An Age of Criticism

1900-1950

TWENTIETH-CENTURY LITERATURE IN AMERICA

GENERAL EDITORS

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HENRY REGNERY COMPANY

CHICAGO: 1952

HENRY REGNERY COMPANY
Chicago 4, Illinois

Manufactured in the United States of America

For

GERTRUDE AND DONALD

PREFACE

THE ARGUMENT *or controlling idea in the following chapters is, I hope, clear. Perhaps only as a Platonic essence or Idea is there such a thing as pure literary criticism, but insofar as there is, it is concerned with the structure of the literary work, the way meaning and emotion are discovered in their appropriately imagined and created forms. Certain critics, like Henry James and Joel Spingarn, manage to stay close to pure criticism, or at least to urge upon other critics that this is their essential task, and a number of the analytical critics associated with the movement called the "new criticism" have striven to make this their primary function. Unfortunately, the limits beyond which the pure critic should not venture are not easily defined. Literature is concerned with ideas (or what some aestheticians call "life values") as well as with forms, and they exert a pull away from the literary object toward philosophy, or politics, or ethics, or social questions. Thus one finds criticism that concentrates primarily on milieu or ethics or politics, using the literary work largely as a stepping-off point into a discussion, for example, of the national mind, or into a justification of, or pleading for, certain ethical, political, or social views. In such instances the literary work is often praised or berated on the grounds of its serving or not serving a cause, and it tends to disappear as a literary object. But when such criticism manages to stay close to the literary work itself, its value resides in showing how factors out of a milieu or principles from an*

ethical system quicken the literary work. The job of such a literary history as this, therefore, is to describe the general character of various critical movements, to observe as far as possible the degree of success and failure engendered by specific methods. Again, the individual critic does not always fit easily into one category or another—and sometimes he turns up in two or three different groups or movements.

Another problem in writing such a history as this is that American literature from the 1890's to about 1920, especially as it includes minor literary figures, is a kind of twilight period. There are no detailed or full-length studies of the "genteel tradition" in its own terms, nor as it has been interpreted by twentieth-century writers of liberal persuasions. Nor are there detailed studies of the influence of nineteenth-century European modernism on American writers prior to World War I—especially modernism in its self-consciously sophisticated and cosmopolitan lines. Again, almost no attention has been given to the influence of such French critics as Hippolyte Taine and Ferdinand Brunetière. Therefore, anyone attempting to indicate the way in which literary criticism has been affected by these major movements and influences is in danger of falling into errors that subsequent study of a more detailed kind will uncover.

For the most part, the works of criticism I have not mentioned or discussed belong to two groups: scholarly or historical studies, in which there is a considerable amount of criticism, and analytical criticism or detailed studies of literary works. The bulk of the former prohibits such attention, and similarly, the number of analytical studies is so great that only the major texts and the general issues could be treated.

Among those who have helped me in the writing of this study I am especially indebted to Frederick J. Hoffman, Joseph Kwiat, Robert Penn Warren, Theodore Hornberger, Henry Nash Smith, and Robert Spiller. Two of these sections, in somewhat different form, appeared in the New Mexico Quarterly *and in* College English.

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I

THE GENTEEL TRADITION

THE term "genteel tradition" resists easy and neat definition. Apparently coined by George Santayana, it was taken up quickly by critics and novelists interested in loosening the American mores. In the period before and after World War I, it became a term of opprobrium. Sinclair Lewis, in his Nobel Prize speech in 1930, could use William Dean Howells and the genteel tradition as the reactionary enemy over which the liberal and realistic writers had won their now officially recognized victory. In his own period, however, Howells had helped win a victory for realism, had sponsored (although somewhat reluctantly) the acceptance of a novelist like Emile Zola, and had encouraged young Stephen Crane. One begins to suspect that there are two genteel traditions: the one that might exist for the disinterested historian and the one that was mythologized by

Lewis and his contemporaries. This is not to say, of course, that the contemporaries of Lewis were wholly imagining their enemy in order to give an air of valorous achievement to their own work. They did create a rather grotesque effigy of the genteel writer and critic, but it was true that the group they opposed, insofar as it was homogeneous,[1] did not encourage the expression in literature of the bristling vigor, the commercialization, the scheming and plodding in American life, or of the realist and pragmatic forms of idealism that developed out of this part of the American mind. Many members of the group that Lewis was attacking did look upon themselves as part of an aristocracy of culture and intellect and even as a distinct social class. By and large, the tradition they supported came out of New England and had in it the idealism of Ralph Waldo Emerson as modified by the generations of the cultivated that had followed him. Even though the group's assurance that they were the representatives and arbiters of culture seems supercilious and arbitrary to a later generation, it must be recognized that they usually believed themselves to be following some such doctrine as Emerson's on the "inner light," and that they looked upon themselves as eminently moral. In fact, if there is one characteristic that can be said to pervade all others, it is their moral sense. Aesthetic, intellectual, economic, and political considerations are almost invariably bathed in the light of ethical considerations. This fact undoubtedly controls what a later generation of readers likely to see as the peculiarly idealistic tone with which they discuss all subjects, whether it be environmental factors in literature, scientific procedures in writing criticism, or a determination to write realistically.

[1] One of the difficulties in generalizing about the group is that it was not of one mind about all of the characteristics one may justly label "genteel."

Such a tone is pervasive in almost all of the essays in an anthology edited by William Morton Payne, *American Literary Criticism.*[2] It is evident, for example, in the selection from *The Nature and Elements of Poetry* (1892) by Edmund Clarence Stedman, who prided himself on the scientific foundations of his criticism:

Distinction ever hath been achieved through some form of faith, and even the lesser poets have won their respective measures of success, other things being equal, in proportion to their amount of trust in certain convictions as to their art, themselves and the "use of it all." The serene forms of faith in deity, justice, nationality, religion, human nature, which have characterized men of the highest rank, are familiar to you. . . . Homer cheerfully recognizes the high gods as the inspirers and regulators of all human action.

And the tone is evident in the selection from *Criticism and Fiction* (1891) by William Dean Howells, a critic who believed that literature *should tell the truth* and whose dictum was: "Realism is nothing more and nothing less than the truthful treatment of material." Howells is writing about Shakespeare:

To the heart again of serious youth uncontaminate and exigent of ideal good, it must always be a grief that the great masters

2 (New York, Longmans, 1904.) This collection, which includes only the work of critics born before 1850, affords an easy way of seeing the major lines in late nineteenth-century criticism. Payne recalls that Edgar Allan Poe, insofar as he had a single master, derived from Samuel Taylor Coleridge; that the early *Dial* (1842–44) gave such critics as Emerson, Margaret Fuller, and George Ripley a vehicle for "their idealism, their impatience of tradition, their zeal for intellectual discovery, and their passion for political reform"; that James Russell Lowell, despite his keen intellect and occasional valuable insights, was without method or direction in his criticism; that Sidney Lanier strove, but with only limited success, to give a scientific basis to the study of verse and the novel; and that a critic like Hamilton Wright Mabie "has been unwearying in exhorting us to keep in touch with our Homer and Plato, with our Dante and Shakespeare and Goethe."

seem so often to have been willing to amuse the leisure and vacancy of mean men, and leave their mission to the soul but partially fulfilled. . . . Few consciences, at times, seem so enlightened as that of this personally unknown person, so withdrawn into his work, and so lost to the intensest curiosity of aftertime; at other times he seems merely Elizabethan in his coarseness, his courtliness, his imperfect sympathy.

Around Howells when he was associated with *The Atlantic Monthly* (1866–81) was a group of critics dedicated to sponsoring realism in fiction.[3] It is interesting to observe how frequently their nominal or intended acceptance of realism threatens to, or actually does, become an adverse criticism of it. Thus, Thomas Sergeant Perry says that the melancholy of Turgenyev is "to be explained by some personal, immediate cause, [rather] than by his wilful contempt for the great laws which have made literature the consolation that it is." He then explains that "despair . . . is not what readers want . . . ," but rather a way of escaping "the harassing, sordid cares of the world." Literature should show the inevitable progress that is the reward of human struggle. Perry and some of his colleagues would have fiction describe the everyday world, but they wished that only optimistic and hopeful themes be used to interpret and, therefore, to soften any harshness that the improperly tutored mind might infer.

The aspirations and attitudes of the genteel writers, from Henry Wadsworth Longfellow to Henry van Dyke, Lewis's immediate opponent, differ with each individual; but common to almost all are a kind of melancholy optimism, a

[3] There is a valuable survey of this group by Dorothy M. Forbis in a University of Texas M.A. dissertation (1942), "The Concept of *Realism* in the School of Howells." Members of the group included R. M. Keeler, Harriet W. Preston, Edwin P. Whipple, Thomas W. Higginson, Horace Scudder, H. T. Tuckerman, and Thomas Sergeant Perry.

wan elegance, and an unwillingness or sometimes a strong-minded refusal to discuss the gross, the vulgar, the indecorous. The element of melancholy in the optimism probably derived from the deliberate and therefore frequently unnatural cheerfulness. Again, the melancholy was inevitable in a literature that preferred not to involve itself with the subject of ineradicable and pervasive evil, with the tragic view. Van Dyke referred to poetry as "idealism set to music." And in some of the poetry and criticism, at least, man's chief aspiration seems to be to turn ethereal and insubstantial.

By and large, the criticism leveled against the genteel critics by a Marxist writer in the 1930's seems to be true. He found that despite occasional promises to relate literature to American environment, the genteel critics generally ignored environmental factors and instead abstracted literature from life, associating it with genteel forms of idealism. He might have added that when they treat environmental forces, the harsher aspects seem not to obtain. He found that they had a respect for tradition that precluded acceptance of the new or experimental. (He might have added that their respect for the cultural tradition of which they saw themselves as the custodians often tricked them into pompous stylistic mannerisms and terribly solemn assertions about human dignity.) He also found that the tradition implied a provincialism that assumed American culture was British and was transmitted to the rest of the country through the good offices of New England.[4]

[4] Useful but diverse accounts of the genteel spirit are to be found in the following: G. E. De Mille, *Literary Criticism in America* (New York, Longmans, 1931); Ludwig Lewisohn, *Story of American Literature* (New York, Random House, 1939); F. I. Carpenter, "The Genteel Tradition: A Reinterpretation," *New England Quarterly*, XV (September 1942), 427–43; Willard Thorp, "Defenders of Ideality," *Literary History of the United States*, ed. Robert Spiller, *et al.* (New York, Macmillan, 1948), pp. 809–26; Howard Mumford Jones, *The Theory of American Literature* (Ithaca, N. Y., Cornell

Because of this New England provincialism the genteel tradition made its way easily in the schools and colleges. Lowell, to whom George Woodberry, Hamilton Wright Mabie, Charles Eliot Norton, and later the New Humanists were indebted, had taught modern languages at Harvard. Professor Fred Lewis Pattee once proposed that Barrett Wendell's *A Literary History of America* (1900) be retitled *A Literary History of Harvard College, with Incidental Glimpses of the Minor Writers of America.* Similar in tone, however, were such Eastern professors as William Peterfield Trent, author of *A History of American Literature, 1607–1865* (1903) and Brander Matthews, author of innumerable volumes. Similar, too, were many of the leading editors and critics outside the academy: Bayard Taylor, Richard Stoddard, William Winter, at whom H. L. Mencken liked to poke fun, and Richard Watson Gilder, a special target of Vance Thompson and the aesthetes.

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To account fully for the origins of and the reasons for maintaining the attitudes common to the genteel critics would be extremely difficult for the obvious reason that human motives can be complex and are often obscure. Inevitably behind some of the attitudes were prejudices or biases of various sorts, such as for Anglo-Saxondom and the culture of New England, for one's own social or economic class, for one's own philosophical tenets or aesthetic principles, or for a combination of them. William Charvat, a

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Univ. Press, 1948); *After the Genteel Tradition: American Writers Since 1910,* ed. Malcolm Cowley (New York, Norton, 1937); Arthur Hobson Quinn, "The Foundations of American Criticism," *The Literature of the American People* (New York, Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1951), pp. 384–423.

careful student of an early period in nineteenth-century American criticism,[5] lists a number of attitudes or principles which he found pervading critical literature, and which the twentieth century was to label "genteel." In other words, some of the genteel attitudes, among them the following, are of long standing:

Literature must not contain anything derogatory, implicitly or explicitly, to religious ideals and moral standards.

Literature should be optimistic: it should not condone philosophical pessimism or skepticism.

Such terms as "discipline," "restraint," and "idealism" occur commonly in the literature of the period.

In his account of the general pattern of early nineteenth-century criticism, Charvat says that the critic almost invariably saw his primary function to be the protection of the established social order. Literature was not to question religious ideals or standards because individuals lack "the judgement to decide between right and wrong" and religion is "the disciplinary force which makes social life possible." Literature was to foster optimism because gloom was thought to be a selfish thing, "a product of too much introversion and a lack of proper social feeling." Much of the criticism, as Charvat demonstrates, was written by men who had a stake in keeping the social order stable, and it is quite possible that behind the attitudes or principles of their criticism were economic or social interests. To some extent such interests undoubtedly influenced later critics like Gilder or W. C. Brownell. But, as George Santayana has suggested, other motives must have operated also. And, while we are

[5] *The Origins of American Critical Thought, 1810–1835* (Philadelphia, Univ. of Pa. Press, 1936).

concerned with the motives behind principles, we should observe that Santayana's own view, which is not a very sympathetic one, comes out of a Spanish and Catholic tradition, which prevented his assimilating or even accepting the New England world in which he grew up. Primarily, Santayana has looked for motives related to the religious inheritances and the philosophical antecedents of the genteel tradition.

In "The Genteel Tradition in American Philosophy," given as a lecture in 1911 and then incorporated into *Winds of Doctrine* (1913), Santayana makes the point that America at the end of the nineteenth century was a young country with an old mentality. Industrially and socially it was a new country, but in its emotions, literature, and philosophy it was trying to live with the doctrines of its fathers. No philosophy, he continues, is genuine that does not express the deepest feelings of those who hold it. The wisdom of the genteel tradition therefore seems "thin and verbal, not aware of its full meaning and grounds." It had left a part of the American mind floating "gently in the backwater, while alongside, in invention and industry and social organization the other half of the mind was leaping down a sort of Niagara Rapids."

In this essay as well as in *The Genteel Tradition at Bay* (1931), he makes a good deal, not without a little malice, of the religious and philosophical origins of the tradition. One of the elements which colonial America had inherited was the "agonized conscience" of Calvinism, out of which had come three major assertions:

> that sin exists, that sin is punished, and that it is beautiful that sin should exist to be punished. The heart of Calvinism is therefore divided between its tragic concern at its own miserable condition, and tragic exultation about the universe at large. . . . Human nature, it feels, is totally depraved: to have the instincts

and motives that we necessarily have is a great scandal, and we must suffer for it; but that scandal is requisite, since otherwise the serious importance of being as we ought to be would not have been vindicated.

But by the middle of the nineteenth century, he continues, Americans had lost the sense that men and God are natural enemies, that man is depraved. The American had become convinced "that he always had been, and always will be, victorious and blameless." The sense of propriety, for example, remained, but its original justification had largely disappeared. And a considerable part of the changed attitude was owed to transcendentalism.

Transcendentalism proper, Santayana said, is not a system of dogma, nor even a collection of facts; it is a method, a way of looking at the world out of self-conscious eyes. "Transcendentalism is systematic subjectivism." Emerson, who practiced the method in its purity, did not insist on his notions; he asked every morning, as it were, how the world appeared. He watched the energy or spirit of nature working in himself. In Nature, as their romantic impulse compelled them to emphasize it, transcendentalists like Emerson found a kinship with their very own elements. In nature they found solace and refreshment. And in their desire to submerge or lose themselves in landscape, winds, or clouds they contributed another element to the genteel tradition:

> Serious poetry, profound religion (Calvinism, for instance), are the joys of an unhappiness that confesses itself; but when a genteel tradition forbids people to confess that they are unhappy, serious poetry and profound religion are closed to them by that; and since human life, in its depths, cannot then express itself openly, imagination is driven for comfort into abstract arts, where human circumstances are lost sight of, and human problems dissolve into a purer medium.

By refusing to acknowledge evil or man's being caught in the "destructive element," the transcendentalists were limiting what one was free to acknowledge about his own nature. This fact caused the genteel critics no end of difficulty in having to avoid frank discussions of the human body, or, more specifically, of sex.

Bliss Perry's *Walt Whitman* (1906), for example, has a Janus-faced treatment of "Calamus" and the general celebration of sex. Perry seems to have accepted Whitman's bragging about his six illegitimate children as fact. "In one sense, comment upon this phase of Whitman's life is as superfluous as it is painful. Sins against chastity bring their own punishment." But a page or so later these sins are accepted as the source of the poetry: "Its roots are deep down in a young man's body and soul: a clean, sensuous body and a soul untroubled as yet by the darker mysteries." Except for his inability to come to terms with this question, Perry's book is valuable, a fair-minded evaluation of Whitman's work. In *The American Mind* (1912) he said that American literature might not be great but it at least has the virtue of being clean. After admitting that the critic is likely to temporize about the badness of much of our writing by emphasizing certain non-literary values, he adds:

> Like the men and women described in Locker-Lampson's verses, Americans
>
> > . . . eat, and drink, and scheme, and plod—
> > They go to church on Sunday;
> > And many are afraid of God—
> > And more of Mrs. Grundy.
>
> Now Mrs. Grundy is assuredly not the most desirable of literary divinities, but the student of classical literature can easily think of other divinities, celebrated in exquisite Greek and Roman verse, who are distinctly less desirable still.

George Edward Woodberry, the student of Lowell and in turn the teacher of Joel Spingarn, protested the American rejection of the nude in sculpture and painting, "forfeiting thereby the supreme of Greek genius and sanity, but to the prejudice, also, of human dignity, as it seems to me." In *America in Literature* (1903), *The Torch* (1905), and *Two Phases of Criticism* (1914) he furnished clear expositions of available critical methods and surveyed a good deal of the literature of his period. (His *Collected Essays* were published in six volumes in 1921.) But Woodberry's good will and emphasis on literature as the "treasury of man's spirit" and the means whereby we may discover "eternal reality" impelled him to move beyond discussion of given literary works to vague discussions of the ideal. It is clear also that he felt the genteel tradition, with which for the most part he was allied, was being killed by American indifference to the life of idealism or the soul, as he understood these terms.

Among the best of these critics was W. C. Brownell, who apparently wanted to be an American Matthew Arnold. After several years in France in an effort to assimilate a greater knowledge of European culture and of French art in particular, he wrote *French Traits* (1889) and *French Art* (1892). Like Arnold, he was an apostle of culture and standards and was concerned with culture in relation to democracy. His comments on American in comparison with French culture strongly favor the French. The French genuinely accepted the Revolution, he said, and as a people held to the "reforming and revising instinct." Democracy in France had become a network through which the social instincts are free to flow. Society furnished the ideal, and the individual aspired to rise above his baser inclinations. Literature and art flourished because they served and were

served by the society. If Americans were prepared to follow the implications of their belief in democracy—to give themselves to the life of the mind—they would improve not only their art but their society.

Brownell's best-known books are *Victorian Prose Masters* (1901) and *American Prose Masters* (1909). In these studies he frequently employed Sainte-Beuve's method of searching for the *faculté maîtresse,* finding the key to John Ruskin, for example, in the "predominance of the emotional sense over the thinking power," or to Emerson in the presence of "light" but the absence of "heat." In *Criticism* (1914), *Standards* (1916), *The Genius of Style* (1924), and *Democratic Distinction in America* (1927), Brownell was concerned with standards for cultural life in the United States. "To an intelligence fully and acutely alive its own time must, I think, be more interesting than any other," and he said that literature is in direct dependence on the life of the times that produced it. But Brownell also believed that the principles inherent in the art of a democratic society should be consonant with the highest possible cultural achievements, by which he meant the ideals of the genteel tradition. Therefore, he was not prepared to accept the naturalism and impressionism of his own time.

Because of his insistence that personal temperament restrict and discipline itself (which accounts for his disapproval of the impressionists), Brownell is sometimes listed among the New Humanists. This passage from *Standards* (characteristic of his tendency to be pretentious) might suggest such an allegiance:

> There is running through currents and eddies of the movement in France, which boil rather than flow, a clear stream of temperamentally conservative criticism, that clarifies and purifies

and carries along to the ocean of general appreciation the sweetness without the sediment of troubled waters through which it passes, while at the same time it tranquilly transports its own freight of principles and standards.

But Brownell dissociated himself from the humanists because he found Irving Babbitt's doctrine of self-restraint too negative, and in *Democratic Distinction in America* he made his reason explicit:

> The age certainly has need of self-control, but self-control in the sense of self-discipline to the end of self-direction must to us wear a fairer face than the self-restraint that, though undoubtedly an incidental, is plainly not the driving force, of self-development.

Some of the critics of the 1920's and 1930's, especially Ludwig Lewisohn, have treated Brander Matthews as the personification of the genteel tradition in criticism, but he, like Howells, belonged to two worlds; he could maintain the manner and employ the tone of the genteel critic but at the same time be aware, sometimes sympathetically, of the new forms in literature. Part of the impression he creates is the result of his possessing only slight imaginative strength. He could say, for example, that drama should be "ingenious and clean, adroit and agreeable, neat and shrewd." And his interpretation of Henrik Ibsen in *Inquiries and Opinions* (1907) seems weak and dated because it is not related to the profound sense of the modern world that Ibsen, whatever his exaggerations, possessed. Ibsen, Matthews wrote, does not belong with Sophocles, Shakespeare, or Molière for this reason: "There are few of his social dramas in which we cannot find more than a hint of abnormal eccentricity or of morbid perversity; and this

is the reason why the most of them fail to attain the dignity of true and lofty tragedy." He saw in Ibsen an able technician, but he was unprepared to see the hard substance, the passion in lieu of sentiment, and the ignoring of the traditional heroic protagonist about which eighteen-year-old James Joyce had been thinking and writing in 1900. Matthews and many of his colleagues were unprepared to read Ibsen sympathetically because their sensibilities had been formed in the genteel tradition.

