted enough political pressure to compel them to become more respectable in their tactics: to abstain from such crude devices as waging pitched battles among themselves, openly buying off legislative assemblies, and stuffing ballot boxes. Utterances like that attributed to Commodore Vanderbilt: "Law! what do I care about the law? Hain't I got the power?" became passe; the capitalists took on polish and became suave. Most of the genuine reforms, such as reduced hours of labor, improved working conditions and the like, that occurred in the period were not due, however, to the action of the petty bourgeoisie but were forced through by threatening upheavals in the lower depths.
For, along with the class of big capitalists, the proletariat as we know it today came into being and with it the class struggle in its modern form. The proletariat forming in the period immediately preceding and during the Civil War had arisen in the urban centers in response to the demands of developing large-scale industry. Its numbers were enormously increased after the war by the hordes of immigrants, who flooded into the country and settled mainly in the cities. The periodic economic crises, a permanent feature of capitalism and now in full swing in the country, also swelled the ranks of the proletariat with ruined petty bourgeoisie whose slender capital did not enable them to weather the shutdown of business. Again, the ruthless competition of the big capitalists drove some of them into bankruptcy from whence they gravitated into the proletariat. During the Civil War the cost of living had risen sharply and wages as usual had lagged behind. The resulting fall in real wages stimulated the proletariat to action. The Knights of Labor was organized in 1869, grew slowly at first, then rapidly in the late seventies and early eighties, declined swiftly after the Anarchist episode which gave the labor movement a considerable setback, and was superseded by the American Federation of Labor which gradually grew in strength until by 1906 it was the primary labor organization in the country. Strikes first became numerous after 1873, a year of severe de-
pression, and from then on they came into constant and frequent use. At first such of the labor revolt was spontaneous; the workers struck first and then joined the Knights of Labor. But after they had become organized, the programs of their organizations reflected the immaturity of the proletarian ideology. The programs were a confusion of proletarian and petty bourgeois attitudes and demands. That of the Knights of Labor, for example, was pitched in a highly idealized, petty bourgeois moralistic key, the Bible being quoted in the preamble, while specific proletarian demands like the eight-hour day were mixed up with such petty bourgeois demands as the reservation of the public lands for actual settlers instead of the railroads and the speculators.

The program of the American Federation of Labor differed only in that it resolved to wash its hands of politics and confine itself to purely economic proposals. Patterned after the English trades-union movement, it regarded the owner of labor power and the owner of capital as each possessed of commodities which each wanted to sell at the best terms possible. "Collective bargaining" was therefore its tactic. The Knights and the Federation both failed to see the irreconcilability of the interests of the proletariat and the bourgeoisie; they thought in terms of class collaboration not class struggle; they accepted capitalism. Hence in the last analysis they were
bourgeois organizations; they sidetracked the forces of revolution and left the fundamentals of the system unchanged; they were a safety valve for mass discontent, a necessary condition of the continuance of capitalism.

But it was difficult to see the issues clearly in the economic maelstrom of those years. Genuine Marxian theory had got no hold in the country. What influence the First International had in the country was either along the line of English petty bourgeois parliamentary socialism or along the line of continental anarchism as expounded by Bakunin. Native theory comprised mainly in the doctrines of Henry George and Edward Bellamy was of a distinctly petty bourgeois cast. In view of the infancy of the proletariat and the abrupt transformation in the country's economic foundations, a transformation which proceeded so rapidly that it left men living in a new economic world but still thinking in terms of the petty bourgeois ideals of the past, it was hardly to be expected that America should produce a genuine proletarian social-economic theory—much less a correct one. When Howells turned his thoughts to the social problem he was handicapped in his understanding by this condition. But he was doubly handicapped by the New England genteeelism which he had absorbed in his consciousness and which made him confuse the socio-economic problem with the question of manners.
We have dealt with the Civil War and its significance and with the rise of the proletariat and the big capitalists. Let us now look at the ideology of the country as a whole. At the time of Howells' youth and early manhood, roughly the twenty years preceding the war, the ideology of the country fell into three broad categories: aristocratic, petty bourgeois, and upper bourgeois. The aristocratic we can dismiss with a word as it does not concern us. Suffice to say that it was localised in the South where it developed from the feudal economic conditions, and that it existed there in a relatively pure form (the chivalric ideal); petty bourgeois moralism and religiosity, which was the dominant characteristic of the settlers of America, South as well as North, was confined to the yeomanry, who were not the ruling class.

