THE TECHNIQUES OF JOHN WILLIAM DE FOREST,
TRANSITIONAL NOVELIST

DISSERTATION

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree Doctor of Philosophy in the
Graduate School of The Ohio State
University

By

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1953

OHIO STATE
UNIVERSITY

Approved by:

C. W. Simpson
Adviser
Acknowledgement

I should like to express my appreciation to Claude M. Simpson, who aided me throughout the course of my investigations, and to William Charvat, who directed me in the final stages of the writing.

P. H. F.
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Chapter One

Introduction

John William De Forest (1826-1906) wrote some fifteen major works and innumerable magazine articles and stories; yet his reputation rests largely on one book, *Miss Ravenel's Conversion from Secession to Loyalty*. The standard histories of American literature are unanimous in their praise of that one work and in their scant treatment of De Forest's other writings. Some few commentators, mainly the more recent literary historians, have accorded De Forest more space but not much more depth of analysis. There has been only one full-length study, James H. Croushore's unpublished dissertation, "John William De Forest: A Biographical and Critical Study to the Year 1868," Yale, 1944; and it analyzes only three of De Forest's major works. Even those who pay only lip service to De Forest's reputation agree that his work should be better known than it is. This dissertation is an attempt to give De Forest's work some of the attention which it has been so long denied. I have been aware that my sympathy with the aims of the realists and my belief that previous evaluations of De Forest have been unjust might lead me to overestimate him, and I have tried to avoid that pitfall by letting the evidence speak for itself whenever possible.
Because De Forest was one of the pioneers in American realism, it is difficult to separate his artistic achievements from his historical importance. I have attempted to make a double judgment of De Forest. First, I have placed him in his own literary milieu in order to make explicit comparison of his work with that of his contemporaries. I have hoped thus to show the extent of his acceptance of or departure from the commonly followed techniques. Second, I have attempted not only to show the historical importance of De Forest's techniques but also to evaluate their artistic worth.

I have chosen to call De Forest a transitional novelist since he uses both realistic and romantic techniques. Like many other writers of the period, De Forest was caught between a desire to portray the commonplace realities of his time with unflinching accuracy, and the romantic tradition with its subjective portrayal of idealized characters in bizarre settings. Because his desires opposed the prevailing, though weakening, tradition, his work reflects a kind of uneasy compromise. To my knowledge, no previous attempt has been made to examine De Forest's conflicting techniques or their implications for a general estimate of De Forest as a novelist.

The transitional quality of De Forest's work becomes apparent when comparable elements of the novels are grouped for general analysis. Such a presentation, though it does violence to the organic unity of the novel, makes possible an objective comparison of De Forest's materials and methods with those of other writers. This
I have done by dividing my discussion into three major areas: materials, mode, and craftsmanship.

Since the most obvious difference between romanticism and realism was in materials, that is, in the selection of the types of settings and characters to be portrayed, my discussion opens there. De Forest made a major contribution to realism by his objective portrayal of commonplace materials, for his settings and his characters faithfully reflect his contemporary scene. Perhaps the greater achievement was his portrayal of American men and women who represented current thought and manners in speech and action. In contrast to the frequent romantic preference for exotic scenery and heroic characters, De Forest's preference for the commonplace makes his works valuable social history.

Important as such materials are in the development of literary realism, De Forest's choice of humor as a method was, I think, his greatest achievement as well as the motivating influence in his choice of materials. His use of humor as a corrective instrument is strikingly similar to George Meredith's, though no evidence exists that De Forest was aware of his English contemporary. An understanding of De Forest's humor is basic to a real appreciation or interpretation of his work, for it was his desire to expose those fellow citizens who transgressed the boundaries of common sense that led him to portray objectively (and thus realistically) the wide variety of characters who make up his American communities.

To complete my discussion of De Forest's work, I have examined such elements of craftsmanship as plot, theme, characterization, and
Most notable are his realistic techniques for evoking the sense of community life and his conscious effort to write in idiomatic American English rather than the traditional literary English.

De Forest's historical and artistic achievements do not make him a great writer. The romantic scenes and incidents in his work, though acceptable in themselves, are incongruous when placed in juxtaposition to the commonplace realities of life. Furthermore, as a craftsman De Forest is frequently only second-rate. Most damning is his inability to create plots which do not falsify or distort his view of life. When De Forest was able to create a plot which functions as an organic part of the novel, as he did in Miss Ravenel and Playing the Mischief, the aesthetic value of his works increases. When, as was more common, he did not, individual elements are still valuable, but they are not fused into a unified whole. Individual characters, for example, may be satisfactorily done, but their relationships to one another are arbitrary if not coincidental. Such novels as The Wetherel Affair and Kate Beaumont make unreasonable demands on the reader and, in consequence, bewilder or exasperate him.

The three divisions of my investigation are arbitrary, and their contents are by no means mutually exclusive, but through them it is my intention to show the transitional quality of De Forest's work. The following chapters are an attempt to show that in materials, tone, and technique De Forest frequently broke with the traditions of romanticism and that his departures from tradition were in the direction of common sense portrayal of familiar life. Perhaps De Forest's
background, as well as the strength of the romantic tradition in literature, made it impossible for him to evolve a satisfactory realistic method. Certainly it can be said that he wrote more realistically than any of his contemporaries from 1850 to 1880.

Although the intent of this dissertation is not biographical, an understanding of De Forest's personal experiences and of the historical milieu in which he lived and wrote is necessary as a frame of reference for the discussion to follow. John William De Forest was born March 31, 1826, in Seymour, Connecticut. As the son of a prosperous cotton manufacturer, he might well have become either a middle-class businessman or a New England intellectual. Indeed, up to his thirty-fifth year De Forest showed signs of becoming a typical, if second-rate, New England intellectual. His education was characteristically genteel; he attended Miss Platt's school and Miss Stoddard's, both near his home. Because of ill health, he did not attend Yale as did his three older brothers. Instead, in 1846, he went to visit his brother Henry, who was a medical missionary in Syria. De Forest hoped that the change in climate would help his lung trouble (he seems to have been bothered by a chronic respiratory illness). He did not keep notebooks on his trip, but he did write detailed letters home, letters which he later published as Oriental Acquaintance (1856).

Upon his return to the United States in 1848, he settled down to a quiet existence with his family. Since his share of his father's estate was sufficient for his needs, he did not have to work, but he worried about being a drone. Casting about for an occupation, he
began his *History of the Indians of Connecticut* (1851), a subject which had interested him even in his youth. Here he was following the pattern of the New England Brahmins, the pattern of Prescott, Motley, and Parkman. His history done—it is still considered the definitive work on the subject—he went to Europe where he stayed for four years. There he visited health resorts, traveled about, and learned French and Italian and some Spanish. He continued to write detailed letters home, which he later issued as *European Acquaintance* (1858). During this European period he tried to write essays and poetry, but his interest lagged and in the latter part of 1853 he commenced the translation into Italian of Hawthorne's *The House of the Seven Gables*. This project, for which he and an Italian were to do alternate chapters, was also abandoned.

Returning home in 1855, De Forest began to make preparations for publishing his Syrian letters. On June 5, 1856, he married Harriet Silliman Shepard, daughter of Professor Charles U. Shepard of Yale, and established residence in New Haven—though the couple spent part of each year with Professor Shepard in Charleston, South Carolina. With his marriage, De Forest began his career as a writer. In the first six months of his marriage he published two tales of Syria and the first installment of "Witching Times," all in *Putnam's Monthly*. With his marriage, also, began his acquaintance with the South which was to bear fruit in *Miss Ravenel's Conversion*, *Kate Beaumont*, and *The Bloody Chasm*. From this time on, with the exception of three years as a Union officer and three years as head of the Freedmen's Bureau at Greenville, South Carolina, De Forest devoted
all his time to writing.

De Forest's period of greatest activity was the seventies, in which decade he produced seven books and countless articles and stories. After *The Bloody Chasm* (1881), he was silent for seventeen years. Then in 1898 he published a mediocre historical novel, *A Lover's Revolt*, about Boston and the beginning of the American Revolution. In his last years De Forest compiled a history of his family, *The de Forests of Avesnes* (1900), and published *The Downing Legends* (1901) and *Poem: Medley and Palestine* (1902). The latter two contain material dating as far back as his early travel days. De Forest died in 1906 at the age of eighty.

De Forest's most productive period, 1856-1881, spans the great transitional period in American literature which led to the acceptance of realism, however defined, as the basic mode for American fiction. This acceptance is so commonplace today that truth to reality is a basic, if unexpressed, assumption of most critics; yet the transition was painfully slow and violently resisted by many. In De Forest we find the transition to realism mirrored more clearly, perhaps, than in any other writer, for, though he was a pioneer in realistic techniques, he could not shake off his inheritance of romanticism.

In the early years of the nineteenth century, America was eager to create a cultural tradition. It was natural that such writers as Cooper, Willis, Paulding, and Irving—the Knickerbocker School—and other New Yorkers such as Bryant and Halleck should have been the arbiters of taste in the twenties. Were they not from New York, the intellectual center of the nation? During the fifties, however,
New England usurped the place of New York as the cultural center of the United States. The influence of New England rose as the popularity of Whittier, Holmes, Longfellow, Lowell, Hawthorne, and Emerson widened. These writers and the still popular Knickerbockers, preoccupied in creating a culture comparable to that of the Old World, ransacked American history and Europe for materials with which to educate morally and intellectually the American public. They were creating culture--and a romantic tradition in literature which did not die easily. The patrician quality of these men was evident in their works. Moreover, as critics and friends of publishers they assured the continuance of their taste beyond their own time.

During this period of genteel literature, and particularly genteel poetry, De Forest was attending private school or educating himself. As a New Englander he could not escape the Brahmin influence. Nothing could have been more natural than for him to want to write essays and poetry--which he never quite gave up trying: witness his slim volume of verse in 1902. But, as has been noted by the literary historians, the blood was running thin in New England by 1870 and the public tastes were changing.

The climax of the romantic movement in America was reached in the eighteen fifties. The contributions of such men as Hawthorne, Melville, Motley, and others make "American renaissance" a fit term for the period, but the romantics found themselves competing with an increasingly sensational and sentimental popular literature. Much of the work of the decade was sub-literary. Taking their cue from Dickens, writers mixed sentimentality and propaganda to produce such
works as Ten Nights in a Bar Room, Uncle Tom's Cabin, and Tempest and Sunshine. Robert Bonner accommodated the public demand for sentiment and sensation by commissioning works from Fanny Fern, Sylvanus Cobb, Jr., and others for publication in his incredibly successful New York Ledger. The impending political crisis, however, overshadowed everything.

When the Civil War broke out, it brought a flood of patriotic literature. What was published during the war was generally not good literature, nor did it have to be. The struggle did give men like De Forest the opportunity to study at firsthand the ways of modern war, but they could not easily exploit their experiences. Even after the war, little first-rate literature about it was issued. The immediate reaction to the struggle was so great that no one wanted to read about it unless the realities of the fighting were completely ignored. The treatment Miss Ravenel received illustrates the unpopularity of war as a subject. After accepting the novel for publication in their magazine, Harpers withdrew their offer and compromised by publishing the story in book form in 1867. It did not go well. How could a brutally realistic war novel compete with St. Elmo, The Gates Ajar, and The Celebrated Jumping Frog of Calaveras County? The first illustrates the continuance of the spirit of the sentimental fifties. The latter two are representative of the new spirit of the Union. What the public wanted, what the publishers wanted, was a spirit of reconciliation, however baldly expressed, or a sentimental or humorous tale which would stimulate interest in the heretofore unappreciated regional differences of the United States. Local color and frontier
humor, both realistic in part, suddenly became respectable. Neither the war nor the Reconstruction was.

The war brought other changes. America, which had been slowly evolving from an agrarian nation to an industrial one, suddenly found industry the dominant force. America had become the land of big business. Cities grew as immigration and industry multiplied. It was the time of what Parrington has called the Great Barbecue, of spoils and frauds, of rapid expansion westward. Through all this De Forest was writing steadily: he published five books in the first five years of the seventies. He wrote a "western," a Southern romance, two exposes of the Washington scene, and a mystery-comedy; but he could not capture the public. His work was much like everyone else's, yet strangely different. He could not generate the optimistic glow so characteristic of the times. Neither could he sentimentalize over the lost glories of the South or the regional peculiarities of the North or West. His clear-sightedness thus prevented him from expressing himself in the most popular modes of the day, nor would he have done so anyway. Even in Seacliff (1859) De Forest had displayed an aversion to the attention-getting techniques of the popular novelists. Through the narrator of Seacliff, Fitz Hugh, De Forest parodied the popular style of romantic adventure novels like The Count of Monte Cristo and, in addition, the histrionics of the Childe Harold hero. As Fitz Hugh says, American writers in search of something to save their works from lethargy and early death often dashed "into rapid movement, passionate situations, and a rhetoric
flavored with gunpowder." De Forest was scornful of such cheap

tricks. In the seventies De Forest's disgust with the current reading taste led him to portray a typical reader of the time, Imogen Eleonore Jones. He writes:

Here was a young woman who read almost nothing but novels, and who yet scarcely knew the name of Charles Reade, while Hawthorne and Trollope were evidently as strange to her as Berosus and Sanchoniathon. To a person of refined taste the lack of literary culture among the great mass, the overwhelming majority, of the so-called reading public is all but incredible. The million, or perhaps one might truthfully say the millions, who find their sentimental recreation in such papers as the sanguinary "Spasmodic" or the amatory "Turtle Dove," are as unaware of the real masters of dramatic and literary art as they are of the celebrities of metaphysics or philology. They do not know their works at all, and if they knew them they would not like them. A sensational weekly which should attempt to entertain its subscribers with the novels of Hawthorne or George Eliot, would probably come to an early decease. The true secret of gaining the favor of this immensely numerous class of readers is to furnish them with matter just a little better than they could write themselves.

Though De Forest understood what the public wanted, he refused to take the easy road to popularity. He continued to write what he saw. The public continued to be indifferent.

The period of the seventies was, for literature as for everything else, a time of chaos. It was, paradoxically, the heyday of the local color story and the occasion of the American rediscovery of Europe. John Hay, who issued *Pike County Ballads* and *Castilian Days* in the
same year, 1871, illustrates the paradox. It was a fruitful decade for literature, though few if any great works were produced. With the exception of Edward Eggleston, the local color writers' best works were short fiction, and it must be remembered that a great number of the most notable local color writers (Joel Chandler Harris, Kate Chopin, Mary E. Wilkins Freeman, and George Washington Cable, for example) belong to the decade of the eighties and later. More important, the work of the more prominent writers, Twain, Howells, and James, for example, was mainly groundwork for their later masterpieces. Twain was writing the second and third (Roughing It, 1872, and A Tramp Abroad, 1880) of his travel books and The Adventures of Tom Sawyer (1876); Howells was publishing such realistic yet somehow sentimental works as Their Wedding Journey (1871), Suburban Sketches (1871), A Chance Acquaintance (1873), and A Foregone Conclusion (1875); and Henry James was just beginning his experiments which were to lead him from Hawthornesque gestures like The Madonna of the Future (1873) to the more typically Jamesian Roderick Hudson (1876) and Daisy Miller (1879). The chart on the following pages shows what De Forest and other writers published between 1850 and 1880.

Throughout the fifties, sixties, and seventies, all of those intellectual, social, political, and economic impulses which contributed to the desire for and the eventual success of realism were in operation, as well as many obviously conflicting impulses. In De Forest's work one can see how he solved the problems that faced the early realists and how he failed to exclude many contradictory romantic techniques. Since the complete acceptance of realism as a
method followed rather than preceded the three decades in which
De Forest actively contested for literary favor, the inconsistencies
of his approach are not surprising. His accomplishments, in the face
of the lack of precedent for his realism and the strength of the
romantic tradition, make this investigation worthwhile. Whether he
succeeded or not in his endeavors, it is important that he tried.

Chronological Table of Representative Books Published

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**History of the Indians of Connecticut**

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<td>Simms, The Forayers</td>
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"Witching Times"

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Chapter Two

De Forest as Social Historian

Oscar W. Firkins, writing about the works of William Dean Howells, concluded:

If a Japanese—a cultivated Japanese—who knew nothing of America by travel or reading, were to ask me whether he could repair that defect by a perusal of the novels of Mr. Howells, I should hesitate, and I can imagine myself ending with the recommendation that he get his elementary schooling in American life from the works of some inferior writer. The cultivated American...of a century hence might find himself in the position of this Japanese.1

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One might well suggest that Mr. Firkins' hypothetical Japanese read De Forest's works for a reflection of the prevailing trends of American life in the three decades, 1850-1880. A contemporary of De Forest's, Clarence Gordon, attests to the value of De Forest's works as social history. In 1873, reflecting on De Forest's writings, Gordon perceived that

a portion of them have, beside their literary value, value as materials for future history, so admirably do they portray the manner of life, tone of thought, etc., of certain portions of our country; whilst there is a literalness of surroundings—descriptions of scenery, war records, and political influences—that is wonderfully honest.2

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2"Mr. De Forest's Novels," Atlantic Monthly Magazine, XXXII (Nov., 1873), 611.

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In this chapter I should like to expand Clarence Gordon's remarks into an investigation of the extent to which De Forest's work mirrors the life of his time. I have two motives for this investigation. First, a discussion of De Forest as social historian can throw light on his realism, since to the extent that De Forest wrote good social history he also wrote realistically. My second motive is to show, by comparing his works to those of his contemporaries, the degree to which his materials differed from those of other writers. From the extent of his departure from the accepted material of his time, we can begin to measure his contribution to the realistic movement.

I Setting

Perhaps nowhere is the difference between romantic and realistic intentions so distinct as in their choice and treatment of setting. The settings of most romantic novels can be classified roughly into three groups, foreign settings, exotic settings, and more familiar but intentionally vague settings. There were both historical and artistic reasons for each of these types. One basic reason was the desire of the romantics to indicate the correlation between man and nature. In the adventure-travel novel, such as Melville's Typee and Loti's Le Mariage de Loti, the romantics exploited the growing public interest in the enlargement of the known world. In the historical romances, the settings reflected the growing nationalism of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries—as the works
of Scott and Cooper illustrate. In the Gothic novel, setting combined
the lure of the exotic with the romantics' interest in medievalism.
And in the sentimental novel, which bulks larger numerically than
perhaps any other, the unlocalized setting freed the writer from
strict obligation to reality. This genre ranges from Richardson's
*Pamela* through Brown's *Power of Sympathy* to Augusta Evans Wilson's
*St. Elmo* over a hundred years later.

Yet the remoteness of setting aided the romantics in their
creation of a more imaginative literature than was possible under
the restraints of classicism. With the freedom gained from the use
of settings which were picturesque yet real, it was possible for
the romantic novelists to portray individuals and actions in, as
Hawthorne put it, "a sort of poetic...precinct, where actualities
would not be...insisted upon..."3 Hawthorne was only claiming

3Nathaniel Hawthorne, Author's Preface, *The Marble Faun*, in
*The Complete Writings of Nathaniel Hawthorne*, Boston, 1900, IX,
xxiii-xxiv.

the prerogatives of the writer of "romance," prerogatives set out
as early as 1785 by Clara Reeve, who distinguished the "romance"
from the "novel" thus:

The Novel is a picture of real life and manners, and of the
time in which it is written. The Romance, in lofty and
elevated language, describes what never happened nor is
likely to happen.4

4The Progress of Romance, London, 1785, quoted by René Wellek
However apt that distinction may be—and, as a generalization on the two lines of development of fiction, I accept it—there was in America no strain comparable to Fielding, Austen, and Trollope, no "novelist" worthy of the name before 1850. Thus for America the distinction means little; American fiction had been since its inception romantic. It is clear, from their works as well as from the prerogatives which they claimed, that the American romantics had no desire for the sincere, complete, and exact reproduction of a social milieu.

In response to the growth of nationalism, the progress of science, and the extension of democracy, in the second quarter of the nineteenth century there appeared increasing demands for a more realistic treatment of the American scene. The very excesses of the romantics themselves gave additional impetus to the movement toward realism. William Charvat has noted that "in the criticism of romance the greatest contribution of the magazines was their demand for realism in the treatment of plot, character, and historical incident."\(^5\) He credits this demand to the critics' awareness of the


distinction between possibility and probability and their resultant desire for a literature which could achieve the willing suspension of disbelief. Although he says that this insistence on probability was a reaction to the earlier Gothic novels of C. B. Brown, Charvat notes that even Cooper was attacked for his coincidences. It is my
own belief that an equally strong desire for more realistic treatment
grew out of the critical reaction to the flood of sentimental novels
which engulfed the country in the eighteen-fifties.

Because no such thing as a pure example of either type exists,
it is difficult to distinguish late romantic fiction from early
realistic fiction. One difficulty is that realism embodies, in
modified form, the same nationalism which was one of the motivating
forces of romanticism. Arthur H. Quinn has noted the difficulty
of distinguishing realists from romantics in the eighteen-fifties--
the period in which De Forest began his writing career.

While the idealistic treatment of romantic material was still
popular in the 'fifties, there were already signs of a reaction
to a more realistic portrayal of familiar life. The pioneers
in this movement can hardly be distinguished from their contem­
poraries who were still pursuing the older methods, for often
the material seemed to be the same.6

6American Fiction, An Historical and Critical Survey, New York,
1936, p. 159.

Though clear-cut distinctions are difficult, they are not
impossible. One of the most valuable clues to classification is
setting, as a comparison of De Forest's first novel, "Witching
Times," (1856) to The Scarlet Letter (1850) will show. Both are
historical novels about colonial America; thus the materials are
about the same. One notes that Hawthorne attempted to create an air
of plausibility by the age-old device of finding a manuscript—a
device which was old, I imagine, when Swift used it, but which had
a tradition even in America, particularly among the early senti­
mentalists whose insistence that their works were based on "fact"
was designed to exempt them from the opprobrium attached to writing "fiction" in those days. For Hawthorne the device served mainly as a transition to the story proper.

It is the setting, however, which interests me here. The story takes place in the Boston of circa 1650—that much Hawthorne tells us. But he does not include anything like an exact description of the locale. The most detailed description in the story is that of Governor Bellingham's mansion.

This was a large wooden house, built in a fashion of which there are specimens still extant in the streets of our older towns; now moss-grown, crumbling to decay, and melancholy at heart with the many sorrowful or joyful occurrences, remembered or forgotten, that have happened, and passed away, within their dusky chambers. Then, however, there was the freshness of the passing year on its exterior, and the cheerfulness, gleaming forth from the sunny windows, of a human habitation, into which death had never entered. It had, indeed, a very cheery aspect; the walls being overspread with a kind of stucco, in which fragments of broken glass were plentifully intermixed; so that, when the sunshine fell aslant-wise over the front of the edifice, it glittered and sparkled as if diamonds had been flung against it by the double handful. . . .It was further decorated with strange and cabalistic figures and diagrams, suitable to the quaint taste of the age. . . .

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7 *The Scarlet Letter, Complete Writings*, VI, 145-146.

Hawthorne then says, as Hester goes inside, that with many variations, suggested by the nature of his building-materials, diversity of climate, and a different mode of social life, Governor Bellingham had planned his new habitation after the residences of gentlemen of fair estate in his native land.


This is so obvious as to hardly need telling. If Hawthorne had then given some of the ways in which Bellingham's house differed from the
English models, the setting would have been localized. Instead he confined himself to typically English aspects of the interior. There are oak paneled walls, folios, and even a suit of mail. Such details, though authentic, were hardly calculated to evoke a sense of New England life. Only in the section titled "The New England Holiday" did Hawthorne attempt to create an impression of the diversity and the barbarity of New England life, and there he did it by describing a variety of people in the market place—Indians, sailors from the Spanish Main, and Puritans.

What is one to conclude? One must, it seems to me, see that Hawthorne was not interested in recreating for his readers the physical world of 1650. What he desired was just enough of the atmosphere of early New England to sustain his investigation of sin and its effects on the human heart. This is exactly what Stanley Williams means when he remarks that the romanticists were interested in an accurate description of setting, but only as "a picturesque yet plausible background against which to display the subjective passions which were their main interest."9 Settings remote in time or place were historically or geographically interesting and plausible, but, more important, they relieved the romantic writers of what Henry James called "the inconvenience of a related, a measurable state, a state subject to all our vulgar communities."10


10 The Art of the Novel, New York, 1934, p. 33.
It must be pointed out, furthermore, that, though Hawthorne chose that period of history because it was fundamentally religious, the crime is not an outgrowth of the environment. The main situation, the expiation of sin, is universal, not regional.

Outwardly De Forest's story about Salem in 1691 is very similar to The Scarlet Letter. The central situation in "Witching Times" is the witchcraft trials of that year. But De Forest localized his setting more than Hawthorne. From the opening scene on the rickety wharf De Forest attempted to recreate in the reader's mind the sights and sounds and smells of old Salem. His description of the town is notable in its concreteness of detail:

Presently they reached Main street, the principal thoroughfare of the village. More glanced with evidently deep interest up and down its meandering longitude, scattered with thin grass, mullens, thistles, and brambles, and faced by straggling houses, of various, many-pointed outlines. About one-third of these dwellings were log huts, chinked in with clay; brown, slovenly, and often mouldering with incipient mossy ruin; flanked on the exterior by rude stone chimneys, nearly as considerable and nearly as ruinous as themselves. Others were stout little framed buildings, primly capped with cedar shingles, and buttoned up to the throat in oaken clapboard; unpainted, but in most cases coated with whitewash, a good deal dimmed in brilliancy by the weather, and streaked with rust from countless flat-headed nails of wrought iron. Then there were a dozen or fifteen really pretentious dwellings, rudely finished, yet picturesque specimens of the Elizabethan architecture, each story bulging out broadly and sharply over the one beneath it; the roof diversified by a number of peaked gables, fringed with fanciful wood-work; a monstrous white dial-plate staring in broad astonishment out of the southern gable; and the whole pile crowned by a ponderous stack of chimneys, big enough to heat a moderate city. A deeply recessed door, splendid with brass nails, and six or eight
square windows, with small, lozenged panes, finished off the physiognomy of one of these colonial mansions.\footnote{John William De Forest, "Witching Times," Putnam's Monthly Magazine, VIII (December, 1856), 571.}

He does not gloss over; he does not generalize. He sketches the interior of the pretentious house described above, the home of the rich merchant Bowson, in equal detail. De Forest describes the rooms, the kitchen, the sanded floor with its pattern of blue sand on white, and even the dishes and the food. Like Balzac's description of Madame Vauquer's boardinghouse, De Forest's description of Bowson's house makes the life of its inhabitants clear: the crudity and materialism of the Bowsons are plain, as well as the atmosphere of piety and plenty in which they live. In the light of what De Forest tells his readers, the witchcraft trials are not so hard to understand.

The difference in the two novels, then, is not so much the central situation as the method of handling and the causes assigned to the effects. De Forest saw the trials as the result of the ignorance, superstition, and greed—all of which add up to intolerance—of the inhabitants. He clearly showed that the influences were both intellectual and environmental. Hawthorne, conversely, dealt almost exclusively with the intellectual aspects of his morality play; the setting became important only when Hawthorne could make it symbolically useful. While there is a universality about De Forest's story of intolerance, it is tied to the New England of 1691. Such things could happen again, true; but this thing could have happened only in
De Forest's given time and place. De Forest, then, used the historical situation differently from the way a romanticist would. He was not interested in the outcome, which was known, but in an analysis of the motivations of the act. He had, therefore, to recreate the setting with accuracy so that his analysis would stand up.

Historical realism is partial at best, though realistic in intent, for no author can hope to recreate the distant past with absolute fidelity. He can reproduce setting with fidelity, but manners, conversation, and habits of thought of the past are more difficult to recreate authentically.

After this one adventure into the historical past, De Forest turned to writing about the places which he knew best—and he began, of course, with his home state of Connecticut. The setting of Seacliff (1859) is characteristically American. The house of the Westervelts, in which most of the action of the story takes place, is described as carefully by De Forest as if he were appraising it for a mortgage.

The house stood in one of the southwesterly townships of Connecticut, crowning a bluff which fronted sharply upon the narrow arm of ocean, called Long Island Sound. The grounds, varied and full of character by Nature's gift, gayly toned with bright hillocks and little dells of shadow, or wrought into a stronger relief of ledge and leafage, were well adapted to the modern style of landscape gardening after which they had lately been remodelled. No reflection was there here of Versailles Vandalism, laid out stiff and stark by grim undertaker Le Notre. The general appearance of the two or three acres was already agreeable and tending toward the picturesque, although no one feature of the landscape was surprising or in the least suggestive of alpine sublimities. The dwelling itself was far from worthy of an environment so tasteful.
The work doubtless of some predecessor to the present proprietor, it bespoke those dark ages of American country architecture previous to Downing, and seemed to assert, with all the force of its snobbish individuality, that it had no sympathy with the natural graces which surrounded it. It was one of those mock Parthenons, beloved of our fathers thirty years ago; a temple of brick and mortar, coated over with stucco veined and lined in shabby imitation of marble; breaking out toward the south in a staring, shameless pediment, and Ionic columns which shaded Yankee windows; and flanked on either side by modern wings, built solely for convenience, in abrupt disregard of the sham classicism of the edifice. On each side of the main body there was a slight one-story veranda, running forward from the wing and joining the heavy front portico. Altogether the building reminded me of a clumsy translation from the Greek, ekeout with modern supplement, appendix, and commentaries. Partial amends were made for these absurdities by the beautiful outlook of the house, standing as it did on a prominent turfy hillock, and facing the mid-day sun, the shining sheet of the Sound, and, far away, the green and yellow belts of the Long Island shore.  

\[12\] Seacliff, pp. 8-9.

Although the description of the grounds has romantic echoes, the setting is accurately reproduced. Both in style and geographical location it is typical of a new class of American. The Westervelts are not landed gentry, nor are they of the old aristocracy. They are the nouveaux riches. Their money comes from the stock market in New York and from speculative enterprises. They are the class about whom Edith Wharton, and after her John O'Hara, would have much to say. They have their country houses and generally town houses or apartments in New York. When possible they go to Newport or Saratoga; when they cannot, they entertain house guests.

In contrast to this structure, so definitely American and so characteristic of the age and of the people living there, one has only to recall the incredible architectural extravaganzas favored
by the sentimental novelists of mid-century. There is, for example, the castellated mansion in the mountains of an unnamed mid-Atlantic state which Daniel Hunter and his family inhabit.\textsuperscript{13} Symbolic of the extent to which the story is removed from reality, the house is located in a valley surrounded by impassable mountains. Even carriages cannot manage the trail which enters the valley through the lone pass. Again, there is Grandison Place—the name is significant—in which the Linwoods reside.\textsuperscript{14} Grandison Place, somewhere in western New York I believe, is in the English tradition.

I do not wish to labor the point, but one last example deserves attention. Because even the sentimentalists kept up with the changing frontier, the setting of St. Elmo\textsuperscript{15} is farther west. The Murray mansion, called Le Bocage, is in Kentucky or Tennessee (my vagueness is attributable to Mrs. Wilson's reluctance to enable any reader to identify the area, though recognition of the locale would be impossible in any event when she gets through with it). The house is surrounded by large park-like grounds, a part of which is inhabited by a collection of deer, bison, Cashmere goats, a Lapland reindeer, a Peruvian llama, a chamois, and a white cow from Ava. The house

\textsuperscript{13}In Emma D. E. N. Southworth, \textit{The Lost Heiress}, Philadelphia, [1854].

\textsuperscript{14}In Caroline Lee Hentz, \textit{Ernest Linwood}, Boston, 1856.

\textsuperscript{15}Augusta J. Evans (Wilson), New York, 1871. The first edition of the book was in 1866.
itself is sensational. The exterior is a combination of the best
features of Greek, Roman, and English architecture; the interior can
be described only by Mrs. Wilson. The following is but a partial
description:

St. Elmo threw his cigar out of the window, and walked up
and down the quaint and elegant rooms, whose costly bizarrerie
would more appropriately have adorned a villa of Parthenope
or Lucanian Sybaris, than a country-house in soi-disant "repub­
lican" America. The floor, covered in winter with velvet carpet,
was of white and black marble now bare and polished as a mirror,
reflecting the figure of the owner as he crossed it. Oval
ormolu tables, buhl chairs, and oaken and marquetrie cabinets,
loaded with cameos, intaglios, Abraxoids, whose "erudition"
would have filled Mnesarchus with envy, and challenged the
admiration of the Samian lapidary who engraved the ring of
Polyerates, these and numberless articles of virtu testified to
the universality of what St. Elmo called his "world scrapings,"
and to the reckless extravagance and archaistic taste of the
collector. 16

Admittedly the description of the house is used by Mrs. Wilson to
characterize the young St. Elmo—as it surely does; but it also
typifies the predilection of the sentimental novelists for the
country house setting.

From the time of Pamela, the country house was favored as the
scene of tribulation for the heroine of sentimental fiction. There
were sound reasons for that choice. The inhabitants of such houses
were isolated both physically and economically from the mundane
activities of everyday life. This remoteness, like that of the
foreign settings of the romantics, enabled the sentimentalists to
ignore the laws of probability. Even though such mansions did exist
in actuality, realism was not the intention of the sentimentalists.
The fact that they were, almost without exception, reluctant to acknowledge the exact geographical location of their mansions indicates as much. In addition, such houses are excessively glamorous. Mrs. Wilson, for example, is not content to equip Murray mansion with the costliest furnishings she can imagine; she adds a library of rare books:

Two in Pali—centuries old; and moth-eaten volumes and valuable mss.—some in parchment, some bound in boards—recalled the days of astrology and alchemy, and the sombre mysteries of Rosicrucianism. Side by side, on an ebony stand lay an Elzevir Terence, printed in red letters, and a curious Birman book, whose pages consisted of thin leaves of ivory, gilded at the edges; and here too were black rhyta from Chiusi, and a clylix from Vulci...  

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17Ibid., p. 77.

One has only to recall Howells' note of caution that "the true artist will shun the use even of real events if they are of an improbable character" to realize that the effect of such gilding places Murray mansion outside the category of realism. Compare, for example, Mrs. Wilson's description to De Forest's matter-of-fact comment on the interior of Seacliff:

I paced slowly to the other end of the room, led on by a straggling line of pictures. There was a landscape of no significance; a modern half-length, clearly a portrait; a Madonna which looked like a Carlo Dolci; and a fair copy of Guido's terrible Beatrice Cenci.  

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18Seacliff, p. 10.

The difference between Seacliff and Murray mansion is the difference between realistic and romantic treatment, for the materials are
clearly similar. In concreteness of detail Mrs. Wilson is far superior; yet the effect of her description is, for all that, unrealistic. Her setting is neither commonplace nor objective. Over everything hangs the glittering promise of an environment in which the drab realities of life are exchanged for an existence of passionate agony and pleasure. No such expectation is aroused by De Forest's setting.

The outbreak of the Civil War interrupted De Forest's career just as he was beginning to hit his stride, but it provided him with the material for his next novel, Miss Ravenel's Conversion from Secession to Loyalty (1867). The major setting is, of course, the war; and De Forest's descriptions of camp life and field service are second to none; but De Forest chose his scene more carefully than most commentators have realized. The story begins in New Boston, the capital of the New England state of Barataria and home town of the hero, Colburne. It is New Haven, Connecticut, not very much disguised. De Forest shows his sensitivity to the contemporary American scene in his description of the little academic world of a New England college town. The physical setting characterizes the New England mind and sets up the basis for the contrast which becomes apparent when Colburne is later stationed in New Orleans, the home of the heroine, Lillie Ravenel. The austere correctness of New England, the angularity of mind and body, are clear in the following passage:

The Whitewood house was of an architecture so common in New Boston that in describing it I run no risk of identifying it to the curious. Exteriorly it was a square box of brick, stuccoed to represent granite; interiorly it consisted of four rooms on each floor, divided by a hall up and down the centre.
This was the original construction, to which had been added a greenhouse, into which you passed through the parlor, carefully balanced by a study into which you passed through the library. Trim, regular, geometrical, one half of the structure weighing to an ounce just as much as the other half, and the whole perhaps forming some exact fraction of the entire avoirdupois of the globe, the very furniture distributed at measured distances, it was precisely such a building as the New Boston soul would naturally create for itself. Miss Ravenel noticed this with a quickness of perception as to the relations of mind and matter which astonished and amused Mr. Colburne.

"If I should be transported on Aladdin's carpet," she said, "fast asleep, to some unknown country, and should wake up and find myself in such a house as this, I should know that I was in New Boston. How the Professor must enjoy himself here! This room is exactly twenty feet one way by twenty feet the other. Then the hall is just ten feet across by just forty in length. The Professor can look at it and say, Four times ten is forty. Then the greenhouse and the study balance each other like the paddle-boxes of a steamer. Why will you all be so square?"

"But how shall we become triangular, or circular, or star-shaped, or cruciform?" asked Colburne. "And what would be the good of it if we should get into those forms?"

"You would be so much more picturesque. I should enjoy myself so much more in looking at you."


When Colburne's regiment finds itself stationed in New Orleans as occupation troops, one understands Lillie's preference for the picturesque. The luxury in which Doctor Ravenel finds Colburne and a brother officer, Lieutenant Van Zandt, is significant though only sketchily described.

The Doctor bowed and smiled assent as he put the letter in his pocket, not thinking it worth while to explain matters to a gentleman who was so evidently muddled by the Soulé vintages. As his interlocutor [Van Zandt] rattled on he looked about the room and admired the costly furniture and tasteful ornaments. There were two choice paintings on the paneled walls, and a dozen or so of choice engravings. The damask curtains edged with lace were superb, and so were the
damask coverings of the elaborately carved oaken chairs and lounges. The marble mantels and table, and the extravagant tortoise-shell tiroir, were loaded with Italian cameos, Parisian bronzes, Bohemian glass-ware, Swiss wood-sculpture, and other varieties of European gimcracks. Against the wall in one corner leaned four huge albums of photographs and engravings. The Doctor thought that he had never seen another house in America decorated with such exquisite taste and lavish expenditure.\textsuperscript{20}

\textsuperscript{20}Ibid., p. 108.

A comparison of the Soule house and Le Bocage reinforces Quinn's previously mentioned remark about the similarity of romantic and realistic materials in this transitional period. One notes that the actual details—the lushness, the profusion of imported objets d'art—are much the same. Both houses are unique, in that they are not representative of the middle-class culture of the region. Yet Mrs. Wilson has made Le Bocage the central setting of her story. The inhabitants of the house are thus removed from commonplace actuality. Mrs. Wilson attempts to dazzle her readers with the intellectual and sensual connotations of her description so as to impart a Byronic glow to her hero and to the actions of the story. De Forest, on the other hand, recognizes the uniqueness of the Soule house and reconciles his readers to it. As Van Zandt explains to Doctor Ravenel:

"It belongs to a gentleman who is now a captain in the rebel service. He built it and furnished it for his affinity, an actress whom he brought over from Paris, which disgusted his wife, I understand."

\textsuperscript{21}Ibid., p. 108.

\textsuperscript{21}Ibid., p. 108.

The elegant little box, as De Forest calls it, is not a home, then, in the accepted usage of the word. Though it reflects the atmosphere
of New Orleans, its excessiveness is clearly the result of a taste and a morality exceptional even in New Orleans. Such a love-nest would be, of course, unthinkable in New Boston. By his careful explanation, De Forest prepares his readers for this momentary departure from the typical. He does not, further, use the Soulé house to set the mood for extravagant actions, as Mrs. Wilson does Le Bocage. Therein lies all the difference.