John Jay Chapman, whose sensibilities were also formed in this tradition, was at least partially able to transcend it. His literary criticism is almost an incidental part of his work, concerned with politics, education, and religion, but it is distinguished by vigor and perspicacity. In *Memories and Milestones* (1915) he expressed a low opinion of Shaw, finding him deficient in taste and without reverence; but, however unfair he may have been to Shaw, there is nothing genteel in his expression. "Ibsen reasoned thus: 'If you want to give emotion to the average playgoer, you must take a rusty blade from an old razor, attach it to a brick, and therewith suddenly shave off one of the man's toes. That is art.' Shaw has the same rake and saw theory." In one of his letters there is this comment on Lowell: "His prefaces—sometimes very nice, in spirit—but his later prefaces are so expressive—Oh my, so expressive of hems and haws and creased literary trousers. I feel like running him through in the belly and singing out Hulloo! old cockolorum." Perhaps Chapman's best collection of papers is *Emerson, and Other Essays* (1898), and the shrewdest of his comments is that in which he finds Emerson "a faithful exponent of his own and of the New England temperament, which distrusts and dreads the emotions. . . . If an inhabitant from another planet should visit the earth he would receive, on the whole,

a truer notion of human life by attending an opera than he would by reading Emerson's volumes. He would learn from the Italian opera that there were two sexes; and this, after all, is probably the fact with which the education of a stranger ought to begin." Chapman wrote about twenty-five books before his death in 1933, but his ghostly roots prevented his acceptance of the America known to his younger contemporaries. In a Preface published in 1909 he said:

> The spiritual life in New England has never been luxuriant. It is one-sided, sad and inexpressive in many ways. But it has coherence, and this is what makes it valuable for the young American. Every young person in the United States ought to be sent to Massachusetts for some part of his education.

Chapman found only a very small audience. His was certainly not a wasted career, but it does seem unmistakably clear that his involvement in the genteel tradition caused him to withdraw from the world around him and made him seem merely a victim of exacerbated nerves, a crank in rather than a critic of a new world.

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Writers in the genteel tradition had divided experience into two major spheres. On the one side was love, art, and the ideal; on the other, sex, everyday experience, and the forces of materialism. They were unwilling to acknowledge that love and a frank view of sex were not incompatible; that art expressed in appropriate form, language, or idiom might arise from the everyday world; and that valuable ideals could grow in a world dominated by science, business, and industrialism. The genteel critics were writing

out of a tradition that was evaporating, but they were also actively opposed and sometimes ridiculed by critics who prided themselves on being aware of the new European traditions and by critics who felt that the methods and information furnished by science were applicable to the study and the creation of literature.

2

SOPHISTICATION AND IMPRESSIONISM

AMERICAN literature at the end of the nineteenth century was not quite ready to assimilate or to borrow intelligently from the decadent movement in England and from the subjectivist and often esoteric movements in France. Borrowings tended to have an artificial look and to be self-conscious. The exotic line that runs from Lafcadio Hearn to Carl Van Vechten and James Branch Cabell produced mostly wax flowers. Imitations of Verlaine and others by Richard Hovey and William Bliss Carman, for example, seem, in retrospect, presentations through a glass transcendentally. Yet, as the new century progressed, such borrowings, from the symbolists especially, helped make possible the poetry of T. S. Eliot, Wallace Stevens, Ezra Pound, Allen Tate, and Hart Crane. The American criticism indebt-

ed to these subjectivist movements suffers from bohemian posings and cosmopolitan airs, but some of it is sensitively and intelligently impressionistic. Even the bohemian and cosmopolitan criticism which indulged in its own kind of stereotypes and clichés claimed to be highly personalized and to evoke the character and quality of the original work —in a word, to be impressionistic, after the manner of Anatole France and Walter Pater.

Anatole France was the enemy of those who would impose any system as *the* truth. Skeptical of all values, he became dependent upon irony. Only after many centuries, he said, will it be possible to have true sciences. The completion of the sciences is only in the mind of Auguste Comte, the founder of the positivist line in modern philosophy. As yet there is no science of biology, much less of sociology. "Aesthetics," he wrote in *La vie littéraire* (1888–93), "is based on nothing solid. It is a castle in the air. Some have tried to base it upon ethics. But there is no such thing as ethics." There are no acceptable systems, but fortunately, as France would have it, the ironic mind enables us to live with our illusions and prevents our being outrageously victimized by them. (If the eighteenth century in its neoclassic aesthetic and its rationalistic philosophy overemphasized permanence, stability, and law, then the subjectivist movements of the nineteenth century may be said to have gone to extremes in emphasizing impermanence, instability, and the absence of law. Impressionism obviously was a part of this reaction.) The good critic is one who relates the "adventures of his soul among masterpieces." Beauty is an illusion or a dream in which man finds it necessary to live. France's aesthetic appealed strongly to American critics like James Huneker and Lewis E. Gates. The cold, dignified precision of Walter Pater's manner won respect, but the

disintegrating irony of France won humble followers. Even so, Pater furnished them a valuable and neat exposition of the function of the impressionist critic.

Studies in the History of the Renaissance is undoubtedly the classic of impressionist criticism in English. The critic, Pater wrote, should not concern himself with definitions. The important thing is that he have "a certain kind of temperament, the power of being deeply moved by the presence of beautiful objects." Pater, profoundly aware of the world as flux, wrote in the "Conclusion" that "to regard all things and principles of things as inconstant modes or fashions has more and more become the tendency of modern thought." The more conservative elements of the Victorian society overemphasized the solidity and permanence of "things and principles of things," but Pater tended, in the "Conclusion" at least, to overemphasize the "whirl of thought and feeling." At first, he wrote, we have a sense of "sharp and importunate reality" in the presence of objects and experiences. But upon reflection these externalities dissolve, "each object is loosed into a group of impressions—color, odor, texture—in the mind of the observer." Language gives objects and principles a solidity and permanence which in our consciousness become "impressions unstable, flickering, inconsistent." Impressionist criticism found its inconstant center in "the impressions of the individual in his isolation, each mind keeping as a solitary prisoner its own dream of a world." Ideas or systems which bring us to a stasis in which abstract theory and rule supersede the qualities, the subtle discriminations, even the ecstasy of the given moment should, Pater concluded, have "no real claim on us."

Edgar Saltus, more genuinely impressionist in his fiction than in his criticism, is perhaps the most egregious poseur among the cosmopolite writers. He said that in literature

only three things count: "style, style polished, and style repolished." He was even capable of faking esoteric sources, but when he chose he could write sensibly and with restraint. Saltus began his career with a modest biographical and critical study, *Balzac* (1884), most notable for its asides on realism in fiction. An era's realism in letters is simply its sentiments and attitudes about "the obvious and true." Imitation or copying by lesser writers enervates the sense of the real. The innovator, like Balzac, establishes a new way of seeing, which in its turn will be copied. Saltus's *The Philosophy of Disenchantment* (1885) is an account and extension of Schopenhauer's *The World as Will and Idea,* and *The Anatomy of Negation* (1886) is an account of antitheism, ranging from India, Greece, and Rome to nineteenth-century France. Each is, for Saltus, unpretentious, and each is well written. The closing chapter of *The Anatomy of Negation* implies a need for an exquisite art in lieu of belief, and evokes a sense of the ennui pervading the poetry of Alfred de Vigny, Baudelaire, and Leconte de Lisle. "Morality in Fiction" in *Love and Lore* (1890) furnishes one of our first attacks on the puritan spirit in American literature. And in the same book he spoke of romanticism being a corpse from which the warmth has not departed. In 1917 he published *Oscar Wilde: An Idler's Impression.* In its twenty-six pages Saltus catches not merely Wilde as a man but the sickly elegance of much *fin de siècle* literature, including a great deal of his own. Like Wilde, with whom he was acquainted, Saltus believed that the only important question for the critic was to distinguish between good writing and bad.

Vance Thompson was also a mannered aesthete, the man with a monocle. In the Preface to *French Portraits* (1899) he said that for "many years, now, the dear Lord has pre-

served me from the sin of inutile reading." The editorial in the first issue (1895) of *M'lle New York,* which he edited, stated that it was the ambition of the magazine to "disintegrate some small portion of the public into its original component parts—the aristocracies of birth, wit, learning, and art, and the joyously vulgar mob." With approval he quotes a minor French decadent: "I wish to play with this life that has been given me, in all its beauty, richness, liberty, elegance; *je suis un aristocrate.*" For himself, he adds: "There are two races of men. And the one is beautiful, luxurious, heroic, cruel, ravished by the splendid banality of life; the other is gray, patient, drowsy, dutiful, the race of pitiful men." The method of Thompson's criticism is also given in the Preface: "In these appreciations of the writers of young France I have not, I trust, laid undue stress upon what they have done, slighting what they are. I should like you to see—across these pages—Verlaine hobbling to his cafe in the Bou' Mich', Mallarmé jogging by in his donkey-cart, Eckhoud fondling his rabbit, or, it may be, Signoret, impossibly young, promenading his pale soul in the autumnal alleys of Versailles." After writing *French Portraits,* Thompson became a popular journalist, turning out behind-the-scenes articles and finally writing uplift books.

Lewis Gates, a professor of English at Harvard and a sober student of modern literature, sought in *Studies and Appreciations* (1900) to characterize and account for the public favor in which impressionist criticism had recently found itself. He acknowledged Arnold and especially Pater as being in the impressionist tradition which insists upon "delicacy of perception, mobility of mood, reverence for the shade, and a sure instinct for the specific integrating phrase, and for the image tinged with feeling." Yet no single critic, he said, is responsible for the tradition; it is rather that

since the eighteenth century we have cultivated a sense of the particularized, specific detail; in place of the typical seasons of James Thomson and the generalizations of Addison we have come with the romantics to value the fleeting mood and to enjoy the unique experience of critical appreciation (no one feels exactly the same way twice in the presence of a work of art). Impressionist criticism at its best, he continues, is the record of a single temperament at a particular moment in the presence of literary work capable of arousing spiritual energies. But Gates warned in "Impressionism and Appreciation" that when the egoism of the reader moves on a tangent from the work the resulting commentary can hardly be called criticism. Impressionism too often moves on a tangent. Therefore, we need the "appreciative critic," one who is not whimsical. The appreciative critic, Gates says, takes into account the objective and permanent nature of a work. And since an understanding of the historical context is necessary if he is to know a work intimately, he seeks a detailed historical knowledge. Similarly, so far as possible, he tries to recreate the consciousness of the artist at the moment he evoked his images, "charged them with spiritual power, and called into rhythmical order sound-symbols to represent them henceforth for ever." The appreciative critic will learn what he can from aesthetics, but he is well advised to avoid being caught in the meshes of a priori theories. He will learn what he can of normal or typical responses, but he will remain an individual and rely on his own impressions. Knowing all he can about the milieu and psychological origins of a work, the impressionist *and* appreciative critic will neither judge nor dogmatize—he will enjoy. His function is "to realize the manifold charm the work of art has gathered into itself from all sources, and to interpret this charm imaginatively to the

men of his own day and generation." Gates, the professor of English literature, pays his respects to the historical method, the students of the biographical origins of a work, and "the science of aesthetics"—but in the end he throws in his lot with Anatole France. There is an "enchanting fickleness" in literature as there is in life and in the "temperament that confronts it."

Joseph Percival Pollard, like James Huneker, his colleague on *Town Topics,* helped in the popularization and acceptance of Continental literary movements. For an American edition (1905) of Oscar Wilde's *Intentions* he wrote the Introduction in which he said: "Literature is an advertisement of one's attitude toward life. It is the record of a mood. It is the impress, writ in wax, of some mask we wore at some moment." Pollard's critical accounts in *Masks and Minstrels of New Germany* (1911) are little advertisements for Nietzsche, Stefan George, Rainer Maria Rilke, Hugo von Hofmannsthal, Arthur Schnitzler, and others. He concludes with a brief confession of faith in impressionist criticism: "Only as we ourselves have vividly felt this or that sensation in life or the arts, can we pass such sensation on. What this book has tried to convey is the personal impression of one who believes in only individual taste and appreciation." There is little, however, that is really idiosyncratic in Pollard. His are fairly commonplace judgments. For all his enthusiasm he has little of the artiness, attitudinizing, and pretentiousness that now make Vance Thompson's comparable volumes almost unreadable.

ii

It is Huneker, more than any other critic, who has made Americans aware of Wagner, Strauss, Rodin, Degas, Stend-

hal, Baudelaire, Flaubert, Nietzsche, Hauptmann, and Ibsen. He wrote tirelessly for newspapers and magazines: the *Sun,* the *Times, Scribner's,* and *Town Topics.* Through them he had his greatest influence. His books, *Iconoclasts* (1905), *Promenades of an Impressionist* (1910), *Ivory Apes and Peacocks* (1915), and the others did not sell well, even though they were influential among those interested in the currents and whirlpools of modernism. Huneker, a modest, humble man, was also highly respected, not merely by his American colleagues, but by Rémy de Gourmont and Georg Brandes.

It is easy to be unfair to Huneker, to lump him with those eclectic critics who serve their time as public relations men for *avant-garde* movements, then are overtaken by oblivion. His manner and method may have derived from his desire to serve primarily in publicizing the arts or from the refusal of newspaper and magazine editors to encourage analytical and sharp criticism. Huneker in manner was pleasant, enthusiastic; in method he was rhapsodic, anecdotic, and allusive. Most often his essays are conversational—he remembers something he has heard about the man's student days; this reminds him of something in the *Imitation of Christ,* and how better isolate the characteristic genius of the work than by suggesting how much it has in common with the work of three other artists? This is a passage on Anatole France:

Here, too, we recognize the amiable casuistry of Anatole—Voltaire. And there is something of Baudelaire and Barbey d'Aurevilly's piety of imagination with impiety of thought, in France's pronouncement. He is a Chrysostom reversed; from his golden mouth issue spiritual blasphemies.

Mr. Henry James has said that the province of art is "all life, all feeling, all observation, all vision." According to this rubric,

France is a profound artist. He plays with the appearances of life, occasionally lifting the edge of the curtain to curdle the blood of his spectators by the sight of Buddha's shadow in some grim cavern beyond. He has the Gallic tact of adorning the blank spaces of theory and the ugly spots of reality. A student of Kant in his denial of the objective, we can never picture him as following Konigsberg's sage in his admiration of the starry heavens and the moral law. Both are relative, would be the report of the Frenchman. But, if he is sceptical about things tangible, he is apt to dash off at a tangent and proclaim the existence of that "school of drums kept by the angels," which the hallucinated Arthur Rimbaud heard and beheld. His method of surprising life, despite his ingenuous manner, is sometimes as oblique as that of Jules Laforgue. And, in the words of Pater, his is "one of the happiest temperaments coming to an understanding with the most depressing of theories."

A slightly different sort of essay is the sensible and illuminating "A Visit to Walt Whitman," a mixture of humorous anecdote and observations about his own response to *Leaves of Grass*. Whitman, Huneker said, had a great capacity for recording the surface of things, for tactile images—yet he seldom managed a poetic synthesis. His celebration of sex was good for his time, for the sexless world of Emerson, Poe, and Hawthorne. "But women, as a rule, have not rallied to his doctrines, instinctively feeling that he is indifferent to them, notwithstanding the heated homage he pays to their physical attractions." He was a great poseur and he was also quite lovable. Huneker tries to be fair:

With all his genius in naming certain unmentionable matters, I don't believe in the virility of these pieces, scintillating with sexual images. They leave one cold despite their erotic vehemence; the abuse of the vocative is not persuasive, their raptures are largely rhetorical. This exaltation, this ecstasy, seen at its best in William Blake, is sexual ecstasy, but only when the mood

is married to the mot lumière is there authentic conflagration. Then his "barbaric yawp is heard across the roofs of the world"; but in the underhumming harmonics of Calamus, where Walt really loafs and invites his soul, we get the real man, not the inflated humbuggery of These States, Camerados, or My Messages, which fills Leaves with their patriotic frounces. His philosophy is fudge. It was an artistic misfortune for Walt that he had a "mission," it is a worse one that his disciples endeavor to ape him.

Within its limits, Huneker's chatty, allusive, and impressionistic manner is successful.

Around Huneker[1] there formed an influential group of critics: H. L. Mencken, George Jean Nathan, Benjamin De Casseres, Carl Van Vechten, Lawrence Gilman, and Paul Rosenfeld. Most of them were interested in painting, drama, music, and literature. They were eclectic, journalistic, elegant, modern before all else, cosmopolitan, and impressionistic. Mencken, Nathan, and Willard Huntington Wright (later S. S. Van Dine) as contributors to and later editors of *Smart Set* added bumptiousness and impudence. They kept up a running attack on American provincialism. If a subject had been untouchable, they delighted in sponsoring hearty discussions of it.

H. L. Mencken became literary editor, with Nathan as drama critic, of *Smart Set* in 1908. The two became editors of it in 1914. Under them, *Smart Set* succeeded in pushing over the internally weakened but seemingly still eminent structure of gentility. The romantic primitivism of Jack London, the somber realities of Theodore Dreiser and Ed Howe, the radicalism of Upton Sinclair, and the seemingly

1 There are interesting studies of the prose styles of a number of writers in the Huneker tradition in Joseph Warren Beach's *The Outlook for American Prose* (Chicago, Univ. of Chicago Press, 1926).

wicked ironies of James Branch Cabell were welcomed. In 1923, Mencken and Nathan founded *American Mercury.* Nathan resigned after one year, but Mencken continued with it until 1933.

Through his editorials in *American Mercury,* his series of *Prejudices,* as well as through his other articles and books, Mencken popularized such phrases as "Boobus Americanus," "booboisie," "Bible Belt," "Sahara of the bozarts," and "smuthound." Like Shaw, whose plays were the subject of his first book (1905), Mencken found his chief delight in attacking whatever was conventional or held sacred.

His second book *The Philosophy of Friedrich Nietzsche* (1908) gave Mencken a chance to introduce one of Huneker's cultural heroes and to attack organized religion, conventional morality, and democracy. Mencken reduced Nietzsche's philosophy to eight propositions, the last being: "That human beings of the ruling, efficient class should reject all gods and religions and with them the morality at the bottom of them and the ideas which grow out of them, and restore to its ancient kingship that primal instinct which enables every efficient individual to differentiate between the things which are beneficial to him and the things which are harmful." In "Puritanism as a Literary Force," included in *A Book of Prefaces* (1917), he described the puritan force as relentlessly "against the rise of that dionysian spirit, that joyful acquiescence in life, that philosophy of the Ja-sager, which offers to Puritanism as in times past, its chief and perhaps only antagonism." Mencken's strength was in his willingness to affirm native American voices with few or no apologies for their artistic deficiencies, his willingness to do battle with the representatives of propriety who would impose their bigotries and repressions in the name of virtue. But the individualism in Mencken that could attack

puritanism could ridicule economic reform as the sentimentality implicit in democracy.

The crudeness in Mencken or his willingness to oversimplify made him an able pamphleteer. Edmund Wilson has said that in the 1920's he was "a sort of central bureau to which the young looked for tips to guide them in the cultural confusion." Mencken had a gusty self-assurance that served the moment and gave him a style that those desiring to be equally brash could not resist imitating. Wilson described the style as "a blend of American colloquial speech with a rakish literary English that sounded as if it had come out of old plays of the period of Congreve and Wycherley; and a tone that was humorous and brutal in the combative Germanic manner."

Mencken's "Footnote on Criticism" (1921) exhibits his tendency to be intellectually vulgar. The literary critic as such, he said, is one who uses the work of art as an excuse for writing an essay of his own—like the nineteenth-century reviewers who used a book given for review as occasion or excuse for writing a long paper of their own. The critic sets up "shop as a general merchant in general ideas, *i.e.*, as an artist working in the materials of life itself." The reviewer, "hollow as a jug," retails the ideas of his superiors, the artists. "Like writing poetry," reviewing is "chiefly a function of intellectual immaturity." Several years earlier in "Criticism of Criticism of Criticism" (1918) he had called the critic a catalytic agent. The untutored spectator has no intelligible reaction to the work of art until the critic causes it to live for him. The most feasible method, he had said, is to be found in certain chapters of Huneker, wherein a "sensitive and intelligent artist recreates the work of other artists." In one sense, however, Mencken belongs less with the impressionist critics than with those, like Van Wyck Brooks

and Carl Van Doren, who help to liberalize the American mores. He is a social critic first and a literary critic only incidentally.

George Jean Nathan, Mencken's alter ego, was the most determinedly naughty of the cosmopolite critics. Except for *The American Credo* (1920), which he did with Mencken, *The New American Credo* (1927), which he did alone, and the autobiographical *Friends of Mine* (1932), Nathan's thirty-odd books are composed mostly of pieces about fashions in the theater and his collected reviews. He has written of the theater, he said in *The World in Falseface* (1923), "as a man criticizes his own cocktails and his own God." He is the gentleman ironist: "I do not take it seriously; nor on the other hand do I take it too lightly, for one who takes nothing very seriously takes nothing too lightly." The theater for Nathan was "excellent diversion," occasion for a witty review. A few of his witticisms have proved durable, most notably the characterization of J. M. Barrie as "the triumph of sugar over diabetes," and of Maeterlinck as "the Belgian Belasco." Nathan has attacked academicism and prudery, and he has helped "discover," or at least encourage the reception given, Eugene O'Neill, Sean O'Casey, and the earlier works of Paul Vincent Carroll and of William Saroyan. It may be that the immaturity and crudity of most American plays has precluded any serious criticism from Nathan. Yet his assertion that drama, "a thing of suggestion and illusion," should not be scrutinized too closely can certainly be read as an essentially frivolous statement. With Mencken, he helped to make America self-conscious about artistic values, but in refusing to subordinate his personality to writing about drama as an art he has presented himself as a sophisticate and cosmopolite whose interests and opinions too often are trivial.

Carl Van Vechten, a lesser Huneker, has also written of the seven arts. The aesthetic life in its dilettante aspects has been his subject. He worked as hard as any of his fellows to make the dream of an unending holiday flourish in postwar America. Art was not selection and brooding upon experience until it came to aesthetic form and significance; it was experience itself limited to *décor,* epigrams, and gilt elegance. It was the wealthy Caribbean world of Joseph Hergesheimer's novels, the pastiche that was Elinor Wylie's Augustan England, the Poictesme of Cabell's dream, and the alcoholic and money-ridden set from which F. Scott Fitzgerald was never quite able to free himself. Van Vechten in his novels wrote the story of a decade in which mannerisms, eccentricities, cynicism, and eroticism were experimented with and investigated. In retrospect the gaiety seems artificial and the cynicism forced. In 1930 he gave up his novels and criticism, except his continued promotion of Gertrude Stein, for photography. His literary criticism, rather slight in bulk, was the counterpart of his fiction. Most of it, now largely unreadable, appears in *The Merry-Go-Round* (1918), and *Excavations* (1926). Still usable, both for its commentary as well as its data, is "Edgar Saltus" in *The Merry-Go-Round.* Van Vechten places Saltus in the tradition of Gustave Moreau: one finds in Saltus's works "the same unicorns, the same fabulous monsters, the same virgins on the rocks, the same exotic and undreamed of flora and fauna, the same mystic paganism, the same exquisitely jewelled workmanship. One can find further analogies in the Aubrey Beardsley of 'Under the Hill,' in the elaborate stylized irony of Max Beerbohm." Van Vechten's study of Saltus is written in the tapestry prose he admires in the work of Saltus, but, as with most of the novels it celebrates, the old luster is gone.