The petty bourgeois ideology, although suffused throughout the lower free classes of the country was dominant culturally at this time only in the West because only here were the petty bourgeoisie economically and politically dominant. The politico-economic dominance here of this class was assured for the time being by the undeveloped character of industry, which breeds the big bourgeoisie and the proletariat. Industry had already

121. The West at this time was what is now the Middle West.
taken root, however, and was soon to overpower the region. The Civil War, which was precipitated by the rise of the big bourgeoisie and which strengthened this class enormously, marked the decline of petty bourgeois economic and political power in the country. But the dominance of the petty bourgeois ideology persisted after the economic and political defeat of this class; it not only persisted but became the dominating factor in the culture of the country as a whole. The explanation of this fact lies in the existence of the frontier as an economic fact.

The West was settled by people imbued with a petty bourgeois ideology. People of wealth and position emigrate only under very exceptional conditions. Hence wealthy Easterners, Southerners, or foreigners (people of upper bourgeois or aristocratic ideology) were hardly ever found in the ranks of those who crossed the Alleghanies in search of greener economic pastures. The proletarians who came were imbued with petty bourgeois attitudes and principles; this applies to foreign proletarians as well as Eastern, for the foreign proletariat though older and more extensive than the American was still in its ideological infancy. The ideology brought to the West, then, was very definitely petty bourgeois.

Under frontier conditions this ideology underwent
modification and accumulated new elements, which arose from the new social experience. Individualism, one of the basic attitudes of the petty bourgeois mind and one which arises out of certain historico-economic conditions too complicated to be gone into here, received a distinct afflatus from the prospect of boundless economic opportunity; it became expansive, positive instead of negative, psychologically on the offensive rather than the defensive: the petty bourgeois citizen in moving out to the West cast aside the economic and cultural fetters of his ruling class at home. He moved to a region where the great majority of the people were of his kind, where there was no upper bourgeoisie nor aristocracy to keep him down by way of economic monopoly, political domination or caste discrimination. Here the individualism of the petty bourgeois settler—New England farmer, land-hungry European peasant, dissatisfied petty commercialist or whoever he might be—could express itself unhampered. The equilibrium it had maintained with opposing forces in its former environment, Eastern or European, was destroyed with the absence of those forces, and its potential energy was transformed into kinetic: petty bourgeois individualism became dynamic.

122. Individualism as opposed to collectivism.
With fertile prairie lands, heavy forests, and rich deposits of coal and iron easily accessible to the Midas-touch of the exploiter it appeared that the petty bourgeois millenium was at hand. There developed as a consequence a carefree, exuberant spirit and a tremendous optimism.

The crabbed, ascetic morality, which had characterized the petty bourgeoisie under oppression underwent a change; the inhibitive virtues, frugality, thrift, abstemiousness, no longer received their former emphasis and there arose a freer and more indulgent attitude toward the natural impulses (save for the sex impulse). Sobriety gave way to humor: boisterous, risible and irreverent, in its quieter aspect just 'good humor'. Protestant Dissent, the petty bourgeois religious manifestation, broke into numerous new sects and the revival service was carried to orgiastic lengths. Democracy was embraced with a fervor unknown to other sections of the country; the doctrine of equality received strong emphasis and was interpreted in a way to deny caste distinction.

128. Often mistakenly termed Puritanism. See The Religious Background of American Culture (Boston, 1920) by Thomas Cuming Hall who devotes a good deal of his book to clearing up this question.
The petty bourgeois culture as molded by Western conditions soon rose to be the governing element in American culture as a whole. The Civil War achieved economic unity in the country and with it there had to come cultural unity. The Western culture eminently suited the psychological needs of the unified nation. In the first place it was more organically rooted in the environment than its closest competitor, the New England culture, which was borrowed from the English upper bourgeoisie. The Southern culture patterned somewhat after that of the English aristocracy was, of course, practically extinguished by the destruction of its economic basis, slavery; and it consequently ceased to play any significant part in the future cultural life of the nation. In the second place the Western petty bourgeois culture which developed out of the process of economic exploitation in the Middle West became more powerful than ever by the rapid extension of this process (through the growth of railroads) farther West and by the rapid growth of industry in the East which broke down the New England culture. With the phenomenal expansion of American capitalism after the Civil War the big capitalist class increased in economic and political power at the expense of the petty bourgeoisie. But the petty bourgeois culture continued to dominate the country because of the existence of the geographical frontier which acted as a great
reservoir for the replenishment of petty bourgeoisie enthusiasm as it ebbed before the advance of big capital. The frontier vanished about 1890, but the process of economic expansion continued at a great rate by virtue of the powerization of industry and the industrialization of the South. There continued to be, therefore, some objective basis for the petty bourgeois expansive optimism. Business held up in spite of the periodic depressions, and the national wealth continued to grow until the end of the World War found the country the undisputed financial master of the world.

