AN ANALYSIS OF WOMEN CHARACTERS IN SELECTED NOVELS OF JOHN WILLIAM DE FOREST

A Thesis

by

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ABSTRACT

An Analysis of Women Characters in Selected Novels
of John William De Forest. (January 1970)
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Although John William De Forest was considered one of the most promising American novelists in the early 1870's, by the time of his death in 1906 he was virtually unknown. In the last quarter-century, however, there has been a revival of interest in De Forest and his work. Scholars and critics of De Forest's own time believed that he was a very keen, perceptive observer of society and that he recorded his observations with great accuracy and precision. Modern scholars and critics have concurred with this view. Most of the scholars and critics of De Forest's time felt, however, that he was weak in characterization of women. Again, modern scholars and critics have concurred. This study analyzes, evaluates, and draws conclusions about the women characters in selected novels of John William De Forest.

This study is divided into five chapters. Chapter I presents a short biography of John William

De Forest and then reviews the criticism of De Forest and his work, particularly the criticism of De Forest's women characters. Chapters II, III, and IV discuss the women characters in Miss Ravenel's Conversion from Secession to Loyalty (1867), a novel of the American Civil War; Kate Beaumont (1872), a romance of the antebellum South; and Playing the Mischief (1875), a novel of political satire. The discussions in these chapters attempt to provide a thorough analysis of the various women characters.

Chapter V points out some errors which have occurred in De Forest scholarship; further, it goes on to explain that these errors might have occurred because scholars and critics, both contemporary and modern, have studied De Forest in light of particular movements, genres, or philosophical points of view, and therefore have not based their comments about the women characters on a thorough study of the characters themselves in their particular situations. Then, after an explanation of De Forest's approach to writing, the chapter concludes that the women characters in the novels are sketched believably and realistically because they reflect the environmental influences which motivate them to action.

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There is nothing that I can say to fully express the sacrifice of my family. My wife Linda and my sons Danny and Davey have known frustration, loneliness, and neglect. They know what it is to live with an inconsiderate grouch.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

A Short Biography of John William De Forest

John William De Forest was born in Humphreysville (later Seymour), Connecticut, on March 31, 1826. He was the youngest of four sons born to John Hancock De Forest and Dotha Woodward De Forest. From early childhood his health was delicate, and an attack of typhoid fever in 1838 caused a chronic bronchial ailment which plagued him most of his life.[1] Although his delicate physical condition prevented him from attending school regularly and from enrolling in college,[2] he educated himself through independent study, wide reading, and travel (Light, p. 20).

The death of his father in 1839 and of his mother in 1847 provided De Forest with a substantial

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[1] James F. Light, John William De Forest (New York, 1965), p. 20; hereafter cited as Light. The citations on the following pages follow the style of The MLA Style Sheet.

[2] Gordon S. Haight, Introduction to J. W. De Forest's Miss Ravenel's Conversion from Secession to Loyalty (New York, 1955), p. v; hereafter cited as Haight.

inheritance which he invested in the lumber business of his brother Andrew (Light, p. 28). The invested inheritance gave De Forest an independent though barely adequate income. In 1846 he journeyed to the Near East, traveling through Greece, Turkey, and the Holy Land before establishing a short residence in Beirut with his brother Dr. Henry De Forest, a medical missionary.

De Forest returned to the United States in late 1847 only to leave it again three years later for extensive travels in Europe. However, during the interval between his trips abroad he completed a comprehensive study of the history of the Indian tribes of Connecticut, History of the Indians of Connecticut from the Earliest Known Period to 1850 (1851), a fifth edition of which appeared in 1964 (Light, p. 26).

While in Europe during the early 1850's, De Forest developed an interest in languages. He learned to read, write, and speak French, German, and Italian fluently; moreover, "he translated Hawthorne's House of Seven Gables into Italian as an exercise."[3] Also,

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[3]Alfred Appel, Jr., Introduction to J. W. De Forest's Witching Times (New Haven, 1967), p. 8; hereafter cited as Appel.

De Forest succeeded in arresting his bronchial condition and in raising the general level of his health by means of hydropathic cures (Light, p. 33). In late 1852 he journeyed to England, and after a short stay--he was trying to find a publisher for some verse he had written (Light, p. 35)--backtracked across the continent to Italy and then home. James F. Light says that in late 1854 or early 1855 John William De Forest returned to America: "A slim young man who liked an occasional cigar and glass of wine, he had thick brown hair, hazel eyes, a high forehead, and a classically handsome profile. He had lost much of his youthful timidity but had not, as he once had feared he might, become brash, arrogant, or dilettante" (p. 38).

Shortly after his return to the United States he married Harriet Silliman Shepard, June 5, 1856, and began his literary career in earnest. His second long work, Witching Times, a historical novel, began serial publication in Putnam's Monthly Magazine in 1856. From his travel experiences abroad De Forest compiled Oriental Acquaintance (1856) and European Acquaintance (1858). De Forest's first attempt at depicting the contemporary American scene appeared under the title Seacliff; or, the Mystery of the Westervelts (1859).

Throughout the decade of the fifties De Forest was writing travel letters, short fictions, and poetry for newspapers and popular magazines of the period (Light, pp. 35-47).

De Forest was living in Charleston, South Carolina, during the summer of 1861, but he managed to escape to the North with his wife and young son just prior to the firing on Fort Sumter. On returning to New Haven he began to raise a company of Connecticut volunteers. De Forest's company was assigned to the Union garrison at New Orleans for almost two years, but later in the war De Forest was transferred to Sheridan's command for the Wilderness Campaign (Light, p. 70). Wounded and sick, he was medically discharged in late 1864. After a short recovery period, De Forest re-enlisted in the Veteran's Bureau, and when that branch was disbanded at the end of the war, he was transferred to the Freedmen's Bureau. On January 1, 1868, after six years of active duty, De Forest was mustered out of the service as a Brevet Major.

The end of the Civil War marked the beginning of De Forest's most productive period. While De Forest was with the Freedmen's Bureau in Greenville, South Carolina, Miss Ravenel's Conversion from Secession to Loyalty (1867) was published. On January 9, 1868, The

Nation published a very perceptive essay of De Forest's entitled "The Great American Novel." De Forest's next two novels did not receive book publications; they were published serially in the Hearth and Home magazine--"Della, or the Wild Girl," II (February 5-March 19, 1870), and "Annie Howard," II (March 19-May 21, 1870). Although Miss Ravenel had been a critical success, it and the two novels published in Hearth and Home had failed to win De Forest a popular audience--so he changed the focus of his work. Although he had never been west, he wrote a western adventure, Overland (1871); then a romance, Kate Beaumont (1872); then a mystery, The Wetherel Affair (1873); then three politically oriented novels, Honest John Vane (1875), Playing the Mischief (1875), and Justine's Lovers (1878); then a melodramatic travelogue set in Syria, Irene the Missionary (1879); and finally a romantic novel of the reconstruction period, The Bloody Chasm (1881). Throughout the decade and a half following the Civil War De Forest continually supplied the popular magazines of the period with a multitude of short stories and essays which reflected the changing American scene.[4]

[4]E. R. Hagemann, "A Checklist of the Writings of John William De Forest (1826-1906)," Studies in Bibliography, VIII (1956), 188-192.

After the publication of The Bloody Chasm, De Forest fell into a period of literary silence. He traveled to Europe in 1884 "to continue his exploration of his family crest and ancestry" (Light, p. 155). Soon after his return to the United States, De Forest began to revise his novels in hope of publishing a collected edition of his works--a "small monument" to himself (hence, Joseph Jay Rubin's present endeavors with the "Monument Edition" of De Forest's works). However, De Forest could interest no one except William Dean Howells in his dream, and therefore he abandoned it in the early 1890's.

De Forest's last publications were A Lover's Revolt (1898), a historical romance of the American Revolution; The De Forests of Avesnes (and of New Netherland) a Huguenot Thread in American Colonial History, 1494 to the Present Time (1900), a genealogical study; and The Downing Legends: Stories in Rhyme (1901) and Poems: Medley and Palestina (1902), two volumes of verse.

De Forest applied for a Civil War veteran's pension in the early 1890's, but he did not receive it until 1904, at which time he was bedridden at his son's home in New Haven (Light, pp. 169-170). John

William De Forest died quietly, obscurely, on July 17, 1906, in New Haven--unknown and unsung.

A Survey of Criticism of John William De Forest

Robert Falk has said that John William De Forest was "the most promising novelist in America,"[5] during the 1870's; however, De Forest fell into obscurity during his own lifetime because he failed to gain a popular audience. In most recognized literary histories of the American novel, De Forest is mentioned only as a minor figure of the nineteenth century, if he is mentioned at all. Furthermore, in the late 1930's Van Wyck Brooks "discovered that most of them [De Forest's novels] had not been checked out [of the Yale Library] for fifty years" (Appel, p. 15). However, men who are familiar with nineteenth-century American literature and history after the Civil War usually recognize the novelist's name, and a few scholars have investigated De Forest and his work.

In 1939 Harper and Brothers published De Forest's <u>Miss Ravenel's Conversion from Secession to Loyalty</u>,

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[5]Robert Falk, "John W. De Forest: The Panoramic Novel of Realism," <u>The Victorian Mode in American Fiction, 1865-1885</u> (Lansing, Mich., 1965), p. 41; hereafter cited as Falk.

edited with an introduction by Gordon S. Haight. In 1955 Haight edited and wrote an introduction for a Holt, Rinehart, and Winston edition of the same novel. In the late 1950's Joseph Jay Rubin began work on the "Monument Edition" of De Forest's novels. To date three novels--Honest John Vane (1960), Playing the Mischief (1961), and Kate Beaumont (1963)--of the series have been published by the Bald Eagle Press, State College, Pennsylvania, edited with introductions by Joseph Jay Rubin. In 1965 a critical biography by James F. Light, the only biography of De Forest, was published by Twayne Publishers, Inc. In 1967 College and Unitersity Press Services, Inc., published one of De Forest's previously unpublished novels, Witching Times, edited with an introduction by Alfred Appel, Jr. In 1946 the Yale University Press published some of De Forest's letters to his wife and some of his journalistic writings of the Civil War period in a volume entitled A Volunteer's Adventures, edited with an introduction by Stanley T. Williams. In 1948 the same press published some letters and essays of the immediate postwar period in a volume entitled A Union Officer in the Reconstruction, edited with an introduction by James H. Croushore and David M. Potter. The

above mentioned works are available in the Texas A&M University Library, but most of De Forest's work has been out of print since the initial publication or serialization in the nineteenth century. The library also holds a few of De Forest's serialized works and essays.

Excluding contemporary book reviews, most of the criticism concerning De Forest and his work has been done in the last quarter century. However, this criticism tends to parrot William Dean Howells, who praised De Forest for his keen observation and his realistic description of life and society.[6] The same points are emphasized in the criticisms of Brooks,[7] Cowie,[8] Falk (p. 33), Quinn,[9] Simpson,[10] and

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[6]William Dean Howells, "The Heroine of Kate Beaumont," Heroines of Fiction, II (New York, 1901), p. 162; hereafter cited as Heroines.

[7]Van Wyck Brooks, New England: Indian Summer (New York, 1940), p. 248; hereafter cited as Brooks.

[8]Alexander Cowie, The Rise of the American Novel (New York, 1948), p. 511; hereafter cited as Cowie.

[9]Arthur Hobson Quinn, American Fiction: An Historical and Critical Survey (New York, 1964), p. 171; hereafter cited as Quinn.

[10]Claude M. Simpson, Jr., "John W. De Forest, Miss Ravenel's Conversion," The American Novel, Wallace Stegner, ed. (New York, 1965), p. 40; hereafter cited as Simpson.

