Critical Analysis of the Artistic Principles of William Dean Howell's Criticism and Fiction By Means of a Comparison with Aristotle's Poetics

Richard H. Lundstrom
Loyola University Chicago

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CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF THE ARTISTIC PRINCIPLES OF WILLIAM DEAN HOWELLS'S CRITICISM AND FICTION BY MEANS OF A COMPARISON WITH ARISTOTLE'S POETICS

BY

RICHARD H. LUNDESTROM, S.J.

A THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF MASTER OF ARTS IN LOYOLA UNIVERSITY

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VITA AUCTORIS

Richard Henry Lundstrom was born in Terre Haute, Indiana, October 5, 1922. He received his elementary school education at St. Patrick's parochial school in Terre Haute. He attended State High School, Honey Creek High School, and Wiley High School, all in Terre Haute, Indiana. He graduated from Wiley High School in 1939. During 1939 and 1940 he attended Indiana State Teachers College. He attended Marquette University during the summer sessions of 1942.

In September, 1942, he entered the Society of Jesus at St. Stanislaus Seminary, Florissant, Mo., and enrolled in St. Louis University which he attended from 1942 to 1946.

In August, 1946, he began his three year course in Philosophy at West Baden College, West Baden Springs, Indiana, at which time he enrolled in Loyola University. From Loyola University he received the Bachelor of Arts degree in June, 1947. In September, 1947, he enrolled as a graduate student in the Department of English at Loyola University.
CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

In our present day and age it has become the custom in fiction writing to associate the phrase 'best-seller' with immorality. Great quantities of novels are being poured upon the public, some few of which are good, others doomed to mediocrity, still others, and this class contains the vast majority of the publishers' output, of practically no artistic or moral value. All too many of these novels achieve prominence for a short time because of the element of immorality contained in them.

In the latter half of the nineteenth century, William Dean Howells, the Father of American Realism, was starting the American novel along the path by which it has come to its present condition. His emphasis upon Realism was a reaction to Romanticism, then making a last feeble stand in America. However, Mr. Howells's theory of Realism was moderate; and while the modern novel has developed logically from his theory and principles, still in all too many instances it has ignored the guide posts and warning signs he set up to direct it.
It is the purpose of this paper to examine Mr. Howells's theory of Realism in the light of the general artistic principles set down by Aristotle in his *Poetics*. It is important to note that this is not to be a comparison of the theories of Aristotle and Mr. Howells in so far as these theories are rivals. It is rather a study of the classical theory of criticism represented by Aristotle and its relation to the critical theory of Mr. Howells.

In the latter half of the nineteenth century, the Naturalistic novel achieved the ascendancy in France. The pens of such talented authors as Gustave Flaubert, the Goncourt brothers, Emile Zola, and Guy de Maupassant produced volume after volume of pornographic literature under the supposition, explicit or implied, that there is an unbridgeable chasm between art and morality. The inevitable swing away from Romanticism had begun innocently enough. In the beginning the reactionary Realists were content to depict life as it was without the lofty and idealistic soarings of the Romanticists. However, there soon came men like Dumas (fils) who hitched this Realism to a method of morals and sought to teach men to be good by showing in their novels the evils consequent upon sin.

To read a novel describing sin was to have an effect similar to vaccination against smallpox. The fallacy in this method of reasoning lies in the fact
that the excitement of the senses is pleasurable and requires a stronger prophylactic than a book. All cannot resist the ordeal of St. Anthony.1

The next stage of the journey toward Naturalism followed quite logically. For the Realistic author, dealing, as he was, with material that in incapable hands might well become trite and uninteresting, was often forced to go farther and farther afield, to portray more and more abnormal things, the real but exceptional in life, in order to attract the attention required for a well-stocked larder.

So he haunts the hospital and the Salpêtrière, the dramshop and the brothel and dwells among the lowest passions of humanity, until, as with the hero of Musset's Lorenzaccio, they cling to him like the shirt of Nessus. Thus Zola loses all sense of proportion, and with his proneness to exaggeration he piles up descriptions of vice until he can see in humanity no atom of goodness.2

And so the distinction between the Realist and the Naturalist becomes clear. The sane Realist sees life as it is. Of the abundance of matter available to him he must exercise keen artistic selection. He can not use the grotesque, the exotic, or the fanciful as can the Romanticist; his task is

2 Ibid., 758.
more difficult than that of the modern Idealist who can let his fancy play without control. On the contrary,

There is no worse perverter of art and nature than the French Naturalist, because, as Meredith says of St. Simeon Stylites, he 'sees only the hog in Nature and then takes Nature for the hog.' Naturalism had the pessimism and exaggeration of the unreal Romanticism and was, in some cases, hypocrITICAL besides.3

The departure from the Romantic tradition in literature, through Realism, to Naturalism, was not confined to France. With the passage of a few years, echoes of the new movement had reached even to the shores of distant America. However, it was not until the last two decades of the nineteenth century that the Realistic novel came into its own in America.

Engulfed, as she was, in the rapid, almost violent, growth of adolescence, America and her citizens felt their attention drawn towards the momentous events that daily aroused great excitement and interest. American 'Westerners' were in a state of discontent because of a supposed lack of representation in the government and because of a very real persecution at the hands of railroads, insurance companies and land offices. Strikes resulting in violence were common; during one of these, the famous Pullman strike in Chicago in 1893, Eugene V. Debs made a name for himself. A Titan of the steel industry was

3 Ibid., 758-759.
shot and stabbed. The remnants of Cox's army arrived in Washington. The World's Columbian Exposition of Chicago in 1893 gave millions of people their first real insight into their country, the United States of America. The upshot of it all was that a new, national self-consciousness arose and people began to seek to know more about regions of the nation outside their own ken. Add to these facts the trouble with Spain that was brewing in Cuba and there results a nation faced with problems and sincerely seeking to know more about itself and those problems in order the better to find a solution.4

The country was in a ferment; causes were being battled for with a fervor that demanded that novelists should look things in the face and tell what they saw.5

On the other hand, influences from without the United States were equally strong in preparing the nation for the new Realism.

In the fin de siècle the bulwark of Anglo-Saxon (or rather, Victorian) reticence in matters of sex was slowly but certainly crumbling under the ceaseless poundings of waves that crossed the Atlantic. The flood of new Realism from abroad was not to be denied, especially the surge from France. Gautier and Flaubert, Maupassant and Zola were being read, perhaps sub rosa; even The Critic could not ignore them, but did its best to make their names, or at least that of Maupassant, synonymous with evil. Sapho, which startled even Paris in

5 Ibid., 368.
1864, was pirated by a New York publisher who was so anxious to outstrip his competitors that he divided the volume into three parts for the sake of speedier translation. ...And the names of Baudelaire and the Goncourt brothers are sprinkled through the critical essays in the magazines of the times. 6

Likewise, English writers were helping to break down the Victorian tradition of prudery that whoever had wished to write had had to obey. To name only a few, Kipling did not always use delicate words, nor did he tell delicate stories; and the publication of Thomas Hardy's Jude the Obscure in Harper's Magazine was a victory for liberalism since the new novel was almost negligibly romantic and was based upon a grim and remorseless theory of chance. 7

Consequently, America was ready for Realism and there were Realistic writers ready for America.

This Realistic method arose in all the Western countries, spontaneously, inevitably, following similar general causes. No one invented it: it came. Howells was a Realist before he ever heard the word, ...he had written Realistic sketches as a boy in Ohio, sketches "as natural as the tooth-ache," as his father called them. Realism was only relatively new. In England, Defoe was a Realist, and even Jane Austen.... Howells had developed his own Realistic method, and Turgenev rather confirmed than determined this method.... But science had intensified the Realistic

6 Ibid., 370.
7 Ibid., 368.
impulses and the Yankee mind in general was prepared for this movement. 8

In France the literature had passed quite rapidly from Realism to Naturalism. In America, on the contrary, the career of the French was retarded; for here Realism had, almost from the beginning, a strong champion, William Dean Howells, who set down a clear-cut theory of Realism and silenced the cry for Naturalistic novels such as were to be found in the contemporary French school. His word carried sufficient influence and esteem to hold off for a number of years the logical transition from Realism to Naturalism. Nonetheless, his position was that of a small rear-guard, left behind a retreating army to slow as much as possible the advance of the enemy. That Naturalism is in our midst today is evident from the works of Dreiser, Anderson, and countless other lesser lights whose dim glow consists chiefly in the rather common ability to attract attention by being obscene. Paradoxical though it seems, William Dean Howells, all his efforts on behalf of Realism notwithstanding, served to direct the American novel along the path by which it has come to its present condition.