Strangely enough, after so successfully depicting the American scene around him, De Forest turned next to a region of which he had no first-hand knowledge—the Southwest. There were several reasons for his choice. Of primary consideration was the fact that his war novel was very reluctantly published and unenthusiastically received. The circumstances of Miss Ravenel’s publication are revealing. In 1865 De Forest sold the novel to Harpers for serial publication in the Monthly and possible later book publication. Even after De Forest agreed to moral reform of the story, Harpers balked at serial publication. They finally drew up a new agreement and reluctantly issued Miss Ravenel in book form in 1867. It was not a success. How could it have been, when, as Howells remarked in his review of Miss Ravenel, "The heroes of young-lady writers in the magazines have been everywhere fighting the late campaigns over again, as young ladies would have fought them."22

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22 William Dean Howells, Atlantic Monthly Magazine, XX (July, 1867), 121.
Yet with all the subjects open to him, why did De Forest choose to write about the Southwest? Three factors seem to me to be involved. First, De Forest had always been interested in Indians. Second, the Mexican War and subsequent annexation of Texas, New Mexico, and California—followed by the gold rush of '49 and the Gadsden Purchase of '53—had made the Southwest a logical area to exploit fictionally. Third was the precedent of the romantic travelogue which subordinated plot to geographical movement. The early Howells as well found the travelogue construction congenial, as an inspection of Their Wedding Journey and A Chance Acquaintance shows.

Since De Forest had no personal knowledge of the Southwest,23

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23James H. Croushore, in his unpublished dissertation, "John William De Forest: A Biographical and Critical Study to the Year 1868," Yale University, 1944, p. 76, establishes the fact that De Forest got his factual information from such books as J. R. Bartlett's Personal Narrative of Explorations and Incidents in Texas, New Mexico, California, Sonora, and Chihuahua (New York, 1854) and Report upon the Colorado River of the West (Washington, 1861) by J. C. Ives and A. A. Humphreys.

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one suspects that Overland (1871) was deliberately modeled in the romantic fashion. The fact that the realistic Miss Ravenel had gone unappreciated further suggests that De Forest's adoption of romantic methods was not accidental. Overland is not, however, without successful passages: the wild ride down the San Juan River in a canvas boat is a tour de force which Cooper would have been proud of. But the travelogue technique deadens the book for page after page; the action is too completely subordinated—almost obliterated—by the lengthy descriptions of the scenic wonders to be found in the
West. De Forest's scholarship is so thorough that one scarcely believes that he never saw the region he describes. Yet one wearies, waiting for the plot to move on. Particularly is this so when De Forest unconsciously adopts the dogmatic tone of a lecturer, as in the following passage:

Not twenty minutes after the snapping of the towline the boat had entered one of those stupendous cañons which form the distinguishing characteristic of the great American table-land, and make it a region unlike any other in the world.

Remember that the cañon is a groove chiselled out of rock by a river. Although a groove, it is never straight for long distances. The river at its birth was necessarily guided by the hollows of the primal plateau; moreover, it was tempted to labor along the softest surfaces. Thus the cañon is a sinuous gully, cut down from the hollows of rocky valleys, and following their courses of descent from mountain-chain toward ocean. . . .

To begin with, vast lakes, which once swept westward from the bases of the Rocky Mountains, were emptied into the Pacific. Next the draining currents transformed into rivers, cut their way through the soil which formerly covered the table-lands and commenced their attrition upon the underlying continent of sandstone. It was a grinding which never ceased; every pebble and every boulder which lay in the way was pressed into the endless labor; mountains were used up in channelling mountains.²⁴

²⁴John William De Forest, Overland, New York, 1871, pp. 125-126.

Nor did De Forest neglect the curious customs of the natives of the Southwest. As the caravan takes shelter from hostile Indians in a pueblo of the Moquis Indians, De Forest takes advantage of the interlude to give a detailed history of the construction of the pueblo as well as a colorful description of the Moquis customs. The high point of the section is the picturesque rain-dance which occurs just before the visitors leave for further adventures. The dance is performed in the plaza of the pueblo by twenty men and
twenty women. De Forest's description is minutely detailed—though it leaves something to be desired as literature. He writes:

The dance began; the performers furnished their own music; each rolled out a deep aw aw aw under his visor. . . .

The movement was as monotonous as the melody. The men and women faced each other without changing positions; there was an alternate lifting of the feet, in time with the aw aw and the rattling of the gourds; now and then there was a simultaneous about face.

After a while, open ranks; then rugs and blankets were brought; the maidens sat down and the men danced at them; trot, trot, aw aw, and rattle rattle.

Every third girl now received a large empty gourd, a grooved board, and the dry shoulder-bone of a sheep. Laying the board on the gourd, she drew the bone sharply across the edges of the wood, thus producing a sound like a watchman's rattle.

They danced once on each side of the square; then retired to a house and rested fifteen minutes; then recommenced their trot. Meanwhile maidens with large baskets ran about among the spectators, distributing meat, roasted ears of corn, sheets of bread, and guavas. 25

25 Ibid., p. 80.

Here is setting for its own sake, combined with a pseudo-sociological interest. The same kind of thing shows up in the early local colorists, many of whom were motivated by a socio-historical-geographical interest. But on the whole, the method of Overland is simply the exploitation of picturesque scenery in the romantic tradition.

In the novels following Overland, De Forest returned to scenes about which he had first-hand information; and, with the exception of Irene the Missionary, all have American locales. Kate Beaumont is set in upland South Carolina; The Wetherel Affair is in Connecticut and New York City; Honest John Vane, Playing the Mischief, and Justine's Lovers are all about Washington, D. C.; The Bloody Chasm
is set in post-war Charleston and Paris. *A Lover's Revolt* is about Revolutionary Boston and completes De Forest's career on the historical note that began it. I group all the novels after *Overland* because they present a different problem and must be dealt with by a different method. In all these later books, De Forest gives the reader very little isolated description of the physical surroundings in which his action takes place. He does not neglect setting, but he builds it up by the accretion of small bits of detail. This method was a change from the technique of giving setting in blocks, frequently used by the romantics, and it was a technical advance since it relies on implicit suggestion rather than explicit statement.

With this change of method in the presentation of setting, De Forest began to rely more and more on characters and incidents to establish both the time and place of his stories. He was becoming a novelist of manners in the years following 1871. Now the novel of manners is the result of close observation of the writer's contemporary scene. It presents an articulate, often ironic, commentary on the customs and mores of the times. Thus the setting of these later novels did not need the careful description of physical details because they were known to his readers. Rapport between reader and scene can be established by reference to significant details or variations from the norm; the reader relies upon his own knowledge for the rest. Thus these stories, carefully attuned to the events and ideas of De Forest's day, did not need the same kind of treatment the romantics gave the settings for their stories.
De Forest gave evidence of his ability as a novelist of manners in Seacliff, but it was not until Kate Beaumont (1872) and The Wetherel Affair (1873) that these abilities were more than a promise.

In the latter, the scene opens in Connecticut and then shifts to New York City. Nestoria, coming by sea from Connecticut, wanders for several hours through the dock section after landing.

She came to a great, rambling, sombre, sloppy market, encumbered with a monstrous traffic in edibles, and overrun with purchasers and wayfarers. To her utter dismay she presently discovered that this was the very same market which had perplexed her footsteps in the very beginning of her pilgrimage. For two hours she had feebly toiled away from it, and here she was once more in its undesired medley and uproar. But at least it offered her food; various stalls and shops sent forth an aroma of oysters and coffee; and in some of them there were women satisfying their morning hunger. She stole into one these homely lairs, seated herself on a wooden stool without a back, and leaned her aching head against the grimy wall.

"Stew?" asked a sweaty attendant in a foul apron and rumpled paper cap.

Nestoria nodded, and added in a whisper, "Coffee."26

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26De Forest, The Wetherel Affair, p. 97.

At this ordinary coffee shop Nestoria meets a public school teacher, Miss Jones, who takes pity on her and offers her asylum in her apartment. They take the streetcar to Miss Jones's neighborhood.

The two young women alighted below Canal street, in one of those quiet quarters of the east side of the city which have been forsaken by whatever grandeur they once possessed, where dingy and dirty and unlovely tenement houses mingle with sombre and unpleasantly odorous storehouses, where fashionable ladies never go, and suppose that no one else lives.

Turning into a narrow street, bordered by sloppy gutters and piles of garbage, and walking for some distance under the mildewing shadow of tall, unshapely, hard-visaged, discolored edifices, they halted before a plain, dolefully plain doorway, a mere rectangular opening in an ungarnished front of cold gray stone...
Up they went, clinging to dirty banisters, avoiding the flaky whitewash of neglected walls, and creaking along the bare floors of musty, not to say rancid passages. At last, breathless and tottering, Nestoria was ushered into a small furnished room, the combined parlor and bedchamber of Imogen Eleonore [as Miss Jones likes to think of herself]. It was not sumptuous, but it was less comfortless and forbidding than the approach to it had promised, for there was a carpet, a fresh and clean bed, and a small array of other decent chattels.\(^7\)

\(^7\)Ibid., pp. 101-102.

Other details of New York life are furnished as the story progresses. For example, this rather typical detail of the ingenuity required by life in a one-room apartment:

It must be understood that Miss Jones had so arranged her own room as to be able on a pinch to receive visitors in it. She had divided it into two compartments by means of a lofty though fragile rampart of paper screen, which completely environed her bed and washstand with its gaudy representation of scarlet ships on a blue-vitriol ocean, so that nothing could well be more seemly and genteel at the price. Thus she was in a state of decorous preparation for the two gentlemen, and could admit them without going through any preliminary housewifery.\(^8\)

\(^8\)Ibid., p. 112.

There are further scenes at Madison Square, the Tombs, and the Battery. In all, one gets a sketchy but realistic view of New York and of life there.

Underlying my evaluation of the realism of De Forest's New York are two major assumptions. The first is that realism deals with the middle and lower classes and that a refusal to do so is an evasion of the responsibilities of the realistic novelist. Historically, realism was an outgrowth of and an expression of
the rise of the middle and lower classes. The acceptance of these classes as worthy of portrayal in fiction, therefore, is one of the criteria by which the degree of realism in a novel is judged. It is this feeling which leads Harry Levin to conclude, "Its tendencies are grounded on a democratic attitude toward society and an experimental attitude toward nature." This is a reversal of the classical doctrine, partly taken over by the romantics, that denied major literary stature to any but the aristocratic. The second assumption is that the realist must look at life objectively. Even though realism must "accept suffering and squalor and indignity on at least equal terms with their opposites" it must not go so far as to exaggerate such misery. The possibility of this kind of exaggeration has been noted by William Charvat, who writes, "Also, there is a kind of inverse idealism which makes the real thing worse than it is."

The portrayals of urban life in the domestic novel of De Forest's time frequently illustrate such inverse idealism. As George A. Dunlap shows, few authors who wrote about the city in the nineteenth century--and their works are more numerous than artistic--were objective in

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29Harry Levin, "What is Realism?" Comparative Literature, III (Summer, 1951), 199.

30Bernard R. Bowron, Jr. "Realism in America," Comparative Literature, III (Summer, 1951), 268.

their appraisals. "Horror, terror, and disgust are the emotions which our novelists strove to arouse when they pictured poverty and villainy in the city."32 Herbert R. Brown's study of the


domestic novel reinforces Dunlap's observations. Brown shows that most authors of popular pre-Civil War fiction viewed the city as a spawning ground of evil, where "seducers lurked behind every lamp-post."33 No objective appraisal could be expected in the works of


authors who felt such hostility toward city life. Even when they curbed their hostility, they tended to depict only the extremes of wealth and poverty and to ignore the middle ground. The humble urban heroines of such sentimentalists as Maria Cummins are as unbelievable as they are perfect. It is as absurd to claim that poverty ennobles as it is to claim that wealth or birth automatically makes for nobility of character.

Melville's view of city life in Pierre (1852) is less doctrinaire than the views of the popular novelists, but it is hardly dispassionate. It is a vivid piece of tonal writing, but it is not realistic, nor is it meant to be. It is dark when Pierre and his companions reach the city. Gloom is the keynote of the description; even the long rows of street lamps "seemed not so much intended to dispel the
general gloom, as to show some dim path leading through it, into some gloom still deeper beyond.® The central scene of their arrival in the city occurs in the watch-house where Pierre returns for Isabel and Delly.

In indescribable disorder, frantic, diseased-looking men and women of all colours, and in all imaginable flaunting, immodest, grotesque, and shattered dresses, were leaping, yelling, and cursing around him... On all sides, were heard drunken male and female voices, in English, French, Spanish, and Portuguese, interlarded now and then, with the foulest of all human tongues, that dialect of sin and death, known as the Cant language, or the Flash... The thieves'-quarters, and all the brothels, Lock-and-Sin hospitals for incurables, and infirmaries and infernos of hell seemed to have made one combined sortie, and poured out upon earth through the vile vomitory of some unmentionable cellar.®

The key word is, of course, "inferno." The city represents an inferno for Pierre, and it is so described by Melville that one does not think it real any more than one does Milton's Pandemonium.

Compared to such pictures of urban life, particularly those in the pre-Civil War novels, De Forest's clear-sighted portrayal of New York is both rare and significant. He does not, like Melville, attempt to create a mood. Neither does he attempt to arouse disgust or hostility toward the city when picturing the seamy side of New York. He presents life in the New York tenements with the same objectivity with which he presents life in the New York mansions—and he does present both. He gives a more balanced view of American
urban life than his contemporaries do.

The South Carolina pictured in *Kate Beaumont* is another case in point. What it is, is not so important as what it is not. It is not the South of palatial mansions and blowing cotton fields, the South of Kennedy and Cooke; nor is it the back country of Longstreet and his successors, complete with dialect and Sut Lovingood humor: it is the more commonplace, though little written of, small town and its surrounding farm lands of pre-Civil War days. The first glimpse of Hartland (the name, like many in De Forest, has a literal significance) is of a church fair in the courthouse. Since it is the principal building, De Forest's description sets the tone for the town and district.

...Judge McAlister, has secured the court-room gratis for the use of his society, notwithstanding much dumb jealousy on the part of the Methodists, Baptists, etc. The greasy wooden seats have been "toted off"; the tobacco-stained floor has been scrubbed into a speckled cleanliness; there are plenty of gayly decked tables, with pretty girls smiling over them. ...The squeezing, buying, prattling, laughing, and staring crowd enjoys the scene heartily. A decent and civil crowd it is, although far from being purely aristocratic, for it exhibits many plain people, many unfashionable garments and some homespun ones. No negroes, barring a few as attendants. ...

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The genteel, but hardly magnificent, home of the McAlisters is even less pretentious. They and the Beaumonts are the principal society of Hartland and the central characters in the story. De Forest saves space by noting that the Beaumont home is very similar to the McAlisters' and then sketching the latter:
Speaking with severe truthfulness, and without regard to the proud illusions of Hartland District, it had no claim to be styled a mansion, except on account of its size alone. It was a plain, widespread mass of wood-work, in two stories, with plenty of veranda and more than enough square pillars, the white paint of the building itself rather rusty, and the green blinds not altogether free from fractures and palsy. 37

When Kate, the heroine, goes to Brownville to visit her married sister Nellie Armitage, she must travel on a rickety railroad in creaky cars. She is met by her sister in the family coach driven by a shabby negro. The coach is a

shabby barouche attached by a roughly patched harness to two noble horses... "What is that?" asked Kate, pointing to an ax and a coil of rope which lay on the driver's footboard.

"Dem ar is to mend the kerridge with, case it breaks down, miss," grinned the coachman.

"You don't know our Saxonburg fashions," laughed Nellie. "Family coaches will get shaky if they are kept long enough; and we up-country people almost always keep them long enough..."

In an hour the high-spirited bays halted champing at the door of Randolph Armitage's house. It was a strange-looking residence, which had obviously not been created all at once, but in successive parts, as the means of the owner increased, and without regard to aught but interior convenience. Two stories in height here and one story there, with one front facing the south and another the southwest, it appeared less like a single building than like an accidental collection of buildings. If three or four small dwellings should be swept away by a flood, and beached together without further disposition than that of the random waters, the inchoate result would resemble this singular mansion. It was, in fact, the nest where the Armitages had grown up through three generations from backwoods rudeness to their present grandeur, if grandeur it might be called. There was evidence in the building that prosperity did not yet haunt it overflowingly. The white paint which had once decked the miscellaneous clapboards had become ragged and rusty. In a back wing, constituting the kitchen and servants' quarters,
several window-panes were broken. The wooden front steps were somewhat shaky, and the enclosing fence fantastically dilapidated.38

Small wonder that Kate Beaumont, which Howells thought De Forest's shapeliest novel, did not have a large audience. If one remembers the post-Civil War vogue of the reconciliation novels which pictured the South in all its supposed elegance before the war, one can understand that De Forest's refusal to idealize his vision of the South put him at odds with the reading public.

When De Forest turned again to the South as the scene of The Bloody Chasm (1881), he turned to the most shopworn of materials. As we will later see, the book was deliberately fashioned to imitate the popular reconciliation novels; even so it is a disappointment. The setting is war-torn Charleston and, after that, Paris. Though De Forest's description of Charleston is, one presumes, accurate and unflinching, its vitality and effectiveness are mitigated by the lack of specific detail and by the melodramatic plot which intrudes. In the midst of the city's desolation, for example, the observer, Mr. Mather, meets a poor-but-decorously-clean clergyman in front of the ruined Huguenot Church. Probability abdicates as the reader is informed that this is the very clergyman who married Mr. Mather in that church some twenty years before. The story which follows is vapid and sentimental and, on the whole, less realistic than anything else De Forest wrote. The setting seems to have been intended to evoke a sympathetic reaction from the reader--

38 Ibid., pp. 94-95.
a mood; such intentions are romantic rather than realistic, for as Wellek and Warren rightly note, "Romantic description aims at establishing and maintaining a mood: plot and characterization are... dominated by tone."\(^{39}\)

\(^{39}\) *Theory of Literature*, p. 229.

In his last novel, *A Lover's Revolt* (1898), De Forest returned to the historical novel. The story is set in Boston in 1775. The setting is painfully accurate but obviously in the traditional vein of those romantics for whom the setting became the plot. The book is not significant except as a further sign that De Forest never entirely eliminated his latent romanticism.

In summary, one can say that De Forest fulfilled the demands of those who desired literature to portray American scenes, and in his best works he portrayed the national scene with a clear-sighted realism without parallel in his time. His ability to catch the spirit and feel of his time is nowhere better shown than in his description of a pseudo-English chop-house in New York. He exposes the rather half-hearted English atmosphere of the place and the type of people who were attracted by its imitation English air.

I observed a chop-house directly opposite Delmonico's bearing the following legend on its sign board.

**THE RETREAT OF OLD BILL HOBSON**
Hot Joints from Twelve to Four

I entered, and seated myself at a table by a front window. It was a long, dark room, slovenly, soiled, and smoky, containing thirteen small tables of stained cherry, thirty-three wooden-bottomed chairs, a model of a pilot schooner set over a freckled looking-glass, and two or three rusty engravings of yachts, racers, etc., hanging awry against the walls. On one
of the tables lay two or three copies of the Illustrated London News, two or three Punches, a Bell's Life in London, and a New York Herald. A dozen men of the "hossy" sort, mostly English, sat here and there, eating, drinking, talking, and smoking. A handsome, dissipated young fellow stood near me, calling on a party of his friends to finish their dinner and come out on a lark. Holding fast to a chair with one hand, and gesturing violently with the other, he swayed and jerked like a galvanized corpse, talked loud, swore at every other word, looked about him insolently, as if anxious to pick a quarrel, and, in short, was very drunk and not far from delirium tremens. A chubby boy was serving the guests with fat jorums and long slim glasses of ale. Old Bill himself, a lean leathery personage, an Englishman run to legs in America, approached me with a dignified suavity which showed travel, and asked what I would have. I told him ale, and he brought me some half-and-half, as full of sparkle as the best of London. Lighting a cheroot, I sipped quietly, keeping an eye on the door of Delmonico's, and an ear on the conversation of my neighbors.40

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4De Forest, Seacliff, p. 130.

Other examples would only reinforce the point that De Forest's settings are definitely localized descriptions of the common American scene presented in a realistic manner. That he was almost alone in even attempting to reproduce the American scene objectively is difficult to prove; the lack of such settings in other works is difficult to illustrate. That De Forest did not often use settings for their intrinsic value as atmospheric pieces—as Melville used his Spouter-Inn or Hawthorne his Pyncheon house—is, I think, demonstrably clear. Even when the settings of his contemporaries are accurate and detailed, they are colored by doctrinaire or moralistic intent. With the exceptions I have noted, De Forest's settings have the objective reality of photographs, and this objectivity sets him apart from his contemporaries.
II An American Gallery

It is not only in his settings, good as they are, that De Forest showed himself as a social historian without peer in his time. His awareness of the changing times in which he lived is apparent in his remarks on "The Great American Novel." In this article De Forest examined the possibility of some author writing a novel which would do for America what Thackeray, for one, had done for England. After noting that neither Irving, nor Cooper, nor Hawthorne, nor the New England local colorists had yet managed to "paint American life so broadly, truly, and sympathetically that every American of feeling and culture is forced to acknowledge the picture as a likeness of something which he knows," De Forest gives his reasons for the lack of a great American novel. He states that the absence of a general frame of reference (and a cultural community) such as exists in England precludes a great social novel: the multiplicity of American society is too bewildering, too vast for comprehension. He concludes with the question: "Can a society which is changing so rapidly be painted except in the daily newspaper?" He doubts it.

Yet, of all the writers of his time, De Forest tried hardest to do
this very thing. Though no one of his novels succeeds, taken together they show his constant striving for a truly American portraiture. Look, for example, at the array of American types which he includes in his novels.

In Seacliff there is, first of all, Somerville, the suave, debonair society crook who preys on the foolish women of Newport and other resorts. Though the existence of Somerville and his kind has been noted in European and English literature, this is an early appearance of the type in American fiction.

Entered the dandy, the diner-out, the Apollo of Gothamite tailors, the man who drew at sight on ladies' hearts, the unrivalled manager of fancy balls and private theatricals, the high priest of Fifth Avenue mysteries, Frank Somerville, Esquire, Attorney at Law. He was a very noticeable man in person as well as in manners and character. He must have been thirty-seven at that moment, and he had seen dissipation enough to waste the ruddiest health; yet he was as erect, as fresh, as unwrinkled, as graceful in port as if Father Time had but just brought him to the first full perfection of manhood. Nature seemed to have gifted him with that imperishable beauty, that eternal youth, the ideal of which we see in statues of Grecian gods and heroes. Five feet ten and finely proportioned, he had the features of an Achilles, a clear pale complexion, stern dark-gray eyes, waving glossy black hair and a heavy moustache unequalled in curl and unsurpassed in blackness. I had observed him in Paris as one of the most perfectly Gallicized Americans that ever trod a boulevard; in London as a prime man-about-town, indistinguishable to my eyes from the purest bloods of the English aristocracy; and I had heard of him in Italy as the rival of Russian princes, the conqueror of contesse and marchesine.

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44De Forest, Seacliff, pp. 20-21.
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And so Somerville remains until the end. His urbanity and wit break down only at the melodramatic denouement, which is a flaw not in Somerville but in the story. Here is something new for
America. Somerville is no Lovelace, though his manner suggests Chesterfield. Somerville is the creature of the rootless, traditionless society in which he operates, a society which, for lack of anything else, is based on appearance, not family. As the Westervelts are themselves distinguished only by old Mr. Westervelt's six millions, they can hardly be expected to see through the brilliant exterior of Somerville.

Westervelt senior is himself something new to American fiction. He is a New York tycoon, almost perfect of his kind. He represents the new economic power of America which began as mercantilism but turned to speculation—a sort of halfway point between John Jacob Astor and Daniel Drew.

While I loitered, a small, thin, alert man of seventy or seventy-five, with large Roman features, great gray eyes, and short stiff white hair, brushed upright, stepped briskly into the doorway from the interior, and stared sternly at the Quincy granite stores opposite, very much as if he had resolved to knock them down that afternoon, and build better ones next morning. He talked impatiently to himself, and beat a sharp tattoo with his cane on the granite doorstone. As I resumed my walk, and passed slowly by him, a tall, portly gentleman came to his side and looked down at him with precisely the same expression as if he were looking up at him. "So," said he, "you decidedly disapprove of the operation, Mr. Westervelt?"

"Yes, sir," returned the senior, in a voice as sharp, distinct, and decided as the click of his cane. "Disapprove of it altogether, sir. You don't want two more clippers any more than you want two camel-leopards. Shouldn't weigh yourself, so, sir. Why, sir, my dunce of a son couldn't have a worse idea. No, sir; no more clippers. Good-morning, Mr. Jones."45

45 *Ibid.*, p. 120.
When the hero goes to visit Westervelt senior, he notes:

His hat, coat, vest, pants, and gaiters, were all of a Quincy granite color; his great eyes were of a cold, stony gray, astonishingly like polished Quincy granite; and his face, with its rugged lines and hard expression, was as the countenance of a Quincy granite quarry.\(^46\)

\(^46\)Ibid., p. 359.

The office of this tycoon is also spare and cold and cheaply furnished. The chair offered to the hero is "wooden-bottom, uncushioned, and savagely whittled."\(^47\) Mr. Westervelt, the reader later finds, drinks cheap port and uses a tin fork, ostentatiously at that. He has the same strictness of character in personal affairs that he has in business. When he discovers after her suicide that his son's wife has, with Somerville, defrauded her cousins, the Van Leer brothers, Westervelt comes to them shortly.

"It's no time, I am aware, for ordinary operations; but this is an affair which demands immediate attention. I have a debt of honor and I must pay it, or I shan't sleep. Gentlemen, a person who once belonged to my family defrauded you out of sixty thousand dollars. I have calculated it at compound interest, seven per cent., as you will see by looking at this paper. Here are two checks which cover the total. Here, also, is a receipt. Will you be so good as to examine the checks and sign the receipt."\(^48\)

\(^48\)Ibid., p. 456.

The Van Leers attempt to refuse the money, but Westervelt is adamant. As he leaves, Henry Van Leer remarks, "What a h-ll of an upper lip
the old cock has!"\(^{49}\) That is about as good a statement as one can

\(^{49}\text{Ibid.}, p. 457.\)

make for that famous class of men who were ruthless and predatory, but capable and never given to whining. I suggest that the De Forest of 1859 was many years ahead of his time in his presentation of Westervelt senior.

The spirit of materialism which De Forest rightly saw as a major characteristic of his America is well represented by old Westervelt. His business-like conference with Fitz Hugh, who comes to ask him for his granddaughter's hand, is typical. One notes particularly the old man's confidence in his ability to make money. The conference begins abruptly with a question by Westervelt:

"What do you want to marry her for? She's no money."

"I don't care about money," returned I, quite insulted. "I ask for nothing but Miss Westervelt herself."

"How much are you worth?" he demanded, without taking the least notice of my sentimental excitement.

"About thirty thousand dollars," responded I, with a sudden feeling of shrinkage, as I thought of his six millions.

"Thirty thousand," said he. "Rumph! It's not a great sum, sir. I hope you know it. However, it's enough, with pluck, sir. I hadn't thirty hundred when I married. A man doesn't need much of an inheritance to make his way in the world. He doesn't need any, sir!" (Loudly.) "Make me young again, and set me down in my shirt, I don't care where, and I wouldn't call the king my cousin. Well, can you live on your money,--keep a wife on it?"

"Yes, sir," replied I cheerfully. . . .

"Be sure you can live, sir. Don't look to your father-in-law; he has nothing. Don't look to me, either;--I'm sick of my son and his family. . . . Well, what are your investments?"

"Half bank stock, and half bond and mortgage, averaging seven per cent., and a little over."

"No business then?" he asked sternly, and all Quincy granite again.
"No business except authorship. I have got out one small work, and am writing another."
"Humph! Do you publish your own books?"
"No sir," returned I. . . .
"Very right, very right," said he. "Don't publish them; you'd be sure to lose, sir. By the way, you are the son of Charles Fitz Hugh, the lawyer, who died some ten years ago, eh?"
"I am, sir. I believe my family is a thoroughly respectable one."
"Don't care a straw for respectable families, sir. Every man is respectable for himself, or contemptible for himself. Your father was respectable. I knew him. Fine man. Clever man. Was climbing the ladder fast. Pity he died just when he did."  

50 Ibid., pp. 360-362.

Thus the marriage is arranged. Westervelt's qualifications for respectability are notable—cleverness and ability to "climb the ladder." Ben Franklin, patron saint of business ethics, or Babbitt, would have admired Fitz Hugh's father, too, and for the same reasons. Westervelt is neither sanctimonious like Richard B. Kimball's Henry Powers nor as Machiavellian as Henry Morford's Charles Holt (Days of Shoddy, 1863). In many ways Westervelt was more typical of his kind than any contemporary portrayal of the financier. Indeed, this facet of American life which was so dominant in the latter half of the nineteenth century was not fully explored until Fuller and Dreiser came to examine the motives and actions of the financiers.

In the same book appears the first gossip-columnist that I am aware of in American fiction. De Forest refuses to name this offensive columnist, calling him only The Reporter. He appears only briefly and then is hardly characterized; yet he is drawn with understanding
and allowed to state his own defense.

"I dare say that at bottom, the Old Harry is my employer; it is the Satanic Press that I work for, I acknowledge; but the fact is, that I am less afraid of the devil than of my own stomach. The question with me is not so much how I can escape the clutches of the one, as how I can pacify the juices of the other. It is all very easy for you to preach and practise fine moralities, with your pockets full of half eagles and certificates of bank stock. But put yourself in my situation, with never a dividend coming in from year's end to year's end, and all the while an old mother looking to you to keep a flicker of fire under her teapot. You haven't lived the whole round of human life, my boy."51

51Ibid., p. 135.

Though the individual newspaperman is thus absolved somewhat, Fitz Hugh's scorn of The Reporter illustrates De Forest's revulsion for the yellow Journalism of the eighteen fifties. Bartley Hubbard and Henrietta Stackpole, also journalists, are of much later vintage, more respectable and more fully developed.

In The Wetherel Affair (1873) is another classic American figure, the not-too-genuine count (from Poland supposedly) who is in America searching for a rich heiress to marry. Count Poloski is well mannered and scholarly, although as De Forest observes,

He was continually telling you that he had written this or that elegant or recondite work, and promising to let you see it, only he never brought it. If he borrowed a book or bought one (which he frequently did on trust), he would usually remark, "I take this for the pleasure of studying the man's style; the subject is familiar to me."52

Throughout the book, Poloski acts as a catalyst to bring out the reactions of various Americans to that incongruous phenomenon, nobility in a republic. To Wolverton, a sound man though a gambler and cynic,

"They are all dead-beats, looking out for a rich marriage or some other chance to swindle somebody. And to the best of my travelling observation and study, four-fifths of those in Europe are no better. Poloski at any rate is a sucker. He is a sponge incarnate."53

Yet to Edward Wetherel, reformed rake and hero of the novel, "There is something in blood... I suppose a count must be a gentleman in some one point of his character, if you can only discover what that point is."54 To old Mrs. Dinneford, who is a characteristic New England Yankee, Poloski is perplexing. She may not understand him, but she instinctively dislikes him.

"I don't want to be bewildered with words that I am not used to," declared Mrs. Dinneford. "When a man tells me that he is a count, I don't know what to expect of him. It's as perplexing as if he should tell me that he was a jabberwok. And especially when he has no county! A count in a republic, getting his living nobody knows how, seems to me what our market-men calls a dubersome character, and I am always wondering what he was disinherited and banished for, and feel like addressing him in the words of Tupper, 'O degenerate scion of a stock so excellent and noble,' which I dare say would bother the head of our poor man tremendously, for his brains are no thicker than batter, in my opinion."55
In spite of his over-elaborate manners, his too effusive compliments—in short, his continental manner—Poloski's ability to be all things to all men wins over all opposition, and he becomes engaged to Alice Dinneford. De Forest's analysis of the count's success in America lays bare that strange contradiction which still exists, the attraction of aristocracy in a democracy.

It was probably the title of Count which mainly did the business for these two ladies, as well as for a number of other ladies then breathing the air of freedom in this glorious republic, the land of democratic simplicity and equality. After our best society had decided to concede and eventually to affirm that Poloski was an entirely authentic noble, his success as a man of fashion and as a beau was assured. Even to the minds of free men and free women there is something powerfully and we will not say irrationally dazzling in the fact of descent from "a hundred earls," or even from a much shorter string of titled forefathers. As we look upon a "scion of noble stock," we get an impression of the virtues and potencies and great deeds of successively eminent generations, all accumulated and concentrated in the perhaps personally unattractive individual before us, and shining out of him like the vitality of bygone forests out of a lump of anthracite. . . . We are good republicans in our heads; we can argue against caste in the abstract, and do not want its hands in our pockets; but our imaginations are enchanted by it.\footnote{Ibid., pp. 158-159.}

Much like Henry James after him, De Forest saw that there was something to be admired in the count's culture. Poloski understands things of the spirit much better than his American friends. For example, the following:

"We must not laugh at the world-sorrow," put in the Count, . . . "You practical Anglo-Saxons delight to laugh at it; you call great Byron humbug because he felt it and sang it. But you are wrong. The world-sorrow is a true and
beautiful emotion. I cannot boast of it; but I respect it. The illimitable Shakespeare divined it and described it. The melancholy of Hamlet comes not altogether from his troubles; it is partly the world-sorrow. When we behold that great drama from this one of its many sides, we see that Hamlet was in part a prophecy of Rousseau and Byron. There is nothing great in the sentimental cosmos that the illimitable Shakespeare has not foretold or recounted. He knew the past and the future, the fact and the possibility of the man-soul; and he, the all-enfolding, the highest known intellect, speaks not contemptuously of the world-sorrow."57

57Ibid., p. 65.

De Forest admits that the count was not trying to show off nor just talking to hear himself. His friends, good materialistic Americans all, make fun of the count for his outburst; for they know him to be a gambler and flâneur. He hits back at them in words which might well have come from De Forest himself.

"Why should not a flâneur be also a great man?" he asked. "Caesar was a dandy. You Americans are not many-sided enough. It is not that you have not brains individually. It is the defect of your intellectual atmosphere. There is in it no variety of culture. It is not so in Europe. Look at me--what you call a dandy--I know seven languages, and have written brochures on them all, and now I am preparing a great work on the Origins of Speech."58

58Ibid.

Poloski is representative of an interesting phase of American history. After the revolutions of 1848 in Europe, America was flooded by refugees, much as in our own times; but the refugees in 1848 were as often as not nobility who were fleeing the expected democratization which Mazzini and Kossuth, among others, were urging. Perhaps the most notable of the foreigners was Louis Kossuth himself,
who was brought to the United States as a guest of the nation in
1851. Indicative of his popularity was the introduction of the
Kossuth slouch hat into the fashions of the day. Kossuth, of course,
was no refugee, but others not so prominent were. Even earlier,
however, America had become the hunting ground for many impoverished
noblemen who sought to enrich themselves by marriage to an American
heiress. William Irving Paulding, for example, satirized the foreign
count and the Boston society which lionized him in The Noble Exile
(1847).59 In Poloski De Forest showed his awareness of the influx

59See Arthur Hobson Quinn, A History of the American Drama from
the Beginning to the Civil War, Second Edition, New York, 1943,
pp. 319-320

of foreigners in the fifties and the reaction to that influx by a
representative group of Americans.

From the fifties on, moreover, America was visited by a steady
flow of cultural emissaries from across the sea. They came to visit,
to observe, or, more practically, to lecture to the Americans
thirsting for culture. The great Thackeray came (lecturing strangely
enough on "The English Humorists of the Eighteenth Century") and
after him, Tupper. The latter, along with Fanny Fern and Sylvanus
Cobb, was one of the most popular reading favorites of De Forest's
time. Tupper's Proverbial Philosophy had, by 1881, sold a million
copies in the United States.60 In The Weatherel Affair, De Forest

60Fred Lewis Pattee, The Feminine Fifties, New York, 1940, p. 83.
shows a typical member of that reading public, Mrs. Dinneford. She is of that class of which Pattee speaks in the following passage:

Tupper to newly-rich debutantes ignorant of books, to aspiring landladies' daughters who had boarders like the Autocrat, to sighing old maids with longings for culture, was refinement. 61

61 Ibid., p. 82.

Mrs. Dinneford is a good woman, with a quotation from Tupper for every occasion. Her religious cousin, Judge Wetherel, feels that she approaches blasphemy with her elevation of Tupper over the Bible; and so she does. But the real danger of Tupperism lies in its reduction of human experience to platitudes. Mrs. Dinneford can reject the Higher Criticism with "Shall time teach the lesson which eternity cannot master?" 62 Her idea of Saint Paul is this:


"There is a beauty of the reason, grandly independent of externals; it looketh from the windows of the house, shining in the man triumphant." 63 When Edward Wetherel is disinherited by his uncle,

63 Ibid., p. 18.

Mrs. Dinneford is ready with Tupper again: "There is no greater evil among men than a testament framed with injustice." 64

64 Ibid., p. 56.

Nor did De Forest ignore that other great educator, Sylvanus Cobb, author of The Gunmaker of Moscow and star of the New York
Ledger. The Ledger was a university, a lyceum, for a vast audience (it had perhaps a 400,000 circulation)\(^{65}\) of shopgirls, clerks, and respectable middle-class families from the fifties to the eighties. The influence of the violently romantic adventure stories of the Ledger—a few Cobb titles are indicative: "Karmel the Scout," "The Mystic Bride," "The Scourge of Sefton Dale," "The Wild Knight," "The Brigands of Como"—is shown by De Forest in yet another character from The Wetherel Affair, Miss Imogen Eleonore Jones.

When first seen, Miss Jones is eating stew in Fulton Market and reading "Angela's Revenge" in the New York Spasmodic (the Ledger surely). De Forest burlesques her, but Miss Jones remains a genuinely amusing character even when overdrawn. It is Miss Jones, moreover, who befriends Nestoria out of sympathy—and a desire to be involved in a mysterious intrigue. They are sharing a table as the conversation opens.

"And have you seen better days?" she [Jones] asked in her affected, melodramatic monotone, whimsical enough surely, but not devoid of sincerity. Nestoria made no answer, but she thought of a lost home and a lost love, and the tears brimmed her eyes.
"Poo-o-or cheild!" murmured the subscriber to the "Spasmodic." "Has the da-a-ark hand of misfortune been so insupportably heavy on thee?"
She mouthed her words like an actress in a fourth-rate theatre. She was little less than ludicrous and yet she meant to be truly sympathetic, and was doing her best to console.

The homeless one still made no reply; her whole soul was bruised in striving to quell her emotion; she was obliged to fight hard to repress sobs and convulsive twitchings.
"Poo-o-or, poo-o-o-or distressed spirit!" continued the stranger, stretching a hand across the table and laying it
on a quivering shoulder. "Canst thou not tell me thy sorrow?"

"I have nothing to tell," replied Nestoria, crushing more emotions in one breath than the other had known in her whole life.

"Let us swear to respect each other's secrets," exclaimed the sympathizer, with an enthusiasm which was strongly tinctured with romantic joy. "You have a secret of deep and dark misfortune, and you shall not divulge it even to me, nor will I ask it. I also have my burden of woe. But let silence enfold it. Why don't you eat your stew?"^66

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Miss Jones, one can see, is easily carried away by her imagination. Her language has the gaudy orotundity common in much of the literature of the fifties and sixties. What is not so plain, but is perhaps as typical of those attracted to the Ledger, is her core of hard-headed common sense. Her typical switch from melodrama to a practical concern over Nestoria's uneaten stew is only one of many such illustrations. Miss Jones, herself, De Forest notes, "devoured crackers, oysters, and chopped cabbage [this is for breakfast, incredible as it may seem] with appetite, having no doubt found them by experience to be very supporting under burdens of woe."^67 De Forest's presentation of Miss Jones is not so one-sided

67Ibid., p. 99.

as these illustrations may indicate. She is kind; she is not completely a fool; she is merely uneducated, or rather she is educated over-sentimentally. She is a very real type of American, and she justifies De Forest's interest. Such women, with little education, living in the growing urban centers, working at grubby
jobs, renting rooms or small apartments, were to play an important part in the life and fiction of the later nineteenth century.

