

**“Richmond-in-Virginia” in the Literary World:
Correspondence Between Ellen Glasgow and Carl Van Vechten**

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The reader focusing critical scrutiny on Ellen Glasgow cannot avoid analyzing “Richmond-in-Virginia” during the early twentieth century.¹ As writer she set her novels in Richmond or other Virginia locations. As Southern woman she embodied that trait commonly referred to as “Southern hospitality” and is still remembered as much for her aristocratic lady-like conduct as for her writing. Her identity as realistic author is closely tied to her identity as Richmonder. In each novel Glasgow worked to avoid the prevalent sentimentalism she found so distasteful in Southern writing, focusing instead on the harsh realities of life for Southern women in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Yet Glasgow preferred Richmond to literary centers like New York and London. She visited these cities often, annually for several years, but never felt comfortable remaining for long periods of time. She revered Southern traditions, but considered them inspiration for future work, not a burden of retrospective veneration.² Glasgow lived and died a Richmonder, proud of her Southern heritage but critical of its early writers.

Ellen Glasgow’s Richmond was not always the provincial backwater she claimed it to be in letters to her cosmopolitan friends. Although she ironically wrote, “there are no ‘literary’ people in Richmond,” the city and its surroundings boasted a startling number of “literary people” and artists during the early decades of the twentieth century (Glasgow 1958, 173). Ellen Glasgow and James Branch Cabell called Richmond home throughout their lives. Princess Amélie Rives Troubetzkoy and her husband, Prince Pierre, Mary Johnston, Thomas Nelson Page, Hunter Stagg, Emily Clark, and Stark Lee all called Richmond or the surrounding areas home for a time. During the early twenties, *The Reviewer*, one of few Southern “little magazines,” received national critical acclaim and circulation during the four years of its short-

¹ “Richmond-in-Virginia” was a term James Branch Cabell used to describe the unique literary blossoming of the city within its Southern context.

² She details these feelings in her first essay contribution to *The Reviewer*, “The Dynamic Past” (3.1 [March 15, 1921]: 73-80).

lived circulation.³ These authors and artists found in Richmond a rich literary and cultural tradition from which to draw inspiration. As an oasis in H. L. Mencken's "The Sahara of the Bozart," how well did Richmond's writers fare in mainstream literary opinion?⁴ To characterize this "literary mainstream" during the 1920s and 1930s, three writer/critics come to mind: Carl Van Vechten, Joseph Hergesheimer, and Henry Louis (H. L.) Mencken. These three share the distinction of being the first authors published by the upstart Alfred A. Knopf. Their literary and critical opinions reflect mainstream opinion by representing the new American literary consciousness that included both the grounded, earthy humor of rural America and the urbane wittiness of a transplanted New Yorker who hosted and supported urban debauchery.⁵ Though physical proximity separates them, their critical work, friendship, and affiliated social and literary history distinguish them as representatives of mainstream literary opinion. On the other hand, Ellen Glasgow and James Branch Cabell clearly represent Richmond's literary community. Behind Glasgow's claim that "there are no 'literary' people in Richmond" lies the ironic understatement that she and Cabell remained the most famous "literary people" in Richmond after *The Reviewer* moved to North Carolina.

By tracing a representative relationship of correspondence—that of Ellen Glasgow and Carl Van Vechten—I hope to illustrate that mainstream literary critics took Richmond's literary renaissance, short-lived though it was, as a serious and viable flowering of genuine acclaimed

³ Nashville's *The Fugitive* and New Orleans' *The Double-Dealer* were the only other Southern "little magazines" of note.

⁴ Essay critical of Southern arts. Refer to the discussion of H. L. Mencken and this essay below.

⁵ Mencken lived outside Baltimore and preferred the small town to the bustling dirtiness of New York, although he enjoyed visiting Van Vechten for drinks. Hergesheimer lived on a farm in rural Pennsylvania. Van Vechten lived in New York and hosted (in)famous parties there, but he originally hailed from rural Iowa, Maple Valley of *The Tattooed Countess*.

talent.⁶ I also hope to establish through this correspondence that Richmond's "literati" considered themselves major players in the world literary scene of the early twentieth century, on equal footing with those same mainstream critics.

To trace the origin of Van Vechten's relationship with Glasgow requires a short history of Richmond's little magazine *The Reviewer*.⁷ Emily Clark, Margaret Freeman, Mary Street, and Hunter Stagg founded *The Reviewer* at a social party in 1920 out of a desire to see books intelligently reviewed. To move the project from idea to reality they requested endorsements from significant Virginia artists like Ellen Glasgow, James Branch Cabell, Mary Johnston, Thomas Nelson Page, Amélie Rives, and Pierre Troubetzkoy. In 1921 they printed the first issue with the names of these and other endorsers gracing the cover page. The editors, particularly Emily Clark (and James Branch Cabell for three issues), solicited contributions from Virginia and national artists promising remuneration "in fame not specie." This publishing policy led to what Cabell described as "unaccountable efflorescence of polite letters in Virginia" (Scott 136). It also led to unorthodox benefits for contributors willing to visit Richmond, including the privilege of dining at one of Glasgow's famous social dinners. Joseph Hergesheimer contributed early and often to the magazine and visited Richmond as one of the first "outside" authors to meet the editors and dine at Glasgow's home. Clark invited (and Hergesheimer urged) Carl Van Vechten to contribute, which he did early and often afterward. In 1923 Hergesheimer brought Van Vechten to Richmond, providing Van Vechten an opportunity to meet the editors and to dine with Glasgow. This dinner led to regular correspondence between Glasgow and Van Vechten and to a life-long friendship with a fellow animal lover and devoted literary admirer.

⁶ Examining correspondence between Van Vechten, Hergesheimer, and Mencken to, from, and about Glasgow and Cabell would require volumes. I chose Glasgow and Van Vechten because of their distinct differences—any relationship had to be founded upon common literary ground.

The Reviewer also brought Glasgow and Cabell into a dubious early relationship with H. L. Mencken. Mencken had met and befriended Cabell before writing “The Sahara of the Bozart.” Cabell reviewed a newly released and expanded edition of this barbed essay in an early issue of *The Reviewer*. The essay stated that Southern arts did not exist in any worthy form: “there was not a museum worth visiting, an orchestra worth hearing, or a writer (with the exception of James Branch Cabell) between the Potomac mudflats and the Gulf” (Scott 130). Mencken later claimed he wrote the essay hoping to stir Southern artists to action. *The Reviewer* struggled against this prevailing stereotype of Southern culture and, in doing so, accomplished that which Mencken had hoped would occur—the bestirring of Southern artists into action. Later Mencken married Glasgow’s friend and fellow writer, Sara Haardt, which brought Mencken and Glasgow into much closer relationship. Maurice Dukes writes, describing the influence of *The Reviewer* on Richmond’s literary community and relationships:

It would not be until the decade of the 1920s, however, that the city would come to be known nationwide for such writers as Ellen Glasgow and James Branch Cabell and for another literary publication, *The Reviewer*, together bringing to the town such people as H. L. Mencken, Joseph Hergesheimer, Carl Van Vechten, Hugh Walpole, and Burton Roscoe (388).

