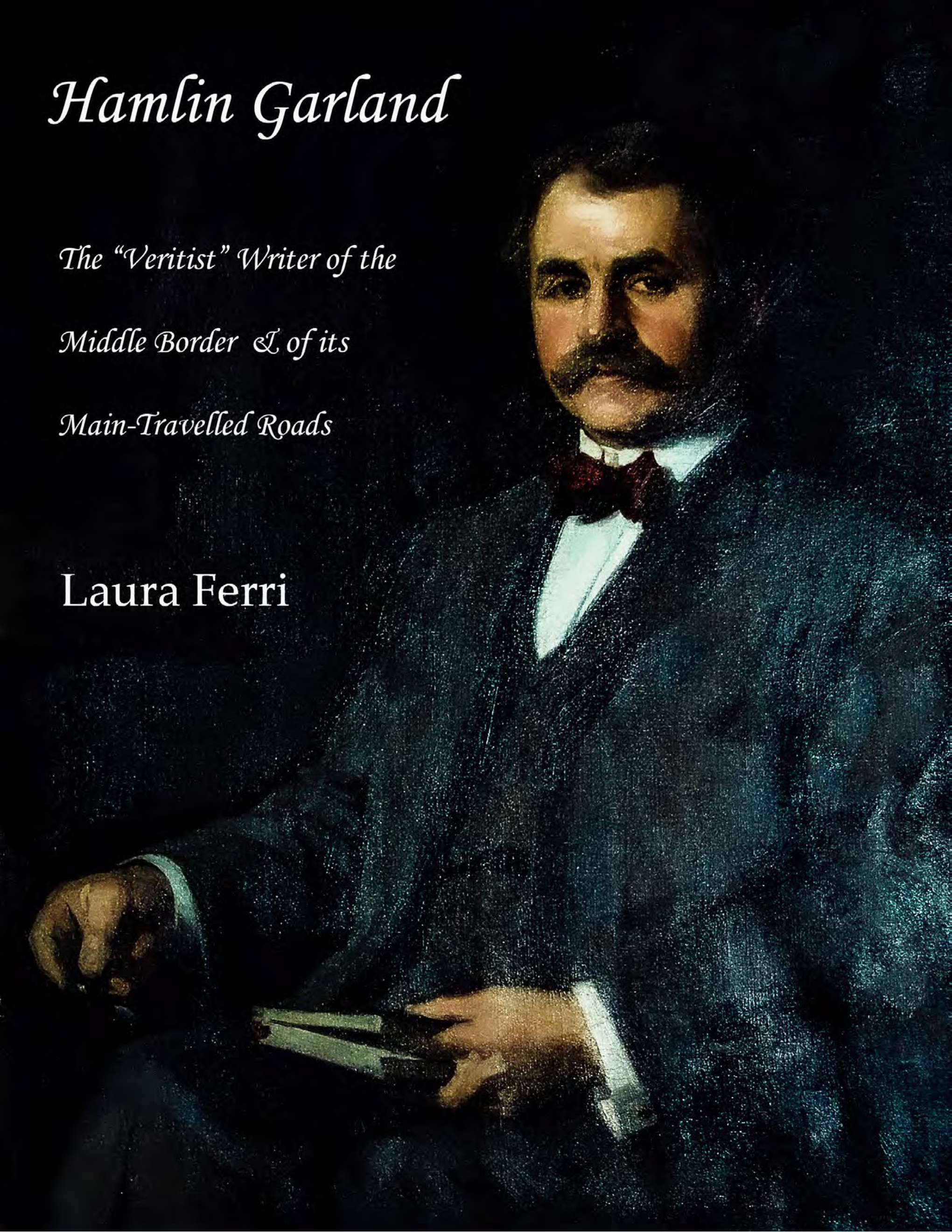
Hamlin Garland

The "Veritist" Writer of the

Middle Border & of its

Main-Travelled Roads



Laura Ferri

About the Author

Laura Ferri was born in Siena, Italy in 1943, where she currently resides. Laura studied foreign literature and translations at the University of Pisa and graduated in 1965 with her thesis, *Hamlin Garland, the "Veritist" Writer of the Middle Border & of its Main-Travelled Roads*. Now, more than a half-century later, we are the beneficiaries of Laura recently translating her original Italian language work into impeccable English.

After a lengthy teaching and writing career in Italy, Laura served for many years as the coordinator of the Siena-Toronto Centre at the University of Siena and today she is director of the cultural association *CanaDiana* in Italy. In her work with the Siena-Toronto Centre and *CanaDiana*, she has focused on promoting Canadian literature in Italy as both a translator and editor.

Her translations into Italian include works by Canadian authors as well as the *Chicago Poems* by Cliff Dweller Carl Sandburg and works by Stephen Crane. In addition to her work in Italy as a translator and editor, she has published essays in Canadian and European literary journals. Her articles on Alice Munro, the 2013 Nobel Prize Winner in Literature, are referenced in the Italian collection of Munro's shortstories.

While accompanying her husband to a medical conference in Chicago in 2006, she had an opportunity to stop by The Cliff Dwellers. She was warmly welcomed by receptionist Bob Thiebout, who immediately introduced them to me during my tenure as Club president.

This fortuitous trip to Chicago gave Laura and her late husband a chance to visit and dine at the place she had first learned about as a student while researching the life and writings of Hamlin Garland. In 2007 my wife Cathy and I paid a reciprocal visit to Laura and her husband at the Siena-Toronto Centre and Laura and I have kept up a correspondence over the intervening years since.

The recent availability of an English translation of Laura's work has opened a new and important window onto the life and work of Hamlin Garland, the founding father of The Cliff Dwellers.

William J. Bowe
The Cliff Dwellers
May 2, 2021

Hamlin Garland: the 'Veritist' Writer of the Middle Border and of its Main-Travelled Roads

Laura Forconi Ferri

HAMLIN GARLAND

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Chapter I

A Son of the "Middle Border"[1]

A significant picture of Hamlin Garland during the most important years of his literary career is offered by his contemporary J.E. Chamberlin, who described him as a young man extraordinarily handsome. Of medium height, and slender build, he wore brown thick hair and a long tawny beard which made him look like an apostle. His grave and pensive manner increased this effect. He would have been a perfect model for John, his favourite apostle. He was very young and he seemed to carry centuries of study on his big square shoulders. But behind his pensive manner there were not centuries of study. There were, rather, his experiences, pregnant with literary significance, as son and survivor of the Middle Border. In fact, with the conflict between attraction and repulsion it exerted on him, the Middle Border was the main component of Garland's personality.

Garland was born in 1860 in Wisconsin[2] and his life was intimately connected with the vicissitudes of the frontier: his father, Richard Garland, a farmer from Maine, enticed by "the sunset" (*A Son* 35), was urged by a restless impulse throbbing deep in his blood to drive his family farther and farther west as the frontier moved on and on[3]. Of the various stages of the frontier which marked the journey of this typical American pioneer, the most significant for Hamlin was perhaps that in Iowa. Up till then his feelings had grown within the halo of heroism which in his childhood imagination he saw enwrapping his family members. An indelible impression on Hamlin was certainly left by his father, who had plenty of stories from his adventurous past to nourish a child's fantasy, or by his uncles, the Mc.Clintocks, sons of the mystic Adventist, Hugh Mc.Clintock, fine fiddlers, endowed by Celtic inheritance with "a deep vein of poetry"(18). It was probably to the fascination exerted by those characters that were due Garland's heroic view of the pioneer and the sympathy with which he wrote about frontier life in spite of the fact that his personal experience as an adult had made him well aware of the frustration, physical and spiritual, that such life entailed.

When Richard Garland undertook the march towards "the sunset regions" of Iowa, Hamlin had not yet experienced any disillusion about the frontier and was enthused by the sight of the limitless prairie expanses. But during the very years spent in Iowa, "now the place of the rainbow" (35), from 1871 to 1875, this juvenile enthusiasm began to dissolve.

In the grandeur of the landscape, he perceived "the superabundant glow and throb of nature's life" (116) - a constant contrast to the bleakness of the farm life he knew and, at the same time, an inflamed source of images that coloured the backdrop to his literary rendition of the West: white and purple clouds sailing majestically in the sky, caressing voices of the west wind, myriads of subdued sounds and murmurs filling everywhere the wide expanses of the prairie, boundless wheat fields of gold, shafts of crimson light

inundating the ocean of corn ears lazily undulating under the wing of the wind at sunset[4]. But under the martial discipline that his "soldier father"[5] had imposed upon his children, entrusting them with hard, daily tasks, Hamlin learned that the fascination of the natural world was only a momentary relief from the severe toil demanded by farm life. When at the age of ten, suffering from exasperating loneliness and whipped by the relentless northern wind, he, all alone, had to run the plow from morning to dusk, or when at harvest time the burning sun scorched his shoulders bent and aching under the grip of fatigue[6], he learned that the exhilarating rapture of the boundless prairie expanse could be surpassed by bitter feelings of rebellion.

With his increasing experience of the realistic aspects of farm life, the lure of wild pristine regions, of soil untouched by the plow vanished and the myth of the frontier started to dissolve: notwithstanding the promising abundance of the crops, the Garlands' home, like the others in the neighbourhood, was graceless and lacking in basic comforts; although a constantly improving collection of farm machinery somewhat mitigated the men's toil, their wives were condemned to incessant labor, and Hamlin began to resent the daily unrelenting drudgery which debased his mother's existence[7]. Colonization was pressing in Iowa, and as the fenced territories increased in number, young Garland realized that his father and uncles' world was rapidly receding into the realm of nostalgic memory.[8] With profound melancholy and regret, in adulthood he was to cherish his childhood life:

> It all lies in the unchanging realms of the past – this land of my childhood. Its charm, its strange dominions cannot return save in the poet's reminiscent dream [...] it was a magical world, born of the vibrant union of youth and fire light, of music and the voice of moaning winds, a music which can never come again to you or me, father, uncle, brother till the coulee meadows bloom again unscarred of spade or plow. (*A Son* 56)

But back then, his experiences of farm life in Iowa provoked in him disgust and rebellion, and a growing dual attitude of attraction and repulsion urged him to seek escape in Boston and then led him to the frontier again, in search of artistic inspiration.

Back on the frontier, his penchant for social denunciation mingled with his personal sympathy for the inhabitants of the prairie, as appears in the stories he wrote about the Middle Border farmer.

In Dakota, where in the general wave of optimism he had bought some land[9], while the enthusiasm that had transported his fearless pioneer father was on the wane[10], he had to take decisions about his future life, It was then that he experienced more urgently that need to escape which was rooted in that childhood he insisted on presenting as burdened and deformed by the merciless weight of labor, and yet capable of yielding abundant compensation for that burden: an inexhaustible wealth of deep-felt emotions and lyrical intimations. In *A Son of the Middle Border* he wrote how the charm of the world of his youth was disappearing:

> Meanwhile an ominous change had crept over the plain [...] Smiling faces were less frequent [...] week by week the holiday spirit faded from the colony and men in feverish unrest uttered words of bitterness (260).

There, the lure of the "Sunset Regions" appeared as "a bitter mockery" (261), and Hamlin, "eager to escape the loneliness of the treeless sod" (264), turned his back to the frontier, set out on a reversed journey and headed East, along the road once trodden under the urge of his father's thrust in moving westward. When in the rainy, gray November of 1884 he settled in Boston, "the home of literature," his declared intention was to become a teacher, but the ardour with which he immersed himself in Bates Hall, the reading room of the Boston Public Library, betrayed the more ambitious objective to conquer that "province of art" (231).

That was an arduous attempt. The endeavour was made particularly difficult by the limited cultural preparation, with which he, humble and frustrated, was entering the "city of light and learning." The diploma of the Cedar Valley Seminary[11] at Osage, obtained in 1881, was not a guarantee of solid culture[12]. Equally small was the literary preparation acquired prior to the Osage Seminar. In spite of the considerable impact on his *bildung*, the family environment did not certainly help him to form a consistent knowledge of literature, even though he attributed to his parents and uncles a certain artistic influence, and to his grandmother and great-aunt Bridges from St. Louis his first literary instruction, "a partial offset to the vulgar yet heroic influence of the raftsmen and mill hands" (29), a rudimentary knowledge that he eventually enlarged with the McGuffey Readers[13], in the country school he attended when the bad weather saved him from the work in the fields.

In spite of his limited cultural background, Garland could, nevertheless, draw on his own personal resources to deal with the difficulties of his cultural growth: as 'a son of the Middle Border' he was equipped with a personality the most significant traits of which seem to have coincided perfectly with the general intellectual features America owed to the frontier. As Turner argued in *The Frontier in American History*:

> To the frontier the American intellect owes its striking characteristics. That coarseness and strength [...] that pragmatic, inventive cast of mind. Quick to find expedients, that masterful grasp of material things, lacking in the artistic, but powerful to effect great ends; that restless nervous energy, that dominant individualism, and that exuberance and buoyancy which comes from freedom. (57)

While he was pursuing a career in Boston, energy, individualism, practical turn of mind, optimism appeared to be Garland's own features, those very same features that in various ways surfaced in his works.

With great energy, Garland, "fresh from the sunlight of the prairie" (*A Son* 271), faced the first moments of bewilderment in Boston where, confined all day within the grey walls of

Bates'Hall, he seemed to have plunged into "a darker world, a world of storm, of grey clouds, of endless cold." (271).

The letters of reference he showed around were no help, he was not admitted to the classes of Harvard College, and therefore found himself self-learned to pursue his studies with no mentor or guidance. Nevertheless, knowing that his limited finances would not allow him more than a few weeks in Boston, but strenuously determined to fight discouragement, with striking rapidity he acquired the basic aesthetic, philosophical and social learning on which to rest his future work. He spent days and nights in that dark library, engrossed in his reading and learning, promptly responding to the work of culture he was getting in touch with. In *A Son of the Middle Border* he wrote:

> My mental diaphragm creaked with the pressure of inrushing ideas. My brain, young, sensitive to every touch, took hold of facts and theories like a phonographic cylinder, and while my body softened and my muscles wasted from disuse, I skittered from pole to pole of the intellectual universe like an impatient bat. (273)

In his readings he followed the path suggested by the only somewhat important works he had come across prior to his arrival in Boston – Taine's *History of English Literature*, Eggleston's *The Hoosier Schoolmaster*, Howells' *The Undiscovered Country*. Widening his interest in positivism generated by his newly acquired knowledge of Taine's and Ingersoll's theories, he immersed himself into the perusal of works by Darwin, Haeckel, Helmotz, Fiske: thus, in a short time he "became an evolutionist in the fullest sense, accepting Spencer as the greatest living thinker" (274).

Complementary and parallel to his adherence to positivistic tenets was his orientation towards realism in literature. The early interest aroused in him by *The Undiscovered Country* [14] combined with the remote influence by Eggleston, about whose *The Hoosier Schoolmaster* Garland noted: "This book is a milestone in my literary progress as it is in the development of distinctive western fiction" (97). Eggleston was, in fact, the leader of that western tradition of local literature into which fell the early works of Garland who, at the onset of his literary progress, maintained with a regionalist's pride:

> The farm life of New England has been fully celebrated by means of innumerable stories and poems: its husking-bees, its dances, its winter scenes are all on record; is it not time that we of the west should depict our own distinctive life? The Middle Border has its poverty, its beauty, if we can only see it. (297)

Garland's tie with the Middle Border and sense of place was interwoven with a penchant for social controversy. "With Henry George as guide, [he] discovered the main cause of poverty and suffering in the world" (280) and Henry George's *Progress and Poverty* inspired his desire "to battle for the right" (265), which was an ethical urge perfectly in tune with his apostle-like look, but aimed only against one single target: the economic injustice on the Middle Border.

So, at his appearance on Boston's cultural scenery, the Middle Border was Garland's main social and literary concern. As a matter of fact, he always kept the Middle Border in his heart, even though the need of independence had driven him away from it. His bond with that world was never severed, not even when, after an initial bewilderment, he had rapidly achieved a prestigious position in the hub of American culture.

In Boston he became the protégé of Hurd, the editor of the *Transcript*, and got acquainted with the great democrat of literature, Walt Whitman, above all, he met William Dean Howells, "the most vital literary man in all America at [that] time" (324). Howells treated him as a fellow-writer rather than as a disciple and during their long-standing friendship, he was the mentor whose stimulating advice the young author went constantly to seek[15].

Garland made other friends, creating a thick network of connections and correspondences, with such zeal and ability as to be accused of opportunism. But then, already moving at great ease around Boston's literary circles,

He had probably been led towards positivism also by his natural tendency to an "imperious grasp of material things" and by his innate individualism, his other attribute as son of the frontier fully compliant with Spencer's creed. with success near at hand, he realized that city was only "a story already told," a song already sung" which did not inspire him to write. He "remained immutably of the middle border" with an ever growing desire to celebrate the West (296).

Therefore, in 1887 he returned to the Middle Border, armed with a rationalistic mind and literary aspirations, illumined by *Progress and Poverty* on the causes of the western farmers' financial unease and determined 'to fight for the right.' In Dakota, while he worked for his father, "every detail of the daily life of the farm assumed literary significance in [his] mind" (314), on the way home, passing through Chicago he met Kirkland by whom was encouraged to write the truth about that life, and so he noted down all the unpleasant results of severe physical labor - the quick callusing of the hands, the sweating of the scalp, the swelling of the muscles - with no intention to exalt "toil into a wholesome and regenerative thing as Tolstoy, an aristocrat, had attempted to do" (314). In the autobiography, *A Son of the Middle Border*, he declared that his "visit to the west [...] was the beginning of [his] career as fictionist" (318).