Wagenknecht.[11]

However, the criticism of De Forest and his work is not all favorable. In the 1870's De Forest's critics challenged what they called his exaggerated characterization of women. Joseph Jay Rubin reports: "Scribner's wrote in February 1872: 'As for Mr. De Forest's heroines, they are always of one type. . . . His heroines are simply tall little girls in long clothes: artless, affectionate, sweet, but singularly unintellectual.'"[12] In 1901 Howells said of De Forest, "A certain scornful bluntness in dealing with the disguises in which women natures reveal themselves is perhaps at the root of that dislike which most women have felt for his fiction, and which in a nation of women readers has prevented it from ever gaining a merited popularity" (Heroines, p. 153). That De Forest failed to gain popular acceptance with the primarily female novel-reading public because of

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[11]Edward Wagenknecht, Cavalcade of the American Novel (New York, 1952), p. 107; hereafter cited as Wagenknecht.

[12]Introduction to J. W. De Forest's Playing the Mischief (State College, Pa., 1961), p. 15; hereafter cited as Rubin-PM.

his treatment of women characters is an attitude echoed by Brooks (p. 248), Cowie (p. 513), Quinn (p. 168), and Wagenknecht (p. 107).

From this attitude was derived the idea that De Forest's frankness and "realism" marked him as a masculine writer; i.e., he had superior ability for delineating the male character, but was very weak in discerning the nuances of the female character (Howells Heroines, p. 162; Brooks, p. 248; Cowie, p. 519; and Wagenknecht, p. 107). However, more recent contributors to the criticism of De Forest and his work question this prevailing attitude. Many modern critics--Appel, Light, Falk, Simpson, Haight, Rubin--suggest that Howells' criticism reflected his personal biases and was therefore narrow and oversimplified.

These modern critics have attempted to re-evaluate some of De Forest's female characters in the light of a broader historical perspective, but most of these re-evaluations have dealt with a particular female character, or the female characters in a particular work: Haight--Lillie Ravenel and Mrs. Larue in Miss Ravenel's Conversion; Rubin--Kate Beaumont, Nellie Armitage, Mrs. Chester, and Jenny Devine in Kate Beaumont and Josie Murray, old Mrs. Murray, and

Mrs. Warden in Playing the Mischief. Further, it seems that the greater the number of female characters included in these recent criticisms, the more superficial the analysis. Although some of the criticism of De Forest and his work does suggest general parallels between the various major female characters, there has been no general study of the women characters.

Most of De Forest's novels are concerned with the social customs of a specific group in society or a particular segment of society. He structures his novels around the "sexual triangle" (Light, p. 170), which Edwin Oviatt feels provided "the only kind of plot a writer could get the public interested in"[13] during De Forest's productive years. Furthermore, the use of a female name in the title of many of the novels reflects De Forest's concern with women characters. This thesis investigates and evaluates the female characters in Miss Ravenel's Conversion from Secession to Loyalty (1867), a war novel; in Kate Beaumont (1872), a romance; and in Playing the Mischief (1875),

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[13]"John De Forest in New Haven," New York Times, Saturday Supplement (December 17, 1898), p. 856; hereafter cited as Oviatt.

a political satire. These novels, all written during De Forest's most productive period, indicate not only De Forest's concern with female characters but also the variety of his literary interests.

CHAPTER II

MISS RAVENEL'S CONVERSION

Miss Ravenel's Conversion from Secession to Loyalty, the "biography" of Lillie Ravenel,[1] opens just after Fort Sumter fell to the Confederates at the beginning of the American Civil War. Lillie and her father, a medical doctor, having been forced to leave New Orleans because of the Doctor's abolitionist sympathies, have established residence in New Boston, "the capital city of the little Yankee State of Barataria" (MR, p. 1). Shortly after her arrival in New Boston, Lillie, a naive nineteen year old, meets two men--Edward Colburne, a young New England lawyer, and John Carter, a professional soldier from Virginia. Lillie is drawn to both men, but she is more impressed by the worldly charm of Carter than by the quiet strength of Colburne. Neither of these men is indifferent to Lillie; Colburne is fascinated and Carter is amused by the charming young Southerner. After a dinner party and a picnic, the triangle is established.

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[1]John William De Forest, Miss Ravenel's Conversion from Secession to Loyalty (New York, 1955), p. 483; hereafter cited as MR.

After the Union defeat at the first battle of Bull Run, Colburne, commissioned a captain of militia, raises a company of volunteers, and his company is attached to a newly formed regiment commanded by Colonel Carter. The regiment is assigned garrison duty in New Orleans, and when Lillie and her father return to their home, all the major characters meet in the Southern setting.

Lillie, though a native Louisianian, finds that she is not welcome socially in her homeland. Slighted by her countrywomen and surrounded continuously by Carter, Colburne, or other Union sympathizers besides her father, she slowly begins to change her attitude toward the South. The shift in her attitude is dependent upon emotion rather than reason. The same is true of her romantic life; it is guided by her passionate, affectionate nature. Lillie likes Colburne a great deal, but she idealizes and exaggerates the "magnetic," physical attraction she has for Carter; therefore, against her father's wishes, she follows her heart and marries Carter.

Later, when Carter is on duty in the field, Dr. Ravenel and Lillie undertake a project which hopefully will teach some of the newly-freed Negroes responsibility. Dr. Ravenel manages a confiscated

plantation which employs the Negroes for wages, and Lillie teaches school for the Negro children even though she initially feels that they are not capable of learning. Before the project can become effective the plantation is overrun by a regiment of Texas cavalry, and Captain Colburne, recovering from wounds in a nearby hospital, becomes instrumental in rescuing the Ravenels from the onslaught. After the narrow escape all the parties return to New Orleans; Dr. Ravenel to his hobby of mineralogy, Colonel Carter to command as quartermaster of the New Orleans district, Captain Colburne to duty as a court-martial officer, and Lillie to the joyful misery of expectant motherhood.

Seeking promotion, Colonel Carter journeys to Washington by steamboat, and during the trip becomes involved in an affair with Mrs. Larue, Dr. Ravenel's coquettish, Creole sister-in-law. Carter passively continues the affair in Washington, and Mrs. Larue insists on a continuance after both parties have returned to New Orleans. The affair comes to an end only after Lillie presents Carter with a son. During this period Carter reluctantly engages in some under-the-table dealings with military property in order to stabilize his financial situation, and he is forced to destroy several steamboats for the insurance to

cover his mismanagement. Ironically, at this time he receives his promotion to brigadier and returns to duty in the field. After Carter's departure a letter revealing his infidelity accidentally falls into Lillie's hands. Immediately Dr. Ravenel takes his daughter and his grandson north. The setting shifts back to New Boston after General Carter is killed in his first engagement as brigade commander and Captain Colburne is transferred to another theater of the war.

After being deceived by her husband and betrayed by her aunt, Mrs. Carter begins to recover from the tragedy of her marriage to the Colonel. Just before the end of the war, Captain Colburne, recovering from maladies suffered for his country, is mustered out of the service. By the end of the war Mr. Colburne has resumed his courtship of Lillie. And after a proper length of time, during which she realizes that Colburne is the man whom she should have loved, whom she now does love, Lillie, rationally not emotionally, accepts his proposal. The couple marries in the fall after the war's end, and as a testimony to her conversion, Lillie insists on living "Always at the North!" (MR, p. 480)

The description of Lillie is not original when compared to that of other fictional heroines of the

period: she "was very fair, with lively blue eyes and exceedingly handsome hair, very luxuriant, very wavy and of a flossy blonde color lighted up by flashes of amber. She was tall and rather slender, with a fine form and an uncommon grace of manner and movement" (MR, p. 6). She is more than just pleasing to look at. Lillie is the product not of a socially stiff and unsympathetic culture, but of a culture which appreciates the colorfully beautiful and which promotes the social gayeties, amenities, and graces. However, when she is transplanted to New Boston, her very feminine appearance and her sexual appeal tend to make her a unique personage in the Puritan environment. She is so completely different from the New Boston maidens, those "Thin-lipped, hollow-cheeked, narrow-chested" young ladies who are "without a single rounded outline or graceful movement," and whose smiles seem "to be rather a symptom of pain than an expression of pleasure" (MR, pp. 17-18), that she appears strikingly beautiful and unusually charming.

Not only her appearance, but also her personality set Lillie apart from the maidens of New Boston and make her more interesting to the males. When the young lawyer is first introduced to Lillie by her father,

> Colburne was flattered by the quick blush and pretty momentary flutter of embarrassment with which she received him. The same irrepressible blush and flutter often interested those male individuals who were fortunate enough to make Miss Ravenel's acquaintance. Each young fellow thought that she was specially interested in himself, that the depths of her womanly nature stirred into pleasurable excitement by his advent. And it was frequently not altogether a mistake. (MR, p. 6)

Lillie's blushing is an emotional response to people, not a cunning contrivance. She possesses a "sympathetic as well as . . . [a] graceful cordiality and consequent charm of manner, the whole made more fascinating by being veiled in a delicate gauze of womanly dignity" (MR, p. 6), and even though her innocence and naivete prevent her from recognizing or realizing the power of her sexual appeal, she is very affectionate and lovable as well as very capable of loving.

Her affectionate nature can only be revealed by her feeling for other people. Lillie likes people, almost all people--she even feels that the people of New Boston are kind and friendly enough, but not as kind and friendly as the people of her homeland--and most people like her. At the Whitewoods' dinner party in New Boston, the only other young lady present besides Lillie is Professor Whitewood's daughter, "A shy but hospitable and thoughtful maiden, incapable of

striking up a flirtation of her own" (MR, p. 14). Miss Whitewood, "twenty-five years old and without a suitor" (MR, p. 15), is representative of all of the maidens of New Boston. But Lillie, consistent with her cultural homeland, is capable of striking up a flirtation, and Colonel Carter, who is present at the party, takes a liking to Lillie because she "was willing to talk about any kind of nothing . . . and that therefore he could please her without much intellectual strain" (MR, p. 23). Instinctively, both Colonel Carter and Mr. Colburne, also present at the party, are more enchanted by Lillie's feminine freshness and social accomplishment than by Miss Whitewood's matronly demeanor and social ineptness, qualities which cause the young New England maiden to be self-conscious, quiet, and reserved at social gatherings.

Lillie's affection for people is not strictly social. She is interested in people and is "very inquisitive by nature" (MR, p. 96). However, Lillie is also a sharp, forward, bossy individual who constantly nags her father because she feels that she knows what is best for him. But Dr. Ravenel does not really mind Lillie's tirades because he knows that she loves him so much that her manner is not intended to be spiteful or vindictive but affectionate: "Never

was a child so haunted by a pet sheep, or a handsome husband by a plain wife, as was this charming papa by his doating [sic] daughter" (MR, pp. 135-136). Furthermore, Lillie is silly and childish enough to blame West Point for her husband's immorality, and when her son is born, selfish enough to believe that other mothers' sons should fight the wars.

Lillie is a personality who expresses not stereotyped but unique qualities. She is innocent and protected, yet headstrong and naively self-confident. She is not at all disciplined like the New Boston maidens whose harsh environment and Puritan training have taught emotional control; a passionate nature rather than a reasoned understanding guides Lillie's actions and reactions. However, whatever the quirks of her personality, Lillie is very feminine--she is talkative, curious, and dotingly affectionate; on the other hand, she is domineering, silly, and even childish. But even though some of her character traits, both the good and the bad, are carried to an extreme, when Lillie is compared to the "bookish," matronly women who haunt New Boston, she is decidedly the more balanced creature. However, Lillie is more than a unique personality; she is a dynamic individual who

expresses definite, though changing, attitudes and opinions.