It was in the petty bourgeois atmosphere of the West that Howells was born (in an Ohio village, 1857) and grew to manhood. His family environment was typical of his class except for a somewhat greater regard for cultural standards on the part of the parents than is customary in the average petty bourgeois family—they fostered in the children a taste for literature—and for a more uncompromising moral idealism: the father, an anti-slavery Whig and firm opponent of the Mexican War, was ready to imperil the economic security of his family if need be in the interests of a cause that he felt to be righteous. In other respects the family was like a

thousand others in the region. The children received a thorough religious and moral training and grew up in an atmosphere of homely domesticity. There was little formal education. The family was an autonomous unit supplying the majority of its cultural, and a good many of its material, needs. Owing to the fact that the father's mind "was not on the things that make for prosperity" the financial affairs of the family were never very stable, but they managed to live "in abundance, and in their way belonged to the employin; class."

The father put his children to work early on the theory that they must learn to be useful. Howells began composing in the family printshop before he could write and helped to support the family throughout his youth. His irregular schooling was supplemented by a close intellectual companionship with his father whom he resembled in certain temperamental qualities (humor, idealism) and by his own self-imposed strenuous study. He was a sensitive, eager, ambitious boy, deferential to authority and timid, yet withal possessed of a certain practical aggressiveness that was strengthened, perhaps, by his perception of his father's deficiency in this respect.

125. Ibid., p. 28.
126. A Boy's Town, p. 11.
From 1867 to 1882...

Then at one time, under the stress of overwork, plunged
youth with Gladly twenty and a half years of hell, and
there was in him a strain of mortality that hastened his
In the meantime something was developed and with it

follows what has happened.

on into the middle of the next century. Something happens
results of the compromise. The theoretical focus is on

concerned with the development of the country at the start of
the twenty-first century. There is a sense of diversity and

degree of participation. Now participation is understood in

from that section of the ruling class that sees itself as

treaty. The leaders of the country were
deployed with the compact and the requirement

society were the beneficiaries of the people who rejected the

contextualized with the compromise articulated and the exclusive

statement into which we have entered when we joined the

Let us pause now and consider the ideological on—
there came into existence a class of prosperous merchants who felt the need for a strong central government.
Religion began to decline into morality and emphasis shifted to politics. During this period the New England culture was almost wholly derivative from England. English economic tyranny over the colonies, however, forced a break with the mother country. The War of Independence found the colonies victorious, and there then ensued a struggle between the merchant class led by Hamilton and the agrarian element led by Jefferson over the form of the national government. The Constitution was a compromise between the interests of these clashing parties. But the economic break with England did not result in a cultural break; New England continued to reproduce the culture of England in its essentials, although there was a conscious effort on foot to cultivate a native culture.

The petty bourgeois merchants who had grown wealthy were in their root ideas indistinguishable from their English compatriots. In politics they were mainly Whigs with a die-hard Tory interspersed here and there among their ranks; they took Hobbes and Locke as their guide rather than Rousseau and Tom Paine; they looked upon democracy as mob rule, believed in the check-and-balance theory of government, insisted on property qualifications for suffrage, and wanted a strong central government to
protect property, interfering in business only to the extent of acting as umpire between individual competitors. In economics they grounded themselves on Adam Smith rather than on the French physiocratic school.

The wealth of the New England merchant class afforded the basis for development of a class of Anglo-American gentlemen, distinguished from the gentry in the South by a devotion to academic and cultural pursuits rather than to dueling, horse racing, and balls. These men felt the seriousness of American culture and bent their efforts toward the promotion of a native American literature, criticism, and scholarship.

The founding of the North American Review in 1815 was an expression of their endeavor. The journal was designed to do away with the nation's dependence on the Edinburgh Review, a dependence which was rendered insufferable by that periodical's unflattering opinion of the state of civilization in America. For the next fifteen years the journal was in the hands of its founders, Jared Sparks, E. T. Channing, Willard Phillips, A. H. Everett, staunch old Brahmins of the earlier variety, stemming intellectually mainly from the eighteenth century. These men regarded themselves as the schoolmasters of American culture. They agitated for a native literature, brought American books to the attention of the public,
eastigated the *Edinburgh Review*, and wrote long propagandistic articles attempting to instruct the petty bourgeois public in polite learning and attempting to overcome its Dissenter prejudices against art. Poetry, for example, they found it necessary to apologize and plead for on moral and utilitarian grounds. But they themselves were not untainted by their petty bourgeois antecedents: they congratulated themselves that "the theory which treats of beauty, as of something independent of moral effects is still without advocates among us;" they regretted that "the moral effect of the drama has not in general been of the most exalted kind;" they were glad to find a novel "replete with profound practical wisdom, conveyed in a vigorous and manly style; and finally they held that "there can be no more hideous fault in a literary work than prolixity. Leavity is next in order."