On returning to Boston, "as a reformer [his] blood was stirred to protest. As a wrier [he] was beset with a desire to record in some form [his] newly born conception of the border" (318). The *Harper* and the *Century* rejected the stories he wrote with this new approach to the West; "one or two friendly souls" protested against his "false interpretation of western life;" publishers wanted love stories. But he did not give up. The force of his individualism combined in him with the stimulating influence of George and Whitman, under whose "inspiration he "had pondered the significance of democracy and caught some part of its spiritual import" (280). And that combination made him "more and more the dissenter from accepted economic as well as literary conventions" (320). With his grave and pensive manner, he became the spokesman of Henry George's theory, and

challenging Boston's conservative minds, took active part in the Single Tax and populist debate. He also invested his interest in the theatre with a radical and reformist spirit. Between 1889 and 1891, introduced by the Hernes into Boston's theatre circles, he influenced them with *avant gard* theories, promoting Spencer's agnosticism, the Single Tax, women's rights; and furthering interest in Ibsen, who was beginning to be celebrated in North America as a radical playwright. He himself wrote a few realistic plays expressing radical views and economic concerns - *Under the Wheel*, centered on the theme of the single tax, *A member of the Third House*, based on a legal scandal in Massachusetts.[16]

Garland's *avant gard* stance hindered the publication of his short stories, until publisher B.O. Flower's approval encouraged his radicalism. Flower was an ethically committed altruist, animated by reformist zeal and his magazine *The Arena* was of a decisively radical tenor. Following Flower's advice, Garland gathered all his western stories in the volume *Main-Travelled Roads*, which was published in 1891.

"The outcry against that volume was instant and astonishing" (*A Son* 352) to him. He had had "the foolish notion that the literary folk of the West would take a local pride in the colour" of his work. On the contrary, he was attacked with adverse editorials and criticisms, accused of giving utterly false descriptions of the Middle Border, execrated by nearly every critic as a rebel in art and 'as a bird willing to foul his own nest' (352). To the unexpected accusations of the critics was added tragedy in the family: his little sister Jessy died, his mother became hopelessly crippled and he developed a growing sense of guilt and disloyalty for having abandoned his family to the hardships he was denouncing in his work.

However, to console him for the bitterness of all that unfavourable criticism, there soon arrived Howell's encouraging letters and the applause of the great democrat of literature, Walt Whitman, "who hailed [him] as one of the literary pioneers of the west for whom he had been waiting" (356). Meanwhile, with a blunt statement of fact, he strenuously defended the disconcerting realism he had chosen for his book in the name of truth:

> I grew up on a farm and I am determined once for all to put the essential ugliness of its life into print. I will not lie, even to be a patriot. A proper proportion of the sweat, flies, heat, dirt and drudgery of it all shall go in. I am a competent witness and I intend to tell the whole truth. (353)

He resisted his conservative friends' exhortations to abandon radical ideas, not to be associated with writers like Whitman or cranks like H. George and their advice to consent to amuse the ruling classes (354), and for a certain time he remained the champion of realism.

Main-Travelled Roads was followed by some socially and politically committed novels: *Jason Edward*, *A member of the Third House*, *A Little Norsk*, *A Spoil of Office*. Between

1891 and 1892 his concern with the farmer's plight intensified: he held numerous meetings for the populist party in Chicago, Saint Louis, Boston[17], continuously translated his interests into action, and showed the practical sense and the energy that Turner recognized as the main contribution of the Frontier to the American intellect.

After 1892, however, Garland's social zeal gradually declined, his bonds with the populist revolt loosened, perhaps due to his failure to inflate the movement with enthusiasm for the Single Tax. As Donald Pizer pointed out in *Hamlin Garland's Early work and Career*, although he still considered himself a reformer for many years, "never again did his reform fervour reach the evangelical pitch it had attained during 1887-1892. And never again did it reach a level at which he was forced to identify the artist so completely with the reformer" (97).

Parallel to the dwindling of his social indignation was the transition in his fiction writings from a realistic and ethical commitment to a more sentimentalized and conventional view.

Garland appeared again as a radical realist in only three more works. In 1893 he published *Prairie Folks*, dealing with the same themes as those of *Main-Travelled Roads*. This time, criticism was expressed in a more respectful tone, as it was expected to be for an already well-established author. Afterwards there was the publication of *Crumbling Idols*, the summary of ideas he had been elaborating since before 1890. Finally in 1985 it was the turn of *Rose of the Dutcher's Coolly*, the realistic story of a girl who, albeit regretfully, abandoned her father in a farm, with the egotistical intention to seek new horizons and pursue a career. The book was considered more unpleasant than *Jude the Obscure.*[18]

Such adverse criticism against his prairie stories put an end to Garland's career as a middle border realist. After 1895 Garland's vein of inspiration followed a different course[19].

During his frequent journeys out of the city in search of inspiration, his point of view became exactly that of the summer tourists whom he had once despised because of their false legend about idyllic western rusticity. The defence of the cause of the Red Skin, of the miner in the West, of the conservation of natural resources, along with the gold rush in Yukon became the main themes of *The Captain of the Gray Horse Troop*, of *Hesper*, of *Cavanagh* and of *The Long Trail* – the most notable novels of his latter career. But he dealt with the social issues inconsistently and in a detached way, and, as according to Taylor, those novels never reached a level higher than respectable mediocrity.[20]

Meanwhile Garland moved to Chicago from Boston, which had now decayed from America's literary capital. Thus he escaped Fowler's pressing ethical influence and proposed to better control the preacher who was inside him[21]. Perhaps for this reason he became part of the *Chap Book*, even though proving fundamentally unable to adhere to the decisively fin-de siècle and cosmopolitan tendencies of that magazine - which published representatives of European Decadentism: Mallarmé, Verlaine, Max Beerbohn[22] - and , above all, proving unable to turn his formula "art for truth's sake" upside down into the formula "art for art's sake"[23]. As Taylor noted, the change in

Garland's literary career, after his arrival in Chicago, was determined by factors related to a new tenor of life,[24] including his marriage, the improved financial conditions of his parents (whom he had convinced to move from distant Dakota to a comfortable house in Wisconsin), as well as many other circumstances like his urgent need for quick earnings, his many friendships in the capitalistic *ambience,* the flattering praise he was receiving by well established fellow writers. "Instead of the thrill of the solitary discovery of Whitman and Taine and Spencer and H. George, now he had the thrill of being the guest of Theodore Roosevelt," Taylor observed (*op. cit* 178).

It is certainly true that Garland's inspiration and themes became weaker and more conventional as his personal bonds with the Middle Border were lost to an increased middle class complacency. But when he returned to those places of his youth, not with inflamed spirit of revolt, but with a nostalgic, poetical distancing of emotions, his inspiration gave a last vivid spark enabling him to produce his autobiographical works, *A Son of the Middle Border* (1917) considered by many his masterpiece, *A Daughter of the Middle Border* (1921), with which he was awarded the Pulitzer Prize, *Trail Makers of the Middle Border*[25]. *"*A domestic chronicle of the frontier," as Spiller defined them in his *Literary History of the United States* (II, 1020), these works describe Garland's childhood events, his gradual adaptation to Boston's and Chicago's literary environments, his father and family's vicissitudes on the frontier, the fall of the pioneers' dream and their backward journey.

The phase of recollections and memories did represent the last creative period in Garland's career. After that, his inspiration froze, and up to the very end of his life he rarely escaped the attacks of critics. He was accused of betraying the social cause, of literary decline, prolixity in his memory books, conservative attitudes. In fact the writer often showed the irritation of the conservative, or rather of the survivor in an age which was no longer his: he disapproved of pornography in the theatre, Jews in schools, the increased number of immigrants in New York, whom he considered responsible for the nation's cultural decay[26].

Having been the target of inflamed unfavourable criticism throughout his writing career, and very rarely the object of unconditioned approval, as the years went by he could not escape moments of disillusion and dismay. After all, he had been long aware of the unremitting failing of his artistic inspiration. In *A Daughter of the Middle Border* he admitted: "As a writer I have failed. Perhaps I can be of some service as a citizen [...] the scrape of my pen became a weariness (280). At that point, literary success had long lost its appeal on Garland. He was just happy with the results of an honest artisan-like use of the pen. Nor was that kind of success to be sought as a reason for financial well being, which he mainly derived from the steady profits given by his farms in Oklahoma. On the other hand the affection of his family was abundant recompense for all his dissatisfactions as a writer. However, he continued painstakingly to lead a life full of cultural interests and commitments. In 1918 he was elected member of the American Academy of Arts. Thus he could enjoy such high prestige as Howells' among the leading cultural personalities of the time, but disappointed those who had seen him as the rebel in revolt against the

literary hierarchies consecrated by that kind of academies: he had become “an intellectual aristocrat,”[27] as in his self definition, but was betraying the democratic views once expressed in *Crumbling Idols.*

Changing views and attitudes, he undertook several journeys abroad, on his own or with his family: in England he met Shaw, Hardy, Barrie[28], widening his friendships to an international dimension.

After his biographical books he produced two more works, which were inspired by an interest in the occult. When he died, in fact, he was writing *The Fortunate Exile*, a document of the years he had lived since 1930 with his daughter, in California: he was exploiting his historical autobiographical resource, the last remained to him as a writer.

In Hollywood he had become a characteristic figure. He walked down the avenues, with long hair and a noble dignified gait. He made one think of Hawthorne, Mark Twain, Longfellow[29].

Chapter II

The decline of the agrarian civilization in the West and the rise of realism

After the Civil War what characterized America was the clash between new forces and the old economic and political system dictated by Jefferson's agrarian policies. That system, although bound to succumb in the unequal strife against the growing industrial capitalism, did not disappear without clamour or victims: before it was completely submerged by the industrial middle class power, at the end of the 19th century, it exploded with a last flare which took the shape of different movements, from the Grange, to the Farmers' Alliance, to Populism.

Having grown under the pressure of war needs, American industry in the North seemed to converge into the ever wider channels the vigorous individualism and the rude sense of freedom developed by the pioneers in their advance westward. In fact, while the frontier, the vital force of American democracy was closing, huge titans emerged from the industrial agglomerations and from the unrestrained rush to the economic hegemony of the nation, to control banks, credit and firms. Mainly starting from scratch, magnates like Rockfeller, Jay Gould, Jay Cooke, and all the group of minor noveaux riches summed up their ethics in the words of the same Rockfeller: "I am bound to be rich! Bound to be rich!"[30]

The trust in progress accompanying the rise of evolutionary theories was the springboard for the capitalists' action, while the idea of evolution intended as the product of the struggle for life, in which the weakest are bound to succumb and be eliminated by the more powerful, vaguely legitimated their ethics, their corruption, their boundless egotism.

The defenseless victim of capitalism was the Middle Border farmer. The Homestead Act of 1862 gave a strong push to the colonization of the West, allowing settlers to have 160 acres of land after they had occupied it for a given period of time. The process was accelerated by the discovery of minerals, by the building of transcontinental railroads and by a huge wave of European immigrants who poured into the last frontier, the area between the settled areas along the Pacific and the territories reached by the pioneers' westward advance[31].

The fruits of the Homestead Act were soon wasted with the large concession areas given by the state to the railway companies which were stretching in an ever thicker and wider network all over the country. Equally fast died away the optimism that had originally inflamed the settlers' dream[32]. The farmers were soon caught in the grip of the railway companies' policies, strangled by the costs imposed on the transportation of their agricultural

produce. The refrain "In God we trusted, in Kansas we busted" became the epitome of the Middle Border farmers' disillusion, the slogan of their retreat eastward where they went to increase the steady growth of the industrial proletariat[33]. All this inevitably led to a clash between capitalistic and agrarian forces, between plutocracy and democracy, between the unifying and centralizing movement in the East and the differentiating trends of the pioneers' individualism in the West.

Agrarian and proletarian economics were not granted too much attention by American economists, early attempts of denunciation were ridiculed, left wing European thinkers, like Saint-Simon, Louis Blanc, Marx were ignored, and, as Parrington put it, "the pessimism of Ricardo and Malthus, bred of the bitter dislocations of English industrial life, was diluted into an optimism more suited to the temper of the New World" (*Main Currents in American Thought* 104). The evils brought about by the industrial revolution were not so insignificant as to be ignored, but "the more distinguished critics," with "minds saturated with a decadent aristocratic culture" (*ibid.* 138) either withdrew into dethatched skepticism, or got lost among various abstract conjectures in concealed or overt defence of plutocratic interests. The agrarian class was notably disadvantaged, lacking class consciousness and theoretical support by contemporary thinkers, and being deprived of the original vital hopefulness, now directed to the industrial centres, it was fragmented into variegated groups of European peasants lured to the frontier by the mirage of free lands.

The farmers, once considered the people of God, now were no more than villains featuring in satirical cartoons, with no representatives in the Congress. However, challenged by the hardships of their life they engaged in a more and more strenuous struggle against the domination of plutocratic powers over the country. In defence of their rights, in the course of the 1880s they first organized the Grange and the Farmers' Alliance, which operated mainly in the social and financial areas, and later formed a more political movement which was to develop into a third party, the populist party, opposing the traditional Republican and Democratic parties. [34]

Garland had a keen interest in the evolving of the agrarian revolt as he strongly desired the improvement of the western farmer's plight. His democratic sensibility could not but be in tune with the expression of the Jeffersonian spirit against plutocratic tendencies. Like B.O. Flower, he became one of the most vital voices of the agrarian protest, proposing the adoption of the policies indicated by that group of reformers – H. Evans, H.Greely, P.Cooper, W. Philips, and above all H.George – who generally lacked an academic

education in economics, but were equipped with a greater sense of the real ongoing situation, or at least did not pretend to ignore it.[35] They maintained that the farmer's natural rights should be recognized; monopoly was to be abolished and agrarian property regulated. The leading personality in his group was Henry George and Garland was his disciple.[36] Even though George was anchored on facts and not based on abstract speculations, his social philosophy clearly echoed the physiocratic thought of the 18th century. In fact, the core of his theories was the principle that "The equal right of all men to the use of the land is as clear as their equal right to breathe the air . It is a right proclaimed by the fact of their existence." (George, *Progress and Poverty* 338).

Believing he had found the causes of the failures of this principle, he had identified the origins of any social injustice with the agrarian monopoly and with the private property of the land, because he maintained that "Nobody can be right fully entitled to the ownership of anything which is not the produce of his own labor." (*ibid.* 336). As a remedy against the agrarian monopoly and the speculations of big landowners, he thought that it would be right "to abolish all taxation, save that upon land values" (406), and proposed the "single tax" as the sole source of government revenues. Farmers would be exempted from it and given, therefore, the possibility to enjoy all the fruits of their labor. But the proposal was too utopian to be included into the populist movement and Garland's enthusiastic propaganda of the "single tax" resulted to no avail.

Even though the awareness it raised did not achieve much in response to social and financial demands, it did affect the literary field insinuating into it a sense of unease which greatly disturbed the non committal complacency of the 'genteel tradition.' In fact it gave an impulse to the trends towards naturalism which characterized the works of Crane, Norris and London.

As Alfred Kazin maintained, North American literature was born out of the new generations' protest and bewilderment at finding no direction when they realized that the old formalist culture was no longer of any use. According to Kazin the populists who voiced the feelings of the farmers of the West were the first realists of the new literary era to speak openly and courageously of the perils of plutocracy and to express something of that bewilderment and anxiety which followed the Secession War; they were the first to contribute to the rise of a literature of the people, often rustic, yes, but based on common needs and struggles; they were the first to proclaim the everlasting value of Jefferson's submerged democracy, which was to remain the legacy of a great part of the American people till the First World War [37].

Besides, the agrarian unrest, other elements contributed to change the features of American literature after the Civil War. Mainly they were Spencer's theories and the tenets of European naturalism.

Parallel to the passage from an agrarian to an industrial era there occurred a shift from a theological and transcendental to a scientific and materialistic vision.[38] Even though Kazin thought that America was philosophically and spiritually disarmed in front of the

sudden rise of capitalism and its ethics (contrary to what happened in Europe where Marx, Ruskin, Morris, Arnold provided a solid theoretical construct to face the consequences of the Industrial Revolution)[39], we must recognize that positivism spread even in America, in a rapid and very significant way with the same consequences as elsewhere.

In their attempts to modernize literature, the post-war generations mostly turned to Spencer: the trust in progress and the need for personal freedom implicit in his philosophy, easily grafted onto the traditional American optimism and responded perfectly both to the views of the reformist and to those of the capitalist. The age when works by Hawthorne, Melville, Emerson were now given only absent-minded admiration, was particularly prone to the influence of literatures from abroad, to defend which rose Howells who promoted the knowledge of Russian and Spanish realists, of Zola and Ibsen[40].

The introduction of the European philosophical thought into American literature gave it a strong impetus to emancipate from many prejudices and to infringe the genteel tradition of New England's sterile literature. The aristocratic conservatism and immobility into which Boston had fallen once the big writers of the past had disappeared from the scene, would have not been a serious loss if the representatives of refined culture had not attempted to impose their standards and their obsolete mentality on the whole nation[41]. Instead, the pressure of their impositions was so heavy nor to be resented by the new generations of writers imbued with new ideals. Consequently, there developed a movement of revolt and dislocation from hegemonic Boston –.analogous to the Middle West farmers' revolt against the East's economic monopoly- which resulted into a decisive realistic orientation in literature.

Against the essentially idealistic genteel tradition was enunciated the principle of adherence to reality; against Boston's tribute to the past, there grew a need to deal with the present; against New England's cultural uniformity "local color" conjured the literary resources of every single region, directing them towards realism. Although "local color" writers accepted current inhibitive standards of decorum and respectability of ideas and language and tended to sentimentalized situations, due to the very need to restrict their observation to local confines, they notably contributed to the cause of realism[42]. However, new positions were assumed with a certain caution. While the theories of positivism jumped to the fore already mitigated in Fiske's puritan identification of

The caution of the realistic orientation in American literature is testified by the fact that the European influences the Americans were more inclined to accept came from such writers as Turgenev, Tolstoy, Ibsen.

Those writers were no thorough realists[44], but because they did not slip into the extremes of Zola's naturalism, they were more likely to exert a steadier effect on the American writers' sensibility.

Underrating the romantic individualism in Ibsen, and the mysticism in Tolstoy, American literates saw those writers along with Turgenev as the champions of realism and the

renovators of literature to be appreciated and imitated for their interest in people's ordinary life, for their honest reproduction of average people's true language, for their simple and easy writing technique, for their freedom to judge and denounce social injustice.