After residing in New Boston for almost a year, Lillie becomes more and more enchanted with the aristocratic tradition of her South. She does not share her father's sympathies, and upon her arrival in New Boston she is a confirmed rebel because "Like all young people and almost all women she was strictly local, narrowly geographical in her feelings and opinions. She was colored by the soil in which she had germinated and been nurtured" (MR, p. 10). She has been accustomed to social adventures, and she desires the attentions of some Southern planter, that ideal of manhood, that civilized gentleman who could "talk delightfully to ladies," who is "perfectly charming at receptions and dinner parties," and who is "so hospitable . . . generous and courteous" (MR, p. 11). And because she is narrow and local, Lillie has no real conception of society, either Southern or Northern; her loyalties are emotional, and therefore she is concerned only with what she knows--the attitudes and opinions of the upper classes of the South, not with the poor white trash. She believes that fighting is a gentlemanly, civilized pastime, and she respects a man because he will fight; what

he fights for makes little difference as long as he will draw a sword. Needless to say, New Boston does not appreciate Lillie's point of view, and its citizens receive her quite coolly. The men tolerate her politely because she is an attractive woman, but the women of the city completely avoid her. The social vacuum of New Boston deprives Lillie of the company of robust men and charming women, a company which her passionate nature demands.

Thus, Lillie seeks attention in New Boston, but her motive is not materialistic or cunning. She has been pampered and protected by her father all of her life, and therefore her motive is innocent, girlish, and naive. She only needs reassurance of her femininity; the source is not important. However, Lillie is particular on one point: her idea of a man has to be met even in New Boston. And even though she can find nothing worthwhile in a New Englander like John Whitewood, Jr., who is "Thin, pale and almost sallow, with pinched features surmounted by a high and roomy forehead, tall, slender, narrow-chested and fragile in form, shy, silent, and pure as the timidest of girls" (MR, p. 19), she can be interested in Mr. Colburne, "the finest and most agreeable young man in New Boston" (MR, p. 19):

> His forehead was broad and clear; his complexion moderately light, with a strong color in the cheeks; his nose straight and handsome, and other features sufficiently regular; his eyes of a light hazel, and remarkable for their gentleness. There was nothing hidden, nothing stern, in his expression--you saw at a glance he was the embodiment of frankness and good nature. In person he was strongly built, and he had increased his vigor by systematic exercise. (MR, p. 19)

However, Lillie is positively drawn to Colonel Carter, that magnetic, materialistic Virginia gentleman who has been greatly influenced by his Southern heritage and the Southern way of life:

> A little above the middle height he was, with a full chest, broad shoulders and muscular arms, brown curling hair, and a monstrous brown mustache, forehead not very high, nose straight and chin dimpled, brown eyes at once audacious and mirthful, and a dark rich complexion which made one think of pipes of sherry wine as well as of years of sunburnt adventure. When he was presented to her he looked her full in the eyes with a bold flash of interest which caused her to color from her forehead to her shoulders. In age he might have been anywhere from thirty-three to thirty-seven. In manner he was a thorough man of the world without the insinuating suavity of her father, but with all his self-possession and readiness. (MR, p. 20)

Thus, in New Boston, Lillie is afforded the attention which she seeks. But when both Carter and Colburne leave New Boston to answer their country's call, nothing remains for Lillie, and she desperately longs to return to the amiable, glamorous society of New Orleans.

Lillie gets her wish. Soon after the city falls to the Union forces, Dr. Ravenel and his daughter return to their home. However, after returning to New Orleans, Lillie finds that the city is no longer the charming social center it had been when she left. The initial social affront comes while Lillie is visiting her youthful aunt, Mrs. Larue. While Mrs. Larue is trying to console Lillie and to explain the dreadful situation which exists in the city, the two are interrupted by "two stern, thin, pale ladies in black, without hoops, highly aristocratic and inexorably rebellious" (MR, p. 131), Mrs. Langdon and her daughter. The Langdons are of the same cultural background as Lillie and Mrs. Larue, native Louisianians. They are motivated by the same loyalties and controlled by the same passions. But these Southern ladies deliberately do not acknowledge Lillie, nor do they seem to remember that they had been acquainted.

The occasion of their visit to Mrs. Larue's residence is "to discuss affairs political, metaphorically tying Beast Butler to a flaming stake and performing a scalp dance around it, making a drinking cup of his skull, quaffing from it refreshing draughts of Yankee blood. Lillie remembered that, disagreeably

local as the New Boston ladies were, she had not heard from their lips any such conversational atrocities" (MR, p. 131). In the course of the conversation Mrs. Langdon relates how they had snubbed a Union officer that morning: "The brute got up and offered us his seat in the cars. I didn't look at him. Neither of us looked at him. I said--we both said--'We accept nothing from Yankees.' I remained--we both remained--standing" (MR, p. 132). Lillie almost laughs aloud. The cool reception of the Langdons prompts her to cause the Southern ladies some discomfort: "Really," she observed, "I think it was right civil in him to give up his seat. I didn't know that they were so polite. I thought they treated the citizens with all sorts of indignities" (MR, p. 132). (Ironically, the snubbed Union officer turns out to be Captain Colborne.) The Langdons ignore Lillie's comment and immediately leave. Lillie has been thoroughly snubbed, and she decides that if "She was to be cut in the street, to be glared at in church, to be sneered at in the parlor, to be put on the defenseive, to be obliged to fight for herself and her father. . . . she would turn loyal for very spite" (MR, p. 132).

Her social situation has not changed with her change in residence. Lillie discovers that the Union

occupation of New Orleans has changed not only the social structure of the city, but also the basic attitudes of the Southerners who remain in the city. She is somehow held responsible for her father's political sympathies. She is politely tolerated by the few old Southern gentlemen who remain, but she is socially ostracized by the Southern ladies. At each encounter with old friends Lillie's resentment grows, and as the social gulf between herself and her old acquaintances widens, Lillie leans more and more toward loyalty.

When Lillie begins the transition to loyalty, she is contrasted with her aunt, Mrs. Larue, a widow who occupies the house next door to the Ravenels. Mrs. Larue is not at all like the New England women, nor is she like the Southern ladies Mrs. Langdon and her daughter. She is French Creole by birth and like the Ravenels belongs to the upper social class of New Orleans:

> [She was] thirty-three years of age and still decidedly pretty. Her complexion was dark, pale, and a little too thick, but it was relieved by the jet black of her regular eyebrows and of her masses of wavy hair. Her face was oval, her nose straight, her lips thin but nicely modeled, her chin little and dimpled; her expression was generally gay and

> coquettish, but amazingly variable and capable of running through a vast gamut of sentiments, including affection, melancholy and piety. Though short she was well built, with a deep, healthy chest, splendid arms and finely turned ankles. (MR, p. 129)

But even though both Lillie and her aunt appear to be similarly attractive, interesting women, any real similarity between them is negligible. Mrs. Larue, with her dark features, her gay, coquettish expression, and her great variety of sentiments, is in many ways the antithesis of Lillie.

Lillie, though guided by emotion rather than reason is generally consistent in her point of view; Mrs. Larue is as "double-faced as Janus." She can curse the Union and praise the Confederacy with as much ease as she can secure protection from the loyal Mayor of New Orleans or from "Beast" Butler himself. Even though the Ravenels are relatives, she will not invite them to her home for social functions, but she will attend gatherings of Union sympathizers in the Ravenels' home. By being socially ambidextrous, Mrs. Larue maintains compatible relations with everyone, no matter what his sympathies, and she succeeds in keeping open all avenues which may bring her advantage. However, her actions do not stem from a desire to be socially acceptable; they are derived

from her selfishness. She wants nothing more than to be on the winning side when the conflict is over; in the meantime her goal is to hold on to her remaining property.

Mrs. Larue's selfishness is indicative of her whole moral nature--she is completely corrupt and immoral. Unlike Lillie, she is well aware of her sexual power. Mrs. Larue believes "that Don Juan was a model man. . . . that man should not leave woman alone; that he should seek after her constantly, and force himself upon her; that, losing one, he should find another. Therefore the man, who, losing one, chooses another, best represents his sex" (MR, p. 203). Though a woman, Mrs. Larue practices the aggressive philosophy. She knows what type of man Colonel Carter is, and she likes him for it. But when she realizes how Lillie feels about the Colonel, she turns to Captain Colburne even though she would prefer the tete-a-tete with Carter. However, when the Colonel and the Captain are gone, she turns her attentions to Dr. Ravenel, her brother-in-law. "The plain, placid truth was that she was willing to flirt [with any available man just] to please herself" (MR, p. 166).

In order to maintain her selfishness and to sustain her pleasure, the dark lady is "all things to all men" (MR, p. 182).

Although her coquettish pride is hurt when she realizes that Colonel Carter will propose to Lillie, Mrs. Larue rationalizes that the proposal and Lillie's acceptance will mean that Mrs. Larue herself will then have very influential relatives in the city. And, as a kindred spirit, Mrs. Larue decides to help Carter's suit by praising his virtues to Dr. Ravenel. However, when the Doctor asks her directly if Carter is planning to marry his daughter, Mrs. Larue replies in the negative, "lying frankly, without the slightest hesitation or confusion" (MR, p. 163). At every turn Mrs. Larue encourages the match between Lillie and Carter by constantly suggesting the arrangement to Lillie when the Doctor is absent.

Mrs. Larue believes that marriage is highly desirable for other women, but she has a quite different attitude toward marriage for herself. Although she believes that a woman who is not allowed to love is not complete, "she never had been in love in her life and was not going to begin at thirty-three" (MR, p. 166). At the Ravenels' she tells Captain Colburne:

"Marriage will not content me, nor will single life . . . I have tried both, and I cannot recommend either. It is a choice between two evils, and one does not know to say which is the least" (MR, p. 166). Her selfishness, her corruptability, her immorality demand that she live for her own pleasures, that she never create bonds or obligations which would tie her to another individual; she accepts love as a force in the world and love-making as a natural feminine weapon because "she was not easily hurt by love-making, no matter how vigorous" (MR, p. 346). Nonetheless, Mrs. Larue does consider marrying again, not for love but to put an end to "risky intrigues and harassing struggles" (MR, p. 383).

Lillie can not see through the Colonel's corrupt nature, and she pictures him as a pure, just, noble individual. She drifts toward him because he is magnetic and because she is a little afraid of him; he rules her heartstrings because her reaction to him is more emotional than rational. Mrs. Larue also realizes that Carter is a man who could rule a woman, but she is drawn to him because he is a challenge to her feminine pride: she knows "certain secret methods of rareyizing[1] gentlemen which hardly ever

fail upon persons of Carter's physical and moral nature" [MR, p. 146. De Forest's note: "[1]Taming. From a horse-tamer named Rarey (1826-66)."] However, Lillie, with her girlish, sweet, innocent personality plus her gushing enthusiasm, wins Carter's proposal of marriage, but her success is dependent mainly upon the Colonel's temporary change in morals and the fact that Mrs. Larue "had found neither the time nor the juxtaposition necessary to a trial of her system" (MR, p. 146).

But Mrs. Larue does get the chance to entangle Carter during the boat trip to Washington. Carter is her only acquaintance on board, and though the other men on board admire her madonnesque, nun-like demeanor, Carter knows that she is "as malicious as Mephistopholes" (MR, p. 351). Carter is at first uncomfortable in Mrs. Larue's presence because he knows what type of woman she is, but after a week of misery Carter's true nature takes control, and the affair bursts into full bloom. Ironically, after the decision is made, Carter lets "Mrs. Larue take the helm and guide him down the current of his own emotions" (MR, p. 351). Lillie does not have a chance for reforming her husband because she can not

play the game according to the rules of Carter and Mrs. Larue--Lillie's feelings are sincere. And Carter experiences self-reproach and regret when he compares Lillie's love with Mrs. Larue.

In her sincerity, Lillie suspects nothing. She believes everything is well because she wants to believe everything is well. Mrs. Larue provides no opportunity for Lillie to be suspicious--she pets Lillie, brings her flowers, helps her sew, and cheers her up when she is despondent during her pregnancy. She even flirts with the Doctor so much that Lillie beings to worry about a match between her father and her aunt. Even Carter plies his wife with tenderness and understanding during this period. And when the baby is born, Lillie devotes herself so completely to her son that she does not even miss her husband when he is away on duty, nor is she completely conscious of her father's or Mrs. Larue's presence when they are nearby. However, the secret seems so safe that Carter grows careless. He fails to destroy one of his letters to Mrs. Larue. When the revealing letter falls into Lillie's hands, her world is shattered by the intensity of the shock. Dr. Ravenel immediately suggests that they leave "that Sodom of

a city" and go north, and Lillie readily accepts the offer because it is a way for temporarily escaping her shame and humiliation.