Yet what the Naturalists missed in Howells, as so many others were to miss it for almost half a century after them, was that his delight in reality and his repugnance to Romanticism clearly encouraged them to work at the reality they themselves knew. Whatever his personal limitations of taste and the prudery that was so obsessive that it does not seem altogether a quality of his age, Howells's

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service was to stimulate others and to lend the dignity of his spirit to their quest. Whatever the fatuousness or parochialism that could call three-fifths "of the literature commonly called classic...filthy trash" and set Daudet above Zola because the latter wrote of "the rather brutal pursuit of a woman by a man which seems to be the chief end of the French novelist," his insistence that young writers be true to life as they saw it..."that is the right American stuff"...was tonic.9

The purpose of this paper is to analyze the principles of Realism as set down by Mr. Howells in his small but masterful and direct book, Criticism and Fiction; and in so doing to reach a clear understanding of Mr. Howells's concept of Realism by a comparison with the artistic tenets of Aristotle as enunciated in the Poetics. Character, plot, and the final cause of fine art will be discussed. Naturalism, since it is criticized by Mr. Howells from the standpoint of its failure to realize the purpose of fine art, will be discussed in the chapter dealing with the final cause of fine art.

CHAPTER II
HOWELLS AND ARISTOTLE ON CHARACTER AND PLOT

William Dean Howells, the son of an indigent Scotch printer, was born before the American Civil War in a small Ohio town west of the Alleghany mountains. The date was 1837. He received little or no formal education, but he began early to educate himself when he was given a job as printer's devil in his father's shop. There he learned to read and set type; there it was that he came into contact with his first books; and, more important still, there it was that he came to brush shoulders with the plain, outspoken men of the West and to see life as it was without an overabundance of the social amenities of England and our New England states. During his free hours he occupied himself with writing essays, the topics of which were quite naturally drawn from the life he saw about him. He set the type, printed, and distributed these essays free of charge when, as was usually the case, no purchasers presented themselves. Thus lived William Dean Howells during the formative period of his life. When, as a mature man, he traveled to the East, he took with him a genuine love for the 'true' and the 'commonplace' not only as these qualities were to be
found in his native Ohio, but also as they were manifested in multifarious society the world over.¹

William Dean Howells's greatest claim to fame rests upon his artistry as a novelist and critic. He was also a poet, dramatist, essayist, and editorialist; but the volume and quality of these latter are inferior to his works of criticism and fiction. All his literary writings are distinguished by that quality of Realism to the propagation of which Mr. Howells devoted his long life of eighty-three years.

Realism, while it always carries the connotation of 'actuality,' still is an equivocal term. Enigmatic as it may seem to the many material-minded readers of the present age, the word in its philosophical use is applied to the philosophy which presents a spiritual view of the world, that is, that there exists a reality apart from its presentation to conscience. It is opposed to Idealism which denies any but subjective, mental reality.² Even a precursory examination of these two positions will show that Realism in literature and art came as a reaction to the Romantic flights of fancy prevalent in the late eighteenth and the early nineteenth centuries.

In the field of literature and art, with which we are here directly concerned, Realism still retains its ambiguous character.

The Realist is:
a. He who deliberately declines to select his subjects from the beautiful or harmonious, and, more especially, describes ugly things and brings out details of an unsavoury sort; b. He who deals with individuals, not types; c. Most especially, he who strives to represent the facts as they are.

These three divisions, while subject to further qualification, will suffice for the present purpose. It now remains to be seen to which of these three classes William Dean Howells belongs, or, rather, into which of these groups he has placed himself; for he has left us a very concise and pointed statement of his literary tenets in his masterpiece of critical writing, Criticism and Fiction.

To begin with, it would be a mistake to assume that Mr. Howells was eliciting entirely new principles of his own contrivance in this work.

The principles with which this book of ninety pages is occupied had been affirmed with energy before, as Mr. Howells's magnanimous citations clearly prove. The credit is freely, nay eagerly, relinquished to Symonds, to Farrar, to Emerson, to Valdes, to Carlyle. Mr. Howells is content with the sure burdens and doubtful recompense of the devoted subaltern. When all has been conceded, it is somehow Mr. Howells who has done

3 Ibid. 6.
the work. The honor he diverts to others flows back ineluctably to its source. The supremacy of the simple truth in fiction had been avouched by others; it was implanted by Mr. Howells.4

Nor was Mr. Howells the first to breach the defenses of the entrenched Romanticism.

The widespread interest in fiction, in the new mode of Realism, was a natural effect of the moment... The popular mind was drawn away from the contemplation of grandeur and mysteries to the careful observation of human traits. Human nature in all its complexity became a sufficient field of interest, and minds that had once been concerned with principles and lofty technique, devoted themselves with zest to the study of manners. This inevitable tendency of all post-heroic ages was reinforced at present by the spread of science, which attracts the mind away from itself to the world of outer experience, to all the wondrous fruits of observation. Science revealed the importance of environment, the power of material conditions over the psychic, and the half-romantic Balzac and his realistic French successors gradually brought the novel to terms with science:...whatever was romantic, heroic, distinguished, was revealed as an effect of natural causes, and more and more the novel devoted itself to picturing life as ordinary people lived it.5

Howells simply took up his stand with a rising cause, and, recognizing the intrinsic worth of this new mode of Realism, he devoted all his energies and activities to its prosperity.

5 Brooks, op. cit., 236-237.
Realism such as William Dean Howells envisages, is a somewhat distinct quality in literature, and needs some study and elucidation to distinguish it from other literary qualities often referred to as Realism but which differ greatly in fact from Mr. Howells's conception of it. The purpose here is not to decide which literary type is most properly called Realism, but merely to understand Mr. Howells's terminology, and to bring out the various shades of meaning which he saw fit to place on his interpretation of it.

Of the three definitions given above, the first will by no means suffice for Mr. Howells. Realists as they, in a sense, may be, those "who deliberately decline to select their subjects from the beautiful or harmonious and more especially, describe ugly things and bring out details of an unsavoury sort,"6 were classified by Mr. Howells as Naturalists. No enlargement upon the subject of Naturalism will be necessary here since the Naturalists will come in for explicit mention and discussion in a later chapter.

The next definition given, states that a Realist is he who deals with individuals, not types. Obviously, the definition has to do with the delineation of character, a subject upon which Mr. Howells frequently waxes eloquent. Now it is impossible to state that Mr. Howells's characters, either in theory

or practice, are in every way individuals and in no way types. On the other hand, it is equally impossible to say that they are types and not individuals. Once again, a clear understanding of the terminology involved will serve to resolve the mist.

Artistic endeavor, according to the great classic principles set down by Aristotle in his *Poetics*, has as its object the representation of human life as manifested by character, action and emotion. Aristotle's doctrine is different from Mr. Howells's Realism in that the universal element in human life, and not the particular, is the object of artistic imitation.

'Imitative art in its highest form, namely poetry, is an expression of the universal element in human life.' (Poet. ix. 3.) If we may expand Aristotle's idea in the light of his own system,...fine art eliminates what is transient and particular and reveals the permanent and essential features of the original. It discovers the 'form' towards which an object tends, the result which nature strives to attain, but rarely or never can attain. Beneath the individual it finds the universal. It passes beyond the bare reality given by nature, and expresses a purified form of reality disengaged from accident, and freed from conditions.  

The artist sees a model and lets his imagination work upon that model until he has conceived an ideal of it. This 'ideal' will be without all the imperfections of the particular model; it will have had removed all the characteristics which go to make

up the individual character of the model and will leave only the
universal representation of some human character, action, or
emotion.