On the contrary, it was not easy to accept Zola in America. And nobody followed his lesson until Norris saw the highest expression of romanticism in him. Intolerant of the tranquil everyday life proposed by Howells in literature, Norris was enthused by Zola's naturalism because it showcased ugly situations and characters disrupted from the uniform course of ordinary life.[45] His kind of enthusiasm did not render justice to the intention of Zola who aimed at clinic objectivity. However it was typical of the American attitude to consider the French writer a romantic sensationalist, both in the negative and positive meaning of the definition. In what Norris praised of Zola's naturalism, the spokesman of the American prejudices about the French school, W.D. Howells, saw an excessive distortion of real life. Against Zola's representation of the sordid, brutal aspects of life and his digging into the wounds of society, in *Criticism and Fiction* Howells proclaimed: "Our novelists concern themselves with the most smiling aspects of life which are the most American" (32). As Lars Ahnebrink noted, to French naturalism American critics preferred Spanish and Russian novelists in whose works, even the most realistic, "the characters are men and women however degraded; they are human and not animated embodiments of cardinal sins"[46].

With similar caution American writers approached the philosophy of determinism, even though current social conditions underlined the powerlessness of the individual, seen as a cog of the industrial machinery. Even authors who went beyond Howells' mild realism recognized only one principle of that doctrine, choosing to

Spencer's evolutionary law with a benign scope of Providence[43], realism took the first steps from the moderate Victorian realism of Howells, from the psychological realism of James (who investigated the interior reality that escaped the rigid schemes of scientific reality) from the "local color" realism which was more true to actuality, albeit optimistically romanticized.

believe in the influence of the environment rather than in the import of heredity: in their view, people's behaviour and self-realization were determined, independently of the individual's will, by their social *milieu* rather than by biological inheritance, that is, by removable contingent causes rather than by inevitable *a priori* conditions.

Notwithstanding their intentions of renewal, American authors were reluctant to accept a movement from abroad without exceptions, disregarding the native experience. The naturalistic tinge in some of their works was due to local historical circumstances as well as to their spirit of revolt and need of reform with which such situations were observed. It was not due to passive acceptance of a doctrine coming from elsewhere, alien to them albeitnot ignored or wanting in the power to affect them.

This was the case of Eggleston, Howe, Kirkland, Frederic. When the myth of the frontier was on the wane, those writers were urged to repellent descriptions of the farmer's life,

with indignation akin to the spirit of revolt which animated the agrarian protest. As Rolando Anzilotti pointed out in the preface to *Strade Maestre* these authors can be considered Garland's precursors for the naturalistic turn they gave to local color, adopting the theme of the West in their works and introducing it into American literature. They started the movement of vindications which culminated in the Chicago literary boom of 1893. That was the year when "Chicago was full in the spotlight of the National Stage" (Garland, *A Son* 387) with the World's Exhibition and seemed about to take its place among the literary capitals of the world. In *Crumbling Idols* Garland wrote:

> Centers of art production are moving westward, that is to say the literary supremacy of the East is passing away [...] racial influences are at work, and changes in literary social ideals are hastening a far- reaching subdivision, if not decentralization of power.(114)

The racial influences he was alluding to had probably found their first spokesman in Eggleston, seen by Garland as the pioneer of the novel of the Middle West[47].

In the preface to *The Hoosier Schoolmaster* Eggleston clearly showed that his objective was to raise the literary reputation of the West:

> It has been in my mind since I was a boy to do something toward describing the life in the backcountry districts of the Western States. It used to be a matter of no little jealousy with us, I remember, that the manners, customs, thoughts and feelings of New England country people filled so large place in books, while our own life, not less interesting, not less romantic and certainly not less filled with humours and grotesque material had no place in literature. It was as if we were shut out of good society. And, with the single exception of Alice Cary perhaps, our western writers did not dare speak of the West otherwise than as the unreal world to which Cooper's lively imagination had given birth. (29)

In this introduction there is moreover implied the intention to render a realistic non idyllic account of the West, distancing itself from previous romantic versions. As later did Garland, Eggleston pursued his aim by resorting to Taine's principle that characters were to be rendered according to their social milieu. Hence his work resulted into a faithfully realistic account of the farmers' environment in Indiana, in spite of the sentimentalism and moralism he imbued his narration with.

More severe and pessimistic was Howe's denunciation of the misery and spiritual narrowness of the West's bleak life in *Story of a Country Town*. Equally mean was the life in a farm of the York State presented by Frederic in *Seth's Brother's Wife*: men there

were deformed by their poor, vulgar, coarse, and narrow-minded environment, women, embittered by their desperate drudgery, were obliged to put up with and share the intellectual aridity of their husbands. In the same year as *Seth's Brother's Wife* Kirkland published *Zury*. Kirkland lived in "plutocratic grandeur" (*A Son* 300), but his work was inspired by a bitter spirit of denunciation of the conditions of rural life. Zury, a typical western man, along with Anne McVey and his two illegitimate children led a sordid life mortified by a miserable environment and unrewarding labour. Garland reviewed *Zury* and wrote:

> The writers of the West have not now risen to the full knowledge of the fact that the realistic study of their actual surrounding was their only salvation from utter conventionality [...] but the full revelation of the inexhaustible wealth of native American material will come to the eastern reader with the reading of *Zury* [...]. The book is moreover likely to have a very great influence upon any western writer who is planning a new novel. To say that Joseph Kirkland has written the most realistic novel of American interior society is to state the simple fact. [...]. Zury is unsurpassed in some respects by any story of American rural life hitherto written.(qtd in Ahnebrink, *op. cit*. 58)

With their regional claims, these forerunners of Garland positioned themselves in the 'local color' tradition, but insisting on the brutal aspects of rural life they lost a sort of sentimental taste for the picturesque with which that tradition curbed its realism, and thus they gave to American literature a decisive turn towards Naturalism. influenced by strains of skepticism and Darwinism, American naturalism did originate from the resentment and hatred stirring the rural class in the 1880s and 1890s, from the squalor and bitterness in the provinces and in the new urban centres of the sprawling proletariat, as well as from the scorn of the *nouveaux riches.* As a literary movement it was so primitive that its strictest acolytes engaged the very task to depict those crudest realities of rural life that one hundred years earlier had spurred Crabbe to rebel against Goldsmith's bucolic and sentimental elegies. The leaders of that movement were the unhappy children of the rude forefathers of the prairie, bitterly committed to denounce the meanness of provincial life[48].

We shall attempt to see how the indignation about provincial life affected and limited the realistic import of the work of Garland, the most typical of the prairie sons.

Many are the critics who have maintained that American Naturalism descended directly from Eggleston and through Howe, Kirkland and Garland reached down to Norris, Dreiser, and Sinclair. Therefore we can say that in America the movement of naturalism had essentially a native-social origin. As Kazin pointed out, although influenced by strains of skepticism and Darwinism, American naturalism did originate from the resentment and hatred stirring the rural class in the 1880s and 1890s, from the

squalor and bitterness in the provinces and in the new urban centres of the sprawling proletariat, as well as from the scorn of the *nouveaux riches.* As a literary movement it was so primitive that its strictest acolytes engaged the very task to depict those crudest realities of rural life that one hundred years earlier had spurred Crabbe to rebel against Goldsmith's bucolic and sentimental elegies. The leaders of that movement were the unhappy children of the rude forefathers of the prairie, bitterly committed to denounce the meanness of provincial life[48].

We shall attempt to see how the indignation about provincial life affected and limited the realistic import of the work of Garland, the most typical of the prairie sons.

Chapter III

Crumbling Idols: The Defence of the West and Veritism

In the preface to *Crumbling Idols*, Garland wrote:

> I do not assume to speak for anyone but myself –being an individualist- and the power of this writing to destroy or build rests upon its reasonableness simply. It does not carry with it the weight of any literary hierarchy. (3)

It is easy enough to attribute to psychological and autobiographical motivations such individualistic stance, an attitude very consistent with the principles on which Garland's theories were based. In Garland's plea for individualism there is to be detected his proud resentment for having been denied access to traditional academic culture when, seeking acceptance in Boston, he presented himself as a young hesitant, obsequious young man at the entrance to Harvard College. There is also to be found the pride of the *parvenu* who, even though walled out by the College, had already gained some renown in the radical reformers' *milieu,* confiding exclusively on his own forces, with no support from any literary school. His sentiment of self-sufficiency probably emphasized a character independent *per se* and stimulated by individualistic self-education. As a result, Garland was inevitably determined to "weaken the hold of conventionalism upon the youthful artist" (3) exerted by New England's literary hierarchy.

If we ascribe the genesis of *Crumbling Idols* to a combination of psychological and autobiographical motives, we can better understand the nature of the author's proclamations of Western literary superiority, which sometimes, in their hyperbolic way, suggest an emotional impulse rather than meditated and objective analysis; we can better understand what may have caused the disproportion between the iconoclastic impetus of the book and the limited originality of its contents. Essentially we may better understand what may have caused his jaunty attacks against the culture of the East, which, a decade earlier, had lured him, reverent and observant, to Boston from his much vaunted West.

This does not mean that the strenuous celebration of the West in his writings was due solely to personal motives and that it had no theoretical foundations. In *Crumbling Idols* Garland stated the wider purport of his defence:

> It really comes down to a contest, not between the

> East and the West, but between sterile culture and creative work; between mere scholarship and wisdom; between conservative criticism and native original literary production. (127)

Garland's plea for the West was above all a wish for a native American literature which might be capable of expressing the life and spirit of the whole nation. That kind of literature could not be produced in the East, which having inherited the hegemonic role perpetrated on America by Great Britain, had derived from the latter the conservationism, absolutism and fetishistic worship of the past and, therefore, had delayed all forms of individualistic initiative and inhibited the original local genius. With its "provincialism," i.e. "dependence upon a mother country for models of art production" (*Crumbling* 7), the East was the last part of the nation apt to givean impulse to an indigenous literature (121).

Why, on the contrary, was the West likely to give such impulse? Garland's answer in ethnographic terms reveals the weakness of his argument: the East is "English in general character" (121), while the West is not, as it is more distant from England, and Scandinavian and German elements prevail in it. Apparently embracing Taine's principle that literature, like other things, is the product of racial influences, he wrote:

> The literature rising from these people would not be English. It was to be something new; it was to be, and ought to be, American – that is to say, a new composite. (121- 122)

Being the question put this way, it is obvious that the literature to be wished was not to be dominated by 'the English idea," but following the same argument one can object that it might be dominated by the Scandinavian or Teutonic idea. But Garland explained that the links of that literature with Norway and Germany would have a less paralyzing effect, because those Northern people "are not so deeply enslaved to the past as England is." (122). The main obstacle to the rise of a national literature, Garland reiterated, in the case of America was the worship of the past, the blind attachment to tradition.

For Garland what counted was the present: "To the *veritist* the present is the vital theme. The past is dead, and the future can be trusted to look after itself." His was a time when America did not need and could not seek the proof of its greatness in the past, but rather in the present which was so dense with events and meaning. Perhaps he derived from his nature as son of the frontier the eagerness to definitely turn away from what was behind him, and to capture the present moment of life in its promising flow towards the future, in the same way as the pioneer was reluctant to trail back and thus admit defeat and disappointment. It was perhaps the pioneer's spirit in him that drove Garland to advocate contemporaneousness, the vital quality

of artistic creation[49], deprecating that a culture slave of the past and fearful of the future should distract the young artist from the "the very material which he could best handle, which he knows most about, and which he really loves most- the material which would make him individual, and fill him with hope and energy"(*Crumbling* 12-13); he deprecated that art should be considered something "very civilized" and "far away;" and that the young writers should, thus, be distracted from the beauty and significance of the life near at hand, and from the riches that America was offering everywhere, above all in the West.

Then, according to Garland, life "near at hand" (13), was to bring to American art the renewal that would give it a distinctive national character and emancipation from the generalizing academic culture. But, once again his theory seems to have operated only within the confines of personal individual precincts. As actuality to be proposed for a renewed literature he does not seem to have contemplated anything of all that, in his time, was giving a new shape to the whole of America. – namely the steady growth of big industrial centres, the massive movements of the urban proletariat, the forebodings of the glorious capitalistic destiny of the nation. On the contrary, he kept his insistent gaze on a world on the wane, on the social and historical reality to which he was tied by personal feelings and which assumed to his eyes epic dimensions. He expressed his fascination with the "near at hand" like this:

> As for myself, I am overwhelmed by the majesty, the immensity, the infinite charm of the life that goes on around me. Themes are crying out to be written. Take, for a single example, the history of the lumbering district of the northern lakes – a picturesque and peculiar life that through a period of thirty years has been continually changing in all but a few of its essential features; and yet this life has had only superficial representation in the sketches of the tourist or reporter; its inner heart has not been uttered. (14-15)

That was the life his father had lived and used to recount in the evenings to the family, deeply impressing little Hamlin's imagination. In the following passage, the sentimental motif concurring to older Garland's creed is even clearer:

> I am a western man, my hopes and ambitions for the west arise from absolute knowledge of its possibilities. I want to see its prairies, its rivers, banks and coules, its matchless skies put on canvas. I want to see its young writers writing better books , its young artists painting pictures that are true to the life

> they live [...] To imitate is fatal. *Provincialism (that is to say, localism) is no ban to a national literature*. (30-31)

His hopes were about to be fulfilled, as promised by the Columbian Exposition which of the West enhanced the literary possibilities besides the economic power. The essential life of the West, however, was not to be caught in the tourist's or the journalist's superficial representations:

> The superficial work of the tourist will not do. The real realist of these sections is walking behind the plow or trudging to school in these splendid potential environments. (60-61)

The real narrator was to be the *veritist.*

Veritism is a word created by Garland to designate his artistic creed. Defined as "the truthful statement of an individual impression corrected by reference to the fact"[50], it is the result of various views, in particular it implies a subjectivist, almost romantic attitude, which allows the writer to choose the themes to which he is emotionally tied, not those imposed by tradition. It also propounds a realistic stance, according to which the author is to depict contemporary differentiated circumstances of life and to tell the truth about them. These two apparently antithetic stances co-existing in Garland respectively responded to Spencer's influence as well as to an impressionistic and romantic vision. They converged into the local color creed.

It has been noted that Garland's criticism in defence of local color rested on his adherence to Spencer's evolutionism and Taine's positivism.

Taine, Garland's first literary guide, advocated a scientific form of criticism based on the analytic method of naturalism for the investigation of causes, as well as on a strictly deductive method, to be conducted in a surveyor's manner, for the application of rules. Taine considered literature the mechanical product of three basic factors: climate, race, historical circumstances. According to Pizer, Garland had already revealed his allegiance to Taine in his first lecture when, speaking about Victor Hugo, he suggested that on examining a writer the elements to be considered ought to be first race, secondly environment, thirdly historical circumstances, and that finally there was to consider how such writer fulfilled his own duty towards the humankind of his time and of the future.[51]

This idea, later expounded in *Crumbling Idols*, implied that the works of an author thus designed were to be indigenous, having to be judged according to race, local and contemporaneous, being the products of the author's environment and historical time, and they were also to be socially and ethically committed, since that writer was to be judged according to the fulfillment of his obligations to the human beings

of the present and of the future.

Pizer, among others, also argued that Garland's theory was similarly influenced by Spencer's evolutionary idea. Spencer believed in an evolutionary force which regulates life transforming it continuously from the incoherent to the coherent, from the homogeneous to the heterogeneous, from indefinite and diffused mass to a distinctive unit, leading it towards complete perfection and the greatest happiness. That force operates also in art, directing it towards the complex and the specialized. As a consequence, new forms of literature emerge continuously from older forms, and each of them has a distinctive and subtler character. Spencer's belief served Garland's plea for a modern and contemporary form of art. His adoption of the evolutionary theory is manifest in *Crumbling Idols* with such declarations as "Life means change," "Life is in continual progress of change" (63, 82)

Garland trusted the "local color" so much that it became a real theoretical prejudice when, being considered as a differentiated form of art, not specifically American, nor associated to a particular historical moment, it was assessed as form of art *per se*:

> The charm of Horace is the side light he throws on the manners and customs of his time. The vital in Homer lies, after all, in his local color, not in his abstractions. Because the sagas of the North delineate more exactly how men and women lived and wrought in those days, therefore they have always appealed to me with infinitely greater power than Homer. (49)

According to this argument, the worth of a work of art would seem to rest exclusively on its exactness as historical document, as detailed realistic account invalidating the freedom of the artist which with his individualistic spirit Garland so strenuously propounded. In fact certain of Garland's ideas, above all those derived from Taine, affected the creative possibilities of the artist. In *Crumbling Idols* we read that "the iconoclast is a necessity" (109), meaning that the artist ought to free himself from pre-established models, but also to operate within the precincts of contemporaneousness and of his environment: the writer of the West was to be he who "is walking behind the plow," "the novel of the slums must be written by one who has played there as a child" (61).

By virtue of such assertion, implying besides the naturalistic tenets a bond of affection with the reality lived by the author, it seems that in part Garland overcame the contradiction between the independence he claimed for the author and the constriction to which the local color tied him.

In fact, if the writer's first commitment is to be "true to himself" and if "the most

natural thing for a man to love is his native land and his native intimate surroundings" (53), the logical consequence is the writer's wish to fully fulfil his individuality and creative freedom: he must not look for inspiration in fantastic evasions, but rather in the concrete surroundings from which his natural affections spring: "Write of those things of which you know most and for which you care most. By so doing, you will be true to yourself, true to your locality and true to your time" (30), was Garland's advice.

This is the essence of *veritism*, which could otherwise be called realism or local color. And it is in this *veritist* formula that Garland reduced the rigidity of an exclusively positivistic view of art, as the writing, although realistically, about what is closest to the author, excludes depersonalization and the total distancing of emotions. Besides, allowing an escape from his individualism, Garland maintained "Art, I must insist, is an individual thing, the question of one man facing certain facts and telling his individual relation to them" (30).

Keeping in mind this stress on the author's personal and emotional response to facts, we can evaluate Garland's realism and its distancing, since its early stages, from the movement of realism in Europe.