When Mrs. Larue learns that she has been found out, she moves out of her house and establishes residence with a devout New England family who lives outside of New Orleans. She remains with the New Englanders for only a week after the Ravenels leave New Orleans. On returning to the city, she choses the winning side and begins to flirt openly with the Yankee officers. Her intentions are quite materialistic; by means of flirtatious manipulations she seeks favors from the military government: when last seen Mrs. Larue has secured title to some contraband cotton and has sold it for a profit of fifteen thousand dollars, thereby regaining some of the financial loss she had incurred during the war. As Gordon Haight has said in Spiller, Thorpe, _et al._, _Literary History of the United States_ (New York, 1948), Mrs. Larue "is the first profligate woman to escape retribution in an American novel" (II, 882).

The initial shock of the affair shatters Lillie's world, but she is spared the full impact of the ordeal by a fever which causes insensibility and semi-consciousness. On recovering she holds no animosity

for either the Colonel or for Mrs. Larue. When Lillie learns of her husband's death, she says to her father, "I am so sorry I quarreled with him. I wish I had written to him that I was not angry" (MR, p. 427). However, at a later time anger once does well within her. She says to her father: "I don't see why I should have been made miserable because others are wicked" (MR, p. 427). The shock of her tragedy makes Lillie only a hollow shell of her former self: she no longer blushes, she avoids people, she never questions her father, and she seldom smiles.

However, all is not lost. Lillie's primary interest during the early period of her mourning is her son, and she dotes over him constantly. But by living one day at a time she is able to survive. Time, youth, and hope bring back the rose to her cheeks, the pertness to her smile, the grace to her form, and the brightness to her eyes. She begins to dominate her father, she cooks and sews, and after a while she begins to gaze at herself in the mirror. She once more begins to demonstrate the qualities which are basic to her character; however, her countenance is more serious and more mature than before. Her experiences have seasoned her.

Lillie's experiences are parallel to those of the nation, and she has almost recovered when the war is over. She again sees people socially, and when Mr. Colburne returns from the war and recovers from his wounds, she is courted not only by him but also by Mr. John Whitewood, Jr., who is worth eighty thousand dollars. Of course Lillie refuses Mr. Whitewood's offer of marriage to wait for Mr. Colburne's: "The nation was not more certainly guided by the hand of Providence in overthrowing slavery than was this man in loving this woman" (MR, p. 462). The trials and tragedies of her personal war have matured Lillie. She realizes that Colburne has loved her faithfully for four long, hard years, and she understands why she should have loved him all along instead of having loved Carter. In her marriage to Colburne, Lillie finds the love, the happiness, and the security which her emotionalism and immaturity had failed to find in her passionate attraction to Carter and the glamorous world which he had represented.

CHAPTER III

KATE BEAUMONT

Kate Beaumont is a novel of Southern manners, and except for the initial chapters which deal with a shipboard romance between the main characters, the novel is set in the Hartland district of South Carolina. In the novel De Forest attempts to capture the attitudes and the opinions of the chivalric Southron: "In the days before the greatest of American wars, in those now all but incredible days when the planter was the grandest figure in American society."[1] De Forest points out the superficial romanticism upon which the society is based, and also the exaggerated sense of duty and of honor which the Southerners live by. The author satirizes the code of dueling which the Southerners uphold and believe in by demonstrating the waste and futility of a feud between two aristocratic families, whose members are unsure of the original causes of the feud.

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[1] John William De Forest, Kate Beaumont (State College, Pa., 1963), p. 43; hereafter cited as KB.

The novel opens on board the <u>Mersey</u>, a freighter bound for Charleston, South Carolina. Kate Beaumont, together with her brother Tom and her aunt Mrs. Chester, is returning home after an extended stay in Europe. Also on board the ship is Frank McAlister, a member of the rival family, returning home after eight years of study abroad. Frank learns of the Beaumonts, but they do not know him, and when the captain of the vessel conveniently calls him Mr. McMaster, he does not correct the mistake because he wants to avoid trouble. Frank does not care for the feud nor for the traditions which cause it to continue, and ironically, Kate feels the same way. During the journey, Frank falls in love with Kate, and when he reveals his heart to her he also reveals his real name and background. Kate promises not to reveal Frank's secret, but soon, thanks to the curious efforts of Kate's aunt, all of the Beaumonts learn that a McAlister is on board.

Before reaching port the <u>Mersey</u> catches fire, and as the passengers are abandoning ship, Kate slips and falls into the sea. She is saved by Frank. The passengers are soon rescued and taken to Charleston; from there they proceed to their respective homes in Hartland district. However, indebtedness proves to be stronger than animosity. For the first time in almost a century of

feuding, one of the rival families is obligated to the other. Southern honor and duty demand that the Beaumonts personally express their appreciation to Frank for his heroic deed. Knowing this, Kate utilizes her family's obligation plus the influence of her esteemed grandfather, Colonel Kershaw, in an effort to end the feud. For a short time the rival families enjoy a peaceful, though strained, relationship, and Frank and Kate make romantic progress. But the fragile truce does not last. Tom Beaumont, a heavy drinker, drunkenly picks a fight with Frank when he encounters him in town one evening. To avoid being shot Frank hits Tom and then ties him up. The next day challenges are made and accepted and the feud is on again.

Many obstacles arise to prevent the union of "Romeo and Juliet in South Carolina" (KB, p. 107). Frank wants Tom to kill him because he cannot live without Kate. Frank fires his dueling pistol into the air, and Tom follows his example. Kate decides to give up Frank because she does not want to let personal feelings come between her and her family. Mrs. Chester, who likes Frank a great deal, endeavors to cause much heartache for Kate and much trouble for Frank because he will have nothing to do with her.

Then the patriarchs of both clans run for Congress, and their politics create more turmoil for the lovers. Furthermore, Nellie Armitage, Kate's older sister, is forced to leave her drunken husband Randolph Armitage, and Randolph believes that Frank is responsible for his wife's departure. Randolph comes to Hartland "gunning" for Frank, who is conveniently at the Beaumont plantation on a mission of goodwill. During the ensuing skirmish Colonel Kershaw is fatally wounded, and the McAlisters are blamed for the dastardly deed. All hope for the young lovers seems lost.

However, Kershaw, on his death bed, asks Kate's father to try to end the feud, and he agrees. Later it is discovered that Randolph Armitage fired the bullet which killed Kershaw, and the McAlisters are honorably and ceremoniously relieved of all responsibility for the heinous crime. Mr. Beaumont, true to his pledge, sets himself to the task of fulfilling his promise to the dead Kershaw, and he secures a district judgeship for the elder McAlister. The two patriarchs meet, and both agree to bring an end to the feud. When the two families are reconciled, the path of love is opened for Frank and Kate. They are

married and live happily ever after on the Kershaw plantation.

De Forest attempts to expose Southern society as it really was at the time the novel takes place. He chooses Kate Beaumont to represent all that is ideal in the mythical, romantic Southern tradition. Kate is an eighteen-year-old Southern belle who is perhaps more mature and more sophisticated than the average Southern young lady because she has spent four years in Europe. She is a very attractive young lady:

> Her face was very beautiful, very interesting, and even very impressive. It was of the type which one expects to find in Italy, or more likely, in the Orient. The profile was gently aquiline, the complexion a medium brunette faintly flushed with rose, and the eyes of a dark lustrous hazel. But the expression was beyond painting, so sweetly pure was it, and so sweetly noble. . . . [A face which seemed] to utter a coming perfection of our nature, not to be attained perhaps on this sinful earth. (KB, p. 47)

Her face always expresses great dignity and purity, and her manner is "a beautiful combination of tenderness, of patient management and gentle imperiousness" (KB, p. 159). But Kate is more than graceful, beautiful, and delicately feminine; she is "manly" in a sense: "she was thoughtful, judicial, deliberate, and a little slow. . . . In her aquiline face . . .

was a waiting, holdfast power, like that in the face of Washington" (KB, p. 257). Physically and mentally Kate is an extremely attractive woman, and in the limited society of the Hartland district, she is "the loveliest of women."

Kate is much like the typical Southern girl in many ways. She is innocent and naive, very unworldly, and when she is talking to young gentlemen, she always holds their attention and adoration with a shy, girlish flush. Kate blushes when she is passionately excited or emotionally exasperated. When her aunt, Mrs. Chester, questions her about Frank McAlister, Kate colors under the sharp gaze of her aunt, and when Jenny Levine teases her about loving Frank, Jenny says, "Oh, how you blush!" (KB, p. 205). When Kate secures the aid of her grandfather, Colonel Kershaw, in trying to put an end to the feud, Kate's face flushes with hope (KB, p. 142). But Kate's blushing is not a feminine weapon used to attract men. "Her purity and nobility of soul, obvious to every worthy beholder, are what draw adorers" (KB, p. 374).

Kate is not aware of the potency of her manner and her form because she is not "experienced in society, or in novels, or in reveries" (KB, p. 68). She does

not understand the ultimate power of her sexuality. To Captain Brien she is "the most charming, innocent, modest" (KB, p. 50) young lady; to Frank McAlister she is a "goddess" (KB, p. 65); to her brother Tom she is an angel (KB, p. 94); to her father and older brothers she is a child to worship (KB, p. 130); to her grandfather she is a "grand young lady" (KB, p. 140); to Major Lawson she is a "Beautiful creature" (KB, 141); and to Bentley Armitage she "suggested a better world" (KB, p. 149). Kate listens to their compliments and accepts their attentions without "the slightest thought towards flirting" (KB, p. 47).

Kate is the ideal woman, and her attitudes and opinions are what a reader expects from an ideal woman. Her nature is completely passive, and her reactions to all situations are guided by her cultural development, her training, and her background. When Frank proposes to her on board the Mersey, after having known her for only nine days, Kate is stunned--"She was not angry, . . . simply amazed, and in a certain sense shocked" (KB, p. 71). Kate does not answer Frank; she neither accepts or refuses his offer because she has no answer. Kate is "not gifted for effort, and she puts forth none. She waits like a diety, for the worship which is due her, not even perceiving that it

is due. She is as calm in appearance as Greek art, and as sure of admiration. . . . The more unconscious she is of worship and the more indifferent to it, the more she commands it" (KB, p. 374).

Kate Beaumont is a highly idealized character. Her reactions are ordinary and expected, common to the fictional heroines of the period. She does not grow or mature; she only achieves success. The episodic events of her life are only melodramatic contrivances which successively increase her mental anguish and pain, but, in the true romantic, sentimental vein, they culminate to make Kate's eventual success more sweet. After she meets her lover, the sinking of the *Mersey*, the ramifications of the feud, the plight of her sister, and the death of her grandfather are not tragedies in any real sense; they are only obstacles which stand between Kate and her ultimate happiness. However, Kate is not unimportant; she is in many ways the antithesis of the other women characters. The perfection of her character is shown by how most of the other women characters fail to measure up to the ideal standards of Southern womanhood demonstrated by Kate. Kate possesses all of the virtues inherent in the mythical, Southern, romantic tradition. But,

as William Dean Howells has said, "the want of something salient in her appearances unfits her for quotation" (Heroines, p. 161).

Although they are only minor supporting characters, the McAlister women, Frank's mother and his sister Mary, are derived from the same vein as Kate. Mrs. McAlister is "a tall, pale, gray, mild-eyed woman" (KB, p. 153), "religious and tender-hearted, . . . [who] looked upon the code of honor with steady horror" (KB, p. 154). George McAlister, the eldest son, says that his mother is: "one of the armies that are marshalled by the Lord of hosts . . . She *is* a peacemaker . . . I've heard her say that she almost regretted having a boy; if her children were only all girls this feud might have died out" (KB, pp. 156-157). Mary McAlister, an attractive, cheerful girl, is "quiet and very good" (KB, p. 115), and she too longs "for the holiness and salvation of a lasting peace" (KB, p. 167).