For all their patriotic efforts, however, these old gentlemen remained the slaves of the English tradition. Environed in a society organized along the English pattern with its caste distinction between the upper and lower bourgeoisie and nourished on English literature and English upper-bourgeois social ideas they could hardly have done otherwise. Their revolt against the mother culture was

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129. Ibid., p. 24, quoted by DeMille.
After the crisis that the democratic institutions of the republic

...
the psychological needs of an expanding capitalism. The Southern ideology was, of course, totally incompatible with capitalist politics and economics and was rendered impotent by the Reconstruction. And the New England ideology was simply irrelevant; eighteenth century in spirit and positing a capitalism stopped in its historical evolution at the commercial-agrarian stage, it bore hardly any relation to the conditions in New England itself let alone those of the country at large. For New England was growing industrial and its social composition was rapidly altering. The Brahmin had now some million or so Irish immigrants settled upon him. Many native sons had gone west to seek their fortunes; and there was a crop of post-war nouveau riche storming the citadel of polite society. Howells has drawn well the picture of the Brahmin defeat in its own stronghold, Boston, in his novel Silas Lapham; Bromfield Corey, the incarnation of Brahminism in its last stages vitiated with skepticism, is shown to be no match for the vulgar paint manufacturer, Silas, in the battle of social survival.

The transfer of the literary capital of the country from Boston to New York about 1860 marked the end of Brahmin cultural domination. In a few years Howells was to wage his fight for realism. New voices were being heard all over the country, but American literature in
the coming years took its inspiration mainly from the
Middle West.

We return now to Howells. It was in the intellectual
climate of Brahminism, entered upon its genteel phase, that
Howells immersed himself when he settled down in Cambridge
at the close of the war. During his fifteen years residence
here and in Boston, he soaked up, by a process akin to
osmosis, the New England culture with its genteelism.
His wife, a New England girl of old family whom he had
met in Columbus, Ohio and married in Venice, was no doubt
influential in Brahminizing him. But his own native relish
and aptitude for the politer social graces and his youthful
worship of the New England literati also conduced to that
end. And the Brahmins for their part found him a very
acceptable addition to society.

It must not be supposed that Howells ever entirely
succumbed to the Brahmin influence. Speaking in retrospect
of Lowell, who was a sort of god father to him, he said:
"In Lowell I was always conscious of an older and closer
and stricter civilization than my own, an unbroken tradition,
a more authoritative status. His democracy was more of
the head and mine more of the heart, and his denied the
equality which mine affirmed." He developed nevertheless

130. Literary Friends and Acquaintance, p. 213.
the admiration for Bostonian society which persisted long
after the glory that was [Boston] had been dissolved in the
acid of plutocracy. Looking back in 1902 he said: "To
my mind the structure of Boston society was almost ideal,
and until we have a perfectly socialized condition of
things I do not believe we shall ever have a more perfect

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society."

The chief effect of Howells' residence among the
Brahmins seems to have been a bleaching-out of his simple
unintellectualized moralism into something that approached
the pale propriety of genteeleism. The process, however,
was never complete, and as we have seen, he later had a
moral 'reawakening', as a result of his experience with
Tolstoy and the economic situation, in which he reverted
to the petty bourgeois moralism of his origins.

The genteel influence on Howells is manifested in
his practice, as distinguished from his theory, of realism.
It is recognizable in (1) his preoccupation with manners
and his fascination with the theme of the love match be-
tween persons not of the same social rank; (2) his ex-
tensive use of the life of the drawing room for his ma-
terial; (3) his highly subtilized moral analysis of char-
acter motivation; (4) his squeamish scrupulousness in ob-

151. Ibid., p. 180.
serving the proprieties ("though the proprieties are not virtues, they are very good things, and at least better than the improprieties"); (5) his attitude toward his lower class characters; as Firkins has well phrased it: "he has the effect of continually repressing slight starts in their society, of politely hiding his disposition to treat them as a branch of anthropology."

Genteelism, however, had no influence on Howells' theory of realism. On the contrary, his theory was an expression of petty bourgeois attitudes incompatible with the upper bourgeois attitudes of genteelism. The democratic spirit and fraternizing ideal that lies at the heart of Howells' theory is a negation of the aristocratic spirit and segregative ideal that characterizes genteelism.

For all their approval of Howells' abidance by the proprieties and use of upper-class materials in the practice of realism, the Brahmins scented the mob in his theory and turned up their noses. As Howells afterwards remarked of one of their number: "[Lowell] was probably most at odds with me in regard to my theories of fiction."

Besides the element of democracy in Howells' theory

133. *William Dean Howells*, p. 228.
134. *Literary Friends and Acquaintance*, p. 244.
there were other elements that were, if less objectionable, not precisely what the genteel mind could assent to. His suspicious attitude toward beauty, offended their aestheticism and his emphasis on the practical efficacy of artavored rather of the lower classes. Again, the general anti-hedonistic character of his doctrine was a bit unpalatable to a generation which had swung considerably away from the dutifulness of its fathers and was engaged in a way of life dedicated more or less to pleasure.