Zola, the founder of the French naturalistic school, committed himself exclusively to a scientific, objective and impersonal investigation in art. In the same way, even though his practice contradicted his theory, Verga insisted on the concept of 'dispassionate' and 'disinterested' expression – using two adjectives occurring extensively in the realist movement, along with "truth," "reality" "sincerity" which constitute an esthetic prejudice when they are not intended to allude to the genuine artistic process for which reflection on life becomes creation of life. Thanks to his individualistic urge, Garland overcame even in theory this esthetic prejudice by focusing on the author's personal mediation between reality and its artistic rendering:

> Realism in its true sense, in the sense in which the Spanish novelist Valdés uses it, and as Mr. Howells uses it, does not mean the reproduction in a drama of tanks and fire- engines, or real burglars blowing open a safe. Neither does realism in a novel mean the study of murderers, or of criminal classes. Realism in its broadest meaning is simply the idea of perceiving and stating truth in an individual way, irrespective of past models. It is progress in art. (81)

Like Valdés Garland believed "The reflection of exterior nature in the individual spirit to be the fundamental of art"[53] . And with Valdés, again, he believed that the author's sympathy for his subject matter is necessary: "The realist must love what

he depicts" (81). Owing to his insistence on the artist's personal bond with the reality he represents, Garland seems closer to Impressionism than to Naturalism.
He viewed Impressionism closer to *veritism* because, he wrote, impressionist painters "are not delineating a scene; they are painting a personal impression of a scene, which is vastly different" (105). They look at nature from a subjective standpoint.

The impressionist school did represent Garland's ideal of art with many of its features. First of all it represented his idea of truth as the artist's fidelity to his own impressions and to himself. His fundamental view of impressionism was that a painting should be a "unified impression," not "a mosaic but a complete and of course momentary concept of the sense of sight" (97), a temporary apprehension of the eye; and if we consider Garland's ideas derived from Spencer, we understand how this apprehension responded to the principle of truth more than to the need for an analytic, detailed, mosaic-like representation. In fact, the mosaic is static, while the immediacy and transience of impressionistic images, the total effect based on the interrelation of colours, reflects the dynamic evolutionary concept of life. Impressionism is "evolutionary" and the impressionists "know that the landscape is never twice alike." (97). Like the evolutionist, they knew that metamorphosis is the law of the universe and art. Therefore their theme was the present, and they highlighted the individual impression, continuously relating it to nature. They are anti-historical and unquestionably iconoclasts. Their position towards academic art seems to have been the same as the local colour writers' position was in relation to the official views sanctioned by New England. With the individual reaction to reality in mind, and registering it in its local variations, they assumed the same principle of differentiation as that assumed in Garland's local color theory. Garland pointed out all this in *Crumbling Idols*.

Garland's celebration of Impressionism, as a form of art consonant with the evolutionary process and allowing individual freedom of perception, confirms the fundamental difference between his creed and Naturalism, which demanded the artist's analytical, objective, almost photographic approach to reality versus the impressionists' synthetic, subjective, personal way.

The difference between the theory of Veritism and that of Naturalism concerned, therefore, mainly method and form. For Garland, however, it was a question of contents. He coined the word 'veritism' (perhaps from the Italian *Verismo*)[54] to underline his desire to distinguish his views from those of Zola's school about the way of presenting themes, but above all he wanted to underline the difference between the themes he chose from those chosen by Naturalism:

> You ask about my use of the word "veritist". I began
> to use it in the late nineties. Not being at that time a

> "realist" in the sense which the followers of Zola used it, I hit upon the word "veritist". In truth I was an impressionist in method in that I presented life and landscape as I personally perceived it them. But since I sought a deeper significance in the use of the word, I added a word which subtended verification [...]I thought to get away from the word realism which implied predominant use of sexual vices and crime in the manner of Zola [...] For the most part the men and women I had known in my youth were normal, and decent in work and action. Their lives were hard, unlovely, sometimes dread and bitter, but they were not sexual perverts. [55]

He also wrote:

> In advocating "veritism," I am not to be understood as apologizing the so-called realists of our day. In fact they are not realists from Howells' point of view; they are imitators of the French who seem to us to be sex-mad.[56]

With all this, Garland seems to have been misunderstanding Zola's and his followers' intentions: in choosing characters exceptionally dominated by their nerves and blood, devoid of free will, driven in every situation by the fatality of flesh, Zola's objective was essentially scientific. In *Teresa Raquin*, he wanted to make each chapter

the study of a strange physiological case. He said that, after all, he had done in two living bodies the work of analysis that surgeons do in corpses[57] .

Notwithstanding his formation based on the theory of positivism, Garland seems to have ignored or not recognized the worth of that work of analysis, which, according to Zola, was the universal instrument of which his century availed itself to penetrate the future[58]. Garland resented the treatment of sex in naturalistic literature and did not understand why "that predominant use of sexual vice and crime could be redeemed by an analytic and sincere study, as Zola maintained. To him the raw and overt representation of sex in literature was to be condemned as insane taste for the pornographic. It was not an excess of prudery to dictate his attitude, it was rather his evolutionary conception. He declared: "To me as an evolutionist, [those representations] are a return to the life of the animals who are supposed to be lower on the scale of life."[59] His attack against Naturalism, then, unilateral and moralistic, had to do only with the most visible and perhaps more

superficial aspect of that movement, that is, with the choice of subject matter. He did not take into consideration others of its aspects, which also were at variance with his own philosophy, that is, elements like the negation of free will and the idea that the writer's task is the same as the scientist's or analyst's.

Garland's realistic formula was apparently rather simple and flexible: "Life is the model, truth is the master." (*Crumbling* 25). But the 'life' he intended was only that "near at hand," not any kind of existence including the social plagues that the naturalist, guided by scientific curiosity, aimed to sound out. He wrote:

> A new literature will come with the generation just coming to manhood and womanhood on the Coast [...] it will not deal with crime and abnormities, nor with deceased persons. It will deal, I believe, with the wholesome love of honest men and women, with the heroism of labor, the comradeship of men, - a drama of average types of character, infinitely varied, but always characteristic. (25)

His view of art was as distant from the naturalistic mode as Howells' view was. The latter proposed a realism which should exclude the pathological and abnormal, a simple, honest, discreet "truthful treatment of material" (*Criticism and Fiction* 38) that he saw best exemplified in English literature by Jane Austen. Zola, due to the intrinsic quality of his art, constituted a separate question. Indeed, according to Howells, the French master was not a realist: "the fever of romanticism was in his blood" (163). Howells appreciated the worth of Zola, "the greatest poet of his day and perhaps the greatest poet that France has produced" (38), but he rejected the objectionable French novels of his school as a whole, agreeing with Valdés in denouncing their sensationalism and "the itch of awakening at all cost in the reader vivid and violent emotions" (35). Not for an excess of Puritanism, but for the sake of truth, he discredited the naturalistic inclination in literature to deal "with "certain facts of life which are not usually talked of before young people" (70). In his view, "[a novel] was all the more faithfully representative of the tone of modern life when it dealt with love that was chaste, and with passion so honest that it could openly be spoken of before the tenderest society bud at dinner"(70), because "the guilty intrigue, the betrayal, the extreme filtration even, was the exceptional thing in life" (70). Like Garland, Howells had reservations against naturalism dictated in part by a moral urge, but above all by the principle of faithfulness to common ordinary life, the representation of which should not commit the sin of "effectivism." He advocated "common beauty" and "common grandeur"(66) and agreed with Valdés in maintaining that "in nature there is neither great or small; all is equally just; all is equally beautiful because all is equally divine"(33) and that "in life [the poet] finds nothing insignificant. He cannot look upon and declare this

thing or that thing unworthy of notice" (35).

Similarly, Garland, paraphrasing Valdés stated:

> The trifle does not exists absolutely, only as a relative term. That which is a trifle to some is a great fact to others. In all that is particular we may be shown the general, in all that is finite the indefinite. Art is charged with its revelation. (*Crumbling* 93)

And also: "The near at hand things are the dearest and sweetest after all"

He was expressing the same idea which became a lyrical motif in Whitman's verse: "I believe that a leaf of grass is no less than the journeywork of the stars." (*Leaves of Grass* 72).

Falling into a literary tradition which goes back to Gray and Wordsworth, and George Eliot, that same principle was enunciated by Emerson in his essay "The American Scholar":

> I ask not for the great, the remote, the romantic. I embrace the common, I sit at the feet of the familiar and the low [...] man is surprised to find that things near are not less beautiful and wonderful than things remote [...] The foolish man wonders at the unusual, but the wise man at the usual. ("Oration" 28)

And in "The Poet" Emerson said: "Small and mean things serve as well as great symbols". (*Essays*, 22)

But in Whitman the re-evaluation of the ordinary in common, everyday life was due to pantheistic assumptions: Whitman saw God in every object, "Letters from God dropt in the street and signed by God's name"(*Leaves*. 94). Instead, Garland whose *forma mentis* was free from any transcendental preoccupation and completely rooted into concrete situations, ignoring or trying to disregard the invisible side of reality, escaped the romantic and idealistic dilemma between the visible and the invisible, without solving it, focusing on the tangible aspects of life, without seeing in them any foretaste of the supernatural or symbols of the metaphysical. The concentration on reality without any attempt to evade it, leads either to a stoical, silent pessimism or to a satisfied acceptance of what it is, as in the case of Howells. Garland who did not accept the most destructive consequences of determinism and of the pessimism of modern thinkers, did not believe evil to be inherent in the order of things, but only an accident to be possibly taken measures

against. On the other hand, he did not share Howells' Victorian complacent, ingenuous, (if not rhetorical) optimistic belief that death, disease and evil are a tragedy "not peculiarly American, as the large, cheerful average of health and success and happy life is." (Howells, *op.cit*. 62) Due to his personal experience, Garland knew the least "smiling" aspects of the contemporary American life. According to his evolutionary faith he was prone to consider them contingent and transient. Therefore he claimed that the fictionist of his day, "

> [b]ecause he is sustained by love and faith in the future, [...] can be mercilessly true. He strikes at thistles because he knows the unrotted seed of loveliness needs but sun and the air of freedom to rise to flower and fragrance (C*rumbling* 43).

His kind of evolutionary optimism gave Garland's realism the strength to be more inclusive, and more disillusioned than Howells' without excluding the more depressing, more repellent that Howells claimed was not typical of the American reality.

Moving a step ahead of Howells' realism towards the realism of Crane and Norris, Garland, therefore, maintained that fiction not only was to be sincere and faithful to life, but it was to be so even at the cost of having ruthlessly to show the most squalid aspects of life. At the same time, he attributed to the realist the high social task "to hasten the age of beauty and peace, by delineating the ugliness and warfare of the present" (44). Thus he elevated the realist writer to a prophet's position, similar to the position the romantic poet was raised to by Shelley's *Defence of Poetry*. Shelley wrote that the poet "not only beholds intensely the present as it is and discovers those laws according to which present things ought to be ordered, he beholds the future in the present and his thoughts are the germs of the flower and the fruit of latest time." "Poets are the mirrors of the gigantic shadows which the future casts upon the present" ("A Defence of Poetry" in *English Critical Texts* 228). Garland said: "The realist or veritist is really an optimist, a dreamer. He sees life in terms of what it might be, as well as in terms of what it is, and, at his best, suggests what is to be, by contrast." There is an obvious analogy between Shelley and Garland's declarations. Even though Garland's assumptions rested on the doctrine of Positivism, there was in them a vein of optimism which ran into romantic idealism.

It is evident, however, how Garland believed that art should have a social scope – and how the way he expressed his theory anticipated the preaching mode often even too overt in his Middle Border stories: his concept has been synthesized in the formula "Art for truth's sake" to suggest that in his programme social and ethical concerns prevailed on aesthetic intentions.[60]

Howells advocated the didactic function of "the true meaning of things" in

literature versus an aesthetic complacency in the 'art for art's sake' practice:

> The art which in the meantime disdains the office of teacher is one of the last refuges of the aristocratic spirit which is disappearing from politics and society, and is now seeking to shelter itself in aesthetics (Howells, *op.cit*., 87).

In the same way, Garland insisted on the meaning of things rather than on beauty, saying:

> Mere beauty no longer suffices. Beauty is the world-old aristocrat who has taken for mate this might young plebeian Significance. Their child is to be the most human and humane literature ever seen. (50)

Later, in *A Son of the Middle Border* he added "[t]hat truth was a higher quality than beauty and that to spread the reign of justice should be everywhere the design and interest of the artist" (317).

In "Literature of Democracy" his trust in a democratic literature, ethically committed to foster brotherhood, is definitely more explicit:

> Advocate justice, mercy, equality before the law. Paint the customs, the acts, emotions and concerns of the modern man, till sympathy widens like a sea, till we shall indeed know each other face to face, till sharing each other's burden, we march shoulder to shoulder up the heights to brotherhood and liberty.[61]

Whitman's influence was certainly very significant in fostering such democratic creed. And Garland openly admitted his debt to the American poet of democracy. But the most immediate impact probably came from Howells' similar wish for a kind of art capable of building fraternity among people:

> [Democray] wishes to know and tell the truth confident consolation and delight is there [...] Men are more like than unlike one another: let us make them know one another better, that they may all be humbled and strengthened with a sense of their fraternity.(Howells, *op. cit* 87)

For both Howells and Garland, the task to fulfill a democratic and ethical objective in literature is to be assigned to Realism. But in Garland the task was more specific than a vague preaching of fraternity among people. The art he conceived was

democratic with regard to three aspects: choice of subject, treatment of subject matter and character, function. That is, in his view art was to deal with the common and average, disregarding any hierarchy of themes and subjects, nullifying the traditional distinction between main and minor characters; it was no longer to be the privilege of the elect, on the contrary it was to be read by the man in the street and produced not by scholars and heroes, but by "men who love the modern and have not been educated to despise common things" (*Crumbling*, p 50); in short writers were to draw on the thematic resources offered by the "average soul"[62] and to take into account the comprehension skills of the "average American"[63].

The faith in the common man, already expressed by Whitman, Emerson, Howells, in Garland appears excessive and simplistic, and above all, not free from biases when he identifies the highly conceived "common American" with the American farmer. He writes about the men who have not been educated to despise common things:

> These men are speaking a new word. They are not hunting themes, they are struggling to express.[...] They are rooted in the soil. They stand among the cornfields and they dig in the peat-bogs. (50)

As Jane Johnson maintains, in this declaration we can detect an ancient faith in the unacknowledged potentiality of rural people, often celebrated in English literature. However, given that Garland did come from the "cornfields," we may suspect that, even though unconsciously, with this very assumption he was making an apology of himself and of his own literary expectations.

In a conclusive assessment of *Crumbling Idols*, we must, then, say that moving from an occasional defence of the literature of the West, Garland attempted a theory of local color and realism without ever getting rid of a certain autobiographical conditioning and never reaching total objectivity.

Perhaps it was the very immediacy of his unrestrained feelings that gave to his assertions the vehemence that his contemporaries mistook for inflamed radicalism, In fact such radicalism does not ultimately appear plain and consistent in the book. And it is at variance with the irritation that he, as an established writer, later showed against that rural class which in his youth he had celebrated for contributing a distinctive national element in American literature.

In sum, Garland simply made himself an interpreter of the cause which, in America, was then being fought for realism in its general principles of 'verity,

'sincerity' and representation of things of life close at hand, in accordance with the theory of realist writers like Norris, Crane, Howells. But he never surpassed the conceptions of realism expressed by Howells, the most moderate of them all. In fact, as has often been noted, *Crumbling Idols* is more or less an uninterrupted echoing of *Criticism and Fiction*.

Even his more decisively iconoclastic statements have precise antecedents in *Criticism and Fiction*. Compare, for example, the two following passages about the realist writer, one from *Crumbling Idols* the following from Howells' *Criticism and Fiction,*

> You should not be bound to a false and dying culture, you should not endeavor to re- act the harsh and fierce and false social dramas of the Old World. You should not turn your face to the east, to the past. Your comment should be that of free men and women, loving equality, justice, truth. You are not to worship crumbling idols. (*Crumbling* 124)

> [The novelist's] soul is exalted not by vain shadows and ideals, but by realities in which alonethe truth lives. It is his business to break the images of false gods and misshapen heroes, to take away the poor silly toys that many grown people would like to play with. (Howells, *Criticism* 85)

Howells was not the only influence accepted more or less deliberately by Garland: like Emerson, Valdés and Whitman he advocated the ordinary and common in literature, like Whitman, he believed in democratic art, and like Emerson, Whitman and Howells he wished for a literature free from any literary hierarchy. In short he was not proposing anything new with his theories.

Therefore, rather than in originality (which Garland seems to claim in his introduction), the worth of the book lies in the earnest purpose with which it was conceived and in its importance as a "reminder of an age when the youthful American artist did not seek isolation from his society."(Johnson, introduction to *Crumbling*. XXVIII).

Such is the comment of Jane Johnson who in her introduction also wrote:

> A young man's book, *Crumbling Idols* is redolent with the vigor , ambition and idealism of first maturity. It is also illogical, elliptic, emotional, boyishly unself conscious. Still it continues to deserve attention because it is a challenging attempt to define a form of

> artistic fulfillment wholly consistent with social responsibility (*ibid.*).

We could even add that *Crumbling Idols* gave to Garland the merit of having promoted a formula of realism triggered by an individualistic urge – "Life is the model, and truth the criterion and individualism the coloring element of literature" (120) - where such urge represents an unconscious romantic attempt to protect the rights of the individual threatened to remain caught in the ethics of a mechanistic vision of the world. There remains to be assessed how far Garland managed to fulfill in his artistic practice this conception of realism, impressionistic in method, of local colorist dimensions, social and ethical in purpose, and conditioned by an individualistic impetus.

Iowa prairie" (*Main-Travelled Roads* 171), and Sim Burns's square, bare, little home devoid of any touch of beauty, carry the same message of wretched misery and ill-concealed despair revealed to Garland by the homes he visited in Dakota in 1887. With a naturalistic taste, he lingered on the minute depiction of the interiors ofthose homes in which "Poverty is a never-absent guest" (171).