The female McAlisters are true to the cultural heritage of the family; they are always passive, "silent, obedient to their male folk, as was their custom" (KB, p. 224); however, family affections at times prove to be stronger than family traditions.

When Mrs. McAlister and Mary first meet Kate, they fall in love with her, and they are very pleased that Frank has chosen such a beautiful, charming girl. But when the feud resumes, they both realize that Kate is lost to Frank, so, noting the young man's increasing despondency, they decide to get her back. After much "spiritual shuddering" and fearful trembling, the ladies realize that their "duty" as women is to "Frank's happiness and Frank's prospects" (KB, p, 332); thus, knowing full well that "To bring about their sweet purpose, they must controvert the awful will of their lord and master" (KB, p. 331), they oppose Judge Mc-Alister and petition for a peaceful settlement of the feud. This is probably the first and only time in the lives of these quiet, passive women that they ever do anything irregular or out of character.

However, not all of the women characters are one-dimensional figures which float passively through the novel. Mrs. Chester and Jenny Devine are female characters who exert a pressure within their own sphere of influence. Mrs. Chester, Kate's aunt, is a haughty individual who can not believe that she has passed her youth:

> [She] was well preserved; her complexion brunette, but tolerably clear,--from a distance; her hair very black, to be sure, but honestly her own, even to the color; her face long, but not lean, and with high and rather fine features, . . . Her form had not kept quite so well, being obviously a little to exurberent, notwithstanding the cunning of dressmakers. What was repellent about her, at least to an attentive and sensitive observer, was her smile. It was over sweet; it did not fascinate; it put you on your guard. Even her eyes, with all their fine color and sparkle, were not entirely pleasing, being too watchful and cunning and at times too combative. On the whole, it was the face of a woman who had long been a flirt, . . . who had seen trouble without getting any good out of it, who had ended by becoming something of a tartar, and all without ceasing to be a flirt.
> (KB, pp. 63-64)

Moreover, Mrs. Chester is a "harebrained, spiteful old flirt" (KB, p. 376). She needs attention and petting, and she wants it from young men:

> It was almost a mania with her; it had grown upon her during her married life with a husband twenty years her senior; and now that she was a middle-aged widow, she was fairly possessed by it. There was always a youngster at her apronstrings, held there by Heaven knows what mature female magic, and making both himself and her more ridiculous than should be.
> (KB, p. 73)

When Mrs. Chester meets Frank McAlister, she immediately takes a fancy to him. She tries repeatedly to impress him with her wit and her worldliness, but the independent young man will not dangle from her apronstrings because he is interested solely in Kate

Beaumont. The cunning "elder baby" (KB, p. 79) becomes furious when she realizes that the young man is not interested: it is unthinkable to her that any real man should prefer an immature child to an aristocratic lady.

Mrs. Chester does believe herself to be an aristocratic lady: she is a "'Beaumont all through,' keeping up family prejudices and grudges with the family loyalty of a woman" (KB, p. 79). She is enamored of Southern tradition. Her most pleasant memories are of her being the cause of two duels in her youth. However, when she learns from "her ancient maid and foster-sister, Miriam, a tall, dignified, and middle-aged negress" (KB, pp. 136-137), of a duel to be fought between Wallace McAlister, Frank's older brother, and Vincent Beaumont, Kate's older brother, she stops to consider the consequences of the feud. After Miriam's lecture on the evils of dueling and "white folkses notions" (KB, p. 138), Mrs. Chester decides, aristocratic or not, the feud should be ended. But Mrs. Chester is not really interested in stopping the feud because she cares "little for any one's feelings, [she would do or say anything just] so that she compassed her ends" (KB, p. 138). She wants Frank

McAlister because he is a handsome young man who pays her no attention, and she is "the woman to go after what she wanted with the eager scramble of a terrier after a rat" (KB, p. 168).

When a truce is declared in the feud, Frank begins to call at the Beaumont plantation. So Mrs. Chester devises a plan to get her young "Titan" (KB, p. 200 and passim) at her apronstrings. She persuades Bentley Armitage, the younger brother of Kate's sister's husband, that Kate is interested in him and that he should court the young lady; thus, Kate will marry Bentley and Frank will be free. To support her plan Mrs. Chester mentions the consequences of a McAlister-Beaumont marriage to her brother, laughing "a bit hysterically" (KB, p. 179) as she does so. During the conversation Mrs. Chester mentions money matters--the Kershaw plantation is to be Kate's inheritance--and Kate's father accuses her of being too materialistic for a Beaumont. Mrs. Chester is "Stung by her brother's charge" (KB, p. 181). When her plans fail to get results, Mrs. Chester is near the point of abandoning her hopeless cause, but then she learns that Nellie Armitage is coming to visit. "She remembered Nellie as a 'true Beaumont,' full of

the family pride and passion, the fieriest perhaps of Peyton's children. . . . [and] Poor, bewitched, unreasonable, almost irrational Mrs. Chester plucked up her spirit a little as she looked forward to Nellie's arrival" (KB, p. 182).

But Nellie's coming proves diastrous for Mrs. Chester because the daughter sides with the father--they both feel that Mrs. Chester is "a babbling busybody" (KB, p. 183), not a true Beaumont. Furthermore, Mrs. Chester and Nellie have fought for many years, sometimes even physically. "The fight had been renewed many times, the niece gaining more and more victories as she grew older, for she was a cleverer woman than Mrs. Chester, and also braver" (KB, p. 185). Unfortunately for Mrs. Chester, Nellie soon realizes that her "unhappy, ridiculous, irrational relative" (KB, p. 194) is in love with the young McAlister. On being discovered, Mrs. Chester shakes "with shame and rage" (KB, p. 195), and although she knows she can not give him up, she decides to cease making eyes at Frank in public. Mrs. Chester, much to her chagrin, fully understands that Nellie will always stand between her and anything she wants to do, especially between her and Frank McAlister.

When Mrs. Chester decides that her only recourse is to get Frank completely away from Kate, Nellie, and the whole Beaumont clan, she seeks the aid of her "protege," that young flirt who had caused the dispute between Wallace McAlister and Vincent Beaumont--Jenny Devine. Jenny is "a dangerous looking fairy, rather of a brunettė order, sparkling with black eyes, glistening with white teeth, and one shoulder poked high out of her dress for a temptation" (KB, p. 115). "Rather hoydenish and over-coquettish," Jenny is "one of those young ladies who rule by pertness. . . . [Much like Mrs. Chester, she likes] to play one man against another" (KB, p. 117). Jenny accepts Mrs. Chester's challenge to her femininity and proceeds to do her enchanting best on Frank. She is very successful because she has "a thousand tricks for occupying and amusing men" (KB, p. 206). However, when jealous Mrs. Chester accuses her of openly flirting with Frank, Jenny, insulted and hurt, immediately leaves the Beaumont plantation, vowing never again to participate in the intrigues of a "cracked old flirt" (KB, p. 194).

Frustrated and hurt, Mrs. Chester begins to lose her mind, and as her mind fails, she grows more

"spiteful, mischievous, and full of the devil" (KB, p. 203). She can not give up her quest, so she devises several stupid and irrational plans for achieving her ends. She grows more and more jealous of ladies that are even courteous to Frank. When one of her plans fails, she becomes completely unreasonable. For instance, when Mrs. Devine--"one of those mild, soft-spoken women, who have no mind nor will of their own, but who, in carrying out the desires of some adored being, can show the unexpected persistence and pluck of a setting hen" (KB, p. 380)--criticizes one of her plans, Mrs. Chester breaks out in such "a fit of passion as one seldom sees outside of a lunatic asylum" (KB, p. 381). She begins to talk "with such rapidity as to throw off a slight spattering of foam from her lips" (KB, p. 386). She is eventually confined to her room, and within a year of the marriage of Frank and Kate she dies of "softening of the brain" (KB, p. 424).

Perhaps the most notable female character in the novel is Nellie Armitage, Kate's older sister (she is twenty-four years old). Nellie is active, dynamic, and aggressive from the moment she steps into the Beaumont house, and she bears "a certain resemblance to her father" (KB, p. 182):

> She was of medium height, with a figure more compact than is usual in American women, her chest being uncommonly full, her shoulders superbly plump, and her arms solid. Her complexion was a clear brunette, without color; her hair a very dark chestnut and slightly wavy; her eyes brown, steady, and searching. Barring that the cheek-bones were a trifle too broad and the lower jaw a trifle too strong, her face was a handsome one, the front view being fairly oval and the profile full of spirit. There was something singular in her expression; it was a beseeching air, alternating with an air of resistance; she seemed in one moment to implore favor, and in the next to stand at bay. To all appearance it was the face of a woman who had had a stirring and trying heart-history. You could not study it long without wishing to know what had happened to her. (KB, p. 182)

Initially, prompted by family pride and spite for Mrs. Chester, Nellie wants to rekindle the feud and to dismiss Bentley Armitage, her brother-in-law and Mrs. Chester's proposed suitor for Kate. However, before taking any definite action, Nellie talks first with Kate, and then, for her sister's sake, she decides to talk to Frank. Nellie begins her conversation with Frank with a negative attitude, but the young man's "honesty and beauty" perplexes and confuses her, and she is amazed at him wanting to work for a living--he wants to pursue his professional training in geology and mineralogy. As the conversation progresses, her opposition weakens, and she ends the conversation by giving "the young man a tacit

permission to continue some silent sort of courtship" (KB, p. 193). However, after the interview, Nellie is not passive. Although she does not at the moment intend to rekindle the feud, she does seek out Bentley Armitage, and she tells him: "You sha'n't court her. If you do, I'll tell my whole story to my father and brothers. Then we'll see if ever an Armitage enters this house again" (KB, p. 202).

Nellie's attitude toward the feud and toward her sister's happiness are mixed, much the same as the other women characters in the novel: she finds family affections stronger than family traditions. When the tensions of living become too great for Kate and all the Beaumonts fear that she will have a nervous breakdown, Nellie suggests that Kate come to visit her and her husband. Kate agrees. During the first few days of the visit Kate is thoroughly enchanted by her brother in law. She is in love with Frank McAlister, and she believes in love; therefore, Kate believes that her sister and her brother-in-law have the happiest marriage possible. Nellie, gentle and noble, is tight-lipped and silent through it all. She is so pleased to see Kate's spirits rise that she goes along with her husband's act. Kate does

not suspect that Randolph Armitage is putting on an act for her, and she can not see through his facade. But Randolph can not maintain his facade, and one evening he leaves and is gone all night. He has gone to a "cracker ball."

The ball is held in a cabin in the woods a short distance from the Armitage plantation:

> This cabin was the residence of two "lone women," who held it rent free of its charitable owner, a wealthy physician in the village. The eldest was Nancy Gile, thirty-five, yellow-haired, white-faced, freckled, red-eyed, dirty, ragged, shiftless, idle, a beggar, and otherwise of questionable life. The youngest was Sally Huggs, a small, square-built, rosy-cheeked, black-eyed girl of not more than seventeen, who had run away from her mother to secure larger liberty to flirtation. Nancy Gile had two illegitimate children, and Sally Huggs was herself an illegitimate child. (KB, p. 265)

It is paradoxical that Randolph Armitage, a rich, handsome, cultured individual, prefers two such low creatures above his wife, his family, and his home--but he does. Nancy Gile and Sally Huggs represent the poor white trash of the South, and they indicate the basic immorality which was inherent in the South, especially the baseness of the Southern planter.

On the morning after, Kate learns the truth about her sister's domestic bliss. Nellie tells her that Randolph drinks excessively, and when he does,

he breaks things in the house; he beats, insults, and degrades his wife; and he seeks the company of other women. Kate is astonished:

> "I wonder at you," said Kate once. "I never imagined that a woman could have such fortitude."
> "Fortitude!" returned Nellie. "I am intelligent enough to know that it is not the fortitude that you mean. It is mere hardened callousness and want of feeling. I ceased some time [sic] ago to be a woman. I am a species of brute."
> (KB, pp. 280-281)

But Nellie is no brute, she is very much a woman. "The law of the 'survival of the fittest' had blessed her" (KB, p. 316), and she sticks to her marriage because she feels that it is her duty as a woman to do so. She has kept her secret well because she knows that if the Beaumont men ever find out about how she has been treated, they will kill Randolph.