Ellen Glasgow met Carl Van Vechten when he and Hergesheimer dined with her in November 1923. By that time Van Vechten had already met James Branch Cabell, about whom he wrote in March 1924, “[Cabell is] *very* difficult . . . but on the whole we got on better than I expected” (Kellner 1968, 164). Van Vechten remained a consistent correspondent with each until each their deaths. These three maintained a mutual admiration society, each praising the others’ published works and inscribing copies of their newest publications to one another. Van Vechten collected many such volumes, donating each collection to the Yale University library.

⁷ Although the paper focuses solely on Van Vechten and Glasgow, I establish the relationship between all five writers as preliminary work for future study of their correspondence with one another.

Of Cabell's work Van Vechten donated fifty-four letters (1919-1957) and fifty-two first editions, forty-four signed or inscribed. Of Glasgow's work he donated seventy-nine cards and letters (1924-1945) and seven first editions, all inscribed. These collections indicate Van Vechten's admiration for these two Richmond authors.

Glasgow formally invited Van Vechten to dinner in a letter after learning through Emily Clark that he was to be in town with Joseph Hergesheimer. Her invitation reveals a common friend that the two authors had in Hugh Walpole. The invitation itself is insignificant, but the visit and correspondence that resulted from this invitation impacts the remainder of this paper. I include the entire text of this and all following correspondence when available to demonstrate their tone of mutual admiration and their evolving literary and personal relationship.

My dear Mr. Van Vechten,

Emily has given me your messages and she tells me that you expect to be in Richmond only two or three days. As it is difficult, even in the provinces, to meet unless one plans a little ahead, I hope you will keep a part of Tuesday or Wednesday for me. Will you dine with me informally, Tuesday evening at a quarter to eight o'clock? If Mr. Hergesheimer is with you (someone told me he was expected) of course I hope that he will come too. I have heard so much of you from our good friend (and the friend of all the world) Hugh Walpole, that I am sure we are not strangers.

Will you telephone me if tomorrow (Tuesday) is quite right for you. Otherwise, if you prefer, you might come to tea in the afternoon or to lunch Wednesday. My telephone number is 4199 Madison.

Sincerely yours,

Ellen Glasgow
(Glasgow 1958, 71)⁸

Because Glasgow was famous for these dinners, one could hardly expect Van Vechten to refuse the invitation. Glasgow's unofficial sponsorship of social dinners for contributors to *The Reviewer* seems not to have motivated this particular invitation; she simply wished to meet a person spoken of so highly by Walpole, an author Glasgow admired at the time for his portrayal of character. She writes to Walpole in August 1923:

Like you my one interest, apart from the quality of the thing in literature, is the creation of character—and of course in the most modern of the modernists, there are no cohesive characters, only a stream of more or less vague impressions or sensations. It seems to me all so facile. After all to make a living thing whole is the difficult thing, just to record ripples of consciousness is so much easier, and so much cruder” (Glasgow 1958, 68-9).

Her respect for Walpole and his abilities surely influenced her positive first impression of Van Vechten.

Van Vechten initiated friendly correspondence with Glasgow in a letter dated April 9, 1924, in which he thanked Glasgow for dinner. The note suggests the close bond that quickly united the two authors:

My dear Miss Glasgow, One of the principal reasons for my trip to Richmond was to meet you, a reason richly satisfactory in results. Do let me thank you for your great kindness to me—and do let me hope that we shall soon meet again. If you come to New York please let me know. Will you present Miss Bennett with my best wishes, and to you my lowest bow.

very sincerely, Carl Van Vechten

Scheherazade sent Jeremy her photograph yesterday. Tomorrow I shall write to Hugh.

(Van Vechten 1987, 63).

The original included two photographs, one showing Van Vechten with a snake wrapped around his neck, the other showing Van Vechten and a parrot. Most of the note consists if little more than an elaborately polite “thank you,” but the note’s postscript reveals two areas on which Van Vechten and Glasgow based a future friendship. Both authors adored animals, specifically their own pets (which explains the photographs enclosed), and both authors thought highly of Hugh Walpole.⁹ Both pets and Walpole played a significant role in their developing relationship and correspondence.

⁸ I follow the typesetting of the original letter or that of the collection editor whenever possible.

⁹ “Jeremy” was Glasgow’s dog and “Scheherazade” was Van Vechten’s cat.

Glasgow's response, dated two days later, illustrates her genuine appreciation for Van Vechten's humor and love for animals. As a founding member of the SPCA, Glasgow was naturally attracted to a fellow animal lover.

My dear Mr. Van Vechten,

Jeremy, who can do everything but write and hopes to do that if he lives long enough, asks me to thank you for the charming photograph. He thinks Scheherazade the loveliest Persian he ever saw, and regrets that she is a cat! He wishes she could tell him all about the stories she knows, especially the one about The Talking Bird.

It is a pleasure to hear that you were not disappointed in your visit to Richmond. Do come again before you have forgotten us, and then we may have a chance to talk to each other. Yes, I shall be glad to let you know when I am in New York. We had a lovely day at Westover, and we missed you.

Sincerely yours,

Ellen Glasgow
(Glasgow 1958, 71-2)

Van Vechten's letter elicited a pleasant response from Glasgow, wishing to talk with him alone. Perhaps Glasgow, who remained distant from many other writers of the period, desired a deeper, closer relationship with him. Although few signs of admiration for one another's work emerge from this early correspondence, these letters establish a developing friendship upon which their literary relationship built.