A typical example of his detailed presentation of the miserable, gray, bareness of those shelters is the description of the sitting room of the McLanes in "Up the Coulé":

> In the sitting room where his mother sat sewing there was not an ornament, save the etching he had brought. The clock stood on a small shelf , its dial so much defaced that one could not tell the time of day ; and when it struck, it was with disproportionate deliberation, as if it wished to correct any mistake into which the family might have fallen by reason of its illegible dial. The paper on the wall showed the first concession of the Puritans to the Spirit of Beauty, and was made up of a heterogeneous mixture of flowers of unheard-of-shapes and colors, arranged in four different ways along the wall. There were no books, no music, and only a few newspapers in sight – a bare, blank, cold , drab-colored shelter from the rain, not a home. Nothing cosy, nothing heart-warming; a grim and horrible shed. (93-94)

Garland rendered the spiritual disquiet produced by the view of such dwellings, using comparisons, like chicken– trap or box-like, to underscore the physical constraints farmers suffered inside those miserable four walls, by contrast with the

openness of the vast prairie stretching outside:

> In the midst of oceans of lands, floods of sunshine and gulfs of verdure, the farmer lives in two or three rooms [...] the houses they live in are hovels. (*Prairie Folks* 114)

During Garland's journey through Dakota, "every detail of the daily life of the farm assumed literary significance in [his] mind," while "the glory of the sky and the splendor of the wheat" deepened his sense "of the generosity of nature and monstrous injustice of social creeds" (*A Son* 314). And he could not but lament that the beauteous forms of nature were no help for the farmers' plight:

> Yes, the landscape is beautiful, but how much of its beauty penetrates to the heart of the men who are in the midst of it and battling with it? How much of consolation does the worn and weary renter find in the beauty of cloud and tree or in the splendor of the sunset? Grace of flower does not feed or clothe the body, and when the toiler is both badly clothed and badly fed, bird song and leaf shine cannot bring content. (312)

Chapter IV

Main-Travelled Roads and Prairie Folks

The rise and fall of Garland's realism which covers the period between his journey to Dakota in 1887 and the publication of "Rose of the Dutcher Coolly" in 1895, reached its peak with the short stories collected in *Main- Travelled Roads* (1891) and *Prairie Folks* (1893).

There is a basic consistency between the author's convictions and the core of these stories. Both *Main-Travelled Roads* and *Prairie Folks* can be considered the most faithful exemplification of the *veritist* formula: "Write of those things of which you know most, and for which you care most" (*Crumbling* 30). As a matter of fact, there was no life that Garland, when aged 27, knew better than that which he dramatized in his stories, nor things he cared more than the hardships and injustice suffered by the farmers of the Middle Border, and above all by his mother and family. Garland himself revealed how much he cared for them in *A Son of the Middle Border*, a document of the impressions which catalyzed his imagination during his journey in Dakota in 1887.

During that journey west, the period of time spent in Boston, and the intellectual experiences enriching his mind there, allowed him the distancing of emotions he needed to ponder and investigate, - and, then, transfigure artistically - the rural environment of which six years before he had tried to infringe the limits. On the other hand, his perfect knowledge of that environment, and his strong sense of real life prevented his imagination from remaining stuck to the picturesque surface of things which would have enticed the eastern visitor in search for local color. On the westbound train, the vision of the wild and unkempt prairie, which superimposed on the previous sight of the New England ordered and refined landscape, triggered his sense of belonging to that prairie and the responsibility he had in it. Everything appeared to him "significant rather than beautiful, familiar rather than picturesque." (*A Son* 301)

Even if Whitman had not taught him to ponder the significance of democracy[64] and if Henry George had not provided him with the first elements of a rudimentary social philosophy, Garland could not have helped catching the social implications of the reality which unfolded to his view during that journey. Being a person about whom is most frequently pointed out the zealous seriousness,[65] he could only be painfully struck by the dim eyes, the crooked fingers, the heavy knuckles of the Middle Border dwellers, by the depressing gracelessness of their homes, which, looking like animals' dens, loomed against the glorious scenery of the prairie. He

caught "the spiritual message of sordid struggle and half-hidden despair" (309) coming from every house he visited. The men who lived there went “to table in their shirt sleeves, smelling of sweat, stinking of stable” (*ibid.*), their wives, bent, withered, complaining, toiled twelve or fourteen hours, as long as they could stand on their swollen, aching feet, the youth with some ambition cursed the slavery of the farm.

Garland observed all this during the visits with acquaintances, before reaching his parents’ home. All the gliding of farm life melted away from his sight. His vague intention, already nourished in Boston, to put that life into print, was now charged with social indignation. He acknowledged to himself: “Of such pain and futility are the lives of the average man and woman composed [...] why lie about it?” (309).[66]

Thus, the common men of the prairie, on whom Garland’s social urge focused, became the protagonists of his stories. John Boyle, Haskins, Grant, Sim, Burns, some of the characters of *Main-Travelled Roads* and *Prairie Folks,* are common men whose vicissitudes were those troubling any Middle Border farmer. And, conforming to his theoretical principles about the significance of ordinary reality, of the common place and common man, Garland set about to produce with them a kind of democratic art ignited by the spirit of social and moral revolt. The polemical attitude Garland assumed in presenting the Middle Border reality is an undeniable characteristic of his short stories: the moralist who was in him was convinced that “truth was a higher quality than beauty, and that to spread the reign of justice should everywhere be the design and intent of the artist” (317).

He intended to carry out that design confuting the soporific legend that “tilling the prairie soil” was the noblest vocation in the world (353).

He, “the first actual farmer in American fiction” (314), as Kirkland called him, urged by the need for truth and by his personal direct experience, felt obliged to show how little that legend represented farm life – a daily toil made of dirt, sweat, dust, mud. “Bitter with revolt” (352), his stories were “written to convict the selfish monopolistic liars of the towns” (353). Garland’s experience of real farm life, and the feelings it aroused in him, could have simply “let his stories degenerate into tracts” (354) against the injustice suffered by rural society, if, aside from his social awareness, Kirkland had not spurred him to emotionalize western life and if Howells had not advised him: “Do not preach, exemplify” (354).

The concern with the efficiency of the narration often restrained his social indictment within the confines of a sound realism. Instead of impeding artistic fulfillment, his moral indignation became an inner force which gave colour and dramatic potency to the stories of *Main-Travelled Roads* and *Prairie Folks*.

Garland’s outraged charge was voiced through the restrained, albeit relentless,

realism with which he focused both on the material and spiritual aspects of farm life. The farmers' misery appears to the reader in the desolate conditions of their homes: for example, the poor little shanty of "Uncle Ripley," like "a chicken trap on the vast Iowa prairie" (*Main-Travelled Roads* 171), and Sim Burns's square, bare, little home devoid of any touch of beauty, carry the same message of wretched misery and ill-concealed despair revealed to Garland by the homes he visited in Dakota in 1887. With a naturalistic taste, he lingered on the minute depiction of the interiors of those homes in which "Poverty is a never-absent guest" (171).

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Occupying a relevant part in Garland's fiction, generally nature seems to have affected his state of mind in the romantic manner, forming the background of indifferent and unavoidable beauty to the hopelessness of human life. The viewer's individual human feelings of revolt and indignation seem to have dashed and foundered into the endlessly vast and profoundly evocative spaces of the western sceneries.

Garland resorted to the technique of the contrast between nature and the farmer's plight and feelings in almost all of his stories. The contrast is particularly obvious in "Up the Coulé." When Howard returned to visit with his relatives, after becoming a successful actor in the city, while approaching his brother's house, he moved across the beauty of the West, but in the midst of the deeply touching wonder of the scenery soon emerged the depressing spectacle of farm life:

> A small white house, a story-and-a a-half structure , with a wing , set in the midst of a few locust- trees ; a small drab-colored barn, with a sagging ridge –pole; a barnyard full of mud, in which a few cows were standing , fighting the flies and waiting to be milked. An old man was pumping water at the well; the pigs were squealing from a pen near by; a child was crying. Instantly the beautiful peaceful valley was forgotten. A sickening chill struck into Howard'ssoul as he looked at it all. (*Main-Travel* 56)

Also the following passage exemplifies the contrast perceived by Howard between the beauty of nature and the hardships of his father's farm life:

> It was magically, mystically beautiful over all this squalor and toil and bitterness, from five till seven - a moving hour. Again the falling sun streamed in broad banners across the valleys; again the blue mist lay far down the Coulé over the river; the cattle called from the hills in the moistening, sonorous air; the bells came in a pleasant tangle of sound; the air pulsed with the deepening chorus of katydids and other nocturnal singers. Sweet and deep as the very springs of his life was all this to the soul of the elder brother; but in the midst of it, the younger man, in ill-smelling clothes and great boots that chafed his feet, went out to milk the cows - on whose legs the flies and mosquitoes swarmed, bloated with blood – to sit by the hot

> side of a cow and be lashed with her tail as she tried frantically to keep the savage insects from eating her raw. "The poet who writes of milking the cows does it from the hammock, looking on," Howard soliloquized. (*Main-Travel* 78)

Here the contrast takes on a particularly dramatic significance in that it reflects the divergence between the two brothers, one desiring to be joyously welcomed home, while the other was mortified at the notion of the contrast between the success achieved by his brother in the city and the hopeless life he had to endure in the country.

Apart from this particular case, it is simply suffering that is conveyed by Garland's contrast technique, whether it was used to express humanitarian feelings or an indignant social invective.

After letting his sister-in-law, Laura, give vent to her invective against life on the farm, Howard felt all the horror, the despair and the tragedy threatening that life "the glory of nature, the bounty and splendor of the sky and the generosity of the sky only made [...] more benumbing" (92). He then thought of a sentence Millet once wrote, which perfectly synthesizes the way Garland perceived the opposition between the splendor of nature and the tragedy of man:

> I see very well the aureoles of the dandelions, and the sun also, far down there behind the hills, flinging his glory upon the clouds. But not alone that- I see in the plains the smoke of the tired horses at the plough, or, on a stony-hearted spot of ground, a back- broken man trying to raise himself upright for a moment to breathe. The tragedy is surrounded by glories - that is no invention of mine.(92)

However, nature does not always appear so impassive in Garland's stories. Sometimes it could have calming and cathartic effects: in "Among the Corn – Rows," Julia Peterson had to lead the corn-plough under a July scorching sun, for hours and hours. Stunned by the fatigue, she took a moment's rest by the river, contemplated the sky and in spite of her anguish she had some respite. On the rare occasions of this kind, the natural scenery could be a source of inner restoration as it must have been for Garland during his youth in the Middle West.

Other times nature may appear responsible for human suffering, as revealed in "John Boyle's Conclusion – An Unpublished Middle Border Story" where drought and hail combined with financial adversities to produce the protagonist's bankruptcy and "it seem[ed] as if all the stupendous forces of nature so blind and inalterable unit[ed] to torture or to crush such an infinitesimal mote as man"[67].

More frequently nature appears indifferent or adverse to man's feelings as in "Sim Burn's Wife" where Lucretia Burns, afflicted by the drudgery of merciless labour, consumed her tragedy against the natural peace of a splendid morning: Lucretia could have sung like a bird if the men had been as benevolent as nature, But she was a victim of social injustice, and the "glorious winds brought her no melody, no perfume, no respite from toil and care." (*Prairie* 116).

Then, even his sentiment of nature, an essential component of Garland's sensibility, had a role, albeit oblique, in his social protest. It is true that his love of nature was not contaminated by his social indictment, as confirmed by the intense lyricism[68] of his descriptions, but it was there along with his indignation. And thus there was produced a vehement effect of light and shade consisting in the contrast between the beauty and prodigality of the open natural scenarios on one hand, and, on the other, the mean narrowness of the farmer's life.

Garland exempted the beauty of nature from the distortions of social dissatisfaction, and avoided reflecting into it tragic states of mind. This dissolves the supposition that there was a pessimistic attitude in Garland.

In spite of his desolate descriptions of the West, and in spite of the fact that happy endings are rare in his stories, Garland was, in fact, an 'optimist,' a 'dreamer,' as he calls the veritist in *Crumbling Idols* (43).

His possible pessimism was always circumscribed by circumstances, even though sometimes it may appear of universal scope as when, in "Up the Coule" Howard exclaimed "evil so predominates, suffering is so universal and persistent, happiness so fleeting and so infrequent. (*Main –Travel* 93).

We must remember that however negative his vision of the West may have been, it found him armed with Spencer's progressive tenets, and that while he recognized the cause of the farmer's hopelessness, he immediately also saw the remedy for it.

The cause of the farmer's suffering was the land monopoly. In *A Son of the Middle Border* he wrote:

> This wasteful method of pioneering, this desolate business of lonely settlement took on a new and tragic significance as I studied it. Instructed by my new philosophy I now perceived that plowmen, these wives and daughters had been pushed out into these lonely ugly shacks by the force of landlordism behind. (311)

But Henry George had taught him what the remedy would be: the "single-tax." And Garland learned the lesson,as shown in the story "Under the Lion's Paw."

As Taylor argued, this story has the same relation to Henry George's theory as the

relation that in mathematics the example has to the theorem[69]. The protagonist in the story, Haskins, a tall man with a thin, gloomy face, had been obliged by financial difficulties to abandon the fresh and woody country of western Indiana and migrate to the arid prairies where the grasshoppers destroyed his harvest for four years in succession, devoured even the forks in his farm and ruined him completely. His bitterness became even more aching at the thought that while he was about to die in that wretched land, in the regions he had left behind endless stretches of land remained uncultivated because of the high costs imposed on them by land speculators. Haskins was a victim of social injustice, rather than a victim of fate. He would not have been afflicted by the disaster caused by the grasshoppers. if land speculation had not forced him to abandon more eastern regions. However his social indignation surrendered to resignation and, then, to hope after he met Council during his retreat journey back East. Council is an unusual farmer in Garland's stories in that a rewarding job allowed him to lead a tranquil tenor of life. His jovial and plump wife, equally unusual among the women of the West, mostly gaunt and pale, welcomed warmly Haskins who, on the verge of desperation, in a snowy afternoon was seeking a shelter for the night for his family and himself. Council's kindness opened to Haskins a new chapter of life inspired by the optimistic conviction that "there are people in this world who are good enough t'be angels, an'only haff t' die to *be* angels." (*Main-Travel.*159) Evil, then, is not universal as, in "Up the Coulé," Howard maintains. It is a contingent condition, inherent to particular circumstances, which are mainly of an economic order. Haskin's observation is not there to conclude the story with a happy ending. On the contrary, the social dissatisfaction, alluded to in the first part of the story with brief notations, is amply dramatized in the latter part, with a strong emphasis on the idea of the single tax.

Thanks to Council's mediation, Haskins obtained a vacant farm in that area. He worked like a fiend (163), but finally he could nourish some hope. And when he sank into his bed with a deep groan of relief, too tired to change his grimy clothes dripping with sweat, he felt that he was getting nearer and nearer to a home of his own and pushing a little farther from him the threat of starvation (166). But when Butler, the owner of the farm, went back to see his land, Haskins heard that if he wanted to buy the farm, he was to pay the double of what had been agreed between them three years before: the land had doubled in value since it was given to Haskins, no matter if it had been the latter who had toiled and spent money on it, or if Butler had not added a cent. Butler claimed he was the landlord and, therefore, entitled to use it as he liked. On hearing this, Haskins felt like "a man struck on the head with a sand-bag" (168). This was decisively the end for him. As if hid in a mist, he went over the situation, thinking of the terrible toil of the previous year, feeling the dust and dirt of the threshing-time, reliving the ferocious husking-time with its cutting wind and biting snows. "Then he thought of his wife, how she had cheerfully cooked and baked, without holiday and without rest" (170) during all this, with the

hope of a better future. At that thought he suddenly leapt and grabbed the fork to point it against Butler. The appearance of Haskins's little daughter thwarted the tragedy, but his failure was complete. However, we cannot say for sure that this ending is due to a pessimistic view of life. It may be interpreted as a narrative device to serve the writer's social denunciation. A happy ending, aside from diluting the dramatic effect from an artistic point of view, would have undermined the effect of the indictment, leading the reader to disregard the injustice suffered by Haskins at the hands of land speculators.

Garland's technique was to enact his social indictment by ending the story at the extreme effects of inequity, before the results of the remedy appeared. Thus he fulfilled the veritist's aim "to hasten the age of beauty and peace by delineating the ugliness and warfare of the present" (*Crumbling* 44).

In fact, in the description of the causes of evil is already implied the remedy. Garland implicitly identified the cause of the injustice suffered by Haskins with the violation of Henry George's principle that the right to

property derives from work, and that, therefore, nobody is legitimately allowed to possess anything but the product of his/her own work.

Such principle was violated by landowner Butler who claimed as his own the fruits of Haskins's work. Accepting, thus, Henry George's tenets, Garland implicitly accepted their conclusion – that is, the proposal of a single tax on the value of the land to curb the rising land speculation and the private landowners' monopoly, and consequently to allow workers to freely use the profits of their toil.

Garland did not preach all this. He exemplified the idea, as Howells advised him to do. As Taylor noted, one of Garland's greatest achievements was to translate George's abstract economic theory into the concrete, humane, dramatic and moving circumstances of the short story "Under the Lion's Paw" [70] .

At times, however, Garland voiced openly his social indictment and economic beliefs, thus impairing the artistic value of his work.

For example, Radbourn's presence has no artistic or psychological bearing in "Sim Burns's Wife," he simply seems to be there as the spokesman of the social theories and most open criticism Garland had ever expressed before. Through him, Garland clearly voiced his preaching:

> Writers and orators have lied so long about the "idyllic"in farm life, and said so much about the "independent American farmer," that he himself has remained blind to the fact that he's one of the hardest-working and poorest-paid men in America. (*Prairie* 125)

He did not denounce so much the disheartening consequence of the farmers' toil on

their bodies, but rather the damage the tiresome drudgery produced on their spirits:

> It ain't so much the grime that I abhor, nor the labor that crooks their backs and makes their hands bludgeons. It's the horrible waste of life involved in it all . I do not believe God intended a man to be bent to plow-handles like that, but that ain't the worst of it. The worst of it is these people live lives approaching automa. They become machines to serve others more lucky or more unscrupulous than themselves. What is the world of art, of music, of literature, to these poor devils –to Sim Burns and his wife there, forexample? (125).

Reflecting Garland's idea that art must have a social objective, Radbourn seems to have laid the responsibility for all this on the novelist. In his view, to the great satisfaction of landowners, the novelist depicted as idyllic the farmers' slavery, repressed aspirations, thwarted hopes, and crooked bodies deformed by fatigue. Nor did his

indictment spare religion, as Garland did not either. Garland conceived reality in material rather than metaphysical terms. Therefore, he denounced as soporific the religion that promised the farmers a future reprieve in the other world from their life of hardships on this earth. For him there was no proof of the existence of Another World: it was on this that must be found the remedy for so many lives deprived of the dignity that would make them worth living. And Garland was as open and frank in his denunciation as firmly direct was he in proposing through Radbourn a series of concrete remedies: the abolition of all indirect taxation, the abolition of private property interfering with individual equal rights, the abolition of any speculative manoeuvre through the return of incomes to the government.[71] There could not have been any propaganda of the single tax clearer than his.