We have given some account now of the economic and ideological background of the country in the period between Howells' birth and his enunciation of his theory and we have shown his relation to this background. We saw that he was nourished on the petty bourgeois ideology of the West and that he matured in the genteel upper bourgeois ideology of New England. We saw, too, that his theory is an expression of the petty bourgeois ideology. Let us turn now to a consideration of the class meaning of his theory.

135. 'Class meaning' is a general term frequently used by Lenin. I have here broken it down into sub-heads relevant to our subject but still in line with the central meaning of the term used by Lenin; when Lenin speaks of the class meaning of a given social phenomenon he is referring to its character as a class instrument for the perpetuation or overthrow of capitalism.
(1) the class ideology of which it is an expression, 
(2) its class-historical function in the field of literary activity and (3) its relation to revolutionary literary theory. Although we have already dealt with (1) in our discussion of the gentle influence on Howells, we shall consider it again from a more general standpoint and with reference to the summary of Howells' theory at the end of Section I.

The aim of the realist, according to Howells, is to make men know one another better so that they may be 'humbled and strengthened with a sense of their fraternity.' Now the ideal of fraternity is a bourgeois ideal for it fails (whether deliberately or mistakenly is unimportant) to recognize the existence of the economic classes, proletariat and bourgeoisie, and the fundamental conflict between them. It is an impossible ideal under capitalism for there can be fraternity, if at all, only within the limits of an economic class. To ask the proletariat to fraternize with the bourgeoisie is to ask them to fraternize with their exploiters, and to ask the

186. That is, under capitalism. The ideal of human brotherhood antedates capitalism, of course. In the capitalist era it received great emphasis in the French Revolution when the bourgeoisie were engaged in overthrowing the landed aristocracy.
bourgeoisie to fraternize with the proletariat is to ask
them to fraternize with their wage-slaves.

The issues are, of course, not so sharply drawn as
this except in time of revolution. That they be thus
drawn is one of the objective conditions of revolution.
Hence it is part of the bourgeois tactic, conscious or
unconscious, to keep them from being sharply drawn: to
either preach the doctrine that there are no classes or
to adhere to theories which cut across class lines by ad-
dressing themselves to mankind in the aggregate and which
appeal to metaphysical abstractions like Justice, Human
Brotherhood, Peace, Civilization, Democracy, the Neutral
State and so on for a reconciliation of class conflict.
These abstractions derive meaning only when considered
in their concrete historical context. When brought down
into the world of history they are seen to be class ideals
having a class function. Actually, under capitalism Just-
ice is bourgeois justice administered by a law either
framed in the interest of the ruling class or interpreted
in that interest; Brotherhood, the bourgeois brotherhood
of exploiter and exploited; Peace, bourgeois peace in-
sured by a police and standing army at the beck and call

127. This statement, as well as others of the same nature
that follow are based on Marx's analysis of the
economics of capitalism.
of the capitalist; Civilization, capitalist civilization; Democracy, bourgeois democracy, a political form developed by the bourgeoisie to serve their economic ends; the Neutral State, an executive committee of the big capitalists. The particular bourgeois character of these ideals lies in the fact that they are not thought of in their historical context, for if they were so thought of they would collapse into meaninglessness in the face of reality; in their abstract form, however, they serve the interests of the bourgeoisie by confusing class issues and by referring to no specific, practical mode for their realization thereby leaving the field free by default to existing bourgeois modes.

Howells' theory of realism is a bourgeois theory, for it dedicates itself to the idea of fraternity or human brotherhood, an abstraction of the kind we have just been discussing. More particularly it is a petty bourgeois theory. In general, the upper bourgeoisie do not embrace the ideal of brotherhood with enthusiasm or conviction though they may pay it lip-service. As that section of the ruling class which actually does the ruling, they are constantly making, and acting on, decisions which are class decisions and which they recognize as such—else they would not rule. They are more aware, in other words, of the class character (not necessarily as Marx would define it, however) of (capitalist) society than the petty
bourgeoisie, consequently the ideal of fraternity is to them more or less of an absurdity. Furthermore, supposing the ideal were realized, where would they be? Any practical attempt to realize it would be sure to operate to their disadvantage. Thus, historically, when the ideal of fraternity was linked up with a program of action that threatened to realize it, as happened in the French Revolution, the upper bourgeoisie were flatly against it; witness the upper bourgeoisie reaction to the French Revolution in England and America.

