Thesis

The Novel,
Its Tendencies and Influence,
For the Degree of

B. L.

In the College of Literature and Science,

By

Mabel Jones

1891.
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The Novel, its Tendencies and Influence

It has been shown repeatedly that fiction provides the bulk of the material consumed by the reading public in this generation. The causes of this tendency to novel reading, the reason for the marked popularity of prose fiction is found in the nature of the novel itself and in that want in man’s nature which the novel meets. Life, the manners, customs, emotions, the joys and sorrows, pain and pleasures of our common humanity are treated in the novel more fully than in either history or poetry. Man craves such emotional food for his heart, such imaginative food for his mind and in the fulfilment of these needs of mind and heart lies the chief justification for the existence of the novel.

In reviewing the past we find the novel or its equivalent to have existed even from...
the beginning of the cultivation of letters and the art.
In its earliest form it consisted of tales of the
marvelous and unreal, tales like the "Arabian Nights"
in which form it was called the Romance. In a
later embodiment of the ideas treated by the novel,
the Drama the ancients found the action and workings of the great passions displayed, but to-day we
no longer frequent the theatre for the gratification
of this tendency in our nature, but in the quiet of
our homes open the covers of the novel.
The novel in literature, delineates
in an aesthetic manner man's emotional and
psychical nature as exhibited in his daily life.
In the recognition of the full import of the term
"aesthetic," we touch the mainspring of that character-
istic which in the most marked manner distinguishes
the novel from other departmens of literature.
The novel is the Art of literature. Its main object is that of all art is to please. The novel not only pleases but in an indirect way instructs. But should the secondary aim of instruction become paramount in any novel, to the exclusion of the aesthetic element, that novel would fail to meet the requirements demanded by our definition.

Again, the novel fulfills another important feature of all art, that of sociality. In its perfection it addresses itself to no class, no individual, but to all men, to humanity, just as a truly artistic production of the sculptor or painter bears a message, or interprets some emotion to all men, and as good music appeals alike to the cultured musician and the neglected street waif. The older novelists found their characters among the nobility or the higher stratum of life, but Fiction
today knows no such bounds. Many of our later and most celebrated novelists have broke the narrow lamp-pered lives of the poor, the subjects of their gifted pens.

Another characteristic of art, and therefore of the novel is its adherence and subservience to truth, and this brings us to the consideration of the rival tendencies of idealism and realism in the novel.

Prose fiction may oscillate between these extremes. In the past, in the Romance stage of the novel all was idealism. There was nothing of truth or probability. Gradually as man advanced farther from the childhood of intellect, he grew tired of reading of the impossible adventures of giants and fairies, and cried, “Oh, give me life, truth! Something we can feel to be at least possible.” Thus, little by little, the
pendulum swing past the middle point, till today
in the so-called Realistic school, of which Zola is
the recognized exponent, we have the other extreme
This school, dating from about 1880, holds that
nothing but what has actually been observed in
life should be portrayed by the
novelist.

Everyone agrees that in the novel we
want reality, the truth, man’s life as it is. Carlyle
says, “The thing that is, what can be so wonderful,
what, especially to us, that are so far from such
significance. Study Reality, search out deeper and
deepen its quite endless mystery, see it, know it
then whether thou wouldst learn from it and
again teach, or love it, or love it or despise it
or in any way relate thyself to it, thou hast the
finest enduring basis, that hieroglyphic page is
one than cannot read on forever, find new mystery in forever." Yes, art demands truth, but the novelist of Zola's school fails to give us truth, a full symmetrical view of life, but putting a certain phase of life under the object of his powerful microscope he gives us the benefit of his observation. No object to this repulsive and morbid, unhealthy view of life. It is no more fall and satisfactory than would be the drawing of a man, should the artist draw the head complete in every detail, connecting it with the mere outline of a dwarfed and stunted body. Moreover, a true and esthetic representation of character or any art, is not necessarily actual, but is one which in its truth to life and humanity might be actual. In other words it must be one built on the general principles of nature. James Lully, in a recent discussion of
the realistic tendency in modern fiction says. The radical fault in the so-called realistic school is that it regards fact and disagreeable fact as synonymous."

"The novelist should not ignore the existence of evil in the world, for, as Emerson declared, "No picture of life can be true and reality which does not admit the odious facts." But if evil is shown in its true relations with the other elements in life, the novel will not produce the depressed and oft-times disgusted feeling left by some modern novels. Life is not all dark, truth and goodness, religion and justice, health and happiness are still in the ascendency, the impression given by the nominal realist to the contrary notwithstanding."