Confined and restrained within the boundaries of the dramatic representation, the propaganda is openly declared in "Under the Lion's Paw," producing a long break in the narration, totally unrelated to the plot. The social concern is rather overt also in "Among the Corn-Rows." Rob, the main character in the story, was urged by the obscure desire to develop his own personality. He migrated West like thousands of other farmers, into the sun- burnt Dakota prairies, in order to avoid the disparaging glances of the summer residents in the Wuapac County, to avoid people calling him 'fellah' (*Main-Travel* 107), to be able to make his way where "the cussed European aristocracy hadn't got a holt on the people"(107). In fact, it was not possible to survive in Wisconsin for the farmers who could not accept the life of slavery and moral degradation imposed on them, nor to toil for incomes which they were deprived of by the land speculators. But Rob was to pay dear his need of economic and moral freedom. He was to pay with the loneliness in the prairie, with the loss of "one o' the handsomest counties the sun ever shone on, full o' lakes and rivers and groves of timber" (107). However he could be going to be his own boss, and with

great pride could say:

> I consider myself a sight better 'n' any man who lives on somebody else's hard work. I've never had a cent I didn't earn with them hands. Beauties, ain't they? But they never wore gloves that some other poor cuss earned. (107)

According to the writer, "this farmer had voiced the modern idea. It was an absolute overturn of all the ideas of nobility and special privilege born of the feudal past" (108). "He had exposed also the native spring of the emigrant by uttering the feeling that it is better to be an equal among peasants than a servant before nobles" (*Ibid*).That is, this farmer's ideas reflect perfectly Garland's individualistic and democratic sensibility, which, however, never finds expression in an overt indictment except in "Up the Coulé" where the writer unleashed his indignation in describing "the infinite tragedy of these lives which the world loves to call "peaceful and pastoral" (90). Otherwise his criticism is conveyed through more artistically effective means, as has already been pointed out, namely through the contrast between the social environment and the natural scenery, or the dramatic exemplification as in "Under the Lion's Paw." Above all, his criticism is expressed simply by the truthfulness of his description of farm life, focussing on some main aspects of it: the Middle Border rundown homes, the marks that the exhausting, unrewarding, endless toil left on the farmers' body and spirit, the disastrous damage that the hardships of farm life produced on the farmers 'marriages, on the destiny of their children, on the desperate plight of their wives, daughters and women.

In *Main-Travelled Roads*, many are, indeed, the descriptions of ordinary farmers pervaded by the writer's indignation. Grant's physical look is an indictment of the miserable tenor of his life:

> His suspenders, once gay-coloured, had given most of their color to his shirt, and had marked irregular broad hands of pink and brown and green over his shoulders. His hair was uncombed, merely pushed away from his face was covered with a week's growth of beard. His face was rather gaunt, and was brown as leather. (*Main-travel* 61)

And the following is the picture of Burns in "Sim Burns's Wife":

> He was tall, dark and strong, and had grown neglected of even decency in his dress. He wore the American farmer's customary outfit of rough brown pants , hickory shirt and greasy wool hat. (*Prairie* 109-110)

Quite similar is John Boyle'look;

> John Boyle was short and sturdy. His shoulders were stooped with thirty years of terrible toil and his coarse and filthy garments were the usual farmer's dress: a check shirt , straw hat, coarse boots and worn and faded blue trousers. His hands were knotted and shapeless with toil, bruised with the hammer, crooked with the plow handles, burnt with the sun. His equally shapeless feet were into red red and clumsy boots. His dusty red beard grew thin and scraggy about his mouth which was characterless save for an unconscious sorrow droop at the corners. (62)

All these descriptions are a *j'accuse*. The insistence on unpleasant details would make the characters seem caricatures if Garland's sympathy for them did not transpire. In his grotesque wretched clothes, John Boyle might appear like a laughingstock to the superficial observer, "but if you looked at him long and closely you would have thought him a pathetic, almost tragic example of a toil-worn man"(65). On returning to Dakota, Garland had looked at people like John Boyle long and closely, with his emotion as member of their own community stirring the more objective perspective newly acquired in Boston. Therefore. in the fictional rendering, the descriptions kept a tinge too bitter and acrid for those characters to be taken for laughingstocks. And the authenticity of the detail results into a heavy charge of acrid denunciation.

With an equally keen eye Garland observed the children of the prairie who already carried the early injuries of the life that had deformed their fathers. In "Up the Coulé," the bent shoulders under the weight of hard labor make Grant's 14–year-old son look like an old man (*Main -Travel* 61). Haskins's son, at the age of 9 already occupied the role of an adult in the farm:

> An infinitely pathetic but common figure – this boy- on the American farm, where there is no law against child labour. To see him in his coarse clothing, his huge boots, and his ragged cap, as he staggered with a pail of water from the well, or trudged in the cold and cheerless dawn out into the frosty field behind his team, gave the city- bred visitor a sharp pang of sympathetic pain (164).

Also:

> Julia Peterson's little brother had to trudge along like an old man from morning to night. And Milton, a boy of thirteen, in "Daddy Deering" in *Prairie Folks*, forgetful of the glory of an Autumn day, exhausted by the fatigue of the threshing time, choked by dust, poisoned by chaff, lifted his eyes to the beautiful far-off sky, where the clouds floated like ships, a lump

> of rebellious anger rose in his throat. Why should he work in this choking dust and deafening noise, while the hawks could sail and sweep from hill to hill with nothing to do but play (209).

In this environment where, from childhood to adulthood, people could only experience incessant labor, even personal relationships were inevitably deformed, while a monotonous grey patina spread over them, often to degenerate into silent conflicts, outburst of intolerance, clashes between characters.

The forced solitude added to the farmer's destitution. His rare occasions of social life were the toilsome threshing and corn husking days when all the neighborhood gathered to help. But he and his family had no chances of escape from the confinement of the farm, except for the meetings in the brawling schoolhouses, where some obtuse preacher offered soporific talks about the Other World, as in "The Test of Elder Pill" in *Prairie Folks* (33), or some occasional short trips to the nearby town, often resulting simply into humiliations of various kinds. Thus they lost the habit to communicate. For William McTurg not even a nephew's coming back after ten years was sufficient "to cause any flow of questions or reminiscences" (*Main -Travel*. 53), or more than a few strictly necessary words. Grant McLaine only growled something in response to his brother's cheery "good-morning" – one of the "finical" things "not much practiced in such homes as Grant McLane's" (68). Marriage was the relationship within the family most severely affected by such scarcity of words. As Rose said in "Up the Coulé," marriage was "a failure" for most girls of the Middle Border who could not bear life on a farm and could not get a living in the city (82). Girls got married with men of the Middle Border for economic reasons, as shown by the case of Agnes in "A Branch Road," or for a vain desire of escape, or a vain hope of rising in social status, as in the case of Julia Peterson in "Among the Corn-Rows." At the very best, marriages resulted into the reciprocal tolerance with which the Ripleys resignedly carried on in "Uncle Ethan Ripley" and in "Mrs Ripley's Trip," but more often they produced explosions of bitter disappointment and pitiful regret as Laura Howard's in "Up the Coulé":

> I was a fool for ever marrying. I made a decent living teaching. I was free to come and go, my money was my own. Now I'm tied right down to a churn or a dish-pan, I never have a cent of my own. He's growlin' 'round half the time, and there's a chance of his ever being different. (92)

The most frequent flaw in these unhappy marriages was the wife's loneliness due to the husband's disregard. But marital unhappiness might have even more severe consequences like Agnes Kenney's escape from home, or Sim Burns and his wife's failing love and sorrowful inability to communicate with each other in "Sim Burns's Wife." The lines introducing their story are the *leit motif* of their life:

> *A tale of toil that's never done I tell;Of life where love's a*

fleeting wing Above the woman's hopeless hell
Of ceaseless, year-round journeying. (*Prairie* 99)

Love, which had passed with a fleeting wing above Lucretia's life had always been hindered by poverty. Her husband, Sim, "had long since ceased to kiss [her] or even speak kindly to her," (110) and, instead of drawing them closer, economic difficulties had completely estranged them. Once, when Sim went back home, exhausted, hungry, ill-tempered, with eyes gleaming "wrathfully from his dust-laid face," (105), Lucretia in ferocious rebellion against her daily drudgery, was too desperate to care about him. The few words that they exchanged only contributed to reciprocal irritation. Then "her mind changed to a dull resentment against "things" and him" (105). Her situation was so desperate that "she thought of suicide" (105). In the long hours of lonely brooding over her hopeless life, she happened to compare her own destiny with that of Sim's poor old mare that, put to the plough when it was too old and weak to work, with sad drooping head, toiled and toiled, "till at last she could no longer move, and lying down under the harness in the furrow, groaned under the whip - and died." (113) Lily, the young teacher of the local school, intervened to make peace between Lucretia and her husband. Without any word of kindness or affection, husband and wife resumed their monotonous life together, without any better future to be hoped for. In fact theirs was only a truce, not a reconciliation: Lucretia returned to fulfill her tasks as mother and wife, which she had briefly left unattended in silent protestation, but her bitterness did not dissolve. Lily convinced Lucretia that not only her husband was to blame for her suffering, but rather, that it was caused by their common plight: "Sim told me to tell you he was to blame. If you will only see that you are both to blame and yet neither to blame, then you can rise above it. Try, dear" (140).

Nevertheless, Garland's sympathy was entirely with Lucretia. He had, in fact, an obvious aptness to emphasize the woman's martyrdom in the history of pioneering. He seems to suggest that, however hard life in the farm was for men, it was not as hard as the life of their wives. Subject to the same environmental determinism as that which deformed their husbands, the handsome girls of the Middle Border soon became middle-aged shapeless, faded and worn women like Lucretia, or like Mrs Bacon in "Elder Pill Preacher," who "unlovely at her best, about her work in her faded calico gown and flat shoes, hair wisped into a slovenly knot, […] was depressing" (141). Those women's tragedy was their daily toil: cooking for the men, taking care of the children, washing and ironing, milking the cows, making the butter, feeding the horses, following each other in an incessant sequence for seventeen hours a day, were tasks sufficient to drive those women to the doors of asylums, which were mostly filled with the farmers' wives[72]. They did not have any way out of their forced loneliness, out of the confinement of the four walls of their wretched shanties, as Lucretia experienced on trying to run away from her unkind husband.

Only Mrs Ripley succeeded in her determination to have a brief escape. Ethan Ripley's wife, a woman of sixty who "looked pathetically little, weazened and hopeless in her ill-fitting garments" (*Main-Travel* 171), had remained "stuck right to the stove an'churn without a day or night off," (173) for twenty-three years. But one evening, while she was intent on mending a stocking, she briskly announced the unusual resolution to go back East and visit her old folks, and to her husband's and neighbours' "genuine stupefaction" (172), her trip did become a fact."No chance could rob her of it. She had looked forward twenty-three years toward it. But once it had been accomplished, "she had to take "her burden again, never more thinking to lay it down" (185).

Such was the unavoidable plight of the Middle Border women, which of course reflected on the rest of the family. Naturally Garland put the blame of it on the constraining circumstances of farm life, but he emphasized that the women of the prairie were above all the victims of their husbands' disregard and of the sexist attitude of men in general: Mrs Ripley's decision would not have appeared so absurd and unusual had Mr. Ripley shown prompt attention and respect for her nostalgia, and Lucretia Burns would not have succumbed to the tragic instead of ill-treating the children, had realized that she had toiled as hard as he all day.

In short, Garland's stories reveal an intention to suggest that women's rights were ignored in the pioneers' community, and that the farm wife was robbed of her human rights more than her husband was of his. Julia Peterson's tears of exhaustion under July's burning sun seem to contain a double indictment, as does Laura Howard's invective in "Up the Coulé":

> I hate farm-life […] It's nothing but fret, fret, and work the whole time, never going any place, never seeing anybody but a lot of neighbors just as big fools as you are, I spend my time fighting flies and washing dishes and churning. I am sick of it all. (91)

In fact, it is to be argued that Garland's view of the plight of women in the West reflected both concerns related to the agrarian propaganda and those inherent in the stances of feminism. Very probably, due to his connection with the *Arena*, he inevitably got involved into the debate then underway regarding women's rights, of which B.O. Flower was a militant supporter.[73] According to Donald Pizer[74], prior to being influenced by B.O. Flower, Garland had derived from Spencer his equalitarian view of marriage and of women's rights. Even more evident in Garland is the influence of Ibsen who, as Lars Ahnebink pointed out, was a fundamental source of inspiration for "A Branch Road" and "Among the Corn-Rows" [75]. Through both stories runs the same sympathy expressed by Ibsen for the subjugated woman rightly rebelling against men and her community in order to be faithful to herself and her own ideals.

In “Among the Corn-Rows” rebellious Julia Peterson was anxious to get away from her family to build up her own life, but her parents did not allow her to leave the farm, otherwise they would have had to pay a hired man twenty dollars a month for the work that she was doing. In bitter revolt against the perspective of having to consume her entire youth behind the plough, she accepted Rob’s offer of marriage. She knew that her parents would not even allow her to get married and first replied bitterly to the offer saying “they’d never let me go […] I am too cheap a hand. I do a man’s work an’get no pay at all.” She realized also how far Rob’s manner of proposing to her was far from her dreams of courtship. But Rob put in “You’ll have half o’ all I c’n make” (*Main-Travel* 126) and the equalitarian terms of Rob’s proposal soon convinced her to run away with him, driven by the hope of independence and the promise of love. The idea of marriage conceived according to the principle of equity between husband and wife, and according to the lesson of individualism taught by Ibsen, found confirmation in Garland’s personal experience. In *A Daughter of the Middle Border* he wrote:

> My philosophy, even at that time, was essentially individualistic. Equal rights meant equal rights in my creed. I had no intention of asking Zulima Task to sink her individuality in mine. I wanted her to remain herself. Marriage , as I contemplated it, was to be not a condition where the woman was a subordinate, but an equal partner. (98)

For Agnes, in “A Branch Road,” self-realization meant a more severe infringement of moral standards, as she was already a married woman when she received a proposal of partnership between equals. She had been obliged to marry Ed Kinney by financial restrictions and the necessity to give financial support to her widowed mother. But married life had resulted into a torture for her. The radiant beauty of her youth vanished completely from her bent over, exhausted thin body. She lived imprisoned in the tangle of quarrels with her in-laws, while her husband dismissed possibilities to talk with her, bitterly snapping her to silence whenever she dared say something. Will, the betrothed of her youth who had left her for futile motives, returned with the “desire to repair the ravage he had indirectly caused” (*Main-Travel* 45), and to convince her to run away with him. Maintaining with Spenserian faith in the future “well, it’s no use to cry over what was. We must think of what we’re going to do” (46), he promised her a better life which might even include cultural satisfactions coming from music, books, concerts and theatre. “How others might look at it, he did not care” (45). He just wanted Agnes to realize she had a right to escape the humiliations her marriage had obliged her to suffer. His rustic argument was simple and straight: “what right has anyone to keep you in a hole? God don’t expect a toad to stay in a stump and starve, if he can get out” (46), “There’s just one way to get out of this, Agnes. Come with me. He don’t care for you; his whole idea of women is that they are created for pleasure and to keep house” (44). It is evident

that Garland must have approved of Agnes's elopement with Will, because "there was nothing equivocal in his position, nothing to disown, no passion of an ignoble sort" (45). Following Will's advice, unlike Laura Mclaine and Lucretia Burns, Agnes legitimately pursued the possibility to fulfill her duty of self-respect as an individual, and, therefore, to escape her condition of degraded housewife and mere instrument of her husband's pleasure. For the same reason, in *Doll's House*, Nora Helmer abandoned her husband's home.

Garland amply developed the same theme of woman's rights in the novel *Rose of Dutcher Coolly*. The protagonist in the novel is a modern woman who sought emancipation from the backward ideas that prevented her from expressing her personality. She did not want to have a husband who would only oblige her to cooking and child bearing, and to renounce to make a free choice should someone else appear to promise her a better life. She could accept marriage only on an equality basis.

It is to be remembered that Garland's tribute to his female protagonists was due not only to Ibsen's and Spencer's influences, but also to his own experience: as he repeatedly pointed out in his autobiography, he had seen his own mother as the defenseless victim of the frontier. His father was the master of his own situation, but his mother could not but passively suffer the difficulties caused by their continuous westward migration. Consequently, it is natural to expect on the writer's part an unconscious desire to vindicate the farm-wives' destiny so warmly, and to deliberately propose modern ideas for their emancipation.

The reformer's indignation at the injustice suffered by pioneering communities, evident in *Main-Travelled Roads* and *Prairie Folks*, is not the sole source of inspiration for either of the two collections. Garland's journey to Dakota was certainly of capital importance for him, but not only because it awakened his social awareness. If the social concern had been the only motivation in his writing, it would have resulted simply into controversial dissertations rather than into fiction enriched by true deeply felt emotion. The essential tragedy lived in the Midwest enticed Garland's imagination only when the embitterment was ignited by personal motives, as he himself put it in *A Son of the Middle Border*:

> The essential tragedy and hopelessness of most human lives under the conditions into which our society was swiftly hardening embittered me, called for expression, but even then I did not know that I had found my theme. (310)

He was definitely spurred to "tell the truth about the barnyard's daily grind" (312) when, more intimately moved by the suffering in the Middle Border, he realized that his own family had to face exactly the same hardships as those suffered by Sim Burns, and that his own mother - paralysis-stricken since her second stay in the West in 1888 - was a pathetic victim of the frontier. The autobiographical

motivation was then fundamental both for his social criticism and in his narrative works. The dedication note in *Main-Travelled Roads* is most telling:

> To my father and mother, whose half-century pilgrimage on the main-travelled road of life has brought them only toil and deprivation, this book of stories is dedicated by a son to whom every day brings a deepening sense of his parents' silent heroism. (1)

The coincidence between events of Garland's life with those in his stories makes evident the autobiographical drive of his imagination. Let us take Private Smith's return home, in *Main-Travelled Roads*. The image of that soldier returning, gaunt and pale with signs of fever, to resume "his daily running fight with nature and against the injustice of his fellowmen," without exciting notice or a friendly word, epitomizes the return home of that "epic figure" which Whitman called "the common American soldier" (151). Garland described how this common character lost his personal peculiarities to become an emblem of national pride and faith in the future:

> The common soldier of the American volunteer army had returned. His war with the South was over, and his fight, his daily running fight against the injustice of his fellowmen, was begun again. In the dusk of that far-off valley his figure looms vast, his personal peculiarities fade away, he rises into a magnificent type. (152)

But, although elevated to the depersonalized stature of national symbol, Private Smith was firmly rooted in Garland's familiar grounds, echoing his father's return from the Civil War, as described in *A Son of the Middle Border*.