The petty bourgeoisie, on the other hand, as a class are less informed as to the realities of capitalism than either the upper bourgeoisie or the proletariat. They are not faced with the practical exigencies of ruling, nor are they obliged to face the fact of class exploitation in all its nakedness as the proletariat have to face it. They are thus the prey of illusions about the nature of (capitalist) society, and while they maintain their class position (historically, the tendency of capitalism is to force them down into the proletariat) they are incorrigible sentimentalists, subscribing to doctrines, of a wishful variety, that are not sufficiently contradicted by the objective conditions of petty bourgeois class life to be revealed as patent absurdities. The doctrine of freedom, equality, and fraternity is one such doctrine, and as history showed, in this country, for example, it found
its chief support among the Western petty bourgeoisie.

Summarizing the foregoing discussion, then, Howells' theory is bourgeois in the general sense that it is dedicated to an ideal that hides class issues and thus sub-serves bourgeois ends, and petty bourgeois in that it is dedicated to an ideal held by the petty bourgeoisie because of their intermediate class position.

The historical function of Howells' theory was to render articulate the Western petty bourgeoisie ideological viewpoint in the field of American literary criticism. Inasmuch as the period following the Civil War found the country economically united and the Western petty bourgeoisie ideology in the ascendancy, it was inevitable sooner or later that the petty bourgeoisie viewpoint should find expression in literary criticism. More particularly, there was growing up a body of Western petty bourgeoisie literature (Mark Twain, N. W. Howe, Joseph Kirkland, Edward Eggleston, John Hay are a few of the names.) that needed a petty bourgeois critical theory to help it make its way against the New England literary monopoly. Howells' theory was a response to that need.

In the battle which Howells fought with genteel criticism the issue raised was Realism versus Romanticism. This issue, however, was an expression of a more basic issue: the petty bourgeoisie idea of literature versus the upper bourgeoisie idea. The dispute was a question of the clash
of two class attitudes. That this was so is evident in
the fact that Henry James, a representative of the upper
bourgeois ideology, could embrace realism, but not in the
form that Howells preached it. Why? Because he could
not accept the petty bourgeois equalitarian ideal and the
petty bourgeois anti-aestheticism with which Howells united
realism.

Around Howells there gathered a group of writers and
critics (Charles Dudley Warner, George William Curtis,
Frank Norris, and Hamlin Garland), "the most definite and
unified group of critics since the early days of the North
American Review." In varying degrees, these men accepted
Howells' doctrine and upheld the petty bourgeois critical
viewpoint: that literature must dedicate itself to the
ideal of democracy and come down among men and be of use
to them. Now reform presupposes one or the other of two
ideas: either that society is not organized on a class eco-


138. Realism as a literary mode, i. e., as a literary effect
achieved by a certain literary technique, is not or-
ganically connected with any particular class. Lang-
land, a petty bourgeois Dissenter, was a realistic
writer; on the other hand Chaucer, an upper bourgeois
skeptic, was also. It is the class ideological el-
ments associated with a given literary mode that are
generally not the root of critical controversy over
that mode.

139. DeMille, Ibid., p. 169.
achieved within the existing economic framework, or that
granted society is organized on a class economic basis
which must be changed before any considerable social amelio-
ration is possible, still class antagonisms are not ir-
reconcilable and a policy of class collaboration--i. e.,
an appeal to the reason and higher instincts of both the
conflicting classes--can be pursued which will gradually
bring about the desired change in the class economic basis.
Howells inclined to this latter idea. The Marxian criticism
of it is this: that the testimony of history is all against
it, that ruling classes do not give up their power without
a struggle, that in practice a policy of class collaboration
results in the ruling class dictating the terms of col-
laboration. It goes without saying that there are besides
the proneness of men to error and selfishness a good many
reasons why a ruling class does not voluntarily give up
power.

We come now to the third point under the head of the
class meaning of Howells' theory: the relation of his
theory to a revolutionary or Marxian literary theory.
A revolutionary literary theory, as its name indicates,
is dedicated to revolution. It is dedicated not simply to
literary revolution, for then it would be bourgeois, but
to social revolution, to the overthrow of capitalism.
Howells' theory, in contrast, is dedicated to social
reform.
A revolutionary theory begins by recognizing the fact of irreconcilable class differences, and it does not stop there but goes on to take sides with the proletariat. Realism it views not as an instrument to weld men together but as an instrument to weld the proletariat together and promote struggle against the ruling bourgeoisie so that their rule may be the quicker ended, and the control of the means of production be socialized. When a classless society is achieved then the ideal of human brotherhood will have become relevant to objective social conditions and realism may well enough be dedicated to that ideal.