This doctrine seems at first sight to be, and, indeed, to a very large extent, is, the very antithesis of the definition of Realism applying to character portrayal. Now the position of Mr. Howells is to be examined in the light of Aristotle's doctrine. Because his theory of Realism was based upon the importance of real, extramental existence, because our knowledge of this reality comes through contact with individual objects having individual characteristics, and, most especially, because he considered it the function of the artist to portray objects as they are, Mr. Howells logically considered that Realistic art should culminate in the expression of the individual.

Whereas followers of Aristotle and Plato had urged that the artist imitate an imaginative synthesis recreated from reality selected in the interest of a representative type, something universal derived from particulars, Howells ridiculed this doctrine of idealization as analogous to reproducing a cardboard grasshopper when a "real grasshopper" was available. Idealizing characters meant to him taking "the lifelikeness out of them and putting the booklikeness into them." "The greatest achievement of fiction, in its highest sense, is to present a picture of life: and the deeper the sense of something desultory, unfinished, imperfect it gives, even in the region of conduct, the more admirable it seems." 8

8 Gay W. Allen and Harry H. Clark, Literary Criticism, Pope to Croce, New York, American Book Company, 1941, 565
Passing over for the moment the rather flagrant misinterpretation of the true meaning of Aristotle's 'imitation' revealed by Mr. Howells in this quotation, we give his own very concise statement upon the Realistic character.

But let fiction cease to lie about life, let it portray men and women as they are, actuated by the motives and passions in the measure we all know; let it leave off painting dolls and working them by springs and wires; let it show the different interests in their true proportion, let it forbear to preach pride and revenge, folly and insanity, egotism and prejudice, but frankly own these for what they are, in whatever figures and occasions they appear; let it not put on fine literary airs; let it speak the dialect, the language of unaffected people everywhere; and there can be no doubt of unlimited future, not only of delightfulfulness, but of usefulness, for it.

Van Wyck Brooks has this to say of the Realism of Mr. Howells's character portrayal:

Accordingly, for settings, he liked those fortuitous meeting-places, where his fellow-Americans gathered on a neutral ground: and he shared all their pleasures in the bustle of travel....How amusing to sit in a waiting room with people whom one saw for half a minute! Howells delighted in these adventures, in the tinkle of the ice-water pitchers, in the cinders of the train, in the negro porters, the conductors, the drummers,.... Through decade after decade, Howells followed the life of the nation, and he caught so many of its phases that as a social historian he had no equal. No doubt, he was most at home in domestic relations....

Howells's portrait-galley was large. He knew the town and the village, the farm and the city, the factory, the business-office and the lumber camp, the artisan, the idler, the preacher, the teacher:... professors at home, religious impostors, philanthropists, helpless children, manufacturers, scientists, country squires, sterile dilettanti,...and the village fool. All these people were admirably real.... In range and variety his portrait-galley was second to none:...and so truthfully drawn were all his people that every reader exclaimed at once, Yes, this is right, how well I know them! They all assumed flesh and blood at once....And how natural were his conversations, what an ear he had for shades of distinction in tone between regions and classes, the rustic and the urban, the Western, the Virginian, three or four kinds of Bostonians, and the people of Maine!10

It can readily be seen that Mr. Howells's creations were highly individualized characters. In fact, this ability to perceive and bring out the maze of seemingly small yet significant detail is one of the important factors of Mr. Howells's genius.

Further light will be shed upon the position of Mr. Howells by an understanding of his position in regard to the then recently defunct Romanticists and their followers. That Mr. Howells came under the influence of these men can readily be inferred from his words quoted above, "let it speak the dialect, the language of unaffected people everywhere,"11 which

obviously have their origin in Wordsworth’s Preface to the Lyrical Ballads. 12

Toward the middle of the nineteenth century, the literature of the Romanticists had degenerated into what, in the field of the novel, was a continual orgy of sinister villain versus virtuous heroine, of sentimentality, blood and thunder, pursuit and chase.

Edward S. Ellis’s Seth Jones or The Captive of the Frontier (1860), one of the earliest of the sort, its hero formerly a scout under Ethan Allen, but now adventuring in Western New York, sold over 600,000 copies in half a dozen languages. Though no other single dime novel was perhaps ever so popular, the type prospered, depending almost exclusively upon native authors and native materials: first the old frontier of Cooper and then the trans-Mississippi region with its Indians, its Mexicans, its bandits, its troopers, and above all, its cowboys, among whom “Buffalo Bill” (Col. William F. Cody) achieved a primacy much like that of Daniel Boone among the older order of scouts. Cheap, conventional, hasty,—Albert W. Aiken long averaged one such novel a week, and Col. Ingram Prentiss produced in all over six hundred,—they were exciting, innocent enough, and scrupulously devoted to the doctrine of poetic justice, but they lacked all distinction, and Frank Norris could justly grieve that the epic days of Western settlement found only such tawdry Homers. 13

What chiefly characterized American fiction of the decade 1850-1860,... was domestic sentimentalism.14

All this vast output of extremely poor literature was characterized by the tall, strong, handsome hero, the dark scoundrel, and the swooning heroine. The characters were not types; they were stereotypes. It seems probable that the great overabundance of this type of literary output had no little influence upon Mr. Howells; that it was, at least in part, responsible for his demand that characters be real, be full of the life blood then coursing through the veins of living, breathing Americans. He states very clearly and concisely his case when he writes that a real character is the most difficult type to create since it involves an understanding of human character.

Superhuman characters, subterhuman, preterhuman, or intrahuman characters are easy to portray compared with human characters. It is easier to portray "passion" than feeling. It is easier to show oneself a "genius" than an artist. One may not make one's reader enjoy or suffer nobly, but one may give him the kind of pleasure that arises from conjuring, or from a puppet show, or a modern stage play, and leave him, if he is an old fool, in the sort of stupor that comes from hitting the pipe; or if he is a young fool, half crazed with the spectacle of qualities and impulses like his own in an apotheosis of achievement and fruition far beyond any earthly experience.15

In this same regard Mr. Howells quotes a passage taken from the introduction to Senor Armando Palacio Valdes' novel, The Sister

14 Ibid., 69.
15 Howells, op. cit., 70-71.
of San Sulphizo. To get the full import of this passage, imagine that Mr. Howells has just read for the twentieth or thirtieth or even the hundredth time a slightly modified version of the heroine's breath-taking escape over the ice-floes of a storm-tossed river. Such violent strivings toward arousing emotion he labels 'effectism.'

Valdes defines "effectism" as a vie existing in human nature and in the artist which prompts him to display the qualities that he thinks will astonish his readers, just as women laugh for no reason if they have pretty teeth. Artists think it necessary to strive for exaggerated effects in order to be recognized as geniuses by the vulgar. There are many persons who suppose that the highest proof an artist can give of his fantasy is the invention of a complicated plot, spiced with perils and surprises, and suspenses; and anything else that is the sign of a poor and tepid imagination. Even some critics refer to this striving on the part of the author for effect as "power." Equally obnoxious, says Valdes, are those who strive for effect in paradoxically complex characters. Love that disguises itself as hate, incomparable energy under the cloak of weakness, virginal innocence under the aspect of malice and impudence, wit masquerading as folly, etc., etc. By this means they hope to make an effect of which they are incapable through the direct, frank, and conscientious study of character.16

Such is the objection of William Dean Howells to the effete remnants of decadent Romanticism. However, it would be erroneous to conclude from his words that he was the foe of true Romanticism. For, being a sincere man, and consistent with his

16 Howells, Ibid., 68-69.
principles of Realism and honesty, he could not but recognize
the intrinsic worth of the artistic productions of the great
Romanticists, Wordsworth, Coleridge, Shelley, Keats, and Byron.
Certainly with these men he has no quarrel. Indeed, he states,
once again citing Valdes, that

'It is entirely false that the great
romantic...poets modified nature; such
as they have expressed her they felt her:
in this view they are as much realists as
ourselves. In like manner if in the real-
istic tide that now bears us on there are
some spirits who feel nature in another
way, in the romantic way,...they could not
falsify her in expressing her so. Only
those falsify her who, without feeling
romantic wise set about being romantic;
wearisomely producing the models of
former ages; and equally those who, sharing
the sentiment of Realism which now pre-
vails, force themselves to be realists
merely to follow the fashion.' The pseudo
realists, in fact, are the worse offenders,
to my thinking, for they sin against the
living; whereas those who continue to
celebrate the heroic adventures of Puss in
Boots and the escapes of Tom Thumb, under
various aliases, only cast disrespect upon
the immortals who have passed beyond these
noises.\textsuperscript{17}

Consequent upon what has been revealed above, it now is
patent that William Dean Howells fulfills the second definition
of Realism given at the beginning of this chapter; that he
"deals with individuals and not types."\textsuperscript{18} To this extent he is
in disagreement with Aristotle who maintains that art is the

\textsuperscript{17} Ibid., 63-64.
\textsuperscript{18} cf. Chap. II, note 2.
expression of the universal in human life.