Imogen has one hilarious flirtation with a New York detective, a Mr. Sweet, which begins on a streetcar and ends on a corner of Madison Square. The acquaintance flowers through the offices of the personal column of the newspaper. Sweet puts in this ad:

Will the lady who rode in the Fourth Avenue car, with blue bonnet, striped silk, and auburn hair, grant a meeting to a gentleman who sat opposite her in Madison Square, with a view to further acquaintance?68

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68Tbid., p. 188.

Imogen, on seeing the ad, cries out, "'Be still, poor fluttering heart!'" They meet and Sweet makes advances. His manner is delightful.

"And may I ask your name?" inquired Mr. Sweet in a thrilling murmur, the same hoarse murmur in which he said to bar-keepers, "Whiskey straight."69

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69Tbid., p. 189.

Finally Sweet decides to "quit fooling round and proceed to business."

What follows is pure comedy, though characteristic of a level of society usually either avoided or depicted only to condemn.

"You are a mighty nice girl!"

"Oh, don't say that!" murmured Imogen Eleonore, scared out of her breath now that the wooing had commenced.

"But you are, though, and I'm a-goin' to say it, and stick to it like a pitch plaster," insisted Sweet with another pressure.

"Oh, no! -- flatter me not -- bewilder me not!" pleaded Imogen, throbbing with happiness perhaps as much as alarm.

"Now don't put a dam-damper on a feller!" protested Sweet, slipping that ponderous arm of his around her whalebony waist,
for he believed that her shyness was in her own way, and that she would be grateful to him for breaking it down. "Come, it's dark enough for us to walk a little closer. Nobody'll see it, or care if they do."

For a moment Miss Jones was paralyzed; for a moment she was squeezed right heartily and without resistance; for, though she seemed to herself to pull away, she did not pull an ounce. But she was really terrified; the magazine of honest modesty which lay at the bottom of her silly soul was all aflame; and she did sincerely want to get out of the hands of her athletic admirer. Unable to use her muscles, she remembered that she once had a voice, and she made a spasmodic effort to get it out. In the next instant the dusk of Madison Square resounded to a squeal of, "Unhand me, wretch!"70

70 Ibid., pp. 189-190. The pun on "spasmodic" is probably intentional.

Her demand shocks Sweet, mainly because he does not know what to make of such high-flown language. The romance continues, however, after a bit of apology offered by Sweet. All this may not seem very significant to modern readers, nor very representative; and indeed it is played for laughs. Still, the manner of meeting and the whole subsequent affair, unconsummated as it was, bring a spirit of everyday life to the American novel. Certainly this is a far cry from the drawing-room flirtation common to the literature of that period.

Mr. Sweet, like Imogen, represents another facet of De Forest's America. Howard Haycraft substantially documents the thesis that the appearance of the detective, in literature as well as life, is a corollary to the establishment of modern police forces in the democratic countries.71 De Forest was not the first to exploit the

71 Murder for Pleasure, New York, 1941. For a discussion of this topic see Chapter XV, "Dictators, Democrats, and Detectives."
theme of modern detection, of course. Earlier there were Poe in America and Gaboriau in France. Even more pertinent, the stories of Wilkie Collins and Charles Reade were currently circulating in America. The similarity of The Wetherel Affair to the detective story genre can be seen in its callous indifference to the fate of the victim, Judge Wetherel. De Forest's detective has a striking similarity to the modern hard-boiled detective. Sweet is no genteel Sergeant Cuff, nor is he an embroiled amateur like the Chevalier Dupin. Sweet is an experienced detective, now retired and making his living as a tavern keeper. He comes into the case in hope of a reward, not out of any moral considerations. (De Forest wrote him into the story because he wished to strike at the ineptitude and venality of the New York police, much as Poe wrote "The Mystery of Marie Roget" to expose police methods. The Nathan murder in particular bothered De Forest.)

72 De Forest, The Wetherel Affair, p. 205. In an editorial aside, De Forest writes:

It may be imagined by some persons that I do injustice to this noble caste by presenting Mr. Sweet as an example of their abilities. I modestly but firmly, and sorrowfully, also, believe the contrary. I believe that American detectives, and especially those of New York city, are usually models either of eminent dishonesty or of eminent incapacity. Just consider the vast morasses and Pontine marshes of undrained, uncleared crime, which send up their horrible malaria on the island of Manhattan. Look at the Nathan murder and the long series of other murders...
story. J. De Forest would have agreed, for he saw that the murder-

mystery added realism to the rest of his story. In an aside he noted, "From this festering subject (which lends, by the way, a groundwork of probability and even of naturalness to our story) we must return to Nestoria."74

Notice the sound reasoning behind Sweet's first observations as he views the body of Judge Wetherel, killed by a blow on the head with a small hatchet.

"And no regular hand would 'a hit such a lick as that," reasoned Mr. Sweet. "A regular hand don't draw blood when he can help it. A regular hand would 'a choked the old man a little, or stunned him with the hammer end of the hatchet, and taken the money and vamosed. It was a greenhorn that did this job, and it was a greenhorn that the old man knew, so that he had to kill or be shown up. Then there's the will gone; that's a note of the first importance; that p'ints, that does. I did think for a minute that professionals might 'a taken it to bleed the heirs; but, come to consider it, that game would be too almighty risky; professionals wouldn't try it on. The business was done by some man that wanted to destroy the will and keep the old gentleman from making another. And who's the man? The nephew! That's the way I see it."75

Sweet's further kinship with the amorous modern detective, in fiction at least, is evidenced by his flirtation with Imogen. When he first sees her, he is riding the streetcars looking for pickpockets and he
immediately suspects Imogen of being "one of the light-fingered sisterhood." Further investigation reveals that she is out on a flirt, and, since Sweet is not averse to public flirtation when not too absorbed in his "biz," he winks at her and begins the romance. Sweet works on her as patiently as if she were a case; instinctively he knows that she is "a milliner, or a shop girl, or some other 'piece of calico.'" The advertisement and meeting at Madison Square follow.

Sweet's similarity to the modern detective, interesting as it is, is not as important as the fact that he represents another in De Forest's gallery of Americans. He illustrates again De Forest's awareness of the multiplicity of American life and his determination to portray it in all of its diversity. His pages are crowded with contemporary types too numerous to do more than name here. There are the brutish Van Leer brothers in Seacliff whose whole ambition and pride center on their abilities as shark fishermen. There, too, appear Pa and Ma Treat and their little Johnnie, who will probably cut his grandmother's throat some day. Then there is Mr. Hunter, also in Seacliff, a rusticated undergraduate who lays claim to having smoked thirty cigars in a day and being a devil of a fellow. In sharp contrast is John Whitewood, Jr., a scholar in Miss Ravenel:
This last named individual, the only son of the host, a youth of twenty years of age, was a very proper person to hold the position of fourth lady. 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 timidiest of girls, he was an example of what can be done with youthful blood, muscle, mind and feeling by the studious severities of a Puritan university. 78

Both Hunter and Whitewood are less idealized than Bernard Langdon, that apotheosis of scholarly young manhood who performs so brilliantly in Elsie Venner. (But perhaps the medical schools demanded such perfection.)

In Irene the Missionary De Forest presents the expected cast of missionaries and travelers to the Holy Land and, in addition, another memorable American character, Porter Brassey, American consul to Syria. Brassey is of that breed which so scandalized Henry Adams; he is totally unfitted for his post, knows no foreign languages, cannot hold the respect of the natives, and, worst of all, is so chauvinistic that he can see little good in any foreigners and none whatsoever in Syrians. His post is a political plum awarded for swinging the West Wolverine citizens of some western state to his party. He is a hard-drinking, poker-playing, likeable sort of fellow who attracts sympathy from the reader because of his utter loneliness in Syria. In the same book Miss Biffles appears. She is an old college flirt, daughter of a professor, who has become a Millerite. She is another of those daughters whom De Forest wrote about in Miss Ravenel. She is traveling about the world with
a Mr. Wormly to whom she is not married. The situation is unexploited but gives rise to a number of conjectures, none of which is ruled out since De Forest merely notes the incongruity of their ages and explains that Miss Biffles' attraction to Wormly is a logical result of her long years of admiring undergraduates.

As a final illustration of De Forest's American types there is Senator Pickens Rigdon, who is too drunk to find Washington. He is a good antidote to the charming Southern gentleman as seen by Caroline Lee Hentz and her tribe.

Few authors of De Forest's time offer such a wide range of American types. Howells and James both dealt with a much narrower segment of society. True, in later days Howells broadened his scope, notably in *A Hazard of New Fortunes*, to include such diverse types as socialists and entrepreneur capitalists; but his earlier fiction deals with a remarkably uniform society. That James deliberately limited the area of his fiction is too well known to need examination here. The limitations of Holmes and those others who dabbled in New England local color were noted by De Forest himself when he wrote: "The Yankeehood which he [*Holmes*] exhibits is...a community of old maids, toothless doctors, small-souled lawyers, village poets, shelved professors."79 De Forest's Yankeehood,

III  The Historical Present

Besides objectively portraying American types which had either been ignored by his predecessors or been reduced to stock characters for popular consumption, De Forest presented numerous characters who personify contemporary intellectual and social currents. Previous writers had reflected social and intellectual movements, of course—Hawthorne's The Blithedale Romance contains numerous transcendentalists—but the choice was infrequent. Here again it is the range of De Forest's vision that differentiates him from his contemporaries. De Forest, more like Thackeray than Jane Austen, to both of whom he has been compared, did not neglect or ignore the issues of his day. He was personally caught up in many of them and was, to all appearances, well-informed on most of the others. Any list of the significant currents of the latter half of the nineteenth century would include at least these major ones: the Civil War, the Reconstruction, governmental corruption, woman suffrage, Darwinism, transcendentalism, abolition, and perhaps missionaryism. De Forest had something to say about all of them, sometimes by commenting in the purely authorial manner of Thackeray, more often by simply picturing a person who embodies prevailing views. The latter method is the more artistic—and more effective by far.

In Overland appears the first of De Forest's several feminists, Mrs. Maria Stanley.

Forty-seven years old, or thereabouts; lots of curling iron-gray hair twisted about her round forehead, a few wrinkles, and not all of the newest. Round face, round and earnest eyes,
short, self-confident nose, chin sticking out in search of its own way, mouth trembling with unuttered ideas. . . . Walks up and down, man-fashion, with her hands behind her back—also man-fashion. 80

80 De Forest, Overland, p. 4.

Mrs. Stanley dislikes men whom she cannot rule—most men, that is. When she meets a direct descendant of the original Coronado, she comments:

"What evils has that creature man wrought in this beautiful world! Ah, Mr. Coronado, it would have been a very different planet had woman had her rightful share in the management of its affairs." 81

81 Ibid., p. 16.

She is so completely in the hold of her ruling passion that it is child's play for Coronado to flatter her opinions and lead her to make the wrong decisions for her ward. She is, as De Forest clearly shows, a foolish woman. She never retreats from her idée fixe. At the end of the story, with the lovers united and Coronado exposed for what he is, she exclaims:

"Oh, that smooth-tongued, shiny-eyed meeching, bowing complimenting hypocrite! I see at last what a villain he was. . . . To think that a person who was so right on the main question [female suffrage] could be so wrong on everything else! The contradiction adds to his guilt." 82

82 Ibid., p. 207.

Woman's suffrage appears in a different form in Squire Nancy Appleyard:
. . .she beheld a Bloomer: not, indeed, the ordinary Bloomer, a limp, diminutive, ill-favored nondescript, in a flannel or calico bathing dress, but a young woman, who really looked like a man, so nearly did her garniture resemble masculine apparel. A tall and strong young person, dressed in a plaited frock-coat, plaited cloth vest, and gathered cloth pantaloons, was the figure which Josie stared at with a mixture of wonder, amusement, aversion, and contempt.\textsuperscript{83}

\textsuperscript{83}John William De Forest, \textit{Playing the Mischief}, New York, 1875, p. 35.

De Forest's further description of the Bloomer is surprising in its frankness.

She was a tall and vigorous young person, resembling in figure a man much more than most women do, but still looking oddly in coat, vest, and pantaloons. It was impossible not to note, with a sort of discontented surprise, the slope of the shoulders, the hollowness of the back, the breadth of the hips, the fullness of the haunches, and the pulpy plumpness of the thighs. To an eye unaccustomed to plain exhibition of such phenomena the effect was decidedly grotesque, a little indecorous, and, one might almost say, revolting. It was a coarse and unpleasing removal of the veils and mysteries with which our race has in the main loved to drape the forms of womanhood.\textsuperscript{84}

\textsuperscript{84}Ibid., p. 43.

After such an introduction, one is not surprised to find Nancy Appleyard made the butt of many scenes in the book. She attempts to make Josie play a sort of Russian roulette with poisoned bread pills. Later Nancy attempts, man-like, to horse-whip her wayward lover, Sykes Drummond. None of her schemes come to anything, for De Forest rides hard against female suffrage.

Even so, De Forest shows that he was well aware of the movement which was so violent in his time. He analyzes at least two of the types who worked for woman suffrage. Aunt Maria, who has not been
happy in her marriage and is tired of the secondary status of females, is one type; Nancy Appleyard, who desires to be a lawyer but in reality would settle for a husband and home, is the other. De Forest, it is clear, deprecates the motives of the suffragettes. Still, his picture of American life would have been less complete had he ignored the problem altogether.

John Bowlder, a disciple of Emerson, appears in The Wetherel Affair. De Forest describes him as a man of "headlong demeanor and plunging gait," who looks like a fat Newfoundland puppy, with a great bush beard and a shock of prematurely white hair.

He worshipped Emerson, admired Thoreau, and read much in Walt Whitman. Years before this, carried away by the story of "Walden," as many a boy has been by that of "Robinson Crusoe," he rushed into the forests of Maine, built a hermitage there, and communed obstinately with unsympathizing nature, until a party of surveyors found him bedridden with rheumatism and starving, and sent him back to the degrading comforts of civilization.

His first speech is characteristic. He appears just after Judge Wetherel has been murdered and Nestoria has disappeared.

"I have just seen Edward," he opened abruptly, without any prelude of salutations. "Cheer up about your little friend who has vanished into the unknown. He has found a suggestion of her. Delicate omens traced in air. There is a boat gone, and she must have taken it. Edward is off in search of her. Thought will dissolve the universe and find her at the bottom of it. As for the Judge, dear me, dear me! What can I say to comfort you? The red slayer has been here. But then when
he thinks he slays he errs. Our noble friend lives on in the heaven of the good. Well, here is Lehming. . . . "87

87 Ibid., p. 79.

Bowlder, in his bumbling way, decides to help the searchers for Nestoria, who is believed drowned in the harbor. When asked if he can row, he replies characteristically, "I can learn." But he capsizes three rods from shore and has to be put to bed. While waiting for his clothes to dry, he sits by the window and discourses to the idlers who wander about the scene of the crime.

"Your goodness must have some edge to it, else it is none," he lectured to a knot of boys who gathered to stare at him. Go out and do your bidden work, if you do it alone. Shun father and brother, if your good genius calls you, and they hear it not."89

89 Ibid.

After a bit more of this, De Forest writes,

"Benny, come here," yelled one urchin to another, more distant, with whom he was in friendly relations. "Here's a bully old crazy man, an' he's a goin' it like everything. I guess he's the murderer. Come an' look at him."90

90 Ibid.

Throughout the book Bowlder is kindly and well-meaning but likely to be misunderstood by the world. In his eccentricity he reminds one of Bronson Alcott, who would eat only the "aspiring vegetables," those that grew above ground. Bowlder's good intentions, and their
ineffectualness, are illustrated when he takes a job wheeling bricks in order to find out what such work is like and is arrested as a suspicious character because he is wearing a gold watch on the job. De Forest shows that, in his view, idealists lack the common sense to adjust to the realities of life. Yet such visionary forces were strong in the nineteenth century, and the inclusion of John Bowlder shows that De Forest was aware of such currents in the American intellectual stream. Interestingly enough, De Forest was related by marriage to Ralph Waldo Emerson.

That De Forest was also aware of the Darwinian controversy of his time is shown by the lengthy digression in Playing the Mischief to allow Colonel Julian Murray and his brother, the Reverend John Murray, to debate the doctrine of evolution. The Colonel has come rather late to the new scientific discoveries and "had something like a pious desire to reconcile all men to its teachings." De Forest was also aware of the Darwinian controversy of his time is shown by the lengthy digression in Playing the Mischief to allow Colonel Julian Murray and his brother, the Reverend John Murray, to debate the doctrine of evolution. The Colonel has come rather late to the new scientific discoveries and "had something like a pious desire to reconcile all men to its teachings." His brother John takes a dogmatic view that "Evolution is not true, and the Church can not accept it. God's Church can not grow mightier on falsehood." The Colonel advances all the accepted arguments:

"Look at this question in the light of history. Your Church Universal has learned a great deal from laymen since they were first invented. Once it denounced astronomy, and sent Galileo to the guard-house. But at last it had to accept the solar systems, and since then it has flourished wonderfully
on them. See what shining discourses your modern divines, from Channing down to the Ecce Coelum man, have made out of astronomy! The Church actually did not know what a great and beneficent Deity it worshiped until the vastness of His creation was revealed to it by the anathematized stargazers. Well, it accepted astronomy, and it has grown mightier on it. Some day it will accept evolution, and grow mightier on that.\textsuperscript{93}

\textsuperscript{93}Ibid.

When the Reverend declines to discuss it, the Colonel replies,

"But you can't help discussing it,"..."It is in the forefront of the battle of modern thought. If you don't seize it and turn it to your own purposes, it will damage you badly."\textsuperscript{94}

\textsuperscript{94}Ibid.

The Colonel also refutes the argument that the scientists are atheists. Indeed, he says,

"They are the advanced guard and the skirmishers of religion in the warfare of discovering truth and glorifying the Creator. Nine-tenths of them have been worthy men, as little given to sin and atheism as the clergy."\textsuperscript{95}

\textsuperscript{95}Ibid., p. 33.

The arguments are not new, nor is the expression of them very original—-with perhaps the exception of the Colonel's translation of the whole controversy into military terms; but the adamant position of the Reverend and the missionary fervor of the Colonel are neatly representative of the two trends in American thought.

Since De Forest had spent two years (1846-1848) visiting his brother, Henry A. De Forest, who was a medical missionary in Beirut,
Syria, he could not be expected to overlook the phenomenon of the missionary spirit. He wrote his first travel book, Oriental Acquaintance (1856), about the Near East and the various missionary communities he visited. Later he reworked much of the same material into a novel, Irene the Missionary (1879). In the latter, the Reverend Mr. Payson, the head of the mission in Syria, is shown to be a saintly man who gives untiringly of his strength and time to the natives, but his labors are unrewarded. The natives do admire the medical attention which they receive from Dr. Macklin, medical missionary, but even he can claim few converts. It is, De Forest sees, not so much in matters of religion as in education that the missions' true accomplishments lie; and he praises the mission schools highly. Nor does he picture the missionaries as suffering, except from climate, at their work. Payson, an honest fellow, feels a twinge of guilt for his comfortable life abroad; he knows that the supporters of the mission at home have the idea that he is living a rude, rough life. The primary danger, as De Forest shows, is of an anti-foreigner riot such as that with which the book ends.

De Forest pictures also the pious spirit of those sturdy New Englanders like Judge Wetherel who support these missionary endeavors. Van Wyck Brooks' estimate of Judge Wetherel is a fair statement.

As a specimen of the old New England rural aristocracy, he enabled one to understand the power of the missionaries who founded schools and colleges all over Asia. Judge Wetherel is so steeped in the Bible that whenever he feels strongly his language is naturally biblical. With no suggestion of cant in his patriarchal simplicity, he represents the grand style of the Puritan tradition. See his words of welcome to
the missionary's daughter who has come to Sea Lodge as a guest: "The child of God's apostle to his ancient church in the Kurdish mountains shall be a member of my family as long as she chooses to be." A dictatorial soul, grimly authoritative under a consciousness of duty, he is invariably courteous and gentle with the gentle.96


In various works De Forest considered three crucial issues of his time, the Civil War, the Reconstruction, and government corruption. His most notable achievement and best known work, is, of course, Miss Ravenel's Conversion from Secession to Loyalty (1867). As Gordon Haight has noted, the Civil War attracted few writers into the struggle. Neither James nor Howells, for example, was involved, and Twain's period of service was limited, to say the least. This lack of first-hand experience by the major writers and the public desire to forget the struggle make Miss Ravenel significant both historically and artistically. Haight calls it "the first realistic American novel."97 It has become something of an American classic, though it was ignored in its own time except by Howells. De Forest's own experience was the basis for much of the book. Like his hero, Colburne, De Forest recruited a company of volunteers and served as their captain for three years of the war, campaigning in Louisiana and later in the Shenandoah. During the war he contributed articles to various magazines describing his experiences in camp and battle.

97Miss Ravenel, Introduction, p. xii.
"The First Time Under Fire," as Haight says, "a masterly account of a recruit's sensations in battle beside which Crane's *The Red Badge of Courage* (1895) appears excessively theatrical." 99


99 *Miss Ravenel*, Introduction, p. xi.

De Forest drew on his war articles, his letters to his wife, and his writings as historian of the Nineteenth Army Corps when he composed *Miss Ravenel*. Later on, around 1890, De Forest gathered all his various war writings with a view toward publishing a volume under the title *Military Life*. This complete text was not published until 1946, when it was retitled *A Volunteer's Adventures*. 100


The reasons for the critical enthusiasm accorded *Miss Ravenel* are obvious when one compares it to the war stories of John Esten Cooke, Ambrose Bierce, S. Weir Mitchell, Joseph Kirkland, and Stephen Crane. All but Cooke wrote in retrospect, and Crane lacked any real knowledge of war when he wrote *The Red Badge of Courage*. De Forest depicts war as it really is—long periods of boring inactivity in ill-prepared, often unhealthy, camps where disease takes a greater toll than battle, followed by lengthy, tiresome marches, hasty bivouacs, and short periods of confused battle. The effects of army discipline, the reactions of men under fire, the bloody
aftermath of battle, the sordid hospital conditions, and the interminable demands of Army paper work, all are carefully documented in De Forest's writings. He did not, like John Esten Cooke, see the war as a romantic adventure with all the honorable men on one side. To Cooke, this was war:

The present epoch is stupid—why not try to enliven it? So I ponder here at Eagle's Nest, and, falling into dreams as it were, see the past return. All comes back to memory, fresh and living,—the days and nights of adventure, the charging squadrons, the ringing shouts; all the romance and incident,—the mingled comedy and tragedy of "that place and time,"—the border in 1864.101

Obviously, De Forest's war was not the same war at all. Take, for example, his much quoted description of a field hospital after battle.

Deep in the profound and solemn woods, a full mile and a half from the fighting line, they came to the field hospital of the division. It was simply an immense collection of wounded men in every imaginable condition of mutilation, every one stained more or less with his own blood, every one of a ghastly yellowish pallor, all lying in the open air on the bare ground, or on their own blankets, with no shelter except the friendly foliage of the oaks and beeches.

In the centre of this mass of suffering stood several operating tables, each burdened by a grievously wounded man and surrounded by surgeons and their assistants. Underneath were great pools of clotted blood, amidst which lay amputated fingers, hands, arms, feet and legs, only a little more ghastly in color than the faces of those who waited their turn on the table.102

Even Ambrose Bierce's Gothic horror tales of war pale in comparison with such matter-of-fact enormities.
Not less striking was De Forest's realization of what war does to men mentally. He stands quite alone in his recognition and portrayal of that stoical resignation which enables men to endure the complexity of modern war. Mitchell has a passage expressing the usual platitudes about war. The sentiments are those of Lieutenant Morton, the hero of the book, who writes them in a letter.

"But don't think I like it at all. Any one who says they like it is stupid, or lies. I don't. I never realized until now how dreadful is war; but I think I know that I ought to be here, and why. Yet when a fellow is in the thick of one of these mad rushes at death through smoke, there is something of a wild joy about it. At all events, it does one some good. That is, it does the decent fellows good. It seems to me I am older by years in these few months; but then, for people who think at all, there is time and material here for thinking, and much to learn about war out of books on tactics, and so on, with practical lessons at intervals. Edward, who was always the boldest man I know, keeps writing me not to accept needless peril. Tell him I do not mean to. It is really necessary sometimes for officers to expose themselves as examples, when men are shaky, but not often."103


Compare that attitude with Captain Colburne's ironic summation of all that war has taught him.

"A soldier's life cultivates some of the Christian virtues," he answered; "especially resignation and obedience. Just see here. You are roused at midnight, march twenty miles on end; halt three or four hours, perhaps in a pelting rain; then you are faced about, marched back to your old quarters and dismissed, and nobody ever tells you wherefore. You take it very hard at first, but at last you get used to it and do just as you are bid, without complaint or comment. You no more pretend to reason concerning your duties than a millstone troubles itself to understand the cause of its revolutions. You are set in motion, and you move. Think of being started out at early dawn and made to stand to arms till daylight, every morning,
for six weeks running. You may grumble at it, but you do it all the same. At last you forget to grumble and even to ask the reason why. You obey because you are ordered. Oh! a man learns a vast deal of stoical virtue in field service.”

It was not, indeed, until the First World War that that attitude was again explored in fiction. In one of the classics of that war, Under Fire, Barbusse noted the effects of war on his squad in almost identical terms.

"But you stick it," growls Barque.
"You've got to," says Paradis.
"Why?" asks Marthereau, without conviction.
"No need for a reason, as long as we've got to."
"There is no reason," Lammse avers...
"At the beginning of it," says Tirette, "I used to think about a heap of things. I considered and calculated. Now, I don't think any more."

"I've given up grousing," says Barque. "At the beginning of it, I played hell with everybody—with the people at the rear, with the civilians, with the natives, with the shirkers. Yes, I played hell; but that was the beginning of the war—I was young. Now, I take things better."
"There's only one way of taking 'em—as they come!"
"Of course! Otherwise you'd go crazy."

Compared to that other great nineteenth century war novel, The Red Badge of Courage, De Forest's book stands up well. Though it may not have quite the impressionistic intensity which Crane's book develops, Miss Ravenel makes up for that lack in a greater scope and in its detailed analysis of all the aspects of war, including mustering out. An outstanding difference between De Forest's novel and Crane's
(previously unnoted to my knowledge) is that De Forest writes strictly from the viewpoint of the officer, although admittedly an officer who lived and suffered alongside his men. Still, the responsibilities of command are inherent in his views. The enlisted men, though sometimes singled out as individuals, remain flat and unreal, their motivations a pale reflection of their officers'. De Forest shows no awareness that the motives or reactions of the men might be different from Colburne's. This oversight is common to most writing on the Civil War. It was, so far as literature was concerned, an officers' war, just as the First World War was mainly a privates' war and the Second World War a non-coms'—more often than not sergeants'—war. This convention of the officer in nineteenth century literature will be further explored in connection with De Forest's heroes.

De Forest's government service did not stop with the actual war itself. The post-war period of Reconstruction—technically, perhaps, it should be called occupation—involved him for an additional three years. In a group of articles later issued as A Union Officer in the Reconstruction, De Forest wrote of his experiences as head of

106 John William De Forest, A Union Officer in the Reconstruction, ed. James H. Croushore and David Morris Potter, New Haven, 1945. These pieces appeared variously in Harper's, Atlantic and Putnam's from 1868 to 1869. De Forest later gathered them and provided transitions between the separate items, intending to publish the whole as The Bureau Major. The manuscript was edited by Croushore and Potter and issued as A Union Officer.

the Freedmen's Bureau at Greenville, South Carolina. These three years at Greenville provided him with an excellent firsthand knowledge of the South and its society—knowledge which he put to good use in
Kate Beaumont. In A Union Officer De Forest recognized the various levels of Southern society—slave-holding plantation owners, small farmers, poor whites, and Negroes—and analyzed them at length. His observations were sociologically accurate, but the book is fact, not fiction. It was reporting on a high level, but reporting nevertheless. It is regrettable that he did not do more fictionally with his experiences; but, from his observations, he recognized the failure of his age to present a true picture of the South. He remarks:

The chivalrous Southerner has been too positively and authoritatively a political power to get fair treatment in literature. People have not described him; they have felt driven to declaim about him; they have preached for him or preached against him. Northern pens have not done justice to his virtues nor Southern pens to his vices.

The elder romances of Dixie, produced under a mixed inspiration of namby-pambyism and provincial vanity, strong in polysyllables and feeble in perception of character, deserve better than any other results of human labor that I am aware of, the native epithet of "powerful weak." The novelist evidently had but two objects in view: first, to present the Southerner as the flower of gentility; second, to do some fine writing for his own glory. Two or three works by Kennedy and by the authoress "Marion Harland" are the only exceptions to this rule. Let us pray that a true Southern novelist may arise, for he will be able to furnish us vast amusement and some instruction. His day is passing; in another generation his material will be gone; the "chivalrous Southerner" will be as dead as the slavery that created him.

106a Mary V. Terhune, who wrote Sunnybank (1866).

107 De Forest, A Union Officer, pp. 203-204.
De Forest is speaking here of the genteel Southerners, for not even De Forest could have conceived of the poor white as a fit subject for serious fiction. The time for the Erskine Caldwell type of story was not yet.

De Forest did not serve during the period of Klan violence in the South, but his earlier observations on the Negro problem were prophetic:

Not for generations will the respectable whites of the South, any more than those of the North, accept the Negroes as their social equals. That pride of race which has marked all distinguished peoples, which caused the Greeks to style even the wealthy Persians and Egyptians barbarians...that sentiment which more than anything else has created nationality and patriotism, has among us retreated to the family, but it guards this last stronghold with jealous care. Whether the applicant for admission be the Chinaman of California or the African of Carolina, he will for long be repulsed. The acceptance of the Negro as the social equal of the white in our country dates so far into the future that, practically speaking, we may consider it as never to be, and so cease concerning ourselves about it. Barring the dregs of our population, as, for instance, the poor-white trash of the South, the question interests no one now alive.108

Although De Forest could see the Negro only as a prospective plebeian, he noted that "the most hopeful sign in the Negro was his anxiety to have his children educated."109 Such sentiments are echoed by Dr. Ravenel throughout Miss Ravenel as he states the Negroes' need for sympathetic understanding. He says of the nation's obligations to the Negroes,
"For nearly a century the whole power of our great Republic, north and south, has been devoted to keeping them stupid. . . . We wanted stupidity, we have got it. . . . It is your duty and mine to work patiently, courteously and faithfully to undo the horrid result of a century of selfishness."

Or again, when confronted by moral laxity in Negroes working for him, Ravenel says,

"I am a little disappointed, but not much astonished. . . . I was inclined to hope at one time that I had found an actual Uncle Tom. I was anxious and even ready to believe that the mere gift of freedom had exalted and purified the negro character notwithstanding uncounted centuries of barbarism or of oppression. But in hoping a moral miracle I was hoping too much. . . . He wants to do right, but how is he to know what is right? Suppose he can't read. . . . Suppose he is misled by half the teaching, and all the example of those whom he looks up to as in every respect his superiors. . . . A man educated under the degrading influences of bondage must always have some taint of grossness and lowness. . . ."

Thus De Forest, though sympathetic with the Negroes' plight, viewed the Reconstruction as a most probable failure. His views are similar to those of Albion Tourgée, whose *A Fool's Errand* (1879) and *Bricks Without Straw* (1880) concerned the period of Klanism and active Reconstruction. Tourgée believed that the men who had fought could not be trusted to govern and that the Federal government should keep control over the South until the education and rights of the Negroes were assured.

But just as it was not time for war novels, it was not the time for realistic views of the Reconstruction. Tourgée wrote his
polemics despite the opposing public opinion which was encouraged by the publishers. What the public and publishers alike desired was reconciliation of the North and South. In *The Road to Reunion*, Paul H. Buck describes this spirit and its effect on literature:

The first step in Scribner's conscious effort to promote nationalism was the exploration of American scenes by means of descriptive articles, profuse illustrations, and local color fiction. Out of this policy grew the Great South Series, reported by Edward King and illustrated by J. W. Champney, in 1873 and 1874. The Southerner who was admitted to its columns, as one of its editors stated, was "tacitly barred from any expression of the old hostility." He was also "softened in spirit" by the gratitude of being sponsored by a magazine which more than any other in the United States could start an author well along the road which led to success. Lanier, Harris, Johnston, Cable, Allen, Page, Smith, Russell, Edwards, Grace King, and Ruth McEnery Stuart, were all "discoveries" of Scribner's and the Century.112

Nor was Harper's, after 1868, much more receptive to stories about the war or Reconstruction.

Harper's Monthly Magazine was much slower in introducing Southern themes and proved far less cordial in encouraging Southern writers. In 1865 and 1866 the House of Harper had published a number of books dealing with the various phases of the war, only to find that public indifference to war themes made the ventures financially unremunerative. Miss Ravenel was one of these, although not released until 1867. Such an experience made for conservatism which continued to affect the editorial policy of Harper's Monthly long after Scribner's had discovered that public taste had changed. Not one article or story with the South or the Civil War as a background appeared in Harper's Monthly from volume forty (1869) to volume forty-eight (1874). In January 1874 Harper's, inspired by the success of Scribner's Great South Series, printed a series of articles on the New South [written by Edwin De Leon].113

112 *The Road to Reunion, 1865-1900*, Boston, 1937, p. 222.

It is clear that De Forest was out of step with the times. His views on the South, as expressed in *A Union Officer*, were not the sort to inspire confidence nor optimism about the future of the South. Nor could he write the kind of hazily romantic, often sentimental local color stories that proved successful for Cable, Allen, Page, and the others. The closest to their works that De Forest could come was *The Bloody Chasm* (1881), which contains all of the stock elements of the sentimental reconciliation novel—and little else.

With the subject of political corruption, on which there were no such editorial strictures, De Forest made up for his failure to portray the post-war South successfully. He made a good start with *Miss Ravenel*. In that book De Forest depicted the shabby politics which corrupted the Grand Army of the Republic. He first exposed the maneuverings behind the choosing of officers for the Baratarian regiment which Colburne joins. Colonel Carter, commander of the regiment, wants the majority for Colburne, but the Governor has other plans. He has promised the majority to a ward-heeler named Gazaway. As the Governor explains it:

"I am obliged to permit certain schemes which personally I disapprove of. Captain Gazaway lives in a very close district, and influences a considerable number of votes. He is popular among his class of people, as you can see by the ease with which he filled his company. He and his friends insist upon the majority. If we refuse it we shall probably lose the district and a member of Congress. That is a serious matter at this time when the administration must be supported by a strong house. . . . If I were left alone I would take the risk, and appoint good officers and no others to all our regiments, satisfied that success in the field is the best means of holding the masses in support of the Government. But in the meantime Burleigh, who is our candidate in Gazaway's district,
is defeated, we will suppose. Burleigh and Gazaway understand each other. If Gazaway gets the majority, he promises to insure the district to Burleigh. You see the pressure I am under." 114

114 De Forest, Miss Ravenel, pp. 79-80.

Gazaway's history runs as a vivid contrast to Colburne's throughout the book. Gazaway is finally threatened with court-martial after his cowardice at the battle of Fort Winthrop. He wangles a medical discharge to evade trial and goes home to retirement. Later he is appointed a lieutenant colonel as part of a deal in which he promises to carry his district again and then resign in favor of the Governor's nephew. Gazaway refuses to resign after the election, however, and is put in charge of a conscript camp. When last seen, Gazaway has again been retired on a medical discharge—just in time to avoid service at the front—and with his capital of ten or fifteen thousand dollars, acquired by allowing conscripts to escape at five hundred dollars a head, has set up a billiard-saloon in New York, turned Democrat, and become a political power. To be truthful, one feels that Gazaway's career is used less as an example of political corruption than as a means of bolstering De Forest's position that the army should be run by the War Office rather than the state governments. Still, the political exigencies which motivate the Governor are not denied, nor their importance minimized.

In "An Inspired Lobbyist," 115 De Forest focused on the ease

with which votes could be bought in state legislatures. That such conditions were widespread can be seen in the perspective that history gives:

State legislatures, everywhere, were suspected of gross corruption. The systematic looting in which the Southern carpetbag governments indulged could be matched in Northern and Western states. In the fierce struggle between Daniel Drew and Cornelius Vanderbilt for control of the Erie Railroad the legislature of New York State was auctioned off to the highest bidder, and both the bar and the bench proved that they too were for sale. In Pennsylvania the powerful Cameron machine bought and sold legislation with bare-faced effrontery. In Illinois a corrupt legislature jammed through, in flagrant disregard of the Constitution, over seven hundred acts of incorporation. In Iowa, Minnesota, and California it was charged that the legislatures were controlled by railroads, and the charges were not hard to substantiate.\textsuperscript{116}


The situation in De Forest's story is that of a state in which the capital alternates yearly between two towns, Slowburgh and Fastburgh. The lobbyist, a vaguely evil figure, persuades first one town and then the other to collect a war-chest for the purpose of buying up votes to be picked as the permanent capital. The whole story is a kind of parable, for the lobbyist, after collecting his money, refuses to influence the legislature for he finds that its decision is already reached. With all of the very real situations in his contemporary scene, it is unfortunate that De Forest chose to portray this unlikely one. Its significance is lost in the comparative unimportance of the problem and the fable-like treatment.

\textit{Honest John Vane}, De Forest's next excursion into political
corruption, is better; but it too has an allegorical significance rather than a realistic one. An illustration of the biting satiric
tical tone in which the book is written is De Forest's exposition of the situation which gains John Vane the nomination from his district. The incumbent, James Bummer, has been caught in a scandal and is about to be thrown overboard by the party. The defense put up by his friends, and their motivation, evidences De Forest's close observation of political logic.

On the other hand, the personal friends of Bummer, that is to say, the men whom he had put into "soft places," or who had shared his "perks," supported him for many cogent reasons. They charged his enemies with encouraging the Copperheads and the Ku-Klux; with dishonoring American institutions in the face of monarchical Europe and of high Heaven,—both apparently hostile countries; worst of all, and what was insisted upon with the bitterest vehemence, they charged them with demoralizing the party, as if Bummer had moralized it. They denied the bribe doubly; first, they asserted that their man had accepted no stock in said Steam Navigation Company; second, they affirmed that he had as much right to own stock in it as any other citizen.117

117 John William De Forest, Honest John Vane, New Haven, 1875, pp. 18-19.

When the party caucus is deadlocked between Bummer and his opponent—a gentleman named Saltonstall who is disliked simply because he is a gentleman—Vane, a refrigerator manufacturer and political dark horse, is trotted out in a speech which ends with a crescendo Bryan would have been proud of.

"Let the old Republicans," he chanted, "come out for him; let the young Republicans come out for him; let the Democrat, yea, the very Democrat, come out for him; let the native-born citizen come out for him; let the foreign-born citizen come out for him; let the Irishman and the German and the colored man come out for him; let the cold-water temperance man come
out for him; let the poor, tremulous whiskey-rotted debauchee come out for him; let the true American of every sort and species come out for him; let all, yea, all men come out for awnest Jawn Vane!"118

After Vane is nominated, his political mentor, Darius Dorman, gives him his first words of advice, advice which shows that De Forest understood practical politics:

"It all depends on what branch of politics you work at. Don't go into the war memories and the nigger worshiping; all those sentimental dodges are played out. Go into finance. The great national questions to be attended to now are the questions of finance. Spread yourself on the tariff, the treasury, the ways and means, internal improvements, subsidy bills, and relief bills. Dive into those things, and stick there. It's the only way to cut a figure in politics and to make politics worth your while."119

So Honest John goes to Washington and at first tries to do right, but he is underpaid and sorely tempted. His living and his wife are both costing him much more than he has figured on.