The autobiographical element in Garland's works is not solely revealed by the overlapping of fiction and actuality. Above all it is what triggers the process of objectification in art of feelings originated in personal circumstances. As Bledsoe puts it in his introduction to *Main-Travelled Roads*, "Garland had a large gift for translating his private emotions into public abstractions" (*op. cit*,. XVI). Evidence of this is given by "Up the Coulé," the most autobiographical of Garland's stories. Howard McLane's return to the West to visit his parents, somehow resembles Garland's journey back to Dakota in 1888, except that the latter was returning home without having won laurels yet. Howard's emotions in viewing the landscape, his feelings for his mother, his attempt to help his relatives to harvest hay, his decision to buy a more comfortable house for them, the desire to spend with his mother Thanksgiving are facts corresponding to those described in *A Son of the Middle Border*, but the autobiographical element consists mainly in the feeling that runs

through the whole story: Howard's regret at realizing how much he had neglected his mother in pursuing personal success reflects an analogous feeling to which Garland often alluded in his autobiography[76] - the sense of guilt for having abandoned his family, and especially his mother, to go and seek success in Boston, and thus become an accomplice of the Eastern society, the primary cause of the poor living conditions in the Middle Border, to become one of those "fellers that don't work (*Main-Travel* 63), for whom Western farmers had to toil.

Garland's inner conflict between that sense of guilt and the need to escape which led him to Boston, between the attachment to his family and the lure of personal success away from home, was the same inner conflict experienced by Howard on his return home. The inner conflict eventually exploded in the clash of personalities between Howard, refined, cultivated, well dressed, and his brother Grant, a tragic, sombre farmer "his large, long rugged Scotch face bronzed with the sun and scarred with wrinkles that had histories, like sabre-cuts on a veteran, the record of battles (*Main-Travel*. 101).

"Daddy Deering" in *Prairie Folks* is another story imbued with the autobiographical note made of fact and feeling. Daddy Deering, exalted as the prototype of the strong, robust pioneer, ennobled and at the same time degraded by his own life, is the perfect projection of the idealization that Garland had made as a boy of his uncle David McClintock. David McClintock had been the hero of Garland's boyhood, and Daddy was a hero for his nephew, little Milton. Like David McClintock, Daddy Deering was gifted with artistic qualities destined to remain anonymous and unknown, and his failed attempt to play the violin again, when he had lost the use of his hand, is parallel to the episode narrated in *A Son of the Middle Border* about David's physical decay and inability to play as well as he used to. Also here the autobiographic element is reflected, not only in the realistic representation of facts, but above all in the feelings informing the story: the nostalgia for a vanishing past, or the sense of guilt disturbing both Milton for not having taken measures in time against Daddy Deering's decay, and Garland for not having been of any help when his mother was struck by paralysis.

The autobiographical input had a particular relevance in Garland's stories, giving a special vehemence to his social denunciation and enhancing the quality of his realism. Garland found in realism the most suitable means to voice his social protest, but, being his indignation ignited by personal emotions, his representation of reality never became cold and detached as in the works of French Naturalism. His descriptions of the farmers insisting on harsh physical traits and the rendering of their environments with a focus on unpleasant details reveal the obvious adoption of a realistic writing technique, but they never give the impression of a documentation provided with cold detachment by a writer who is foreign to the reality documented. The personal and emotional bond between the writer and the

reality described is constantly visible, and the heavier stress is put on the actual data, the stronger is the sense released of authentic, truly lived life.

In sum, Garland's realism does not seem to be the expression of a literary taste *per se*, or of a *forma mentis* leading the author to look, *a priori,* for themes suitable to a realistic rendering, it is rather the occasional instrument to serve a state of mind prior to the intention to produce a realistic narration. Of course, all this does not exclude that Garland's work may be rightly classified as belonging to the movement of realism. His work can be placed within the realist school owing to the fact that he stripped the prairie of the romantic halo, that he had the courage to depict "the infinite tragedy of these lives which the world loves to call peaceful and pastoral," (*Main-Travel* 90) and that he debunked the idyllic view of corn husking, threshing, (in "Daddy Deering" and in "A Branch Road"), pig-killing (in "Daddy Deering") and all the rest of rustic life, of which the tourist could only catch the picturesque and which he had the merit to introduce into American literature with minute descriptions.

In assessing Garland's realism we have not only to consider he autobiographical element, but also to keep in mind that the realism he was inclined to follow was Howells' mild true to life realism, rather than the naturalism of French origin which, instead, particularly influenced Norris, Crane and then Dreiser. However, Ahnebrink spoke of precise reverberations of naturalism in Garland's descriptions of farm life and tried to demonstrate their debt to Zola, by comparing them with similar passages in *La Terre*, the well-known portrayal of farm life which had a vogue in the years during which *Main-Travelled Roads* was written. "Like Zola, Garland did his best to dive his reader of any sentimental notions he might have of the happy and healthy life led by farmers; like the French writer he wanted to refute Rousseau's slogan 'Back to nature" (Ahnebrink 235), but the similarities between their works may just be assumed as due to a chance coincidence between what Garland, once again, derived from his own true experiences of country life and what, in the French writer's case, was a deliberate literary fabrication.

As to the philosophy of naturalism, Garland proved quite keen to accept it. He did interpret the conditions of life in the Middle Border in deterministic terms. Zola believed that the individual's behavior is determined by internal and external forces. Garland, and then Crane and Norris, shared the same view: western people, gifted by nature with good will, sensibility and moral health were reduced to sorts of beastly beings by the spiritual distress and lack of human communication to which they were condemned in the endless prairie wasteland. As already pointed out, those individuals' physical look was the first to show the action of deterministic forces on them, reflecting damages suffered by their character: daily toil and eternal unhappiness brutalized women like Lucretia Burns, or Agnes who, grown thin and bent, at the age of 30 had lost all the shining beauty of her youth; men, once athletic, healthy and robust young fellows were deformed into figures whom only Garland's

sympathy could prevent from appearing like grotesque caricatures. Garland's deterministic view of life in the Middle Border is synthesized in Radbourn's words:

> You must remember that such toil brutalizes a man; it makes him callous, selfish, unfeeling, necessarily. A fine nature must either adapt itself to its hard surroundings or die. Men who toil terribly in filthy garments, day after day and year after year, cannot easily keep gentle; the frost and grime , the heat and cold will soon or late enter into their souls. If the farmer's wife is dulled and crazed by her routine, the farmer himself is degraded and brutalized. (*Prairie*, 137)

What is worse is that a man cannot get out of such life, as Grant said in "Up the Coulé", a man is caught in it "just like a fly in a pan of molasses. There ain't any escape for him, the more he tears around, the more liable he is to rip his legs off." (*Main-Travel* 87)

Garland's concept of determinism is also suggested by his frequent use of words such as 'slave,' 'machine,' 'automata' alluding to the strict rules that determined the farmer's life from outside. But, again, it was never a thorough allegiance to the French movement of thought.

First of all, French determinism implied that the individual's free will is regulated by two factors – environment and heredity, For Garland, instead, the environment was indeed a basic factor, but heredity had no effect on the farmer's life, or at least it did not have a negative effect. As a matter of fact, in all his stories Garland referred to the congenital integrity of character and physical characteristics of the western farmer. Moreover, as to the impact of the environment on his characters, even though strong, it was limited by the high concept Garland had of those people: Grant, Sim Burns, with their worn out garments, their coarse boots, their brutal, sometimes beastly, reactions, do not provoke disgust, but, rather, sympathy. In Garland's view, the figure - and the significance - of the farmer in its essence remained untouched by external forces. His crippled body, rather than diminishing the farmer, gave him a heroic dimension. Like Wilson in "Drifting Crane," notwithstanding all adverse influences, the 'farmer' or "settler" "represented the unflagging energy and fearless heart of the American Pioneer. Narrow-minded, partly brutalized by hard labor and a lonely life, yet an admirable figure for all that" (*Prairie* 195).

Furthermore, a total acceptance of the philosophical tenets of determinism would imply a pessimistic vision of life, while, as a "veritist," Garland himself claimed to be indeed an "optimist," "a dreamer" nourished in Spencer's theories. It seems that his determinism did not have a universal purport, as it was a particular section of society that he viewed in the grasp of deterministic forces -, the agrarian society. There was no hope for the farmer to get free from those forces in the

present, however, as Radbourn said, he could hope in a better future, were removed those forces, which, after all, sprang from one source only, i.e. economic and social injustice, for which Garland saw a prompt and precise remedy- the single tax.

If we understand correctly Charles Walcutt's interpretation[77], we may observe with him that Garland's deterministic view focused mainly on economic circumstances and social discontent. It did not presuppose hereditary conditions, and contemplated transitory, avoidable situations, not universal, immutable realities. On the other hand, Garland's individualism, his faith in man's resources, were strong enough to provide a safety escape from the extreme implications of the philosophy of determinism.

An example of such faith can be found in "Among the Corn Rows". The story illustrates the spirit of initiative and stamina with which Rob undertook his search for a better life, and reached the place where he could say "I am my own boss[…] and I'm going *to stay* my own boss if I haf to live on crackers an' wheat coffee to do it; that's the kind of hairpin I am" (*Main-Travel*. 107). Rob realized he was helped by good fortune and, having become from poor farmer famous actor, admitted: "It was luck […] I did nothing to merit it." Instead, John Boyle's and Haskins's courageous journey West ended in failure.

So Garland's sort of deterministic situations combined with the emphasis he put on the fortuitous and fatalistic. Not always he saw life as regulated by fixed laws of cause and effect: sometimes it was a reality at the mercy of unpredicted forces.

That Garland was inclined towards the doctrine of fatalism appears in the description of the different destinies of the two brothers, Howard and Grant, in "Up the Coulé." The two brothers moved from the same starting point, the farm, but while the former managed to have a successful career away from home, the latter stayed to till the soil, and, a prey to misfortune and eventually depression, lost this homestead and his land, having the letter sent for financial help to his brother never reached its destination. The difference between the two brothers' lives was made by a "best chance," Howard was aware of that. He asked himself "Am I so much superior to him? Have not circumstances made me and destroyed him?'' and concluded, telling his brother: "Circumstances have made me and crushed you. That's all there is about that. Luck made me and cheated you. It ain't right" (98, 99).

Also "A Branch Road" gives evidence of the relevant part chance played in Mid-Western people's lives. William planned a visit of reconciliation with his girl, but because of a minor accident to one of his buggy wheels he was delayed, and when he arrived he found that the girl had left. As a consequence of this accident, in despair he gave up his studies and went West, while the girl, feeling abandoned, married unhappily.

The emphasis on adverse fate in Garland's works, even though enhancing, as in a

deterministic approach, the negation of free will, once again shows that his adherence to the doctrine of determinism was only partial and possibly counterbalanced by other alternative influences. For example, Lars Ahnebrink argued that Garland may have been drawn to Turgenev 's works by "the latter's use of the failure type of man, a type which Garland had ample opportunity to study in the Middle West (Ahnebrink 318). This reminds us that to whatever other writer Garland may seem akin, the main catalyst of his inspiration was most invariably his direct observation and personal experience of life. This, also again, represents the line of demarcation between his work and French naturalism. Nevertheless, Anhebrink noted that, being Garland acquainted with evolutionary thought, "like the French naturalists he depicted man's kinship with the animal" (125). In "A Branch Road," when Bill Young was angry "the wolf rose in him." (*Main-Travel*.12), and Will, in a fit of jealousy, wrote to his fiancé a cruel adieu letter which came from the ferocity of the mediaeval savage in him" (36). Similarly, Howard said that the "savage" was in Grant (63), while Haskins, in a wild wrath against Butler, was transformed into an "avenging demon." (170). But all these phrases and nouns denoting animals and savagery do not provide undisputable evidence of a belief in the theory of the animal nature of man. More probably those words are intended to stress sporadic states of mind of individuals living in particular contexts, rather than to imply allegiance to Darwin's theory. Even if they were intended otherwise, they would not be meant to reveal the surfacing of the inner true nature of man , but rather, momentary aberrations from it. After all, even when described in the grip of violent emotions, Garland's characters are shown as people capable of dominating the worst part of their inner selves: Young was able to win the fight between the excesses of his bad temperament and his usual self, Haskins with a sudden leap caught a fork in his hands and aimed it at Butler, but managed to control himself in time, "his hands relaxed; the fork fell to the ground; his head lowered" (170).

Garland had a concept too high of farmers like Grant and Haskins to degrade them in his writings to the low level of animals. He, instead, saw as signs of animal behavior the expressions of sexual obsession of which were to be condemned the characters presented by French writers. As a writer he was coherent with the criticism that, in this respect, he moved against naturalism at a theoretical level: his characters never fell into sexual debasement or depravities of any sort. His characters may have been failures, people defeated by social injustice or fate, but never moral degenerates. His women were reduced to despair by their environment, but were never hysterical and neurotic females dominated by passion like Teresa Raquin. Like Turgenev's women, they were endowed with a personal force of will, often stronger than men's, and could choose to follow their own road when they were given the chance to do so[78].

Women's elopements are frequent in Garland's stories to unexpectedly interrupt his monotonous insistence on social-economic issues. On behalf of women's rights, Garland audaciously allowed Agnes, Julia Peterson, Marietta to infringe the moral

standards of their time and place. There was nothing illicit in their escapes, nothing deceitful, no constraint on the part of their seducers. They freely agreed to run away taking their own part of responsibility in their decisions. Garland did not leave space to any doubts regarding their correct behavior, if morality is intended as something ampler than mere conformism.

In "William Bacon's Hired Man," Marietta, a more conventional character than the other women, went back to his father's home after the failure of her clandestine marriage with Lim, justified herself and deflated the shock of her behavior by reminding him that her own mother had been compelled to a similar audacious action in order to marry him when he was only an unfortunate farmer without any means. In "Among the Corn-Rows," Julia Peterson's acceptance of Rob's simple and honest proposal was not tinged by any condemnable passion, and she decided to run away with him in perfect mental and spiritual freedom, therefore her motives were presented by Garland as perfectly legitimate. A genuine naturalist would have depicted Agnes's desertion with a halo of perversity prompted by illogical and uncontrollable instincts. Her escape with the man with whom she had been in love in her youth would have lent itself to be presented as the fruit of an insane or at least instinctive passion, but Garland rejected the naturalist mode, pointing out that "She was not moved by passion. Flesh had ceased to stir her." She was convinced by the logic of his argumentation rising "to the level of Browning's philosophy" (46).

On the other hand, Garland did not indulge in romantic elation, and described pragmatic attitudes and concrete, situations in ordinary life. Agnes had lost the beauty of youth; seven years had passed since the time of her idyllic love for Will; her disastrous marriage and similar disappointing experiences on Will's part had erased in both of them a romantic vision of life: "He did not love the woman before him so much as the girl whose ghost she was – the woman whose promise she was" (45). He felt responsible for the situation in which Agnes found herself now, and was ready to make amends.

In writing the story, Garland was faithful to Howell's concept of 'common beauty' and coherent with the tenets of his 'veritism' which demanded descriptions of ordinary types in ordinary life: his farmers were not exceptional types or grotesque caricatures; even Sim Burns was defined as an "average farmer,"[79] although depicted in colors stronger than those of any other settler. Garland did not look for the abnormal or the pathological. Similarly, in order not to surpass the boundaries of the concrete, he avoided giving way to romantic feelings even if sentimentality was not completely foreign to his nature. Every so often the sentimental note rang through his stories, as for example, in "Up the Coulé" with Howard's expression of love and respect for his mother. But the typically romantic modes prior to Darwin's concept of man and the universe did not enthuse him and he avoided sensational plots, the action of a 'deus ex machina', or the happy ending to solve the intricacy of situations.

In *Main-Travelled Roads* and *Prairie Folks*, plots are simple, the situations are static and nothing there can make the author incur the charge of sensationalism with which his mentor, Howells, blamed the form of art that deviated from ordinary reality. Except for female elopements, which as we have seen are properly justified, there is nothing much in Garland's stories to interrupt the slow, monotonous flow of the common life of the Middle Border. In the absence of a narrative movement, dramatic effects are obtained with the relentless emphasis on realistic situations without resorting to sensational vicissitudes which might disturb the sense of a really lived average kind of life, whether beautiful or ugly. For example, in "Up the Coulé" the conflict between Howard and Grant does not unfold through changes of state or interferences of other kind, but is made more and more dramatic by the urgent rise of its own tension. And once it has reached its climax, the drama is not diluted into a happy ending: even though the two brothers reached a pathetic understanding, Howard could not offer any remedy for Grant's unhappy plight – it would have been useless to give him money to buy the farm; money could not have lifted Grant's spirit and rescued him from the despondency determined by the adversity of fate. Grant turned down the offer of help saying:

> I'm too old to take a new start. I am a dead failure. I've come to the conclusion that life's a failure for ninety-nine per cent of us. You can't help me now. It's too late.(101)

In fact, Garland closed most of his stories with the rejection of the happy ending. Mrs Ripley, returning home after her brief trip away, "took up her burden again, never more thinking to lay it down" (185). Hoping to find some respite from the bitterness of the hard years at war, instead, on his return home, Private Smith found he had to undertake another war, against nature and against his fellow beings; after having given vent to her despair, Lucretia Burns resumed the gray routine of her marital life without any spiritual relief or hope in a better future; the story "Under the Lion's Paw" culminates at the climax of drama, when Haskins hardly managed to arrest his murderous impulse and avoid complete ruin.

By avoiding unexpected improbable solutions and happy endings for his stories, Garland seems to have chosen his own technique to render a truthful narration of ordinary life - in which unhappiness and suffering are seldom dispelled by unexpected twists and turns. In this way, in obeisance to the principle of 'veritism,' he rendered a picture of the Middle Border, which was faithful, even though static and compressed within the boundaries of the social denunciation. Similarly static and compressed was the expanse of his narration, which he chose to constrain within the boundaries of the short story.