However, she is not concerned with nor does she have sympathy for Randolph; she is concerned with her own self-interest: "What I care for is the exposure. If they shoot him, people would learn why. It would be known that I had failed; that Nellie Beaumont could not live with her husband; that she could not lie on her bed after making it; that she had failed as a wife and a woman" (KB, p. 274). True to the traditions of her heritage and her culture, Nellie's

greatest fear is to fail in her duty as a woman and as a member of her society. But ironically, when Kate offers to stay with Nellie during the night, Nellie replies, "You can't . . . My husband has a right to come to my room at any time" (KB, p. 281). Even insult, degradation, and fear can not make Nellie shirk her duty as a woman and a wife. Randolph does go to his wife's room that night, seeking the whiskey she had hidden. Kate, awakened by a noise, goes to Nellie's room, and there she finds Randolph threatening his wife with a knife. When Kate enters, Randolph relinquishes his hold on his wife, but as he turns to leave the room, he sneers at Nellie: "That's all I came here for. Do you suppose I wanted *you*" (KB, p. 284). The next morning Nellie leaves her husband, but her action is based on an exaggerated sense of shame and failure, rather than on a fear of Randolph.

Nellie is an aristocratic individual. While working for Kate's happiness, she demonstrates all of the tenderness, understanding, and tenacity which is inherent in the character of the ideal woman of the South. But she is not Kate. Nellie's independent spirit and "abundant pugnacity" (KB, p. 316) also give her "manly" qualities which are denied the other female characters; she is not passive, nor is she

one-sided. She is rounded, whole, complete; real enough to represent all that is desirable in a declining civilization. Nellie's high sense of duty, of honor, and of self-pride give dignity to her suffering. Her confrontations with her husband mold her noble character, and the fact that she remains with him as long as she does is her way of defending her honor, of fighting her duel, of maintaining her family traditions and her way of life.

CHAPTER IV

PLAYING THE MISCHIEF

Playing the Mischief is a novel of political satire which takes place in Washington, D. C., during the early years of an unnamed administration, which appears to be that of U. S. Grant. In the novel De Forest seeks to expose the graft and corruption which were rampant in the Federal government during the early 1870's. To achieve his purpose, De Forest depicts the intricate, diabolical machinations of the notorious claim lobby.

The novel opens with Josephine Murray, a bewitchingly attractive female claimant, traveling to the national capital from upstate New York. On the train from New York to Washington, Josie meets the Honorable G. W. Hollowbread, and soon she tells him about her claim. Hollowbread is skeptical about a $20,000 claim for a barn burned in 1812 and feels that Josie is just another fraudulent claimant who wants "to screw a lot of money out of the Treasury,"[1] but he is so enchanted by her that he agrees to work her claim.

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[1] John William De Forest, *Playing the Mischief* (State College, Pa., 1961), p. 63; hereafter cited as *PM*.

In Washington Josie stays with her late husband's uncle and aunt, the Reverend John Murray and his wife Huldah. Another uncle, Julian Murray, "a full colonel in the regular army, and chief of an office in the War Department" (PM, p. 97), also lives in Washington. Josie does not tell her relatives about the nature of her visit. She feels that they will oppose her claim because they all feel that public funds are a sacred trust and because the family has already collected $2,000 from a claim filed by the family lawyers shortly after the War of 1812 for the same barn.

Later Josie's immorality, intrigues, and duplicity are indirectly responsible for the death of her husband's uncle and aunt, but the elder Murrays initially find Josie so exciting and so youthfully fresh that they permit her to use their parlor to receive guests, and Josie establishes her base of operations at the Murray house. One of her first calls is to Mrs. Frances Hooker Warden and her daughter. Mrs. Warden is a middle-aged widow who has been trying to push a claim through Congress for several years; however, Belle Warden, the daughter, despises her mother's claim. Nonetheless, undaunted by criticism, Mrs. Warden and Josie decide to join forces and make a concerted assault on Congress.

From the platform of respectability provided by the Murrays, Josie launches a notorious social career. She attends teas, parties, and dances in such profusion that she is soon the most sought after woman in Washington. The prominent social queens, Olympia Vane and Mrs. Senator Ironman, are envious of Josie's rapid success, and they hate her for it. However, Josie has no trouble at all with the male population of Washington. At a presidential reception, Josie meets Congressman Sykes Drummond, the representative from her district, and Congressman Aristides Cato Bradford, a former beau. Josie uses her feminine charms to make these two men agents for her claim, and although both men are thoroughly enchanted by her, she succeeds in securing only the aid of Drummond because Bradford is too conscientious and too moral to become involved in such fraudulent dealings. Nonetheless, Josie does have two enthusiastic congressmen--Hollowbread and Drummond--to work her claim, for each expects romantic reward for his effort.

Josie is so selfish that she trusts neither of her agents and does a great deal of lobbying of her own. By studying the workings of the lobby and by gathering information from a variety of women in

Washington, Josie discovers that by adding such things to the claim as livestock, farm equipment, liveries, outbuildings, fences and various other items which might be in or around a barn, she can raise the amount of her claim; of course the value of her loss must draw compound interest. Although she becomes an effective claim-pusher, Josie dismisses neither Hollowbread nor Drummond; in fact she becomes engaged to both of them, simultaneously. However, before the end of the session and without the knowledge of either of her agents, she hires a professional lobbyist, Jacob Pike. Although Pike wants $50,000 for getting the claim through Congress, Josie bargains him down to $10,000; Pike rationalizes that he will get a great deal of publicity by helping her, so he accepts her offer.

On the last day of the session, Josie's claim for $100,000 is carried. She is rich. After receiving the money, Josie dismisses Hollowbread and Drummond without a "thank you," and she refuses to pay Pike because she doesn't want to deface her nice, round principal of $100,000 by spending part of it on such a despicable creature as a lobbyist. At the end of the novel, Josie goes to a banquet given by a notable

banker and his lieutenants, "a gang of affiliated blacklegs . . . who are willing . . . to pluck the feathers of a lucky novice" (PM, p. 448).

At twenty-two, Josephine Murray considers herself very much a lady of culture and refinement:

> She was handsome enough to make it an agreeable pastime to look at her; her manners, while proper and lady-like, were facile, gracious, and winning, if one might not even say alluring; furthermore, she was sufficiently bright, well-read, well-traveled and fluent in speech to be remarkably entertaining; and finally, she was gifted with a coquettishness which gave her a prompt hold upon the attention of gentlemen.
>
> . . . .
>
> [She] had a wonderful faculty not only for making people like her on short notice, but also for leading them to believe that she reciprocated the yearning. Her passing flirtations had a semblance of being love at first sight, and love, too, of an impulsive, fascinated, durable nature. (PM, p. 43)

Josie not only looks like a lady, but she also sounds and acts like a lady. She has an incomparable talent for "brisk, dashing narration" (PM, p. 89), and observers can not help noticing her cultured voice and her "neat, distinct, musical, delightful enunciation, without a stammer of awkwardness or a mince of affectation" (PM, p. 51). And although Josie is almost a pauper because her late husband, "'poor' Augustus" (PM, p. 75 and passim), had squandered his fortune, she appears to be a dignified lady; "the trimness of

her figure, the grace and taste of her costume, and the litheness of her walk" (PM, p. 357) instantly distinguish her as "a born and trained queen of society" (PM, p. 193).

On first meeting Josie, people generally like her a great deal. Women are usually impressed with Josie's girlish good-nature and free and easy chit-chat, and men are enchanted by her giggling gayety and roguish self-possession. Josie is at all times angelic and even-tempered, "one of the most patient, amiable, courteous creatures that ever wore a bonnet" (PM, p. 137). Under no circumstances does "she ever quarrel" (PM, p. 60) with anyone, because she believes that she can get more out of people with compliments than with sarcasm. However, after knowing and watching and listening to her for only a short period, observers understand "that if she chose to be satirical she could take the skin off" (PM, p. 53). Nonetheless, because of the initial impression of fine personality and high nobility which Josie demonstrates, she becomes "the most potent and petted lady that ever came to Washington to seek her fortune" (PM, p. 353).

Josie is truly a woman who represents her time. Humbly, she does not care to think of herself as "pretty," but vainly she wants her "best friends" to

think her so (PM, p. 252). She is a "fragile and sensitive child of lazy luxury, the fine lady of that century" (PM, p. 161). She pursues her claim because she wants money enough to maintain her way of life, and she feels that the primary purpose of the "Nice people in Washington" is "to help along people who can't afford to be altogether nice" (PM, p. 96). However, she does not want just sustenance; her greed demands ostentatious wealth, and she will "as lief get it [money] by swindling and perjury as in any other way" (PM, p. 330). But Josie maintains such "a great deal of womanly dignity and sensitiveness of perception," and she is so very "capable of doing the nice thing with the promptness of instinct" (PM, p. 158), that people overlook what she does and ignore the ultimate consequences of her actions.

Josie constantly breaks "her own pledges and promises" (PM, p. 373). She lies instinctively to her admirers, and when her deceptions are exposed, she discovers that she can best circumvent ill feelings by a "confession of error," and by saying that she is "so sorry!" (PM, p. 189) Her confessions are always successful because she is "not a mere counter-feiter of feelings"; she really has "strong and almost

fervent impulses, evanescent though they might be" (PM, p. 243); indeed most of her emotions are evanescent and superficial:

> If she had not much heart, she had an intellect which could stir up, bring to the surface and exhibit whatever heart she had, and could thus give her the appearance of an ardent nature. Her talk illumined her feelings; she spoke so fluently and vigorously that she could impassion herself; only the passion was apt to die to ashes almost as quick as she stopped chattering. (PM, p. 154)

But Josie's manner is so humble and so sweet and so complimentary that people cannot see through her facade, and therefore they do not really mind being used by her.

Intelligent and clever, Josie is a good judge of human nature. She possesses the perception and sensibility "to distinguish clearly between noble and ignoble characters, and to consider the former 'lovely' and the latter 'horrid'" (PM, pp. 191-192). For example, she feels no reservation about employing and using to handle her claim a man such as Sykes Drummond, who believes that Congressmen are really the "representatives of the wire-pullers and log-rollers who run the primary meetings" (PM, p. 57); however, although Aristides Cato Bradford has a very low opinion of claims and claimants in general and of her claim in particular, she thoroughly admires this arrogant,

authoritative young man who is "especially proud of his character for honor, and very touchy to any imputation upon it" (PM, p. 123). Although Josie has a great deal of respect for nobleness and morality of character, her selfishness causes her to push her unjust claim.

Although selfishness is a dominant element in Josie's character, she also has a curious, mischievous nature which prompts her to have "a fancy for queer things" (PM, p. 336). For instance, at one time she considers turning her siren charms on Colonel Julian Murray because she whimsically wonders what it would be like to be her own aunt. And although she is personable, bright, and clever, she has "the thoughtless whims of a child, who kills birds and kittens without knowing that it hurts them" (PM, p. 426). Josie does not like the type of person she outwardly is, but she so thoroughly believes in her rationalizations that she is unconscious of the fact that she has no "moral discipline at all, or any ethical base to start from" (PM, p. 356).

Men are especially delighted to be used by Josie because her demure smile sows "wild hopes" and promises "rich rewards." Josie's favorite coquettish trick

for getting attention is to only "half say something, and then wait to be questioned, thus making it easier for her to tell what she wanted to tell" (PM, p. 121). After making the acquaintance of some man, Josie consciously utilizes all of her extremely feminine charms to destroy his will to resist her. She elicits great passion and sincere loyalty from all her admirers. For instance, after the presidential reception, she has so many Congressional "scalps" that everyone in Washington knows she is there, and no one doubts that her venture will be successful. Josie even manages to stop the reception line long enough to get a kind comment and a hearty smile out of the president. She is audacious, coy, and witty enough to dazzle most men, and she is always adroit and masterful enough not to be dazzled by them.