The next published letter from Van Vechten to Glasgow is dated September 1929. Before that date, however, several letters and volumes certainly passed between them, as Glasgow's letters about Van Vechten's books emerged in the interim years.¹⁰ After Van Vechten sent Glasgow a copy of his *The Tattooed Countess* (Knopf, 1924) with its female

¹⁰ Obviously some of these letters are in Yale's collection or in the New York Public Library. I believe an interesting study would be to trace and publish ALL of the correspondence between these two authors in its proper order, a taste of which I hope this paper provides. The conclusion drawn about these letters might be no more than that of this paper: that the mainstream literary world treated Ellen Glasgow as a serious author and a major "player" in the literary world of the early and middle twentieth century.

protagonist Ella, Glasgow responded with a letter dated August 1st, 1924, that reveals her veneration for Van Vechten as author and humorist.¹¹

Dear Mr. Van Vechten,

I have had a beautiful time with Ella. It was very kind of you to remember me and to send me the book, which I enjoyed immensely. Even now, with the book securely put away between *The Cathedral* [by Walpole, Doran, 1922] and *The High Place* [by Cabell, McBride, 1923], I don't seem to be able to shake the democratic dust of Maple Valley from my clothes. You have made me it wonderfully vivid, and how I should have hated it if I had been your temperamental heroine! (Poor creature! For I see quite clearly that it came to the Seine at last, and that the freedom minded youth she eloped with ascended to places higher and more unnatural than Mr. Cabell's.) But I delighted in the oblique rays of your satire, and I am not sad after all, that you did not choose the better part for his destiny. When all is said the great denial of a temperament is the denial of a sense of humour, and you made this quite evident in the earlier career of your Countess. What a delightful title you found for the book!

Sincerely yours, and with every good wish for a great success,

Ellen Glasgow

(Glasgow 1958, 72)

Placing Van Vechten's volume with those of her respected friends Walpole and Cabell indicates the esteem she placed in his writing. A significant mark of Van Vechten's growing esteem for Glasgow during this period was his practice of printing very limited and elaborate first editions that he inscribed, signed, and sent to his literary friends around the world.¹² Although I have found no evidence that Glasgow received such a copy of his novel, Van Vechten's generosity, his past record of distributing collector's first editions, and his respect for Glasgow lead me to believe she did receive such an edition of this and other novels.

The next volume Glasgow received was a collection of essays entitled *Red: Papers on Musical Subjects* (Knopf, 1925). Clearly some correspondence—probably an inscription—

¹¹ In all dates I have preserved the writer's format.

¹² Kellner writes of the limited first edition of *The Tattooed Countess*: "Encased in a black box, the book was bound in black boards decorated in circus pink and white and green flowers . . . and the spine was pink linen. There were 160 copies thus issued, signed of course, and numbered" (Kellner 1968, 152).

accompanied the novel. In her letter dated January 3rd, 1925, Glasgow again demonstrates her appreciation for Van Vechten's humor while appealing to his soft spot for Scheherazade.

My dear Carl Van Vechten,

I was charmed to receive "Red" at the appropriate season, and I have enjoyed the essays immensely. Since I am less musical than literary, my favorite, I think, is the chapter on a theme by Havelock Ellis.

Intellectual audacity always appeals to me, and the manner of your audacity is particularly delightful.

At last my book is finished [*Barren Ground*, Doubleday, Page, 1925], and I am on my way to New York! That is why I did not write sooner. I wished to be able to tell you definitely where I should be. If the coat of ice in which we are encased thaws by the end of the week, I have planned to go to New York on the 12th and to be at the Hotel Chatham, 48th Street and Vanderbilt Avenue, for ten days or two weeks. I am looking forward with much pleasure to seeing you again and to meeting your wife and the Persian Princess. A delightful Richmond woman, Mrs. Frank Duke, will be with me. I think you met her last spring, but I am not sure.

Ah, it is good to be free—but I have already written the first sentence of a new book, a short ironic thing [*The Romantic Comedians*, Doubleday, 1926].

With every good wish for the New Year and every year.

Your friend,

Ellen Glasgow
(Glasgow 1958, 73-4)

Several characteristics in this letter deserve attention. As the first addressed to "Carl Van Vechten" and not to "Mr. Van Vechten," it suggests a growing friendly intimacy. For a woman like Glasgow imbued with Southern hospitality and charm, using Van Vechten's first name must have been a significant step in their friendship. Her desire to see Van Vechten again while in New York may express little more than a desire to see a familiar face in an unfamiliar city, but her configuring of New York as a place of healing in *Barren Ground* may denote a more enlightened opinion of the city. Visiting Van Vechten probably represented a high point of her trip, along with speaking to the publishers and printing *Barren Ground*.

Glasgow's next letter to Van Vechten, dated April 21st, 1925, responds to a letter in which Van Vechten evidently showered praise upon *Barren Ground*. Glasgow's regard for Van

Vechten as a critic becomes evident, for the letter's date is just six days after the book's official date of publication.¹³ Glasgow sent Van Vechten an advance first edition, possibly in response to Van Vechten's inscribed first editions. This letter reveals the earliest direct evidence of Van Vechten's genuine appreciation for Glasgow as a writer, not simply as a lover of animals and a friend of Hugh Walpole. In this letter also Glasgow refers to him simply as "Carl," beginning the letter informally (as she states, "like a love letter"). This informality and implied critical approval mark their deepening friendship and allude to more clearly expressed literary opinions.

Dear Carl,

Your letter made me very happy—(I realize that this begins like a love letter, but I beg you to continue fearlessly.)

Everything you wrote of *Barren Ground* delighted me, and I wish that you could say over again and in print the part about my treatment of the Negroes. That pleased me tremendously.

I am keenly interested in your new book. Someday, somewhere I must write of your work. I wonder if you saw my review of Carl Van Doren's book on Cabell [*James Branch Cabell*, McBride, 1925], and if you saw, too, Dr. Sherman's splendid article (or, so it frankly seemed to me) in yesterday's *Tribune* [review of *Barren Ground* in the *Herald Tribune Books*!] I am barbaric enough to love my friends and hate my enemies!

But, after all, what I like most about your letter is your tenderness for Scheherazade. Of course I am very much disappointed that you can't come in May, and Jeremy is inconsolable because he thinks that, after Uncle Hugh, you are his very nicest Uncle. However, what you write of not leaving Scheherazade makes me know that from the beginning God has intended for us to be friends. As I expect to be in New York on the 11th of May, we must have that long talk, and Virginia is almost as nice in the autumn.

Greetings to Fania.