The sudden eminence of James Branch Cabell was a sign of the times. The immediate occasion was the censorship of *Jurgen* in 1919, but almost inevitably he would have been acclaimed as an American voice speaking in the accents of French aestheticism. Cabell was overpraised because certain readers were looking for the wit, the irony, and the sophistication associated with writers like Anatole France. Cabell's *Beyond Life* (1919) and *Straws and Prayer-Books* (1924) express the vanity of human affairs and the need to believe in romantic dreams. Man "hurtles into these various roads from reality, precisely as a goaded sheep flees without notice of what lies ahead."

> Among the countless internecine animals that roamed earth, puissant with claw and fang and sinew, an ape reft of his tail, and grown rusty at climbing, was the most formidable, and in the end would triumph. It was of course considered blasphemous to inquire into the grounds for this belief, in view of its patent desirability, for the race was already human. So the prophetic portrait of man treading among cringing plesiosauri to browbeat a frightened dinosaur was duly scratched upon the cave's wall, and art began forthwith to accredit human beings with every trait and destiny which they desiderated. . . .

This irony is hardly that of Anatole France, who could see such a situation as the pursuing of dreams in more subtle and complex ways. Cabell's assumption of the ironic manner always seems a little forced. Cabell is more romanticist than ironist. He states a partial truth and then rests on it: "And romance tricks [man] but not to his harm. For, be it remembered that man alone of animals plays the ape to his dreams. . . ." It is about tomorrow that "romance is talking, by means of parables. And all the while man plays the ape to fairer and yet fairer dreams, and practice strengthens him at mimicry."

Paul Rosenfeld was among the best of the impressionists. Unfortunately, his inability in his later years to write objective, less evocative criticism apparently made his work unacceptable to most editors, and his career in this respect suggests the dissolution of Huneker's kind of criticism. The center of a painter's or a poet's work was evident to him and he could probe it for deficiencies or test its strength. He was among the first of his generation to perceive the strengths and weaknesses of Van Wyck Brooks. And he had the great virtue of giving himself without excess to his enthusiasms. But Rosenfeld also tried to re-create in his prose an approximation of the work, whether a painting or a poem, he was criticizing. Marsden Hartley's "New Mexico" has a "strange depraved topography. . . . strawberry-pink mountains dotted by fuzzy poison green shrubs, recalling breasts and wombs of clay; clouds like sky-sailing featherbeds."

In order to re-create the work, Rosenfeld too frequently extended words beyond their capacities and he dislocated phrases. The critic's appreciation seems forced on us. It is a little like Pater's insistence that the color, odor, texture be experienced to the full by an observer who must enjoy himself at all costs during his brief existence. Perhaps this is why *Port of New York* (1924) and *Men Seen* (1925) seem a little dated.

iii

But impressionism in the hands of imaginative critics, who seem more often than not to be poets, has made possible a criticism free from the rigors of fixed systems. The

level of criticism in magazines like *The Symposium, The Dial, Poetry,* and *Hound and Horn* in the days when contemporary criticism was trying to find itself frequently depended on such critics. Conrad Aiken's *Scepticisms, Notes on Contemporary Poetry* (1919) exhibits a consistently high level of impressionism as well as a knowledge of current aesthetic and psychoanalytical theory. Marianne Moore, one of the best critics in this tradition, has often caught the quality of a work by judicious quotation as well as by little asides that suggest the nature of the writer's perceptions. Her criticism is most effective when she is examining writers like James or Stevens with whom she has close affinities.

Similarly, Louise Bogan has managed to write a highly perceptive criticism without identifying herself with a group or school. She is especially good at borrowing an insight from or pointing up parallels with music or the other arts, and she has a keen sense of milieu. For example, in a few sentences she can create a sense of the world of 1904 which Joyce evoked in *Ulysses:* a feeling "of untoward squalor and specialized glitter; a sad and ugly pathos and an outmoded and naïve gaiety; a sense of the hidden massiveness of institutions opposed to the extreme particularization of individuals. . . . Colors are dark or muddied: mustard brown and magenta. There is a pervasive smell of beer, horses, and human sweat. It is a period without outlet."

These critics have the highly refined sensitivity which makes perceptive criticism possible, and in the absence of which formal rules quickly become rigid categories. Probably it is true that all worth-while criticism is in some sense impressionistic, in the sense that the critic lends himself to the work, trying to see it in its own terms, to sympathize with it, and to give the reader some understanding of the

kind of excitement it can generate. But to be seen disinterestedly a work has also to be subjected to the kind of analysis that is open to critics who are aware of ways in which the given work is like or unlike those in the genre to which it belongs and who, possessing a fairly complex knowledge of critical theory, can discuss the structure of the given work.

3

REALISM AND THE AEGIS OF SCIENCE

As a critical term, "realism" is not very useful. It does suggest the exclusion of a certain type of subject matter, such as fantasy, utopias, tales of Gothic horror, and the like. In the latter part of the nineteenth century it meant, more specifically, opposition to tales in which "girls were shrinkingly modest and yet brave in emergencies," as well as opposition to novels like *Ben Hur* and *Uncle Tom's Cabin.* (Henry James said that American readers of fiction had not made up their minds whether the truth could be told, and Howells said that truth "unvarnished" is "almost the rarest thing in an Anglo-Saxon book.") But to say what realism *is,* is quite another matter. The realism of Howells is not the realism of James or Hamlin Garland or Stephen Crane. Common to all of them was the desire

to tell the truth, but each of them was likely to discover reality in different forms and to search for his truth in diverse sources. The following passage from Howell's *Criticism and Fiction* is his version of what the eyes of the honest critic should see:

> In life he finds nothing insignificant; all tells for destiny and character; nothing that God has made is contemptible. He cannot look upon human life and declare this thing or that thing unworthy of notice, any more than the scientist can declare a fact of the material world beneath the dignity of his inquiry. He feels in every nerve the equality of things and the unity of men; his soul is exalted, not by vain shows and shadows and ideals, but by realities, in which alone the truth lives.

In the passage are echoes from Emerson and the latter's reverence for each object in the living world. Obviously Crane would not have formulated his understanding of the concept of realism in any such idealistic or genteel terms. The truth about the complexity of the problem of realism was put neatly by James in "The Art of Fiction": "Humanity is immense, and reality has a myriad forms; the most one can affirm is that some of the flowers of fiction have the odor of it, and others have not; as for telling you in advance how your nosegay should be composed, that is another affair."

Some of James's contemporaries, however, believed that by drawing upon the truths of science, or those which science would eventually furnish, the artist could know in advance how a literary work should be composed, how reality could be caught and fixed. They were, of course, living in a period in which for many science had become the religion of reason; and even for those who saw it in a different light the prestige of scientific modes of thought was necessarily high. One frequently finds critics trying to model their own methodology on the methodology of science (or

what they think the methodology to be) or trying to establish as literary ideals the ideals of the scientist.

Surprisingly enough, one finds that even a man like Howells could be so awed on occasion by what he understood to be scientific methodology that he could abjure his right to make judgments about literary worth. Apparently, his desire to be of his age, and therefore scientific, induced him to make comments that contradict the position he takes when expressing himself as the genteel idealist that at heart he was. There is a contradiction, for instance, between his emphasis on a genteel morality and his comments on the function of scientific criticism. He was willing to have expressions of the "beast man" dropped from literature, "as they were long ago dropped from the talk of decent people." On the other hand, he sometimes wrote of literature as being the inevitable product of milieu. The function of the critic, he once said, was to report on what he found. "There is a measure of the same absurdity in his trampling on a poem, a novel, or an essay that does not please him as in the botanist grinding a plant underfoot because he does not find it pretty." It should be his concern "rather to identify the species and then explain how and where the specimen is imperfect and irregular." When he was not being so fashionably scientific Howells could state his doubt that formlessness, whatever its roots or causes, should be accepted as inevitable. "Something, it seems to me, may be contained and kept alive in formality, but in formlessness everything spills and wastes away. This is what I find the fatal defect of our American Ossian, Walt Whitman, whose way is where artistic madness lies." But this conflict, however minor in Howells, is an important clue to the minds of his critic contemporaries. The appeal for a realistic literature was frequently made on the ground that it was scientific.

ii

The battle waged, and finally won, over the excesses of Emile Zola's naturalism—the battle which helped make it possible to write the truth rather than make-believe—was conducted largely on the grounds of its being scientific. The translation of *Nana*[1] in 1880 had been called obscene, sordid, and nauseous. Magazines like *The Literary World* and *The Atlantic Monthly* had scoffed at Zola's claim in *Le roman expérimental* (1881) that he was like the medical scientist concerned with the sickness of man socially in order to help restore him to health; the former said Zola's interest "must be that of a man of science watching with abhorrent fascination some hideous larva crawling in the filth of a dung hill," and the latter assumed that any French novelist claiming "to have purpose with a capital P" undoubtedly "intends to be particularly indecent." (The battle was won partly, of course, by the sympathies Zola aroused through his support of Alfred Dreyfus. Whereas *L'assommoir* had been violently decried for its low life and moral contagion, later books, such as *La terre, L'argent,* and *La débâcle* were read as painful accounts that were moral in intention and ignored by respectable people at their peril. Zola won new respect in 1898 with his famous letter *J'accuse,* in Dreyfus's behalf. It is obvious, *The Nation* said, that he is "a devoted champion of civil justice." When he died in 1902, Zola, by and large, was treated with respect by the literary commentators.) Zola and his followers made their appeal for acceptance on the grounds that they were scientific writers. One of the key statements in *Le roman*

1 See A. J. Salvan, *Zola aux Etats Unis* (Providence, R. I., Brown Univ. Press, 1943).

expérimental, translated by Belle Sherman in 1893, is this: "The experimental novelist is therefore the one who accepts the proven facts, who points out in man and in society the mechanism of the phenomena over which science is mistress, and who does not interpose his personal sentiments, except in the phenomena whose determinism is not yet settled. . . ." The tone of the whole essay is suggested by this: "The metaphysical man is dead; our whole territory is transformed by the advent of the physiological man." In his private notes Zola had written for his own guidance: "Study men as simple elements and note the reactions," and: "What matters most to me is to be purely naturalistic, purely physiological. Instead of having principles (royalism, Catholicism) I shall have laws (heredity, atavism)." Men and women are subject to inexorable and indifferent laws, economic, social, and biological. The American novelists who were or seem to have been influenced by Zola stress his objectivity and cool disinterestedness. Frank Norris, for example, said "no one could be a writer until he could regard life and people, and the world in general, from objective points of view—until he could remain detached, outside, maintain the unswerving attitude of the observer." But most of them managed, thanks to evolution as treated by Herbert Spencer, to maintain a romantic optimism about the future of mankind collectively despite the rank hopelessness of the individual caught and crushed by the dramatic inexorable forces.[2]

2 For accounts of the somewhat contradictory theories of the naturalists, see C. C. Walcutt, "The Naturalism of Vandover and the Brute," *Forms of Modern Fiction,* ed. William Van O'Connor (Minneapolis, Univ. of Minnesota Press, 1948); Robert Spiller, "Toward Naturalism in Fiction," *Literary History of the United States,* pp. 1016–38; and, Malcolm Cowley, " 'Not Men': A Natural History of American Naturalism," *Kenyon Review,* IX (Summer 1947), 414–35, and his "Naturalism in American Literature," *Evolutionary Thought in America,* ed. Stow Persons (New Haven, Yale Univ. Press, 1950).

McTeague and *Vandover and the Brute* are indebted to Zola for specific scenes as well as doctrine; the respect for hereditary influences, the preoccupation with disease, especially nervous diseases, character rigorously determined by environment, a liking for brutal and violent scenes, huge primitive men and healthy, vigorous women, the careful accumulation of detail to establish an air of actuality, and so forth. "Terrible things must happen," Norris wrote in *The Responsibilities of the Novelist* (1903), "to the characters of the Naturalistic tale. . . . Everything is extraordinary, imaginative, grotesque even, with a vague note of terror quivering throughout like the vibration of an ominous and low pitched diapason." But Norris knew that naturalistic fiction was not a transcript of life; it was a peculiar kind of adventure story. To write such stories, it helped to be able to think of modern businessmen as descendants of the aggressive Anglo-Saxons carrying out their fighting instincts, not in war, but in trade. Occasionally Norris could talk of the real struggles of the poor, of economic inequality and social injustices, and he could write of the need for the novelist to have a purpose. But Norris was primarily concerned, it seems, to write good stories. The aesthetic principles of the naturalistic school, as he chose to interpret them, served him. Naturalism, Norris noted with perceptiveness, "is a form of romanticism, not an inner circle of realism." Zola's laws, as Norris knew, were not absolutes; they were factors, partial truths that the artist exaggerated and stylized for his aesthetic purposes. By calling them laws and appealing thereby to the prestige of science the stories took on a greater air of reality.

Perhaps the critic who best summed up Zola's importance, and at the same time suggested why the search for realism was in the air, was Harry Thurston Peck in "Emile

Zola," done for *The Bookman* in 1902 and later published in *Studies in Several Literatures* (1909). Peck said that Zola's assertions about the novelist writing as a scientist were long since "whistled down the wind." No one cares, he said, what theory or fancied theory helped make his novels possible. Peck also gave a neat summary of realism, the movement which had burst into the intensities, the efflorescence, called naturalism. Realism is a phenomenon as old as Euripides among the Greeks and Petronius among the Romans. It usually follows a period of romanticizing, as the picaresque tales followed the chivalrous romances, or as Henry Fielding followed the sentimentalities of Samuel Richardson. The present movement, he pointed out, may be seen in Stendhal or Rousseau, men who perceived the power in the naked truth. "Realism, however, was not a creation or a rediscovery by any one particular man. Its germ was in the air. . . . Democracy in politics, rationalism in theology, materialism in philosophy and realism in literature, are very closely linked together." Even in Chateaubriand, the so-called father of romanticism, and in Victor Hugo one finds strong evidences of the developments later to be called realism and naturalism. The general drift of the realistic movement begins with Stendhal, carries through Balzac, the Goncourts, and "reaches absolute perfection with *Madame Bovary*. . . . Realism, as such, can never go beyond what Flaubert carefully wrought for us in this one exquisitely-finished etching, of which every line is bitten out as by an acid upon metal, and of which, in consequence, the sombre memory can never die." Flaubert brings the movement to its perfection. "After Flaubert came Zola—not to work further miracles in the name of Realism, but to give Realism a new development and to call it Naturalism."

Like Peck, many critics felt that the scientific movements were related to attempts to write truthfully, realistically. In 1904, Brander Matthews in "Literature in the New Century" listed some of the ways in which science had already influenced the writing of literature. Ibsen found in "the doctrine of heredity a modern analogy of the ancient Greek idea of fate"; *Ghosts* has something of the inexorable inevitability found in the tragedy of Sophocles. The doctrine of evolution has altered our theory of literary history; Brunetière "has shown us most convincingly how the several literary forms—the lyric, the oration, the epic, with its illegitimate descendant, the modern novel in prose—may cross-fertilize each other from time to time, and also how the casual hybrids that result are ever struggling to revert to their own species." Disinterestedness, an ideal of scientists, makes for a "lofty curiosity" in the search for knowledge, "helps the creative artist to strive for a more classic directness and simplicity" and to abhor the "freakish and abnormal." Respect for science means respect for "the reign of law; it establishes the strength of the social bond, and thereby, for example, it aids us to see that, altho romance is ever young and ever true, what is known as 'neo-romanticism,' with its reckless assertion of individual whim, is anti-social, and therefore probably immoral."

Matthews warned, however, that although the study of science could give the writer a sense of actuality it might tempt him, already had tempted him in fact, "to dwell unduly on the mere machinery of human motive and to aim not at a rich portrayal of the actions of men and women, but at an arid analysis of the mechanism of their impulses." Matthews was also aware of what we have come to call "scientism"; he quoted Thomas Huxley's warning that history

tells us it is the "customary fate of new truths to begin as heresies, and to end as superstitions."

Vida Scudder, writing as an orthodox Christian, had devoted a part of *The Life of the Spirit in the Modern English Poets* (1895) to asking whether the influence of science is an unmixed good. If it is, she replies, it is hard to explain why it is accompanied by influences "which tend insidiously to destroy the life of poetry by robbing it of its characteristic powers." The love of fact and of minute observation restricts the imagination and encourages a confined art. How else, she asks, explain the preoccupation with sordid facts and with a "dismal fatalism." But there were many critics, unlike Vida Scudder, who had the utmost faith in the powers of science to unlock the secrets of art and to improve its very nature.

With more critics than not, the appeal to science meant that reality could be seen, understood, and stated in literary and critical terms. We find that the concept of evolution was to unlock the secrets of literary history; that a knowledge of scientific laws would eventually enable the novelist to control his plot as he would a reaction in chemistry; that to know the factors operating in a milieu was to know the character of the literary work produced in it; and that the acceptance of a scientific milieu meant the end of romantic make-believe and the writing of a literature in which objectivity, a cool disinterestedness, and an understanding of scientific laws would make it possible to tell *the* truth.

iii

Although no one has yet published a full-scale study of the influence of Hippolyte Taine on American literature,

both fiction[3] and criticism, the frequency with which his name is mentioned and his works referred to in critical studies[4] suggests that the influence was broad and deep. At least five Americans translated one or another of his works, and one of them, John Durand, translated several.

William Morton Payne, as already suggested, held Taine in great respect. He had republished in *Little Leaders* (1895) the editorial article in which he had commemorated Taine as a brilliant exemplar of the "scientific method in historical criticism." Payne admits that many observers had pointed to limitations in Taine's method. Even so, the "tendency of modern criticism is unquestionably towards a scientific method; in history and philosophy it has already reached such a basis; that in art and literature it will eventually come to such a basis we may hardly doubt." A scientific method "must show itself productive of similar results when employed by many different observers, and it must fulfill the supreme test of enabling us to forecast the future with certainty." Literature depends, according to Taine, on the *race, moment,* and *milieu* that produced it, and is, therefore, rigorously determined. Virtue and vice, like vitriol and sugar, he had said, are the products of material causes.

Anyone who attempts to study Taine's influence will undoubtedly have a difficult job separating the strands of his influence from those deriving from earlier social critics. That literature cannot be wholly understood by a reader who knows little or nothing of the milieu in which it was

[3] Hamlin Garland, for example, acknowledged how important to him Taine's *History of English Literature* had been, and Edward Eggleston said Taine's *History of Art in the Netherlands* led him to employ local manners and local speech in his fiction.

[4] In their *An Introduction to the Methods and Materials of Literary Criticism* (1899), C. M. Gayley and F. N. Scott said: "The brilliancy of Taine's style and the glib simplicity of his system, have made his theories better known in this country than those of any other foreign writer."

written was implicit in J. C. Herder's *Ideen* (1784–91); also, Mme de Staël in *On Literature Considered in Relation with Social Institutions* (1800) had claimed that romanticism and Protestantism go together because both exalt the individual, whereas classicism and Catholicism go together because both respect formal discipline and exalt tradition. But Taine enlarged the conceptions of Herder and Mme de Staël, codified them, and made them explicit in his formula. The formula, modified or qualified, has been widely influential. Taine belonged also to a world that prided itself on its scientific realism, its positivism. It had an awesome respect for the powers of environment and heredity. Zola, following Taine, had attempted to find a scientific way to write novels.

Subsequent criticism and scholarship have tended to reduce Taine's triad to milieu, but under that to include social, political, and climatic environment as well as nationalism, regionalism, and traditionalism. Even biographical studies in which an author is investigated in psychological terms tend to be subsumed under milieu studies. Taine's shadow hovers in the background. How much he contributed to the *Zeitgeist* and how much he was himself a product of it seems difficult to decide. A simpler matter is to restate what some of the critics consciously borrowed, accepted, or rejected after reading his work.

Sainte-Beuve was among the first to state the general criticism that has been directed against Taine's formula: "After every allowance is made for general and particular elements and circumstances, there remains place and space enough around men of talent to give them every freedom of moving and turning." Interestingly enough, we have in some detail Henry James's reaction to Taine. He reviewed H. Van Laun's translation of *History of English Literature* (pub-

lished 1864; translated 1871) for *The Atlantic Monthly.* James appreciated the "massive work" but he was not unaware of its limitations. "[Taine's] aim," James said, "has been to establish the psychology of the people. . . . It is a picture of the English intellect, with literary examples and allusions in evidence. . . . Its purpose is to discover in the strongest features of the strongest works the temper of the race and time, which involves a considerable neglect not only of works but of features." In an aside, James observes that Taine's triad has "lately been reiterated to satiety." But the will to method, James implies, is an invitation to oversimplifications. "The truth for M. Taine lies stored up, as one might say, in great lumps and blocks, to be released and detached by a few lively hammer blows; while for Sainte-Beuve it was a diffused and imponderable essence, as vague as carbon in the air which nourishes vegetation, and, like it, to be disengaged by patient chemistry . . . and we cannot but think his frank provisional empiricism more truly scientific than M. Taine's premature philosophy. One may enjoy many incidental judgments if one neglects to hold Taine to his premises. There is a constantly visible hiatus between his formula and his application of it." Taine, as James implied, had an inordinate haste to reach conclusions.

Some American readers of Taine were less critical than James. Hamilton Wright Mabie made proper acknowledgment in his *Short Studies in Literature* (1893) to the critical genius of Winckelmann, Lessing, Goethe, and Sainte-Beuve before making his bow to Taine. His chapters on race, surroundings, and time, despite their genteel tone, are further evidences of his acceptance of Taine as a master critic. Lewis E. Gates, in whose class at Harvard the young Frank Norris wrote *Vandover and the Brute,* published an article in *The*

Nation the year Taine died in which he called the *History* "a magnificent achievement and a work of the greatest possible significance." Gates was primarily an impressionist, but in his article, which he republished in *Studies and Appreciations* (1900), he said that Taine "stands as the one great representative of scientific method in the study of literature." Similarly, in the Introduction written for the 1900 edition of the *History*, J. Scott Clark said that scholars owed a great deal to Taine. Hitherto they had spent their time writing vague generalities about a writer, but now, thanks to Taine, "the movement toward a true scientific method is already begun." Fred Lewis Pattee's *A History of American Literature* (1896) had, according to the Introduction, at least an avowed intention of following Taine's method. The actual debt to Taine seems slight. Bliss Perry's *The American Mind,* published a number of years later, is profoundly indebted to Taine's method. In "Race, Nation and Book," the opening chapter, Perry says that whatever racial homogeneity develops or has developed will be an amalgam of all our immigrant peoples and their multiple traditions; each work will have a regional or local as well as a national character; certain writers will have European models, others will write out of their feeling about the political aspects of the American mores; and some will appear almost to have escaped the time spirit. These possibilities should be kept in mind by anyone looking for the representative character of American books. Perry himself concludes that the "most characteristic American writing" is a "citizen literature,"[5] the *"Federalist,* and Garrison's editorials and Grant's *Memoirs."* It is not the "self-conscious literary performances of

[5] In *The Atlantic Monthly* for May 1901, J. D. Logan had found American prose part of a "citizen literature," the chief characteristic of which is vigor and "manliness."

a Poe or a Hawthorne." Perry has chapters on American idealism and individualism and fellowship. Perry's observations, despite the genteel tone which tends, incidentally, to belie his thesis, are useful in the way a sociologist's or cultural historian's observations would be useful. That his thesis and method are not adequate to his subject, literary criticism, becomes evident when he is forced to treat the work of Poe or Hawthorne as "performances." Perry's book augurs Vernon Louis Parrington's *Main Currents in American Thought*. The study of literature is the study of milieu. In Perry's thesis, citizen literature is both the more admirable and the more characteristic part of the milieu. The status of the work as literature is largely irrelevant.