The third definition quoted above states that the Realist is "most properly he who strives to represent the facts as they are." Mr. Howells places himself in this class.

Mr. Howells is not, nor can he be expected to be, as systematic and as clear as the master, Aristotle, who always begins with principles, proceeding therefrom to place every element of his artistic theory in its proper genus and species. However, in the instance of the most important definition in Criticism and Fiction Mr. Howells attains for a moment the insight of the great philosopher. The words are profound, yet simple and obvious once one's attention has been drawn to them. "Realism," he says, "is nothing more and nothing less than the truthful treatment of material." Mr. Howells does not proceed to analyze and define each term, to show its relation to every other term in the definition, and by so doing to reveal the exact signification of the whole. He considers that a man of normal intelligence will be able to understand the meaning of his definition. The reader must cull from the remainder of Criticism and Fiction Mr. Howells's own elaboration of his definition of Realism.

What Mr. Howells means by the truthful treatment of

20 Howells, op. cit., 73.
character has already been made clear. Just precisely what is meant by truthful treatment of the subject-matter of the plot needs further elucidation. In view of the fact that the characters are to be drawn from individuals, preferably individuals of the author's acquaintance seeing that he will be able to write most realistically of these, the subject-matter of the plot must needs be confined to such actions as these characters would be likely to perform. Accordingly, the bulk of his stories were concerned with life as it was being lived in America during his own lifetime. As a boy, William Dean Howells had become familiar with the rough and ready life of the frontier. In his maturer years he had fitted in well with the more aristocratic and cultured circles of the eastern seaboard. As a result, he knew American life in all its varying aspects, and it was of America that he wrote.

If Howells thought it salutary to confine his novels to those aspects of our life which as "the more smiling ones," seemed to him "the more American," we have only recently begun to see the value of his work in proper perspective. Even though he was more courageous in his criticism and his appreciation than in his own creative work, there is much more awareness now than there was even ten years ago that restricted though they were, the novels of William Dean Howells brought something both solid and illuminating to the depiction of American life. His title to fame as a pioneering American realist... will one day stand again unquestioned.21
Norman Foerster has this to say:

In a long series of books he faithfully set down American life as he saw it--Silas Lapham's house in flames, a cut writer deciding what magazine he would most like to edit if he were given the opportunity.... Howells, with grace and calmness, recorded the "realism of the commonplace" in the America about him.  

Finally, Mr. Howells's position upon the all-important denouement of the plot is quite clear:

For the moment it is charming to have the plot end happily, but after one has lived a certain number of years, and read a certain number of novels, it is not the prosperous or adverse fortune of the characters that affects one, but the good or bad faith of the novelist in dealing with them. Will he play us false or will he be true to this or that principle involved? I cannot hold him to less account than this; he must be true to what life has taught me is the truth, and after that he may let any fate betide his people; the novel ends well that ends faithfully.

And so we have at length seen that William Dean Howells is a true Realist. For he deals with individuals, not types, and he strives to represent the facts as they are. However, his artistic stand places him at logger-heads with Aristotle's statement that fine art is the representation of the universal element in human life. Mr. Howells deliberately contrived to make his characters as individual as possible. Nonetheless,

23 Howells, op. cit., 85-86.
the two positions are not without their common grounds.

An explanation of the agreement of these two men will be more easily understood by using the portrayal of character as an example. In the first place, the two terms 'Idealization' and 'Realism,' with its connotation of the individual, are not mutually exclusive.

According to Aristotle, the object of art is the representation of human life. It is important to note that this representation, or 'imitation' as the translators would have it, is to be idealized; it is equally important to note that the artist must give us his creation in a form manifest to the senses. For our senses can, by no stretch of the imagination, apprehend an abstract man; they must see the actuality before them and this actuality will be apprehended only through individuating characteristics perceivable to the senses. True, the classic Greek artists so standardized these individuating notes that their artistic creations could not be said to be any particular individual. Thus sculptors conformed to norms or standards of proportion between head and torso, height and weight.

Regularity was the fetish of Polycleitus; it was his life aim to find and establish a canon or rule for the correct proportion of every part in a statue; he was the Pythagoras of sculpture, seeking a divine mathematics of symmetry and form. The dimensions of any part of a perfect body, he thought, should bear a given ratio to
the dimensions of any one part, say the index finger. The Polycleitan canon called for a round head, broad shoulders, stocky torso, wide hips, and short legs, making all in all a figure of strength rather than of grace. The sculptor was so fond of his canon that he wrote a treatise to expound it, and molded a statue to illustrate it.25

All imperfections that inevitably occur in the works of nature were removed; the result was an idealized man.

To find the direct opposite to the Greeks in art, if, indeed, this may be called art, we have only to examine the work of the Roman portrait sculptors of later centuries. Their works are slavishly individual. Every imperfection, every wrinkly sag of cheek or chin, every sign of cruelty or debauch, every mark of kindness is faithfully wrought in the stone. Such work has nothing in common with Aristotle, for the Roman portrait sculptor was in the very same status as the modern photographer. Mutatis mutandis, William Dean Howells has taken a course midway between the two. His characters, as has been shown above, are definitely individual. Yet he has not drawn them out to such an extent that we feel that there exists only one such person in the world. The character of Silas Lapham, for example, despite all its rugged individualism, is a type which stands for all of America's nouveaux riches struggling to assume a position of prominence in a poorer but more finely-tuned society.

The Rise of Silas Lapham, our first and greatest analysis of the self-made man and of the social implications of his money, is a tragedy whose significance reaches nearly the whole of self-made America. 26

Silas Lapham with his Yankee sense for business, his black cigars, his devotion to his wife and daughters, his uneasiness during the formal gatherings of the Boston blue-bloods, his ham-like hands protruding from his sleeves, his ramblings about the citizen-army of the Civil War while half in his cups, is a character whom one imagines one has met and talked with and loved. And yet Silas Lapham is any man who has pulled himself up by his own bootstraps to a position of affluence only to find life made miserable by an unintelligible maze of social traditions and conventions. Silas Lapham is at once a particular man and a symbol standing for a whole class of men.

Nobody generalizes more persistently than Mr. Howells; the comprehensive reflection incrusts—some would say infests—the later novels; yet, outside of criticism, his fidelity to the trail of individual experience is a valuable and noticeable face. The explanation is not remote. Mr. Howells is passionately fond of the generality that borders on the particular, the generality that is divided from the particular by a single step of the mind, and is still instinct with the aroma and warmth of the concrete world which it has barely and passingly forsaken. 27

27 Firkins, op. cit., 59-60.
William Dean Howells was no scholar of Aristotle. It is obvious from some of his writings that he never formed an accurate idea of the Aristotelian concept of 'imitation.' A reference made by Mr. Howells to classical 'imitation' will be given in full.

The young writer...is instructed to take the lifelikeness out of them and put the book-likeness into them. He is approached in the spirit of wretched pedantry...and told: 'I see that you are looking at a grasshopper there which you have found in the grass, and I suppose you intend to describe it. Now don't waste your time and sin against culture in that way. I've got a grasshopper here which has been evolved at considerable pains and expense out of the grasshopper in general; in fact, it's a type. It's made up of wire and card-board, very prettily painted in a conventional manner, and it's perfectly indestructible. It isn't very much like a real grasshopper, but it's a great deal nicer, and it's served to represent the notion of a grasshopper ever since man emerged from barbarism. You may say that it's artificial. Well, it is artificial; but then it's ideal too; and what you want to do is to cultivate the ideal. You will find the books full of my kind of grasshopper, and scarcely a trace of yours in any of them. The thing that you are proposing to do is commonplace, for the very reason that it hasn't been done before. But if you say that for this reason it isn't commonplace, you'll have to admit that it's photographic....I hope the time is coming when the...artist...will have the courage...to reject the ideal grasshopper wherever he finds it, in science, in literature, in art,...because it is not like a real grasshopper. But...I think the time is yet far off, and that the people who have been brought up on the ideal grasshopper, the heroic grasshopper, the impassioned grasshopper, the self-devoted grasshopper, the adventureful, good old romantic cardboard grasshopper...must die and the natural grasshopper can have a fair field.'