The choice of the short story *genre* turned out to be of suitable advantage for Garland. The spatial limits imposed by this genre probably helped him to contain

(and at the same time enhance) the dramatic quality of certain motives which otherwise would have been diluted into the sentimental or through prolix repetition. Garland's gaze moved within the space of a particular environment, according to the principles of local color he himself had enunciated. But it did not reveal the psychological insight attempted by those who renounce extensive analysis and engage the particular in order to scan it to its very core, and to ferret out of it the universal. Confining sufferance within the limits of only one cause -the economic and social cause- Garland crystallized all investigation on the surface of the actual, and disregarded the interweaving of unfathomable factors that constitute the intimate essence of daily existence. It is to be argued that the constraint of vision within fixed boundaries of width and depth compressed the writer's emotional impulse which exploded into the impetuous hues with which he colored the detail. As a result readers are confronted with the representation of a monodic experience of life in which the autobiographical motif and the reformer's concern combine to conjure feelings from the contingent actuality and to impose on the writer an instantaneous, impressionistic reaction.

Only the descriptions of the natural scenery appear of ampler and transcendent purport. The spectacle of the vast expanses of western lands and skies seemed to subdue the writer's spirit of revolt and to free him from the the constrictions of the reformer's social and engagement – which appears to have been sincere and unpremeditated, and, therefore, to have brought more gain than loss to his art. In fact, while on one hand the social involvement circumscribed his work within time and place, on the other hand, it gave colour to his art and saved it from banality.

Bledsoe, perhaps too derogatorily, remarked "without indignation, banality was the only place Garland could go"[80]. As a matter of fact, when his social indignation and personal resentment were toned down, at the very best, Garland's stories might reach the vividness of "Uncle Ethan Ripley," in which a light tone of humorous sympathy makes up for the banal theme of the easy-going husband dominated by his wife. But, without the spur of the social concern, Garland's later stories did not overcome the banality of "Saturday Night," a story which already showed all signs of the writer's decline. The fact is that once his spirit of indignation was smothered, in Garland's works appeared all the flaws of a narrative where local color had been the objective rather than simply the medium. Of Garland's best art then remained only certain vivid effects obtained with the use of theimpressionistic technique.

Significantly enough, Garland himself declared he was an impressionist, a colorist, one who in writing proceeded to render "unified impression[s]" (*Crumbling* 97) of natural sceneries - even though outlining characters and inner spaces with an attention to details akin to the methods of naturalism. In his descriptions of nature, the color prevails over the framework, and a polychromous whole of yellow, pink, orange, blurs lines and realistic features. Kept to a minimum and rapidly replaced by different passages, often according to a technique of opposition between the

natural world and human feelings, Garland's impressionistic descriptions perfectly convey his strong sentiment of nature along with the lyricism emanating from the prairie crossed by the main- travelled road of the West which, as everywhere , is " hot and dusty in summer, and desolate and drear with mud in fall and spring, " while "in winter the winds sweep the snow across it." (*Main-Travel*. VII)

More than for the technique of description, Garland may be considered an impressionist for the way he dealt with the subject matter of his stories. The best of them show his adherence to the notion of impressionism as a means to be faithful to his self and to his own impressions as an impressionist author, whose " attitude to nature is [to be] a personal one" (*Crumbling* 104) and whose reaction to any given reality is subjective and immediate. And with his spirit of protest, his tendency to social denunciation and personal resentment, Garland's reaction to his vision of the Mid West, during his journey to Dakota, was certainly subjective, immediate, spurred by his spiritof social and personal resentment.

In substance, in his stories Garland was consistent with his creed. Concentrating his investigation on a given environment, he fulfilled the objectives of his regionalism; dealing with the plight of average Western people, he carried out his program of democratic art; making use of the impressionistic method, he produced his own type of realism, distinguishing it from naturalism in general, and conforming it to his ideal of veritism.

Critical interest in Garland's works has focused on his short stories and above all on *Main-Travelled Roads*, very rightly considered his best work.

Amidst the reading public's bewilderment at the early manifestations of realism, in *Criticism and Fiction* Howells granted the first praise to Garland's stories, those "severely conscious studies of Wisconsin life". About *Main Travelled Roads*, he wrote "These highways are truly the paths that the sore feet of the common men and women have trodden to and fro in the rude new country" (261). He found in them the kind of art which responded to his view of democratic art, that is, he gave them the coveted recognition of indigenous art in which "the average West and Far West may behold itself as in a mirror" (264).

Howells' praise was not sufficient to trigger long-lasting critical acclaim for Garland. On the contrary critics have often pointed out the limitations of his literary achievements, relegating him to a secondary position in the history of North-American literature.

Garland's failure to reach a higher rank of literary recognition has been identified with his decline from realism – that is, with his inability to follow the road undertaken with *Main-Travelled Roads*, and with his prompt settling, at the outset of his literary career, for the conventional, sentimentalized form of art, as testified by

some stories of*Prairie Folks*,

Investigating the writer's falling off from the elevated standpoint reached with *Main-Travelled Roads*, Mencken maintained that in Garland's work there was an awareness of beauty, but the confident gusto of the artist was always lacking, so fate led him into paths too steep and rocky[81]. Even more severe was Bernard Duffey. In the fiercest attack ever moved by any critic against Garland, Duffey argued that Garland's commitment to realism and to the social cause was urged by sudden inspiration or opportunity, rather than by needs intrinsic in his nature: his realistic and reformist writing came only upon the opening to him of a chance for literary success. Most telling were his submissions to B. O, Flower who in 1889 inaugurated the radical magazine *Arena*, hospitable to articles on the Farmer's Alliance, the Populist movement and other subjects of a Western and reformist sort. In "Hamlin Garland 's "Decline" from Realism" the critic concluded:

> We may, with justice, argue that for Hamlin Garland reform and realism were never in themselves primary literary or intellectual pursuits. They were accessory for a time to his campaign for intellectual and literary success. To the extent that they served his end, he used them; but he seemed from the beginning never to hesitate over any necessary compromises. His trade was learned [in Boston] at the fountainhead of Eastern genteel tradition, and it was in that tradition, with occasional lapses in favor of Flower, Howells, Kirkland, that he drew his identity and rewards[82].

Donald Pizer counterbalanced the charge of opportunism on Garland with an ample documentation ascertaining the fact that Garland's remarkable early writing was genuinely spurred by deep-felt anger against the injustices of the Middle Border[83]. Pizer also downplayed the fault of mediocrity and conservatism in Garland's later writing, stigmatized by Granville Hicks in the 1930s[84], pointing out a paradox in the writer's career[85]: Garland was a 'narrow-minded' evolutionist, he remained strictly faithful to the vision of his youth, and therefore unable to realize that, in force of the very evolutionary laws of which he had been a spokesman, his point of view as a younger man was to become obsolete. Because of that unawareness, he had become unfit to compete with the more advanced later stages of realism, and incapable of carrying the burden of his social commitment at a time when social problems from agrarian and rural (the ones he knew) had become industrial and urban.

Also Parrington pointed out Garland's inability to surpass the boundaries of his agrarian world, as the reason why he was considered outdated by the younger generation, forgetful of their agrarian origins, and as the reason why he became a 'survivor' when the Populist revolt waned to nothing more than an episode in the

history of America[86].

And if we see with Kazin that realism for Garland was not the literary equivalent for populism, but populism itself[87], we can understand why, once the populist ferment was over, Garland was unable to develop his career in consonance with the characteristics of his own realism in *Main-Travelled Roads* and *Prairie Folks*.

But, once again, as has been unanimously argued by Bledsoe, Knight, Walcut, Williams, Van Doren and Kazin himself, it is to be remembered that there was an autobiographical element along with the spirit of protest to condition the realism of those works,. And acknowledging this can help to understand Garland's realism and Garland's decline from it.

As a matter of fact, in *Crumbling Idols* Garland declared "The realist has only one law, to be true to himself." (93) that is to his personal emotions at a given time and place. The faithfulness to this principle to some extent justifies Raw's definition of Garland as 'romanticist'[88]. It also explains how, once he felt detached from any reality which was not the Middle Border, Garland felt unable to render that reality in a 'veritist' way.

However, notwithstanding the charges against him because of his supposedly pedestrian talent, Garland's merits have not remained unacknowledged.

Although defining Garland a 'half-writer,' who reduced the innumerable complexities of taste and form and experience to a class struggle between the burly West and the decadent East, Kazin recognized Garland's merit to have cleared the ground for realism by resorting to his autobiographical experience of rural life[89];

Also Anzilotti acknowledged the writer's importance. He praised him for contributing to literature his deep-felt and precise rendering of the impact of the environment on characters, and for repeatedly proclaiming the injustices of social slavery and the needs for social emancipation. To these and all other critical recognitions of Garland's own service to the development of realism by opening the common mind to vistas of nationalism, freedom and democracy there is to be added Parrington's evaluation. Parrington saw in Garland more than the simple observer and chronicler. According to Parrington Garland's greatest merit was to have evocated the hopes and spirit of the Middle Border as well as to have depicted its defeat, having thus enclosed in his work a great movement, a great experience, one of the most significant chapters of American history.

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Abbreviations

A Daughter of the Middle Border	*A Daughter*
A Son of the Middle Border	*A Son*
Crumbling Idols	*Crumbling*
Main-Travelled Roads	*Main-Travel*
Prairie Folks	*Prairie*

Endnotes

[1] This is how Garland defined those territories in America which it became possible to colonize after 1869, as a consequence of the widening of the railway network. Cfr J. Hicks. *The Populist Revolt.* Minneapolis: The University of Minnesota Press, 1955, p. 4.

[2] See Gronewold, B.:"The Social Criticism of Garland", Ump. Ph.D. Thesis, New York University, 1943.

[3] See Garland,H. *A Son of the Middle Border.* New York, MacMillan, 1962, pp. 6, 35.

[4] *Ibid*., pp. 116, 126, 128, 146.

[5] His father was thus called due to the manners learned as a soldier in the Civil War.

[6] *Ibid*., pp. 74, 75, 128.

[7] *Ibid*., pp. 133, 134, 264.

[8] *Ibid*. 123, 133, 136.

[9] *Ibid*., p. 254.

[10] *Ibid*., p. 193.

[11] Garland had enrolled for it when his father moved the family to Osage for a brief period of time. He continued to attend the Seminary in spite of his father's opposition, after they had returned to the 'farm'. Cfr "A taste of Village Life" and "Back to the Farm" in *A Son of the Middle Border*, pp.160-185.

[12] Gronewold, in "The Social Criticism of Hamlin Garland," Ph. Thesis, New York University, 1943, p. 40, maintains that the preparation offered by the Seminary could not be more than that ofa modern high school.

[13] An anthology commonly used in the schools of the Middle Border between 1868 and 1874. Cfr Nevins, *The Emergence of American Thought*, MacMillan co., New York 1927, p. 155.

[9] *Ibid*., p. 254.

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[14] See *A Son of the Middle Border*, p. 191.

[15] See Holloway, J. *Hamlin Garland, A Biography*. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1960, pp. 22-24.

[16] For Garland's career as a playwright and his relationship with the Hernes, cfr Pizer D. *H.Garland's Early Work and Career*. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1960, p. 78 and Holloway *J. op.cit.*, p 22.

[17] See Pizer, *op. cit*., pp. 91-92.

[18] See Holloway,J. *op. cit*., pp. 103, 123.

[19] See Pizer D. *op. cit*, pp. 163- 164 and Van Doren, Contemporary American Novelists. New York: MacMillan, 1922, p 44.

[20] See Taylor W.F. *The Economic Novel in America*, The University of Carolina Press, 1942, p. 180.

[21] See *A Son of the Middle Border*, p. 355.

[22] See Holloway J.,*op.cit*, p.114.

[23] See Goldstein J. S., "Two Literary Radicals" in American Literature, May XXVIII, 1945, p.157.

[24] When Garland married Zulime Taft, in "The Downfall of Abner Joyce," whose protagonist is

satirically reminiscent of Garland, H. B. Fuller wrote: “His downfall was complete” (qtd. InHolloway, op. cit., p.163).

[25] See *A Son*, p. 393; Carter E, “H. Garland” in *Dictionary of American Biography*, supplement 2, New York, Scribner’s Sons, 1958; Spiller R., *Literary History of the United States*, New York, MacMillan, 1948, II, p. 1020.

[26] See Holloway, op.cit., p.246.

[27] See Holloway, J., p.283.

[28] See *A Daughter*, 72-80.

[30] Ahnebrink Lars, *The Beginnings of Naturalism in American Fiction*, Upsala-Cambridge Mass, Harvard University Press, 1950, p.15.

[31] See Ahnebrink Lars, *op cit*., p. 15.

32 See Morrison and Commager, Storia degli Stati Uniti di America, Firenze, La Nuova Italia, vol. II, p.1.

[33] For the agrarian situation in the Middle Border see Commanger, *Storia degli Stati Unitid’America*, “Il problema delle fattorie, 272- 284; Ahnebrink, L. 1-10; Parrington, V.L. *Main Currents in American Thought*, New York, Harcourt, Brace, 1930 “Storm Clouds” p.257; Hicks,G. *The Great Tradition*, New York, MacMillan, 1935, pp.142-143; Knight,G. *The Critical Period in American Literature*, Chapel Hill, N.C, University of North Carolina Press 1956, “The Search for reality” pp.49-52; Hofstadter, R. *The Age of Reform*, New York, Knopf, 1966, pp. 23- 130; Nevins, A. *The Emergence of Modern America*, New York, The MacMillan Company, 1927 “The Revolt of the Farmers” pp.54-177.

[34] See Parrington, op.cit., p.104; Commanger, op.cit., 282-284 and pp.322-331.

[35] See Pizer, *op. cit*., p.92 and Parrington, *op.cit*., 104.

[36] See Edwards Herne, “Garland and H.George,” **AL** 1956, XXVIII, pp. 359-367.

[37] See Kazin, op.cit. 50-52.

[38] See Nevins, *op. cit*., p.232.

[39] See Kazin, *op.cit*., pp. 33 and 37.

[40] See Ahnebrink, *op. cit*., p.73.

[41] See Parrington *op. cit*., p.52.

[42] See Van Doren, *op. cit.,*p. 203 and ff.

[43] See Parrington, *op. cit*., p. 203.

[44] See Knight, G,C,. *The Critical Period in American Literature*. Chapel Hill, N.C.; University of North Carolina Press, 1956, p.12.La

[45]See Kazin, op.cit, 133.

[46] See Lars Ahnebrink, *op.cit.*“Literary World," October 2 1886.”

[47] See Lars Ahnebrink , *op. cit*, “The Westward March of American Settlement”, p. 52.

[48] See Kazin, *op. Cit.* 33-34.

[49] See *Crumbling Idols*13, 44, 59, 81, p.13.

[50] qtd by Jane Jane Johnson in the Introduction to *Crumbling Idols* XXI.

[51] See Pizer D. “Herbert Spencer and the Genesis of Hamlin Garland’s Critical System” in *Tulane Studies of English* 153-168.

[52] See *Crumbling Idols* 63, 64, 71.

[53] Quoted in Howells, D.H., *Criticism and Fiction*, p.34.

[54] Cfr R. Anzilotti, prefazione a Strade Maestre, p., XIX

[55] Letter to E.C. Hill, Feb. 14, 1939 in Lars Anhebrink, *The Rise of Naturalism*, p. 139.

[56] Qtd without date in L. Ahnebrink, *op. cit*., and in J.Holloway, *op. cit*., p. 104.

[57] See. Zola, *Teresa Raquin*, p. 12.

[58] *Ibid.*. p.12.

[59] Letter to C.H. Hill in Lars Ahnebrink, *op. cit*., p. 137.

[60] See Goldestein, “Two Literary Radicals: Garland and Markham” in *American Literature* XVII (May 1945) 158.

[61] Quoted in Ahnebrink, L., *The Beginning of Naturalism in American Fiction,* p. 448.

[62] See Garland, “The Literature of Democracy” in Lars Ahnebrink*, op.cit*, p. 50.
[63] See Garland, *op. cit*. pp. 123, 141.
[64]See *A Son* 280.
[65] See Gronewold. B., "The Social Criticism of Hamlin Garland," *op. cit.* p. 248.
[66] See also ibid., p.35.
[67] “John Boyle’s Conclusion, an Unpublished Middle Border Story” in *American Literature* XXXI, March 1959,
[68] It has been argued that the lyricism in Garland’s descriptions of nature is to be attributed to Turgenev's influence. Precisecomparisons have been made between passages in *Main-travelled Roads* and some in Turgenev’s works.
[69] See Taylor W.F., *The Economic Novel in America*, p.162
[70] See Taylor, W. *op. cit*., p. 131.
[71] See *Prairie Folks*, p 127.
[72] See *Main-Travelled Roads*, p 166, *Prairie Folks*, p.133.
[73] See Ahnebrink, L., *op.cit* , p.80.
[74] See Pizer D., *Hamlin Garland’s Early Works and Career*, op. cit.151.
[75] See Ahnebrink, L., *op.cit*. 365.
[76] See. *A Son of the Middle Border*, pp. 338, 339, 347, 367,
[77] See Walcutt,C. *American Literary Naturalism, A Divided Stream*, p. 58.
[78] Cfr, Ahnebrink, *op. cit*. pp 318 ff.
[79] See *Prairie Folks*, p.121.
[80] Bledsoe*, op. cit*., p. XXIX.
[81] Cfr Mencken, “Hamlin Garland” in “A Mencken Chrestomathy”. New York , Knopf, 1949, pp. 498-500.
[82] See *American Literature* , Vol. 25, No 1 (Mar.,1953), pp. 69-74. Duke University Press.
[83] See Pizer, D. “Hamlin Garland in the Standard” in AL XXIV, 1954, pp. 401, 415.
[84] See Hicks,G. The Great Tradition, New York: MacMillan,1933, pp. 145, 148.
[85] See Pizer, D. Hamlin Garland’ Early Work and Career, op. cit. p. 168 and ff.
[86] See Parrington., L. Main Currents in American Thought, p. 299.
[87] See Kazin, A., Storia della letteratura Americana, p. 59.
[88] Raw,R., “Garland the Romanticist “ in Swanee Review, XXXVI, p.202.
[89] Kazin *op.cit*., p.58