In short, honest John Vane was so abundantly tempted and harassed by the lobbyists and their Congressional allies, as to remind us of that hardly bested saint whom we have all seen in ecclesiastical picture-land...Virtue was the harder for him to follow after, because he perceived that the vicious were not only enviable prosperous, but walked in their evil ways undiscovered...It seemed to him at times that, if there was a city on earth where integrity got all the kicks, and knavery all the half-pence, that city was the capital of this model Republic.120

118 Ibid., pp. 26-27.

119 Ibid., p. 29.

120 Ibid., pp. 106-107.
John is more than tempted; he succumbs. He accepts stock in something which sounds much like the Credit Mobilier. He refuses to let the stock be kept by the promoter; instead he piously announces, "'I won't trouble you to hold my property for me, Darius... I'll hold it in my own name. Honesty is the best policy.'"\(^{121}\) His subversion is now complete. Yet, when the scandal breaks, Vane alone is cleared, ironically because his own greed was strong enough to make him put his stock in his name. In Honest John Vane, De Forest was riding two horses at once: He was disturbed by the election of unqualified men to Congress and, in connection with that, by the ability of the rising industrial capitalists to subvert the ignorant, and often needy, Congressmen.

That the Washington situation was in need of correction is proved by the historical facts. The Civil War and the occupation created literally thousands of claimants--some legitimate, some not. According to the records, over 40,000 Southern claimants alone were reimbursed by the federal government because of illegal confiscation of their property.\(^{122}\) These claims, plus memorials, veterans' bills and other items made a grab-bag of legislation for years. Then, too, government aid to the railroads had created a precedent which other corporations used to justify their own demands. Moreover,
the public was made aware of the corruption by the outcome of the election of 1874. In that year the Democrats carried the House, and they set afoot a series of investigations designed to clean out the government and, incidentally, to furnish ammunition for the impending presidential contest of 1876. These investigations, coming on top of the Credit Mobilier scandal, the Salary Grab, the Emma Mine swindle and other corruption that had been brought to light in the early seventies, made government corruption the topic of the day.

De Forest was not alone in his interest in corruption. Henry Adams in Democracy, Twain and Warner in The Gilded Age, and A. G. Riddle in Alice Brand surveyed the tawdry Washington scene in the seventies. None of these contemporaries of De Forest kept as close to the everyday facts of the matter. Adams' Silas P. Ratcliffe, the Prairie Giant of Peonia, Illinois, is a Machiavellian figure of romantic stature. Like C. B. Brown's Ormond, for example, Ratcliffe shows an unlikely indifference to money and an overwhelming ambition for power in its pure form. While there may have been such men around, they were not typical of the Washington scene. Twain and Warner caught the enthusiasm and speculative frenzy of the age, but their Washington is overshadowed by Sellers and by the melodrama of Laura as a femme fatale. A. G. Riddle's Alice Brand contains by far the best realistic picture I have encountered of the boarding house stratum of Washington. Riddle shows a detailed knowledge of civil service employees—clerks and the like—and their troubles and opportunities in the Washington bureaus. But those observations are embedded in a melodramatic morass of plot complications which
defy summarization and belief. The most memorable contribution of
the book is the statement made by the cynical St. Arnaud:

"It must be conceded, I think, that there is just a little
something in the atmosphere here a trifle depressing to
rigid morality, something that corrodes and wears away the
sharp edges and angles of severe virtue, and men, and
women too, grow personally not less pure, but more tolerant."¹²³

¹²³A. G. Riddle, Alice Brand, Cleveland, 1875, p. 68.

This is mild indeed, compared to De Forest's broad indictment of
the Credit Mobilier and other scandals:

In every civilized land on this planet, thoughtful souls are
seeking to divine, by the light of these and other similar
dolorous revelations, whether it is possible for a democracy
to save itself from the corrupting tyranny of capital.¹²⁴

¹²⁴Honest John Vane, pp. 244-245.

The effectiveness of Honest John Vane comes from its commonplace
subject matter. It starts with the district nominating convention
and follows Vane through every step of public life from election to
re-election. In Vane's life a postmastership can carry a town, and
franked agricultural reports to farmers are more influential than
a congressman's voting record. Because the book deals with the
ordinary political practices of a mediocre congressman, it seems to
me more representative than Henry Adams' Democracy, which deals
with the conflict between a president and the most influential
senator in Congress. Only indirectly does Adams refer to the broad
basis to which this struggle for power will inevitably descend. He
gives no details. For example, he is content to indicate the extent
of patronage by saying,

At the thought that their honestly earned harvest of foreign missions and consulates, department-bureaus, custom-house and revenue offices, postmaster-ships, Indian agencies, and army and navy contracts, might now be wrung from their grasp by the selfish greed of a mere accidental intruder. . . their natures rebelled. . .

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125 Henry Adams, Democracy, New York, 1933, p. 149.

The lack of specific examples makes Democracy seem more a polemic than a dramatic portrayal of political corruption. It is keyed on too high a level to seem real.

If De Forest had written only Honest John Vane, which is almost a political primer for anyone interested in knowing how to manage a campaign or make money in Washington or evade a Senate investigation, to him could be ascribed the ability to evoke only the spirit and not the flesh of the political scene. But he followed Vane with Playing the Mischief, a much more realistic examination of Washington in which his politicians become three-dimensional figures.

In the latter, De Forest centers his attention on Josie Murray, a claimant, and her adventures in Washington with Representatives Hollowbread, Sykes Drummond, and Edgar Bradford, and with Senator Pickens Rigdon, a Southern gentleman. De Forest follows Josie through all the intricacies of pushing a claim, and a fraudulent one at that, through Congress. She moves in Washington society, goes to the Presidential reception, meets with the Spoliation Committee, flirts in the Rotunda, bargains with Mr. Pike, a ten-percenter, and drives her aunt and uncle into an early grave. Everywhere that Josie goes,
the claim is sure to follow. The picture of Washington society is much like that in *The Gilded Age*, except that De Forest's people never forget that they have an ax to grind; every flirtation, every friendship is made to count. It is a Washington where every man has a price. These politicians are not, like those in *Honest John Vane*, two dimensional caricatures. Some are weak, some are strong; but all are recognizable politicians who are neither idealized nor despised.

A more complete, more level-headed examination of the Washington scene (an area strangely neglected in American fiction) is hard to find. De Forest, with unusual insight, saw that the government was composed of men who individually were similar to any cross-section of American society. The one thing that these men had in common was that they were all extroverts to the extent that they could win votes and influence people. Their motivations, he saw, were the same exploitative, competitive motivations of their constituents. The danger, De Forest saw, lay in their collective actions. He lamented their ignorance, lamented the opportunities for venality provided by law and precedent, lamented the influences brought to bear on them by corporate capital. All in all, De Forest presented the most representative and most provocative picture of the Washington scene in the literature of the nineteenth century.

IV Summary

This chapter has been concerned with De Forest as a social historian because it is this aspect of his work which reveals his
basic realism most clearly. Almost by definition, a social histo-
rian must be at least something of a realist. If he is to present
a fictionalized record of his time, his characters must move in a
recognizable setting and they must reflect the attitudes and feelings
current in that time and place. Judging De Forest by these criteria,
it seems clear that he is a social historian. His settings are
accurate reproductions of typical American locales; his characters
personify a wide range of American types and classes; and his plots
and characters reflect the events and issues of his time. His
accomplishment is not unique in American fiction, of course; prob-
ably the author who can be best compared to him is Sinclair Lewis,
though Lewis' tone was sharper. Still, what Lewis did was essen-
tially what De Forest did. Both presented characters so typical
of their times that they were immediately recognizable by their
contemporaries. Both verged on caricature. Both saw and reflected
the society of their day with seismographic accuracy.

De Forest's accomplishment is all the more striking when one
considers the literary atmosphere in which he worked and the unap-
preciative audience for which he wrote. Of his contemporaries only
William Dean Howells and Clarence Gordon were aware of his true
worth. Howells appreciated and encouraged De Forest in his real-
istic method; Gordon saw that De Forest was presenting a portrait
of American society and manners which only future historians of the
period would appreciate. One must admit that De Forest's realism
was neither pure nor consistent. Such novels as Overland, The Bloody Chasm, and A Lover's Revolt, though accurate in setting, are more romantic than realistic. Notwithstanding that qualification, when one compares De Forest's American scenes to those of his contemporaries, one must conclude that De Forest's objectivity, accuracy, and range were unique for his time.
Chapter Three

The Importance of Being Humorous

I  A Method of Approach

Although De Forest was ostensibly a serious writer, he exhibits a consistent reliance on humor, in all its forms, as a method of expression. Furthermore, a submerged strain of ethical and political satire is constant in all but his travel books. While De Forest was not a professional humorist, an understanding of his use of humor explains many of the contradictions in his works which have baffled his recent critics. His works are understandable only when one realizes that they contain an almost Meredithian development of humor directed at the exposure of the excesses in American life.

Since De Forest's control was weak and his method inconsistent, it is impossible to classify his works exactly. For the purposes of this chapter I have divided his works into serious fiction and roughly three categories of humor: parody, comedy of manners, and satire. Here again, as with all literary classifications, one must make approximations based on the dominance of a particular method in a work. Another difficulty lies in the obvious fact that only fine distinctions separate one type of humor from another.

Still, the exact proportions of kinds of humor, assuming the possibility and value of such analysis, are not so important as the contribution that De Forest's humor made to his realistic presentation
of material. Humor, it seems to me, is basically realistic; a humorous work is more apt to be realistic than romantic or naturalistic. Joseph Warren Beach, speaking of the comic spirit in Meredith (admittedly a special brand of humor but one which, as we will see, is pertinent to a discussion of De Forest) emphasizes the median course of common-sense fiction based on a sense of humor. He writes:

The comic spirit, then, is foe alike to the sentimental and the naturalistic style in fiction. The one is too fastidious to touch the material fact; the other will touch nothing else. There is in both cases a divorce of body and soul.¹

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¹The Comic Spirit in George Meredith, New York, 1911, p. 22.

Surely the idealism of the romantics or the doctrinaire pessimism of the naturalists is unlikely in the works of a writer who sees clearly that man and his institutions are imperfect, incongruous, contradictory, and often foolish.

II De Forest's Use of Humor in Serious Fiction

By the term "serious fiction" I mean those works which do not employ humor as a basic method—though I consider all of De Forest's works serious literature in that they are artistic creations designed for serious contemplation and not merely for amusement. De Forest's first novel, "Witching Times," was an eminently serious polemic on the intolerance which produced the Salem witchcraft trials. De Forest lightens the gloomy picture of that dark savagery with a few conscious attempts at humor. He portrays Cotton Mather, for example, as a dour, slightly sadistic churchman whose macabre mind finds relaxation in
very bad puns. Such punning does not so much characterize Mather as show De Forest’s inability to resist a chance to pun, a weakness that a close reading of all his books bears out.

De Forest’s war novel, Miss Ravenel, is another predominantly serious work, but it too is lightened by conscious humor. The impact of the major tragedy in the book, the defection and death of Colonel Carter, is weakened by the subsequent remarriage of the widowed Lillie to Captain Colburne. The casual good humor with which De Forest approached even such subjects as the affair between Mrs. Larue and Colonel Carter can be seen from the Thackerayean chapter heading, “Colonel Carter Makes an Astronomical Expedition with a Dangerous Fellow Traveler.” Throughout the book, moreover, De Forest examines the problem of slavery in the anecdotal manner of a Mark Twain, the spokesman for union and freedom being the urbane and witty Dr. Ravenel. De Forest’s use of humor in such situations suggests that he believed the humorous expression of ideas to be as valid a method as any other; the mere fact that a mortal sin is treated with seeming irreverence neither deprecates the evil nor countenances it. For example, I am sure that he intended Carter’s infidelity to be viewed with the same abhorrence that Hawthorne hoped to inspire when he portrayed Roger Chillingworth. The means may be different, but the aim is the same.

One finds, then, even in De Forest’s serious works, humor functioning both as comic relief and as a means of serious expression. In the remaining novels humor becomes the major mode of expression.
III Parodies

I make no pretense of being the first to notice the underlying humor of much of De Forest's work. In his introduction to the 1939 edition of Miss Ravenel, Gordon S. Haight, speaking of De Forest's travel books, notes:

Though this theory of travel is quite the opposite of Mark Twain's, De Forest finds plenty of humor; such a passage as "I used my *dictionnaire de poche* for some months before I discovered that Poche was not the author of it" would slip into *The Innocents Abroad* without arousing the slightest suspicion of its authenticity.²

²P. x.

James H. Croushore, De Forest's most recent critic, finds De Forest's lack of seriousness one of his major flaws. While Croushore analyzes closely only three novels, "Witching Times," *Seacliff*, and *Miss Ravenel*, he frequently draws conclusions which include all the works. Speaking of *Seacliff*, he notes numerous faults in addition to a weak plot. He particularly objects to the flippant manner in which De Forest treats the whole mystery of the household of the Westervelts. Croushore concludes:

Though this flippant attitude came to the surface less and less frequently as the story progressed, the important consideration was that the author had suggested, in the early pages of the novel, that the whole mystery was a farce; later seriousness did not remove the impression. Not of *Seacliff* alone, but also of some of the later novels was this criticism true.³

Croushore's mistake springs from judging the book by standards not applicable to it. By failing to realize that the book is intentionally a parody of the Jane Eyre type of romance, he condemns the basic approach of the book and as a result overlooks its success as a parody and as a study of manners. Note that the plot, though involved, is essentially hackneyed. The hero, Fitz Hugh, comes to Seacliff to court either Mary or Genevieve Westervelt; he is not sure which. Their father is ineffectual and profligate; their mother is kind but vaguely pathetic. An atmosphere of tragic doom hangs over Seacliff. In the midst of it all stalks the villain, the smooth-talking Somerville. In addition, there are Mrs. Westervelt's cousins, the Van Leer brothers, and Mrs. Van Leer. Pa and Ma Treat, who take in boarders, act as Greek chorus, much like Hardy's supernumeraries. Other residents of the area appear briefly. The major action follows Fitz Hugh's romantic vicissitudes and his growing involvement in the mystery of the household. He finally proposes to Mary and is refused. His rival, Bob Van Leer, likewise proposes and is refused. Then Somerville announces that he is engaged to Mary. The denouement follows swiftly: Somerville's blackmail and Mrs. Westervelt's forgery are discovered. Mrs. Westervelt, in disgrace, murders Somerville and commits suicide. Fitz Hugh, in an anti-climactic epilogue, wins Mary, who has loved him all the time but was being forced to wed Somerville to save her mother's name.

If Seacliff succeeds at all, it does so in spite of the plot; one must not take that plot seriously, as Croushore does. The
humorous treatment of the story is the only thing that distinguishes it from the multitude of sentimental romances of the fifties. One may well ask, in what does the book succeed? First of all, it succeeds as a penetrating and enjoyable parody of the romantic novel; furthermore, by opposing the romantic traditions with the realities of American life, Seacliff successfully documents the manners and mores of the American nouveaux riches and their attitudes and relationships with each other and with the natives of the regions in which they built their country homes. Perhaps indicative of this corollary intention is the fact that the title, Seacliff or The Mystery of the Westervelts, did not sit well with De Forest. He wrote to his publisher that he had at one time intended to call the book "The Country House" and was rather sorry that he had not done so.  

In a letter to F. H. Underwood, April 26, 1859, from which I am not at liberty to quote. The letter is the property of Yale University Library.

It is readily apparent that Seacliff is an intentional parody. The clue to De Forest's intentions can be found in the subplot which runs through Seacliff. Fitz Hugh is a writer. He has published one travel book (like De Forest), and his stated motive for residing near Seacliff is to finish his second book, a novel. Since Fitz Hugh is both hero and narrator of Seacliff, it is not surprising that he discusses the problems of this second book. For example, he remarks that his first three chapters were "finished with a rapidity and ease which would have done credit to Alexander Dumas & Co., or to
those inexhaustible human fountains whose romances stream through the New York Ledger." Later on he gives a long quotation from the

5De Forest, Seacliff, p. 256.

fourth chapter, which is inexpressibly bad—full of fine writing, muddy introspection, and references to "Our Lady of Sorrows."

Fitz Hugh self-consciously criticizes it and then continues to explain the plot.

The plot of the story, so far as it had one, was the mystery of Seacliff, such as I then supposed it to be, with the consequences which I imagined would naturally flow from it. I was to quit the spot and tramp restlessly about the world, a groaning hysterical hero of the Childe Harold stamp, an object of tearful pity to all the handsome girls on my route, but savagely refusing to be comforted. After a lonesome perambulation of eight or ten years, during which wealth and power were to force themselves upon me, I was to come back, like the Count of Monte Cristo, in search of my friends and my enemies. Seacliff was to be a desolation, and the family of Seacliff extinct. Johnny Treat, grown to manhood, (rather precociously,) would meet me among the charred ruins of the bluff, and, seated on a blackened cornerstone, narrate the fates of the Westervelts. Mary was lying in the graveyard, the broken-hearted though innocent victim of Somerville's cruelty. Mr. Westervelt had committed suicide, after having been swindled of everything by his dissolute son-in-law, (Somerville,) and cast off by his adamantine father. Mrs. Westervelt and Genevieve had perished slowly of shirtmaking and consumption.

After hearing the story I would rise, turn away from John Treat, raise my moist optics to Heaven and take a silent vow of vengeance. Then the first thing would be to catch Westervelt senior in a perilous speculation, (Monte Cristo again,) trip him up, empty his pockets to the uttermost farthing, and send him to die in the almshouse, or perhaps force him to steal and so finish him off at Sing-sing. And now for Somerville, the deep, the dark, the double dyed villain: I would track him like a bloodhound;—I would follow him over land and over sea;—I would bring him to bay in some remote lair. There I would do his business in a duel fought with Colt's revolvers, altogether regardless of
the fact that I am no duellist, and would not allow myself to be shot at with even a single-barrelled pistol if I could help it. In the smoke of that deadly discharge, in the blood of that sufficing vengeance, the story would terminate.⁶

⁶Ibid., pp. 270-271.

This book-within-a-book technique was not new, but the unconscious irony of Fitz Hugh's criticism was. Concluding with a generalization on American authors like himself, he notes:

I think that this is very much the sort of thing that a young man would hit on in his first attempt at a novel. . . . [He] is not yet aware that true portraiture of character . . . is the gem which lends practical value to a romance. . . . Even if he knows this, he is no better off, for he has not had time to study humanity. . . . [He] writes away with a good heart at first; but after finishing two or three chapters he becomes vaguely conscious that there is some important element of immortality wanting. . . . and. . . . he dashes into rapid movement, passionate situations, and a rhetoric flavored with gunpowder. . . . ⁷

⁷Ibid., pp. 271-272.

The irony is that, however aware Fitz Hugh is of the weaknesses of his novel, the novel for which he is narrator—Seacliff—is combined of exactly such ingredients and he is seemingly unaware of the fact.

Just as Fitz Hugh views his own book with a certain detachment and obvious humor, De Forest, as author of Seacliff and creator of Fitz Hugh, views his own story with good humor and unconcern. Fitz Hugh is an ingénue, most humorous when he is being most serious. As Fitz Hugh moves through his role of romantic hero, De Forest takes the opportunity to expose the preposterous nature of the wildly coincidental happenings. I do not wish to pursue the concept
of Fitz Hugh as ingénue too far, but the essential irony of his relationship to the story and to De Forest clearly shows that Seacliff must not be taken too seriously. As Robert C. Elliott has shown in his examination of the ingénue technique in Swift's Gulliver's Travels, it is clear that one cannot assume that the author stands directly in the place of the viewpoint character, but, rather, that he often stands aside from him, thereby doubling the irony. Allowing the narrator to make a fool of himself is not as subtle as it may seem, nor was De Forest the technician that Swift was, but it is a method well suited to parody.

An examination of a few typical episodes will show the treatment De Forest gives ostensibly romantic incidents. For example, while the party is out horseback riding, Mary's horse runs away—a common enough romantic happening. De Forest writes the chase sequence as if his heart were in it, then checks the built-up emotion abruptly. Here is the end of the scene:

[Mary's horse] ran faster than ever, struggling with all the pluck in his little body, and staggering so wildly in his worry and eagerness, that, had I not forged ahead of him in a couple of strides, Miss Westervelt would have been badly bruised between his flank and the bay's. As I passed his quivering muzzle, he flung it up in such a way that I was able to catch the swinging end of the rein and grasp it firmly. Now came the task of drawing in my own horse, so delicately as to get him and keep him a little behind the
runaway's lead, yet not have the strip of leather wrenched from my hold by any sudden plunge of either animal forward or sideways. Of course, I succeeded; the true prince always succeeds on such occasions; if he did not, the world would be as dissatisfied as he.9

This is crude, of course, but the intention is clear. De Forest is making game of the romantic incident. Nor could he resist further puncturing the romantic ideals in the scene in which Fitz Hugh is rewarded for his rescue. Mary has drawn a picture of the daring deed in honor of the hero. After much maidenly modesty, she brings out her sketchbook and shows the picture. With a straight face, De Forest, or rather Fitz Hugh, describes it. He concludes:

The picture was not yet half completed, but enough was done to show a remarkable talent at composition, and the animals, in particular, were remarkably lifelike and vigorous.10

So far the scene follows the romantic tradition in which the heroines are talented as well as beautiful, but the trap has been laid. When Fitz Hugh, in his role of suitor, praises the picture, particularly the horses, the heroine finally confesses. The horses, she admits, are traced. One finds here an echo of a much earlier parody, Northanger Abbey, in which Jane Austen pointed out the unheroic deficiencies of her heroine, Catherine, by noting,
Her greatest deficiency was in the pencil—she had no notion of drawing—not enough even to attempt a sketch of her lover's profile, that she might be detected in the design.\footnote{The Novels of Jane Austen, ed. R. W. Chapman, 2nd ed., Oxford, 1926, V, 16.}

Time and time again De Forest allows the plot to gain momentum, only to deflate all its pretensions with an ironic twist. Constantly he implies that, although this may seem a story of idealized heroes and heroines and villains, the people are really blunderingly average. Note, for example, the heavy irony of Fitz Hugh's earnest comment on Boston, a comment which parodies the discussions of manners one finds in the domestic novels. Objecting to Mrs. Van Leer's remark that she does not care for Newport because of the many Bostonians there, he replies:

"For my part, I like the Tremont type. It is on the whole the best moral and intellectual man this side of the Atlantic. Let me tell you an anecdote. A friend of mine, a doctor, was walking the pavement of his city close behind a stranger who seemed to have just arrived. The stranger coughed and cleared his throat. Every time that he did so, he stepped to the edge of the sidewalk and spit in the gutter. Most Americans would have expectorated over the pavement, trusting to the next lady's dress to sweep it up. 'That man is a Bostonian,' said my friend to himself."

\footnote{De Forest, Seacliff, pp. 297-298.}

In the tragic dénouement, after Mrs. Westervelt has stabbed Somerville and drowned herself and their bodies are laid out in the library of Seacliff, De Forest's irrepressible humor shows again. The justice of the peace, Squire Bradley, comes to investigate the situation. Fitz Hugh is immediately suspect, since he was at the
scene of the stabbing.

"Mr. Fitz Hugh, I believe, sir?" said he, approaching me with a smile in which disgust at my moustache was visible. "You saw the blow struck, I hear."

Myself. "I did, sir. I was almost within reach of her arm."

The Squire. (Arching his eyebrows.) "Oh, indeed! Bless me! Did the man fall immediately?"

Myself. "Instantly. Gave one leap and was a corpse."

The Squire. (Drawing back a step.) "Shocking! Bless my soul! Ahem, fall anywhere near you, sir?"

Myself. "Quite near. I thought he touched me as he dropped."

The Squire. (Looking me fixedly in the eye.) "Ah! very likely. Little blood on your clothes, I see."

He now retreated and stood silent a few seconds unbending his mind. Presently he was approached by a raw-boned, sandy-haired, squint-eyed man, of intemperate aspect and odor, whose face I had never noticed before, but whose voice I instantly recognized. "That's a damned likely story, Square,—a woman killin' a man."

The Squire. (Fingering his double chin doubtfully.) "Think so, Mr. Bunnel?"

Bunnel. (Scornfully elevating his single chin.) "No sir! I jest don't."

The Squire. "By the way, what is your opinion, Mr. Bunnel?"

Bunnel. (Turning his eye at full cock upon me.) "Square, I can't abide mustachers." (The rascal had a shabby red beard of three days' growth.) "Where there's mustachers, there's the devil. Square, no woman could strike such a blow."

The Squire. "Possible! Well?—Oh, I see. So you think—eh?"13

13 Ibid., pp. 438-439.

The consequence of this outrageous reasoning is that Fitz Hugh is almost found guilty at the coroner's inquest. He is saved by the providential introduction of Mrs. Westervelt's written confession. Still, the result of this low-comedy scene is the obliteration of all tragic implications of the double death—a sharp contrast with the brooding care with which most sentimentalists wrung the last drop out of all scenes of death and destruction, and the depths of
analysis and symbolic significance accorded death by the romantics.

Seacliff thus emerges as a parody of the sentimental novels of the fifties. Much like Jane Austen's Northanger Abbey, which burlesqued the Gothic romances of her fellow novelists, Mrs. Radcliffe et al., De Forest's Seacliff shows his scorn of the complicated plots, the mystery, and the general histrionics common to the fiction of his time. It is not surprising that De Forest's first sally into the novel of contemporary life should take the form of a burlesque of the popular novel. Harry Levin points out that from Rabelais to Jane Austen many realists have begun as parodists.\(^\text{14}\) Perhaps more

\(^{14}\text{Op. cit.}\)

to the point, numerous parodies of the sentimentalists, who were obviously easy marks, were published in the prominent magazines of the fifties. A notable example is the parody of The Lamplighter printed in Harper's Monthly, May, 1855.\(^\text{15}\) A sensitive observer of

\(^{15}\text{Pattee, The Feminine Fifties, pp. 112-115. Pattee suggests that it was probably written by N. P. Willis, prominent editor and critic.}\)

the contemporary scene—and De Forest was surely that—could see that anti-sentimentalism had other adherents besides himself.

It must be admitted that Seacliff is not purely a parody. One feels at times that De Forest is taking his flirtation with romance seriously. His trifling seems, unfortunately, to be out of control. Because of the essential author-ingenu relationship between De Forest and Fitz Hugh, it is difficult to say with any degree of certainty
whether certain purple passages which seem to have an air of conviction are a serious expression of De Forest's thinking or an ironic reflection on that romantic youngster, Fitz Hugh. If irony is intended, De Forest's technique was bad, for the intention does not communicate itself clearly. Since De Forest as omniscient author in later books was not always unromantic, indeed not always unsentimental, it is probable that some passages in Seacliff are actually and intentionally romantic. This does not alter the fact that the book as a whole is a parody. It does show that De Forest wrote neither pure realism nor pure romance, but a blend of the two. The influence of the romantic tradition in which he grew up was never completely dissipated, although in some of the novels it seems slight.

De Forest returned to the method of Seacliff in Justine's Lovers (1878), which has been ignored or misinterpreted by all.

16 The bibliographical information on this book is confusing. The DAB attributes it to De Forest, but gives the date as 1875. The De Forest bibliography in the Literary History of the United States, Spiller and others, does not include the work at all. The Library of Congress Union Catalog erroneously attributes the book to Jane L. Howell, evidently taking the first-person narrator of the book, Justine Vane, as a pseudonym for the author--this in spite of the fact that Jane L. Howell's pseudonym was Violet Vane, not Justine Vane. I discovered sufficient evidence to establish De Forest's authorship of the book to the satisfaction of the Library of Congress, which has agreed to change its listing. The strongest evidence was correspondence between De Forest and his publisher, Harper and Brothers, just before publication of Justine Vane, quoted in J. Henry Harper's The House of Harper (1912) pp. 420-421. The rest of my evidence is irrelevant now because in June, 1953, a part of the Aldis Collection at Yale University Library was opened and was found to contain De Forest's own copy of the book and the copyright certificate. Of course it will be some time before the standard bibliographies are corrected.
previous critics. Published anonymously, *Justine* has been evaluated as a serious work, much to De Forest's discredit, for the book is an intentional parody of the "woman's novel." This intention is obvious from De Forest's note to W. M. Griswold in which he said that the book "was an attempt to imitate the ordinary 'woman's novel.'" Not a critic in the U. S. questioned the sex of the writer; I looked over all the reviews sent to Harpers in order to see if this would be so."17 Here again, as in *Seascliff*, De Forest used the

17De Forest, note to W. M. Griswold, printed in Descriptive Lists of Novels, ed. William M. Griswold, Cambridge, Mass., 1893, pp. 82-83.

ingénue technique. *Justine*, the author of this supposedly autobiographical novel, begins the book with a quotation from her diary.

"A young lady!
"I will not tell how young; I dislike to see it written. . . .
"But I am still juvenile enough to consider one of my friends as a bit old-maidenly, although she is really only twenty-three, and looks like a 'mere chicken.' On the other hand, I am far enough by 'sweet sixteen' to feel slightly uneasy when people talk about birthday celebrations. The comforting way in which I put it to myself is, that I am just at the interesting age."18


One can sense immediately that De Forest intends *Justine* as a satiric portrait of the egregiously sensitive young ladies who appeared so frequently in nineteenth century fiction. *Justine* suffers and suffers. First the family fortune is lost. Then her lover proves false. Her mother, meanwhile, is starving in order that *Justine* may keep up appearances. Finally her second lover dies, fortunately not before
he makes a will leaving her around half a million dollars. The long-suffering Justine, one feels, certainly deserves every penny of it. Throughout the book De Forest convincingly apes the mannerisms of the women writers. For example, after describing her meeting with Henry Starkenburgh, her first lover, Justine notes: "It just occurs to me, also, that I have shown almost nothing of the man to my readers, the girls, all unknown to me, for whom this story is written." In keeping with the character of the narrator, the jokes are unrelentingly bad. One illustration will suffice. Dr. Caswallon, speaking of rewriting Justine's hymns for her, says, "'I am a rhymester, and know how to operate on lame feet.'" No one who has read De Forest's other works can seriously believe that he was capable of unintentionally producing such sustainedly bad prose. The excessive quality of everything in the book--the mawkish sentimentality, the shallow stoicism, and the platitudinous religiosity--parodies the substance of the "woman's novel." The book ends with a statement concerning Justine's future. It, too, is an extract from her diary. The scriptural phraseology--Justine has turned to religion for solace in her suffering--cannot hide the fact that, ironically, Justine's thoughts are obviously materialistic. Here De Forest seems to be parodying the piety characteristically attributed to the heroines of the domestic novels.
The passage ends,

Yet when I look at my too expressive eyes in the glass, and
recall how I have been able and driven to love in the past,
I suspect and fear that I shall not always remain tranquil
in heart. Will there ever again be a chosen one, the chief
of all, the pre-eminent, the king among those lovers of mine?
There are hours when I tremble in both body and soul
lest so it should be. There are prophetic moments when I
fear that I discern distinctly the coming lord.
It does not matter; if he arrive, I shall know how to
keep him; if he tarry, I shall know how to spare him.21

21 Ibid., p. 135.

Justine is obviously unaware of the pun apparent in that phrase,
"too expressive eyes," but I doubt that De Forest was. It is even
possible that the title originally given to the book, Justine Vane
(which was later changed to the more saleable Justine's Lovers), was
intended to be read "just in vain."

Two other novels, Irene the Missionary and The Bloody Chasm,
have the appearance of serious fiction, though they could, with
equal justification, be called parodies. No external evidence
of De Forest's intention is available to support either view, save
that both follow Justine's Lovers, an admitted parody, and that
Irene was, like Justine, published anonymously. The internal evi-
dence leads me to class them as parodies of two rather widespread
types of popular literature--Irene a parody of those pious fictional
treatments of foreign missionary work intended to be read by those
who so willingly supported the far-flung missionary activities of
American churches, The Bloody Chasm a rather more obvious parody of
the numerous reconciliation novels of the seventies and eighties.
Irene was a reworking of the material in Oriental Acquaintance, and, aside from the descriptive passages on mission life and the scenery of the Near East, is noteworthy for little. Though the point of view is omniscient, there is a subtle attempt to characterize the author as a retired missionary. Contributing to such an impression are the frequent flat statements of evaluation, as for example the repeated comparisons made between the value of educational missionaries and medical missionaries. The author favors education, but admits the pre-eminent popularity of medical missionaries. In addition, frequent use of what can only be called trade jokes gives an air of veracity. The very title of the book is ironic, for Irene's missionary endeavors seem directed mainly at the trio of suitors who follow her about. Her pious hopes of saving the natives of Syria through education seem almost hypocritical. She marries well and leaves her work after a very few months with no qualms. Her duty, De Forest remarks with heavy irony at the close of the book, now lies in being a good wife and helping to manage her husband's fortune. The unspoken assumption is that missionaries can do little for the natives' souls and that the missionaries' labors could better be spent in Christianizing Americans like Porter Brassey.

The Bloody Chasm follows the line which all reconciliation novels followed: the situation of a poor-but-proud Southern girl who falls in love with a Northern officer. The symbolism is overt and the obstacles to the affair obvious, but, as any reader of such stories knows, the symbolic union is inevitable. De Forest's careful
inclusion of every cliché known to the genre leads one to suspect he intended a parody. Much of the novel is written tongue-in-cheek, for example General Hilton's naive statement that Virginia Beaufort, in Paris, is fit to be a queen of civilized men because among other things, "she speaks French like a native--better than the natives--more distinctly and comprehensibly." Close reading reveals the ironic intention of other passages. Colonel Underhill's ballad of Raven Van Ross, who died of a broken heart when the Yankees marched past her home, illustrates what I mean. Two stanzas of the poem, written by Underhill in his attempt to reconcile Virginia to the past, are sufficient to give meaning to the comment which follows. Virginia reads aloud:

"My lineage is gentle and old,
   And my heart is virginal pure;
My hair is a girl's sunny gold,
   And my hand is of satiny gloss;
But no heart can more bravely endure
   The peril of life and the loss;
No hand with the pistol is truer,
   And I'll shoot the first Yankee as sure
As my name is Raven Van Ross!"

"She shot! But no death-cry replied;
From the column responded no ball;
It trampled on massive and wide,
From curbstone to curbstone across,
Dumb, solemn and black as a pall,
Unknowning that close by its side,
Withdrawn from life's hyssop and gall,
Heart-broken, death-smitten, lay all
That remained of Raven Van Ross."
A year before, Virginia could not have read these verses
aloud. Now, by a great effort, she was able to finish them; but with the last line she burst out weeping violently.\textsuperscript{23}

\textsuperscript{23}ibid., pp. 284-285.

Even admitting De Forest's lack of poetic ability, which is obvious from his later Poem: Medley and Palestine, I cannot believe that he wrote the comment following the poem without realizing how it could be interpreted. If one insists on believing the book serious, then one must further assume that it was written purely for money by a man who had lost all respect for his art. This I find hard to believe in view of the extreme self-consciousness with which De Forest wrote elsewhere and, more pertinently, his scorn for the popular novel of his time.

To the modern reader, De Forest seems to exaggerate the romantic techniques to make them absurd. Whether they would have seemed so to his contemporaries—or to De Forest—is a moot question. Perhaps De Forest himself was not sure of his intentions. Yet the fact that he seems more interested in the absurdities of his heroes and heroines than in their accomplishments seems reason enough to conclude that these novels are parodies. Perhaps because De Forest was, after all, attempting to sell his works, the parodies are subtle; probably few of his readers even noticed the exaggeration. Certainly few of his reviewers did, though there is a somewhat puzzled tone in many of the reviews of De Forest's works. Accepting these novels as parodies explains many of the seeming irrelevancies and inconsistencies which have bothered previous commentators.
In his parodies, De Forest used the standard method of exaggeration; all the stock elements of the fictional type are present but in grossly expanded form. Into this characteristic whole, he interjects incongruous elements which thwart the expectations of the reader just when he feels comfortably on familiar ground. A superficial reading of such books might well lead to dismissing them as unsuccessful ventures into a type of fiction which others did better, but an attentive reading shows them to be rather neat pieces of literary criticism in fictional form. Seacliff and Justine, and to a lesser degree Irene and The Bloody Chasm, are, in effect, defenses of the realistic method, for there is a constant implication that the events and characters common to popular and romantic fiction have no counterpart in real life. They cannot meet the test of experience which, De Forest suggests, shows that motives are never so altruistic, nor events so predictable, nor success so easily come by as the authors of such works would have us believe. These authors, it follows, were neglecting their responsibilities—a neglect which De Forest, in his own way, was attempting to remedy.

III. Comedies of Manners

De Forest's major attempt to remedy the neglect of reality shown by other novelists was in three works in which the American scene and American society were depicted as they really were. If he had dealt exclusively with the upper class in Kate Beaumont, The Wetherel Affair, and Playing the Mischief, one could, without
hesitation, apply the term "comedy of manners" to them. I hesitate to use that term, apt as it is, without some qualification, since comedy of manners is generally defined as "a comedy form reflecting the life, thought, and manners of upper-class society, faithful to its traditions and philosophy." De Forest does show that side of life, but he presents other contrasting levels of society as well. De Forest's novels of manners thus have a broader scope than can be included within the strict definition; yet the method of these novels follows the basic method of the comedy of manners. The works contain an articulate, often ironic, analysis of the customs and mores of the times. Kate Beaumont, The Wetherel Affair, and Playing the Mischief are, furthermore, basically realistic in intent and method, for it is no imagined ideal world which is presented but the very real world of contemporary experience.

In these novels De Forest presents three different pictures of American life, the old South, New York, and Washington. Each section, he shows, has its own pace and its distinguishing characteristics, for each society is a product of its geographical, social, and economic bases. True, from the basic plots one would hardly suspect these novels of being comedies of manners. Kate Beaumont is, ostensibly, a modern Romeo and Juliet story, a parallel which De Forest takes pains to point out explicitly; The Wetherel Affair is a murder mystery, with a forged will, mistaken identification

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2\textsuperscript{nd} Newell W. Sawyer, \textit{The Comedy of Manners from Sheridan to Maugham}, Philadelphia, 1931, p. 3.
of the murderer, and all the other appurtenances of the crime story; and *Playing the Mischief* is a story of a female swindler. These plots only serve to carry the reader along through a broad investigation of society in America.

Each book unfolds at a pace befitting the characteristics of the society of the region. *Kate Beaumont* is a rather slow, talky book; yet the promise of violence is never far from the surface, and the courtly manners of the characters serve only to heighten the moments of violent action. Even when the scene pictured in *The Wetherell Affair* is Connecticut, the novel has a quicker tempo, which increases to an almost feverish pace once the scene changes to New York. *Playing the Mischief*, perhaps because of the disparate characters involved, is jerky; at times it slows to a legislative snail's pace, while at other times events and characters move with blurring speed.

Notwithstanding its plot, *Kate Beaumont* is a perceptive investigation of Southern manners. It centers on the problem of living by a feudal code which, De Forest notes, countenances and even approves murder when it is carried out according to the rules. De Forest shows how the code affects the lives and thinking of not only the upper classes but also the lower classes and the slaves. Though this is central, he also documents such peculiarities of Southern society as its clannishness, its hospitality, its amusements, and its political mores. Over the whole investigation hovers the laughter of the comic spirit, breaking out each time the pretensions and contradictions of the system become apparent. Though *Kate*
Beaumont was written at a time when, as Francis P. Gaines points out, the glorification of the pre-Civil War plantation was in full swing, it added little to the myth. The plantation homes are not all fine mansions, the belles not all beautiful, the masters not all benevolent despots, the slaves not all devoted comedians. Indeed, merely by not following the traditional view of the South, De Forest deprecated that view. In section after section of Gaines' investigation of the traditional concept of the Southern plantation, he refers to De Forest as "remote from the main current of the tradition."\(^{25}\)


De Forest's realistic picture of the old South was a further departure from tradition in that he was attempting neither to justify slavery nor condemn it. He views the South as he views the North, with calm objectivity, neither ignoring its faults nor glorifying its virtues.