28 Howells, op. cit., 11-12.
Sad to relate, Mr. Howells displays here a rather profound ignorance of Aristotle's artistic theory. What Mr. Howells did not realize was that Aristotle, in stating that the universal is the object of all artistic endeavor, was presenting an object that was at least as real as that which he himself was advocating through his Realism. True, Mr. Howells asked nothing more of the artist than that he be true to nature. But to Mr. Howells nature was the concrete, visible manifestations which we see around us, e.g., the grasshopper in the flesh. Therefore, he could see no reason why the artist should go to the unnecessary and profitless trouble of idealizing a grasshopper when he could walk to the nearest field and find an original to copy. Mr. Howells was imitating nature in that he considered the products of nature to be nature itself. Thus he considered the grasshopper, rather than the force that made the grasshopper, as nature. To Aristotle, on the contrary, nature was not so much the grasshopper but rather that force which produced the grasshopper.

'Art imitates nature,' says Aristotle, and the phrase has been repeated as a summary of the Aristotelian doctrine of fine art. ...The use of the word 'nature' would in itself put the matter beyond dispute; for nature in Aristotle is not the outward world of created things; it is the creative force, the productive principle of the universe.29

29 Butcher, op. cit., 116.
Now "...Nature takes her course from the Divine Intellect..." and being thus divinely fashioned can be content with nothing short of perfection in her works. Nature always tends toward this perfection yet never fully achieves it. It is the work of the artist, according to Aristotle, to realize this perfection of nature in his artistic productions.

Nature, often baffled in her intentions, yet tends towards the desirable end. She can often enlist even the blind force of necessity as her ally, giving a new direction to its results. Wherever organic processes are in operation, order and proportion are in varying degrees apparent. The general movement of organic life is part of a progress to the 'better,' the several parts working together for the good of the whole. The artist in his mimic world carries forward this movement to a more perfect completion. The creations of his are framed on those ideal lines that nature has drawn: her intimations, her guidance are what he follows. He too aims at something better than the actual. He produces a new thing, not the actual thing of experience, not a copy of reality, but a...higher reality--'for the ideal type must surpass the actual;' the ideal is 'better' than the real.

And so we have the higher reality which is the object of Aristotle's 'imitation.' It is the perfection toward which nature tends but which it can never reach because of the limitations of the material it must use. It is the perfection of which the artist forms a concept by visualizing to himself the

30 Ibid., 120, (Carlyle's translation of Dante's Inferno, xi., 97-111).
31 Ibid., 152.
common end toward which all the particular visible manifestations of nature are tending. It is the ideal, the object of art.

It passes beyond the bare reality given by nature, and expresses a purified form of reality disengaged from accident, and freed from conditions which thwart its development. The real and the ideal from this point of view are not opposites, as they are sometimes conceived to be. The ideal is the real, but rid of contradictions, unfolding itself according to the laws of its own being, apart from alien influences and the disturbances of chance.32

Mr. Howells's lack of a true understanding of Aristotle is undoubtedly attributable to his informal education. It is very unlikely that he ever received any incentive to read the Poetics; and, consequently, his knowledge of what Aristotle had therein was got through hear-say. He was so intent upon the quest for reality that he failed to see that his 'real' grasshopper chirping in the nearby lot was but the production, the shadowy image, of a greater reality.

Nonetheless, if Mr. Howells's position be examined in the light of the artistic theory, tastes, and output of his own day, his advocacy of Realism immediately becomes a subject for our admiration and profound respect. The traditional classics had been used as the models for a great deal of sterile, colorless writing. Men were afraid to speak out their souls unless it be in the spirit of the former masters of art. This adherence

32 Ibid., 150-151.
to tradition was without all moderation, without reasonable foundation, without allowance for the personality of the particular artist. It was because of this condition that Mr. Howells launched his criticism of the ancients and demanded that artists reject the ideal grasshopper because it was not "simple, honest, and natural." Because of the circumstances we can recognize the propriety of his statement of the artist's commission:

...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 still like to play with. He cannot keep terms with Jack the Giant-killer or Puss in Boots, under any name or in any place, even when they reappear as the convict Vautrec, or the Marquis de Montrivaut, or the Sworn Thirteen Noblemen. He must say to himself that Balzac, when he imagined these monsters, was not Balzac, he was Dumas; he was not realistic, he was romantic.

What Mr. Howells wanted was not a group of men who could imitate the great artists of the past, but who could imitate nature as they saw it around them in the nineteenth century. Both Classicism and Romanticism, insofar as they had become the objects of slavish imitation, were the objects of Mr. Howells's attack.

33 Howells, op. cit., 12.
34 Ibid., 16-17.
CHAPTER III
HOWELLS: THE END OR PURPOSE OF FINE ART. NATURALISM

Having, therefore, examined the differences between the classic artistic theories of Aristotle and those of Mr. Howells, both in regard to character and the object of art, we now quite naturally ask what the fundamental cause of such diversity may be. What are the premises from which logical reasoning developed the diverse conclusions? The answer to this question is to be found in each man's conception of the purpose or final cause of fine art; for having differently conceived the purpose of fine art, Mr. Howells and Aristotle quite naturally differed in what they considered to be the most appropriate manner of fulfilling this purpose. Mr. Howells is quite clear on the point:

Democracy in literature is the reverse of all this. It wishes to know and to tell the truth, confident that consolation and delight are there; it does not care to paint the marvellous and impossible for the vulgar many, or to sentimentalize and falsify the actual for the vulgar few. Men are more like than unlike one another; let us make them know one another better, that they may be all humbled and strengthened with a sense of their fraternity. Neither arts, nor letters, nor sciences, except as they somehow, clearly or obscurely, tend to make the race better and kinder, are to be regarded as serious interests; they are all lower than the rudest crafts that feed and house
and clothe, for except they do this office they are idle; and they cannot do this except from and through the truth.1

Quite clearly, the purpose of fine art, according to Mr. Howells, is the presentation of truth. As is frequently the case in Criticism and Fiction, Mr. Howells does not consider it necessary to define the term in question; he presumes that a man of maturity will know what is meant by his term. His own elaboration must be culled from the remainder of the book.

To treat the definition of 'truth' briefly from its philosophical point of view, the term implies a certain conformity between the intellect and the object known.2 Thus a man is said to have the 'truth' when his idea of an object is conformed to the object itself. Now 'truth' thus defined applies to all being, since there can be conformity between everything that exists, or can exist, and some intellect, if not the intellect of man, then the intellect of God. Obviously, the range of 'truth' must be confined within less extended bounds when it is applied to fine art. Otherwise, all sciences, physics, chemistry, history, biology, and philosophy would be included in the realm of fine art. Mr. Howells tells us the limitation of the application of the term 'truth' as he uses it in this regard.

1 Ibid., 188.
I confess that I do not care to judge any work of the imagination without first applying this test to it. We must ask ourselves before we ask anything else, Is it true?—true to the motives, the impulses, the principles that shape the life of actual men and women...and if the book is true to what men and women know of one another's souls it will be true enough. 3

In these words Mr. Howells defines the boundaries of fine art. Fine art is to be, first and foremost, true; true to "the motives, the impulses, the principles that shape the life of actual men and women." Mr. Howells then proceeds to his quasi-definition of 'truth,' not according to genus and species, but relying upon that notion of truth, however hazy, that every man has within his soul—"and if the book is true to what men and women know of one another's souls it will be true enough." So attached to this idea of truth was he that he occasionally seems to stress it too strongly, even to the detriment of the element of human emotions, impulses and principles. An example of what is here intended is Mr. Howells's reference to the memoirs of General U. S. Grant. If any bias is present, it may be explained by the great devotion Mr. Howells felt toward the man who had at length brought an end to the bloody American Civil War.