Josie can flirt with any man, no matter what his age. For her "A male creature was . . . a male creature, and therein attractive enough, or at least bearable" (PM, p. 155). She can infatuate the "girlishly handsome," twenty-five year old Hamilton Bray with as much ease and nonchalance as she can enticingly coerce the "love-cracked," sexagenarian Hollowbread. However, even though she is one of those

unusual women who can flirt "with twenty men at once" (PM, p. 181) and keep them all deliriously happy and frustrated, she limits her flirtations to "weak men and naughty ones" (PM, p. 192) because they are more easily controlled than men of conscience and morality. But although she has many, many esteemed admirers on the string, Josie can not bear the thought of losing even one of them. For example, even though she is engaged to both Hollowbread and Drummond, when she learns that Bradford is engaged to Belle Warden, Josie cries herself to sleep that night, "ready to kiss the darkness whenever she . . . [thinks] of his name" (PM, p. 404). Josie's problem is that she is in love "with the actual business of making love; and the more difficult any special flirtation appeared, the more it fascinated her" (PM, p. 311).

From all outward appearances Josie is a lady, but for her the term "lady" is license to be devoid of all moral awareness. Young, unskilled, and widowed, her only means of supporting herself are flirtations and claim-hunting. Most of her friends, relatives, and associates, though they initially like her very much, rue the day that they met her, but she has such an emotional hold on them that they cannot break off

the relationship. Her acquaintances feel that her inconstant nature and her deceptive cleverness are an indication of illness which she cannot help, and that "A medical observer might easily conclude that they were connected with her circulation, or were in some other way idiosyncratic and symptomatic" (PM, p. 370). Her uncle Colonel Julian Murray has the greatest insight, understanding, and compassion for Josie because he is a shrewd adherent of the theory of evolution and the survival of the fittest. During one of their first interviews he tells Josie: "What with Max Muller and Whitney, and Galton and Lecky, and Spencer and Darwin, and forty more amazing chaps, I am up to my eyes in new ideas all the while" (PM, p. 104). Colonel Murray applies some of his "new ideas" to Josie's situation, and he tells Bradford in realistic, military terms: "Life is a battle. You get your ball, and it does for you. But the man who fired it did not aim at you; he was acting blindly and to save himself; he bore no malice. Josie's faults are selfishness, dishonesty, and lying. She is not malignant" (PM, p. 390). Josie Murray is worldly, greedy, and aggressive enough to devise a plan for an assault on Washington and see it through. "Much of her life was guided by plans,

although her conduct generally had the air of being childishly impulsive" (PM, p. 191). She lets no one stand between her and her proposed goal. But De Forest implies that her turn will come; she will someday be in someone's way, and she herself will get hurt.

Old Mrs. Murray, Josie's aunt and the wife of the Reverend John Murray, is "a singular-looking old lady, small and lean in figure, with a little white, puckered face, an eager expression, and jerky motions" (PM, p. 74). She is married to a man fifteen years her junior, but there is such mutual affection, dotage, and love in the match that "It would be hard to find two other beings who cared for each other more tenderly and vigilantly than did these two elderly invalids" (PM, p. 101). Both the Reverend and Mrs. Murray have money, but she has a special attitude toward her possessions:

> Mrs. Murray had great respect for her property. It was inherited property; it was old family property; it was much nobler than earned property. To leave such wealth as this to any one would be much more than enrichment: it would be like conferring honors, decorations, patents of nobility. (PM, p. 79)

When Mrs. Murray learns that "poor Augustus" had squandered his inheritance, she offers to buy Josie

a new shawl; furthermore, she initially has such a warm feeling for Josie that she decides to change her will and leave Josie $5,000, but she doesn't.

Mrs. Murray is perhaps very frugal because she can remember when money was worth more. She remembers a great many things: "notwithstanding her seventy-eight years, and her decadence of mind as well as of body, [she] had a wonderful memory for the transactions of long ago," and with "a succession of starts and quivers," like "an electric shock" (PM, p. 167), she recalls a burned barn, a barn that had been paid for, Josie's barn. Her frugality also determines her pack-rat nature. The old lady saves scraps of anything, old bottles, pieces of material, everything, and "Every little loose article in the house is folded up and tied, and labeled . . . She is a person of immense industry" (PM, p. 345).

Mrs. Murray has one very noticeable eccentricity--she repeats the last phrase of almost everything her husband says. For instance, when Josie first arrives at the Murray house, the aunt, uncle, and niece-in-law are discussing the fact that Josie is a widow:

> "Yes," sighed the rector. "It is hard to have a husband swept away so early."
> "Swept away so early!" repeated Mrs. Murray . . .

> "The Divine Providence seems to be very careless of our earthly happiness."
> "Careless of our earthly happiness!" murmured the old lady.
> "But if we were blessed continually here, we should never desire the better hereafter."
> "Never desire the better hereafter!" gasped Mrs. Murray, getting a little out of breath.
> "I need not tell you how we sympathize with you in a sorrow which is partly our own."
> "Our own!" added the old lady, falling considerably in the rear.
> "We are glad, very glad, that you have come to us."
> "Glad you have come to us!" repeated Mrs. Murray, freshening up under the influence of sympathy, and coming in almost even with him. (PM, pp. 75-76)

Mrs. Murray is glad that Josie has come. She likes society, and she faithfully keeps a diary. Each morning she gigglingly enters every name and every detail of every item of gossip she hears. Josie brings excitement to the old lady's life, but soon Mrs. Murray jerks and twitches at every ring of the doorbell because Josie has so many admirers who come to see her that it makes the old lady nervous. After the Bloomer Nancy Appleyard has jealously tried to shoot Sykes Drummond, the old lady condemns Josie when she is scandalously identified as the attractive third-party; however, Mrs. Murray enjoys reading about the incident in the paper. However, when the old lady learns that Josie is pushing the $100,000 claim for a worthless barn, she can stand no more because her acute sense

of monetary values and her pride in family honor have been desecrated. As a result of his wife's state of excitement and her failing constitution, the Reverend makes Josie move out of the house, but when Mrs. Murray learns what has happened, she is upset even more because she fears that she has lost "a highly valued plaything" (PM, p. 275).

Shortly after her arrival in Washington, Josie calls at the residence of Mrs. Frances Hooker Warden and her daughter, Belle. Mrs. Warden, a widow, is "a lively, muscular lady of about forty-five, with a brown complexion, black and glittering eyes, and masses of black hair" (PM, p. 82). "A silly, flighty, feather-headed creature" (PM, p. 276), she is "a veteran of the world, once a beauty, but now prematurely jaded with ill-rewarded intriguing" (PM, p. 86). Belle Warden is "a tall and Junoian blonde of nineteen, with regular features and noticeably clear, iron-grey eyes" (PM, pp. 82-82); "As a man, she would be perfect; but as a woman, she is a failure" (PM, p. 92). The mother and the daughter are sharply contrasted personalities. Belle is "a straight forward, sensible, judicial young person" while her mother is "an excitable, adventurous, flirtish, old pussy-cat" (PM, p. 92).

Mrs. Warden is a scheming claimant who has been working the Congress for several years. She is the "great-granddaughter of the famous revolutionary naval hero, Commodore John Saul Hooker, and she is pushing a claim for $100,000 in behalf of his estate, for which she is the only surviving heir. She feels that her great-grandfather was the savior of the country, except for "Washington, Greene, and one or two other generals" (PM, p. 84), but that after the war he had been slighted and snubbed and turned away from the country he had saved. Much like Josie, she is unskilled and believes that someone owes her a living, and her only means of supporting herself and her daughter are flirtations and claim-hunting. Belle sharply disagrees with her mother's chosen occupation not only on legal grounds but also on moral grounds because she wants "to see people do the right thing" (PM, p. 134); however, because of her mother's nervous, excitable nature, Belle abandons satire and scolding and confines "her warfare to an occasional protest or sarcasm" (PM, p. 85).

Even though Belle constantly badgers her mother about her work, there is a great deal of mutual love and affection between the two women, and Mrs. Warden is constantly encouraging Belle to "use her beauty,

as other handsome girls do" (PM, p. 92), to get a man. But cool, mannish, respectable Belle will not go seeking a man. When Mrs. Warden learns that Josie is an old friend of Mr. Bradford's, even though she likes Josie very much, she is jealous of her because she knows that the clever little coquette can eclipse her daughter. Nonetheless, Mrs. Warden hangs on to Josie's skirts, hoping that her impact on Washington will create a sensation of such magnitude that her own claim will be carried.

When Josie leaves the Murrays' home, she boards with Mrs. Warden and Belle, and the "harum-scarum," jealous old flirt becomes even more concerned about her daughter's prospects. However, her fears are groundless because Mr. Bradford soon proposes to Belle, although he stipulates that Mrs. Warden must make Josie move and that Mrs. Warden must withdraw her own claim. Mrs. Warden readily accepts the former condition, but reluctantly agrees to the latter. In the long run, her selfishness and her gambling old heart prevent her from withdrawing the claim. Nonetheless, both the Warden ladies are content for a while. Noble Belle has found happiness in a kindred spirit. Mr. Bradford believes she is his superior, fit to be his commanding officer, and he

tells Colonel Murray, "She will not let me do an unworthy action" (PM, p. 390). Mrs. Warden is in ecstacy because her pure, virtuous daughter has bested Josie Murray. However, on the morning of the day after the last session of Congress, Mrs. Warden reads in the paper that Josie's claim has carried, for it was attached to the Army Appropriation Bill at the last minute. When the greedy old coquette agonizingly realizes that her claim has been removed from the Army Bill in favor of Josie's, she clutches "her hands to her heart," and rolls "out of her chair upon the floor, dead!" (PM, p. 415).

The remaining women characters in the novel are utilized to depict types which haunted Washington political circles during the early 1870's. Jessie Cohen constantly stalks the halls of Congress. She paints historic and patriotic pictures for the galleries of the capital. "The art is not high, but the pay is. Two thousand dollars made a square yard of daubing sublime" (PM, p. 125). "Miss Appropriation Cohen" demonstrates that the public till is very easy to get into. Like Josie Murray, she is an attractive young woman who uses her feminine charms very effectively for profit. When Josie questions Bradford

about the high pay for paintings of such poor artistic value, he says, "What is an ass of a legislator to do when Titania coaxes his long ears" (PM, p. 125).

Nancy Appleyard, the Bloomer, is a paradox. Egotistical, emotional, and confused, she is a lawyer without clients. She outwardly supports the cause of woman's rights, complete with beaver, boots, "plaited frock-coat, plaited cloth vest, and gathered cloth pantaloons" (PM, p. 109), but her sophomoric actions indicate that inwardly she is very much an unemancipated woman, complete with heartstrings, jealous rages, and a "lack of common sense" (PM, p. 210):

> A change of clothes, she thought, was all that was necessary to renovate society; and surely nothing could come more naturally to the feminine nature. A change of clothes, and, lo! Tyrant Man would be dethroned. Woman would mount beside him or above him, and Squire Appleyard would be the first and greatest of her sex. The greatest and one of the revealed handsomest, for there was her figure in plain discovery, and she saw it to be a lovely one.
>
> But, meanwhile, with the reformation only just budding, she had fallen desperately in love; and here she was crying at a man because he would not marry her, and delighted to scoff at her Messianic costume. (PM, p. 201)

Mrs. John Vane and Mrs. Senator Ironman are women similar in nature and attitude to Josie. Olympia Vane, "a lovely woman of the greedy, extravagant, envious, spiteful sort" (PM, p. 174), is a "glaring Cleopatra"

(PM, p. 228) who tries to hurt Josie every time she gets a chance because she is jealous of Josie's many conquests; Olympia has been the pet of Washington society the season before. Mrs. Senator Ironman, "a lady of excellent temper and worldly good sense" (PM, p. 228), has nothing to fear socially from either Josie or Olympia, so she defends Josie's mercurial rise because that is her way of vexing Olympia Vane, her husband's paramour.