The idealistic tendency not in the
sense of the Romance, depicting the marvellous and
miracle, but in the truer sense having for its
basis of conception the real, holding up before
man the image of a nobler condition, a broader
view of life built entirely on principles
common to man's nature, giving him an ideal of
something he is not but may be joined to a
true representation of the goodness hidden in humanity,
the general tendency in the world toward
the amelioration of distress, the sweetness of love and
friendship, the joys of home, the truth of religion and
the love of God and all his creatures, for the sort of
novel, idealistic and realistic that the world most
needs.

A characteristic of later prose fiction
is the employment of Psychology. What is a novelist?
Taine asks, and he answers: In my opinion he is a
psychologist who naturally and involuntarily sets Psychology at work. He is nothing else or more. He labors to manifest the invisible world of inward inclinations and dispositions by the visible world of outward words and actions. 'Instances of the idea of Psychology are to be found in the works of many of our best novelists. What is Hawthorne's "Scarlet Letter" but a conf. study, a study of the mysterious, the doubt, the inexplicable workings of a soul burdened with sin? Yes, Elliot, that "Century Magazine" is preeminent among novelists for the analyses of the subjective experiences of her characters? Victor Hugo also displays the conscience and phenomena of the soul to a marked degree.

The mind of man is so constituted, his heart is so nearly in sympathy with the
Divine, that the inner motion, the impulse, the hidden and nameless unrest of the soul tends h"un more deeply and interest him more deeply than the outward actions and events of life, in which they find expression. Thus it is that the soul of the reader is moved by the turbulent passions, the joys and sorrows of the characters of fiction. The feelings we ourselves have experienced we find delineated in the novel. We are taken from our real world into a larger world, peopled with beings constructed on the same general principles as ourselves. Engelsoll says, nothing can be more marvelous than the common everyday facts of life. Men and women are enough for men and women. In their lives are all the tragedy and comedy that they can comprehend.
natural and marvelous marks another recent characteristic of prose fiction. This use has been distinguished from the use in the old Romances. Dreams and their study also figure prominently in late novels. As examples of writers who have made use of the supernatural in fiction may be mentioned Dickens, Scott and Charlotte Brontë.

We hear the complaint that the market is flooded with novels of low value and that few novels of real worth have been produced within late years. The great productivity in this field of literature shows that the novel meets a need of modern society and that the supply is a consequence of that demand. In regard to the second complaint we can only say that just now seems to be the barren rain-
In the season of prose fiction, and that in the near future we may look for the fruitful spring and summer time of the novel. Of recent novelists in America surely Mr. Hams, Dumas, mention and some judge believe that the English writer, Ripling, has come as an earnest of the fruitful summer time we expect.

If what the future novel will be, many have been the conjectures. Most writers on the subject agree in holding that a most glorious future is store for the novel. Following present tendencies the novelist will yield place and more to man's natural instinct for the mysterious and beautiful and that hidden occult world of fascinating mystery, as seldom fully disclosed since man's inner self shall act, will move and more become his sphere. The coming novel will show
The individual in connection with ideas and social organizations in a fuller manner than in the past. That late years have produced my great novelisce is true, but so also is it true that the development of the novel within the last century has shown the tendency to keep pace with human development in other lines. This is shown in a marked manner by a comparison of the works of an early writer as Fielding with those of a modern writer as Dickens or Thackeray.

The value of the novel consists mainly in its power of producing an aesthetic impression on man's mind by elevating his emotional nature through his imagination, and by bringing him to a more wholesome and dignified point of view and its responsibilities. The attention to the story, the study of any moral truth as brought out by the story cannot fail to start ideas which in their result produce an elevation of soul. In the
old form of the novel, the romance, and in the drama, how narrow was the scope given for moral influence, and how wide the extent and how glorious the opportunity in the modern form! Sully thinks Shakespeare would have made a greater noblest than he is, a dramatist again, aside from its moral value, the novel is valuable as a means of becoming acquainted with character. The opportunity for the study of man in real life is comparatively limited, and it would be impossible from personal observation to gain the broad general view of life one finds displayed in the masterpieces of Dickens, Scott and Hugo.

The motive of fiction has a wide field of choice of subject and form of expression. Adventure in all walks, past history, present events, tradition and the "ever young romance of love" besides problems of government, religious creeds, all
social reforms, and even the hidden future are the legitimate subjects of his employ.

The world is without doubt an

immense power for good in society. In its range of subject and moral influence it rivals even the pulpit. In the main it scatters breadth of ideas, intelligence and good moral teachings.

The only danger in regard to novel reading is that the novel on account of its attractiveness will be allowed to crowd out the less interesting but more substantial works on history, biography and science. The novel, though valuable, should not be permitted to usurp the chief place in course of reading. It is the duty of every educated and cultivated person, neither should it be excluded from such a person's course of reading. The only wise novel do is not be denied forever. Only the good endures in art.
and literature as well as in civilization; and with a deep thankfulness for the past beneficence of the novel, we may confidently look forward to the future for the enlarged and doubled fiction it is sure to bring.

Mabel Jones.