But the personal memoirs of U. S. Grant, written as simply and straightforwardly as his battles were fought, couched in the most unpretentious phrase, with never a touch of grandiosity or attitudinizing, familiar,

3 Howells, op. cit., 99-100.
homely in style, form a great piece of literature, because great literature is nothing more nor less than the clear expression of minds that have something great in them, whether religion, or beauty, or deep experience.4

What attracted the eye of Mr. Howells in the memoirs of General Grant was a shining example of the simple presentation of the truth he loved so well.

When one has clearly realized the importance that Mr. Howells places upon truth in literature, many of the other elements of his artistic theory immediately become intimately connected with the whole. Having understood Mr. Howells's devotion to truth, one can readily perceive the purpose behind the objection to Naturalism as understood in the French school.

Naturalism has been heretofore defined as the product of artists who "deliberately decline to select their subjects from the beautiful or harmonious and more especially, describe ugly things and bring out details of an unsavoury sort."5 Having set up truth as the end of fine art, Mr. Howells will quite naturally criticize this Naturalism of the French novelists from the standpoint of its truth, from its conformity, or its lack of it, to the facts as they are.

Now the French naturalistic novel was, according to Mr.

4 Ibid., 89-90.
Howells, bound up with a "tradition of indecency." The truth of this statement can be borne out by anyone with even a slight acquaintance with the works of such men as Zola, Flaubert, and the Goncourt brothers. The passion of love is the perpetual theme. It pervades every phase of the lives of the naturalistic characters, and even seems to assume the important position of the one be-all and end-all of human life. Mr. Howells was himself a rigid Puritan, a strict moralist, as will be seen from his attitude toward Shakespeare's Falstaff.

The voice of centuries tells him that Falstaff is one of the great characters of literature. He feels as though he ought to admire Falstaff: he really tries hard to do so, but he can't. He is both relieved and delighted when Shakespeare finally dismisses the old reprobate into oblivion. Thus Shakespeare is justified and morality is preserved.

Because of his strict morality he often criticizes the Naturalist from a moral standpoint as when he commends Senor Valdes for objecting to the Naturalists because "he finds them unnecessarily, and suspects of being sometimes even mercenarily, nasty." However, Mr. Howells's attack upon Naturalism is not launched solely from the standpoint of morality. Rather he censures Naturalism because it fails in the commission of art to be "nothing more and nothing less than the truthful present-

6 Howells, op. cit., 150.
7 George E. De Mille, Literary Criticism in America, New York, The Dial Press, 1931, 182.
8 Howells, op. cit., 59.
tation of the facts as they are."9 Quoting Senor Valdes, he agrees with this critic that "the French Naturalism represents only a moment, and an insignificant part of life....It is characterized by sadness and narrowness."10 That the passion of love is but an "insignificant part of life" is indeed true, because this passion, as the French Naturalists treated it, was not subordinate to other goals in life, but the other goals were subordinate to it. This, according to Mr. Howells, was the case in certain instances in actual life; it was indeed real, but it was also the exceptional in life and, therefore, not the proper artistic subject. He says:

No one will pretend that there is not vicious love beneath the surface of our society; if he did, the fetid explosions of the divorce trials would refute him; but if he pretended that it was in any way characteristic of our society, he could be still more easily refuted.11

Thus he acknowledged the fact that "vicious love" exists in society. Nonetheless, the treatment of this love in the raw manner of the Naturalists dooms to failure any attempt at the truthful telling of the facts of life and, consequently, predestines any work to artistic worthlessness. The reason he gives for such a position is valid in view of the manner in which human beings normally act.

The material itself, the mere mention of

10 Howells, op. cit., 59.
11 Ibid., 150-151.
it, has an instant fascination; it arrests, it detains, till the last word is said, and while there is anything to be hinted. This is what makes a love intrigue of some sort all but essential to the popularity of any fiction. Without such an intrigue the intellectual equipment of the author must be of the highest, and then he will succeed with only the highest class of readers. But any author who will deal with a guilty love intrigue holds all readers in his hand, the highest with the lowest, as long as he hints the slightest hope of the smallest potential naughtiness.12

Because human nature is fallen, its attention is too easily riveted to the passion of love, and any too vivid treatment of this passion will completely obscure from a reader's mind the other elements of the author's work. Thus the novel will not be truly realistic, for it will present only a "moment and an insignificant part of life."13 And because it is not realistic, the naturalistic novel is to be rejected as a work of fine art. Naturalism is not art because it does not present a true picture of life. It is as if a painter were to desire to produce a seascape in oil and then proceed to make the derelict boat upon the beach so large and prominent that all the sand, the sea, and the sky are blocked from view. Human life covers a wide range of activities, contains multifarious aspects, and any artist who portrays only one aspect, only one activity, is not presenting a true picture of life, is not truly realistic, and, therefore, is not producing fine art.

12 Ibid., 151-152.
13 Ibid., 59.
Generally, people now call a spade an agricultural instrument;....They require of a novelist whom they respect unquestionable proof of his seriousness, if he proposes to deal with certain phases of life;...It is quite false to suppose that our novels have left untouched these most important realities of life. They have only not made them their stock and trade; they have kept a true perspective in regard to them....They have kept a correct proportion, knowing perfectly well that unless the novel is to be a map, with everything scrupulously laid down in it, a faithful record of life in far the greater extent could be made to the exclusion of guilty love and all its circumstances and consequences....I justify them in this view not only because I hate what is cheap and meretricious, and hold in peculiar loathing the cant of the critics who require "passion" as something in itself admirable and desirable in a novel, but because I prize fidelity in the historian of feeling and character. Most of the critics who demand 'passion' would seem to have no conception of any passion but one. Yet there are several other passions: the passion of grief, the passion of avarice, the passion of pity, the passion of ambition, the passion of hate, the passion of envy, the passion of devotion, the passion of friendship; and all these have a greater part in the drama of human life than the passion of love, and infinitely greater than the passion of guilty love. Wittingly or unwittingly, English fiction and American fiction have recognized this truth, not fully, not in the measure it merits, but in greater degree than most other fiction.14

Despite his Puritan outlook, despite his high personal sense of morality, William Dean Howells censures Naturalism chiefly from an artistic point of view; Naturalism does not present a true picture of life, it fails to be nothing more and nothing less than the truthful treatment of material. Life,

14 Ibid., 154-157.
for the most part, consists in a succession of commonplace events, motives, aspirations, and characters. Each passion, each aspiration, each event takes its appointed place in the character and life of man, and, taken together, the form a harmonious, rounded, true picture of life. When a particular passion is drawn from its surroundings, emphasized and bloated to undue proportions, then the picture of life thus given is about as realistic as the image of a man seen through the curved mirror in the fun house at the carnival.

However, Mr. Howells's adverse criticism of the French Naturalists was not without its mitigating element. He knew that, after all, de Maupassant, Zola, and the Goncourt brothers were but the children of the age in which they had been born and educated; that they were the reliable reflection of the condition of a large section of French life. Due to the onrush of the scientific movement, the literary elite of France sought to explain all natural phenomena, even human actions, as the result of certain combinations of chemical and physical causes. Consequently, morality and the high aspirations of the spiritual component of human nature were barred from their literature. The physical, the animal component of human nature, advanced to the fore in the consciousness of the French because it was the most observable element in human life, and because it was the most susceptible to description, classification, and explanation. The French Naturalists were merely acting in accord with
the trend of the times.\textsuperscript{15} "There is something antipathetic and gloomy and limited in it, as there is in modern French life,"\textsuperscript{16} says Senor Valdes. Mr. Howells's comment upon these words is:

"But this seems to me to be the best possible reason for its being. I believe with Senor Valdes that "no literature can live long without joy;" not because of its mistaken aesthetics, however, but because no civilization can long live without joy. The expression of French life will change when French life changes: and French naturalism at its worst is better than French unnaturalism at its best."\textsuperscript{17}

French Naturalism was an expression of the unnaturalness of contemporary French life. But because French life of the age did not ring true, its literature also sounded off key; its literature did not fulfill the requirements Mr. Howells had set up as the norms of true literature; it did not portray life truthfully.