There were, of course, a few voices like James's raised in warning against any too wholehearted acceptance or too narrow application of Taine's method, but almost always his critics acknowledged that his had been a major contribution to modern criticism. In *The Masters of Modern French Criticism* (1912), Irving Babbitt said that Taine possessed a great capacity for generalizing but added that Taine usually pushed his generalizations too far. Also, according to Babbitt, there was little evidence in Taine's criticism of any very deep spiritual or aesthetic insight. Brownell's *Criticism* (1914) furnished perhaps a fairer view of Taine's virtues and limitations. Brownell said that, following Taine, it was impossible to see a purely belletristic approach to literature as other than antiquated. But Brownell was aware of two tendencies that inhered in Taine's method:

> It tends generally to impose its historical theory on the literary and esthetic facts, to discern their historical rather than their essential character; and, as inelastically applied, at all events, it

tends specifically to accept its "documents" as final rather than as the very *subjects* of its concern.

Taine's method of inferring characteristics of a milieu as they are evident in a piece of literature and of explaining the nature of the literature in terms of what it takes from the milieu is now a commonly accepted practice in the study of literature. Even when unacknowledged or forgotten, the influence of Taine has been very great. The influence of Brunetière, on the other hand, was for the most part only temporary, a part of the fascination caused by the concept of evolution.

iv

The doctrine of evolution, wrote William Morton Payne, in "American Literary Criticism and the Doctrine of Evolution,"[6] is the master key to the secrets of nature and human life. Evolution has given us a new geology, a new anthropology, a new sociology, a new psychology, a new sense of brotherhood, and other boons. Has it, Payne asks, given us a new literary criticism? Yes, it has given us a scientific criticism to replace classical or judicial criticism (Boileau) and romantic criticism which exhibits the character of the work being discussed (Sainte-Beuve). Scientific criticism, like other intellectual disciplines in the new era, seeks to understand by asking how the phenomenon, the literary work, came about: the work is studied in its antecedents, the conditions under which the artist developed, the opinions current at the time, the psychological and physical peculiarities of the writer, and so forth. Taine and Brunetière best exemplify such criticism. Taine, a pre-Darwinian, was

[6] *International Monthly*, II (July 1900), 26–46 and 127–53.

scientific in that he studied literature as a product of race and environment, but it remained for Brunetière to add evolution to the formula, to make it "scientific in the most modern sense."

Brunetière (who had visited the United States in 1897) had written the Preface for an English translation of *Manuel de l'histoire de la littérature* in which he tried to summarize the virtues in his new method. Payne quotes the following passage with little or no realization that Brunetière was far too willing to let analogy run riot:

> A given variety of literature, the English drama of the sixteenth century, or the French comedy of the seventeenth century, or the English novel of the eighteenth century is in process of development slowly organizing itself under the double influence of the interior and exterior environment. . . . Suddenly, and without its being possible to give the reason, a Shakespeare, a Molière, or a Richardson appears, and forthwith not only is the variety modified, but new species have come into being: psychological drama, the comedy of character, the novel of manners. . . . It is in vain that the older species attempt to struggle; their fate is sealed in advance. The successors of Richardson, Molière, and Shakespeare copy these unattainable models until, their fecundity being exhausted—and by their fecundity I mean their aptitude for struggling with kindred and rival species—the imitation is changed into a routine which becomes a source of weakness, impoverishment, and death for the species. I shall not easily be persuaded that this manner of considering the history of literature or art is calculated to detract from the originality of great artists or great writers. . . . Other advantages could be enumerated, but this is the principal: the combination or conciliation of "hero-worship," as understood by Emerson or Carlyle, with the doctrine of slowly operating influences and the action of contemporary circumstances.

Awed by the concept of biological evolution, Brunetière, and Payne with him, made far too much of this thesis and

neglected to consider many of the ways in which analogies from biological evolution do *not* work in discussion of literary history: certain literary works forgotten or dead for generations or centuries may suddenly reproduce. So-called "hybrid" forms like the novel or tragicomedy do reproduce their kind. And neither of these hybrids has shown any tendency to revert to either of its parent species. Further, no one can say whether Pope or Gray or Shakespeare is more characteristic of the English as a racial type, and even if one could, there is no accompanying formula for judging literary worth. Payne was an egregious voice of the new age, willing to see final and absolute answers in the latest forms of knowledge, but he was hardly alone in his enthusiasm.

Aristotle, Horace, and most of the Renaissance critics had said that the "astonishing" and the "marvellous" are necessary attributes of literature, but Hjalmar Boyesen, studying the evolution of the German novel, *Essays on German Literature* (1892), was prepared in the name of the spirit of science to give up any such nonsense. "Fortunately, the beneficent scientific movement of recent years has revealed and is revealing to a constantly increasing number of men the true logic of existence, and teaching them to order their lives in accordance with certain ascertainable laws which will govern them either with or without their consent." What these laws are, Boyesen does not say. He does suggest, however, that the acceptance of the scientific spirit leads one to prefer the normal to the unusual. Those who rid themselves of their unscientific feelings will undoubtedly "prefer Thackeray to Dickens, and perhaps Turgenieff to both." They could not be induced to read detective stories (of the "astonishing" variety) "and they have at heart more respect even for Zola than for some of his sentimental *confrères*." The German novel, he says, has evolved, pro-

gressed from a concern with the miraculous to the probable and normal. The novelist of today puts this question regarding the incidents of his plot: "Are they likely to happen?" The novelist of the future, however, will be satisfied with nothing less than assurance that "his premises given nothing else could have happened."[7]

If Boyesen could allow his faith in the ultimate powers of science to suggest an inevitable and rigorous determinism, he could, on the other hand, see that the novel of the future should more than likely require the complexity of form necessary to refract and evoke a sense of the complexities of society:

> Evolution, according to one of the several definitions presented by Herbert Spencer, is a development from the homogeneous to the heterogeneous, and if the novel is to keep pace with life, it must necessarily be subject to the same development; it must, in its highest form, convey an impression of the whole complex machinery of the modern state and society, and, by implication at least, make clear the influences and surroundings which fashioned the hero's character and thus determined his career. To explain all these things in explicit language would, of course, require an encyclopedia, but there are yet other ways of making them present to the reader's consciousness. Thus in Thackeray's "The Newcombes," "Pendennis," and "Vanity Fair," we seem to hear the rush and roar of the huge city in which the scene is laid. The vigorous blood of the nineteenth century throbs and pulsates through every scene and chapter, and we have a sub-

[7] Boyesen, of course, was not alone in his narrow determinism. Theodore Dreiser, as he recalls in *A Book About Myself*, discovered very early in the 1890's Herbert Spencer's *Synthetic Philosophy (First Principles)*. Spencer, Dreiser wrote, "quite blew me, intellectually, to bits." After such knowledge he could believe only this: "Of one's ideals, struggles, deprivations, sorrows and joys, it could only be said that they were chemic compulsions, something for which for some inexplicable but unimportant reason responded to and resulted from the hope of pleasure and the fear of pain. Man was a mechanism, undevised and uncreated, and a badly and carelessly driven one at that."

consciousness of the noisy metropolitan life even in the quietest domestic episodes.

In the latter part of the quotation Boyesen is saying pretty much what James said in "The Art of Fiction": that one knows the whole pattern from the suggestive detail, but it is interesting that Boyesen introduces the name of Herbert Spencer as authority for part of his statement.

v

Advocates of the spirit of realism found themselves looking into the relationship between realism and the life of the common man and therefore of democracy and socialism. Perhaps the realism of a critic like Howells is best explored in such terms. It is nonetheless true that many of the advocates of realism in criticism, as well as in fiction, frequently made their appeals in the name of science. More specifically, they made their appeals through such terms and concepts as environment, heredity, determinism, evolution, and objectivity. Sometimes the appeals are to analogies that are irrelevant to literary considerations. When not employed irrelevantly or reductively, however, a number of the concepts introduced by scientific-minded critics make for useful insights, and they also give one a sense of dealing with reality as it appears to the twentieth-century mind.

4

ORGANIC AND EXPRESSIVE FORM

PHILOSOPHERS, moralists, and literary critics have held heated arguments over the opposition between *beauty* of form and the *truth* of philosophical principle and moral law. The quarrel is ancient and apparently continuous. It is in Plato, Boethius, Boccaccio, Sidney, Milton, Shelley, Arnold, Tolstoy, Wilde, James, Croce, and Babbitt. In recent years, however, critics have generally avoided the worst extremes.

Traditionally, at least after Horace, the key terms seem to have been "utile" and "dulce." The terms are misleading because they suggest the sweetening or the making palatable of a useful subject. "Form" is preferable to "dulce" if it suggests, as it should, the discovering and evoking of multiple meanings and significances in a subject matter. Utile and dulce invite the assumption that a subject is somehow actual, achieved, or complete to begin with and requires

merely a little reorganization and an entertaining or beautiful style to become literature. The terms do not suggest the process whereby the writer creates his subject.

Utile leads to stressing moralistic, didactic, or utilitarian purposes as the center of criticism. Dulce, as the *l'art pour l'art* theorists exemplify, leads to stressing the enjoyment and inutility of art. The Victorian world for the most part accepted these extremes and took sides. H. B. Fuller could have one of his characters say to a young artist: "Some of your work is not without traces of style; and I suppose style is what you are after. But meat for me." And Hamlin Garland insisted that "truth [is] a higher quality than beauty." James McNeill Whistler's *The Gentle Art of Making Enemies* (1890) was an important document in the quarrel, deliberately baiting those who found art moral and useful. And George Santayana in his influential *The Sense of Beauty* (1896) said, "beauty is an ultimate good. . . . Beauty is therefore a positive value that is intrinsic; it is a pleasure. These two circumstances sufficiently separate the sphere of esthetics from that of ethics." Santayana was right in emphasizing that literature is an art of expression, but an investigation of literary art in terms of organic form or expressive form would have precluded the separation of aesthetics and ethics.

Twentieth-century criticism in America inherits the principle of organic form from Coleridge and his American disciple Poe (from Poe's theory rather than his practice). As a matter of fact, it can be found in a number of places. F. O. Matthiessen in *American Renaissance* (1941) finds it, in similar terms, in Emerson, Thoreau, and Whitman:

> In developing his proposition that "it is not metres, but a metre-making argument that makes a poem," Emerson held that the

essential thought from which a poem rises must be "so passionate and alive that like the spirit of a plant or an animal it has an architecture of its own, and adorns nature with a new thing." Thoreau said in the *Week:* "As naturally as the oak bears the acorn, and the vine a gourd, man bears a poem . . . since his song is a vital function like breathing, and an integral result like weight." . . . Thoreau spoke of a poem as a "natural fruit," as "one undivided, unimpeded expression fallen ripe into literature," a sentence that found extension in the first preface to *Leaves of Grass:* "The rhyme and uniformity of perfect poems show the free growth of metrical laws, and bud from them as unerringly and loosely as lilacs or roses on a bush, and take shapes as compact as the shapes of chestnuts and oranges, and melons and pears, and shed the perfume impalpable to form."

The term "organic form" is useful, but the analogy with natural growth is undoubtedly inexact, because it neglects the conscious, critical element in composition and stresses or overemphasizes the unconscious, romantic side. Furthermore, neither Emerson, Thoreau, nor Whitman discusses the way in which form helps to discover and evaluate subject matter. Henry James, on the other hand, did furnish such discussion.

Perhaps Henry James, more clearly than any of his Victorian contemporaries, understood the issues criticism was facing. His own curiosity, intelligence, and education made this understanding possible. As early as the 1860's he was writing reviews for *The North American Review, The Nation,* and other journals; he was examining the assumptions of the Victorian novelists and beginning to search out the principles of the art of fiction. After reading George Eliot and Balzac, for example, he considered some of the problems of morality in fiction and some of the meanings of realism. Living in France, he became acquainted with Turgenyev, Flaubert, and Daudet; he learned the history

of, and was witnessing contemporary attempts to merge, naturalistic and symbolist theories of fiction. A part of his education in these matters is recorded in *French Poets and Novelists* (1878) and *Partial Portraits* (1888). In *Hawthorne* (1879) he had considered the novelist's relationship to the soil, manners, and traditions of his own country. Through his friendship with and admiration for Robert Louis Stevenson and Joseph Conrad he could sympathize with at least two kinds of romance denied him by his own experiences and subject matter.

James was able to rise above the conflicting schools to consider the elements of truth, or the partial truths, in the cults of *l'art pour l'art,* to consider the elements of the real, of documentation, and of scientific and moral determinism. James did not accept any of the easy formulations. In a characteristic and quite moving passage he defines the critic's function:

> To lend himself, to project himself, to feel and feel till he understands, and to understand so well that he can say, and to have perception at the pitch of passion and expression as embracing as the air, to be infinitely curious and incorrigibly patient, and yet plastic and inflammable and determinable, patient, stooping to conquer and yet serving to direct—these are for an active mind, chances to add the idea of independent beauty to the conception of success. Just in proportion as he is sentient and restless, just in proportion as he reacts and reciprocates and penetrates, is the critic a valuable instrument.

By centering the act of criticism in the individual work and bringing to it not merely sympathy but general knowledge and a trained sensibility, James implied that opposing the *real* and the *true* or the *beautiful* and the *useful* was a fallacious view of the literary object, the work of art.

Early and late in his criticism James says there is no subject matter forbidden the artist. His own perceptions, taste, and sensibility must be depended upon. Without them he cannot create "a sense of life"—and if he cannot do that he is not an artist. Repeatedly James refers to the special case, free from fixed moral or social conventions and free from fixed formulas for fiction. The subject matter becomes a novel only after the novelist has transformed it. After the vision of the novelist is bodied forth it is then subject to criticism—in terms of the quality of the discriminations, and in terms of the success with which the artist has brought his idea vividly and fully alive. Behind these insistencies was James's opposition to the hoary fallacies, first, that moral literature is a simple and fixed truth pleasantly or beautifully uttered, and, second, that the reality of the subject matter or story is somehow lessened or made unreal by a preoccupation with the techniques of fiction.

In the Preface to *The Portrait of a Lady* we have his insistence that moral issues involve discriminations inside the given case (and his favorite novel, *The Ambassadors,* is essentially a dramatization of this particular point):

> Here we get exactly the high price of the novel as a literary form—its power not only, while preserving that form with closeness, to range through all the differences of the individual relation to its general subject-matter, all the varieties of outlook on life, of disposition to reflect and project, created by conditions that are never the same from man to man (or, as far as that goes, from woman to woman), but positively to appear more true to its character in proportion as it strains, or tends to burst, with a latent extravagance, its mould.

James separated morality and artistic processes, but he did not separate morality and inspiration or morality and artis-

tic effect: "It is in reality simply a part of the essential richness of inspiration—it has nothing to do with the artistic process and it has everything to do with the artistic effect." James knew that the faculties of the mind influence one another and are mutually dependent. "There is one point," he said, "at which the moral sense and the artistic sense lie very near together; that is in the light of the very obvious truth that the deepest quality of a work of art will always be the quality of the mind of the producer."

James also knew that the fear of technique and the fear of style (because they were said to alter reality, that is, the objective subject matter or story) implied a naïve conception of the process of creating fiction. His clearest statement of this matter is in "The Art of Fiction" (1884), an answer to an article by Walter Besant:

> "The story," if it represents anything, represents the subject, the idea, the *donnée* of the novel; and there is surely no "school" —Mr. Besant speaks of a school—which urges that a novel should be all treatment and no subject. There must assuredly be something to treat; every school is intimately conscious of that. This sense of the story being the idea, the starting point, of the novel, is the only one that I see in which it can be spoken of as something different from its organic whole; and since in proportion as the work is successful the idea permeates and penetrates it, informs and animates it, so that every word and every punctuation point contribute directly to the expression, in that proportion do we lose our sense of the story being a blade which may be drawn more or less out of its sheath. The story and the novel, the idea and the form, are the needle and thread, and I never heard of a guild of tailors who recommend the use of the thread without the needle, or the needle without the thread.

Realism is not merely the delineation of observed experience.

This does not mean, of course, that James completely deplored the movement in fiction which, before all else, wanted to reflect actuality. He admired the spirit behind documentation and accumulating knowledge. He said that a story should achieve a "saturation of reality." He did deplore those novels, indifferent to form, which were composed without a controlling or with an ill-understood intention. He did not believe there was any irreconcilability between fact and mind, between reality and imagination. The imaginative mind moves toward ideal constructions in order that "true meanings" can be "born." The thematic line or idea in a story, James said, was a more or less general truth. Usually it can be expressed in a sentence or two. The artist, considering the "given case," must extract a pattern of significant meaning. Life itself "has no direct sense whatever for the subject." James disagreed with those who find large "amounts of life" the most important part of fiction. A sense of life, a feeling of actuality should permeate it, but James would have the theme and the pattern it informed and quickened "washed free of awkward accretions and hammered into sacred hardness."

James influenced a few of his fellow writers, most notably Edith Wharton[1] and Ford Madox Ford, but the effect of his criticism, during most of his own lifetime, apparently was not great. When he was writing the prefaces (1907–9) for the famous New York edition of his stories, he wrote to Howells of the "almost universal Anglo-Saxon absence" of a discriminating criticism. This, of course, was toward the end of his career. But the prefaces, especially after they were collected by R. P. Blackmur under the title *The Art*

[1] Her *The Writing of Fiction* (1925) repeats many of the discussions to be found in James's essays and prefaces. It is a useful and intelligent volume, but it lacks the intensity and highly refined perceptiveness that characterize James's criticism.

of the Novel (1934), have been influential. The many subjects and principles James treats or touches on in them cannot be gone into here, but as a sample one can call attention to his discussions of "foreshortening" and observe that it, too, relates to his lifelong concern that neither plot nor "huge amounts of life" be equated with the story, the objective reality. Foreshortening conduced, he said, "to the only compactness that has charm, to the only spareness that has a force, to the only simplicity that has a grace—those, in each order, that produced the *rich* effect." Obviously, foreshortening implies an act of intelligence on the part of the novelist, a control of the story by heightening the quality of the representation and quickening the intensity and realization of the theme. Similarly, one finds that the frequent discussions of art in relation to morality or art in relation to life always include a recognition on James's part that there is no "guild of tailors who recommend the use of the thread without the needle, or the needle without the thread."

ii

James, by showing how theme, intelligence, morality, and a sense of life "compose one structure," might be thought to have answered the content versus form question for some time. That it was not settled is evident from Spingarn's "The New Criticism" (1910) and *Creative Criticism: Essays on the Unity of Genius and Taste* (1917). "Every poet," Spingarn said in "The New Criticism," "re-expresses the universe in his own way, and every poem is a new and independent expression." Style, he continued, "cannot be dissociated from art." Spingarn was a disciple of Benedetto Croce, but there is little in his criticism that is foreign to

the principles formulated by Coleridge and James. Each would have agreed with him that the "technique of poetry cannot be separated from its inner nature."

Yet neither Coleridge nor James would have felt under the necessity, as Spingarn did in this early essay, of refusing to admit general discussions of technique, of genre, of theories of style, or of literature as social or moral document.[2] Spingarn concluded that the "identity of genius and taste is the final achievement of modern thought on the subject of art." The critic who can identify himself with the genius evident in the work of art is a creative critic. But Spingarn neglected to say that only a critic with the necessary native sensibility and a wide knowledge of techniques, genres, styles, and so forth, could have the requisite taste.[3]

One of Spingarn's most pointed and effective analyses of organic form is "Prose and Verse," a chapter in *Creative Criticism*. In this essay Spingarn insisted that the newer aesthetic criticism has made it clear "that rhythm and metre must be regarded as aesthetically identical with style, as style is identical with artistic form, and form in its turn is the work of art in its spiritual and indivisible self." Spingarn, for example, considered that the advocates and the opponents of free verse were conducting their quarrel on the same assumptions—namely, that anapaests, trochees, he-

2 One of the best criticisms of "The New Criticism" was written by Randolph Bourne, then an undergraduate, in "Art and Suicide," *Columbia Monthly* (March 1911), pp. 189ff.

3 Some years later, in "Scholarship and Criticism" (1922), Spingarn admitted that in "The New Criticism" he had not stressed "all the phases of a critic's duty." In 1910, he said, the pedants and the professors had been in the ascendant. Most of them knew the history of criticism but were generally indifferent to the poem itself in its livingness as art. He had therefore stressed the oneness of criticism and creation, appearing to be quite close to those impressionists who reproduced the work in order to understand and judge it. By 1921 the amateurs and journalists were in the ascendant and it was then necessary to "write an Essay on the Divergence of Criticism and Creation."

roic couplets, or iambics signify mathematical succession of beats or accents. A series of iambic lines, he pointed out, whether by the same poet or collected from different poets, will "differ in the *degree* of their regularity of rhythm. There can be infinite variations in the stresses or pauses. No two lines probably are ever quite the same. There is a fundamental distinction between the mechanical whirr of machinery, or the ticking of a clock, and the inner or spiritual rhythm of human speech." The classifications of rhythms are mere conveniences, like speaking of tall men and short men or large books and small books, "without assuming that the adjectives imply fundamental distinctions of quality or character." To confuse such abstract classifications with artistic realities is "to confuse form as concrete expression with form as ornament or a dead husk." The poet writes out of himself. Every subject is a new subject because it is made so by the imagination and the stamp of the individual poet.

Spingarn's early program for the creative critic seems, as he later recognized, very close to the program of those among the impressionists who were more concerned to re-create the work than to exhibit their own delicate sensibilities. Spingarn wanted the critic to be intimately sensitive to each of the details in a literary work. It may be worth noting that James held Sainte-Beuve in high esteem largely because he could penetrate a work in such a fashion:

> Sainte-Beuve had nerves assuredly; there is something feminine in his tact, his penetration, his subtlety and pliability, his rapidity of transition, his magical divinations, his sympathies and antipathies, his marvelous art of insinuation, of expressing himself by fine touches and of adding touch to touch.

But James added that these faculties were reinforced by others of a more masculine stamp—

the completeness, the solid sense, the constant reason, the moderation, the copious knowledge, the passion for exactitude and for general considerations.

