

Ellen Glasgow's *In This Our Life*:  
“The Betrayals of Life” in the Crumbling Aristocratic South

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**Abstract**

Ellen Glasgow's works have received, over time, a mixed interpretation, from sentimental and conventional, to rebellious and insightful. Her novel *In This Our Life* (1941) allows the reader to have a glimpse of the early twentieth-century South, changed by the industrial revolution, desperately clinging to dead codes, despairing and struggling to survive. The South is reflected through the problems of a family, its sentimentality and vulnerability, but also its cruelty, pretensions, masks and selfishness, trying to find happiness and meaning in a world of traditions and codes that seem powerless in the face of progress. The novel, apparently simple and reduced in scope, offers, in fact, a deep insight into various issues, from complicated family relationships, gender pressures, racial inequality to psychological dilemmas, frustration or utter despair. The article's aim is to depict, through this novel, one facet of the American South, the “aristocratic” South of belles and cavaliers, an illusory representation indeed, but so deeply rooted in the world's imagination. Ellen Glasgow is one of the best choices in this direction: an aristocratic woman but also a keen and profound writer, and, most of all, a writer who loved the South deeply, even if she exposed its flaws.

**Keywords:** the South, aristocracy, cavalier, patriarchy, southern belle, women, race, illness

The American South is an entity recognizable in the world imagination due to its various representations in fiction, movies, politics, entertainment, advertisements, etc.: white-columned houses, fields of cotton, belles and cavaliers served by benevolent slaves, or, on the contrary, poverty, violence and lynching. All these are part of an imaginary space we all recognize but fail to know in its complexity. In fact, the South seems to elude a clear definition, remaining mysterious,