Many modern critics consider beauty as the final cause of fine art. Obviously, Mr. Howells is not in this tradition since he proposes truth as the final cause of fine art. He believed that the novel should be a means by which the people of a nation could be brought into contact with the modes of life of the people in remoter regions of that nation.\textsuperscript{18} For Mr. Howells, the novel was a means of broadcasting the truth. Now, as has been noted above,\textsuperscript{19} Mr. Howells does not give us a clear-cut

\textsuperscript{15} Brooks, op. cit., 236.
\textsuperscript{16} Howells, op. cit., 60.
\textsuperscript{17} Ibid., 60.
\textsuperscript{18} Cf. Chapter I.
\textsuperscript{19} Cf. p. 39.
definition of the term 'truth.' Nor, again, does he define 'beauty.' Nonetheless, his position is clear.

Along with this Puritanical love of high morality went the Puritanical contempt of beauty....Howells's depreciation of beauty in literature arose from a desire to emphasize more strongly what he considered the highest quality of a work of art--its truth....The passion for truth was the foundation-stone of his theory of the novel--the theme of nearly all his criticism. In his love for truth--not merely abstract truth, but facts, reality--he became lyric. "Ah, poor real life, which I love," he chanted, "can I make others share the delight I feel in thy foolish and insipid face?" The virtue of the novel, then, is its truth; it should present the facts of life just as they occur. From this basic theory, and its logical corollaries, Howells judges all novelists.20

It seems highly probable, although such a statement can never be more than conjecture, that Mr. Howells was inspired with this antipathy for beauty because of the false Romanticism and false Classicism with which the book-stores of his age were filled. There was far too much slavish imitation, far too little honest and simple following of the simplicity of nature. William Dean Howells came to associate the idea of beauty with these Classics and, sad to say, he also associated with them his loathing for the so-called beautiful works then being written. It was in such a spirit that he could say:

At least three-fifths of the literature called classic, in all languages, no more lives than the poems and stories that perish monthly in our magazines. It is

20 De Mille, op. cit., 185.
all printed and reprinted, generation after generation, century after century; but it is not alive; it is as dead as the people who wrote it and read it, and to whom it meant something, perhaps; with whom it was a fashion, a caprice, a passing taste. A superstitious piety preserves it, and pretends that it has aesthetic qualities which can delight or edify; but nobody really enjoys it, except as a revelation of the past moods and humors of the race, or a revelation of the author’s character; otherwise it is trash, and often very filthy trash, which the present trash generally is not. 21

William Dean Howells seems to have fallen into the error or prejudice of those critics who "have attempted to show that the fundamental principles of fine art are deduced by Aristotle from the idea of the beautiful." 22 Consequently, despite the fact that there existed a conception of fine art entirely divorced from any theory of the beautiful—a separation which is characteristics of all ancient aesthetic criticism down to a late period—23 Howells presumed that beauty was the end of these Classics, and in rejecting them, rejected beauty as well.

Mr. Howells does not make a clear distinction between truth and beauty, as is so frequently the case in his use of terminology. De Mille says that "as to the relation between truth and beauty, his conception was by no means clear." 24 The statement is indeed true; for having disparaged the theory that beauty is the object of art, he seems to repent of his

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21 Howells, op. cit., 146.
22 Butcher, op. cit., 160.
23 Ibid., 161.
24 De Mille, op. cit., 185.
In the whole range of fiction we know of no true picture of life—that is, of human nature—which is not also a masterpiece of literature, full of divine and natural beauty. It may have no touch or tint of this special civilization or that; it had better have this local color well ascertained; but the truth is deeper and finer than aspects and if the book is true to what men and women know of one another's souls it will be true enough, and it will be great and beautiful. 25

Mr. Howells seems to be seeking to explain in rather an obscure manner the fact that truth and beauty, as transcendentals, are coextensive with all being; that when an object is true, it is also beautiful, and vice versa. Mr. Howells was grasping at the reality of the matter in not wishing to separate beauty and truth completely. But his concepts of truth and beauty and of their place in art are not quite clear, with the result that his expression of these concepts suffers from a lack of precision. The mind of Mr. Howells was "warmed by one great passion—the passion for truth." 26 It is as if Mr. Howells, in his determined and single-minded campaign on behalf of truth suddenly realized that beauty was also truth, and not wishing to harm his beloved truth, reconciled the two. In so doing he achieved the truth as regards the relation between truth and beauty; for as Keats says, "Beauty is truth, truth beauty." 27

25 Howells, op. cit., 100.
26 De Mille, op. cit., 186.
Despite his occasional lack of clarity in his use of terminology, William Dean Howells is, in the broad and large, justified in placing truth as the final cause of fine art. Indeed, the very word 'Realism' would seem to demand that truth be its object. As Jacques Maritain says in his splendid book, *Art and Scholasticism*:

> An integral realism is only possible for an art sensitive to the whole truth of the universe of good and evil, for an art pervaded by the consciousness of grace and sin and the importance of the moment.

Mr. Howells's error lies not in a lack of a clear understanding of what his theory of Realism implied, but in a lack of a clear understanding of what it did not imply. He considered that truth excluded beauty; and when he finally discovered the true relation between the two, he relented only enough to concede a minimum to beauty.

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CHAPTER IV
HOWELLS AND ARISTOTLE: THE FINAL CAUSE OF FINE ART

We have now examined William Dean Howells's position that truth is the final cause of fine art from three different points of view: in itself; as compared with Naturalism; and as related to the theory that beauty is the final cause of fine art. It now remains to examine Aristotle's position as regards the purpose or end of fine art and to see in what elements Howells is similar to, and in what elements different from, the position of Aristotle. As will be seen, the discussion will hinge upon the positions of these two men as regards the universal and particular in artistic representation.

Consistent with his customary manner of investigation, Aristotle goes back to the fundamentals in seeking to explain the purpose of fine art. Accordingly, in this human activity, fine art, he begins with that in human nature which is the source of fine art.

Poetry in general seems to have sprung from two causes, each of them lying deep in our nature. First, the instinct of imitation is implanted in man from childhood, one difference between him and the other animals being that he is the most imitative of living creatures, and through imitation learns his earliest lessons; and no less universal is the pleasure felt in
things imitated. We have experience of this in evident facts. Objects which in themselves we view with pain, we delight to contemplate when reproduced with infinite fidelity: such as the forms of the most ignoble animals and of dead bodies. The cause of this again is, that to learn gives the liveliest pleasure, not only to philosophers, but to men in general; whose capacity, however, of learning is more limited. Thus the reason why men enjoy seeing a likeness is, that in contemplating it they find themselves learning or inferring, and saying perhaps, 'Ah, that is he.' For if you happen not to have seen the original, the pleasure will be due not to the imitation as such, but to the execution, the coloring, or some such other cause.

Man has two basic instincts, says Aristotle, which are the fundamentals of fine art. First, he tends by nature to imitate, the truth of which will be attested by our own experience. As children we were in that time of life wherein "still trailing clouds of glory from God who is our home," we were closest to nature and, therefore, most inclined to follow her whims. Imitating the new wonders that daily filled our lives was purely spontaneous and natural. As Wordsworth says:

Behold the child among his new-born blisses,
A six-years' Darling of a pigmy size!...
See at his feet some little plan or chart,
Some fragment from his dream of human life,
Shaped by himself with newly-learned art;...
As if his whole vocation
Were endless imitation.

3 Ibid., lines 85-107.
And because he is following the impulses of nature, following a natural appetite, pleasure ensues from his works of imitation. This is what Aristotle means when he says there is in human nature an instinct to imitate and that pleasure follows upon the carrying out of that instinct.

As the child, so the man takes pleasure in imitation. His imitation takes the form of fine art and the joyous rapture of the child becomes, according to Aristotle, "a certain pleasurable impression produced upon the mind of the hearer or spectator." This pleasure is not the same as that pleasure which comes from the purely intellectual apprehension of some lofty metaphysical truth, although the pleasure of philosophy and the pleasure of fine art are closely allied. Such is necessarily the case, for fine art is addressed to the sense faculty of man, particularly his imagination, and through it achieves its end. Consequently, the pleasure deriving from fine art cannot be purely intellectual. Nonetheless, a certain intellectual element is present in the appreciation of, in the pleasure deriving from, fine art. The mind, having been given the sense apprehension of the work of art, recognizes the idea, the perfection beyond the visible manifestations of nature, and this intellectual element, joined with the activity of the senses,

4 Butcher, _op. cit._, 206.
5 Ibid., 202.
6 Ibid., 209.
produces a pleasurable emotion consisting of an intellectual as well as the more important sensible element.  