In The Wetherel Affair De Forest strays from his investigation of crime and justice to present an array of mountebanks, idealists, eccentrics, and fools, as well as a few normal people, who inhabit New York and its vicinity. Here is a picture of urban diversity such as few American novels of the period present; other novels settle on one or another aspect of urban life, but De Forest attempts a broader canvas. The picture lacks depth but it does have scope. De Forest shows no condescension toward even those lowest on the social scale, and he is quick to point out that their idiosyncrasies are no more absurd than those of their social betters.
Playing the Mischief is the story of a great adventuress, reminiscent of Thackeray's Vanity Fair. Josie Murray's adventures document the complexities of Washington politics and Washington society with a thoroughness unparalleled in our nineteenth century fiction. Josie's widely varied activities enable De Forest to analyze the political as well as the social aspects of that strange community of people whose differing manners and outlooks are unified only by an artificial protocol and their political ambitions. The fact that Washington society reacts much like the society of a very small village is not surprising, for De Forest sees that, unlike other large cities, Washington has only one business—politics, and everything that happens has political ramifications. Thus the apparent diversity of interests is in reality focused to a village narrowness. De Forest deplores this narrowness, the empty words, the chicanery, and the hypocrisy which seem basic elements of Washington existence.

Since these three novels are comedies of manners, one expects a good deal of irony. Note, for example, the unconscious irony of Mr. Stokes's eulogy of the Beaumonts as he deplores the accidental shooting of one of them by a McAlister:

"Take the Beaumonts, now," instanced Mr. Stokes. . . . "They don't go round shootin' the best men in the country by accident. When they pop you, they mean it. They've shot as many as any other crowd in the State, an' never had no damn foolish accident yet, but allays bored the feller they drew bead on, an' no other. Now thar's men you can tie to; thar's men you can hev a confidence in; thar's men you can feel safe with. I tell you, I love an' respect them Beaumonts, for what they do, an' for what they don't do, for what they hit an' for what they miss. . . .
"But as much as I love business, I hate foolin' round an' firin' wild. A feller that goes about killin' by accident, you can't tell what he'll do nor whar he'll stop. He may clean out the whole poppulation by one accident after another. Children an' niggers an' stock an' property at large ain't safe when sech a feller is loose. He can't be trusted. A decent community has no use for sech a man."26

26De Forest, Kate Beaumont, p. 140.

While this is neither so dramatic nor so tragic as Twain's attack on Southern mores in the Grangerford incident of Huck Finn, it is no less effective as a means of showing the warped sense of values which Southern feuds produced.

These three novels of manners illustrate further the danger of judging De Forest from the standpoint of serious fiction. Once one accepts the basic humor of these works--once one ceases to deplore the light-hearted handling of the materials--one can attempt a sounder judgment than has been accorded them previously. The misconception of the basic quality of Kate Beaumont, for example, is readily apparent in the somewhat petulant remark made by Arthur H. Quinn that

the book is crude in effecting transitions and gives the air of having been composed by a man who was not taking himself seriously. It contains, nevertheless, a few passages of excellent psychological analysis. . . .27

27American Fiction, p. 665.

Quite to the contrary, De Forest is taking himself seriously; it is his Romeo and Juliet plot that he is not taking seriously, for it is the ritualistic manners and the incongruity of the existence of
a feudal code of honor in mid-nineteenth century America which he is interested in examining. The people involved in the action may take themselves seriously, but De Forest, as author, cannot. The flaw in both *Kate Beaumont* and *The Wetherel Affair* lies in the fact that De Forest based these social comedies on essentially tragic plots, and thus found himself committed to a more intense treatment that comedy can manage. He must then make awkward shifts in tone and method. There are other flaws. In all three works De Forests shifts at times from, as Meredith would say, the light rapier of comedy to the broadaxe of satire. Quinn rightly protests this introduction of satire in *Kate Beaumont*, but not, I think, for the right reasons. He suggests that the satire destroys the reality, but it is more to the point that satire is inconsistent with the tone of comedy which prevails. I do not, however, consider that the elements of satire negate the accomplishment of these three comedies. For one thing, the line between comedy and satire is an arbitrary one, for many techniques are common to both; it has been my experience, furthermore, that what appears to some a rapier may appear to others a cruder weapon. Either can cut deeply in the proper hands.

IV Satire

De Forest wrote one book which is, without doubt, a satire. From title to conclusion, *Honest John Vane* is a bitter satire and one of the most penetrating attacks on political corruption written
in the nineteenth century. The tone is set by De Forest's explanation of how Vane came to be called "Honest John." De Forest writes scornfully:

It is worth while to relate (if only to encourage our youth in the ways of virtue) how easily he had acquired this high repute. While a member of the State legislature he had refused a small bribe from a lobbyist, and had publicly denounced the briber. That this inexpensive outburst of probity should secure him widespread and permanent fame does not, to be sure, shed a very pleasing light over the character which is borne by our law-givers. . . . We will simply call the attention of Sunday school pupils and Young Men's Christian Associations to the cheering fact that, at a prime cost of one hundred dollars, our townsman was able to arise and shine upon a people noted for its political purity as "Honest John Vane!" Only one hundred in greenbacks (about ninety in gold) out of pocket, and the days of Washington come again! I should suppose that, for say twice the figure, a legislator of the period might get the title of "Father of his Country."28

28 *Honest John Vane*, p. 45.

In much the same manner De Forest scores Vane's qualifications for high office. Vane, he notes, "was too ignorant to be a professor in the State university, or even a teacher in one of the city schools; but it was presumed that he could answer well enough as a law-giver for a complicated Republic containing forty millions of people."29 De Forest further deplores the universal suffrage which, he felt, makes possible the election of such men as Vane. Probably the most illuminating example of Vane's lack of perceptiveness is his conclusion that the franking privilege was at the root of
Washington corruption. Here De Forest is evidently satirizing historical facts, for in 1873 Congress had, in a burst of self-righteousness, abolished the franking privilege, only to restore it quietly a few years later. De Forest sees the inexhaustible means of the corporate finance groups as the main source of governmental corruption, though clearly the lack of character of the politicians makes their subversion easy. No level of politics, however, escapes De Forest's attention. He speaks of that great institution, the nominating convention, in these words:

Then Derius Dorman proposed, for the sake of party union, for the sake of the good old cause, for the sake of this great Republic, to have the job done over by acclamation. There was not an audible dissenting voice; on the contrary, there was "wild enthusiasm." The old war-horses and wheel-horses and leaders all fell into the traces at once, and neighed and snorted and hurrahed until their hard foreheads dripped with patriotic perspiration, every drop of which they meant should be paid for in municipal or State or Federal dollars.30


At times De Forest portrays the machinations of the politicians and their friends, their conversations, their reasoning, with more subtlety. The irony of such situations lies in the fact that these hypocrites actually seem to believe their own fine words. One example is the passage wherein Dorman, the lobbyist, offers Vane a gift of one thousand dollars worth of stock in an organization if Vane will push its recommendations through Congress. Dorman reasons sweetly,

"And don't you make Puritanical faces over it. It isn't money, you see. . . . I wouldn't think of offering money to you. It's
just a business chance. Is there anything low in a Congress-
man's putting his money where his constituents put theirs?
Isn't he thereby joining his fortunes with theirs?"31

31 Ibid., p. 167.

Often, however, De Forest relied on sharp twists which remind
one of Twain or Artemus Ward. De Forest's dry summation of Vane's
first term in office illustrates the method. Vane, he notes, "had
now served two years in the honorable Congress of the United States,
after such a fashion that, could he have had his deserts, he would
have served ten more in jail."32 De Forest describes Vane's court-

32 Ibid., p. 192.

ship by saying that Vane "told all he knew about national politics,
and some things which neither he nor any other man ever knew."33

33 Ibid., p. 58.

This technique is not confined to Honest John but is more common
there than in his other works. Honest John Vane is notable primarily
because it is a book-length satire, and a good one, though it is
marred by intrusions which lessen its effectiveness by appealing
directly to the reader. It demonstrates once again De Forest's
conscious choice of humor as a method of expression; for satire,
which uses the classic techniques of exaggeration, extrapolation,
or direct ridicule, must be classed as humor. Honest John serves
thus as a point of beginning for the reader of De Forest; for it
is a logical end to the works of a man who relied largely on humor
V De Forest's Uses of the Comic Spirit

Throughout De Forest's works, be they serious or satirical, an almost Meredithian comic spirit hovers over the action. This comic spirit is his greatest achievement, for it is at the heart of his success as a social historian and as a realist. Like Jane Austen, Thackeray, Twain, and Sinclair Lewis, all of whom he resembles in method, De Forest posits common sense as a basic approach to the good life, and judges his fellow citizens from that point of view. Most of them fall woefully short of the ideal. For a general statement of the method and its application I can do no better than quote from Meredith's 1877 expression of it in his "On the Idea of Comedy and the Uses of the Comic Spirit."

If you believe that our civilization is founded in common-sense (and it is the first condition of sanity to believe it), you will, when contemplating men, discern a Spirit overhead... Its common aspect is one of unsolicitous observation, as if surveying a full field and having leisure to dart on its chosen morsels, without any fluttering eagerness. Men's future upon earth does not attract it; their honesty and shapeliness in the present does; and whenever they wax out of proportion, overblown, affected, pretentious, bombastical, hypocritical, pedantic, fantastically delicate; whenever it sees them self-deceived or hoodwinked, given to run riot in idolatries, drifting into vanities, congregating in absurdities, planning shortsightedly, plotting dementedly; whenever they are at variance with their professions, and violate the unwritten but perceptible laws binding them in consideration one to another; whenever they offend sound reason, fair justice; are false in humility or mined with conceit, individually, or in the bulk--
the Spirit overhead will look humanely malign and cast an oblique light on them, followed by volleys of silvery laughter. That is the Comic Spirit. 34


Like Meredith, De Forest saw humor as a corrective instrument by which others could be instructed in the art of living. The extent to which he directs his laughter at his characters is proportionate to the extent to which they transgress common sense. All extremists are dangerous, De Forest felt, even those who base their conduct on irreproachable ideals sanctified by tradition. This attitude is expressed by Walter Lehming, the representative of common sense in The Wetherel Affair, who shares it. He remarks, "All extremes of conduct verge on irrationality. The extremist does evil as well as good. Calvin purified the church, but his preachings were too violent, and there has been a harmful reaction to them." 35


That this is De Forest's view as well can be seen by his treatment of Judge Wetherel. The Judge is an honorable man, a long-time supporter of missionary activities, who lives quietly in spite of the fact that he is wealthy. Yet De Forest shows that Judge Wetherel's piety has not hindered him from amassing a large fortune, nor does it prevent his cruelty to his nephew Edward. In truth, the Judge, like many people of principle, is intolerant of any way
of life but his own. Since the Judge lacks understanding and balance, De Forest does not completely approve of him; yet he directs only a gentle sort of laughter at the Judge, for his actions are based on good principles and thus do more good than harm. For example, insisting, as the Judge does, that the household gather for morning prayer service before any conversation may begin does no harm. The Judge’s Biblical exegeses may bore his relatives and his servants, may indeed occasion more humor than piety, and may indict the Judge for failure to distinguish between the forms of religion and the spirit; but such results hardly endanger civilization.

Two more who come in for a share of De Forest’s gentle raillery are Mr. and Mrs. John Murray. Their situation verges on the pathetic, but on the whole they are humorous characters. At twenty-five John Murray had married a woman fifteen years older. His wife, who is not very bright, has the habit of echoing a good deal of his conversation. Here is a sample bit of dialogue:

"Yes," sighed the rector, taking Josephine’s unemployed hand. "It is hard to have a husband swept away so early."
"Swept away so early!" repeated Mrs. Murray, who had a curious way of echoing her lord’s observations, as if she were responding to a litany.
"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.

36De Forest, Playing the Mischief, p. 21.
But worse than Mrs. Murray's innocent triviality is her husband's single-minded purpose to amuse her. In this he is an extremist. As De Forest says,

He was that rare specimen of man who makes a pet of his wife; who watches over her well-being and happiness with the assiduity of a mother watching over an only child; who unflinchingly sacrifices his own ease and his own tastes for her comfort, or even for her mere amusement; and who is disposed to use his fellow-mortals as mere assistants and instruments in this loving labor.37

Since Mrs. Murray is merely trivial, it is the Reverend John Murray who bears the burden of sharper humor. There is a certain tragic grandeur in his martyrdom; but De Forest never overlooked the comedy in anything lacking common sense—even martyrdom. His summation of John Murray's life indicates as much.

At sixty-three he was a gossip-monger and an inventor of child-like babblings for the pleasure of this tottering woman of seventy-eight. Many people laughed at him for this seemingly undignified frivolity of mind. But to one who looks closely into his motives, and who does not object to a one-sided development and a waste of intellectual power, his life can appear scarcely less than beautiful.38

It seems to me that the italicized remarks state De Forest's position clearly, though he admits the possibility that others might not object to such lopsided development. By its construction the paragraph seems to damn with faint praise.

There are other characters, however, to whom De Forest is not so kind. In general he conceived those characters as personifications...
of some intellectual or social movement. Their commitment blinds them to reality. Such blindness, raised to the height of monomania, is dangerous, as De Forest sees it, not only to them but to society.

In his very first novel, "Witching Times," De Forest exposed the danger in overcommitment to an idea. In that book he portrayed the dangers of the religious fervor which produced the witchcraft trials of Salem. It was the only polemic De Forest wrote.

The most prominent objects of his comic spirit were the feminists. Aunt Maria Stanley is his first, and perhaps best, feminist. She is middle-aged and domineering. She has money of her own, which helps, and is inclined to make snap decisions. When her niece Clara implores her aid, Aunt Maria characteristically offers to take Clara back East with her.

"Oh! if you would!" implored Clara, all the tender helplessness of Spanish girlhood appealing from her eyes.

"Of course I will," said Aunt Maria, with a benevolent energy which was almost terrific.

"I would try to do something. I don't know. Couldn't I teach Spanish?"

"You shan't," decided Aunt Maria. "Yes, you shall. You shall be professor of foreign languages in a Female College which I mean to have founded."39

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39 De Forest, Overland, p. 5.

Such forcefulness is frightening, though not improbable. One feels that Aunt Maria is capable of anything. She shrugs off facts as easily as opinions. She dismisses Santa Fe easily, saying,
"Founded in 1581; two hundred and seventy years old. Well, if this is all that man can do in that time, he had better leave colonization to woman!"\textsuperscript{40}

\textsuperscript{40}\textit{Ibid.}, p. 4.

Another example of her blindness is her remark upon finding that the Moquis never shear their sheep until they are dead. She exclaims,

"Absurd! There's another specimen of masculine stupidity. I'll warrant you, if the women had the management of things, the good-for-nothing brutes would be sheared every day."\textsuperscript{41}

\textsuperscript{41}\textit{Ibid.}, p. 79.

When the Indians attack the wagon train, however, Aunt Maria, in the best female tradition, admonishes the guards to "'acquit yourselves like--men.'"\textsuperscript{42} Because her whole life is built on the proposition, "'I never knew a man yet but what he was wrong,'"\textsuperscript{43}

\textsuperscript{42}\textit{Ibid.}, p. 55.

\textsuperscript{43}\textit{Ibid.}, p. 4.

she is an easy prey for anyone who humors her. Thus, when Coronado appeals to her bias by suggesting that the route he wants her party to take to California will supposedly afford them a chance to see some ruins of a civilization where women ruled, she readily sides with him.

It is easy to laugh at her because of her perversity, but, as De Forest shows, she is dangerous because her lack of common sense endangers the lives of all about her. Her lack of logic thus differs
from that of the eccentrics depicted by Scott and his fellow romantics. Scott's eccentrics, Dominie Sampson for example, are comic only. Their harmlessness is further emphasized by their usually being members of the lower classes who play only minor roles in the stories. There are exceptions, of course; Scott's Jonathan Oldbuck is a notable one, but in general the distinction holds. Aunt Maria, however, is a leading character. She has social standing and better than average education and experience. She is a moving force in the book and actively influences the direction of the plot. Because of her status, her delusions are of central importance for the book.

Another feminist is the Bloomer, Squire Appleyard, who dresses like a man. (She has been described previously.) De Forest treats her roughly and allows her no actions except foolish ones. As he sees her, Squire Nancy Appleyard desires two things at once. She desires the millenium in which women are accorded an equal place in government, business, and the professions; but she also wants the prerogatives of a woman. Squire Nancy, attempting to coquette with Sykes Drummond in her rather barren law office, illustrates the inconsistency of her ambitions. Her coquetry is thwarted by her masculine manners and clothes. As Sykes says, "How do you suppose I can love you, with you sitting on a table, and swinging your boots like a man?" Thus balked, she falls back on femininity,

\[44\] De Forest, *Playing the Mischief*, p. 75.

just as Aunt Maria did in an extreme situation. Nancy breaks into
tears as Sykes walks away from the interview.

Then her disappointment and indignation broke out violently. She dashed at the door, tore it open with much noise, thrust out her flushed and wet face, glared fiercely at his disappearing figure, and called, in a loud scream, "You are a villain!"\(^5\)

\(^5\)Ibid., p. 76.

Her attempt to make Josie Murray, her chief rival for Sykes Drummond, play a kind of Russian roulette with poisoned pills is one of the most hilarious scenes in the book. Nancy's foolish melodramatics make an amusing contrast with Josie's childish protestations.

"I thought as much," hissed Squire Nancy, almost losing what little reason Heaven had fitted her out with. "It lies betwixt us two, then," she continued, at the same time producing that mysterious pill-box which has been mentioned. "Mrs. Murray, I am a druggist as well as lawyer," and by this time her voice was so hoarse and sepulchral as to be really terrible, at least to Josie. "I am a druggist. I have here two pills made by myself. One of them is bread, and the other is arsenic. They shall decide between us. Take your choice, and I will take the other. The survivor shall have Sykes Drummond. The other," and here her utterance fell to a hoarse murmur which was all but unearthly and would have been fatal to a sensitive listener--"the other--d-i-e-s! . . ."

Josie shed tears, babyishly, and said, in a contemptible whisper, "I can't take pills without some jam."\(^6\)

\(^6\)Ibid., pp. 78-79.

Another of those characters who are absurd because of their convictions is John Bowlder, a latter-day transcendentalist. His Emersonian-flavored speech, generally unapplicable to the specific occasion of the utterance, and his idealistic approach to life produce much of the fun in The Wetherel Affair. Bowlder's philos-
ophy, De Forest plainly shows, cannot cope with real life. The Emersonian paradoxes are carried to absurdity by Bowlder's misapplication of them. As De Forest notes, Bowlder adds nothing to the real world, for he does not really bother about it. He ignores family and friends to go his own way. De Forest sums up Bowlder's life caustically. He writes:

"Acting in accordance with these whimwhams, as far as his really strong natural affections would let him, the ideological Bowlder prided himself on treating the every-day, essential affairs of his life with sovereign contempt, eschewing discourse concerning the people whom he knew and the things which he did, and talking mainly of matters that he was not acquainted with."

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47 The Wetherel Affair, p. 128.

The genial Bowlder clowns his way through the book. In one instance he echoes Whitman and Emerson together. Bowlder has been singing his own verses, of which this verse is typical:

"All nature hath its clamorous joys;  
The hiding crickets make sharp noise,  
The fireman yaws, the rooster crows.  
The ploughman loudly blows his nose."  

48 Ibid., p. 154.

Nestoria asks him what he calls his verse. Bowlder answers in words which Whitman could well have recognized and then, struck by one of his own figures of speech, a commonplace simile such as Emerson loved to use, Bowlder breaks out in song again. This is the passage:

"Yes, I venture to call that yawp a tune, Miss Nettie," gayly replied the philosopher. "It is the tune the old cow died of. It is Bowlder's tune, the only one he knows, and known to no other cosmos. The man who feels that he is
called to sing cannot wait to learn music. If he is a true
man, he will sing what he can, though the jackass keep him
company. . . .what I have that give I freely, like a bird,
or a running spring, or a pumpkin pie."
This last figure struck him as a particularly good
one. . . .It inspired him to improvise...
"Like a pumpkin pie
Is this essor named I,
Free to every eater,
Would it were sweeter!
But such as it is, the gods mixed it,
And what there is of it, the universal forces fixed it;
And although it is thin and plain,
You may cut it and come again."49

De Forest had more to say about the transcendentalists, for he
was generally suspicious of idealism and felt that the transcenden-
talists lacked common sense. As I have mentioned, while wheeling
bricks with an Irish labor gang, Bowlder is arrested by an over-
conscientious policeman who is struck by the incongruity of a
man wearing a gold watch in such surroundings. The scene at the
Tombs is a reversal of Teufelsdröckh's philosophy of clothes in
Sartor Resartus. Bowlder has been characterized throughout the
book as a large man, and his bluster and precipitousness have
reinforced the impression of power and strength. Now, with a savage
twist reminiscent of Swift, De Forest shows that Bowlder's size,
like his philosophy, is a sham. The police have stripped him, taking
off two coats, two vests, and numerous woolen undergarments.

There was nothing left of his usual bigness and bluntness and
blowsiness. . . .such outlines, so altered, so incredibly
less, so diminished as if by vast distances! They hardly knew
him themselves, and half thought they had begun with one man
and finished with another, so marvellous had been the change.
A clothes-stand, on which his removed raiment hung, looked much more like the real Bowlder than did this white taper of a figure. . . . Even his conversation, stripped and divested as it was of transcendentalisms, was lean and shrunken. A man might have been pardoned for glancing at the clothes-stand to see if his accustomed phraseology had not been hung up along with his garments.  

Even his friends, come to identify him, can hardly recognize him. His manner, once so blustering, is humble and placating. That the whole incident is gratuitous nastiness on De Forest's part is emphasized by the fact that it is not an organic part of the plot. It serves only to show De Forest's disapproval of transcendental philosophy. De Forest underlines that meaning by phrasing Bowlder's change in philosophical terms. Bowlder looked as if "his soul had migrated into some new body. . . . He was a transfigured creature in every way. . . ." Bowlder's resumption of his old ways, upon his release from the Tombs, emphasizes his inability to learn from experience. Though his philosophy cannot sustain him in any personal crisis--it is a sunshine philosophy--he continues on his idealistic way, refusing to recognize the fact. In the end, ironically, he is the only one of the relatives to accept his full share of the inheritance left by Judge Wetherel. Bowlder relinquishes the dollar he has earned by wheeling bricks and shows, once again, his inability and disinclination to live in the real world.
"Take it. . .It is a curiosity. It is Bowlder's only dollar, the only one that ever really belonged to him, because the only one that he ever earned. He wants never to see it again. He desires no more dollars from that source. He prefers money that has been left him. Toil is all very well for the predestined and habituated sons of toil; but the soul which basked in its own sunshine can be happiest without it."52

52 Ibid., p. 221.

With that condemnation of the ivory tower set, De Forest rests his case.

Mrs. Dinneford, the Tupper enthusiast, also appears in The Wetherel Affair. She is granted a modicum of common sense but is still fair game for De Forest's comic spirit. She lives a life in which all emotions, all circumstances, can be reduced to pious platitudes. Her philosophy so obscures her common sense that, like Aunt Maria, she is an easy prey to anyone who will flatter her opinions. Count Foloski is just the man to take advantage of her, and he does. As De Forest explains,

The fact that "Freedom shrieked when Kosciusko fell" pleaded eloquently for him to Mrs. Dinneford's excellent heart. Likewise it advantaged him much with her that he was such a "scholarly man," and knew so much, or so little, of so many languages, and could talk fluently of so diverse, abstruse subjects. An intellectual charlatan. . .was naturally impressive to a semi-educated spirit which had the New England reverence for learning and looked upon every college tutor as a precious well-spring of knowledge.

And when Mrs. Dinneford found that Foloski could discourse copiously concerning the Scriptures, she became disposed to consider him an elect soul, who might properly be received into any of the households of our American Zion.53

53 Ibid., p. 159.
De Forest treats Mrs. Dinneford more kindly than he does many other of his characters who lack common sense. She is amusing because she can always be relied upon to apply one of her favorite Tupperisms to any situation, quotations which show that she fails to appreciate that not all situations can be neatly summed up in a phrase. Her instincts are good, even though they are overcome by her bias toward a muddy kind of sentimentalized religion. She reflects the spirit which made so many Americans easy prey to intellectual charlatans. The same desire for culture, admiration of education, and respect for religion which accounted for Poloski's popularity were at the root of the vogue for Tupper and for many of the vapid, moralistic novels of the fifties and sixties as well.

In the same book, De Forest sums up in the character of Imogen Eleonore Jones all of the shallow ideals and general histrionics common to the popular newspaper novels. Her gaudy speech and flamboyant actions parody the excessiveness of that type of fiction. He does not snipe at this excessiveness; he demolishes it with grape and canister. In his desire to portray the extent of Miss Jones's departure from common sense, De Forest drops the polite manner of the comic spirit for the cruder techniques of low comedy. His lack of restraint in dealing with Miss Jones almost equals her own. Because of De Forest's bitterness, Miss Jones is more a caricature than a real person; yet it must be added that she steals the scene from her fellow characters in the book. For one thing, she simply cannot open her mouth without orating. Describing her friend Nestoria, Imogen says,
"She is passing fair—too fair for the sun to shine upon rudely—much less the wind and the rain. . . Ah, such pearly tints and azure eyes and golden hair, and a mouth sweet with the roses of eighteen, yet tremulous and imploring, ever imploring with sorrow!"  

When asked how long she has known Nestoria, Imogen takes off again: 
"'Only about three months—three months of grief and of pity—three months of sorrow and sympathy.' " Such talk is to be expected of a woman who, in her own words, would not have been the same 'had it not been for my familiarity with the chefdooevers of fiction.' 
Yet she speaks honestly for all those women of the nineteenth century who desired escape from the daily realities and found that escape in popular fiction. For those to whom the grand passions of a St. Elmo or a Lord Byron appealed, the following words seem natural enough.

"If I knew a man who dared be a wretch," she continued, rolling mock-heroic eyes, "I could wor--ship him. Grandeur of soul, whether for good or evil, is what I seek through the feeble—oh how feeble!—inanities of commonplace life."

De Forest finally relents; he allows Miss Jones to slip off to her Vermont home with her childhood lover to prepare for her marriage. 

When De Forest restrains himself, Imogen is a genuinely
humorous character. Her histrionics on such simple occasions as opening a door, saying good morning, or borrowing a book, for example, are wonderful indeed. One cannot help feeling fond of Imogen Eleonore Jones. She is sympathetic, imaginative, and genuinely interested in life. Her pursuit of culture and romance is thwarted by her ignorance—a condition which is exploited by the Spasmodics of every age. They are the real villains.

In Kate Beaumont and The Bloody Chasm De Forest saw a lack of common sense in Southern characteristics which were accepted with a straight face by the writers of sentimental fiction. Perhaps the mainly rural South did not produce as many striking variations in personality as the more urban North, but he did well with the material at hand. Of the hot-tempered, dashing, dueling Southerner, a cliché even in those days, De Forest had much to say. The Honorable Peyton Beaumont is characteristic. His bad temper is excused by De Forest on the grounds that since Peyton goes to bed on brandy he sleeps badly at night. Then, because he sleeps badly, he has recourse to two brandy cocktails upon awakening—three on Sunday, for Peyton, being somewhat religious, regards Sunday as a special day. Describing this specimen of Southern nobility De Forest notes that Beaumont's temper was "sublime as a tiger's and as ridiculous as a monkey's."\(^{58}\)

\(^{58}\)Kate Beaumont, p. 37.

It is Peyton's excessive pride which De Forest shows as most foolish. The central situation of Kate Beaumont is the feud between
the Beaumonts and the McAlisters. The real cause of the feud is lost in antiquity; certain younger members of the families know only that it exists and accept it as they do their names. Yet so powerful is the feud that when Kate is saved from drowning by a McAlister, the Beaumonts are at a loss to know what to do. As the Paris-educated Poinsett Beaumont notes cynically,

"My respected father and my much-esteemed brothers (descendants of the De Beaumonts of Yvetot and other places), we are threatened with the loss of our family institution, our race palladium. The feud with the McAlisters has been to us more than our coat of arms. I may almost call it the Beaumont established religion... Are we to drop away from the creed of our forefathers? Are we to have no faith?" 59

59 Ibid., p. 42.

Although De Forest points out carefully that the book has more than a passing resemblance to the Romeo and Juliet story, he so emphasizes the absurdity of the hot-tempered Southerners and their feuds that the book is more farce than tragedy.

In one of the last novels he wrote, The Bloody Chasm, De Forest again plays for laughs a tragic Southern situation. The book was his attempt to swim with the tide of reconciliation novels published in the seventies and eighties, but De Forest's sense of humor betrayed the solemn note which might have gained it the popular approval accorded other such novels. The central figure of De Forest's book is Virginia Beaufort, the last of the Beauforts of South Carolina, who is offered an inheritance by Mr. Mather, a Northerner who married her sister. The offer is conditional on Virginia's marriage to Mather's nephew Colonel Underhill. Much of
the humor in the book lies in the long arguments between Virginia and her aunt, Mrs. Dumont, over the propriety of accepting the money—and Mr. Underhill. Mrs. Dumont's contribution to the argument is simple; she hopes that Virginia will accept the offer and relieve them all of their poverty, but the acceptance must be handled as befits the family name. She chants this irritating refrain: "The question is...what ought a Beaufort to do under the circumstances?" After much talk, Virginia has one brilliant idea. She will marry Underhill but will not live with him. Mrs. Dumont adds what she evidently considers a clincher.

"Of course, I hope he will accept it. He may. Just consider what an honor even that is to him! We might concede something. We might allow him to take the Beaufort name."

Mrs. Dumont's absurd pretensions are doubly absurd since the Beauforts have nothing, and at present she and Virginia are living in a former slave hut with the last of the Beaufort Negro servants, Aunt Chloe and Uncle Phil, and taking in washing. After the ceremony is over and the inheritance received, Virginia, Mrs. Dumont, and the two Negroes decide to tour Europe as an escape from the ravaged South. Mrs. Dumont retains her illusions of cultural superiority even in Paris. She calls it a Babylon and declares that God will some day destroy such pride and luxury. There is an obvious irony in her warnings on pride. Rejecting everything foreign, even
the size of Paris, she remarks, "'There is no use in any place being bigger than Charleston.'"62 After Virginia is wooed and won by Colonel Peyton, Underhill in disguise, and the reconciliation between North and South symbolically achieved, Mrs. Dumont pronounces her final uncompromising words. "'The affair has been a little—providential... But my niece has acted throughout as became a Beaufort.'"63

Mrs. Dumont is a fool, of course, and De Forest never gives the reader a chance to forget it. Like his idealists and others who pay too much obeisance to a single concept, Mrs. Dumont is shown as unreasonable. The extravagance of her sentiments when she learns that General Hilton, who lost a leg in the Confederate cause, will soon join them in Paris is typical. She cries joyously, "'What a sad pleasure it will be to meet him! I would rather listen to the thump of a Confederate soldier's stump than to an opera.'"64 The unfortunate rhyme, intentional I feel sure, makes the statement more foolish than most of her utterances. Significant of the strength of De Forest's indictment is his statement that she was "a lady who never uttered a joke and rarely understood one—a lady who had no conception of the
Since De Forest valued a sense of humor highly, his statement that Mrs. Dumont lacks one is damning.

Elderly flirts also drew the laughter of De Forest's comic spirit. The elderly woman who refuses to accept the fact that she is no longer attractive to young men is, of course, a standard comedy type. De Forest has few changes or improvements to offer. Mrs. Van Leer, in Seacliff, is quite ordinary. She is homely, married, and foolish. She flirts audaciously with Fitz Hugh until, in a moment of exasperation, he walks her to a secluded spot and scares her silly by proposing to carry to a logical conclusion her implied offers of romance. She protests that she meant nothing of the kind and retreats. This, too, is standard practice for elderly flirts. She reforms at the conclusion of the book—one of those magical re formations associated with the characters in dime novels, children's stories, and the like—and becomes a loving wife resigned to her place in life.

Mrs. Chester, Kate Beaumont's aunt, is different. She is a widow, "tolerably well preserved," but old enough to be Frank McAlister's mother. Yet she persists in mistaking his attentions to her niece Kate as attentions to herself. De Forest is more serious in dealing with her than with the other flirts. From a light-headed, silly woman whose absurdity is readily apparent to all about her, she evolves into a tragic figure. While the seriousness of her affliction is not yet noticeable, De Forest can write
of her angry exit from a room, that she

marched off with short, spunky stampings, reminding one of that famous step between the sublime and the ridiculous. Her hips had become of late years an inch or so too wide to permit her to locomote thus with grace or dignity. They gave her skirts a quick, jerking swing, which, as seen from behind, was more farcical than majestic. The fat washerwoman or chambermaid of low comedy walks by preference in this manner.66

66Kate Beaumont, p. 61.

De Forest makes Mrs. Chester's infatuation with Frank more ridiculous by a series of ludicrous comparisons. De Forest does not even allow her to approve of Frank for sensible reasons. Finally he suggests that Mrs. Chester is drawn toward Frank because he is over six feet tall. De Forest concludes:

So tall! Perhaps that was the key to her possession. The jaded flirt, famished after sensations, had been captivated by a physical novelty. Her next passion might be for a dwarf, or for one of the Siamese Twins.67

67Ibid., p. 68.

Mrs. Chester's actions, amusing enough in the early stages of the book, later become pathological. Her obsession is analyzed in clinical detail; her behavior becomes more and more irrational. In her attempt to isolate Frank for herself, she frantically encourages Kate to visit Washington. When Kate refuses to leave, Mrs. Chester suspects the influence of a friend, Mrs. Devine, who has been encouraging a young minister of the district to court Kate. Mrs. Chester turns on Mrs. Devine.

"I know what you mean by your pious talk, Sally Devine," she chattered. "You want to keep Kate here so that your stick
of a minister can court her. You are stark crazy about that pale-faced, white-eyed, white-livered creature. You know that Kate Beaumont is the best match in the district, and you want her money and niggers to support him. O, you needn't make eyes at me as if I were breaking all the Ten Commandments at once. I don't care if he is a clergymen. I don't like him. I don't like his looks. He has a white liver. He's just that kind of man that the niggers call a white-livered man..."

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68 Ibid., pp. 147-148.

Mrs. Chester's choice of words is far from genteel. Her condition is finally recognized as a true illness and she is put under confinement in the Beaumont house. As it turns out, she is quite mad. She dies of softening of the brain a little later. De Forest's characterization of Mrs. Chester is not particularly deft: by modern psychological standards it is even absurd. Yet it shows how closely those objects of his comic spirit—those characters over-committed to one idea—were allied in his own mind with actual unreason.

Congressman Hollowbread is of a more jolly cast. He is a caricature of the elderly male flirt. He is sixty years old, pompous and portly. His acquaintance with Josie Murray, who is attempting to flirt her claim through Congress, is high comedy throughout. Of the two it is Hollowbread who is made to look foolish, for Josie's position and actions are logically motivated and utterly insincere. Hollowbread, a veteran of Congress and of many flirtations, is an ineffectual Congressman, a tool of more intelligent interests; in flirtations he is equally ineffectual and even more openly used. The light banter between Hollowbread and
Josie is an ironic reflection on the banalities that sometimes pass for humor in conversation. For example, Josie tells Hollowbread that her uncle is a preacher, but not a very good one. Hollowbread gallantly replies that he will, nevertheless, thereafter attend church without fail.

"I shall at least have the pleasure of looking at his family pew," added Mr. Hollowbread, smiling pointedly at the young lady who would be one of the occupants of that inclosure.

"The family pew shall show what gratitude pews can feel [Josie replied]."69

69 De Forest, Playing the Mischief, p. 11.

Hollowbread is made to seem both physically and mentally foolish. His manly figure, De Forest shows, is purely illusory. Hollowbread's imposing, even awe-inspiring, appearance is the result of a remarkable system of machinery.

Coat, vest, and pantaloons were furnished with pads, straps, and springs; and I will not undertake to say that there might not have been a few cog-wheels and pulleys. It is confounding to think what might have happened had this marvelous raiment been buttoned together and dropped on the floor. It might have buzzed and scrabbled away, of its own motion and internal force, like a clock-work locomotive. It might have lounged into a chair, and sat down on the small of its hollow back, and put its empty legs on the mantel-piece. . . . It might have taken a car to the Capitol, and claimed its accustomed oaken chair in the Hall of Representatives, there to play the part of a dignified and harmless political figure-head.

One is lost in conjecture as to what human beings would do in any of these cases.

Would a policeman arrest it as a vagrant without visible means of existence? Would a sergeant-at-arms admit it to the floor of the House, or cash a check for it?70

70 Ibid., p. 67.
De Forest elaborates on this idea of the clothes being the man until his treatment is reminiscent of that scene in which John Bowlder is stripped by the police. The idea of Hollowbread as a mere shell is hardly a fresh device. But De Forest does not

Like many of Dickens' creations, Hollowbread's name has, I would say, a literal significance. He is truly a hollow man, without principles, honor, or worth. Such characterization by name is frequent in De Forest. Walter Lehming, the little hunchback of The Wetherel Affair, for example, is racing toward destruction. Other names having a literal significance are those of the roguish Mrs. Van Leer and the grub-like Mr. Wormly. Others have ironic names. Bowlder, for example, is an ironic name for a man who is anything but sturdy and enduring. Most of the characters in Honest John Vane have ironic or characteristic names: Representatives Greatheart and Sharp, Senators Ironman and Knickerbocker, and Generals Splurge and Boum are but a few. Of a more ambiguous sort are the middle-aged Millerite, Miss Biffles, and that improvident wife of John Vane whose maiden name was, improbably enough, Olympia Smiles.

Generally, however, Hollowbread is a diverting character, whether he is catching cold in the rain escorting Josie home from the railroad station, attempting vainly to catch her as she jumps from a window after a Presidential reception, or cowering under the bedclothes as Senator Pickens Rigdon drunkenly waves a pistol at him.

VI Folk Humor

The remainder of this chapter deals with that part of De Forest's
works which expresses the spirit and follows in the tradition of what has come to be called native American humor. It is thought of by some as frontier humor, but the frontier in America was everywhere. The term, native American humor, like many others is difficult to define. Following the lead of Walter Blair, I think

72 Native American Humor (1800-1900), New York, 1937. In his lengthy introduction Blair has five main topics: Down East humor, Old Southwest humor, literary comedians, local colorists, and Mark Twain.

that when humor springs out of the convictions, customs, and associations of America, that humor can rightly be called American. Such humor is exaggerated, gusty, and, at times, earthy. It is commonly based on regional characteristics.

The importance of folk humor in De Forest's work is twofold. First, because such humor exploits the dialect, customs, and manners of a distinct region, it is essentially realistic in its portrayals of character. The inclusion of folk humor, then, adds much to De Forest's final stature as a realist. Once again De Forest shows his wide knowledge of America and his ability to portray all sides of the American character. His folk characters range from laconic Yankees to coarse-grained crackers from the uplands of South Carolina, from urban Irishmen to freed Negroes. Second, De Forest integrated such characters, and the spirit in which they lived, into a balanced picture of the nation as a whole. He did not, for example, present his examinations of the South Carolina poor whites in the sociological manner of A. B. Longstreet. Nor did De Forest examine
the cultural peculiarities of any region in the anthropological
spirit of Eggleston. Such pseudo-scientific investigations concen­
trated on the eccentric, the unusual, and the extremes of local
behavior. The pictures presented were one-sided; the difference
between such approaches and De Forest's is similar to the difference
between Caldwell's South and Faulkner's.

Many of the characteristics of American humor are to be found
in folk humor anywhere. I will consider here only those examples
of De Forest's humor which reflect the characteristics of the
commonly acknowledged areas of native American humor. De Forest's
folk humor can be divided then into sections of Down East humor,
Old Southwest or cracker humor, Negro humor, and Irish humor. In
the discussion to follow I have pointed out some notable corre­
spondences of De Forest's characterizations to those of acknowledged
American humorists.