As always sincerely,
Ellen Glasgow
(Glasgow 1958, 75-6)

This letter also ignites a recurrent theme in their correspondence: literary treatment of African Americans. Van Vechten championed the cause of African American arts and letters by discovering previously unknown Harlem talents and publishing them, by researching extensively

¹³ In a January 26, 1925, letter to Douglas Southall Freeman Glasgow writes, "You asked me to send you news of my first book before it was published else where, so I am letting you into the secret that it is to be published April 15

and writing *Nigger Heaven*, by photographing rising African American stars for posterity, and by raising White America's awareness of African American arts. For Van Vechten to praise any author's treatment of African Americans in literature is high praise indeed, for Van Vechten discovered and befriended influential African American writers like Langston Hughes and James Weldon Johnson. His admiration for Glasgow's literary skills becomes evident in this specific response from Glasgow.

Glasgow's next letter, dated July 18th, 1925, responds to her reading of Van Vechten's next novel, *Firecrackers* (Knopf, 1925). Her critical reaction to the novel demonstrates the professional admiration she has for his abilities as author. Her personal reaction to the novel—suggesting there may be other “Carls” lurking below the surface of his consciousness—reveals considerably more. A reader of Freud and Darwin, Glasgow's autobiography and novels contain hints of her tendency to psychoanalyze herself and her characters.¹⁴ That Glasgow would blatantly practice such “psychologizing” in correspondence may suggest how close she felt to Van Vechten. Even in today's standards one does not suggest multiple personalities without carefully considering the impact of such a statement. Though Van Vechten probably took the statement in stride, even with pride (he liked being unusual), his reaction does not diminish the significance of Glasgow's comfort at writing such intimate opinions to Van Vechten.

Barnstable, Massachusetts

Dear Carl,

Firecrackers reached Richmond after I had left, and making a short stay there in my absence, caught up with me brilliantly a few days ago. I took the Federal Express at Washington and came straight up that same night without stopping in New York. That is why you did not hear from me.

Yesterday afternoon and last night I spent with your [indecipherable] and terrible book. After I once began it, I was oblivious of everything around me until I was finished. The first chapter is amazingly clear. I felt the fascination of the [indecipherable] from the moment he entered until the end of the book. The

by Doubleday, Page and Company (Glasgow 1958, 74).

¹⁴ A skill that I suspect made her appreciate Walpole's development of character so much.

whole thing is diabolically clever, and so profoundly depressing as any “realistic” novel ever written. I have, too, after reading it with much interest and pleasure the curious feeling that this is a trackless wilderness under you, a desert-hell, not garden but jungle—that I do not know and have never even had a glimpse of. Someday I must talk to you about this, and try to discover how many Carls there are in reality, and if my Carl has any actual relation to the innumerable other Carls. But you have an extraordinary power of [indecipherable] terror. Not since Balzac has there been a more terrible ending scene than the ending of the Countess.

I hope you are having a pleasant working summer. Up here in this retreat I am idling away July and August. I can’t work, but play... every morning and ...afternoon.

In September I hope to be in New York for a few days, & if you are there, I shall look forward to seeing you and talking more about your book.

Sincerely yours,

Ellen Glasgow

(Glasgow 1958, 78-9)

I infer from the first paragraph that Van Vechten inquired how Glasgow managed to arrive in Massachusetts without first stopping in New York to call on him. If true, this demonstrates the genuine pleasure Van Vechten derived from spending time with her.

Not surprisingly, Glasgow wrote her next letter to Van Vechten, dated July 28th, 1926, after reading his next novel, *Nigger Heaven*. Her reaction to the novel is enthusiastically positive, particularly in reference to its “realism” and treatment of African Americans. That she wishes to write a formal review of the novel conveys her deep admiration for the novel and its author. She also reveals in this letter a deeply personal look at her own opinions on African Americans—confusing, intimate, and troubling. That she willingly shared such personal insight also attests to their growing friendship.

Dear Carl,

Yesterday after your book came, I shut my study door and read it straight through from the first page to the last without putting it down.

It is an amazing thing, vivid, barbaric, and so alive that it bleeds. At times it is comic, at times tragic, at times revolting in its horror and its pain, and I may add that it seems to me the best argument in favor of African slavery that I have ever read.

I hope that I shall be well enough to write a review of it. Already I am planning one; but I was quite ill in New York, and the doctor has made me stop work for the summer. Ever since I came home I have been unable to write a line. Still there are many things I should like to say about this book, and I hope that I may be able to write at least a brief review. What interests me tremendously is the way the Negro reacts to the freedom of Harlem.

Only in the father of Mary (a very appealing character) do I find the slightest trace of the Negro that I know. The serene fatalism, the dignity of manner, the spiritual power, all these qualities decayed, it appeared, with the peculiar institution.

I should like so much to talk to you about this book. Though I am too close to it to form a final opinion, I believe it is the biggest, the most vital thing that you have written. There is a fire at its heart.

With best wishes your sincere friend,
Ellen Glasgow
(Glasgow 1958, 80-1)

Van Vechten evidently replied quickly to this letter, for Glasgow follows it up with another, dated only three days later (July 31st, 1926), also about *Nigger Heaven*.

Dear Carl,

I shall be ever so glad to have you use the quotation from my letter. I wrote several paragraphs of a review, but I came down with one of my headaches and had to surrender to the heat. But I hope to write something later on, while it may still do good, for the autumn rush. Meanwhile my comment may be just as useful.

No, I don't mean that you are trying to prove anything. You are too much of an artist for that. But the book has the accent of realism, and I cannot help comparing the world of Harlem as you present it with the life of the Negro as I have known it in the South. This, I think, is tremendously interesting.

I am (God permitting) leaving next week (the end) for Yama Farms, Napanoch, Ulster County, New York.

I shall be one day in New York, and if I am well, I shall telephone you. Otherwise, I hope to see you in September, if you are in town the last week.

Yes, my book [*The Romantic Comedians*] is to come out in September. I almost died over the proof sheets, and this is what made me ill. You know how it is when you finish one. I believe you will like it, and I shall send you an early copy.

Sincerely always,
Ellen Glasgow
(Glasgow 58, 81-2)

These two letters infer Van Vechten's respect for Glasgow's critical opinion. They also reveal sensitive information about Glasgow's feelings toward African Americans, feelings that might

have been best left unpublished. Yet her attitude toward African Americans in Harlem seems ultimately to be one of respect, for the “serene fatalism, the dignity of manner, the spiritual power” which she thought African Americans had lost with the end of slavery. With these lines in mind, her statement that the novel “seems to me the best argument in favor of African slavery that I have ever read” appears less unpleasant, suggesting her belief that African American slave heritage has provided modern African Americans with a stronger appreciation for “the freedom of Harlem.” Sharing these personal and possibly volatile opinions with Van Vechten reveals her trust in him and the deepening level of their friendship.