We see, therefore, the contrast between the positions of William Dean Howells and Aristotle: for Mr. Howells, truth is the final cause or purpose of fine art, while for Aristotle it is pleasure.

Now in the light of Aristotle's whole philosophic system with its strong emphasis upon objective reality, it seems that to make truth the end of fine art would be more consistent and appropriate; for truth, considered transcendentally, follows the essences of things, and is in itself an objective reality. On the other hand, pleasure is subjective; it is the personal reaction of an individual to the work of artistic imitation. Thus the standard of fine art would seem to be subjective in Aristotle's system, while the final cause of Mr. Howells would preserve an objective criterion.

Professor Butcher admits that Aristotle is probably not without some inconsistency upon this point. However, strong arguments supporting the objectivity of Aristotle's position are available.

The work of art is in its nature an appeal to the senses and imagination.

7 Ibid., 210.
8 Renard, op. cit., 95.
9 Butcher, op. cit., 208-209.
of the person to whom it is presented; its perfection and success depend on a subjective impression.10

Aristotle knew that human nature was essentially the same in all men; and just as a person with normal eyes will, on looking at a blue sky, see a blue sky, so a person with normal esthetic training would, according to Aristotle,11 feel the emotional pleasure which a piece of art was designed to impart. Butcher states Aristotle's position thus:

Each kind of poetry carries with it a distinctive pleasure, which is the criterion by which the work is judged. A tragic action has an inherent capacity of calling forth pity and fear; this quality must be impressed by the poet on the dramatic material; and if it is artistically done, the peculiar pleasure arising out of the union of the pitiable and the terrible will be awakened in the mind of everyone who possesses normal human sympathies and faculties....The state of pleasurable feeling is not an accidental result, but is inherently related to the object which calls it forth. Though the pleasure of the percipient is necessary to the fulfillment of the function of any art, the subjective impression has in it an enduring and universal element.12

Thus does Aristotle preserve the objectivity of pleasure as the final cause of fine art.

We saw in the previous chapter that the positions of William Dean Howells and Aristotle in regard to the object of fine art--the universal for Aristotle and the particular for Mr. Howells--were not without a common denominator; that

10 Ibid., 209.
11 Ibid., 211.
12 Ibid., 213-214.
Aristotle was imitating nature in so far as he considered nature to be the creative force, the productive principle of the universe; while Mr. Howells was imitating nature in that he considered nature to be the outward world of created things. Both were imitating the real, but they were considering different aspects of the real. So too, in regard to the final cause of fine art. The positions of Aristotle and Mr. Howells seem to be completely different; yet closer examination will show that they are not so distant from each other as they seem, in fact, that they are rather closely related.

The achieving of the final cause of fine art, according to Aristotle, will be dependent not only upon the senses which apprehend some human character, action, or emotion under a form visible to themselves, but also upon a certain intellectual element by which the mind recognizes the idea, the ideal representation of nature, enclosed in the medium chosen by the particular artist. It is important to note that the intellectual element is essential for the attaining of the pleasurable emotion; for man, being a rational animal, is composed of a nature that is at once intellectual and sensitive. This pleasure is an emotion, and will necessarily be an action of the whole man. The intellectual aspect of the emotion consists in the recognition of the ideal in the work of art. This ideal will be something which is common to many things, for in such a manner, and with such a purpose has the artist constructed
his work. As Professor Butcher states it, "The idea, which is purely intellectual, implies and contains in itself whatever is universal, that is, intelligible, in the object of sense."13 

The idea is said to be universal because it stands for that element which objects, differing in other respects, have in common.

Now this universal idea will be a true representation of reality. In the words of Professor Frick, S.J.,

A universal concept is a single sign which stands for many objects; but a single sign can stand for many objects only insofar as it represents something which is actually in these many objects;...therefore a universal concept represents something which is actually present in these many objects.14

In other words, the mind will contain a representation of something which exists, at least fundamentally, in extra-mental objects which are individual and particular; that is to say that there exists a certain conformity between the intellect and the object known. It will be noted that this "conformity between the intellect and the object known" is the definition of truth as given above.15 Consequently, it becomes clear that

13 Butcher, op. cit., 126.
14 Carolo Frick, S.J., Logica, Friburgi Brisgoviae, Herder and Co., 1925, 235. (Conceptus universalis est signum unum rerum plurium; atqui unus idemque conceptus signum plurium esse nequit, nisi quatenus aliquid repraesentat, quod in his pluribus vere inest;...ergo conceptus universalis repraesentat aliquid, quod vere inest pluribus.)
Aristotle's pleasurable emotion contains an intellectual element which is nothing but that conformity between the intellect and the object known which constitutes truth. To this extent, Aristotle's position is in accord with that of Mr. Howells which places truth as the end of fine art. Indeed, considering the matter in this light, the position of Aristotle seems to embrace that of Mr. Howells, seeing that truth is but an element in the pleasure that Aristotle wishes to achieve. However, a more accurate understanding of the contrast between the two positions will be gained through an examination of what each of the men mean by the term 'truth.'

While discussing the difference between the type of character advocated by Aristotle and that advocated by Mr. Howells, we reached the conclusion that the characters of the former were universal, while those of the latter were particular. So here, in the discussion of truth, the difference which lies in each man's use of the term will be explained by universality and particularity. It has been pointed out above that 'truth,' as Aristotle uses the term, has a universal significance, for the idea which the mind abstracts from the matter the artist has used to realize his ideal, is universal. But for Mr. Howells, 'truth' had a quite different connotation. De Mille gives a clear idea of what William Dean Howells means by 'truth' when he says, "In his love for truth— not mere abstract truth, but facts, reality—he became lyric," and such
is certainly the case. What Mr. Howells wanted was not the universal truth, but particular truth. He wanted the ordinary thoughts, the petty foibles, the humdrum of the every day life of this man or that woman. He wanted what his beloved Tolstoy was giving the world in novels such as War and Peace. He wanted the petty vanity and little mannerisms of Anna Scherer, the puppy-love of Natasha, the indifferent success of young Count Rostov as an officer in the Russian army, the mental scruples and gymnastics of Pierre. He wanted such art as Tolstoy gave us in weaving together all the insignificant little threads of human activities into the great tapestry of early nineteenth century Russian life.

Aristotle, as a philosopher, sought the universal. Mr. Howells, as a student of contemporary American life, wanted that life to be known through a depiction of all its various facets.

16 De Mille, op. cit., 135.
CHAPTER V
CONCLUSION

In view of what has gone before, the following facts become apparent. First, William Dean Howells was a man of his age. His book *Criticism and Fiction* was a cleavage from the tradition of Romanticism and Classicism.

Secondly, he maintains that the object of art should be individual men; that it should be the representation of this particular, human character, action, or emotion. He disagrees with Aristotle who states in his *Poetics* that the object of artistic imitation is the universal element in human life. The two positions can be reconciled in that both are representing a reality: Howells, the reality which is the outward world of created things which he considers to be nature; Aristotle, the reality which is the creative force, the productive principle of the universe which he considers to be nature.

Thirdly, Mr. Howells maintains that truth is the final cause of fine art and in so doing disagrees with Aristotle who places pleasure as the purpose of fine art. The two positions have a common element in that truth plays an essential part in
the attainment of esthetic pleasure. They differ in that 'truth' is, for Aristotle, universal, and, for Mr. Howells, particular.
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APPROVAL SHEET

This thesis submitted by Richard H. Lundstrom, S.J., has been read and approved by three members of the Department of English, West Baden College, West Baden Springs, Indiana.

The final copies have been examined by the director of the thesis and the signature which appears below verifies the fact that any necessary changes have been incorporated, and that the thesis is now given final approval with reference to content, form, and mechanical accuracy.

This thesis is therefore accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree of Master of Arts.

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Date

John B. Conrath, S.J.
Signature of Director