The first evidence of De Forest's American humor appears in
Seacliff. In that book Pa and Ma Treat are quite obviously in the
tradition of the Down East characters of Haliburton, Smith, Shillaber,
and Whitcher. Pa Treat is a typical laconic, shrewd New England
Yankee. He possesses all the characteristics of Jack Downing and
Sam Slick save one—their ability in trade. His speech is larded
with localisms and with words of his own invention; when at a loss
for a word he has recourse to "what-d'ye-call-it," or a comparable
phrase. Of the old house he lives in he says, "'It's an antic old
A sample of his usual speech, with its mystifying phraseology, is this comment:

"He only wanted a little more of the what-d'ye-call-it. Cherk up, Johnny; there'll be another dinner to-morrow. You sha'n't want for something to put in your thingumbob. . . ."74

Ma Treat, on the other hand, follows the pattern of those pious monologuists, Mrs. Partington and the widow Bedott. Whereas Pa Treat might let drop the simple statement that John's dead, Ma goes on at this rate:

"Yes, John's dead," said Ma Treat, shaking her head and winking watery eyes. "The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord; Job, first, twenty-first. Sally died, you know, Lewy, when you was at school; and two years ago last winter, John's wife died in childbed; and then, the summer after, John he died of a lung fever; and now, Lewy, we're all alone except little Johnny here."75

Ma Treat has a wide streak of grim New England Puritanism in her make-up. Her frequent allusions to Scripture are always solemn, even funereal.

Both she and her husband share the distrust for outlanders common in the rural localities of American humor. Pa says with satisfaction that the former owner of Seacliff, a New York banker named Skelton, "went busted." Pa blames their "company." When asked if he means that they had frequent visitors, he replies with

"De Forest, Seacliff, p. 49.

74 Ibid., p. 88.

75 Ibid., p. 48.
typical compression:

"Acre lots full. Then such goings on! Such eating and
drinking. Such jigs and jigamarees! People driving up night
and day. But they dwindled down finally to pretty much nothing
but sheriffs."76

76Ibid., p. 50.

Though the rich New Yorkers are outlanders to the Treats, their
special distrust is reserved for more recent immigrants from abroad.
For example, there is this tirade by Ma Treat against the Irish:

"Why, I just went up to the great house, to show them
Irish helps of Mrs. Westervelt's how to bake an Injun
puddin'," said Ma Treat. "Stupid, awkward, catholic creeturs
they are to be sure; and I wish they'd stay in their own
popish countries and worship their saints to home."77

77Ibid., p. 84.

In Overland, De Forest presents another Yankee, Captain Phineas
Glover. He is rescued from the Indians by Lieutenant Thurstone and his
group, which includes Aunt Maria and Clara, on their way to Cali­
ifornia. Glover's appearance and first words set the tone of his
character. He appears running from behind a rock in the middle of
the desert.

As he approached, he appeared to be a lean, lank, narrow-
shouldered, yellow-faced, yellow-haired creature, such as you
might expect to find on Cape Cod or thereabouts. Hollow-
chested as he was, he had a yell in him which was quite
surprising. From the time that he sighted the three horsemen
he kept up a steady screech until he was safe under their noses.
Then he fell flat and gasped for nearly a minute without speaking.
His first words were, "That's pooty good sailin' for a man who
ain't used to 't."78

78De Forest, Overland, p. 34.
Glover is a typical Down Easterner like the Treats before him. His shrewd, laconic comments on all matters give a comic relief to the troubles and dangers of the long trip overland. Of the suave, voluble Coronado, for instance, Glover observes, "'Pooty tonguey man, that Seenor.'" Glover endures Indian attacks and near-starvation with seeming equanimity. His experiences previous to the overland trip, as he relates them, suggest that he has a philosophical attitude:

"Been in the coastin' 'n' Wes' Injy trade. Had 'n unlucky time out las' few years. Had a schuner burnt in port, 'n' lost a brig at sea. Pooty much broke me up. Wife 'n' dahter gone into th' oyster-openin' business. Thought I'd try my han' at openin' gold mines in Califomy. Jined a caravan at Fort Leavenworth, 'n' lost my reckonin's back... a ways."

For all of his travels, Glover remains a provincial New Englander. At home anywhere, no man was ever less a citizen of the world.

Glover is also a teller of tall tales. Here, as elsewhere, De Forest shows his acquaintance with the oral tale so characteristic
of American humor. Glover gives just enough concrete detail so that the listener is drawn into acceptance of the frame. After the calm opening, the story may explode into wild extravagance. Aunt Maria, his favorite audience, is a perfect foil for Glover. For example, he tells her a lengthy story about a Negro cook he knew once who could cook halibut so that it tasted like beefsteak. Glover relates that he attempted to buy the secret for ten dollars but was refused. When Aunt Maria observes that the recipe would be worth much more, Glover dryly closes the story. "'Not 'xactly here... Halibut too skurse.'"\(^{82}\) When Lieutenant Thurstane decides to explore the

\(^{82}\)Tbid., p. 48.

San Juan River in a small boat, Glover offers to take a hand. He brags of his seamanship with typical frontier understatement. "'Hey rowed some in my time. Rowed forty mile after a whale onct, 'n' caught the critter--fairly rowed him down.'"\(^{83}\) Glover has counter-

\(^{83}\)Tbid., p. 122.

parts, of course, in many other works, but it must be said that at least he is a consistent character. De Forest did not make the mistake which Haliburton and others made of attributing to his Down Easterners all the dialects of the Union, plus some of the territories. Nor did De Forest endow Glover with unconvincing intelligence. He is shrewd but not learned. When he reaches California, he makes his "pile" by a combination of creative handiwork and native trading ability. He buys some equipment and blows glass
"jigmarigs" which he sells to the miners and Indians. Even in the Southwest, Glover remains a true Down Easterner.

Abner Sly, another Down Easterner, appears in A Lover's Revolt. He is a good example of native humor as well as a further example of De Forest's use of humor for serious expression. Since the book is concerned with the Revolutionary War, Sly is given an added characteristic of pugnacity, but, barring that, he is a typical Yankee of his time. His speech is characteristically pungent and laconic; his grasp of the issues involved in the war remains on a strictly provincial, personal level. After the retreat of the Americans at Lexington, for example, Sly observes disappointedly, "'I don't like being throwed on the first holt.'"\(^4\) Sly takes slowly to military discipline, for with home-grown logic he can see little use for such trappings as saluting and standing guard. After several weeks of trenching he comes to the conclusion that soldiering is "'pooty much like farmin', 's fur's I've got..."\(^5\) His best performance is as a prisoner of the British. He is captured by a British party of foragers on Hog Island, just outside of beleaguered Boston. Abner himself has been on Hog Island looking for provisions with other off-duty Yankees. When he is brought before General Gage as a prisoner of war, Abner relates his part in the Hog Island affair in typical Yankee Doodle style. He is, to be sure, playing a part,
for he is in civilian clothes and hopes to be taken for a non-combatant; otherwise he is likely to be shot as a spy. As the General demands to know what he was doing on Hog Island, Abner goes into his act, which consists merely of being himself.

"General, I warn't fighting; I was arter my shoat... That gruntner was mine; he was my own partickler lawful gruntner; I raised him from a shoat... he was a beauty... he must 'a weighed fourteen stun... when the rebels come over to grab our live stock, I put right out without my coat to see if I could save Joe. Wal, they was arter him, and he was a-dodgin' 'em right 'n' left, gruntin' 'n' blowin' like a porpus... Why, that gruntner jest outmanoovred an' whipped half a regiment of them rebels. An' then, when he'd piled up a haycock of 'em, he'd look around an' snort, as much as to say, 'Has any of 'em got away?'... Wal, arter they'd gin him up, I sot in to coax him back to the sty. But the creetur had got wild; an' when I ketched a friendly holt on his ears, he bolted; and as I was determined not to let go, we travelled around a spell. I was lying full along, face down and eyes shut, when somebody lit on me astraddle, and kinder fell over me, head towards tail, an' rid a while that way... Wal, General, your honor may reckon I was consid'ble surprised when I found that I'd bust into one of your regiments an' run off with one of your kumels... An' now, General, I'd be most dreadful obleeged to ye, if ye'd send me back to Hog Island."  

86 Ibid., pp. 195-198.

Abner's innocent recital is reminiscent of Jack Downing's reports on his travels. The quaint turns of phrase, the exaggerated innocence, and the straight-faced delivery are all characteristic of native American humor at its best.

De Forest's humor of the Southwest is neither so well defined nor so extensive as his New England humor, nor is this surprising in view of De Forest's deeper knowledge of New England. Historically, the Old Southwest never developed a character as representative of
its region as Sam Slick or Jack Downing; that is, the regional characteristics never became as sharply defined for the Old Southwesterner as they did for the Down Easterner. This, perhaps, makes understandable the lack of any Southwesterner in De Forest's work who compares favorably with Phineas Glover.

Yet De Forest did present a general view of the Old Southwest which shows a knowledge of the region equalled only by H. E. Taliaferro and others native to the area. A good example is the cracker ball given by Nancy Gile and Sally Huggs in Kate Beaumont. They live in a tumbledown log cabin in an oldfield. Nancy has two illegitimate children and Sally is herself illegitimate. Upon coming into five dollars more than is necessary to buy food for the next day, the girls decide to throw a party. A pound of tallow candles and three gallons of white raw whiskey are their supplies for the event.

The party comes a motley group of poor whites. De Forest's description of the gathering is as accurate as a photograph.

The general cast of countenance was a lean and hardened wildness, like that of Albanian mountaineers or Calabrian brigands. There were no stolid, square, bull-dog "muggs"; everywhere you saw cleverness, or liveliness, or at least cunning; but it was cleverness of a wolfish or foxy nature. The forms, too, were agile, most of them tall, slender, and bony, the outlines showing sharply through the calico gowns or homespun suits. Four or five plump and rosy girls, looking all the plumper because of sunburn, were exceptions to the general rule of muscle and sinew. All the men, through early use of tobacco, and constant exposure to hardship, were figures of displeasing lankness.

The stinted, graceless costumes increased the general ungainliness. Some of the girls were in calico, limp with dirt; others in narrow-cheasted, ill-fitted, scant-skirted gowns of the coarsest white cotton, such as was commonly issued to fieldhands; others in the cast-off finery of charity, worn just as
it was received, without remaking. Nearly all the men had straight, tight trousers, insufficient vests, and short-bodied, long-tailed frock-coats of gray or butternut homespun.

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De Forest, Kate Beaumont, p. 98.

Later in the same book a drunken duel between Randolph Armitage and Redhead Saxon parodies the Southern code duello. The scene illustrates the same spirit of invention and cruelty seen in the adventures of Simon Suggs and Major Jones. The duel is suggested by Bentley Armitage when Randolph and Redhead cannot be persuaded to part peaceably. It is fought, unbeknown to the contestants, with blank cartridges. Molly Saxon and Bentley have to prop the drunken contestants in opposite corners of the cabin and hand them their pistols. The proceedings are carried on with beautiful mock gravity:

"Now, Jim, ha'n't you got any last words for yer woman?" she asked by way of joke.
"Stan' out the way, ole gal," replied Redhead thickly.
"An' take care of yerself."

At this moment Randolph, trying to stand independent of his barrel, fell over it and rolled on the floor.
"Set 'm up agen," muttered Redhead calmly, and without showing the slightest amusement.

By the aid of Bentley the prostrate man rose and braced himself once more in his corner, smiling the monotonous smile of intoxication. . . .

"Now, then," called Bentley. "One, two, three,—fire."
A deliberate firing ensued; it was curious how cool the two drunkards were; though they could scarcely stand, they meant business.
"That's all," mumbled Randolph when he had exhausted his barrels.
"No 't ain't," called Saxon. "I've got a charge left."
"Well, blaze away, old Redhead," returned Randolph, still smiling his alcoholized smile.
Old Redhead took steady aim, resting his revolver across his left arm, and blazed away to the best of his ability. Randolph fell across his barrel once more. 

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88 Ibid., p. 108.
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Another "rencontre"--they are frequent if not always honorable in De Forest's South--occurs in Wilkins' store in Hartland. It is late and everyone there is quite drunk except Frank McAlister. When Tom Beaumont, hereditary enemy of the McAlisters, comes in, the scene breaks wide open. Tom is blind drunk.

"Ah!" shouted crazy Tom. "There's the tall fellow. I'll take him down a story. I'll razee him."

If Tom fired intentionally, then it must be that Frank looked to him about ten feet high, for the ball went a yard or two over the head of the latter, entering the wall only a little below the ceiling.

Wilkins took the hint and dodged into some invisible nook of safety. He was a cool, brave man, and he was pretty well accustomed to this sort of thing, but he had a rational dislike to being shot for some one else. General Johnson, that bland, yet heroic habitué of duelling-grounds, advanced speechifying through the half-darkness, but fell over a pile of ropes and cords, with his hands in his pockets, and lay for some seconds helpless. The somnolent Jacocks did not stir from his seat on Duffy's bed; and Duffy, smiling straight whiskeys, remained astride of his rocking chair. The martial-eyed Jobson hastily pushed the door to with his loaded cane, and then intrenched himself behind the projecting fireplace, remarking, "This is cursed ugly." 

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89 Ibid., p. 82.
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The ferocity and suddenness of the attack are typical of the region as De Forest saw it. Moreover, he saw the eternal belligerence of the Southerners as the motivation for Southern courtesy; "as every man took it for granted that every other man was armed, discussions
The character of the inhabitants of Hartland is brought out bit by bit so that their traits are difficult to demonstrate. Perhaps one example will suffice to show De Forest's insight into the minds and customs of the poor whites of South Carolina. This particular speech, by one of the local inhabitants, concerns the impending congressional election.

"He go to Congress!" sneered John Stokes. "Them Yankees would come games on him an' poke fun at him from Sunday morning to Saturday night. I'll tell you what sort of a man he is. The Judge started out to canvass the district. How did he do it? Got up his coach. Sure as you're born he got up his coach an' four horses to go an' ask po' men for their votes. Well, he druv round an' kissed the young uns an' talked Sabbe' school to the women folks, an' subscribed to meetin'-houses an' all that sort of nonsense. An' you be' he made mistakes. You bet on it an' win every time. Durned ef he didn't take short-haired Dolly Hicks,--she a settin' by the fire wrapped up in blankets because of the chills,--durned ef he didn't take her for the old man an' ask her to vote for him. Now you don't believe that, you fellers of the McAlister crowd. But it's true; you bet your best bale on it; old Hicks he told me. Now that's a lively man to go to Congress from Hartland District and South Carolina. Why, he wouldn't know a he Yankee from a she one. Them fellers up thar in them foreign States would stock the keerds agin him an' clean him out every time. Now look at the Honorable Peyton Beaumont in a poor man's cabin. He don't come in no coach; he comes a horseback. He walks in square an' strong, like he was to home. He straddles out before the fire, an' parts his coat-tails behind him, and hollers for his tod of plain whiskey, an' chews an' spits like one of the family. He don't make no mistakes betwixt the old man an' the old woman. He knows other folks as sure's he knows himself. He knows the name of every voter in this part of South Carolina an' the name of that voter's dog. He's that kind of a man that rouses your entuzzymuzzy. He's a man that South-Carolinians will take a heap of trouble for. We never had an election yet but what loads of fellers would pile over the line from every district round here, walkin' or ridin' ten or fifteen miles perhaps to give him a lift, an'
that too after going as fur for their own men whar they belong. An' they're right; they're right in takin' all that extra trouble for him; he deserves it. I tell you, ef that's a gentleman in this district who's fit to stand for the people of this district and South Carolina, it's old squar'-shouldered, open-eyed, true-handed, big-hearted, high-toned Peyt Beaumont."

Ibid., p. 109-110.

De Forest presented no particulars of Southern character which had not been noted by other observers of the region. The pugnacity, the wit, the drunkenness of the Southerner had been well established in the earlier works of Longstreet, Hooper, and Thompson, to name only a few. But these humorists, as well as the local colorists, portrayed only narrowly limited segments of the population, and never in a serious novel. De Forest could not quite evoke the spirit of boisterous exuberance that characterizes Simon Suggs, for example, but Redhead Saxon comes close to exhibiting that spirit, and, in a middle-class way, so does Duffy. De Forest's view includes both upper and lower classes in an integrated picture of the whole district of Hartland. This total representation was new and its execution a step toward a broader realism.

I have noted that both Phineas Glover and Abner Sly were story tellers of some merit. The oral tale was the genesis of much of frontier humor. The tale is particularly associated with the Southwest and the region in which Mark Twain developed his genius; but it was not restricted to those regions, as any reader of Sam Lawson's
Fireside Stories\textsuperscript{92} knows. De Forest created no masterpiece such as

\textsuperscript{92}These stories, written by Harriet Beecher Stowe, were first published in 1871. Later the name of the collection was changed to Oldtown Fireside Stories.

"The Celebrated Jumping Frog of Calaveras County"; yet he did understand the technique of the oral tale and he did incorporate many oral tales into his works. The characteristics of the oral tale, not all of which occur in any one tale, can be briefly stated. Like most frontier humor, the tale was commonly concerned with the lower social orders. It incorporated realistic details. It was delivered with extreme gravity; it began slowly, sometimes appearing to be pointless at first. It frequently needed audience participation, someone to ask the right questions at the right time.

While both Glover and Sly are natural story tellers, it is surprising for the urbane Doctor Ravenel to handle the form so well. Doctor Ravenel is not, himself, a humorous character, and Miss Ravenel is a serious book; yet his stories lighten it. A few of his anecdotes will show his ability. They are all framed stories though their length is not sufficient for effective development.

"I was travelling in Georgia three years ago. On the seat next in front of me sat a cracker, who was evidently making his first railroad experience, and in other respects learning to go on his hind legs. Presently the train crossed a bridge. It was narrow, uncovered and without sides, so that a passenger would not be likely to see it unless he sat near the window. Now the cracker sat next the alley of the car, and away from the window. I observed him give a glare at the river and turn his head suddenly after which he rolled about in a queer way, and finally went down
on the floor in a heap. We picked him up; spirits were produced...and presently the cracker was brought to his senses. His first words were, 'Has she lit'--"93

93De Forest, Miss Ravenel, p. 64.

"In Tennessee, on one of my excursions, I stopped over night in the log-cabin of a farmer. It was rather chilly, and I wanted to poke the fire. There was no poker. 'Ah,' said the farmer, 'Boz has run off with the poker again.' He went out for a moment, and came in with the article. I asked him if his dog had a fancy for pokers. 'No,' said he; 'but one of my boys once burnt the critter's nose with a hot poker; and ever since then he hides it every time that he comes across it. We know whar to find it. He allays puts it under the house and kivers it up with leaves. It's curious,' said he, 'to watch him go at it, smuffing to see if it is hot, and picking it up and sidling off as sly as a horse-thief. He has an awful bad conscience about it. Perhaps you noticed that when you asked for the poker, Boze he got up and travelled.'"94

94Ibid., p. 305.

"They remind me of a cracker whom I met at a cross road tavern in one of my journeys through the north of Georgia. This man, a red-nosed, tobacco-drizzling, whiskey-perfumed giant, invited me to drink with him, and, when I declined, got furious and wanted to fight me. I told him that I never drank whiskey and that it made me sick, and finally succeeded in pacifying him without touching his poison. In fact he made me a kind of apology for having offered to cut my throat. 'Wa'al, fact is, stranger,' said he, 'I,' (laying an accent as strong as his liquor on the personal pronoun) 'I use whiskey.'"95

95Ibid., p. 7.

Although De Forest wrote serious discussions about Negroes in A Union Officer and Miss Ravenel, his Negro characters were the type common in the minstrel shows and popular fiction of the period. The characterization of the Negro as comic exploited his slyness, his ignorance, and his religiosity. All his actions were accompanied
by bubbling laughter and highly metaphorical speech. Constance Rourke's researches show that the conception of the comic Negro was standardized far earlier than most persons would suppose. By the time of Andrew Jackson, the blackface comic, as portrayed by Jim Crow Rice, was fixed in the national consciousness. De Forest, for all of his personal knowledge of Negroes, followed the tradition in portraying them. Before the Civil War only the Abolitionists took the Negro seriously; after the war, as Miss Rourke notes, "it would still have been possible to reveal the many-sided Negro of the old plantations, but minstrelsy with its air of irreverence seems to have blocked the way."96 Cato Beaumont is a fair example of De Forest's Negro characters. Cato is a comic imitation of his masters, but he lacks their courage and nobility. His story of his "rencontre" with another Negro is typical of the clown-manner expected of Negroes.

"Jes had a tackle yesterday with Matt McAlister, the Judge's old men that waits on him. Matt he sets out, 'cause he's yaller, an' comes from Virginny, that he's better than we is, we Souf Carliny niggahs. So every time I sees him I sasses him. Yeer mornin', I meets him down to the sto'--Mars Bill Wilkins's sto', don' ye know?--kinder lookin' roun' for bar'l o' flour. 'So,' says I, 'Boss,' says I, 'how is things up to your ole shanty?' He's a kinder gray ole fellow, don' ye know? puttin' on airs like he was Noah, an' treatin' everybody like they's childern, rollin' his eyes out o' the corners kinder, an' crossin' his arms jes as the Judge does. So he looked at me, an', says he, 'Boy, who is you?' Says I, 'I'm Cato Beaumont.' So says he, 'I thought it mought be some o' that breedin.' Says I, 'I was jes happenin' down here to teach you your manners.' So says he, 'Boy, my manners was learned befo' you ever heerd they was sech things.' Then I kinder tripped him, an' he kinder tripped me, an' then I squared off and fotched back, an' says I--"[Here Cato is interrupted by

96 American Humor, New York, 1931, p. 82.
members of the Beaumont clan who remark that they hope he won the fight. Cato finishes with this sad confession:] "It didn't 'zactly come to a wrestle... But I 'specs it would, for I was gittin' powerful mad: only jes as I was thinkin' o' gwine at him one o' Mars Wilkins's clerks come out, an' says he, 'Boys, don' make so much noise'; an' so I quit."97

97De Forest, Kate Beaumont, pp. 39-40.

Of a perhaps broader tradition than the blackface comic of minstrelsy are the two Negroes who appear in De Forest's The Bloody Chasm, Aunt Chloe and Uncle Phil. These two play a part so commonplace that I cannot tell whether they are fact or fiction. They are close to a national myth. Aunt Chloe is a large, motherly, domineering, sharp-tongued faithful Negro servant. She alternately scolds and babies her employers. She has been so long in service that she is accorded privileges far beyond her station. She is extremely conscious of the family name and tradition, prouder of it in fact than is the family she serves. Her type can be found often in the works of such apologists for slavery as Caroline Lee Hentz. The type has such a secure hold on the American imagination that it appears frequently even today, most often as the family cook--for example the popular Beulah on radio and the Aunt Jemima pancake flour trademark. William Faulkner's Dilsey "who endured" in The Sound and the Fury is another in a long line of Aunt Chloes. Uncle Phil is small, complaining, and generally ineffectual; he is completely subordinate to his wife, Chloe. Both are naive and find it difficult to adjust to new situations; for example, they get lost in the Louvre.
The situation in which Aunt Chloe and Uncle Phil are found is standard for the post-Civil War period: They are the faithful family slaves who have stayed on as freedmen to aid the proud-but-penniless family who once owned them. Illustrative of their loyalty is Aunt Chloe's refusal of Mr. Mather's money after Virginia Beaufort has spurned it. As Chloe says

"Dar is niggers as dön mind 'bout de folks what raised 'em. But dey is gin'rally niggers of no 'count fam'lies; or dey is niggers what was bawn low an' mean; dey's a mighty diff'rence in niggers. But, ye see, de Beauforts was gret folks from all time; an' so de people what b'longed to 'em takes a pride in stannin' by 'em...."98

98De Forest, The Bloody Chasm, p. 71.

Aunt Chloe is the custodian of the family honor; but she has sufficient common sense to know when honor is not enough. To Mrs. Dumont's repeated references to the Beaufort honor, Aunt Chloe exclaims,

"Dön go to sayin' dat ar ole-time nonsense over an' over. Miss Anna here talks like d' ole poll-parrot. He useter holler 'I'm a Bufor'! I'm a Bufor'!' jes 's loud 's he could screech. Laws! he'd larned it 's peart 's Miss Anna. Some of the plantin' han's useter think he was a Beaufort, shu enough. Does ye 'member him? He had a hook nose, an' a limp like your granpa after he got gouty.... But de fam'ly ain't what it was. Things has mighty changed with it. Dar ain't no sense now hollerin' 'I'm a Bufor'! I'm a Bufor'!' De time am come fur to quit foolin' an' talkin' bird-talk 'bout folks what's done gone to glory. De time am come fur you to think how you's gwine ter git some mo' shoes an' stockin's."99

99Tbid., pp. 85-86.
The humor of Aunt Chloe lies both in the situation, that is, her paradoxical authority over the group, and in her word choice and homely metaphors. For example, to Mrs. Dumont's complaint that she, a born lady, has had to ask for charity, Aunt Chloe replies, "'An' a bawn goose, too. Lady enough, but goose too much." To Virginia's repeated avowal that she does not wish to marry Underhill, Aunt Chloe sagely remarks, "'As fur Miss Ginny not wantin' to be married, never heerd no gal talk different. Smart dog always allow he can't bear sheep-meat." The analogy drawn from animal life is typical of fictional Negroes.

Unfortunately, Aunt Chloe and Uncle Phil sometimes seem more like a comedy vaudeville team than true characters. This exchange between them and General Hilton in Paris is an illustration. Hilton, on his arrival in Paris, asks them how they like foreign parts.

Uncle Phil. "Like 'em fir' rate, Boss--heap sight better'n Charleston."

The General. "Better than Charleston? Old reprobate! hoary apostate! Heve you turned your old back on your country? You don't get any sweet-potatoes here."

Uncle Phil (sniggering). "Da's so, Boss--nor hoecake, muther. But we gits 'long mighty fine on white bread an' chickin. We has good eatin', Boss."

Aunt Chloe. "Never lit on no better, Masr, not in no times. An' y'know cookin' has kinder died out in Sou' Car- liny sense d'wah. Crow and corn don' grow in same field."
It must be remembered that The Bloody Chasm was written as a reconciliation novel. For that reason, perhaps, De Forest's weak portrayal of the Negro can be excused. An honest examination of the psychology of the Negro was undesirable in 1881.

If De Forest's portrayal of Negroes was traditional, his inclusion of comic Irishmen was quite unusual. I do not mean to say that De Forest created the comic Irishman, for he did not, but the Irishman was an unusual figure in the literature of De Forest's time. Constance Rourke traces the emergence of the Irish into American humor from the renewed movement for Irish freedom in the eighteen forties. They were portrayed, she continues, mainly in the theater. By the fifties the figure of the b'hoy came to represent the Irishman in the United States. He was known by his swagger, his soaplocks, fireman's red flannel shirt. . . . Impudent, full of racy and belligerent opinion, he appeared in the public view. . . . with the outbreak of the Mexican War. . . . He bragged, he was always on top, he waved a national flag whose texture was particularly coarse, and gained his constituency by this means and by a gutter wit.103

103Rourke, American Humor, p. 139.

Constance Rourke notes that the Irishman diverged from other types of American humor in that he was characteristically urban. De Forest, perhaps because of his Connecticut background and knowledge of the urban centers of the East Coast (though others had equal knowledge and opportunity) included many Irishmen in his books. Two minor Irish characters, one in "Witching Times" and one in A Lover's Revolt, are straight characters, but the rest of them are comedians. In
Miss Ravenel a whole troupe of comic Irishmen appears.

In particular there is Sweeney, the smallest of the lot and therefore the butt of the company. He is, Colburne notes, "'a curious mixture of simplicity and humor, an actual Handy Andy.'"104 Colburne, whose letters to Lillie Ravenel make up a large part of the military portions of the book, reports in one of his letters a conversation typical of the Irishmen in his company. It seems more like a comedy turn on the stage than a conversation, and shows either that the comic figure of the Irishman was taken from real life or that De Forest patterned his Irishmen after the stage figures. The question cannot be resolved. Miss Rourke herself notes the problem of establishing any correspondence between the stage and the real Irishmen in order to evaluate the reality of the portrayal. She says,

Whether the "b'hoy" was drawn directly from characters on the New York streets or whether similar characters took on bolder outlines in life when they saw themselves egregiously celebrated on the stage can never by known.105

104De Forest, Miss Ravenel, p. 324.
105Rourke, American Humor, p. 140.

Captain Colburne's letter shows the problem more clearly.

"'Sweeney,' says one, 'you ought to do the biggest part of the fightin'. You ate more'n your share of the rashins.'

"'I don't ate no more rashins than I get,' retorts Sweeney, indignant at this stale calumny. 'I'd like to see the man as did.'

"'Oh, you didn't blather so much whin them shells was a-flying about your head.'

"Here Sweeney falls back upon his old and sometimes successful dodge of trying to turn the current of ridicule upon some one else.
"Wasn't Mickey Emmett perlite a-comin' across the lot?" he demands. 'I see him bowin' like a monkey on horseback. He was makin' faces as 'ud charm the head off a whalebarry. Mickey, you dodged beautiful.'

Mickey. Thim shells 'ud make a wooden man dodge. Sweeney's the bye for dodgin'. He was a runnin' about like a dry pea in a hot shovel.

Sweeney. That's what me legs was made for.

Sullivan. Are ye dead, Sweeney? (An old joke which I do not understand.)

Sweeney. An I wud be if I was yer father, for thinkin' of the drrunken son I had.

Sullivan. Did ye see that dead rebel with his oye out?

Sweeney. The leftenant ate up all his corn cake while he wasn't noticin'.

Sullivan. It was lookin' at Sweeney put his oye out. . . .

Touhey. Byes, it's mighty cold slapin' with niver a blanket nor a wife to one's back.

Sweeney. I wish a man 'ud ask me to lish for three years more. Wouldn't I knock his head off?

Sweeney. Ye couldn't raich the head av a man, Sweeney. Ye ha'n't got the height for it.

Sweeney. I'd throw him down. Thin I'd be tall enough.\footnote{De Forest, Miss Ravenel, pp. 324-325.}

A curiously similar Private Sweeny appears in Overland. His squad is acting as armed guard for the caravan in which Aunt Maria and Clara are journeying to California. When the caravan is attacked by Indians, Sweeny does not fire his gun. On being reprimanded he replies,

"Liftinint, I dasn't..."

"Are you afraid anybody will hit you?" asked Thurstane.

"No, I ain't, Liftinint," jabbered Sweeny. "I ain't afeard av them niggers a bit. They may shoot their bow arrowys at me all day if they want to. I'm afeard of me gun, Liftinint. I fired it wonst, an' it kicked me to blazes." [Sweeny is finally persuaded to fire. He does so blindly.]

"Sweeny," said Thurstane, "you must have hit either the sun or the moon, I don't know which."
Sweeny looked discomfited; the next breath he bethought himself of a saving joke: "Liftinint, it 'ud sarve erry won av 'em right;" ... 107

De Forest, Overland, pp. 55-56.

Sweeny and Phineas Glover, who accompany Lieutenant Thurstane on his perilous journey down the San Juan River, add comic relief to the account of the voyage. When the first despair grips the three men, it is Sweeny who brightens the gloom. "'I wish I was in Oirland,' added Sweeny. 'But if the divil himself was to want to desert here, he couldn't."

After their first bear hunt, Sweeny finds that his gun, of which he has grown inordinately fond since he has learned to fire it, is ruined.

"Look a' that now!" groaned Sweeny, when the victory had been secured. "The baste has chawed up me gun barrl loike it was a plug o' tobacky. . . . If there was any whiskey, I'd give um a wake," he sighed. 108

De Forest's Irishmen have all the characteristics of the usual comic conception of them. They are belligerent, coarse, and given to jokes on themselves as much as on others. It is their ability to turn anything into a joke, for example Sweeny's reply to Thurstane about his aim, that keeps them on top of a situation. They are never downed. True, this resiliency was not characteristic of the Irish only. It was shared by most of the figures of American humor.
The Yankee, the backwoodsman, the Negro, the cracker, all were of low estate, and they were looked down on by other sections of society. Force and crude wit were their sole resources. These situations—Abner Sly talking his way out of arrest as a spy, Cato Beaumont playing the fool, and Sweeny escaping a reprimand with a quip—are fundamentally the same.

De Forest's comic native figures are plainly derivative. He invented no striking figures like Sut Lovingood. He explored no new territory, although his use of comic Irishmen in the novel was a pioneer effort. What is significant is that De Forest fused large amounts of this native American humor with other elements of humor and thus enlarged the scope and increased the realism of his works. He was not, like Twain, an American humorist in his own right; but De Forest's work represents the total American culture more completely than it would have if the native humor had been left out. Most of his contemporaries were concerned with a much narrower segment of American society. Howells, for example, never put his western background and wide acquaintance with America to full use. His situation is summed up nicely by Constance Rourke:

Howells had it in his power to draw social comedy of breadth and the first order, for disparities of background were included within his view; he was grounded within the comic tradition. He might have been the great artist to
picture the American against the native scene, complementing the portrayals of James abroad. He had all the gifts except a passionate concern with his subject.¹¹¹

¹¹¹American Humor, p. 264.

Certainly Howells' work before 1881 showed little awareness of the regional characteristics of native American humor. Howells' best and most usual technique was a refined irony. Even Oscar W. Firkins, who attempts to find elements of American humor in Howells' work, emerges with amazingly few specimens, particularly when one considers the extent of Howells' published works.

Of the other writers of De Forest's time it can be said that they were all more-or-less specialists of one kind or another. Bret Harte, Edward Eggleston, Harriet Beecher Stowe, and Rebecca Harding Davis are representative of the writers of the period, and all restricted their observations to a narrow geographical region. Since all of them were local colorists, regional characteristics and folk humor appear frequently in their works, but none of them had De Forest's range and scope. Only Twain, who eludes classification, portrayed a broader American scene than De Forest, though Twain's portrayal of women was clumsy at best.

VII Summary

De Forest's common sense led him to examine the incongruities of man's existence in society with detachment and objectivity. Though not a humorist in the usual meaning of the word, De Forest used humor
to show Americans as they really were—inconsistent, pretentious, or foolish though they might be. Such portraiture required a realistic treatment, for it was actual, not imagined, follies that De Forest wished to expose to the corrective laughter of the comic spirit.

It is important to keep in mind that De Forest’s works are, then, basically critical of American life. His plots were, in the main, undistinguished, sometimes even burlesques of popular plots. Because they were simply vehicles for transmitting his views, they lack structure and consistency. Plot mattered little to him. His main interest was in exhibiting his America broadly and realistically. Since his ambition was to present the whole of American life, his laughter was not reserved for any one class or type of people. His strongest attacks, verging on bitter satire, were made against idealists and politicians, but all follies, incongruities, and pretensions attracted his comic spirit.

De Forest fitted American folk humor into his picture of the nation as a whole. His portrayals of Down Easterners, crackers, Negroes, and Irishmen lighten the seriousness while they broaden the scope of his novels.
Chapter IV
The Writer as Craftsman

I  The Self-Conscious Realists

In probably no period of nineteenth century American letters were writers more conscious of their methods and techniques than in the period in which De Forest worked. It is not strange that this is so. Fiction from 1860 on underwent a drastic change in basic intent and method. This change— from romanticism to realism— was openly debated by critics, editors, and authors on both sides of the issue. Nor was the issue soon decided. As late as the eighteen nineties, Howells, for example, was still fighting for the acceptance of realism against such stalwarts as Agnes Repplier and James Lane Allen. ¹ De Forest took no open part in the conflict, but he was influenced by it and, since he wrote realistically, added his weight to the side of the realists. Because literature, like anything else, resists change, the realists were constantly under attack from the beginning of the movement. Their realization that they were writing a new type of literature led them to both educational and apologetic gestures. Rebecca Harding Davis, one of the

¹ For a detailed description of Howells' part in the battle, see Herbert Edwards, "Howells and the Controversy over Realism in American Fiction," American Literature, III (November, 1931), 237-246.
earliest and most realistic local colorists, writes in Margret Howth:

My story is very crude and homely, as I said,—only a rough sketch of one or two of those people whom you see every day, and call "dregs," sometimes,—a dull, plain bit of prose, such as you might pick for yourself out of any of these warehouses or back-streets. I expect you to call it stale and plebeian, for I know the glimpses of life it pleases you best to find; idyls delicately tinted; passion-veined hearts, cut bare for curious eyes; prophetic utterances, concrete and clear; or some word of pathos or fun from the old friends who have enadenized themselves in everybody's home. You want something, in fact, to lift you out of this crowded, tobacco-stained commonplace, to kindle and chafe and glow in you. I want you to dig into this commonplace, this vulgar American life, and see what is in it.2

2Boston, 1862, p. 6.

The fact that even such a redoubtable romantic as John Esten Cooke began to pay grudging obeisance to the ideals of the realists is a measure of their influence. He felt compelled to say in the prologue to his chronicle of the rebellion:

In the present episode of my memoirs, therefore, good reader, which I call Hilt to Hilt, I tell a plain and unadorned story. . . . Let me repeat that whatever seems strangest in this book is substantially, when not literally, true.3

3P. 9.

Cooke further avows the reality of a mildly bloody military execution.

Other considerations induce me to omit a minute account of the fierce spectacle which I witnessed that night. Melodrama!—claptrap!" some good people would be apt to exclaim. And for fear of these terrible critics, it behoves those who write their own adventures to consult the vraisemblable rather than the vrai.

These things occurred and will not be believed. Let me therefore pass rapidly over the events of that night of 1864.4

4Ibid., p. 36.
Cooke insists further in a footnote: "*This incident is real."\(^5\)

\(^5\)Ibid., p. 40.

For a while, indeed, it looked as if the novels of the time were in danger of becoming more and more like history texts. Henry Morford, for example, writes of the incident of an old man who, upon hearing of the firing on Fort Sumter, took his sword from the wall and sat on the floor to sharpen it. Morford states in a footnote:

"The incident of the "Sharpening of the Sword" is no effort of the writer's imagination, but taken from a relation of real life made at the time."\(^6\)

\(^6\)The Days of Shoddy, Philadelphia, [1863], p. 62.

Following the outbreak of the Civil War in the story, Morford appended one of the longest, most informative, and most irrelevant footnotes I have yet discovered:

It may be a matter of interest, at no distant day, to know what were the performances at the New York theatres when Anderson was defending Sumter and the civil war was beginning. Forrest was playing *Virginia*, at Niblo's; Laura Keene was running the "Seven Sisters;" Edwin Booth was playing *Shylock*, and Charles Dillon *Belphegor*, at the Winter Garden; Wallack was running Wilkins' successful play, "Henriette;" Fox was doing "Mother Goose" and Robt. Johnston the "Rag Picker," at the New Bowery; and Spalding's and Rogers' Circus was at the Old. "Un Ballo in Maschera" and "Moses in Egypt" were the features at the Academy of Music, then just closing its season.\(^7\)

\(^7\)Ibid., p. 97.

The belief of the early realists, local color writers and humorists alike, that they were preserving for all time the language and manners of a fast-disappearing period in American life led to much
of this documentation. Their motivations were more historical and sociological than literary but the later realists emulated their practices.

Documentation came to be used more to apologize for something that the author felt might offend the delicate sensibilities of readers whose experience had been mainly with books which glossed over the drab or unsavory realities of life. Such documentation attests to reality while it apologizes for it. Tourgée, for example, after a murder by the Ku Klux Klan, adds a note to explain:

This account of an incredible barbarity is based on the sworn statement of a colored person who overheard just such an account, given of just such a performance, by one of the authors of it. It is too horrid to print, but too true to omit.  


In addition to educational prefaces and documentary evidence, the realists forestalled the arguments of their critics by comparing their own fiction to that of the romantics. De Forest, who wrote no prefaces and used no footnotes, on occasion felt the pressure of the anti-realist enough to apologize for the inclusion of particularly strong material. When he portrayed three violently pro-Southern women jeering at the Yankee wounded, for example, he introduced them with these remarks:

But the wife and two grown-up daughters were there, full of scorn and hatred; so unwomanly, so unimaginably savage in conversation and soul that no novelist would dare to invent such characters; nothing but real life could justify him in painting them.  