The next piece of correspondence comes from Van Vechten in response to either an unpublished letter or a newspaper article announcing the death of Glasgow’s dog Jeremy.¹⁵ This short note reveals the level of friendly intimacy he and Glasgow had reached.

10 September [1929]

There is no good telling you, dear Ellen, that you will get over it because you won’t. I know that. Always when I think of Scheherazade there is that dull pain at the pack of my heart. That is the permanent comfort that animals give us, the power to *remember* & feel. I understand, dear Ellen, but I cannot help you.

with my affection, Carlo
(Van Vechten 1987, 108)

Van Vechten’s next letter, written just four days after this consolation, addresses Glasgow’s book *They Stooped to Folly*. In this letter Van Vechten continues to express his admiration for Glasgow’s “masterful manner” as a writer. The letter confirms what other correspondence had only hinted; that Van Vechten valued not only Glasgow’s positive critical reviews of his own work, but her talents as a writer as well. He expresses his appreciation directly while demonstrating his close friendship with Glasgow through personal revelations and his informal, often poignant style.

¹⁵ Jeremy died 5 September 1929. The event received considerable press in Richmond.

14 September 1929

I have just laid down *They Stooped to Folly*, dear Ellen. What a book you have written! [. . .] Your wit always amazes me—and you have not been sparing of it in your miraculous dedication—but more often, in this book, I found myself near to tears, for you have created a mood of timeless melancholy—like that of the final scene of *Der Rosenkavalier*. In short, I not only congratulate you, I also envy you the sureness of your pen. The masterful manner in which you put down what most of us are only permitted—so fragile are our talents—to suggest vaguely. *Ich kusse ihre hand, Madame!* Carl Van Vechten

(Van Vechten 1987, 108-9)

That Van Vechten envied Glasgow her “sureness of pen” must have flattered her and is suggested by her response. The comment unquestionably represents his significant esteem for her writing talent.

Glasgow’s response, dated September 19th, 1929, confirms the effect of Van Vechten’s flattery. It also reveals Glasgow’s appreciation for Van Vechten’s critical abilities, which in turn suggests Van Vechten’s strong personal and ideological connection to Glasgow. By claiming that Van Vechten alone suspected her true intentions in the novel, Glasgow infers that she and Van Vechten have similar critical visions. Her claim expresses both friendship and their mutual admiration for one another as serious literary figures of the twenties.

Nothing that has been written about my book, dear Carl, has pleased me more than your letter. Do you know you are the only reader or critic who has even suspected that Victoria is really the figure of the pattern. Yes, she was, indeed, so subtle and difficult that you alone perceived what I meant by her.

I am ill now and cannot write, but I shall hope to see you in New York this autumn.

Your affectionate friend,
Ellen
(Glasgow 1958, 98)

This short letter’s style also reveals a subtle deepening of their relationship. For the first time Glasgow foregoes her formal address and mimics Van Vechten’s informal greeting in the first line. She also abandons the formal “Sincerely yours” and replaces it with “Your affectionate friend.” Finally, she replaces “Ellen Glasgow” by signing the letter “Ellen.” For a Southern

woman of her breeding and background, these informal changes overcome significant internal barriers, as if officially admitting that she and Van Vechten are close friends of equal literary talent.

The next letter Glasgow writes to Van Vechten, dated almost a year later (August 24th, 1930), contains little professional admiration or critical commentary. Instead it details part of her trip in England and relates the rationale for her altered attitude toward Hugh Walpole. The letter demonstrates her friendliness with Van Vechten, relating a story about a common friend and commenting on Van Vechten's humor.

Old England Lake Hotel,
Windemere
August 24th, 1930

Dear Carl,

Miss Bennett writes me that your book [*Feathers*, Random House, 1930] has come to Richmond ahead of me. Ever so much thanks. I am looking eagerly forward to the pleasure I know it will give me.

Since that delightful glimpse of you and Fania I have had a severe illness, and a part of my summer has been spent in a hospital, or, as they call such places over here, a nursing home. The day we lunched together I was really in great pain, and a day or two later I came down with acute neuritis. Unlike you, however, I had no Chinese robe to cover me and no admiring English "Lady Authors" (isn't that what they call them?) to cluster about me. Devoid of adulation, with only an uninteresting doctor and a calm-featured nurse, I confronted adversity.

Tomorrow, driven by wind and rain, we are returning to London. I am still not able to do very much, though it was worth the trip to Edinburgh just to see the Scottish War Memorial. I, who dislike both war and memorials of war, was deeply stirred by the abundance of imagination and insight. But, then, the Scottish mind seems always to have had imagination and a keen understanding that austerity and beauty are not incompatibles. And, after all, how much better bronze warfare, or even symbolic warfare in stained glass, is than a bullfight, with burning sulphur poured into the bleeding wounds of an animal!

Well, it would be good news indeed to hear that [you and] Fania are in London again before sailing. If you are, by any chance, in town, won't you call us up at the Berkeley Hotel.

Yesterday we motored all day over this enchanting Lake country. On our way, we passed Brackenburn [Walpole's home], and saw the fine view and the borders of gaily blooming flowers. No, we did not stop, and thereby hangs a

story! There was a time, as you know, when Hugh and I were very good friends. I was really attracted to him, and he seemed to like coming to visit me. Once, even, he arrived on Christmas with no warning except the maid's hurried announcement that "Mr. Walpole was downstairs in the drawing-room." Then, and gladly, I put my nephew out of his room, and Hugh was quite delightful and appeared to be depressed by some occurrence in California, which he forgot almost immediately. To go on, last year was the first time I did not see him, though I had many affectionate letters urging me to visit him at Brackenburn. No, this isn't the point. The point is that I accepted. When I found out that we were really coming to England I told him we should be charmed to stay two days with him either before or after our cure at Harrogate. But to this letter, though he had written me constantly til then, there was no answer! So do you wonder that we did not stop but were content to admire the gaily blooming flowers as we sped by?

And it is useless to deny that, unless you have Chinese robes to spread over you, Englishmen can sometimes be as funny as Punch! But you, dear Carl, have learned discretion in a school that was not easy, and perfect discretion admits nothing as long as Chinese robes may be bought.

Well, I have let myself quite run away.

With affectionate greetings to you both, and every good wish in the world for the book.