James, of course, knew that "general considerations," even rules, providing the spirit not the letter is observed, are necessary. In "Scholarship and Criticism," Spingarn said that the "anarchy of impressionism is a natural reaction against . . . mechanical theories and jejune text-books, but it is a temporary haven and not a home." Criticism needs scholarship and it needs rigorous thought in aesthetics. But Spingarn had not entirely quit the impressionists. Judgment is necessary, but it is possible only to a man of taste. Therefore, "the third and greatest need of American criticism is a deeper sensibility, a more complete submission to the imaginative will of the artist, before attempting to rise above it into the realm of judgement."

Later still, in one of his "Literature and the New Era" lectures (1931) at the New School for Social Research,[4] Spingarn also modified or at least clarified his earlier remarks in "The New Criticism" on morality in literature. "We have done," he had written, "with all moral judgement of art as art. . . . It is not the inherent function of poetry to further any moral or social cause, any more than it is the function of bridge-building to further the cause of Esperanto." The tone of Spingarn's commentary on the place of morality invited misunderstanding, and, as a matter of fact, he did overstate his case. Morality, as James said, is part of the "inspiration," the original conception, and it is a part of the effect of a literary work. Spingarn, in one of the 1931 lectures, made it clear that he had not intended to say that morality is not inherent in a literary work:

[4] Only one of these lectures has been published: "Politics and the Poet," *The Atlantic Monthly*, CLXX (November 1942), 73–78.

You will see . . . that I object to a distinction which Professor Irving Babbitt has made between what he calls the ethical and idyllic imagination. Great works of art have the ethical imagination, he says, and ordinary second-rate works of art have merely the idyllic imagination. Of course the imagination in the sense in which it creates a kind of order out of chaos in itself may be said to be moral in the sense in which any ordering or concept of ordering the universe is a moral order. In that sense, of course, to speak of ethical imagination is the same as speaking of edible food because you see in a real sense the moral conscience behind every personality, behind the idyllic imagination and behind the ethical imagination.

Spingarn's position, like Croce's, is an expression of philosophical idealism. Implicit in certain expressions of realism in literature has been the assumption that external nature is the real world, and that the writer, therefore, is obligated to see, feel, and express it as it actually is. Philosophical idealism, of course, finds reality in the mind, including the mind's power to transform matter. All the subjectivist movements in literature in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries—romanticism, symbolism, impressionism, and so forth —are likely to insist on expressive form.

iii

Rémy de Gourmont, for whom Eliot and Pound expressed the highest admiration (and who was represented in Ludwig Lewisohn's *A Modern Book of Criticism* [1919]), pointed out in *Le problème du style* (1902) that "style and thought are one." (Neither Pound nor Eliot, however, has especially noted this part of his work.) The style of Ernest Renan's *La vie de Jésus* wavers, Gourmont said, because the conception is uncertain. Works which are well thought out are invariably well written. "It is a mistake to try to

separate form from substance." Seen in relation to the individual writer, style is a "specialization of sensibility." This emphasis caused him to be concerned with what Pound, in "Rémy de Gourmont" (1919), discussed as the modality of the individual voice. And it caused him, as Eliot observed in *The Sacred Wood* (1920), to inquire and elucidate—to avoid legislating—before generalizing. Gourmont is in the tradition of Aristotle and Coleridge rather than of Horace and Boileau. If Gourmont, as Eliot says, has been the "critical consciousness of his generation," the reason undoubtedly lies in his insistence on examining a work as the expression of an individual sensibility.

Eliot's own description in "Tradition and the Individual Talent" (1917) of the poet as one capable of forming new wholes from unlike elements or from diverse situations, from "the noise of the typewriter [and] the smell of cooking," implies that the poet creates and forms his material—there is no ready-made subject for him. And Pound's brilliant insight into the nature of the image—"An image is that which presents an intellectual and emotional complex in an instant of time"—also implies the view of artist as maker. In other words, the poetic practice and critical theory of Eliot and Pound[5] imply the principle of expressive

[5] The criticism of Ezra Pound is difficult to evaluate. Eliot stated his gratitude for Pound's blue-penciling of *The Waste Land,* and Ernest Hemingway has acknowledged his perceptiveness in criticizing fiction manuscripts. Pound was a generous admirer of the critical or artistic gifts of his elders and contemporaries–of James, Ford, Gourmont, T. E. Hulme, Joyce, William Carlos Williams, or Eliot. And in a sense he gave himself to his generation. His letters and articles in *Poetry, Reedy's Mirror, Blast, The Dial, The Egoist, The Exile,* or *The Fortnightly Review,* and the many others are filled with advice, some of it bombast, some of it indirect self-acclaim, and some of it brilliant insights into the nature of art and the needs of modern art. Reading through books such as *Pavannes and Divisions* (1918), *Instigations* (1920), *How to Read* (1930), or *Make It New* (1934) one feels in the presence of issues and battles fought long ago. Perhaps a part of the Pound tragedy was his inability to stay with a movement—imagism, objectivism, or vorticism—until he had systematized his insights. His was a

form. Whether or not they consciously derived their theory from Gourmont is of no considerable moment.

Throughout the twenties there were occasional protests against the rather frequent assumption that transcripts from experience were viable as literature. Carl Van Doren in "Document and Work of Art"[6] (1925) said that in their zeal to tell the truth about their age some novelists had "got into the habit of thinking that a document is an end in itself." The reverence for raw material had, he continued, become a superstition. Yet Van Doren in the same essay could mention content and form as though they were quite distinct and separate entities.

Such a confusion was not peculiar to Van Doren. It was, in a sense, forced on a society which wanted facts, documentation, or what James called "huge amounts of life." Even Clive Bell, the English art critic who gave his contemporaries the phrase "significant form," could, at least in his conception of literature, divorce content from form. "Significant form," he had said, consists of the expression of the *artist's* emotion, which is unrelated to "life values" or to delight in representation. Significant form *may* appear in pictures that represent something (a beautiful woman or a vase) but the "esthetic emotion" which is peculiar to genuine works of art is aroused only by "arrangements and combinations"; the representative element, however interesting, is irrelevant. But in an article, "The 'Difference' of

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disordered but a suggestive, seminal mind. It could well be that there is no brief statement that better suggests the nature of the modern aesthetic than his "An image is that which presents an intellectual and emotional complex in an instant of time." See, for example, his article on vorticism in *The Fortnightly Review* (September 1914). Ray West has summarized Pound's criticism in "Ezra Pound and Contemporary Criticism," *Western Review*, V (1949), 192–200.

6 This article is available in *Contemporary American Criticism*, ed. J. C. Bowman.

Literature," for *The New Republic* (1922) he said that although "significant form" accounted for almost everything in the art of painting it apparently counted for little in the art of literature:

> The fact is, subject and the overtones emanating from it, wit, irony, pathos, drama, criticism, didacticism even—qualities which in painting count for little or nothing—do seem to be the essence of literature. . . . So, when a writer tries to confine himself to territory which he can cultivate in common with painting and music, when he reduces content and its overtones to a minimum, when he sets himself to create form which shall be abstractly beautiful, he invariably comes short of greatness; what is worse, he is apt to be a bore.

Llewellyn Jones, reviewer for the Chicago *Evening Post,* undertook to answer Bell. Mr. Jones's article was entitled "Art, Form and Expression," and it also appeared in *The New Republic* in 1922. Mr. Bell is surely wrong, he said, in saying that in literature

> content is more than form and different from it. . . . That the content is invariably molded by form is nicely shown by A. C. Bradley in his *Oxford Lectures on Poetry.* He quotes Byron's lines:
>
> Bring forth the horse! The horse was brought.
> In truth he was a noble steed.
>
> Now we could change the form and leave the content intact by reading "steed" to begin with, the "horse" in the last line. Try it and see what happens. Is the content the same?

Jones concluded the article by rehearsing a theory of expressive form based in part on Croce. William Brownell also asserted the importance of the principle in *The Genius of Style* (1924), referring to it as "architectonic" and apply-

ing it to music, architecture, and art as well as literature. The writer, he said in his rather pretentious way, "vitalizes the parts by permeating them with a sense of the whole, and thus gives everywhere the feeling of completeness, of forces in the repose of equipose in contrast to stagnation or even stasis." So too did Stark Young, one of the best drama critics of the period, insist on the principle of substance and form being one. He found *Street Scene* (1929) "a farrago of living matter with the sting taken out of it," adding that "it must be a very elementary principle that the essential idea of a work of art goes through it, and that the themes and conceptions to be expressed must lie inherently in the substance of it, and that they are to be expressed in creation, not in superimposed sentiments." Similarly, Young found the last act of *Winterset* (1935) to be bad poetry and bad drama on the same grounds—that conception and expression are inseparable: "The defects in *Winterset,* in the last act especially, are not due to the fact that the poetic form is being employed, but rather that the poetry is bad, bad either *per se* or bad in relation to the scene—it comes to the same thing." But perhaps Paul Elmer More's discovery in his essay "Lycidas," in *On Being Human* (1936), of the content versus form problem is indicative of a general unconcern.

A few years earlier in *Counter-Statement* (1931), Kenneth Burke, a close student of Gourmont's criticism, had noted that the seeming breach between form and subject is a consequence of introducing scientific criteria into matters requiring aesthetic judgment. He observed that a contemporary writer had objected to Joyce's *Ulysses* on the ground that there is more information about psychoanalysis in Freud! Presumably Burke is also saying that the breach is a consequence of our wanting to believe that fact or content

in literature is, like laws of physics or known chemical reactions, objective and that verified truths can be put inside a pleasing form. Such assumptions, of course, are not applicable to literature. They do not allow for the basic consideration that a given theme is worked out in terms of the given case, and in accordance with the author's own values. The author employs all the minutiae of style, as Burke suggests, to discover the potential meanings in a subject and to evaluate them not as information merely but as information realized in a convincing and moving way.

The critics of Burke's generation seem to have found in the criticism of James not merely the principle of organic form but a methodology, terms and concepts, for getting inside the work. They have returned less often, if at all, to Spingarn's work because he did not leave such a methodology. Rémy de Gourmont they have assimilated, for the most part, indirectly. All three, but James especially, have been of great importance because they helped make it possible to avoid an allegiance to utile and content on the one hand or dulce and form on the other, the recurrent and ancient fallacies of content versus form and truth or morality versus beauty.

5

THE NEW AWARENESS OF AMERICA

EDMUND WILSON somewhere notes that the generation before his own grew up with a vision of America after the Civil War as arid, incapable of producing literary work of merit, and even suspicious of anything that did manage to bloom. John Macy, for example, had made pretty much the same point in *The Spirit of American Literature* (1913). Our literature, he said, was an offshoot of English; it lacked an American spirit. "American literature is on the whole idealistic, sweet, delicate, nicely finished." W. C. Brownell, true to the spirit Wilson describes, could decline Van Wyck Brooks's *America's Coming-of-Age* (1915) for Scribner's, apparently because it had the quality of the new America which was attempting to

discover and define itself. Nonetheless, the affirmation of the new America was soon under way in various parts of the country. Critical studies of American writers done in the new spirit began to appear, such as Amy Lowell's *Tendencies in Modern American Poetry* (1917), Joseph Warren Beach's *The Method of Henry James* (1918), and Carl Van Doren's *Contemporary American Novelists* (1922). Harry Hansen's *Midwest Portraits* (1923), half reminiscences and half literary criticism, provided a good account of the vitality of the Chicago renaissance, with valuable sketches of the many novelists, poets, critics, and editors who took part in it. Academic figures like John Erskine and Henry Seidel Canby, as well as the Van Dorens, took their scholarship into the field of literary journalism. Thereafter at least a portion of literary scholars tried to find a meeting ground with the educated public. There was a new spirit in the air which, earlier, John Butler Yeats had caught in a memorable phrase: "The fiddles are tuning all over America."

Randolph Bourne, Van Wyck Brooks, Lewis Mumford, Paul Rosenfeld, and other critics associated with them made America self-conscious about its intellectual life and culture in a way that academic critics in the genteel tradition of Lowell, the sophisticated tradition of Huneker, or the scientific-minded tradition of Taine had been unable to do. There is no highly consistent pattern in their work, but they provided useful terms and attitudes. They wrote about the need for an intelligentsia to furnish criticism and a body of literature. They alternately ridiculed the genteel tradition and saw great virtues in the American past. They saw in socialism a means of ending an era of economic exploitation. They employed the terms "unity," "wholeness," and "organic" in attempts to create a myth in which Whitman's optimistic dream about a democratic land with spiritual

and creative values might be urged into being. They were extremely useful and influential despite their frequent employment of hortatory tracts and a gospel tone and their willingness to be carried away from an explicit concern with literary texts. Less given to the creating of literary myths than those centering around Bourne and Brooks was a somewhat similar group, under the reluctant leadership of Carl Van Doren, who contributed to *The Nation.*

Members of both groups would have agreed with Stuart Pratt Sherman's note in the *Herald Tribune* in 1924 that "the most fascinating aspect of American life today is the ascent into articulate self-consciousness of that element of our people which Emerson called 'the Jacksonian rabble' and the relative decline toward artistic inexpressiveness of that element which Barrett Wendell called 'the better sort.' "

Randolph Bourne, a legendary figure during a decade or more following his premature death in 1918, belongs, so far as literary history is concerned, with the Van Wyck Brooks of *America's Coming-of-Age.* Like Brooks, he was attempting to understand and then destroy anything preventing America's cultural development.[1] There should be, he said, a "Trans-National America." There were diverse racial and cultural traditions that had not been assimilated. The indigenous Americans—Emerson to Howells—"are elevated to eminence by our cultural makers of opinion," who also cause immigrants to drop their Old World heritage and thereby create "hordes of men and women without a

1 When Bourne returned from Europe in 1914, where he had traveled on a Columbia University fellowship, he wrote articles on city planning, feminism, college reform, and books: *The Gary Schools* (1916) and *Education and Living* (1917). As an undergraduate he had published *Youth and Life* (1913). Following his death James Oppenheim edited *Untimely Papers* (1919), and Brooks edited *The History of a Literary Radical and Other Essays* (1920).

spiritual country, cultural outlaws, without taste, without standards but those of the mob." The solution, he added, should not be sought in another "weary old nationalism," but in cosmopolitanism. "In a world which has dreamed of internationalism, we find that we have all unawares been building up the first international nation." America, he said, was coming to be a "trans-nationality, a weaving back and forth . . . of many threads of all sizes and colors."

In the service of American culture one had to oppose not only the older critics who served a petrified tradition but also the "pachydermous vulgarisms" of "Mr. Mencken and Mr. Dreiser and their friends." Bourne was opposed to the study of classical languages, but he also felt it necessary to look into the Latin writers if only to inoculate himself against the genteel orthodoxy he was attempting to destroy. The sensibility of a new, a cultivated American critic would be formed by the modern world—by Gorky and Chekhov as well as by Twain. The critic needed "an abounding sense of life" and a "feeling for literary form." Borrowing from abroad, he would work to interpret American life. Eventually a new classicism would evolve, but it would be "something worked out and lived into."

The prophets of the prewar years—H. G. Wells, Shaw, Nietzsche, Maeterlinck, and John Dewey—were also Bourne's. As Seward Collins noted in defending the New Humanists from attacks by the young humanitarians, Bourne tended to identify allegiances to the past with obscurantism. He apparently sensed nothing ingenuous in his stating that "youth [is] the incarnation of reason pitted against the rigidity of tradition," nor in his asking "why bother with Greek when you get Euripides in the marvellous verse of Gilbert Murray?" The new freedom for children in elementary and secondary schools, he believed,

would lead to throwing off further shackles. But the chief road to the New Jerusalem was socialism: "Abolish this hostile attitude of classes toward each other by abolishing class struggle. Abolish class struggle by abolishing classes." Bourne's belligerent pacifism after America joined the Allies and his constant carping about the faults of the state also suggest that there may have been a deep-seated perversity in his mind.

Had he lived, Brooks believes, Bourne would have turned from politics and social concerns to a more strictly literary criticism. What his value might have been after he had matured as a critic it is impossible to say. There are, however, suggestive bits that may indicate where his allegiances would have been: he urged that modern literature be taught in the colleges; he wanted critics and writers to discover a "usable past" in Thoreau, Twain, Whitman, in those writers "not tainted by sweetness and light"; and he defined the classics as "power with restraint, vitality with harmony, a fusion of intellect and feeling." Quite possibly the legend that immediately grew about Bourne had several causes. He could write a corrosive prose, and he was a brilliant conversationalist. He was a slight little gargoyle, a hunchback in a flowing black cape, who was capable of making his acquaintances forget his disabilities and give him their strong loyalty. He was also a radical and a pacifist. As his friends matured in the 1920's and pacifism and radical activities grew, the memory of Bourne grew with them. John Dos Passos gave him a place in *U. S. A.*, and Horace Gregory wrote a poem about him. By those who do not belong to that generation, Bourne is likely to be remembered only as one who helped lead the assault on tradition in education, economics, government, and literature, as one who took great pride in opposing his elders, in being a modern.

Van Wyck Brooks, after fumbling attempts in his first volumes, succeeded in formulating a point of view and stating an ideal which developed and extended the criticism Bourne had written. *The Wine of the Puritans* (1908), published in England where Brooks spent a year and a half after his graduation from Harvard, is a dialogue between two effete young men. They find America gauche, ugly, and low-brow, a land with the spirit of Barnum. Its intellectual life and literature were vaguely ideal, unrelated to the ugly vigor that spawned new millions, built factories, and threw out mile after mile of railroad tracks. Practical America was the wine of the Puritans; the aroma was the vague idealism. His next volume *The Malady of the Ideal* (published in London in 1913; in the United States not until 1947) was a further reaching toward his chief subject—the relation of the artist to his society. In this volume Brooks sees each of his three figures, Amiel, Sénancourt, and Maurice de Guérin, as living in sickly relation to an ideal order which prevented him from taking hold of the vulgar but actual world.

Two biographies followed: *John Addington Symonds* (1914) and *The World of H. G. Wells* (1915). With Symonds, Brooks is still preoccupied with the type of man he saw as committed to life as an artist, frustrated by it and cut off from the life of ordinary men. He was apparently not interested in Symonds, who is caught as a subject only insofar as he illustrates a thesis. Wells is seen as a writer formed by his early life in the home of a lower middle-class shopkeeper, and his work is interpreted as the inevitable product of a man attempting to lift himself higher and higher in the world through the sheer power of his intellect and ambition. The study of Wells took Brooks nearer to the method best suited to his talent, criticism-as-biography.

America's Coming-of-Age (1915), which he later repudiated, was one of the most influential of his studies. (Its thesis, incidentally, is similar to Santayana's in "The Genteel Tradition in American Philosophy.") He presented for his contemporaries to ponder an America in which intelligence and idealism attempted to live as though detached from the body of the civilization. America had two types, low-brow and high-brow. The former, the man of action, "dedicates himself to the service of a private end which knows nothing of theory, which is most cynically contemptuous of ideals." The latter is typified by the professor of economics who dedicates himself to "the service of a type of economic theory that bears no relation to the wicked world, leaving all the good people who are managing the economic practice . . . to talk nonsense in the wilderness." There could be no ripe, no serene knowledge, no genuinely aesthetic awareness or expression in a society where intellect lived in an idealistic dreamworld and practical-minded men developed a sense of reality that was narrow and untouched by imagination.

Having described this dichotomy, Brooks proceeded to interpret American literature. Men like Bronson Alcott were pathetic, charming, futile. Men like Emerson were forced to assume a "sort of idealism whose essence lay in the very fact that it could have no connection with the practical conduct of life." Men like Poe created a non-human world, "cold, blasted, moonstruck, sterile," foreign to actual experience. Men like Hawthorne imagined exquisite fables, quite unrelated to a "practical Yankee world." The writers of belles-lettres lived, he said, in a drowsy idealism, while the ruthless industrialists and businessmen, like Rockefeller and Morgan, lived in the practical world.

Later, in 1934, Brooks noted in his earlier writings an

"oft-recurring mistake, that of attributing to one's country the faults of human nature in general." But the Brooks of *America's Coming-of-Age* was right. The American civilization he had analyzed, though cruder, had a great deal in common with Victorian England. Like England, America was a victim of industrialization. In both countries men were troubled by an idealism that they seemed unable to relate to the new scientific-industrial way of life. In Whitman's poetry, Brooks believed, was the way out of this dilemma. In his poetry "action, theory, idealism, business" had been "cast into a crucible," from which they "emerged, harmonious and molten, in a democratic ideal based upon the whole personality." Unfortunately, the American society and its writers after the Civil War had ignored Whitman. The new force was pragmatism, a philosophy of adjustment, not a philosophy of idealistic and realistic striving. America, Brooks said, needed more poets like Whitman to lead her in "the task of building up a civilization."

America's Coming-of-Age was the catalytic agent in the consciousness of the editors and many of the contributors to *The Seven Arts* (1916–17). The editors, James Oppenheim and Waldo Frank, were joined shortly by Brooks. The contributors, among others, were: Sherwood Anderson, John Reed, Randolph Bourne, Paul Rosenfeld, H. L. Mencken, John Dos Passos, Robert Frost, Carl Sandburg, and Eugene O'Neill. The articles which Brooks contributed to the magazine were collected in *Letters and Leadership* (1918). In them he had written about the difficulties of being an artist in the United States, had attacked the academic critics, had deplored the utilitarian spirit in America, and had called for a new and great literature peculiar to the soil and hopes of Americans. The magazine was discon-

tinued because of opposition to its antiwar policy, as well as for other reasons.

Brooks spent the next two years in California writing *The Ordeal of Mark Twain* (1920, revised 1933), a volume that has furnished a battleground for students of Twain. In it, as in *The Pilgrimage of Henry James* (1925), he attributes the failure of our writers to the cultural poverty of their America. Despite his unfairness to such writers and the distortions into which he allowed his thesis to betray him, Brooks must be given credit for contributing to the critical awakening which has been labeled the period of America's Coming-of-Age. But at this point in his career Brooks ceased to have a voice that his fellow critics found compelling. For a time he merely repeated himself, causing Paul Rosenfeld in 1924 to observe sadly that Brooks had ceased to have anything new to say to his young contemporaries. By the 1930's, Brooks had completely reversed his early position. Works like *The Flowering of New England, 1815–1865* (1936), *New England: Indian Summer, 1865–1915* (1940), *The World of Washington Irving* (1944), *The Times of Melville and Whitman* (1947), and *The Confident Years, 1885–1915* (1952) are hardly criticism at all. They are genteelly chauvinistic histories in which the American past is presented in a delicate amber haze.

Yet Brooks left a firm imprint on American criticism. Two of his themes—the isolation of the American artist and the need for discovering a "usable past"[2]—have had a considerable history. Harold Stearns's *America and the Young Intellectual* (1921) treated the theme of the alienated American artist. Matthew Josephson's *Portrait of the Artist as American* (1930), more nearly employing the tone Brooks himself would employ, developed it further:

2 "On Creating a Usable Past," *The Dial,* LXIV (1918).