9 De Forest, Miss Ravenel, p. 261.
After describing in detail the cracker ball in _Kate Beaumont_, De Forest explained his inclusion of the scene by saying,

That he could enjoy the coarse farce seems incredible; and yet the stupid, low-lived fact is that he did enjoy it. It was a monotonous, uninteresting, disagreeable [sic], degrading exhibition; and we only describe it because it dramatizes in brief the character of the man when in his cups.  

10P. 100.

More often, however, De Forest showed his awareness that he was not following tradition by merely saying so. For example, at the first meeting of Lillie Ravenel and Colburne, De Forest writes:

Of course it would be agreeable to have a scene here between Colburne and Miss Ravenel; some burning words to tell, some thrilling looks to describe, such as might show how they stood with regard to each other; something which would visibly advance both these young persons' heart-histories. But they behaved in a disappointingly well-bred manner, and entirely refrained from turning their feelings wrong side outwards. With the exception of Miss Ravenel's inveterate blush and of a slightly unnatural rapidity of utterance in Captain Colburne, they met in a merely friendly, commonplace manner. This is not the way that heroes and heroines meet on the boards or in some romances; but in actual human society they frequently balk our expectations in just this manner. Melo-dramatically considered real life is frequently a failure.  

11_Miss Ravenel_, pp. 128-129.

Here De Forest sounds like Thackeray, who influenced him. More important, however, such comments were directed at those readers who might object to the lack of melodramatic intensity or heroic characterization. The "dear reader" technique was not invented by the realists, but their use of it to justify a specific method of writing differed from the didactic or moralistic uses usually made of it.
De Forest protested and apologized less than most of his contemporaries, partly because of his subject matter. Since De Forest was portraying all levels of society, he did not feel the compulsion to apologize for the inclusion of the lower classes as did those early realists who pictured mainly the poor and the ignorant. His lack of self-consciousness is further explained by his preference for the indirect method. No one who has read Seacliff, that sustained attack on the romantic novel, or who has analyzed the character of Imogen Jones can doubt that De Forest was consciously anti-romantic. Rather than attempt to justify his realism, De Forest attacked romance by parodying it.

It should not be concluded, however, that De Forest developed a theory of realism. For one thing, De Forest was not a consistent realist in practice. For another, though realism was current from 1850 on, the theory and even the name had yet to be introduced into America. Like most movements, in the beginning realism was surer of what it was against than what it was for. Thus one finds the parodies, the burlesque novels, and the constant attacks on the improbability and unreality of the romantics long before one finds a critical theory which defines the methods and aims of the realists. De Forest's works, like those of Rebecca Harding Davis, Edward Eggleston, and other early realists, reflect the groping, the indecision, and the consequent inconsistency which sprang from this lack of definition. Though De Forest's aims may have been in the
direction of realism, he never wrote a completely realistic novel. As the following analysis will show, De Forest's plots, characters, scenes, and diction show a conflict between romantic and realistic techniques.

II Plot Versus Theme

At first glance, De Forest's works seem to have a greater variety than they actually do. "Witching Times" and A Lover's Revolt are historical novels; Seacliff and The Wetherel Affair are murder mysteries; Miss Ravenel is a war story; Kate Beaumont, Justine's Lovers, The Bloody Chasm, and Irene the Missionary are love stories; Overland, a travel-adventure; Honest John Vane, a political satire; and Playing the Mischief, a political parable. There is, however, a unifying element common to all: the basic love-courtship plot. Bernard Bowron, in his article "Realism in America," attests to the widespread use of this plot. He writes, "Our early realists seemed incapable of conceiving any more relevant organizing principle than the love-courtship plot."\(^{12}\) In Honest John Vane the courtship element is negligible, and understandably so; yet it is important in the early parts of the story. In Playing the Mischief Josie casts her lovers aside for further adventures. In all of the other novels, except Justine and A Lover's Revolt, in which one of the lovers dies, the resolution of the plot finds the hero and heroine in each others'
arms, married or about to be married. This very ordinary plot had certain advantages. It was popular with the preponderantly feminine reading audience of the time, although its use did not make De Forest's books popular. Further, from a technical point of view, the love-courtship plot was convenient since it could be prolonged at will by keeping hero and heroine apart. I think it is obvious that the closer a writer follows this stereotyped plot, the less likely he is to bring forth any fresh conception of man's existence or shed much illumination on the problems of life. The results of De Forest's reliance upon the love-courtship plot illustrate the sterility of that approach.

De Forest's use of the courtship in his stories is similar to the use made of it by Scott, Cooper, and Simms. Like them, De Forest was faced with the problem of making the courtship interesting, and he often fell back upon the traditional method of filling his books with highly improbable melodramatic incidents. He depicted three murders, three attempted murders, three shipwrecks, one riot, one train wreck, one scene of torture by Indians, one escape from prison, and uncounted natural deaths. Because these incidents are intrinsically dramatic, they are incongruous considering the air of uneventful, familiar life into which they intrude. I do not mean to suggest that a realistic novel cannot include exciting happenings, but the number of such events in De Forest's novels places him closer to the romantics than to the realists so far as plot is concerned. Except in the parodies which burlesque them, such plots are hardly more than incidental to the main narrative structure of
his novels. In his comedies of manners for instance, De Forest abandons his heroes and heroines for broad investigations of society. One can almost point to the page at which De Forest, remembering his commitment, decided to reintroduce his lovers and bring their courtship to its speedy conclusion. Because of this, the endings of many of his books give the impression of afterthought.

Note, for example, the offhand manner with which De Forest concludes "Kate Beaumont:

Well, a year more saw many events: the marriage of Frank McAlister to Kate Beaumont; the young man's installation over the Kershaw estate, he giving up science as a thing not yet required by Carolinians; the marriage of Vincent Beaumont to Mary McAlister, who became lady of the house in the mansion of her ancestors' enemies; the marriage of Jenny Devine to Dr. Mattieson, "Just to console him for losing you, my dear," she said to Kate; finally, the death of poor worn-out Mrs. Chester by softening of the brain.  

\[13\]

Only in Miss Ravenel does the courtship seem an integral part of the novel.

Wellek and Warren remark, "In a time of transition, a novelist may feel compelled to provide two kinds [of plots], one of them out of an obsolescent mode."  

\[14\] It may well be De Forest felt that his approach needed the reinforcement of a familiar framework; though it may, as Bowron suggests of the early realists, merely attest to a lack of imagination. Whatever De Forest's reasoning, he devoted a disproportionate space in his novels to investigations irrelevant
to the courtships.

An investigation of De Forest's themes reinforces the view that his love-courtship plots were mere façades behind which the real work of the novel went on. The social orientation of such themes as the dangers of intolerance ("Witching Times"), the absurdities of Southern mores (Kate Beaumont), the dangers of universal suffrage (Honest John Vane), or the lack of public morality (Playing the Mischief), shows that De Forest was attempting a realistic examination of society at the same time that he was paying lip-service to the vicissitudes of his lovers. Such novels exist on two levels—the romantic and the realistic—with plot and theme working counter to each other. To state these themes is perhaps to slight the fact that the specific problem is relatively unimportant. For, just as a change of venue made little alteration in the thematic morality of the sentimentalists, the actual problem in each novel is subsidiary to De Forest's basic concern with the lack of common sense, dignity, and honor in American life—deficiencies which De Forest attributed to the shallow, materialistic culture of all levels of society.

III The Cast

De Forest's major success as a novelist lies in his ability to create an exceptional number of lifelike, individualized characters. The scope of his characterizations reminds one of Balzac; it is as if De Forest deliberately set out to portray every type of American
he had ever observed. Counting only characters who are drawn in
detail and have at least a few speeches, *The Wetherel Affair* contains
fourteen; *Kate Beaumont*, twenty-eight; *Seacliff*, twenty; and *Playing
the Mischief*, sixteen. In contrast to the romantics, who usually
concentrated on a few major figures, De Forest painstakingly charac-
terized each minor character in his novels. I think De Forest's
desire to present as much as he could of the everyday world was the
impulse which led him to create so many non-functional characters.
His skill at characterization was great enough to have made him a
first-rate novelist had he used it where it was most needed. The
heroes, heroines and villains of his love-courtship plots, who,
after all, carry the weight of the action of the book, are usually
wooden types, less memorable than the minor characters in the same
books.

De Forest carefully individualized these minor figures, even
his servants. Unlike the characters of, for example, Henry James,
who, it has been suggested, inhabit mansions staffed with large
armies of invisible servants, De Forest's characters are served by
personable Irish cooks, by "wilted, froze-and-thawed"¹⁵ English

¹⁵De Forest, *Seacliff*, p. 364.
Such servants are a long way from being silent, efficient, faceless shadows. They sometimes open the front door with dustpan and duster in hand; they mingle with the guests and offer unsolicited advice; they sit in on the tableaux vivants— and miss the point of them; they offer, in short, a good picture of service in the United States.

Other Americans who appear briefly are also accurately and convincingly described. There are the proprietors of New York eating and drinking places. There is the perfumed, slightly effeminate desk clerk of the St. Knickerbocker Hotel, a type who has since become a cliché in American literature. There is Captain Brien of the steamship Mersey, who shows what can become of an honest sea captain when he is put in charge of a transatlantic luxury liner. His bluster, confidence, and cheerful brag are assumed to make the ladies happy on their voyage; yet, when the ship catches fire, he is a courageous seaman again. Though he appears in only the first twenty-eight pages of Kate Beaumont, the captain is a complex character. Another notable character is Jeremiah Drinkwater, a ninety-three-year-old veteran of the War of 1812, who makes an impression out of all proportion to the three pages allotted him in Playing the Mischief. In contrast to Drinkwater, one of the old Americans who tamed the frontier, fought the British, fought the Indians, and then gambled and fought over the continent that was left, Hollowbread and
his fellow Congressmen engaged in financial chicanery are made to seem petty. Almost scornfully, Drinkwater agrees to perjure himself so that Hollowbread and Josie can bilk the government out of a mere $100,000. Frank Hedstone appears in four scenes, each less than a page long, in *The Bloody Chasm*. He is being supported by his sister, Mrs. Lotharinga Fitz James, an adventuress who, having lost one rich husband, is looking for another with Frank's help. Frank is one of those cultured urbane young men who are later to appear in Henry James's works. He and his sister are Europeanized Americans who seem to have acquired only the worst of European culture.

The list of substantial minor characters could be prolonged, but one further example will show De Forest's attention to detail and his ability at quick characterization. In one scene of *Seacliff*, De Forest introduces some neighbors of the Westervelts, the Caperses of nearby Rockford.

The family consisted of papa, maiden sister, young lady daughter, and boy of fourteen. Mr. Capers was a tall, thin, pale, mild man, high in the shoulders, loose in his coat and pantaloons, tight and white about the neck, with light, tearful eyes, a Roman nose set slightly to one side, and a chin like the after peak of a saddle. Miss Capers, the elder, was a half-century plant, of much the same pattern with her brother, but frost-bitten and tartish in aspect. The daughter was eighteen years old, aquiline in feature, with black eyes, and the general freshness of a healthy village belle; the son, a stout boy, good-looking enough, but grimy under the finger-nails, ill at ease in his best clothes, and speechless with bashfulness.17

17P. 35.

Mr. Capers is one of those melancholy souls who demand sympathy. He is in mourning and he is not one to mourn silently. Fitz Hugh,
after a tableau depicting Satan being beaten off by the angels of mercy in a dire battle for a dead soul, apologizes for the unintentional bad taste of the subject and says he is sorry if the scene has pained Mr. Capers.

"Oh, not at all!" said he. ["I don't think so. On the contrary, it gave me a melancholy pleasure; everything gives me pleasure that reminds me of her. She was a very handsome woman," he added, after a pause. "You would hardly believe it, sir, but she was as young looking as her daughter,--and much handsomer. Strangers often mistook them for sisters, sir. A very tasty woman in dress, too, sir. Her death was an awful blow to me, and to us all, and to Rockford, also, I am sure. Our minister, the Reverend Mr. Jacobs, told me so. I had her buried in a style worthy of her, sir. I thought I knew how she would like to be, sir, and I went and did it. . . .I went down to New York and got the most beautiful rosewood coffin that I could find. Then I had it lined with quilted white satin. As for a shroud, sir, I wouldn't suffer her to be put in an ordinary shroud, but I got a white satin dress made for her, very expensive and very tasty, with real lace frills down the bosom and on the collar and cuffs. Lastly, I put a bouquet of hothouse flowers in her hand. Oh sir! she looked very handsome. Why, sir, when I led Lottie, my daughter, into the room, and showed her how I had arranged everything, she broke right out, 'Oh, pa,' said she, 'I do wish ma could see herself.' That was just what she said, sir, and it was pure nature."18

18 Ibid., pp. 36-37.

Thus in two brief passages De Forest gives a good description of the Capers family and characterizes Mr. Capers rather thoroughly. He lavishes a great deal of skill on Capers' speech, considering that Capers plays no part in the action of the story and appears only twice more in the whole book. Capers' speech has the ring of a story that has been told and retold. It includes all the unnecessary details, all the clichés, plus a theme. One's sympathy
is evoked by the pathetic inability of Mr. Capers, an average man, to express his deep emotion in anything more than pedestrian phrases. One notes particularly such things as the polite anticlimax to his enlarging statement, "'Her death was an awful blow to me, and to us all, and to Rockford, also, I am sure.'" It is all in character. Capers is a polite little man whose only claim to fame is that he has buried his wife, who was a "'tasty woman in dress.'"

Up to this point I have been speaking only of minor characters. De Forest's major characters are less notable than his minor ones. With few exceptions, the more important his characters are to the action of the story, the less believable they are as individuals. The explanation lies in De Forest's willingness to build his novels around the hero, heroine, and villain of the love-courtship plot and in his unwillingness to do much to liven the stereotyped trio. These characters lack individuality and reality. His heroes and heroines are always too good to be true, his villains too bad to be human. De Forest does ring some changes in the characterization of his trios, changes which usually deprecate their ideality. Few of these changes are carried far enough to make realistic characters of his people, but some of them become, interestingly enough, ideal heroes or heroines with uncharacteristic feet of clay.

Some generalizations can be made about these characters as typical of their kind. In the traditional manner De Forest's heroes are all young, brave, rich, tall, and handsome. As befits heroes they are humble and moral, somewhat inarticulate, and always successful.
De Forest's heroines are fit companions for his heroes. They are beautiful, demure, cultured, innocent, sensitive young girls of the weak and clinging type. They are ruled by emotion and blush in any situation. They are, perhaps, a bit less idealized than the heroes. The villains, who appear in slightly fewer books than the others, have all the characteristics of the "heavy" of melodrama. Their chief villainy lies in making improper advances towards the heroines.

Lieutenant Thurstane, in Overland, is typical of the heroes. Like the traditional knight, he must undergo a certain number of trials before winning the fair lady. If some of his actions seem stupid because they lead him into danger—for example, venturing onto the San Juan River in a canvas boat without inspecting the line by which it is kept from going down the river—one must remember that forestalled adventures make poor reading. A summation of his heroism reads like this: He beats off three Indian attacks on his wagon train by superior strategy; he navigates a previously unexplored river; he leads Sweeny and Glover to safety by marching from the San Juan through uncharted territory to a juncture with the overland trail while traditionally denying himself food so that his comrades have something to eat; and he helps his sweetheart, Clara, as well as his arch enemy, Coronado, from a shipwreck. It is hardly out of character for such a hero to say as the ship drives onto the beach and he buckles the only life preserver around Clara, "My darling!... bear it bravely. There is great danger; but don't
be afraid—I will save you."¹⁹  Frank McAlister in Kate Beaumont

¹⁹De Forest, Overland, p. 194.

is comparable to Thurstone, though better educated and given less opportunity for heroism since he lives in a more civilized area.

Edward Wetherel, hero of The Wetherel Affair, shows a kinship with the reformed rake of the sentimental novel. His love for a pure girl, Nestoria, changes him from a penniless, amoral wastrel into a sober, pious millionaire. Young Mr. De Vries, hero of Irene the Missionary, is almost as traditional; yet he has a flaw which makes him less than ideal. He encourages a young native girl to flirt with him and ends by so compromising her that her reputation is ruined. Granted he is later ashamed of his conduct, such lax morality is not usual in the standard ideal hero. Colonel Underhill and Captain Farnlee, of The Bloody Chasm and A Lover's Revolt respectively, are woodenly characterized ideal heroes whose actions are as predictable as they are dull.

It is well to note that De Forest was not alone in portraying most of his heroes as officers. The officer as hero was a convention of post-Civil War literature. The ease with which authors brevetted their heroes is nowhere better exemplified than in Henry Adams' capsule history of John Carrington, hero of Democracy (1879). Adams writes:

At twenty-two he had gone into the rebel army as a private and carried his musket modestly through a campaign or two, after
which he slowly rose to the rank of senior captain in his regiment, and closed his services on the staff of a major-general.\textsuperscript{20}

\textsuperscript{20}P. 21.

De Forest's heroines must be considered within the two traditions of which they are a part. Many of their characteristics are traceable to the heroines of romance. Like them, too many of De Forest's heroines are colorless embodiments of femininity whose chief purpose in life seems to be a constant falling into difficulties to keep the story alive. A second tradition, which has been called the tyranny of the young girl, made difficult any realistic portrayal of heroines in the latter half of the nineteenth century. In both fact and fiction the young girl was accorded the position of highest respect in American society. Possibly her exalted position was the logical outgrowth of the crudity of pioneer life, the height of her tyranny being in direct ratio to the barbarity of actual conditions. Victorian mores were equally to blame. Whatever the reason, the concept of what a young girl should be, helped set standards for fiction. Such powerful shapers of public opinion and artistic form as William Dean Howells made their position on the matter clear: that the American novel should include nothing harmful or insulting to the delicate sensibilities of the young girl in the parlor or, as Howells once put it, nothing that could not "be openly spoken of before the tenderest society bud at dinner."\textsuperscript{21} Few authors rebelled

\textsuperscript{21}Criticism and Fiction, New York, 1892, p. 149.
against the idealization of the young girl; Mark Twain made his Joan
of Arc in her image, and it has been suggested that Henry Adams'
Virgin of Chartres is also a reflection of the idealized nineteenth
century girl. In recognition of this tyranny, Henry James, in his
preface to *The Awkward Age*, noted ironically:

The American theory, if I may "drag it in," would be, I think,
that talk should never become "better" than the female young,
either actually or constructively present, are minded to allow
it. That system involves as little compromise as the French;
it has been absolutely simple, and the beauty of its success
shines out in every record of our conditions of intercourse—
premising always our "basic" assumption that the female young
read the newspapers.\(^{22}\)

\(^{22}\)The Art of the Novel, p. 104.

In the face of these two strong influences, it is not surprising
that realism came last to the heroine of fiction, nor is it sur-
prising that De Forest's heroines were generally colorless, two-
dimensional creatures.

Rachel More, the heroine of "Witching Times," is so pure that
wild animals in the forest nuzzle her hand when she walks among
the trees. She makes no other strong impression. Mary Westervelt
is hardly distinguishable from the wallpaper of Seacliff. Making
a small departure from tradition, De Forest deprecates her ability
to draw, but she appears so infrequently that it hardly matters.
Clara Van Dieman (*Overland*) and Kate Beaumont, in spite of Howells' 
judgment that Kate was the most striking of De Forest's women,\(^{23}\)

\(^{23}\)See Heroines of Fiction, New York, 1903, II, 152-156.
are further examples of the traditional heroines of adventure. De Forest began his description of Clara by premising an interesting mixture of Spanish and American blood, and he was well on the way to picturing a woman with real passion and fire, who would have been an improvement on the cold, ineffectual heroines of Simms and Cooper. Unfortunately, once the trip overland begins, De Forest drops Clara into the usual role of the weak but pure heroine. Nestoria Bernard (The Wetherel Affair), daughter of a missionary, is a purely traditional heroine except for the religious phraseology of her speech. She is more helpless than most perhaps, since she is a stranger to American ways, but even her helplessness is not impressive.

Virginia Beaufort (The Bloody Chasm) is the poor-but-proud Southern girl of post-war romance.

Except for one characteristic, Huldy Oakridge follows the tradition faithfully as heroine of A Lover's Revolt. The fiancée of the hero, Ash Farnlee, she is characteristically beautiful and sensitive, but she is, as De Forest would say, cracked about British officers. She flirts with Captain Moorcastle in particular, who kisses her and then forgets her. Convinced that he loves her, Huldy loyally nurses the British troops, meanwhile laying plans to trap Moorcastle. After an attack of brain-fever, her love becomes an obsession. To add to her confusion, Ash Farnlee, who has slipped into Boston as a spy, follows her about the streets. Huldy reports him, but, because Ash is known to be with Washington's troops, her reports are discounted as the inventions of a love-crazed girl. Thus unknowingly the hero helps drive the heroine mad. There is more than
a little similarity to _Hamlet_ in this and in what follows. Huldy, by now completely mad, wanders Ophelia-like out of Boston and through the rebel forces in search of her lover, Moorcastle.\(^2\) Half recol-

\(^2\) The myth of American girlhood is present even in these passages. As Huldy wanders through the Continental Army, De Forest notes, "Of the many soldiers whom she encountered, not one molested her or spoke to her. There was so little discipline among them that few even saluted an officer. But such was American respect for womanhood, that this lonely girl could thread the swarming camps without insult, and even drunken men hushed their coarse bawling if they noted her approach." (p. 391)

lecting that Moorcastle has returned to England, Huldy finds an old canoe and sets out to follow him. She is last seen paddling with her hands toward the lanterns of the British ships of war in Boston harbor, and her body is later recovered from the sea.

This is harsh treatment of a nineteenth century heroine, and I have given it in detail because it is exceptional, though only partially realistic. Clearly De Forest departs from the traditional portrayal of heroines because of his Anglophobia. The book is more bitter toward the British than most historical novels of the Revolution. De Forest's theme is a condemnation of American colonialism, cultural as well as political, which he implies still exists in late nineteenth century American-British relations. Thus Huldy has sinned by her rejection of the honest love of the hero in favor of the trifling and degrading attentions of a British gentleman. For such perfidy, De Forest invokes his most damning conclusion: Huldy's excessive colonialism, like Mrs. Chester's excessive flirtation, is shown as a mental and physical illness from which there is no recovery.
This rather melodramatic switch does rescue Huldy from the convention.

There are two really notable exceptions to De Forest's run-of-the-mill heroines. They are Lillie Ravenel and Josie Murray. Each is a striking portrayal of a particular kind of woman, convincingly motivated and realistically described. These two show De Forest's ability to characterize women and, more important for our purposes, his willingness to break with the nineteenth century concept of women. With these two portrayals, De Forest surpassed the bloodless, long-suffering heroines of the sentimentalists and the intense, yet usually lifeless, ones of the romantics.

Lillie Ravenel, whom Gordon S. Haight has called "the first realistic heroine in American fiction," is, when first seen, a
delightful Southern young lady in her teens. She charms, and is charmed by, almost everyone. She is not perfect, but she is utterly feminine. Her meeting with Colburne gives De Forest a chance to note some of her less than ideal characteristics. He writes:

Colburne was flattered by the quick blush and pretty momentary flutter of embarrassment with which she received him. This 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 were stirred into pleasurable excitement by his advent. And it was frequently not altogether a mistake. Miss Ravenel was interested in people, in a considerable number of people, and often at first sight. She had her father's sympathetic character, as well as his graceful cordiality and consequent

\[25\] Introduction to Miss Ravenel, p. xv.
charm of manner, the whole made more fascinating by being veiled in a delicate gauze of maidenly timidity. As to her being as lovely as a houri, there were different opinions on that question, the general rule being that those who knew her best were most likely to think her handsome.  

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26 Miss Ravenel, p. 6.

Her conversation, furthermore, is an amusing mixture of proper English and Southern colloquialisms. When her father reproves her for using the term "poky," she replies, "'Everybody says poky; and it is real poky in you to pretend not to understand it; don't you think so yourself now?'" Lillie talks too much; to use De Forest's word for it, she prattles. And she is thoroughly spoiled—the result of her mother's early death and her father's consequent indulgence. Considering that her birthplace and early life were in the South, it is natural that Lillie should be a staunch secessionist. Even in New Boston she argues secession with the Northerners and shrieks with delight when she hears of the Union defeat at Bull Run. Showing feminine disregard for consistency, she falls in love with Colonel Carter of the Union army. Her rejection of Captain Colburne shows that her motives are purely instinctive. She thinks that Colburne is "very pleasant, lively, and good; but--and here she ceased to reason--she felt that he was not magnetic."  

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27 Ibid., p. 50.

28 Ibid., p. 149.
Lillie's war-time wedding to Colonel Carter must have disatisfied De Forest's women readers. The couple is married by a regimental chaplain with only Dr. Ravenel and Mrs. Larue to attend them. When, after only two days, Carter leaves to rejoin his command, Lillie, childishly selfish, can hardly bear it. Their leave-taking is poignant and convincing.

"Oh, how can I let you go?" she said. "I cannot. I cannot bear it. Will you come back? Will you surely come back? Will you be careful of yourself? You won't get killed, will you? Promise me."^9

With unusual candor for 1867, De Forest adds quickly,

Nevertheless she did not feel the separation so bitterly as she would have done, had they been married a few months or years, instead of only a few hours. Intimate relations with her husband had not yet become a habit, and consequently a necessity of her existence; the mere fact that they had exchanged the nuptial vows was to her a realization of all that she had ever anticipated in marriage; when they left the altar, their wedded life was, as she supposed, not only begun but fulfilled.30

She is, as De Forest points out in this and other passages, too young to have any real conception of love or the realities and responsibilities of marriage. She is, therefore, sharply different from the precocious young women of most nineteenth century novels. She is completely consistent with her given background and education.

Most of De Forest's characters are static but Lillie is not. She grows through her experiences into a more mature woman. One
of those experiences, the birth of her son, is given in much more
detail than was usual, such events in romance being skipped over
with ambiguous phraseology. With the same charming simplicity
with which she adored her husband, Lillie reverences her first-
born, Rawtie. But her devotion to him is deeper and more mature
than her love for Carter. She is even inspired to a faith in God.
When she discovers that Carter has been unfaithful, she and her
father and the baby leave New Orleans and return to New Boston.
Except to say that she hopes he will not get killed, Lillie refuses
to discuss her husband. She suffers because of his unfaithfulness,
but her suffering, De Forest notes, is as much from pride and shame
as from outraged love. Even so, when the Colonel's death is
announced later, Lillie can say, "'I wish I had written to him that
I was not angry.'"31 In her new maturity, Lillie finds that she

31 Ibid., p. 411.

loves Colburne with a deeper, more profound love than any she has
experienced before. As she and Colburne make plans for their
future life, there is a new note of assurance in Lillie's grasp
of her domestic responsibilities. The wealth of domestic detail
given about their plans is realistic.

"Rawtie and Rosann [the Irish nurse] shall have the back
chamber," said Lillie, "so that Rawtie can look out on the
garden and be away from the dust of the street. I am so
delighted that the little fellow is at last to have a garden
and flowers. You and I will take the other front bedroom,
next to papa's." Here she colored at her own frankness, and hurried on
to other dispositions.
"That will leave us two little rooms for servants up stairs; and down stairs we shall have a parlor, and dining-room, and kitchen; we shall fairly lose ourselves. How much pleasanter than a hotel!"

Colburne had noticed her blush with a sense of pleasure and triumph, but he merely said, his voice trembling, "You have left no place for friends."

"Oh, but we mustn't entertain much, for a while. We--you--cannot afford it. I have been catechising Mrs. Whitewood about the cost of meat and things. Prices are dreadful."32

Lillie, the reader feels, has now grown up. There is a significant difference between her romantic passion for Colonel Carter, in which the wedding was the culmination of her passion, and the serenity of her love for Colburne, in which one senses a more complete fulfillment.

Lillie is a fully developed though hardly idealized woman. Her accomplishments are few and her deficiencies many. Her delight in her child is touching and convincing. The shortness of her grief over the loss of her husband is understandable and quite unique in the fiction of 1867. She is mature beyond her years—as a result, De Forest explains, of the Southern social life; yet she retains the childishness normal to her actual age. Philosophical contemplations are far beyond her; she lives by instinct and a kind of feminine pragmatism. She is, in short, a complex character realistically portrayed.

Josie Murray is a different, though not less interesting, woman. She is an American Becky Sharp. She so overshadows everyone else in Playing the Mischief that De Forest might well have said of it, as Thackeray did of Vanity Fair, that it was a novel

32 Ibid., p. 465.
without a hero. Playing the Mischief is the epic of a great adven-
ture. Josie is handsome, charming, and completely unscrupulous.
Creating such a character was daring in an America in which the
feminine reader was uppermost in all novelists' minds and in which
women in novels were conventionally depicted as shining examples
for their readers. Josie is a striking figure among the American
heroines of the nineteenth century. She is calculating, she is
bold, she is charmingly feminine, she inspires both sympathy and
condemnation. In chapter after chapter, which by their titles,
such as "A Brace of Offers," "Paying Court to One's Member," and
"Coaxing a Young Congressman or Two," show the influence of Thackeray,
Josie is shorn of all the traditional qualities attributed to young
women. Speaking more frankly than most women in nineteenth century
fiction Josie says to Edgar Bradford, whose attentions are hardly
honorable,

"Ah, Mr. Bradford. . . I suppose it means nothing but
friendship, and yet you shouldn't do it. When you speak
English, I can understand you. But when you kiss my hand,
I don't know where we are."33

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33 De Forest, Playing the Mischief, p. 94.

Her speech lacks histrionics; it is just plain, everyday conversation.
Her sense of propriety is only skin-deep, however, for more often
Josie behaves with an abandon which certainly must have shocked many
of De Forest's readers, though they might have accepted such behavior
of a fictional foreigner. She travels unescorted with her suitor
Hollowbread to a small village. She receives men in her bedroom.
She flings herself on Sykes Drummond's lap to receive his kisses and later writes a note to him signed, "Your Little Pussy." For all her kittenishness, Josie can be as hard and calculating as any business baron. Her final scene with Mr. Pike, to whom she has promised ten thousand dollars to lobby her claim through Congress, shows her unscrupulous ingenuity. First she denies ever promising anything to him. Then she offers five thousand. When that fails, she demands vouchers of his expenses. Pike frantically tries to show her that Congressmen who take bribes do not sign receipts for them. Josie is adamant and finally refuses to pay Mr. Pike anything—threatening to call the police and claim he is molesting her if he remains. In this, as in all other instances, Josie's sex is her basic weapon. In spite of her faults, one cannot help admiring Josie Murray. De Forest, recognizing the appeal of his heroine, sums her up well. He concludes:

She had her pleasing traits; she was beautiful, graceful, clever, entertaining, and amiable; if she had only possessed truthfulness and honor, she would have been admirable. One can hardly help wishing her well while conceding that she deserved ill.\textsuperscript{34}

\textsuperscript{34}Ibid., p. 185.

Like his heroes and heroines, De Forest's villains resemble one another. The clearly defined ones, Somerville, Coronado, Poloski, and Moorcastle, all have an un-American aspect. Three of the four are foreigners, and Somerville has an acquired European manner which makes him more foreign than native. This foreign manner—of the courtliness, the glibness, the urbanity—makes these
villains suspect. In their spiritual and moral decadence they are contrasts to the sometimes uncouth but generally honorable Americans. Such derisive portraits of foreigners were common on the mid-century American stage. Added to this convention was the influence of native humor with its distrust of the outlander. And certainly the critical reporting of such writers as Basil Hall and Mrs. Trollope made many Americans sensitive to the deficiencies of American culture. Such sensitivity was easily turned into a suspicion which equated culture with decadence.

De Forest was too good an artist to paint his villains all black. Somerville's manner is impressive. Even the hero Fitz Hugh (though his actions may be ironic) admires Somerville's manner and attempts to imitate it. The smooth, lying Coronado is courageous. In the fight with the Indians, Coronado far excels the hero in ability and daring. Coronado is given, furthermore, an understandable motive for his villainy. Though he is a descendant of the Spanish hidalgos, he is a Mexican, a "greaser" to whom even the renegade desperado, Texas Smith, feels superior. Coronado sees money as the means to respectability, and he does not care how he gets the money. Captain Moorcastle, for all De Forest's Anglophobia, is also no coward nor are his morals as bad as those of the majority of his fellow officers. Thus, though De Forest's villains follow a pattern, they are somewhat individualized. Their main similarity is their "European" lack of respect for American womanhood.

The secondary characters, many of whom I have described as
objects of De Forest's comic spirit, are not only more numerous but also more striking than his conventionally drawn heroes and heroines. If example be needed, take De Forrest's masterpiece, Miss Ravenel, in which the hero and heroine are very well done. But even they are overshadowed by the powerful and dramatically interesting personalities of Colonel Carter and Mrs. Larue. In Gordon S. Haight's opinion, "no character in our fiction surpasses Carter in origi-
nality, fullness, or virility."35 Carter is an impressive figure,

35Introduction to Miss Ravenel, p. xiii.

a Virginia gentleman and a whiskey-drinking veteran of the Indian campaigns. His love for the innocent Lillie is honest and pure--for him; yet he is frequently unfaithful to her, even with her own aunt. In spite of this, when Lillie is close to death in child-
birth, his remorse is genuine and touching. Above all, he is a professional soldier, whose pride in his job and his brigade is understandably intense. His "'God damn them! see them go in. . . .
God damn their souls! I can put them anywhere!'"36 is an extension

36De Forest, Miss Ravenel, p. 407.

of self which perfectly characterizes the military commander. His death in the field, when it comes, is as inevitable as Achilles' death. He scorns the chaplain, for his last thoughts are professional:

"'Don't bother!--where is the brigade?"37 The attending surgeon

37Ibid., p. 408.
murmurs a fitting epitaph: "\'Il a maintenu jusqu'au bout son personnage... Sa mort est tout ce qu'il y a de plus logique."

38 Ibid., p. 409.

Mrs. Larue, of whom Howells could not think without shuddering,


is a Creole whose moral philosophy is taken from Balzac. Her unconventional attitudes shock Colburne, but Carter understands her instantly. De Forest tactfully records her most shocking remarks in French. More remarkably, he does not feel constrained to suggest that her actions will lead to a bad end. At the conclusion of the novel Mrs. Larue, through the favor of a special permit to trade in cotton, is enjoying a prosperous life. She presages the full length portrait of such a woman in Josie Murray, heroine of Playing the Mischief. Of Mrs. Larue, Gordon Haight has written, "Next to Carter... the modern reader will find her the most extraordinary study in the book." 40 She is one

40 Introduction to Miss Ravenel, pp. xiii-xiv.

of the first really wicked women in American fiction.

There are some basic flaws in De Forest's presentation of his characters, major and minor. When the curtain rises on any of his stories, the characters are suddenly present, full-grown, with attitudes and characteristics firmly fixed. They are already in
motion. The author picks them up as they come on the stage and relates their actions for a brief span of time. In the second or third act, a few die or marry. Then they retire, generally holding the same attitudes and behaving in the same way as when the play began, and the curtain rings down. I use the theater image deliberately, for there is more than a little of the stage technique in De Forest's novels. Though it is true that some few characters do evolve—including Lillie Ravenel, John Vane, and Edward Wetherel—the great majority of both major and minor characters are static. They are presented as typical representatives of their social and intellectual positions and then simply react to the situations with which they are confronted in accordance with their given positions. Their reactions further illustrate their characters but do not change them. Their reactions, furthermore, are not individual, based on their specific experiences, but typical, based on their regional and social environment. It is this very typicalness which makes them sound social-historical figures.

I do not mean to suggest that De Forest's characters are not adequately motivated, for they are; but even the motivation is typical rather than individual. For example, Colonel Carter's explanation of why he drinks explains not only his drinking but that of the army generally.

"Now imagine yourself in command of a company garrisoning Fort Wallah-Wallah on the upper Missouri, seven hundred miles from an opera, or a library, or a lady, or a mince pie, or any other civilizing influence. The Captain is on detached service somewhere. You are the First Lieutenant,
and your only companion is Brown the Second Lieutenant. You mustn't be on sociable terms with the men, because you are an officer and a gentleman. You have read your few books, and talked Brown dry. There is no shooting within five miles of the fort; and if you go beyond that distance, the Blackfeet will raise your hair. What is there to save you from suicide but old-rye? That's one way we come to drink so."

Such explanations do more than characterize the person concerned; they present a condition of contemporary life.

If one compares any of De Forest's characters to, say, Isabel Archer or Silas Lapham, the result will show the lack of evolution in his characters. The word "evolution" has two meanings which are valid here. It can mean that the characterization is presented by the author slowly and carefully through the statements and actions of the character himself. The necessity of sufficient time for such portrayal is implicit in the reasoning behind E. M. Forster's definition, in The Art of the Novel, of a novel as "a prose fiction of a certain length." Only at the end of such works does the character stand revealed in his complexity. The process resembles the way one learns about a new friend. Silas Lapham is drawn that way. His personality is presented through his reactions to various pressures and temptations. The other meaning of the word can be summed up as change. A story concerned with this sort of evolution presents a situation which causes a character to gain self-knowledge. He is permanently changed as the result of his experiences, and the story exists to portray this change. A glance

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41 De Forest, Miss Ravenel, p. 32.
at Isabel Archer in *The Portrait of a Lady* will show what I mean. She is young and unformed when the story opens, and she is a complex woman when it closes. Her maturity, expressed by her voluntary acceptance of responsibilities which previously she would not have understood, is the achievement of the novel.

This time element, implied by such words as "evolution" and "dynamic," is basic to the novel, and it is because of this element that Susanne Langer has defined the primary illusion of the novel as the creation of a virtual past. The creation of that illusion depends upon development and change, for in the human mind both concepts are intimately associated with time. Static is thus a pejorative word in critical terminology, for static characters seem false to the illusion of the novel. De Forest's novels, then, fall short of creating the primary illusion. His characters neither develop gradually so as to give the illusion of time, nor, more importantly, do they change during the time span of the novel. There are exceptions. Lillie Ravenel is a dynamic character. John Vane does change but unconvincingly and very early in the book. Edward Wetherel also undergoes a complete change of character; since his change is not presented dramatically--De Forest states that he has changed but never shows the process by which the change is made--the illusion succeeds only for the very uncritical reader.
De Forest's indifference to the vital illusion of his art shows at other points. His cavalier attitude toward the conclusions of his novels, conclusions which are better left unsaid since they break the rhythm of the novel, shows that indifference. The abruptness of his transitions from one subject to another and his arbitrary changes in viewpoint dispel any illusion that one is reading virtual history. Last, De Forest frequently writes scenes in which he makes no effort to evoke the illusion of narration of the past. He presents these scenes much as they might be written for the stage with dialogue labeled and actors' manner indicated. The technique does not aid the characterizations or further the action.

Virginia. "They talk about the war being over. It isn't over for the widows and orphans."
Mrs. Dumont (spitefully). "No, and never will be!
How can it be?"
Aunt Chloe. "Keeps it up de irlsewes--some on 'em.
Blessed is de peacemakers. Does you 'apos e wah-makers is blessed, too?"
Mrs. Dumont. "I'm sure God ough not to starve us.
We work hard enough--and I've begged, too--actually asked charity--a born lady!"
Aunt Chloe (aside). "An' a bawn goose, too. Lady enough, but goose too much."
Virginia. "Chloe, I wish you wouldn't mutter. Every-
th ing irritates me."

De Forest, The Bloody Chasm, p. 95.

De Forest's art has more than this passing resemblance to the stage. In not only outward form but inward spirit, his efforts seem centered more on the creation of that primary illusion of the stage, virtual experience, than on the creation of the illusion of
the novel. Since the illusion of experience is based on the quality of the experience rather than on its duration, specific detail and intensity are sufficient for stage characters. These characteristics De Forest's portrayals have in abundance. This criticism detracts nothing from their value as socio-historical figures nor from De Forest's ability to create humor of character and incident, for the stage is eminently suited to the portrayal of contemporary manners and humor. His static characterizations do, however, make for somewhat unsatisfactory novels.