As always

Sincerely yours,

Ellen Glasgow

(Glasgow 1958, 103-5)

This long letter reveals a darker side to her personality to which she alluded in an earlier letter, writing, "I hate my enemies and love my friends": the delicate dividing line between friend and enemy. Walpole and Glasgow were long-time friends; Walpole himself told Glasgow about Van Vechten and encouraged the two to meet. For no other obvious reason than a neglected or untimely response to her letter, Glasgow demoted Walpole from "friend" to "enemy." Perhaps Glasgow wrote this letter to explain the matter to Van Vechten, but its length may suggest a less evident motivation. Perhaps she wrote the letter to assure Van Vechten that, although she and Walpole were no longer speaking, her attitude did not apply to him. The letter's unusual length

and “chatty” nature suggest such a reading. The letter also describes Glasgow’s strong desire to remain friends with the Van Vechtens, a sure sign that she still admired and respected him.¹⁶

Glasgow wrote her next letter to Van Vechten, dated March 23rd, 1932, after receiving his collection of essays entitled *Sacred and Profane Memories* (Knopf, 1932). Van Vechten revealed portions of his childhood and developing personality in this collection, a fact that doubtless attracted Glasgow’s Freudian mind. Having earlier admitted that she wanted to know who Carl really was (or who the “Carls” really were), Glasgow responded enthusiastically to this collection as critic and friend. She also revealed her own artistic frustrations to Van Vechten as a fellow author, evidence that she considered herself a literary equal to Van Vechten.

Dear Carl,

You have found a perfect title, and the book has a magic quality. The gem of the collection is the first essay. I loved that, and I see your mother and father, especially your mother, as vividly as if I had known them in life.

There is a lovely pensiveness in that scene of your youth, a tender contour and a delicate colour that blend in the distance. But I enjoyed the whole book. Many, many thanks.

I have agonized all winter over my new novel [*The Sheltered Life*, Doubleday, Doran, 1932]. Ah, the vanished joys of illiteracy! If this book is ever finished, I hope to go to New York, and to see you....

Affectionately yours,

Ellen

(Glasgow 1958, 115)

This letter resumes Glasgow’s familiar greeting, “Dear Carl,” and her familiar signature, “Ellen.” After eight years of cultivating this friendship, Glasgow’s formal flowered style has evolved into a familiar personal conversation with one who knows her and whom she knows. Such familiarity comes hard to a Southern “belle,” a fact that should not be overlooked. Glasgow’s familiarity with Van Vechten reveals her deep appreciation for her remarkable author and friend.

¹⁶ Notice that Fania receives more and more attention throughout the letters. Glasgow’s relationship with Carl broadened to include Fania, another sign that the relationship had not suffered or changed in any way.

Van Vechten's next letter to Glasgow addresses her newest novel, *The Sheltered Life*, an advance copy of which she had sent him. Dated 29 August 1932, the letter reaffirms Van Vechten's high critical opinion of Glasgow and her novels. It also contains his encapsulated interpretation of the novel, something Glasgow's earlier response to his comments about *They Stopped to Folly* indicates he included for several of her works. Including his own reading reveals his effort to read the novel as Glasgow intended, demonstrating his respect for her as an author.

Dear Ellen: There is a kind of "They couldn't help it" implication to every page of "The Sheltered Life" which makes it the most human and (hence) the most pathetic of your books. The characters lead their disordered (and sheltered) lives under the spell of their doom. I think never have divided natures been more skillfully & subtly presented.—Jenny Blair really loves Eva and in her passion for George there is no thought of hurting Eva. Of course George really loves Eva too—completely—and in his philandering he has no intentions of hurting her. And they suffer. And Eva who believes that nothing can be divided, that feeling must be one and steadfast, suffers still more, first because she is afraid she will lose the object of her steadfast feeling, and second because she is afraid she has lost it. I have seldom read a book that so mercilessly exposes the sadistic nature of God and you have never before written a book which is rooted so deeply in the inexplicable torments & impulses of earthly creatures.

Sheaves of cornflowers & poppies to you from your admiring Carlo
(Van Vechten 1987, 127)

Van Vechten's closing, "Sheaves of cornflowers & poppies to you," illustrates his own break with formality. Never one to practice social formalities like Glasgow, Van Vechten nevertheless adheres to certain standards of self-defined formality that he broke only with those to whom he felt close. After the first few letters to someone he always signed his name Carlo. He also assigned nicknames to his correspondents. Mark Lutz became "Marko," while Gertrude Stein and Alice B. Toklas became "Mama Woojums" and "Baby Woojums"—he reserved "Papa

Woojums” for himself when writing to Stein.¹⁷ Yet another symbol of intimacy in his letters was offering imagery gifts in his writing, like “sheaves of cornflowers & poppies.” To his wife he once sent, “Pats & purrs to you!” while to Hunter Stagg he wrote, “I send you 444 white and purple orchids with silver chalices!” Adding this “imagery gift” demonstrates his increasing sense of intimacy with Glasgow, augmenting the professional respect he obviously had for her and her work.

The next letter Glasgow wrote Van Vechten (January 30th, 1935) referred to his request that she give a dinner in Gertrude Stein’s honor while Stein and Alice B. Toklas visited Richmond during Stein’s lecture tour. Glasgow reveals her personal and critical opinion of Stein while discussing her personal habit of practicing “Southern hospitality” even with those she likes very little. Before discussing the letter further, however, examining Van Vechten’s motives for bringing Stein and Toklas through Richmond will prove a worthwhile venture. In a letter to Gertrude Stein (January 25, 1935) Van Vechten shares his admiration for Glasgow as social hostess and friend.

It’s the Jefferson Hotel in Richmond, of course. It’s the older hotel and the one where the haute Monde are most comfortable. Certainly we’ll let Mark [Lutz] make the reservations. Time enough to do that when you get back here. Also I think it would be a good plan to write (for me to write) Miss Ellen Glasgow. I want her to entertain for us if possible. A party at the Academy, ANYTHING, could be arranged, but Miss Ellen would be best (Burns 382).

Upon Van Vechten’s request that Glasgow host them, Kellner writes that “James Branch Cabell and Ellen Glasgow wrote delightedly of their willingness to entertain the ladies when they arrived” (Kellner 1968. 264). The actual letter follows in which Glasgow admits to Van Vechten that she has reservations about Stein, if only because of her “Influence.”

¹⁷ I suspect Van Vechten recognized that he could only go so far in his intimacy with Glasgow. She was certainly more “proper” than many of his other correspondents, a fact that he recognized and seemed to appreciate for its uniqueness and provinciality.

Dear Carlo:

What a gift of friendship you have! Years go by, but one always finds you where one left you. I am always pleased and touched when you send me a card from the same place in London every summer and tell me that the spot brings me to your remembrance.