There is the obscure tragedy of Melville, a genius who passed half his life in silence as a clerk in the customs office of New York. Doomed, uncomprehending, hating the age, he wandered in the anonymous crowd, resigned to his disappearance from the world; he is a sphinx-like figure, living for thirty years in a tomb. And there are all the other ill-starred careers: James Whistler dies in London; Lafcadio Hearn in Japan; Stephen Crane meets death in Germany, early in life; Ambrose Bierce, as an old man, is killed by guerrillas in Mexico; Henry James seeks to obliterate his origin in a long London life and becomes a British citizen in the days of the World War; Henry Adams, in despair of all else, haunts the Gothic cathedrals of France, worshiping the beauty and the logic of medieval art. The record is long and convincing. . . .

Alfred Kazin echoes this passage in the "American Fin de Siècle" chapter in *On Native Grounds* (1942). The theme, whether in Brooks's tone or not, is met in various forms throughout contemporary criticism, as in Delmore Schwartz's "The Isolation of Modern Poetry,"[3] R. P. Blackmur's "The American Literary Expatriate,"[4] or Karl Shapiro's *Essay on Rime* (1945).

Both of Brooks's themes were the concern of Constance Rourke. "The American" from *American Humor* (1931) modified the thesis that Henry James was a failure because of America's cultural poverty. She found him a primary writer of magnificent achievement. The failure was in America's inability to produce a sequence of writers capable of developing what James had begun. The other side of her work, an attempt to discover a "usable past," was largely unfinished at her death, but she had written a number of books preliminary to her proposed history of

[3] *Kenyon Review,* III (Summer 1945), 209–20.

[4] *Foreign Influences in American Life* (Princeton, N. J., Princeton Univ. Press, 1944), pp. 126–45.

American culture. In *Charles Sheeler* (1938), for example, she said that the native American tradition lies in form not in subject matter. As stated by Stanley Edgar Hyman in his chapter on her contribution to criticism in *The Armed Vision* (1948), her thesis is that the tradition lies in "the abstraction of a Jonathan Edwards sermon, a Navaho blanket, a John Henry feat, and a Vermont hooked rug; and that it is Marin who is painting in it, not Norman Rockwell." Her posthumous volume *The Roots of American Culture* (1942), for which Brooks wrote the Introduction, is a collection of essays in which Miss Rourke tried to analyze the character of popular and folk patterns in American arts, with the expectation apparently of relating them eventually to higher and more self-conscious levels of art.[5]

Lewis Mumford, perhaps the best of the critics who followed leads suggested by Brooks, has been only incidentally concerned with literature. His real subject is the culture of America, especially the influences of technology on urban life. The titles of some of his books suggest the nature of his interests: *The Story of Utopias* (1922), *Sticks and Stones* (1924), *The Golden Day* (1926), *Herman Melville* (1929), *The Brown Decades* (1931), and *The Condition of Man* (1944). The essentials of Mumford's thesis are these:

> Our mechanical and metropolitan civilization, with all its genuine advances, has let certain human elements drop out of its scheme; and until we recover these elements our civilization will be at loose ends, and our architecture will unerringly express the situation. Home, meeting place, and factory, polity, culture, and art have still to be united and brought together, and this task is one of the fundamental tasks of our civilization.

[5] Discussions of a "usable past" are also to be found in "The Situation in American Writing," *Partisan Review*, Vol. VI (Summer 1939), a symposium to which a considerable number of writers contributed.

In the American past Mumford found certain guides. In the golden day of New England the village expressed the common religious, social, and political life. Into the houses, for example, there went careful workmanship, and the great elm trees furnished shade and modified the simplicity of the architecture. Whitman and Melville had furnished prophetic visions, the one of "cosmic faith," the other of "cosmic defiance." Much of *Herman Melville* is devoted to developing Brooks's thesis that American artists have been injured or defeated by our business civilization. Mumford has helped students of American culture see the interrelationships between a country's social life and its art.

Waldo Frank in *Our America* (1919) continued Brooks's attack on materialism. With the puritan had begun the denial of the body and the intellectualizing of our energies. With the pioneer had begun our demand for material success at the expense of the whole man. The most interesting chapter in the book, "The Puritan Says 'Yea,' " contains little studies of Robert Frost, Amy Lowell, and Henry Adams in relation to the spirit of New England, a spirit which was being dissipated and was losing its mastery over the rest of the country. *Salvos* (1924) is composed of scattered reviews and informal essays, but the Introduction, "For a Declaration of War," seems to be the beginning of Frank's somewhat grandiose role as cultural historian and prophet. *The Re-Discovery of America* (1929) continues the search for wholeness. (Incidentally, the Appendix gives a thumbnail account of Frank's contemporaries in the "little magazine" movement.) *In the American Jungle* (1937) develops the thesis that the rationalist, product of a scientific-minded philosophy, denies the mind its right to poetic and religious expression. Frank's language, somewhat maundering even in his first books, is often depressingly vague and

misty. And the strictly literary considerations in his criticism, early and late, are infrequent. The lack of a delimited subject matter, an unwillingness or inability to be precise, has seriously hampered Frank as a critic.[6] Yet, like Bourne, Brooks, and Mumford he was instrumental in making America self-conscious about what it was, what it had been, and what it was likely to become.

An instructive example of the influence of these critics is found in the career of Stuart Pratt Sherman, whom they helped to convert from the ranks of the New Humanists. "Read Stuart P. Sherman," Bourne once wrote, "on contemporary literature and see with what a hurt panic a young gentleman, perhaps the last brave offshoot of the genteel tradition, regards these bold modern writers." Sherman, a student of Babbitt's, had published *On Contemporary Literature* in 1917. He was also a fairly eminent Arnoldian, having published *Matthew Arnold: How to Know Him.* Supported on one side by Arnold and on the other by Babbitt, Sherman had given battle against Philistia and Naturalism. From both men he took a strong sense of moral mission. His text for his book on the moderns was: "The great revolutionary task of the nineteenth century thinkers was to put man into nature. The great task of twentieth century thinkers is to get him out again." Thus Dreiser was anathema, "the vulgarest voice yet heard in American literature," and with him, though lesser culprits, were Wells, George Moore, and John Millington Synge. Mark Twain was also dismissed as a vulgarian because he does not help us to realize "our best selves."

The next step in Sherman's development was toward an

[6] An important exception to this is Frank's essay on *Winesburg, Ohio* in the September–October 1941 issue of *Story,* a subject to which he could bring a sympathy impossible to critics who find Anderson's lack of cogency an almost insuperable barrier to acceptance or admiration.

extremely narrow nationalism. For *Americans* (1922) he examined ten writers for the purpose of encouraging "readers to keep open the channel of their national traditions and to scrutinize contemporary literature in the light of their national past." The chief tradition which Sherman found was twofold: Puritanism and Anglo-Saxondom. To Sherman the puritan was not the bluenose creature on whose head Mencken was raising bloody welts, he was "an iconoclast, an image breaker." Puritanism, said Sherman, "is a formative spirit, an urgent and exploring and creative spirit."

There was more than a hint of a new Know-Nothing movement in Sherman's comment that those critics with names out of the melting pot who praise the modern Scandinavian, German, or Russian writers could hardly "be expected to hear any profound murmurings of ancestral voices or to experience any mysterious inflowing in meditating on the names of Mark Twain, Whitman, Thoreau, Lincoln, Emerson, Franklin and Bradford." Ernest Boyd, writing in *The Nation,* labeled Sherman's view "Ku Klux Kriticism."

In *The Genius of America* (1923), Sherman attempted to answer Spingarn's principle that literary criticism is not concerned with moral truth or democracy. Sherman says he thinks he understands the point Spingarn is making in a supersubtle Italian fashion, but every American schoolboy would, if he could understand it, feel it to be false to the history of beauty in America. He would know that beauty "vitalizes and gives permanency to the national ideals." From this point on, Arnold and Babbitt were waning influences. Sherman was becoming a Rotarian. *Points of View* (1924) is a discovery of American "ideals": Cleanliness, Health, Swift Mobility, Publicity, and Athletics. Sher-

man was also beginning to see virtues in novelists like Dreiser, Ben Hecht, and Lewis, but he could wish they had a little more affection for things American. *My Dear Cornelia* (1924) concludes that the younger generation, except for its ignoring of the Eighteenth Amendment, is worthy of its forebears. In the same year Sherman assumed the literary editorship of the *Herald Tribune*. *Critical Woodcuts* (1926) is filled with appreciations of the new men from Oscar Wilde to Wells. He had dropped his allegiances to the humanists. Perhaps it is not unfair to say that Sherman did not grow so much as he changed, but his career, prematurely ended in 1926, has considerable historical significance.

ii

The affirmation of the new America was also carried on in the liberal magazines, *The Nation, The New Republic,* and *The Freeman. Saturday Review of Literature,* under Canby, also took on a liberal tone. Behind them, of course, were *The Masses* of Dell and Eastman, and *Reedy's Mirror.* Under Carl Van Doren's editorship (1919–22) the literary criticism of *The Nation,* especially, took on vigor and forthrightness, even though Van Doren, as Lewisohn later complained, was unwilling to commit himself to a definite critical position. It is true that in reading most of the criticism published in *The Nation* and in the other magazines as well one feels that critical intelligence and sensibility were frequently dissipated for lack of a method, for lack of a complex knowledge of the ways in which life gets into literature. Van Doren later summed up the critical position of most of his associates in this statement: "We were held together by a shared passion for literature as an art so in-

terwoven with life that neither could be understood without the other. This passion set the tone of criticism in the new *Nation* and has marked it ever since." It is true, obviously, that art and life interpenetrate, but art is life selected and usually distorted, refracted, not flatly mirrored. The way in which literature differs from life is also important.

One of the most astute of the liberal critics was Ludwig Lewisohn, drama critic for *The Nation.* He had studied the whole range of criticism and he had imagination, sensitivity, and fervor. He wrote valuable studies of modern German literature, of French poetry and experiments in European drama, and he edited *A Modern Book of Criticism* (1919), which included American, English, French, and German critics. As drama critic for *The Nation* he held up the ideal of the "eternal poet struggling with the mysteries of the earth," and he derided playwrights and directors who knew only the theater. His fervent demands for individual liberty and his image of the artist as one struggling against the bonds of society found receptive audiences, but it also became clear that Lewisohn was not deeply concerned in examining literature in terms of its own historical, social, or philosophical contexts. His German-Jewish ancestry and an unhappy marriage had, or he felt they had, made him the victim of American prejudices and repressive laws. He frequently allowed his sufferings to be magnified until the American society tended to seem merely a part of his autobiography. Had he been less driven by a need to personalize criticism in this fashion, Lewisohn might have become one of our best critics. Even so, he played a significant role among the liberal critics associated with *The Nation.*

Mark Van Doren and Joseph Wood Krutch were also

capable of writing astute criticism. Van Doren's criticism at its best, as in *John Dryden* (1920) or *Shakespeare* (1939), yields great profit on close reading. There appears to be on his part, however, a determined avoidance of technical terms or even generalizations which one might apply in other contexts. In this fact there may be a clue to Van Doren's failure to become a more influential critic. T. S. Eliot's "Dryden," a review of Van Doren's book, does provide such generalizations, as, for instance, that Milton is "our greatest master of the artificial style," Dryden of the "natural," and Dryden's merit consists in his "ability to make the small into the great, the prosaic into the poetic, the trivial into the magnificent." One can read Van Doren's study for the well-chosen extracts, the fine explications, the appreciations. Similiarly with his excellent study of the plays of Shakespeare. Perhaps the point is simply that highly memorable criticism is read not only for the illumination it brings to a given work but for the general principles it provides.

Such comments are less applicable to Krutch because he is more given to generalizations, as in his milieu study *Comedy and Conscience After the Restoration* (1924) and *The Modern Temper* (1929), as well as in his *Samuel Johnson* (1944) and *Henry David Thoreau* (1949). Krutch's reviews for *The Nation* of books as well as plays are almost invariably shrewd and to the point. The book for which he is best known, *The Modern Temper,* is not his best, but it will long be an important document.

The Modern Temper was an expression, somewhat similar to Bertrand Russell's "A Free Man's Worship," of a desire to see the world objectively, honestly, without romantic illusions. It overlooked the fact that any view of the world will arouse feelings appropriate to it. Krutch's view, which

he later abandoned, aroused a sentimental pessimism. It was a view derived from a reductive naturalism, a form of scientism that did not allow subjective elements, that is, such products of the imagination as love or nobility, a place in the true nature of things. In brief, according to this doctrine, because the universe is not anthropocentric, man is nothing. One chapter, "Love—the Life and Death of a Value," demonstrates that human love has no divine sanction; it is a product of the imagination—therefore it is not true, and modern man must believe it a delusion exacted by his senses. "The Tragic Fallacy," another of Krutch's much-discussed chapters, acknowledges that tragedy need not depend upon a belief in God but does depend on a belief in man. However, tragedy is not possible for us because we are incapable of conceiving man as noble. Even though Krutch probably went further in this book than many of his fellow liberals would have gone, his attitudes in general were those of the liberal critics of the twenties. He was one of the few willing to pursue the implications in these attitudes and relate them to literature.

More willing to take their liberal modernism for granted were the abler of the journalist-critics like Francis Hackett, literary editor for *The New Republic,* and Burton Rascoe, editor of the *Herald Tribune's* "Books." They encouraged the new writers and they were, for the most part, eminently sensible. But once they had helped create a liberal audience, much of their criticism, except as it furnished information for the uninformed, had little further use.[7]

The critics associated with the movement called Amer-

[7] In his autobiography, Carl Van Doren tells how he encouraged Raymond Weaver to write the first life of Melville. "In 1920 I had roused questions by writing that nobody knew American literature who did not know Melville. In 1940, revising the book in which this statement had appeared, I dropped it as now too obvious."

ica's Coming-of-Age served their period by attacking the genteel tradition, by insisting that literature be allowed to tell the truth about the everyday world. They helped to create an open-minded audience. Much of their criticism, however, which was more concerned with attitudes than with techniques, was assimilated and then forgotten. With a few notable exceptions, like Beach and Krutch, many of these critics turned to other subjects, to politics, to social studies, to history. As a group, the critics associated with the movement tended to equate life and reality with literature and to be singularly indifferent to the *way* in which life and reality got *into* literature.

6

THE NEW HUMANISM

DURING the postwar years reductive naturalism had made debunking biographies, drab fiction, and behaviorist drama seem inevitable. Irving Babbitt, Paul Elmer More, and their followers were among those who most firmly resisted the tenets of reductive naturalism and the kinds of literature to which it gave rise.[1] The New Humanists were looked upon variously as defenders of the

1 More had edited *The Independent* and *The Nation* before retiring to Princeton in 1914. Between 1904 and 1933 he published fourteen volumes of his *Shelburne Essays,* devoted to short essays as well as to full-length studies of single writers, and *Nietzsche* (1912), *Platonism* (1917), *The Religion of Plato* (1921), *Hellenistic Philosophies* (1923), *The Christ of the New Testament* (1924), *Christ the Word* (1927), and *The Catholic Faith* (1931). Babbitt taught at Harvard from 1894 and published *Literature and the American College* (1908), *The New Laokoon* (1910), *The Masters of Modern French Criticism* (1912), *Rousseau and Romanticism* (1919), *Democracy and Leadership* (1924), *French Literature* (1928), and *On Being Creative and Other Essays* (1932).

genteel tradition, as reactionaries, as enemies of democracy, or as defenders of traditional values, upholders of the moral order, and so forth.

The war waged by and against the New Humanists, with its lulls, its forays, and the final tremendous battle in 1929–30, involved almost every critic and scholar. One of the first attacks from the left, as early as 1910, came from Marion Reedy in *Reedy's Mirror*. He found *The New Laokoön* the most important book since the turn of the century, but he prophesied that Babbitt's promised book on Rousseau, despite the abilities of the "brilliant aristocrat," would fail. "The revolt will go on. Anarchism is a great constructive force." H. L. Mencken, on his side, carried on an attack that was mostly slapstick against Babbitt and More. In revising *The Philosophy of Friedrich Nietzsche,* Mencken found More's study of Nietzsche (one of the essays in *The Drift of Romanticism* [1913]) "very ingenious." Later Mencken lumped, and attacked as a part of his war on respectability, all the New Humanists with "the prim virgins, male and female, of the *Dial,* the *Nation,* the *New York Times,*" and with the "honorary pall-bearers of letters—bogus Oxford dons, jitney Matthew Arnolds," and so on. Randolph Bourne and Van Wyck Brooks were in greater earnest. They saw in the New Humanists not only the enemies of the new literature but the archenemies of socialism.

Bourne, in 1912, found More's study of Nietzsche academic and without the requisite fervor. Several years later, with the publication of More's *Aristocracy and Justice* (1915), the battle lines were drawn. Bourne was one of the young generals in the assault on tradition in education, morality, economics, government, and literature. More had raised the flag of the traditionalists and the reactionaries. Bourne, with his fervent humanitarianism and individual-

ism, saw perversity and cruelty in More's statements that those in government should never "relax the rigour of law" out of "pity for the degree of injustice inherent in earthly life," nor cease to believe that "in the light of the larger good of society" the "rights of property are more important than the right to life." Babbitt, as early as *Literature and the American College,* was equally adamant in his opposition to the humanitarians. Bourne saw in the older critics and in their younger followers like Stuart P. Sherman a petulant and, ultimately, a vain protesting against the new values. Brooks in *Letters and Leadership* (1918) held that More could not feel "human values finely because to have done so would have been to upset his whole faith in a society based not upon the creative but upon the acquisitive instincts of men. . . ."

During most of the 1920's there were few serious attacks on the New Humanists. The young men seemed to have won the war, and the occasional gibes must have seemed gratuitous. Most of the literary journals were avowedly liberal. Lewis Mumford found *Democracy and Leadership* "lucid and temperate" and Babbitt "a valuable critic of democracy." Writing in November 1927 in the *Herald Tribune* he said it was unfortunate that Babbitt and More had been attacked indiscriminately in the all-out war against gentility. Mumford deplored the Tory prejudices of both men, but he added that in reading More at this time he discovered "a man of extraordinary tact and good judgement in every matter pertaining to literature," and that after reading Babbitt he could admit that "had the weaker members of our generation known him better they might not perhaps have made so many knock-kneed compromises."

The following year, however, activities were renewed all along the front when Howard Mumford Jones in *The New*

Republic replied to a series of articles on humanism in *The Forum,* Mary Colum reviewed Gorham Munson's *Destinations: A Canvass of American Literature Since 1900,* and Horace Kallen reviewed Norman Foerster's *American Criticism* for the *Saturday Review of Literature.* Mr. Jones and Mrs. Colum were concerned with berating Babbitt's *Rousseau and Romanticism* and Mr. Kallen with dismissing Foerster's book and humanism as "the last gasp of secularized Calvinism" and "the frayed latter end of the genteel tradition." During 1929 the fighting continued. Robert Shafer replied to an article by Allen Tate entitled "The Fallacy of Humanism," and their debate was carried further in *The Bookman,* the editor of which, Seward Collins, was championing the New Humanists. The book editors and reviewers, Henry Hazlitt, Harry Hansen, Henry Seidel Canby, Edmund Wilson, William S. Knickerbocker, and others got into the fray. Each side had another, though hardly a final, word to say when Foerster published the symposium *Humanism and America* (1930), with fifteen articles, and in reply Hartley Gratton edited *A Critique of Humanism* (1930), with thirteen articles.

Democracy, romanticism, humanitarianism, restraint in discussing sex, respect for traditional beliefs and attitudes, and so on, were hotly debated by the New Humanists and their various opponents, but the underlying and basic issue was naturalism, in its rationalistic-utilitarian line on the one side and its sentimental-romantic line on the other. Norman Foerster said the New Humanists held that "a complete culture necessitates a sharp contrast between what Emerson termed the law for man and the law for thing, the human realm of value and quality and the purely quantitative realm of nature." The New Humanists held that the law for man is clearly evident, not merely in the durable

parts of the Greek and Christian tradition, but in the traditions of India and China as well.

In the first of his *Shelburne Essays,* More had insisted that the critical faculty should serve the "law of measure." The duty of the critic is to "transform and interpret and mold the sum of experience from man to man and generation to generation." Twenty-four years later in *The Demon of the Absolute* he said that men who are morally and intellectually indolent cannot perceive that the voice of the higher discipline is available through tradition. In their conceit the indolent fall into an "absolute relativism" in moral as well as critical values. "That is the present guise of the Demon as he stalks abroad, instilling his venom into the innocent critics of the press."

Babbitt also insisted on this distinction of the lower life which man shares with nature and the higher which man has alone, whether merely as a human or as a supernatural being. The higher faculties of man are reason, moral will, and moral imagination (as opposed to "recreative" and "idyllic imagination"). These higher faculties impose an "inner check" which, critical and moral at once, prevents self-indulgence, sentimental humanitarian acts, and vagaries of romantic expression and forms. Babbitt furnished the clearest exposition of his position in "Humanism: An Essay at Definition" (1930).

In it he stated that the "law of measure" is the center, historically and psychologically, in all humanistic movements. Modernism is a move away from the law of measure, but there always have been humanists, men who have recognized intuitively or believed in a "universal norm," "laws unwritten in the heavens," or believed that human nature demands a "sense of order and decorum and measure in deeds and words." The scientific-utilitarian side of natu-

ralism (typified by Bacon) offends against balance and decorum by glorying in the specialist who sacrifices a rounded development in order to contribute his bit to progress and by pursuing "material instead of spiritual 'comfort.' " The romantic-sentimental side of naturalism (typified by Rousseau) offends against balance and decorum by promoting "free temperamental expansion" and "the humanitarian hope for brotherhood among men based on emotional overflow." The humanists work against excesses of individualism and "intellectual anarchy" by restraining their appetites.

As Norman Foerster would later point out, the excitement over the New Humanism was lessened by the great depression and a new interest in regional writing. Even so, the influence of humanism was considerable, largely because it caused critics to question their basic assumptions.

ii

One would have thought, George Santayana said, investigating the implications in the position of the New Humanists in *The Genteel Tradition at Bay,* that the genteel tradition had all but disappeared, was little more than a remembered atmosphere. But no, the spirit that once motivated it is not dead. Furthermore, its proponents protest "that it is not genteel or antiquated at all, but orthodox and immortal. Its principles, it declares, are classical, and its true name is Humanism." Santayana attempted to demonstrate that the new movement was really a protest against the consequences of the older humanism. Renaissance humanists, he said, were opposed to austerity, were willing to wink at amiable vices, and through a spirit of tolerance

hoped to neutralize the rigors of conflicting dogmas. Eventually, a tolerant humanist was able to give a place in his sympathies to religions of the East, to primitive art, to the virtues of societies quite foreign to his own. "Thus humanism ended at last in a pensive agnosticism and a charmed culture, as in the person of Matthew Arnold." The New Humanists felt the lameness in this conclusion, and in one way Santayana agreed with them. "If the humanist could really live up to his ancient maxim, *humani nil a me alienum puto,* he would sink into moral anarchy and artistic impotence—the very thing from which our liberal, romantic world is so greatly suffering." Because an orderly existence demands insistence on certain patterns, one cannot accept everything that is new or strange. By and large, the humanist movement has emancipated the passions, attempted to turn nature to practical purposes—to surrender the spirit to the flesh.