Revolutionary literary theory is in agreement with Howells in his view which places art forever below humanity. That is, Marxian literary theory is against aestheticism. Not to say that Marxism does not recognize the importance of form in art, for it does; but it insists on the subordination of form in theory. On the Marxian view, the fetishism of form in criticism gives rise to the artificial dilemma Art versus Life; in creative

140. The proletariat, because it is the historical mission of this class to overthrow capitalism according to Marxian theory, which has received confirmation by the Russian Revolution of 1917.
141. On the Marxian view art is a social product produced to meet social needs. Art content is organically related to the material social conditions of a given historical epoch; and art form is also, though less palpably: forms must change to fit content.
...
abstract principles of justice: "Force is the midwife of every old society pregnant with the new."
Dialectical or historical materialism (the terms are used interchangeably) is the Marxian approach to history. Broadly considered, it consists of a synthesis of two potentially conflicting theoretical positions: (a) economic determinism, and (b) what might be called social voluntarism. Economic determinism holds, with varying degrees of rigor, that the explanation of social phenomena is to be sought in the economic activity of society. The material economic facts of a given historical epoch, automatically conditioning the impulse of self-interest and prefiguring the lines along which it shall act, are declared to be essentially determining in the motivation of men. Social voluntarism, on the other hand, sees in human consciousness the effective force in society. Emphasis is placed on consciousness as an historical agent and determiner in its own right.

The references to Hook in the body of this exposition are to Sidney Hook's *Towards the Understanding of Karl Marx* (London, 1935) and those to Trotsky are to Leon Trotsky's *Literature and Revolution* (New York, 1925).
Owing to its less rigid character, this view is susceptible to different formulations. It may, for example, attribute the moving forces of history to great personalities, great ideas, 'human nature,' reason, tradition or to a combination of these. It corresponds to Trotsky's "psychological school, which looks upon the tissue of events as an interweaving of the free activities of separate individuals or groupings." In all cases it eschews the materialism and mechanism of economic determinism. Historically, the general plane of cleavage in the variants of Marxism that have developed has been the potential conflict between determinism and voluntarism in Marx's approach. The revisionist-orthodox controversy that embroiled Marxians at the turn of the twentieth century is an example. The controversy in essence was an exaggerated emphasis on one or the other side of the Marxian dualism and was the result, according to Sidney Hook, of certain historical conditions at that time. Marxism firmly grasped in its original spirit, however, is not conflicting. It is a genuine synthesis in the Hegelian sense.

What is this synthesis? For Marx consciousness is not a self-contained phenomenon operating under its own laws and fashioning the course of events after its own image. Rather, it is at all points chained in an inescapable relationship with the objective environment. This bond is retroactive. A change in the objective environment produces a change in consciousness and a change in consciousness modifies the environment. By consciousness Marx means class consciousness and by the objective environment, the social environment. A transformation of the objective social situation is at the same time a transformation of class consciousness, and the change so produced, produces further change in the objective social situation. Or to state it again in reverse order: a transformation of class consciousness is at the same time a transformation of the objective social situation, and the change in the objective social situation so produced, produces further change in class consciousness. How to which part of this interacting dualism are we to assign the determining role in the historical process? Where in the cycle do we begin? Dialectical materialism rests its case on the material and objective as opposed to the subjective.
Society, from the standpoint of dialectical materialism is a developing whole. Emphasis must be placed on the word 'developing,' for Marxian conceptions are dynamic to the very core. This whole is the aggregate of human activities, political, economic, domestic, religious, etc., differentiated more or less, yet structurally and functionally interrelated. Taken together, these activities constitute an organic pattern and their product is a culture. But cultures change and the question arises, is this change fortuitous or determined? Dialectical materialism says it is determined, and, furthermore, declares that the mode of economic production existing in a given period determines in all fundamental respects the culture of that period. To use the familiar Marxian figure, the mode of production is the base upon which the cultural superstructure is erected.

An analogy, inspired by this figure, may help to clarify the point. That which follows is, within obvious limits, a fair representation of the Marxian view of the relation between the economic process and culture in modern history. Its main purpose is to show the independent-dependent character of the relationship of the two and to add salient details that fill out the general Marxian picture.
Imagine a modern steel skyscraper in process of

day of our age. The hour of the superstructure.

For the superstructure, the foundation must be firmly

strengthened and Bite of the foundation determine the same

extraction upon a concrete foundation. The General concept of

Concrete, pozzolana and chamois are

unforgettable, are the pollutants quaternes. Quantitatively, en

concentrate, ready for occupancy. These men, in our

and danger, They are working the framework impatiently and

with quick and pleasure. Their work is four supplementary

down in the quaking men are YYYYTTT in the framework

Favorable to the flow of concrete from the silo. Then

Great pozzolana, easy, accurate and economical, the

in our undertakers, compare the pollutants intensively, the

lapse, thus fleeting down earthward. These men,

freely. Men from here and there, the monolithic giants into

at the top of the skyscraper change take place.

open to the choice of the maker.

command base have a certain range of extermination variances

as one. The only correct upon a clean so-

variations—size and arrangement or course, furnishment, and

of the building, in the way of your substructure.