It will be lovely to see you next Tuesday. If you think I shall like Miss Stein, I am sure to do so. And even if I shouldn't like her, I should still be polite, because I was so unfortunate as to be born that way. I can be rude as anybody if I am prepared; but it usually takes me at least twenty-four hours to make ready. Usually, I avoid modern Fads and People Who Lecture. However, I have nothing against G.S. except what is popularly known as her "Influence." My private opinion is that the writers she has influenced (especially Hemingway) couldn't have been much worse if she had left them alone. They remind me of spiteful children who feel, after they have been slapped, that they must run out and pull the cat's tail.

James [Branch Cabell] has had a hard time with influenza; but I hope he will be able to come out to dinner Tuesday. I shall have only a very small dinner, and ask a few people to come in for eggnog. As you know, there are no "literary" people in Richmond. We stand or fall by our human quality.

Love to Fania. I wish she could come too.

Affectionately yours,
Ellen Glasgow

For the first time in fifteen years, I went to the movies yesterday. And how I wished I had stayed safely at home with my Dickens! There is entirely too much of Walpole in this David Copperfield. Not only was Hugh in the pulpit, but he was spread thick over the rest of it. Dickens was sentimental; yet his final flavour is as robust as beef and ale. Hugh has his quality, and that is not robustness, though it is quite engaging in its time and place. Or, perhaps— Well, no matter—.

(Glasgow 1958, 173-4)

This letter exposes one of Glasgow's final breaks with formality—she addresses Van Vechten as "Carlo." It also reveals the extent of her trust in Van Vechten's discretion, sharing with him her private opinion of Stein. Their friendship demonstrates their mutual admiration and respect for one another.

Van Vechten thanks Glasgow for her hospitality in hosting him, Stein, and Toklas with a note from the Jefferson Hotel dated 6 February 1935. The note itself confirms their friendship while hinting at a significant future professional development. During the dinner Glasgow

evidently stated her intention to publish her memoirs. Van Vechten indicates his eagerness to read these memoirs, displaying his support for her professionally and personally.¹⁸

Dear Ellen, Everything was perfect last night. You look better than ever, it was good to see you, and I am sure your house is the most beautiful house in the world. I always say so. What I am really writing for is to tell you the ham has been ordered. I do not know if we will get it, but I am trying. The supply is limited. Tennessee hams are not cooked like Virginia hams, but instructions should arrive with the ham. Some time today also I am leaving Miss Stein's Portraits & Prayers for you, suitably inscribed. As I did the photograph on the cover and/or the book is dedicated to me, & as it includes a [word] portrait of me, I am taking the liberty of signing it too (tho obscurely). 1001 happy flamingos to you! Carlo Van Vechten

I am very excited about your memoirs. "A Virginia Lady" would be a perfect title.

(Van Vechten 1987, 144)

Van Vechten's preferred title, "A Virginia Lady," did not appear on the cover of Glasgow's memoirs. Perhaps the title she chose, "The Woman Within," reflects her strong Freudian influences; it certainly reflects the Freudian cast of the book. "A Virginia Lady" focuses attention on Van Vechten's fascination with Southern life. With her writing formalities, her stately dinners, her impeccable manners, and her beautiful home, Van Vechten seemed attracted to the mystique of Glasgow as "Southern belle." Emily Clark expresses this fascination in *Innocence Abroad*:

"Quite brazenly I [Clark] wrote and told him I wished to see him just before I left New York, and Carl suggested the Algonquin, his favorite lunching-place of that period. I arrived, late and breathless, in the manner which Carl has always, perhaps unjustly, called Southern from that day.... Carl chose to refer respectfully to the State [of Virginia] as the last stronghold of aristocracy" (129-30).

¹⁸ I suspect the result of this conversation was *The Woman Within*, an autobiography on which she had already been working by this time. I wonder if he felt disappointed in 1954 when he found himself unmentioned in her autobiography. Given the scandalous opinions she expressed of those mentioned in the book, I wonder if he secretly felt glad to have been excluded. And I wonder if she excluded those with whom she parted on friendly terms, reserving her "memoirs" for scathing remarks on previously unsullied individuals. I certainly find no evidence of a broken relationship between Van Vechten and Glasgow, other than more sporadic communication.

Glasgow's hostility toward Southern retrospective hero worship and other traditions certainly explains her rejection of Van Vechten's suggestion while expressing volumes about her self-conception.

Glasgow's next letter to Van Vechten refers to her recently published novel *In This Our Life* (Harcourt, Brace, 1941). Van Vechten had written encouragingly about the novel, approving once again of her literary treatment of African Americans. In an unpublished letter dated 27 March 1941, he voiced strong approval for *In This Our Life*, particularly for what "you have said in behalf of the Negro race and what you have said against their treatment by otherwise gentle people."

About this topic Van Vechten was serious and sincere, and encouraged equal and realistic treatment of African Americans in literature by White and Black writers alike.

Dear Carlo:

Your letter did me a world of good. I send my affectionate greetings to Fania and to you. How I wish I might see you soon!

As always affectionately,
Ellen

I am so glad you feel about my book as you do. My life and all my will power went into it, and after rewriting most of it in proof, while I was ill in bed, I thought I was really finished forever. You maybe interested to know that the Negro family was taken very nearly from life. You remember that distinguished old lady in a lace cap at my party a few years ago. She and her sister between them made my Miverva, and her grandmother, who died long before I was born, was my mother's Mammy. I was sorry you could not get a photograph of Aunt Roberta. She did not live with me, but she always came to help me with my parties.

(Glasgow 1958, 284)

This letter includes another reference to Fania. Glasgow's frequent references to Fania suggest their friendship had broadened into a family affair, not simply a literary relationship. Later that year she addressed a letter strictly to Fania who had evidently written her a private Christmas card. This letter suggests that Carl had requested Glasgow's manuscripts for his collection and

later donation to a library or museum. Van Vechten encouraged his literary friends to donate their manuscripts and other writings to a library or museum, evidently offering to collect and donate them in the owner's stead. Perhaps this gesture best demonstrates his respect for Glasgow's literary talent.

Richmond, December 31st, 1941

Dearest Fania:

In spite of the war and the world and universe, your charming card brought me a happy moment. How dear it was of you to remember me!

I send you and Carlo a very special blessing for each day and hour of the coming year.

With love always,

Ellen

Will you tell Carlo that I have had this old house searched, and we found nothing worth sending him. My manuscripts, all in long hand, were burned, I suppose, in 1911, when I left Richmond, as I thought for good, after a tragic experience. I can give him books, but not first editions. Even the manuscript of *In This Our Life* is a copy made by Miss Bennett. Not a correction was made in my own handwriting. I asked Harcourt to return it, thinking I might send it to Carlo, but I found it was not worth keeping. It is a mystery where all my original writing in long hand has gone. The time has come when I regret that I was so careless.