We are the heirs of what Santayana calls the three R's of the Renaissance: Reformation, Revolution, and Romance. The Reformation has appealed to lay interests: many a writer has demonstrated the superiority of Protestantism by pointing to its social achievements, more commerce, scientific advancement, neater towns, and so forth. "I think we might say of Protestantism something like what Goethe said of Hamlet. Nature had carelessly dropped an acorn into the ancient vase of religion, and the young oak, growing within, shattered the precious vessel." Santayana, of course, is denying that Protestantism is half so concerned with spiritual as with material well-being. Revolution has increased individual liberty, elevated the average man, and given him more comfort. Romance is unlike Reformation and Revolution in that it is not for the most part in rebellion. Whatever may be the points in history where it mani-

fests itself clearly, its origins may simply be human. "It involves a certain sense of homelessness in a chaotic world, and at the same time a sense of meaning and beauty there." Santayana finds a humbleness, a sense of human imperfections, a kind of prerequisite to enlightened action in the spirit of Romance. As the heir of these three R's, modern man has come to believe that his physical life is not a life of sin.

One of the New Humanists said: "The accepted vision of a good life is to make a lot of money by fair means; to spend it generously; to be friendly; to move fast; to die with one's boots on." Santayana was willing to accept this sturdy ideal as the natural outgrowth of industrialism in America. (And he could add, with a touch of malice, that in the margins of American life there is room for the cultivation of an intellectual life, that democracy loves splendidly endowed libraries and museums, and that "the adaptable spirit of Protestantism may be relied upon to lend a pious and philosophical sanction to any instinct that may deeply move the national mind.") The protests of the New Humanists are not the protests which the Renaissance humanists would have made. The New Humanists were pointing not at a humanism but at a theocracy:

> Theocracy is what all the enemies of the three R's . . . must endeavour to restore, if they understand their own position. Wealth, learning, sport and beneficence, even on a grand scale, must leave them cold, or positively alarm them, if these fine things are not tightly controlled and meted out according to some revealed absolute standard. . . . Let us have honest bold dogmas supported by definite arguments: let us re-establish our moral sentiments on foundations more solid than tradition or gentility. . . . If our edifice is to be safe, we must lay the foundations in eternity.

The quarrel between the modernists or liberals and the New Humanists was a major battle to decide whether naturalism was to be intellectually dominant, but it was not quite the same as the battle waged between Bishop Wilberforce and Huxley. Babbitt denied that humanism was of value only in subordination to orthodox Christianity. In "Humanism: An Essay at Definition" he insisted that a "survey of the past" does not confirm the view that humanism is parasitical. The two most notable manifestations of the humanistic spirit that the world has seen, that in ancient Greece and that in Confucian China, did not have the support of Christianity or any other form of revealed religion. Babbitt placed himself "unhesitatingly on the side of the supernaturalists," but his "revealed religion" included the religion of Sophocles, Confucius, and Christ. Most Christians would see Babbitt's supernaturalism as something other than Christianity.

iii

It is important, as Santayana said, to know from what basic laws, dogmas, or assumptions Babbitt draws his strong convictions. Insofar as one can tell from his own statements he was not an orthodox Christian. Yet he did not hesitate to speak with the assurance of a presbyter. In Babbitt's mind, for example, renunciation had as its corollary an individualism that was contemptuous of any humanitarian gestures or movements. It may be true, as Babbitt held, that "the will to power" is usually much stronger than "the will to service." But it would seem to follow that an act of renunciation would frequently be an act of charity. His dislike of romantics and liberals, who as humanitarians like to insist on the myth of natural goodness, hardly seems reason

enough for the constant ridicule of humanitarian acts. Sympathy and kindness played little part in Babbitt's criticism, and he apparently enjoyed his own belligerent and raucous manner in controversy.

More, on the other hand, seems to have had the agonized conscience of the early Calvinist. His startlingly reactionary statements seem, if taken by themselves, cruel in a way that Babbitt's are not, especially because More was a more sensitive critic than Babbitt. But More was writing under the aegis of an angry God. Responsibility was the terrible burden of the individual, not of society. To blame society as a whole for evil laws, he wrote in *Aristocracy and Tradition* (1917), was to weaken "the responsibility of the individual soul to its maker and judge." The forces of order had to be upheld. If the romantics made a myth of natural goodness, then More may be said to have served the older myth of man as naturally depraved. In his *Platonism* he could make Plato a Presbyterian:

> To the true Platonist the divine spirit, though it may be called, and is, the hidden source of beauty and order and joy, yet always, when it speaks directly in the human breast, makes itself heard as an inhibition; like the Guide of Socrates, it never in its own person commands to do, but only to refrain. Whereas to the pseudo-Platonist it appears as a positive inspiration, saying yes to his desires and emotions.

Most readers probably feel that the *Dialogues* are attempts to isolate, modify, and explain and then either to justify or condemn certain of our desires or designs, but More finds that each ends with a "Thou shalt not!" In More, despite his delicacy and learning, there is a latter-day Calvinism, a genteel masochism.

Norman Foerster's interpretation of the humanist posi-

tion in respect to supernaturalism is found in his *American Criticism* (1928):

> This centre to which humanism refers everything, this centripetal energy which counteracts the multifarious centrifugal impulses, this magnetic will which draws the flux of our sensations toward it while itself remaining at rest, is the reality which gives rise to religion. Pure humanism is content to describe it thus in physical terms, as an observed fact of experience; it hesitates to pass beyond its experimental knowledge to the dogmatic affirmations of any of the great religions.

T. S. Eliot, in "Second Thoughts on Humanism," published in *Hound and Horn,* objected to this passage, saying it typified the ambiguous attitude of the humanists toward religion, identifying themselves with it at one moment and dissociating themselves the next. Their attacks against the forms of naturalism would seem to make it clear that the humanists do not look upon themselves as naturalists. Yet on the other hand they (Babbitt and Foerster, at least) would not be thought supernaturalists. According to believers in the supernatural, morals come from God and are justified thereby. According to the naturalists they come from biology, social adjustment, and so forth. There is, as Eliot puts it, no way out of the dilemma: "you must be either a naturalist or a supernaturalist." Foerster said, "the essential reality of experience is ethical." He was saying, in effect, that an ethical reality lives in a hiatus between the natural and the supernatural. But, as Eliot objected, if the word "supernatural" is suppressed, the "*dualism* of man and nature collapses at once." The point is crucial. The term "human" long depended on connotations derived from supernaturalism. If one is not a supernaturalist he must reconcile himself to giving up, at least eventually, these associations and

accepting those that arise from considering man as natural. This the humanists seemed unwilling to do.

Foerster has been an apologist for the New Humanism rather than a literary critic. He called *American Criticism* "a work of historical-critical exegesis in the field of scholarship." In *The American Scholar* (1929) he said his fellow scholars had "fallen victims to the mechanistic tendencies of the age; and in their pseudo-scientific wanderings into the fields of literary history, general history, and psychology, have lost nearly all perspective and ability to evaluate the writings either of their own age or of the past." In *Towards Standards; A Study of the Present Critical Movement in American Letters* (1930) he had surveyed impressionist criticism, finding, of course, that to emphasize the uniqueness of a work at the expense of traditional values is to dispense with standards. He had surveyed, too, journalistic criticism like that of Henry Seidel Canby, finding it based on "historical relativity or indifferentism"; the Bourne-Brooks-Mumford school which argued the need for a humanistic reconstruction but offered no tangible method for it; and, lastly, the humanists who would find in tradition the values that are permanent in human existence and consonant with a "richly diversified, a finely shaped, and an exalted life." In 1941, Foerster contributed "The Esthetic Judgement and the Ethical Judgement" to *The Intent of the Critic*. Here he acknowledges that the aesthetic critics may be right in saying that delight is the primary criterion in art, but the humanist will "add at once that the delight comes from the wisdom expressed as well as from the expression of wisdom." But there appears to be a contradiction in his adding that "Tintern Abbey" is great aesthetically but is ethically unsound. Like Babbitt and More, Foerster has fought courageously against a self-indulgent material-

ism; his interests have been ethical first and aesthetic only incidentally.

iv

Foerster, in *American Critical Essays* and elsewhere, lists Prosser Hall Frye as a humanist who arrived at his position largely independently. A reading of *Literary Reviews and Criticism* (1908), *Romance and Tragedy* (1922), and *Visions and Chimeras* (1929) makes perfectly clear that he and Babbitt especially had much in common. Frye speaks of life and literature being "vindicated against *naturalism*," of Zola lacking "moral sense," and of "these modern scientific self-complacent humanitarianisms." Frye's manner is usually academic, disinterested, and assured, but when he undertakes to examine the characteristics of romantic literature he can rise to satiric barbs worthy of Babbitt. German romanticism is a work of "degeneration, deformation, and disease," and "it bears on its front the stigmata of its infirmities—absurdity, folly, inanity, and confusion." When Frye was not giving rein to his prejudices, he could write with acuteness, moderation, and clarity. "The Idea of Greek Tragedy," in *Romance and Tragedy,* furnishes an excellent account of the general differences between Elizabethan and Greek tragedy and the development from Aeschylus to Euripides.

Yvor Winters, commonly identified with the new criticism, also has strong affinities with Babbitt, whose influence he has acknowledged. Among his later contemporaries, only F. R. Leavis, the British critic, writes with the same forthrightness about moral issues in literature. *Primitivism and Decadence: A Study of American Experimental Poetry* (1937), Winters's first book, is an attempt to relate the mo-

tive behind a poem to the feelings aroused by connotation, sound, and rhythms. (By "primitive," Winters means writers who "utilize all the means necessary to the most vigorous form, but whose range of material is limited," and by "decadent," he means writers who "display a fine sensitivity to language and who may have a very wide range" but whose work is weakened by a "vice of feeling.") The exact center of the book is not clear, but many of the incidental analyses and statements of principle are explicitly made and valuable. Winters's essential position is most clearly stated in *The Anatomy of Nonsense* (1943):

> According to my view, the artistic process is one of moral evaluation of human experience, by means of a technique which renders possible an evaluation more precise than any other. The poet tries to understand his experience in rational terms, to state his understanding, and simultaneously to state, by means of the feelings which we attach to words, the kind and degree of emotion that should properly be motivated by this understanding. The artistic result differs from the crude experience mainly in its refinement of judgement: the difference in really good art is enormous, but the difference is of degree rather than kind.

Much of Winters's theory, which is expressed and expatiated upon in an authoritative manner, is fallacious. Obviously, there is something to his thesis that the tone engendered by the connotations, sound, and rhythms evaluates or is appropriate to the motive of the poem. But motive does not exist as some Platonic essence, or even as a clear-cut little body of ideas, prior to and separate from its concrete embodiment in a poem; in a very real sense, motive does not exist until the poem is at least partially written, and much of what the poet says is accidental and unwitting on his part. Winters's thesis, to change the figure, suggests a

skeletonized idea, apparently highly complex to begin with, on which the poet is able to grow muscle, tissue, flesh, and appropriate contours. Winters also assumes a poem that is static, constant in its meanings and rhythms, as though the poem in the course of time did not undergo developments in connotations and meanings of words and in the stresses with which they are pronounced. Winters's scansions, frequently done with great precision, do not allow for the possibility of variant readings. Another objection to Winters's system is that it assumes capacity to intellectualize our experience of color, sound, rhythm, weight, texture, size, and so forth that is far beyond human capacity or inclination.

Winters, as one might expect, tends to rate most highly the poets who employ an abstract diction, whose work least resists explicit commentary and paraphrase. He also likes writers restrained in their enthusiasm, strong-minded, and certain about their moral principles. The source of Winters's assurance about moral issues is never made clear. He says he is not a Christian. Some of Winters's judgments are notorious—that Edith Wharton is greatly superior to James, that T. Sturge Moore has written "more great poetry than any of his contemporaries," that Elizabeth Daryush "is the finest British poet since T. Sturge Moore," and so forth. Winters deserves much of the ridicule his ex cathedra manner and excessive statements invite. Even so, Winters is at times a very perceptive critic. In *Maule's Curse: Seven Studies in the History of American Obscurantism* (1938) there are excellent studies of several American writers, one of the best being his examination of "gratuitous emotionalizing" in Poe. His little book on *Edwin Arlington Robinson,* with whom he feels strong sympathies, is probably the best of the critical studies of Robinson. His literal-mindedness in criticizing Henry Adams, Stevens, Eliot, John Crowe

Ransom, and Frost vitiates his studies of these figures. If one can manage, however, to separate some of the basic points Winters makes from the exaggerated judgments to which they lead him, even these studies can be useful.

Yet another critic who had strong affinities with the humanists was Gorham Munson. He had written several volumes of aesthetic criticism, including *Robert Frost* (1927), *Destinations: A Canvass of American Literature Since 1900* (1928), and *Style and Form in American Prose* (1929), before developing his enthusiasm for the New Humanism. Then in 1930, the year he published *The Dilemma of the Liberated,* he contributed "Our Critical Spokesmen" to Foerster's symposium *Humanism and America.* Munson declined, however, to be thought an orthodox humanist. He objected to the humanist emphasis on "moderation," "the law of measure, Nothing Too Much," but he also saw in humanism a valuable critique of the naturalism that seemed to be ending in the romantic disillusionment of Krutch's *The Modern Temper.* Of post-Renaissance history he said:

> The signs are plentiful of another transition: we have gone from the dominance of religious values to the dominance of intellectual ones, and then to the primacy of emotional values. The last stage—barbarism—will occur with the complete triumph of practical and instinctive values. Then Atlas will indeed be but an economic creature, cleverly producing what he needs by the least effort, and spending his increased leisure in the pursuit of cheap distractions from thought and serious emotion. He will truly have diminished to the ninth part of a human being.

In the final chapter of *The Dilemma of the Liberated,* Munson says that scientific-utilitarianism and sentimental-romanticism have, after all, held us at the end of a rather short

tether. "Our progress must consist in finding out the length of our tether, and for that Humanism is one of the most available means."

Later generations are likely to say that although the nineteenth century made too much of moral questions the critics in the first half of the twentieth century, except for the humanists, made too little of them. It is true that a number of critics have said that poetic value was not dependent upon the acceptability of the ethical, philosophical, or scientific statement in a poem. Eliot, for example, said that James had a mind so fine that no idea could violate it, and he said that because there is a difference between "philosophical *belief* and poetic *assent*" we must distinguish between what Dante said as a poet and what he said as a man. Ransom, attempting to explain modernity in poetry, said that the modern poet is intensely concerned with the possibility of creating aesthetic effects apart from moral or social considerations: "He cares nothing, professionally, about morals, or God, or native land. He has performed a work of dissociation and purified his art." Eliot and Ransom were extravagant in such statements. They can be excused, however, if one recognizes that their attempts to make poetry pure was a part of the revolt against the didactic heresy, the message-hunting of the Victorians. Poetic value, as Eliot and Ransom knew, is not to be identified with its philosophical or ethical value. On the other hand, they did not come to terms with the fact that perverse or silly ideas can weaken or preclude poetic value. Somewhat younger critics have been able to accept both emphases. Thus Cleanth Brooks requires that a poem or story be able to withstand "ironic contemplation"; Robert Penn Warren wants an idea to "prove itself" in its context; and Lionel Trilling insists on quality, complexity, and maturity of per-

ception, which he calls "moral realism." The direct indebtedness of these critics to the New Humanism is probably slight, but like their contemporaries they have been aware[2] of voices raising serious objections to the spirit of the age, objecting to romantic individualism and humanitarianism, and insisting on raising moral issues in relation to literature in a period when liberalism and reductive naturalism were dominating intellectual inquiries. But the humanists were essentially negative as critics. They were unsympathetic to almost every writer after Racine. Their doctrine of discipline, proportion, and moderation was primarily ethical. If it had been more than that, they could have employed it in analyzing modern literature. The humanists did not bring to criticism any developed awareness of what R. P. Blackmur has called "symbolic techniques." They were either unable or unwilling to enter imaginatively into a study of symbolic techniques in order to discover the way in which raw life, unconscious and residual forces, traditions, and new insights were transformed into art.

2 For one of the most recent statements of a humanist criticism (although the kinship with the New Humanism is not made explicit), see Douglas Bush, "The Humanist Critic," *Kenyon Review,* XIII (Winter 1951), 81–91.

7

SOCIAL AND ACTIVIST CRITICISM

Big business and the middle-class mores it was felt to be sponsoring were, of course, subjected to attack in the early years of the century. From the muckraking movement came John Curtis Underwood's *Literature and Insurgency* (1914). The main point of the book would seem to be that slick writing, such as the work of Elinor Glyn or of Robert Chambers, was the product of a machine culture, similar to conventionalized clothes and standardized amusements. Presumably the muckraking magazines and those novelists with similar reformist zeal would help restore individuality, realism, and honesty by revealing the forces behind the phenomenon. Underwood's book is hard to follow because its thesis is never explicitly developed, if developed at all. Obviously Underwood thought Howells too genteel, Twain a great democrat, and Norris and David

Graham Phillips our greatest writers. The real hero of the book seems to be Phillips, who revealed, among other things, "the pretenses and the posturings of the 'good' women of America." James was the victim of something called "culture for culture's sake." Precisely how the revolutionary temper of the insurgents enabled them to write an improved brand of American literature is never made clear.

Upton Sinclair was a little more candid about distinguishing between literary value and a writer's political or social views. In pamphlets and in *Mammonart* (1924) he stated a case for literature as class propaganda. "All art is propaganda. It is universally and inescapably propaganda: sometimes unconsciously, but often deliberately, propaganda." Sinclair propagandizes for a socialist literature and tends to see virtues in writers who, however rawly or crudely they write, are on the side of socialism, against rigid mores and against economic exploitation; but he is more moderate than most of the political critics of the late twenties and thirties. Sinclair could see virtues in Henry James and be somewhat critical of Phillips and of Jack London. Toward the end of *Mammonart* he says he does not want to praise writers who do not have intellect and imagination, and in another place he says, "Great art is produced when propaganda of vitality and importance is put across with technical competence." But, like Underwood, Sinclair never explains what is involved in technical competence.

Underwood and Sinclair were writing in the tradition of social criticism to which Howells, London, Garland, Norris, H. B. Fuller, and others belonged. With some exceptions, they assumed a one-to-one relationship between social and economic problems as subject matter and honest, realistic, and therefore good fiction. The theory of economic determi-

nism invited more explicit attempts to relate discussions of technique and form to social considerations. Oddly enough, Brander Matthews, one of the last of the genteel critics, was the first to raise the question. He wrote "The Economic Interpretation of Literary History," *Gateways to Literature* (1912) in order to suggest ways in which Professor Seligman's economic interpretation of history could be applied to the study of literature.

Matthews acknowledges at the start that the "Hero and Hero-Worship" approach of Carlyle—that great men dominate their epoch—seems much more relevant to literature than to history. "It may be that the American Revolution would have run its course successfully even if Washington had never been born, and that the Civil War would have ended as it did even if Lincoln had died at its beginning; but English literature would be very different if there had been no Shakspere, and French literature would be very different if there had been no Molière." There are, nonetheless, ways in which a writer is affected by the economic situation in which he finds himself. In every age, for example, most writers devote themselves to the literary form that is most popular and therefore most profitable. "This is what accounts for the richness of drama in England under Queen Elizabeth, for the vogue of the essay under Queen Anne, and for the immense expansion of the novel under Queen Victoria." Matthews says there are four motives which inspire literature—accomplishment of an immediate end, self-expression, fame, and money. Sometimes all four combine, but the most insistent is the need for money. Whatever one thinks about this hierarchy of motives for writing, it is clear that the desire for money is more relevant to the sociology of the writer than to literature as an art. It has almost nothing to do with the inspiration behind a

literary work. The problem can be seen more explicitly in the following examples quoted by Matthews:

> A distinguisht British art critic has asserted that the luxuriance of Tudor architecture is due directly to the introduction of root-crops into England. That is to say, the turnip enabled the sheep-farmers to carry their cattle thru the winter; and as the climate of the British Isles favors sheep raising, the creation of a winter food-supply immediately made possible the expansion of the wool trade, whereby large fortunes were soon accumulated, the men thus enricht expending the surplus promptly in stately and sumptuous residences.

Matthews admits that the economic factor here is not a direct cause of the architecture. He should have said that it is not a cause of the architecture as architecture in any sense at all. Taine's formula of race, moment, and milieu, on the other hand, would be relevant because the climate and ideals of a people would help to inspire the design. But most important of all is the presence of an artist capable of creating a design that catches the multiple significances suggested by the spirit of the place and the people.

Despite frequent statements to the contrary, economics is relevant to literary criticism only where one can show that the nature and forms of a work have been designed to satisfy a particular audience (coterie, court, or popular), that its character is what it is partly because of the audience the author had in mind in creating it. In *Literature and Revolution,* translated in 1925, Léon Trotsky wrote: "A work of art should, in the first place, be judged by its own law, that is, the law of art. But Marxism alone can explain why and how a given tendency in art has originated in a given period in history; who it was who made a demand for such an artistic form and not for another, and why. . . ."

Such a statement as this latter one has a plausible air to it. It begins to seem less and less plausible, however, when one reaches out for good illustrations. Certainly it would be most unlikely that any critic could explain in economic terms why Virginia Woolf chose to write lyric in lieu of strict plot stories, why the sonnet is rarely written as successfully in the twentieth as in the seventeenth century, or why most modern poetry is much more highly stylized than nineteenth-century poetry. Similarly, it would be most unlikely that a critic could explain solely in economic and class terms why *Antony and Cleopatra* and *Twelfth Night* were written when they were written, for what particular audience, and why the audience demanded those particular forms. Form is an ambiguous term, but even if we limit it to mean the creation of a character like the ambitious Malvolio, forced to recognize his place in order to satisfy the aristocratic audience, we have no assurance that the groundlings did not see him as the aggressive, humorless opponent of easy living, a type as offensive in the ranks of ironmongers or journeymen as in the households of the wealthy. The influence of economics on form means even less if by form we mean the qualities of suspense and the techniques employed to create suspense, metrical patterns, the degree of imagination evident in the imagery of various eras, the pace of the action, or the tone. Trotsky is saying, on the one hand, that art has its own laws; but, on the other hand, he denies that it does by insisting that economic forces dictate the origins or beginnings of a form. To insist that class or audience dictates the form is also to imply that a literary genius is merely a highly complex and delicate mechanism responding to the economic weather of his age. Sainte-Beuve's insistence, in criticizing Taine, that a writer operates as a free agent inside the forces presented to him by his

milieu is even more applicable as a criticism of economic determinism, a single aspect of milieu.