with permit a number of extermination, open to the choice

support a outline. Once led, however, the foundation

a society has to develop, the economic base before it can

that before any superstructure can be erected, just so

For the superstructure, the foundation must be firmly

strengthened and base of the foundation determine the same

extraction upon a concrete foundation. The General concept of

Imagine a modern steel skyscraper in process of

106.
onomic institutional structure and, in general, in all other human institutional structures, as well. By institutional structure (a term of Sidney Hook's) is meant a cluster of closely associated institutions and derivative social relationships that has developed to carry on a particular social activity (juristic, political economic, etc.). The growth in institutional structures is rationally explicable as the resultant of the activity of human consciousness (conditioned by objective environing factors, of course). Consciousness implies activity. It cannot, however, create the conditions of its own activity. They lie outside of itself. It can, however, in virtue of its active character and its relation with the conditions that determine it, modify those conditions. Thus we have change and development. History becomes, as Marx phrased it, "the activity of man in pursuit of his ends." (Quoted by Hook, p. 106.) Institutional structures reflect this activity.

If, in the developing organism of institutional structures that is society, one factor reveals itself in the character of an independent variable, it is reasonable to assume that it determines the rest. Dialectic materialism says there is such a factor and that it is the mode of production; i.e., the ways in which men make their living and the social relations developing therefrom.
Directly derivative from the mode of production are the classes, defined in terms of their function in the productive process. They are the conscious embodiment of social will, the active agency of historical change, the expression of the fundamental contradictions at the heart of society. "For us the fundamental forces of the historical process are classes," says Trotsky, and it is to the psychology of classes and its basis in economic conditions that he turns for the explanation of the politics of the Russian Revolution. To the same source dialectic materialism turns for the solution of the problems of cultural change. Culture is class culture.

III

We have been considering the Marxian view of the general relation of culture to the mode of production. It is pertinent now to indicate the connection between art and the mode of production. Marxism regards the function of art as utilitarian and teleological. "Art, even the 'purest'," Trotsky observes in his Literature

145. Trotsky, Idem.
and Revolution, "is thoroughly teleological, because if it breaks with great aims, no matter how unconsciously felt by the artist, it degenerates into a mere rattle." (Trotsky, p. 107) Art develops to meet a need and this need is the imperative demand of the human spirit for expression of its accumulated yearnings, hopes, moods, feelings and thoughts. The demand is psychologic and of a class character. The artist, incubated, hatched and matured in a class culture cannot escape evidencing, consciously or unconsciously, the stamp of that culture. In this connection, speaking of the Serapions, a modern Russian literary school that boasted of its spiritual autonomy and lack of principles, Trotsky says: "As if an artist could ever be 'without a tendency,' without a definite relation to social life, even though unformulated or unexpressed in political terms. It is true, that the majority of artists form their relation to life and its social forms during organic periods, in an unnoticeable and molecular way and almost without the participation of critical reason. The artist takes life as he finds it, coloring his relation to it with a kind of lyrical tone. He considers its foundations unmoveable and approaches it as uncritically as he does the solar system. And this passive conservatism of his forms the unseen pivot of his work." (Trotsky, p. 70) With the
Marxian definition of class (in terms of its economic function) and the fact of the artist's class affiliations, the line of connection between art and economics is roughly indicated.

Quoting Trotsky again: "New artistic needs or demands for new literary and artistic points of view are stimulated by economics, through the development of a new class, and minor stimuli are supplied by changes in the position of the class under the influence of wealth and cultural power. Artistic creation is always a complicated turning inside out of old forms, under the influence of new stimuli which originate outside of art. In this large sense of the word, art is a handmaiden. It is not a disembodied element feeding on itself, but a function of social man, indissolubly tied to his life and environment." (Trotsky, p. 179) The individuality of the artist stressed by non-social theories of art becomes on this view "a welding together of tribal, national, class, temporary and institutional elements." In fact, "it is the uniqueness of this welding together, in the proportions of this psycho-chemical mixture, that individuality is expressed." (Trotsky, p. 60)

It should be clear that, from the Marxian standpoint, the link connecting the artist with the economics of his time is the crystallised psychology or culture-complex of his class. To some this link may seem quite tenuous. After
all, they may ask, what is peculiar about the Marxian approach to art? The theory that art subserved a social function—is social in essence—is nothing new. Nevertheless the Marxian approach is quite definite. It asks certain questions: to what "order of feelings does a given artistic work correspond in all its peculiarities? What are the social conditions of these thoughts and feelings? What place do they occupy in the historic development of a society and of a class? And, further, what literary heritage has entered into the elaboration of the new form? Under the influence of what historical impulse have the new complexes of feelings and thoughts broken through the shell which divides them from the sphere of poetic consciousness? The investigation may become complicated, detailed or individualized, but its fundamental idea will be that of the subsidiary role which art plays in the social process." (Trotsky, p. 169)
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