(Glasgow 1958, 291)

Glasgow's close and protective hand over those writings that could incriminate others suggests this postscript may not contain the entire truth; this possibility does not diminish the respect with which Van Vechten obviously regarded her and her talent.

Van Vechten wrote Glasgow again on September 22, 1943, after receiving a copy of *A Certain Measure*. The letter rehearses what is by now a common theme: appreciation and admiration of Glasgow's talent as an author. He had been requested by Irita Van Doren to write a review of the book for the New York *Herald Tribune Books* (17 October 1943). He suggests to Glasgow that his review is very positive. Perhaps the most revealing section of this letter, however, is its mundane, trivial, day-to-day household news. Such information lends no support

to Van Vechten's professional admiration for Glasgow, but certainly places her among his close friends.

Dear Ellen, I was immensely happy to receive so early a copy of *A Certain Measure* [Harcourt, Brace, 1943]. It is in all respects a fascinating book and a treasure of wit and wisdom, but I think I will ask you to wait to read my considered opinion when it is published in BOOKS where Irita has invited me to review it. She tells me that you are much better and we hope to see you when you pass through New York, but the sad news is we have no cook.... I think "for the duration" (we probably won't have another cook till the war is over) should supplant "it might have been" as the "saddest words," don't you? Fania and I send love to you, Ellen! Carlo

(Van Vechten 1987, 197-8)

This letter is the last published from Van Vechten to Glasgow. She writes one more short letter to him before her death in 1945.

Glasgow wrote her last letter to Van Vechten on June 25th, 1944, in which she responds to an unpublished request from Van Vechten to inscribe and sign a first edition of her 1900 novel, *The Voice of the People*. Van Vechten's request reveals his mania for collecting—his letters alone (which he donated to Yale) filled twelve file cabinets with four drawers each. After finding that Glasgow could or would add little to his collection, Van Vechten seems to have scoured around on his own to find her first editions. Though mere speculation, his desire for Glasgow's inscription in a first edition suggests once again his admiration and respect for Glasgow. Her helpfulness suggests that she does not find his request at all unusual, which in turn hints at her belief that she deserved his critical approval. She believed herself on equal footing with Van Vechten as an author.

Dear Carlo, how good to have a word from Fania and you.

After one of the worst winters of my life, here I am, yet once again, on my hilltop at Castine....

I expect to stay here until the first week in October. Send *The Voice* whenever you find it convenient, and I shall be glad to inscribe it. The first edition is bound in tan buckram, with a pattern of green oak leaves set in a square.

Merle Johnson and not a few others have listed this edition incorrectly. But the later revised edition is much better reading.

Carrie is with me. We both send affection to Fania and you.

Ellen

(Glasgow 1958, 351)

This ends their correspondence; Glasgow died several months after writing this letter.

I set out in this paper to determine, through their correspondence, Carl Van Vechten's critical opinion of Ellen Glasgow as a writer. I found considerably more. Not only did these two writers appreciate and respect one another's talents and abilities as writer, they also developed a close friendship that lasted from their initial meeting in 1924 (and maybe even from Walpole's first reference to one or the other) to their last correspondence twenty years later. Although many letters have not been included in this paper, those printed certainly reflect the mutual respect and admiration of these two incredibly dissimilar authors.

After Glasgow's death Van Vechten wrote two passages recalling his favorable impressions of Ellen Glasgow. In a memorial essay for Joseph Hergesheimer in *The Yale University Library Gazette* Van Vechten remembered Hergesheimer by referring to Glasgow.

Several times Joe and I visited Richmond, Virginia, together, a rich experience for me. Ellen Glasgow entertained us at dinner in the quiet elegance of her early Victorian house at One West Main Street, with the odor of magnolias invading the open windows and the sound of spirituals being sung by the Sabbath Glee Club drifting in from the garden. Later, Joe and I listened to these Negroes in their own church and both of us wrote about them.... Ellen herself, presiding over the lace and silver and porcelain, the shad roe and Smithfield ham of her superb board, aged colored retainers tottering behind her, was a distinguished figure. By means of an appliance she had conquered the disability of almost complete deafness, handling her receiver so skillfully that she was able to carry on an animated conversation, sparkling with her malicious wit. Once when communism was under discussion she indicated her conversance with the topic in a phrase I have never forgotten: "In the Nineties, while young men of the period were attempting to write like Henry James and to behave like Oscar Wilde, I was reading Karl Marx."¹⁹

¹⁹ "How I Remember Joseph Hergesheimer." *The Yale University Library Gazette* 22.3 (1948): 89-90.

In the introduction to Padriac Colum and Margaret Freeman Cabell's *Between Friends: Letters of James Branch Cabell and Others*, Van Vechten writes a similar passage in praise of Glasgow.

Ellen Glasgow, when she came to New York, usually invited her sister, Mrs. Tutwiler, to accompany her, or at times the chatty Carrie Duke, who sold antique English or American furniture at her shop in Richmond. This was because of Ellen's very considerable deafness. In social intercourse she managed quite well with a hearing aid, but she found it difficult to cope with the hotel waiters and bellboys, and especially she found it difficult to cope with the telephone. When the ladies dined with us, which was at least once during every visit they made to New York, we brought out our best silver and our best china, and we invited our best guests. Ellen returned the compliment when I visited Richmond, usually in the company of Joseph Hergesheimer. Curiously enough, on such occasions, shad roe and Virginia ham, served cold with salad and beaten biscuit, always seemed to be in season. Once, at my special request, she had entertained Gertrude Stein, when Gertrude was lecturing in Richmond, at a dinner which Mr. Cabell attended—a dinner that became very celebrated in its aftermath of gossip and small talk. It was Ellen who invited my first interest in Negro spirituals, when she introduced me to a Negro singing group, The Sabbath Glee Club, who sometimes softly intoned those sweet songs of sorrow under the magnolia in the garden of Ellen's beautiful early Victorian house at One West Main Street (xiii).

These excerpts and the correspondence all demonstrate Van Vechten's healthy professional and personal respect for Glasgow. Inasmuch as Ellen Glasgow represents Richmond's strong literary heritage in the early twentieth century, and Carl Van Vechten represents mainstream critical literary opinion during the same period, literary Richmond-in-Virginia held its own as a literary oasis in "the Sahara of the Bozart."

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