However, all the women who have been discussed thus far are not completely representative of Washington society during the early 1870's. Also in Washington is Miss Elinor Ledyard, the daughter of an esteemed senator. She is twenty years old, admirable and agreeable, "yet not handsome enough to be considered a beauty. Her loveliness consisted largely in a thoroughly lady-like carriage, and an expression of perfect purity, and moral nobility" (PM, p. 230). Of her De Forest says: "It is the misfortune of one who writes the history of a claimant, that he can not be fastidious as to his company, nor give much space to personages of high worth. We have introduced Miss Ledyard mainly to show that we concede the presence of delicately pure souls in the political

circles of Washington" (PM, p. 231). De Forest believes that although there is much graft and corruption in the administration portrayed (historically, that of U. S. Grant) and that Congressmen are easy prey for charming, ruthless, predatory young ladies, there is still hope that the nation may weather the storm because there are still some individuals who maintain a balance of character.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

In a letter dated September 28, 1869, to The Galaxy Magazine, John W. De Forest explains his approach to writing as follows: "What I try to do is to sketch realistic characters & put them through a series of extraordinary & even grotesque circumstances. Such things excite remarks; some people like them and some don't; they may be sharply criticised by the common-place or hurried or jealous people who 'review' for the papers."[1] De Forest seems to have had a very objective attitude toward his profession as well as toward the critics of it. George F. Whicher says in Spiller, Thorpe, et al., Literary History of the United States (New York, 1948), "De Forest was a pioneer realist too honest for his own good in an age that expected falsifications in works of imagination" (I, 571). De Forest does not falsify nor alter what he sees in the world, and both contemporary and modern

[1] E. R. Hagemann, "John William De Forest and The Galaxy, Some Letters (1867-1872)," Bulletin of the New York Public Library, LIX (April 1955), 184.

scholars agree that De Forest reports historic and social events with great precision and accuracy. Perhaps contemporary critics did not do justice to his women characters. The _Scribner's_ reviewer of 1872 said: "As for Mr. De Forest's heroines, they are always of one type. . . . His heroines are simply tall little girls in long clothes: artless, affectionate, sweet, but singularly unintellectual."[2] At this time De Forest had recently published the novels _Miss Ravenel's Conversion from Secession to Loyalty_ (1867), _Overland_ (1871), and _Kate Beaumont_ (1872). The reviewer's comment refers only to the heroines, but his classifying these heroines as all of one type is definitely derogatory.

It must be remembered that De Forest, forgotten for fifty years, is considered a very minor writer. Modern scholars and critics of De Forest's works, in deviating from Howells and those who parrot him, have attempted to re-evaluate the women characters in light of a broader historical perspective, but they generally evaluate De Forest as a part of a movement, or a literary method, or a philosophical point of view.

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[2]See footnote 12, Chapter I.

However, in making their assessment of De Forest and his work, they tend to accept the women characters as second-rate creations because someone else has treated them as second-rate creations. For example, James F. Light in his critical biography says that Miss Appropriation Cohen is a "sculptress" (p. 146); she is a painter. Edward Wagenknecht in his Cavalcade of the American Novel marries Kate Beaumont's sister Nellie to her brother-in-law: "Nelly [sic], wife of the worthless Bentley Armitage" (p. 106); he also misspells her name. Arthur Hobson Quinn in his American Fiction: An Historical and Critical Survey consistently misspells Nelly [sic], Lilly [sic], and LaRue [sic]. Frank Bergmann in his article "DeForest [sic] in Germany," American Literary Realism, 1870-1910, IV (Fall 1968), did not bother to find out bow De Forest spelled his name. Even though these scholars and critics have illuminated De Forest as a minor literary figure, they have devoted themselves so much to movements, or to genres, or to philosophical points of view, that they have tended to be "commonplace or hurried." Perhaps their comments on De Forest's women characters have been based on these special interests rather than on a thorough study of the characters themselves in their particular situations.

De Forest states that Miss Ravenel's Conversion is a biography, and that Kate Beaumont and Playing the

Mischief are histories. The biographer or the historian must concern himself with people in their particular environments. He must consider the various forces and pressures which influence people's decisions and motivate people's actions. And then, if he is to be a good biographer or a good historian, he must interpret and record his observations objectively. In Literary History of the United States, Gordon S. Haight says, and many scholars concur, that De Forest treated "contemporary life with a complete objectivity he seems to have developed abroad" (II, 881).

De Forest's objective outlook on life as well as his preciseness and accuracy in recording his observations appears to have stemmed from some love of the natural and social sciences. In the three novels discussed, De Forest portrays kindred spirits: Dr. Ravenel in Miss Ravenel's Conversion is an amateur mineralogist and geologist; Frank McAlister in Kate Beaumont is a professional mineralogist and geologist; and Colonel Julian Murray in Playing the Mischief is an amateur social scientist, who espouses the theory of evolution. De Forest's History of the Indians of Connecticut (1851) shows that he was a serious historian. And, in addition to his intellectual

interests, De Forest's travels, both in the United States and abroad, probably contributed to his ability to be a fair and detached observer.

Although De Forest was a New Englander, he had lived in the South before the war, he had served in the South during the war, and he had worked in the South after the war. He was acquainted with both sides of the issues which faced the nation. He therefore felt quite competent to record a biography of a woman affected by the war--Miss Ravenel's Conversion. For the same reasons he was prompted to record a history of a disappearing segment of American society--the life in Kate Beaumont of the aristocratic Southern planter. Furthermore, like Colburne in Miss Ravenel's Conversion, De Forest entered and departed military service a captain, and also like Colburne he attributed his failure to be promoted to favoritism and corruption in the military--both at the state and federal level. This experience and his service in Washington in the Veterans' Bureau furnished him excellent opportunities for observation of social and political corruption, of which one manifestation was unjust federal claims, which he treats in Playing the Mischief. De Forest did not write merely about Lillie or Kate or Josie; nor did he write merely about their worlds. Rather

he wrote about each of these characters in her particular world. De Forest looked at each of these characters through eyes focused by objectivity, experience, and historical perspective.

De Forest painted few admirable women characters, but that was because he saw few admirable women. De Forest did not dislike women, but his honesty forced him to portray women as he found them in society. He was contemptuous of flighty old flirts, and he was vexed by hypocritical young ladies. He found that most women were emotional individuals ruled by their passionate natures. He also discovered that some of these passionate creatures were rational and logical and that they exhibited qualities which previously had been reserved for the male. But no matter whether the women were emotional or rational, he made them individuals by showing their decisions and actions as adequately motivated by their experiences and environments.

At the beginning of Miss Ravenel's Conversion, De Forest says, "No volcanic eruption rends a mountain without stirring the existence of the mountain's mice" (MR, p. 1). Lillie has many of the character traits of Kate Beaumont, Jenny Devine, and Josie Murray, and

all are about the same age. But Lillie is placed in a setting of split loyalties, and she is forced to make decisions from a different frame of reference than the other ladies. Her attitudes, opinions, and decisions reflect the social setting in which she finds herself. She dislikes Yankees; but finding herself snubbed by Southern ladies and surrounded by Union sympathizers, and needing reassurance of her femininity, she chooses the path of least resistance and becomes a Unionist. Under other circumstances she might have chosen to be as aristocratically obnoxious as Mrs. Langdon and her daughter. Lillie also chooses to marry Colonel Carter against her father's wishes. Lillie is swept up in the emotional tide of the war, and her passionate, sympathetic nature demands that she make some sacrifice to a man that may soon be dead. Of course, her decision is tragic because she forces experiences on herself for which she is not prepared, for which no woman is prepared. Had she chosen to obey her father's wishes, she could have avoided a great deal of heartache, and like Jenny Devine, she would probably have received a great deal more assurance of her femininity. Jenny is Lillie without the war. Lillie has been provided with

alternatives of action, but like the nation, social forces have determined the course her actions take; Lillie's actions reflect the prevailing influences in her social environment.

Mrs. Larue faces a different situation from that of Lillie because she is a Creole, and therefore she looks at society from a different point of view. Her background does not demand that she adhere to any particular loyalty; her primary concern is survival. Without money and without a husband, she must depend on favors to survive. Because she is not steeped in the honor and duty and morality of the traditional Southern woman, she lives for her pleasure. But social pressures do determine her actions. Initially, when the outcome of the war seems in doubt, she is neutral, playing both sides, but when the tide of war changes and there is no advantage to being neutral, she chooses the surviving side. Mrs. Larue, a practical though immoral woman, reflects the course which her immediate society takes.

De Forest shows Nellie Armitage as one who has been blessed by the law of the survival of the fittest, and therefore she is a strong, aggressive individual. But she is immersed in the chivalric, romantic

traditions of the South. Her society demands that she be honorable, dutiful, and moral; therefore, she first chooses to stay with her worthless husband Randolph rather than be marked as a woman and a wife who has failed. Nellie reflects the rigid traditions upon which her society is based and the extreme pressures which it exerts. But Kate has not been blessed by the law of the survival of the fittest, and therefore she is at the mercy of the social forces at work around her. Because she is passive and because she can do nothing to alter her situation, she almost suffers a nervous breakdown. However, Kate does have an alternative. She can marry Frank McAlister and leave her surroundings; instead, she chooses to stay because she does not want to fail her family. Social pressures have caused her to reject her apparent best interests in favor of the rigid social system of which she is a part. Frank must save her from herself much as he saved her from the sea. Kate not only reflects the social pressures of her limited society but also the extreme pressure which society exerts on those who are not prepared to cope with their environment.

Josie Murray has many of the basic qualities of character that the other young ladies have, but she

expresses them in a different way. Josie is placed in a more sophisticated world than the other young ladies, a world reveling in the aftermath of conquest, and like Lillie and Kate and Nellie, she is forced to choose a course of action. However, Josie's decisions do not involve such clear-cut issues as loyalty, duty, or honor because the social forces at work around her leave her few alternatives. Josie could marry Hollowbread, Drummond, or Bradford if she chose, but she would have to give up her claim if she married Hollowbread or Bradford, and she can't do that. She rejects Drummond because he is too coarse and too domineering for her taste. Olympia Vane and Mrs. Senator Ironman are much like Josie in manner and attitude. They cannot stop; they cannot quit. All three women reflect the extravagance, the combativeness, and the raw power of social forces running wild and unchecked.

The minor female characters, though for the most part one-dimensional, also reflect their societies. The New Boston ladies clearly indicate the musty, academic society of "the capital city of the little Yankee State of Barataria" (MR, p. 1). Their kindred spirit, Belle Warden, indicates the aloofness of lofty

ideals. Nancy Gile and Sally Huggs point out the basic immorality of the Southern planter. Mrs. Chester and her "sister" Mrs. Warden demonstrate the fatality of the monomania of an extremely unbalanced character. Mrs. John Murray depicts the eccentricities caused by sustained social pressures. Nancy Appleyard portrays the frustration of the solitary reformer when change is slow in coming. And Jessie Cohen demonstrates the effectiveness of the female who uses her sexual attractiveness to cajole men.

The women characters in De Forest's novels show a believable individuality based upon their particular experiences and environments. Most of the younger ladies are attractive, well-educated, and intelligent, but each possesses a multi-dimensional personality. The older women are usually faded blossoms that demonstrate eccentric personality faults which, when unchecked, tend to prevail over a period of time; however, some of the younger ladies also possess eccentricities. De Forest's observations reveal that real women in his world do not fit nicely or neatly into particular categories, but that they act and react differently to certain stimuli in their society. They are a mixture, though perhaps an

unbalanced mixture, of both vice and virtue. And even though the circumstances of the women in the novels are exaggerated and melodramatic, De Forest does sketch realistic, believable female characters because he places them in an accurately depicted setting in which the conflicting influences of emotion and logic, of politics and morality, and of human nature and environment interact to determine the individual's response.

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