IV The Scene

Since it is through scenes that action, conflicts, and characters are dramatically presented, it is essential that we examine De Forest's handling of scenes. Once again we find the mixture of romantic and realistic tendencies characteristic of De Forest's transitional position. Though it is difficult to define the difference between realistic and romantic scenes, the following generalizations can be made.

The romantics showed a marked preference for the secluded or semi-secluded meeting of two or three major characters. For example, in The Scarlet Letter Hester meets Chillingworth on a secluded section of beach; later she meets Dimmesdale "deep in the woods." In both these meetings the background becomes hazy, becomes indeed the mere play of light and shadow. The seclusion intensifies the action and heightens the drama; and it was so intended. The romantic
preference for seclusion is further attested to by Herbert Brown's discussion of the favorite stage property of the sentimentalists, the retreat. He notes that almost every estate had one and "as was true in Wieland, these 'paradisaical retirements' often were the scenes of dramatic moments in the lives of their occupants... The secluded retreat proved a popular place for courtship as well as for seduction," he concludes. Quite obviously, this preference of the romantics was in part device and in part an expression of their withdrawal from the world. Nevertheless the secluded scene is a characteristic of romantic fiction.

Since the romantics did not restrict themselves to probabilities but only to possibilities (and sometimes not even that), coincidence and catastrophe play a larger part in their works than in those of the realists. The romanticists employed melodramatic situations where the often symbolic actions and the philosophical speeches of the characters seem normal. Thus one frequently finds the big scene of death, destruction, personal combat, recognition, discovery, or either literal or figurative revelation. The Scarlet Letter will again illustrate the generalization. Its action builds up to a climax as Dimmesdale calls upon Pearl and Hester to help him mount the scaffold so that he can make his confession to the assembled throng. At the ultimate moment, when his speech has reached its point of ambiguous revelation, Dimmesdale tears open his shirt to reveal his stigma—if it is really there. This big scene, with
its extraordinarily emotional climax, is representative of many romantic scenes.

The realists, on the other hand, were more subdued. Their scenes are more likely to take place in social gatherings which afford little seclusion. In Playing the Mischief, for example, Josie Murray goes to a Presidential reception. There, in the crowded rooms of the Treasury Building, Josie furthers her schemes by three separate flirtations; yet she is never out of sight of at least three hundred people. In such a situation the actions and dialogue of the characters are often very prosaic. Much must be left unsaid; the emotions are muffled; but, because the world constantly intrudes upon the scene, probability is strengthened. By such means even scenes which are in themselves melodramatic are toned down to a pitch more consonant with the actual manner of their occurrence in normal life.

That De Forest was aware of the characteristics of romantic scenes is evident from the plot which he permits Fitz Hugh to outline for his book in progress and from the typically romantic scenes which De Forest spoofs throughout Seacliff. De Forest also shows his awareness that in reality human events are seldom highly emotional. He analyzes the degree to which average people repress their emotions.

The conversation of lovers is not usually interesting to outsiders except as a subject of laughter; it is frequently stale and flat to a degree which seems incomprehensible when you consider the strong feelings of the interlocutors. This is the ordinary sort of thing, at least in New Boston:--
Lady.  (smiling) Did you go out yesterday?  
Gent.  (smiling) Yes.  
Lady.  Where?  
Gent.  Only down to the post-office.  
Lady.  Many people in the streets?  
Gent.  Not very many.  

And all the while the two persons are not thinking of the walk, nor of the post-office, nor of the people in the streets, nor of anything of which they speak. They are thinking of each other. . .45

45De Forest, Miss Ravenel, p. 38.

Excluding the three parodies and the almost wholly romantic Overland, De Forest's works contain romantic and realistic scenes in nearly equal proportions. To take a typical example, a romantic scene follows Kate Beaumont's discovery that her sister Nellie is married to a drunken monster. Late at night when Kate hears Nellie arguing with her husband, Kate rises and starts for her sister's room. As she draws near, the voices become distinguishable. What follows is a chapter ending which could well have come from the Spasmodic. De Forest writes:

"Will you tell me--?" demanded the husband, in a hoarse, thick utterance.  
"No, I will not, Randolph," answered Nellie, in that monotone of hers which meant unshakable persistence.  
"Then, by heavens--! Look here, you obstinate fool; don't you know what I'll do to you? Don't you know?"  
"I know, Randolph," said Nellie. "I don't care for your threats."

The answer to this speech was a sound as of a struggle. Kate hesitated no longer; she stepped swiftly into the room. By the flicker of a candle dying in its socket she saw Randolph holding his wife down on the pillow with one hand, while with the other he brandished a long knife.46

46Kate Beaumont, p. 105.
The mood of the scene, lit by the single flickering candle, and the emotional climax as Kate rushes into the room are both worthy of Edgar Allan Poe. The situation is hardly "typical" or "conventional" as Howells used those terms; yet such scenes occur frequently in De Forest's work. De Forest had shown that he knew precisely how cheap a device such suspense was by parodying it himself. In The Wetherel Affair he cites the chapter ending of a typically lurid newspaper novel such as Miss Jones reads.

"'Allyne Castleton left the room, but returned again to look upon the sleeping object of his dreams, who had been that night so strangely restored to him, when he mourned her as sleeping beneath the fragrant roses of a hillside burial-place in sunny Naples. The soft, rich, velvet-piled carpets gave back no sound of his footsteps as he returned to his chamber-door, and he saw with horror his beautiful cousin Isabel, bending over his loved Angela, draw a gleaming dagger of exquisite workmanship from her bosom and lift her hand as if she would bury it to the hilt in the slumber-soothing bosom.'"\(^7\)

\(^7\)P. 101.

The resemblance of this scene to the one in Kate Beaumont is unmistakable; yet De Forest's intent in The Wetherel Affair is to show the low level of Miss Jones' reading taste.

De Forest's battle scenes are good examples of his use of realistic techniques. He does not glorify combat; he does not glamorize his soldiers nor omit unpleasant details. None of his soldiers, not even the officers, display the heroic fortitude shown by the protagonist of Ambrose Bierce's "A Son of the Gods." Indeed, compared to the storming of Port Hudson in Miss Ravenel, other
nineteenth-century descriptions of the Civil War which I have read appear theatrical or childish. The action at Port Hudson is seen through the eyes of Captain Colburne and carefully restricted to his viewpoint. He calmly introduces details of injury which revolt the reader. For example, Colburne notes,

"When one of our men was borne by me with half his foot torn off by a round shot, the splintered bones projecting clean and white from the rags of raw flesh, I grew so sick that perhaps I might have fainted if a brother officer had not given me a sip of whiskey from his canteen."  

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48 De Forest, Miss Ravenel, p. 249.

De Forest's descriptions of the Indian fights in Overland and the battles in A Lover's Revolt are just as objective.

Considering De Forest's personal experience, it is not surprising that he understood the average soldier's mind better than other writers of his time, and his understanding increases the realistic effect of his scenes. The reader will remember that Lieutenant Thurstane's first question to Private Sweeny when he refuses to fire during the Indian attack is "'Are you afraid anybody will hit you?'"  

De Forest, Overland, p. 55.

explains the question:

Now it is not an uncommon thing for recruits to dread to discharge their arms in battle. They have a vague idea that, if they bang away, they will attract the notice of some antagonist who will immediately single them out for retaliation.  

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50 Ibid.
In a recent article based on the finding of Brigadier General S. L. A. Marshall, the problem of the nonfirer, as he calls the soldier who refuses to shoot in battle, is analyzed. The article substantiates several of De Forest's observations, this one among them. From investigations Marshall made during World War II and more recently during the Korean fighting, he discovered that fewer than fifty percent of American troops can be depended on to fire their weapons during battle. One of the primary reasons for nonfiring is the fear of retaliation. As Marshall explains it,

The isolated man...will develop a sense of having been deserted by his fellows, and he will reason to himself that if he does not shoot and expose his position, the enemy will not fire back.51


Sometimes De Forest avoids climactic scenes with a sort of Howellsian propriety and understatement. For example, the leave-taking of Colonel Carter just after he has declared his love for Lillie is cut drastically. The situation and dialogue are becoming passionate, but, after giving the beginning of their conversation, De Forest closes it off with the remark, "I shall go no farther in the description of this interview."52 Again, in the agonizing moments of Lillie's childbirth, Carter and Mrs. Larue decide that their affair must end. The situation has possibilities that few

52 Miss Ravenel, p. 176.
writers would refuse to exploit. Both are strong characters and their passionate affair has had depths which Carter's marriage to his child-bride has lacked. Yet, ignoring these dramatic possibilities, De Forest simply has Mrs. Larue say, while passing Carter in the hall outside Lillie's room, "'What is between you and me must end.'" Carter agrees and that is the end of the affair.

In Justine's Lovers there is a brief scene which is typical of De Forest at his best. It characterizes the inhumanity of the petty bureaucrat swollen with official power better than the pages of ironic description. Justine is waiting in the anteroom of the Secretary of an unnamed government bureau. The room is crowded with job-seekers. After waiting several hours, Justine goes out in the hall to stretch.

...I stepped forth into the hall, and walked slowly up and down the marble flooring. In two or three minutes the servitor came to me and said, in undertone, "Will you step into the waiting-room?"

"Thank you," I replied. "I have been there a long time. I am walking to rest myself."

"The Secretary wishes you to go in there," he insisted. "He don't want you to walk here. It makes a noise."

Humiliated, Justine meekly does as she is told.

Whereas many of De Forest's scenes seem deliberately underwritten, his comedy scenes are apt to be over-extended. For example, there is the memorable scene in Justine's Lovers, in which Justine and her
mother visit Mrs. Starkenburgh, the mother of Justine's fiancé. Mrs. Starkenburgh worships family, her family, the Dickerman branch. Her character is obvious from her statements. For example, she says,

"I wish you could have known my father. I will venture to say that no other man of his generation was his superior, if even his equal. He was the very embodiment of Dickerman character and manner. I never knew him to speak but with such an air that any one who did not hear what he said would have supposed that he was deciding the interests of the nation. Ah, he was a terrible loss to me, and to Goshen County, and to the world."\[55\]

\[55\]Ibid., p. 31.

The unconscious irony of her words about her father and the beautifully anticlimactic statement of loss suffered by Mrs. Starkenburgh, then Goshen County, and then the world, make further illustration of her idolatry and conceit superfluous. Yet De Forest extends the situation. Justine and her mother are made to sit on footstools in a darkened room while the maid beams a lantern at first one family portrait and then another and Mrs. Starkenburgh, in the manner of a museum lecturer, extols the strong points of her family. Each time she ends her discussion with the words, "A true Dickerman!"; and each time Justine and her mother must mutter, "Ah, yes indeed." It is amusing, to be sure, but protracted unjustifiably. Similarly, certain scenes in which Representative Hollowbread, John Bowlder, or Imogen Jones appears grow tiresome. Often De Forest could not leave well enough alone.

De Forest's best scenes are of commonplace life carefully grounded in reality. His novels contain numerous scenes which
depict the minutiae of daily living. Furthermore, he did dare to portray some previously unmentionable subjects such as childbirth. Yet in no one book do the scenes produce a clearly realistic effect. De Forest's commitment to the love-courtship plot is much to blame. Because of it, melodramatic incidents which cannot be handled realistically creep in. In addition De Forest could be fully as reticent as his predecessors and contemporaries in dealing with the elemental facts of life. On the whole, De Forest did not add much to the development of scenic technique, either romantic or realistic.

V Diction

There is no more difficult problem in making distinctions between romanticism and realism than the one of diction— the very stuff of literature. Word choice is basic, and it underlies all of the judgments I have made, but study of it can be carried to a point of absurdity. Yet the transition from romanticism to realism in fiction involved as basic a change in the use of language as the transition from classicism to romanticism. Just as the romanticists revolted against the restraints of the so-called poetic diction of the classicists in favor of a freer expression, so the realists revolted against the rhetorical, stylized, and often abstract language of the romanticists in favor of language which more closely approximated the speech patterns of everyday life with their colloquial wording and concrete metaphors. Romantic fiction had
long tended in this direction by its inclusion of dialect-speaking
low characters whose pungent native idiom flavored but did not
dominate the romantic novels.

In America one aim of the realists, in response to the
nationalism and other forces which motivated them, was to produce
a literature which reflected the American, as distinct from the
English, language. Such chauvinism did not spring into being
suddenly in 1850. The works of the early humorists and the early
local colorists show a preoccupation with native idiom which is
directly in line with the aims of the later realists. Yet it
cannot be denied that, in general, American literature during the
first half of the nineteenth century attempted to reproduce in
America the established forms of English literature. The Addisonian
essay as well as the Scott adventure story had many imitators in
the United States. The establishment of the books of Lord Kames
and the Reverends Hugh Blair and Archibald Alison on rhetoric and
criticism as standard texts in the early American colleges

56Henry Home, Lord Kames, Elements of Criticism (1762), Hugh
Blair, Lectures on Rhetoric and Belles Lettres (1783), and Archibald
Alison, Essays on the Nature and Principles of Taste (1790). For a
discussion of the influence of these texts on American literature
and thinking, see William Charvat's The Origins of American Critical
Thought, 1810-1835, Philadelphia, 1936.

increased the obstacles to the introduction of idiomatic literature.
And the obstacles were great. Whereas the American vernacular was
common in folk humor and local color fiction, the writers of most
fiction still used formal language to present serious ideas in
narrative or dialogue. It is this latter tendency that led Cooper into the inconsistencies in Natty Bumppo's diction which Mark Twain pointed out in "Fenimore Cooper's Literary Offenses."\footnote{Such inconsistencies were common, even though critics as early as 1837 were reminding their authors that "the success of Scott and Edgeworth as delineators of real life...is in proportion to the fidelity with which they copy the diction of whatever rank they introduce--of the vulgar, no less than the exalted." Southern Literary Messenger, III, 692, quoted in Blair, Native American Humor, p. 37.} It cannot be denied that this idealized language of the romanticists, with its fine words, its rolling rhetoric, its circumlocutions and polite euphemisms, gave an artificiality to their works. Indeed, the convention, once laid down, died slowly. Traces of its influence can be found in the literature of the very late nineteenth century--most prominently perhaps in the poetry. The romantics' use of language should not be bewailed but understood for what it was--a true expression of the culture and philosophy of the age. It need only be decried when used by later authors who attempted to express different conditions of life in which a different philosophy prevailed. In such works romantic diction has no organic function and rings false to critical ears. Perhaps a sampling from the romantics will illustrate more clearly the romantic use of language and make more fruitful our examination of De Forest's diction.

The qualities of romantic diction are best seen in dialogue passages. A fairly typical example is Willie's speech to his wife, Nelly, from \textit{The Lost Heiress} (1854). The scene is in prison, where Willie is awaiting execution. Willie is a simple workingman, but
note the rhetorical flourishishes, the word choice, and the abstract quality of his speech.

"You will not die, dearest, you will live for your children, and every year you will grow stronger and firmer, and better able to guard and guide them. Now you are youthful, and tender and sensitive, and grief penetrates you through and through, but after a while you will have more fortitude and resistance. God will give it to you. . . .Poor Nelly! young and weak, and friendless as you are, you will have to take your stand among the workers and sufferers in the exposed outer circle of life—sheltering with your own feeble form the feeble frames of infancy and of age—receiving upon your own shoulders the storms and buffets of life, that they, whom you shield, may be safe and warm—taking upon your soul the heavy cares of life, that they whom you think for may be free of care. . . .There is One who cares for you. . . .He is the God of the fatherless and of the widow, without whom not a sparrow falleth to the ground, much less one of you. . . .And, remember this, dear Nelly. . . remember that the post of danger, of difficulty, of toil and privation, is also the post of HONOR...

58Southworth, p. 83. [Italics mine.]

A scene from Ernest Linwood (1856) illustrates a typical romantic treatment of high passion. The diction is highly refined, particularly the concluding words of the author. The scene is one of reconciliation and discovery; Gabriella's erring husband has just returned unexpectedly.

"Gabriella! beloved Gabriella! I am not worthy to be called thy husband; but banish me not, my own and only love!"
At the sound of that voice, my paralyzed senses burst the fetters that enthralled them, and awoke to life so keen, there was agony in the awakening. . . .I sunk upon my knees before him,—I encircled his neck with my arms,—I called him by every dear and tender name the vocabulary of love can furnish,—I wept upon his bosom showers of blissful and relieving tears. Thus we knelt and wept, locked in each other's arms, and again and again Ernest repeated—
"I am not worthy to be thy husband," and I answered again and again--

"I love thee, Ernest. God, who knoweth all things, knows, and he only, how I love thee."

It is impossible to describe such scenes. Those who have never known them, must deem them high-wrought and extravagant; those who have [sic], cold and imperfect. It is like trying to paint chain-lightning, or the coruscations of the aurora borealis.59

59Hentz, p. 459. [Italics mine.]

Not only the sentimentalists wrote thus, as an example from Hawthorne's works shows. The Blithedale Romance is probably his most realistic work. It deals with his contemporary scene and lacks the depth that legend adds to his other works--although the introduction of mesmerism adds a certain amount of mystery. Real as the situation of the book is, the conversations are not. Take for example, Zenobia's rhetorical retort to Miles Coverdale when he speaks of his duty.

"Oh, this stale excuse of duty!" said Zenobia, in a whisper so full of scorn that it penetrated me like the hiss of a serpent. "I have often heard it before, from those who sought to interfere with me, and I know precisely what it signifies. Bigotry; self-conceit; an insolent curiosity; a meddlesome temper; a cold-blooded criticism, founded on a shallow interpretation of half-perceptions; a monstrous scepticism in regard to any conscience or any wisdom, except one's own; a most irreverent propensity to thrust Providence aside, and substitute one's self in its awful place,—out of these, and other motives as miserable as these, comes your idea of duty."60

60The Complete Writings of Nathaniel Hawthorne, VIII, 243-244.

A further characteristic of romantic diction was its use of foreign words and phrases, often simply to lend plausibility to the
imputed intelligence and culture of the hero and heroine, but often without even that justification. The fact that the authors knew their readers' inability to cope with such phraseology is shown by their habit of translating their own phrases for the benefit of those who knew no French or German or Greek or Latin. Such usage could be excused if the foreign idiom expressed something better than the English equivalent or expressed something inexpressible in English. But the use of foreign words and phrases which have perfectly good English synonyms is arbitrary and affected. This practice was followed even by the realists. For example, Rebecca Harding Davis, widely acclaimed for the grim realism of her "Life in the Iron Mills," could write the following description of a young girl without embarrassment:

It would need pure birth as well as the influences under which she had lived to give her delicate head that poise of command, or to bestow the manner simple and fin, the like of which he had never seen before. He was a connoisseur in address; this bewildered, mastered him. A princess of the blood, among her peers might be thus gravely natural and unconscious, but, below the highest rank, women must have an acquired polish, haughty or gracieuse, by which to assert themselves; that was the society maxim. 61

61 Waiting for the Verdict, New York, 1868, pp. 55-56.

It is safe, I think, to make these general assumptions about romantic diction. It preferred the abstract to the concrete word. It indulged in rhetorical flourishes both in narration and in dialogue. It avoided native idiom, both colloquial and slang, except for the speech of unlettered rustics introduced mainly for
De Forest’s diction reflects both romantic and realistic tendencies. Considering his background, his education, and his age, it is not surprising that much of his diction is in the romantic mode. What is more noteworthy is his extensive use of the vernacular. To a great extent his works are written in the contemporary idiom of his time, including much of the current slang. Nor did he restrict his use of colloquial language to the speeches of the lower classes, as did Cooper and Simms when they included native idiom. To the student of language, De Forest’s works are an excellent source of information about its usage in the fifties, sixties, and seventies.

Not only in intention but in execution, De Forest’s writing is less formal than that of the romantics although he did indulge in romantic fine writing and frequently fell back on the device of foreign words and phrases. A sampling of his words shows that, from all available evidence, many were the current idiom of his time, some evidently appearing in serious fiction for the first time. Such evidence does not include the numerous passages in which folk humor characters speak their native idiom in dialect. The narrative portions of his works are written in concise, swift-moving, natural prose. The characters speak a language which seems appropriate to their condition in life. All of De Forest’s dialogue has the ring of a faithful transcript of American speech patterns.

As will be seen from the following list, De Forest had a wide knowledge of occupational and trade jargon as well as an easy familiarity with the current slang of all classes. In the interest
of brevity, I have listed the following words, taken more or less at random from the various novels, in simple alphabetical order. The word is followed by its definition. The date of the novel in which it appeared and the page reference are given on the next line. (Because it is not important, I have not given the title of the work the word occurs in. With the page reference and the date, one could easily verify De Forest's use of the word.) The third line gives the date of first use, if the reference establishes such a date, the place of that use if it is relevant, and the source. Since not all of the words were to be found in any one source, I have used Bartlett's Dictionary of Americanisms (1877 edition), De Vere's Americanisms (1872), and M. M. Mathews' A Dictionary of Americanisms (1951), as well as the standard work in the field, Craigie and Hulbert, A Dictionary of American English on Historical Principles (1938).

BAMBOOZLED, cheated, fooled.
1875, p. 98.
1833, first used, S. Smith, Jack Downing (Mathews, I, 69).

BENDER, a drunk or frolic.
1872, p. 103.
1846, first used, Corcoran, Pickings (Mathews, I, 39).

BLATHERSKITE, a blustering, noisy, talkative fellow. English dialect.
1872, p. 21.
1841, first American use, Knickerbocker (Craigie and Hulbert, I, 236).

BLOOMER, a feminist in man's clothing.
1875, p. 35.
1854 (Mathews, I, 137).
CHISELING, cheating, swindling.
1875, p. 179.
---- (Bartlett, p. 116).

CALICO, A PIECE OF, a shop girl.
1873, p. 190
1848 (Mathews, I, 243).

CLEAR CUT, TO, to go away, disappear.
1872, p. 107.
1861, first used, Harper’s Monthly (De Vere, p. 591).

CORKED, drunk.
1840, first American use, Longstreet, Georgia Scenes, also English, 1785 (NED).

DEAD-HEAT, a worthless fellow.
1873, p. 66.
---- (Bartlett, p. 170), 1877 first NED listing.

DRY UP, shut up.
1859, p. 417.
1853 (Mathews, I, 528).

HIFALUTIN, high-flown, bombastic
1875, p. 123.
1848 (Bartlett, p. 285).

JIGAMAREE, any trivial object.
1859, p. 50.
1844, first used, Major Jones Courtship (Bartlett, p. 323).

KEEP A STIFF UPPER LIP, keep up one’s courage.
1859, p. 457.
---- (Bartlett, p. 330).

MAD, angry.
1879, p. 241.
1833, first used, Major Downing Letters (Bartlett, p. 378), though it seems to have been provincial in England earlier (NED).

MONKEY-SHINES, tricks.
1873, p. 38.
1847 (Craigie and Hulbert, II, 1540).

MOUNT, TO, to fight and overcome, slang.
1872, p. 107.
1835 (Craigie and Hulbert, II, 1552).
NUTS, enjoyment, pleasure.
1872, p. 35.
---- (Bartlett, p. 432).

POKY, slow, dull, when said of a person.
1867, p. 50.
1848 (Craigie and Hulbert, III, 1779).

PONY UP, TO, to pay up, slang.
1879, p. 211.
1824 (Craigie and Hulbert, III, 1789).

PEART, brisk, lively.
1872, p. 46.
1859 (Bartlett, p. 456).

PUT-UP JOB, secret machinations injurious to someone.
1875, p. 179.
---- (Bartlett, p. 792).

RIGHT, very.
1867, p. 10.
---- (Bartlett, p. 527).

ROPES, TO KNOW THE, to know one's way about, colloquial.
1875, p. 103.
1874, though found in Dana's Two Years Before the Mast, 1840, where it might be occupational (Craigie and Hulbert, IV, 1972).

SHINNED, mercantile phrase meaning borrowed money from or loaned money to a friend.
1859, p. 128.
1845 (Bartlett, p. 580).

SPOONY, loving.
1875, p. 126.
1863 (Craigie and Hulbert, V, 2198).

TIGHT, drunk, used mostly in the South.
1872, p. 21.
---- (Bartlett, p. 705).

WHISKEY-MILL, grog-shop or grocery where liquor is sold, used mainly in California and Far West.
---- (Bartlett, p. 752).

WIRE-PULLERS, political intriguers.
1875, p. 244.
1848 (Bartlett, p. 762), though used somewhat similarly from Roman times on (NED).
Though, as the chart shows, most of these words seem to have been introduced no more than a decade or two previous to De Forest's use of them, no strong reliance can be placed on such evidence nor is it extensive enough to do more than indicate the tendency of De Forest's diction.

In addition, De Forest used many picturesque words and phrases which are not to be found in any reference book that I know of. The origin and introduction of these expressions are a mystery, but many of them are part of American idiom today. For example, De Forest uses the terms "social butterfly" (Playing the Mischief, p. 113), "woman-killer" (Seaciff, p. 91), and "old flame" (Playing the Mischief, p. 161). In his two books about Washington, Playing the Mischief and Honest John Vane, he makes frequent use of the current political idiom, including such terms as "lobby," "log-rolling," "rings," "pipe-laying," and "caucus."

De Forest's interest in current idiom is further shown by his characterization of Poloski, the irrepressible student of American slang in The Wetherel Affair. Poloski's speeches are highly idiomatic, as the following example shows. Speaking of his money, he says, "'There is more where this comes from. I haven't got to the bottom of my pile yet by a long shot'" (p. 171). Also notable is Texas Smith, in Overland, who speaks constantly in the idiom of poker, much like some of Twain's characters. When faced with an unbeatable argument, Texas says, "'The keerds is stocked
again me'" (p. 112). When he decides not to interfere in an action, he laconically remarks, "'I pass'" (p. 112).

Further evidence of the informality of De Forest's diction, though these expressions are not Americanisms and some have quite a respectable history, is available on almost every page of his works. People are "chicken-hearted " (Playing the Mischief, p. 109) or "highty-tighty" (Playing the Mischief, p. 128). Or people get into "hot water" (Playing the Mischief, p. 127), go off on a "wild goose chase" (Kate Beaumont, p. 107), instead of using their "noodle" (Playing the Mischief, p. 98). They also get the "whimwhams" (The Wetherel Affair, p. 128) thinking that they are about to "kick the bucket" (Playing the Mischief, p. 115), when they ought to "grin and bear it" (The Wetherel Affair, p. 43).

Unquestionably De Forest was aware of the distinctions between levels of language. At times his awareness expresses itself by his use of quotation marks around words which he considers slang. At other times he apologizes for ascribing colloquial language to well-bred characters. For example, in Kate Beaumont, after Bentley Armitage, who has a "game leg," speaks of his family as all "'peart'" and "'hearty,'" De Forest follows the conversation with this explanation: "It was evident enough that he used such rural terms as 'peart' and 'hearty' in the way of slang." But De Forest did

62 P. 46.

persist, though sometimes apologetically, in putting normal speech into the mouths of his characters. In Playing the Mischief he
deliberately uses a common phrase and takes the opportunity to lash out at critics who complain of such language.

Mr. Hollowbread perceived (to use one of those picturesque idioms which give so much pain to critics of a certain bore and penetration) that he had put his foot in it.63

63 p. 55.

In his last book, De Forest goes into a lengthy discussion of dialect and pronunciation. I include it, mainly as an illustration of De Forest's interest in linguistics. He speaks of the colonists in the Revolutionary Army:

Their own spoken English was fairly pure, very slightly marked by local dialects and brogues, and more grammatical than the speech of any other yeomanry in the world. Of course they held to certain pronunciations which in our day would sound antique and plebeian; for instance, they said natur instead of naychur, and creetur instead of creechur, and acktually instead of ackchually. America had not yet imported from England that mincing metamorphosis of t into ch, which England imported from Beelzebub knows where, or perhaps dug up in its own Cockaigne.

No doubt there were sniffling, stammering utterances, and backwoods oddities of phrase and metaphor, the origins of that form of English celebrated as the Yankee dialect, a sparse and stunted vulgar tongue which novelists glean and gather with no small difficulty, sometimes adding thereto a logical sprig of their own invention.64

64 A Lover's Revolt, pp. 171-172.

The use of quotation marks, apology, and authorial comment shows De Forest's awareness that he was not following in the traditional ways, that he was, for better or worse, committed to a use of language which closely approximated normal American usage. He was not alone in the accuracy of his reproductions of American
speech and in the informality of his writing as the dates for the first uses of his Americanisms show. Although the introduction of such expressions generally antedated De Forest's use of them, the introduction was almost always in journals or in the writings of the frontier humorists. To my knowledge, not once is so prolific a writer as Cooper given as a source, let alone either Hawthorne or Melville. In his own time, De Forest's use of native idiom was paralleled by Mark Twain and Bret Harte, both younger. These men, furthermore, learned their letters in the free-speaking West. Unlike De Forest, reared a genteeel New Englander, such men might well be expected to ignore the romantic proprieties of language.

Not all of De Forest's diction was realistic. Like the romantics, he used foreign phrases to indicate learning in his characters. Here is a typical example, showing the superfluous quality of the phrase and the awkwardness of the translation which De Forest seemed to feel was necessary. "'Ç'est selon;--that depends,' said she, translating herself."^65 Such phrases are not only awkward but at times so inappropriate that they become ridiculous. For example, there is the passage in which Bentley Armitage goes to take care of his drunken brother, Randolph, while Nellie makes good her escape. De Forest writes, "As he turned his back on Kate Beaumont, and prepared for his horrible tête-à-tête
with his brother, he said to himself, 'Noblesse oblige.'”

There are, it is true, fewer such phrases in the later books.

De Forest also shows a remarkable ability to write in the romantic manner in which a spade was usually called an agricultural implement. Speaking of Somerville's deportment, De Forest notes that "nothing could be more demulcent and balsamic" (Seacliff, pp. 61-62). Or he can describe Nestoria's blond hair falling down as "that aureate inundation" (The Wetherel Affair, p. 9). In the same book he describes a man getting dressed by saying "he mechanically continued his light labor of personal adornment" (p. 37). And, if further example be needed, there is De Forest's comment as the characters look down on Judge Wetherel's corpse.

There was no question about the remorseless completeness of the sanguinary work. The severe and somewhat sunless, but conscientious, benevolent, and on the whole beautiful life had ended; and the sincere spirit of the old man, purified through worthy work and worthier aspirations, had risen by mortal violence to divine mercy.

That the same man could write the passage in which Van Zandt describes a battle by saying, "'It seemed to me, sir, that the day
of judgment had come, and the angel was blowing particular hell out of his trumpet, \(^{69}\) is evidence of conflicting techniques that could hardly be resolved.

Though I would not equate frankness with realism (too much has been written about "grim realism" already), De Forest wrote some passages which were surprisingly frank for the literary milieu in which his books circulated. He seldom hid behind polite euphemisms when he came to describe horrifying or disgusting events. Most notable perhaps is his graphic description of the torture of the young Mexican girl by the Indians in Overland. There he relates in detail the Indian outrages upon the naked eighteen-year-old Pepita, outrages which end with her crucifixion and death. There is also the remarkable passage in which Randolph Armitage, crazy drunk, steals into his wife's room in the middle of the night and demands to know where she has hidden his whiskey. When he is at length persuaded to leave by Kate, he turns to Nellie with an insult which lays bare their relationship in the past. "'Then I'll leave... That's all I came here for. Do you suppose I wanted you?'"\(^{70}\) This statement, following as it does Nellie's remark that she will not lock her door since her husband has a right to come to her at any time, illustrates frank treatment of that side of marriage which, in De Forest's time, was almost

\(^{69}\) De Forest, Miss Ravenel, p. 109.

\(^{70}\) De Forest, Kate Beaumont, p. 105.
universally passed over. The whole situation is a psychologically sound example of sexual incompatibility, unblushingly portrayed. But perhaps the most quietly realistic sentence—and the most amazing when one considers the taboos which were current in nineteenth century publishing—is this: "The Butternut immediately said, in the pleasant way current in armies, 'Halt, you son of a bitch!'" I cannot help wondering what William Dean Howells' reaction to that sentence was.

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VI Summary

Though De Forest's novels are important documents for social history and significant pioneer efforts in American literary realism, they show a basic dichotomy in technique. That is, while it can be shown that De Forest was consciously anti-romantic and that he aimed at a representation of reality, many of his techniques worked in the opposing direction so that his achievement fell short of his aim.

Specifically, his use of the traditional love-courtship plot obscured the fact that his themes dealt with actual manifestations of evil which he saw in the political, social, and intellectual conditions of his time. The central problem in all of these investigations was the lack of honor and dignity which, De Forest implied, was the result of the increasing democratization and materialism of
nineteenth century life. His plots, furthermore, necessitated
the introduction of traditionally conceived heroes, heroines, and
villains, who are dramatically weak. They are, however, somewhat
compensated for by interesting and effective secondary characters
and by a host of vividly portrayed, realistic minor characters.
The major flaw in De Forest's presentation of characters is that
they are generally static personalities without individuality.
They are interesting types, but they seldom achieve life of their
own.

The general characteristics of De Forest's scenes are equally
contradictory. In tone as well as action, many scenes are roman­
tically conceived, while others are objective transcripts of
reality. His most spectacular achievement was his use of language
itself. More openly and more consistently than most of his contem­
poraries, De Forest introduced into serious literature the language
of everyday Americans. He faithfully reproduced American speech
patterns in his dialogue. Furthermore, his knowledge of the
current idiom of people in all sections of the country attests a
scope of interest in the American language which is paralleled by
few writers in the nineteenth century. But even here, De Forest
could not escape the pervasive influence of his romantic predecessors,
for frequent passages reflect that influence in tone and word choice
and in the inevitable scraps of foreign languages.
Chapter Five

Final Evaluations

If, as I believe, De Forest's aim throughout his work was to express the nature of his world, he succeeded admirably. Taken as a whole, his work reflects the tensions, confusions, and contradictions of American life from the early fifties to the late seventies. Focusing his attention on first one and then another section of the country, he portrayed each time the regional and national characteristics of society. And each time he showed that the old, traditional, solid basis of American society was crumbling before the approach of an increasingly materialistic spirit which democratized as it fragmented. Since he shared few of the new ideals, though he understood them well, the general optimism of the period did not blind De Forest to the inadequacies of the new spirit. Furthermore, he understood that it was, in part, the failure of the old traditions to keep pace that accounted for much of the shoddy culture and irresponsible conduct of the present. The hardening of such once-valuable contributions to American culture as religious ethics into sentimental piety and self-aggrandizing missionaryism, and of representative government into self-interested log-rolling, are only two of the circumstances by which De Forest showed the default of the old aiding the introduction of the new.
No other body of works so completely expresses the variety of social, economic, political, religious, and military impulses that changed and molded American life in those three hectic decades.

It would be unusual for a writer who dealt so fully with customs and mores to delve very deeply into man's relationship to the universe. Indeed, the scope of De Forest's presentation precludes anything but a surface investigation. As realistic impressions of manners, however, De Forest's novels are uniquely valuable to American literature. His intelligent observation of social and intellectual currents and even the language of the time gives an excellent insight into that period. Because De Forest's works sprang more from observation than from imagination, it is fortunate that he had a wide variety of experiences upon which to draw. The semi-autobiographical nature of the material in his best works is evident. When a personal frame of reference is lacking, as in "Witching Times," Overland, and A Lover's Revolt, his work also lacks conviction and insight. Students of cultural history might well turn to De Forest; for as recent a writer as Russell Kirk\(^1\)

\(^1\)The Conservative Mind: From Burke to Santayana, Chicago, 1953.

traces many of the ethical values of our time back to shifts that began in the transitional period following 1850. I believe that, as social history of three crucial decades of American life, De Forest's work will increase in value with the years.
De Forest was an artist, however, with an artist's responsibility to give esthetic form and meaning to his work. Unfortunately, in his art as well as in his social history, De Forest reflected the transitional quality of his time. His work gives evidence of the conflict between romanticism and realism which was to decide the direction of American literature for the next century. De Forest's choice of realism as a method makes him not only a pioneer in that direction but also an outstanding example of the difficulty of breaking with tradition when no precedent is available. True, he had the precedent of the Europeans, men like Balzac, Stendhal, and Flaubert, as well as the more familiar Dickens, Thackeray, and Trollope. And I think he unquestionably drew upon all these sources for inspiration and guidance. Yet De Forest had little precedent for dealing realistically with American materials. The frontier humorists and the local color writers were, by and large, realistic in method; but in scope and material they were narrowly restricted, and the nostalgia of the local colorists so obscured their materials as to make them untrustworthy guides.

De Forest's contributions toward the broadening of fictional materials and his insistence on the sincere reproduction of the milieu in idiomatic American English were steps in the direction of a more realistic American literature. The importance of such contributions can only be measured against the literary situation of the time. I do not think it too much to say that realism was the salvation of American literature. In De Forest's time literature
was responding to a kind of Gresham's law, which broadly stated is the theory that bad money drives out good. Between the sentimentalists and the writers of historical romances, the techniques of romanticism were circulating in increasingly debased form. The return of artistic integrity could be accomplished only by a revolutionary change. Restricting himself by neither the idealism of the romantics nor the delicate sensibilities of the sentimentalists, De Forest was working toward the revitalization of American literature.

De Forest wrote honestly of what he knew and what he saw, but he did not always like what he saw. To express his disapproval of the trend of the times, De Forest turned to humor. He had ample precedent for this procedure, for, as Constance Rourke points out, "In a sense the whole American comic tradition has been that of social criticism."² His realism was thus given a sharper edge;

²American Humor, p. 211.

but humor is a dangerous weapon. Like Mark Twain after him, De Forest grew increasingly bitter with the world and its treatment of him. The good-natured laughter of Seacliff became contempt in Honest John Vane. From pointing out the incongruities of his contemporaries, De Forest began to heighten their eccentricities, as in the portrayals of Bowlder or Hollowbread, until characterization became mere caricature. He thereby lessened their value as representative figures because he destroyed them as three-dimensional
characters.

Ironically, the transitional quality of De Forest's work, which makes him an interesting and notable literary figure, at the same time makes it necessary to evaluate his works as artistic failures. Though his efforts to reproduce the scenes and characters of American life were largely successful, the conflict between his realistic intentions and the romantic overtones which appear in both material and method defeated him. Even when he controlled his humor, he was unable to resolve the conflict of his age. The term "camel-leopard," which was commonly applied in De Forest's time to the giraffe, is symbolic of the duality of techniques in De Forest's writings. His use of romantic elements would not, perhaps, have been so destructive to the effectiveness of his novels had he not chosen to use the most stereotyped of the traditional materials—particularly the love-courtship plot with its wooden hero, heroine, and villain. His melodramatic incidents and fine writing are somewhat less damning but still contradictory in spirit to the photographic reality of his settings and his objective portrayal of character.

Even his most powerful work, Miss Ravenel's Conversion, lacks the consistency of tone, the singleness of purpose, and the consequent clarity of effect of a great work. I would judge Playing the Mischief his best novel. True, its subject matter, corruption in Washington, is not as intrinsically dramatic as a great war is
bound to be, nor do any of its characters have the dynamic power and intensity of Lillie Ravenel, Colonel Carter, or Mrs. Larue. But *Playing the Mischief* does possess an organic unity; each scene, each character, contributes to the inevitable resolution of the book. In comparison, De Forest's other works are mere compilations; event follows event with no seeming—and sometimes no actual—relationship to the story as a whole.

It was inevitable that as a pioneer realist De Forest should reflect the groping, the inconsistency, and even the self-consciousness which characterize pioneer efforts. By the same token, it was inevitable that such efforts would not produce first-rate literature. Like the camel-leopard, which was neither, De Forest was neither realist nor romantic. It was his misfortune to be a truly transitional novelist.
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