Few critics, not even such a stalwart as Emma Goldman, got down to cases in relating economic forces to literary form, despite the frequency with which they appealed to the reality of the economic interpretation of history.[1] Only late in the career of political criticism, in the thirties, when the results of equating literary worth with the writer's advocacy of social and economic reform were all too evident, was there a general awareness that Marx had not at all times insisted on a strict linking of economics and literature. In fact, he had said: "Certain periods of highest development of art stand in no direct connection with the general development of society, nor with the material basis and the skeleton structure of its organization." (But Lenin had said: "Down with supermen-litterateurs. . . . Literature must become a component part of the organized, planned, unified Socialist party work.")

Joel Spingarn, in one of his unpublished New School lectures, said that since 1848, when Marx and Engels stated their materialistic conception of history, "all historical study has been dominated by the idea of economic causes." Spingarn offered this criticism of the conception:

> The trouble with American art and literature is that America is too much absorbed in business. This is a commercial country. Therefore we have no art or very poor art and literature. Very good. . . . But let us turn to medieval Italy and the bourgeois commercial cities of Italy, absorbed with business far more passionately than we, produced Dante. In one case business was

[1] Christopher Caudwell (Christopher St. John Sprigg), a British Marxist critic, applied himself to the problem in *Illusion and Reality* (1937). The reader can decide for himself whether Caudwell's interpretations are convincing.

the cause of no art; in the other case business was the cause of the greatest art.

Moral and religious forces, Spingarn says, are the real generative forces in history, and he illustrates the point by recalling that Mohammed preached a narrow and powerful doctrine to the Arabs, "a small petty tribe in a desert surrounded by desert," who were so moved by it that they spread the religion of Islam from the whole of North Africa to the center of Asia "and except for a mischance would have conquered Europe." Marx and Lenin became new Mohammeds. Why, Spingarn asks ironically, did "some external cause make them into Mohammeds when the causes that were at work in Russia for centuries and under a different religion and a different philosophy had produced nothing?" (Bliss Perry to a similar end had quoted Fisher Ames on the climate-environment theory in relation to Greek literature: "The figs are as fine as ever, but where are the Pindars?") That Spingarn was not saying that the external conditions had no relation to the generating forces of morality and religion, is implied in his concluding statement: "All life is a process of the inner urge of men acting on the external conditions. And history is the unity of the condition and the urge. It is not the condition, it is not the urge; it is the unity of the condition and the urge."[2]

ii

Marxist criticism in the twenties had few practitioners and was uninfluential. It may be that most critics, even

2 Harry Slochower came to a similar conclusion in *Three Ways of Modern Man* (1937): "Matter and ideas, economics and art, are not identical. Nor is the relationship between them such that the one is thoroughly subsumed by the other. . . . Man acts not alone from physical necessity. He is driven by an inner impulse toward spiritual freedom."

socialists, did not believe that political theory and literature were inextricably interrelated. The isolation-of-art theories of the nineteenth century had not encouraged such a feeling. Max Eastman as an editor of *The Masses* could write about poetry without reference to politics. In fact, his later works, *Artists in Uniform* (1934) and *Art and the Life of Action* (1934), were protests against a state-controlled literature. Eastman's thesis in *The Literary Mind: Its Place in an Age of Science* (1931) was that, not being knowledge, literature could not compete with science, that is, with "the inexorable advance of a more disciplined study of man." Therefore he was not prepared to take literature as seriously as the communists were taking it. His fellow editor Floyd Dell seemed more interested in psychoanalysis than in politics. Except for occasional reviews and articles in *The Liberator,* it was not until Michael Gold began to edit *New Masses* in 1928 that there was a criticism explicitly Marxist. Gold wrote, often quite movingly, about the New York poor. He was concerned merely with promoting communism, and although he knew very little about aesthetic theory he knew a great deal about arousing sympathy for the working classes. Joseph Freeman, on the other hand, in *Voices of October* (1930) and as an editor of *Proletarian Literature in the United States* (1935), tried to make Marxist criticism acceptable intellectually. He acknowledged that much of the proletarian art was pretty bad, even admitting that the writer did not have to belong, as Edwin Seaver had claimed, to the Party. It was necessary, however, for the writer to identify himself with the proletariat; having done this, he could "grow in insight and power with the growth of the American working class world now beginning to tread its historic path toward the new world." The extent to which the war of the classes dictated the value a critic

could put on a writer is suggested by this passage on Stephen Spender as a radical, written by Edwin Berry Burgum for *Proletarian Literature:*

> The poet seeks to escape pessimism by discovering the old aristocratic virtues in the lower classes, and especially, it should be noted, in their leaders. The great men in one of his most characteristic poems, like his old time aristocrats, Spender describes as born of the sun, traveling a short while toward the sun, and leaving the vivid air signed with their honor. Now in all likelihood, honor can be translated into a Communistic virtue, though it will remain a term of dangerous connotations. . . .

William Phillips and Philip Rahv,[3] editors of *Partisan Review,* in their contributions to the same volume uttered a warning that was not widely accepted: "In criticism the 'leftist' substitutes gush on the one hand, and invective on the other, for analysis; and it is not difficult to see that to some of these critics Marxism is not a science but a sentiment."

But leftism was so much a part of the intellectual atmosphere that many critics, in and out of the Party, admired or disapproved of writers almost exclusively on the grounds of their political sentiments. Four of the most influential of these were V. F. Calverton, Vernon Louis Parrington, Granville Hicks, and Bernard Smith. In Calverton's *Modern Quarterly* (later *Modern Monthly*), Marxist principles dictated aesthetic principles. The language experiments of Joyce, Eliot, or E. E. Cummings were held to be misguided because language should be employed for "social communication," and literature, to be of any value, must "attain a social beauty commensurate with radical vision and aspira-

[3] See also Philip Rahv, "Proletarian Literature: An Autopsy," *Southern Review,* Vol. IV (Winter 1939).

tion." His *The Newer Spirit* (1925) is a plea for literature that serves a social function. Calverton's thesis in *The Liberation of American Literature* (1932) is that the decay of the middle class is behind the pessimism and the confused values of modern literature. Equal suffrage, equal opportunity, and freedom of thought are myths. "Middle class culture driven to a deception in its economic defense, justifying exploitation as a virtue and competition as a sign of progress, translated the contradiction of its economic life into every form of human endeavor." The literature of such a society has inevitably reflected its deceptions. Only today, with the breakdown of the middle class, when no one can believe any longer in its idealism, "are we able to appreciate the catastrophic extent to which human thought and impulse were sold out to the burgher." The future belongs not to the "bourgeois individualist" but to the "proletarian collectivist." Calverton then cites a group of novelists and critics who recognize the need for an alliance not with the acquisitive capitalist but with the intellectual and imaginative proletariat. The premise is that all cultural expressions have their source in an economic order, but even if one could accept the rigors and simplicity of such a theory it would seem unnecessary to attribute virtue exclusively to the proletariat and vice to the middle class.

Vernon Louis Parrington's *Main Currents in American Thought,* appearing in 1927 and 1930, treated American literature almost entirely in political and economic terms. E. H. Eby, writing the Introduction to the third volume after Parrington's death, said that three principles explain the method of the study: Taine's theory, economic determinism, and the equating of American thought with American literature. "When he envisaged American literature as American thought, the trammel of the belletristic was

broken and he was free to reevaluate American writers. . . . The economic forces imprint their mark upon political, social, and religious institutions; literature expresses the result in its thought content." These principles gave Parrington a method whereby he could be "true to the facts," and his liberalism gave him the position and point of view in terms of which the facts could be evaluated.

In the Introduction to the first volume Parrington had written: "The point of view from which I have endeavored to evaluate the materials is liberal rather than conservative, Jeffersonian rather than Federalistic; and very likely in my search I have found what I went forth to find, as others have discovered what they were searching for." The sacred books were: J. Allen Smith's *The Spirit of American Government* (1907) and Charles A. Beard's *An Economic Interpretation of the Constitution* (1913). It was unnecessary to go to Karl Marx because the doctrine had "shaped the conclusions of Madison and Hamilton and John Adams, and it reappeared in the arguments of Webster and Calhoun." The equalitarian doctrines of the French are "treacherous romanticism," but economic determinism is "sober reality." Americans have confused the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution, forgetting that one is a "classical statement of French humanitarian democracy, the other an organic law designed to safeguard the minority under republican rule." Parrington did not explain how economic determinism is consistent with "the liberal's faith" in the rise of the proletariat, his own Jeffersonian democracy, but he said that, beginning with Wilson's Administration, this faith had proved justified. Nor did he explain in specific instances just how a given literary work was the product of economic forces. The truth would seem to be that Parrington's system, social and economic determinism, was another

form of scientism and that he himself was a romantic of the type he claimed to deplore.[4]

Granville Hicks, during his term as a communist, was a spokesman for party-line literature. In "The Crisis in Criticism" (1933), an article in the *New Masses,* he laid down the rules for the "perfect Marxian novel." It must "directly or indirectly show the effects of the class struggle," "make the reader feel he is participating in the lives described," and through its point of view make clear that the author belongs to "the vanguard of the proletariat." Like Parrington, Hicks had to equate the valuable parts of the American literary tradition with an acceptable political and social view. *The Great Tradition: An Interpretation of American Literature Since the Civil War* (1933) ends with this summary:

What stirs us in Emerson is his confidence in the common man, his courageous appeal for action, his faith in the future. He and Thoreau were rebels against the shams and oppressions of their day. They used the language of their times, the language of individualism, but they spoke for all the oppressed, and some of their words remain a call to arms. Whitman felt deeply his kinship with the workers and farmers and caught a glimpse of the collective society. Howells, James, and Mark Twain shrank in their various ways from the cupidity of the gilded age, and Howells, teaching himself to think in terms of a new social order, tried, however feebly, to create, in imagination and fact, a better world. Garland and Norris denounced oppression; Herrick and Phillips worked for reform; Sinclair and London called themselves socialists.

[4] Parrington's style frequently exhibits a floridity and aspiring quality that contradicts his stated concern with "hard fact" and "sober reality." The following is a sentence singled out by Yvor Winters, one of his harshest critics: "The golden dreams of transcendental faith, that buoyed up Emerson and gave hope to Thoreau, turned to ashes in his mouth; the white gleams of mysticism that now and then lighted up his path died out and left him in darkness."

It is significant that Hawthorne, Melville, Emily Dickinson, Henry Adams, Stephen Crane, and Edith Wharton apparently do not belong to the great tradition.

Bernard Smith's *Forces in American Criticism* (1939) was also in the Parrington tradition but militantly Marxist. In his chapter on twentieth-century criticism he explains why Marxist criticism is superior to impressionist and expressionist criticism:

> The Marxist thesis may be briefly stated as follows: a work of literature reflects its author's adjustment to society. To determine the character and value of the work we must therefore, among other things, understand and have an opinion about the social forces that produced the ideology it expresses as an attitude toward life. Marxism enables us to understand those forces by explaining the dialectical relationship of a culture to an economy and of that culture to the classes which exist in that economy. At the same time, by revealing the creative role of the proletariat in establishing a communist society, which alone can realize universal peace and well-being, Marxism offers a *scale* of value. Moral as well as political judgments follow from that thesis—and they include a condemnation of the bourgeois sexual code, of woman's traditional place in the community, and of the accepted relative prestige of labor and unproductive leisure. Of immediate significance to the critic is the conception of reality from which the thesis is evolved and which the thesis defines.

Smith, too, was caught in the thesis that social significance is also literary significance. A victim of the doctrinaire nature of most American Marxist criticism, he was forced, as Morton D. Zabel put it, into a "crudity of sympathy, that keeps him in petty fear of admitting 'beauty' . . . as the proper concern of any serious artist; of sensibility as a critical instrument of infinitely greater importance . . . than popular or political passions."

Parrington, Hicks, and Smith employed only economic and social criteria and ignored, ridiculed, or disallowed the reputations built on standards of artistry. Thus, Parrington on Poe: "The problem of Poe, fascinating as it is, lies quite outside the main current of American thought, and it may be left with the psychologist and the belletrist with whom it belongs." On Hawthorne: "He was the extreme and finest expression of the refined alienation from reality that in the end palsied the creative mind of New England." On James: "In his subtle psychological inquiries, he remained shut up within his own skull-pan." Hicks did not know where to place Poe as a part of the American heritage, but Smith attacked him as a Virginia aristocrat. Hicks was also uneasy with James, finally criticizing his failure to show the reader the source of income of his characters. Smith was contemptuous of James, finding him a snob, a Tory, above the hard social realities of his age. The three critics were harsh with the writer who did not concern himself directly with the social, economic, and political problems of his own day. Melville was alienated from his society and strangely preoccupied with evil; Emily Dickinson could not come to terms with her age; Twain, too, infrequently concerned himself with the social movements of his time; Mrs. Wharton's looking backward to the 1870's for her subject was a retreat. Any writer with traditional values, religious sympathies, or belief was probably a coward or a hypocrite. Thus, Hicks on Eliot: "We need not ask how so melodramatic a skeptic can accept the dogmas of Anglicanism, or what so intelligent an observer can expect from the King of England, or why so resolute an experimenter should affirm his allegiance to the laws of ancient art." Any form of conservatism was unquestionably bad. Ellen Glasgow's liking for good breeding makes her an "apologist," James's

concern with the morality of good manners is mere snobbery, and Hawthorne's preoccupation with evil is the dealing with shadows.

iii

James T. Farrell's *A Note on Literary Criticism* (1936), written by an "amateur Marxist," is a criticism of some of the oversimplifications of Hicks, Gold, and others. The underlying principle in the essay is that no single emphasis can serve to exhaust the values and meanings in a literary work; however important the political may be, it does not preclude other emphases, the psychological, the moral, the biographical, or the aesthetic. The emphasis on economic determinism and the coming victory of the proletariat had caused Marxist novelists and dramatists to insist on a very restricted meaning for the word "real." This is the curtain speech from Clifford Odets's *Paradise Lost:*

> No! There is more to life than this! Everything he said is true, but there is more. That was the past, but there is a future. Now we know. We dare to understand. Truly, truly, the past was a dream. But this is real! To know from this that something must be done. That is real. We searched; we were confused! But we searched, and now the search is ended. For the truth has found us. For the first time in our lives—for the first time our house has a real foundation. . . .

To reduce all the cultural problems of the twentieth century to an economic base, Farrell said, forces the writer to divide the world into warring classes—the bourgeoisie who represent decay and death, the proletariat who represent life and growth; to avoid bourgeois subject matter as decadent, especially that centering in personal relationships; to be indifferent to style, structure, and the logic of events

because of the need to propagandize for the new world order. Literature thus divides neatly into four classifications: *bourgeois,* or decadent; *proletarian,* that is, "with Marxian insight"; *exposure,* showing the evils of the present social order; and *revolutionary,* teaching strikers and farmers how to organize.

Certain other critics, although agreeing with Farrell that in their fervor most of the Marxist writers had been great simplifiers, insisted that the American writer had to ally himself with the proletariat. Newton Arvin wrote *Whitman* (1938) because "the clearer it becomes that the next inevitable step in human history is the establishment of a socialist order, the more interested every man becomes in scanning the work of writers and artists in the recent past for whatever resources there may be in it on which a socialist culture may draw." Horace Gregory could point to the absurdity of C. Day Lewis's line: "Waters of the world unite"; but he could also add that the poet in the thirties was under an obligation to instruct "a bitter, faithless, rotting social organism, a post-War world." Robert Cantwell could write a highly perceptive essay about the society of Henry James in order to compare it with the society of the proletarian novelist, concluding with this sentence: "*To Make My Bread,* in turn, with its weaknesses, gives a new meaning to the term 'beginning of a tradition,' while the works of Henry James so richly and fully illustrate what is meant by the end of one." Malcolm Cowley in *Exile's Return* (1934) and in many reviews for *The New Republic* also insisted on the writer's primary responsibility to society. Cowley would not acknowledge with John Dos Passos that the individual writer, to avoid damnation, had to oppose society or the world; a new and better society is possible, and if we are "for the moment a beaten nation, the fight is not over."

iv

The point of view in *Axel's Castle: A Study in the Imaginative Literature of 1870–1930* (1931), which opened Edmund Wilson's career as a critic, exhibits a conflict similar to that of Dos Passos—whether a writer should serve his art or his age. The highly individualized art of symbolism, in defiance of the authority of science and naturalism, had given us the art of William Butler Yeats, Paul Valéry, Eliot, Marcel Proust, and Joyce, our most impressive writers. But was this enough? "The question begins to press ùs again as to whether it is possible to make a practical success of human society, and whether, if we continue to fail, a few masterpieces, however profound or noble, will be able to make life worth living even for the few people in a position to enjoy them." Wilson suggested, therefore, that we need another type of artist, closer to Wells and Shaw than to Yeats or Proust, presumably writers who would help promote a better society. Wilson was overlooking what Yeats knew, that literature is a world of deeply moving and permanently valuable symbols and insights, not blueprints for social planning; that a poet's imagination cannot be forced but responds to and makes luminous whatever quickens it. The social consequences of literature are likely to be indirect.

Wilson's commentaries on politics and literature tend to be acts of faith in a Marxist social order or sympathetic gestures about the value to literary criticism in the great insights furnished by Marx and Engels. In "Marxism and Literature" from *The Triple Thinkers* (1938) we read that under Marxism society itself "becomes the work of art." In "Historical Criticism," a lecture given in 1940, he lists Michelet, Renan, Sainte-Beuve, and Taine as a school which

had interpreted books in terms of their historical origins, adding the names of Marx and Engels because they had shown the importance of economics in the interpretation of historical phenomena. But, again, Wilson does not demonstrate how economic determinism controls literary phenomena. Wilson has written excellent elucidations of specific works and brilliant accounts, especially in *The Wound and the Bow* (1941), of the psychological hurts of authors like Kipling and Dickens, but, despite his pieties about the economic interpretations of literature, he has written nothing in which economics might be said to explain a work of literature. Irving Howe has said the most admirable part of Wilson's career has been his "trying to live up to the dictum that, whatever else, the criticism of literature should not be merely a criticism of literature." On the contrary, this probably has been a source of weakness in Wilson's criticism. Criticism has its focal point in the literary work itself. Literature is not life or reality. It is an imaginative creation which indirectly can enlarge our understanding and improve the quality of our sensibilities. Wilson is at his best when he stays close to the given work. When, for example, he examines the imagery of John Steinbeck's prose, as he does in *The Boys in the Back Room* (1941) and proceeds to relate it to Steinbeck's preoccupation with biology he enables us to better understand the values which inform Steinbeck's fiction. In reading this latter sort of criticism one has no reason to feel that Wilson's sense of social urgencies is looming so large that literature threatens to seem trivial.

Harry Levin's widely read essay "Literature as an Institution" (1946) also stresses the social at the expense of the artistic aspects of literature. Levin grants Taine his due but observes that Georg Brandes, the Danish critic, had added

a corollary to Taine's method. "Literature is not only the effect of social causes; it is also the cause of social effects."[5] Levin also gives attention to Sainte-Beuve's point about the individual writer being able to move freely, uniquely, inside his race, moment, and milieu, but he relates it to another nineteenth-century idea, Ferdinand Brunetière's "evolution of genres," the notion that literary forms evolve, change, and sometimes die off. "The irreducible element of individual talent would seem to play the same role in the evolution of *genres,*" Levin says, "that natural selection plays in the origin of species." Levin also makes the important point that conventions, "the necessary differences between art and life," have to be studied. But he has little faith in the ability of most critics to use Croce's concept of "expressive form" or Coleridge's "organic principle" as means of analyzing and evaluating any but acknowledged masterpieces. For these forms of criticism he would substitute an "institutional method":

> One convenience of the institutional method is that it gives due credit to the never-ending collaboration between writer and public. It sees no reason to ignore what is relevant in the psychological prepossessions of the craftsman, and it knows that he is ultimately to be judged by the technical resources of his craftsmanship; but it attains its clearest and most comprehensive scope by centering on his craft—on his social status and his historical function as participant in a skilled and a living tradition.

[5] Mme de Staël, in *A Treatise on Ancient and Modern Literature* (1803), made the same point: "The object of the present work is to examine what is the influence of Religion, of Manners, and of Laws upon Literature; and reciprocally how far Literature may affect Laws, Manners, and Religion. On the art of composition and the principles of taste there are extant, in the French tongue, treatises the most accurate and complete; but, methinks, sufficient pains have not been taken to analyze the moral and political causes which modify and mark the character of Literature."

Levin's emphasis, like Taine's, makes for an extrinsic, a social, view of literature. In implying that the ultimate opinion about the work of a writer is to be determined only by time, Levin dismisses judicial criticism.

The framework of Levin's critical procedures is more complex than Taine's, even when Taine's have been modified and extended by other critics. Levin's primary focus, however, is not on the individual work of art but on its origins and its consequences, its social relationships. With such an emphasis the work itself tends to be absorbed into studies of literary conventions and of milieu. Literature is examined not so much in terms of what it is as in terms of what it does, where it came from, and what it relates to. Study carried on inside such a framework moves away from the criticism of literature toward the sociology of literature.

Unlike most critics strongly concerned with politics, economics, and sociology, Levin appears to have no social platform to promote. Lionel Trilling, on the other hand, is, as a critic, very much concerned with understanding and strengthening the liberal-democratic tradition. He studies the characteristics of this tradition as they manifest themselves in art forms. In *Matthew Arnold* (1939), *E. M. Forster* (1943), and *The Liberal Imagination* (1950), Trilling has, for example, frequently pointed out stereotypes and prejudices that have developed as a part of this tradition. He finds it unrealistic to believe that character can be reduced to its social origins; he objects to the pseudo science of the notion that those claiming to be objective can somehow avoid judgments, preferences, and assumptions; and he believes it dangerous to stress only one side of our tradition—to stress the Enlightenment at the expense of the romantic movement.

Criticizing the influence of Parrington, he writes: "Parrington stands at the center of American thought about

American culture because, as I say, he expresses the chronic belief that there exists an opposition between reality and mind and that one must enlist in the party of reality." "Manners, Morals and the Novel," for example, shows how this tradition influences the way novels are written:

> [T]he reality we admire tells us that the observation of manners is trivial and even malicious, that there are things much more important for the novel to consider. As a consequence our social sympathies have indeed broadened, but in proportion as they have done so we have lost something of our power of love, for our novels can never create characters who truly exist. . . . The reviewers of Helen Howe's novel [*We Happy Few*] thought its satiric first part, an excellent satire on the manners of a small but significant segment of society, was ill-natured and unsatisfactory, but they approved the second part, which is the record of the heroine's self-accusing effort to come into communication with the great soul of America. Yet it should have been clear that the satire had its source in a kind of affection, in a real community of feeling, and told the truth, while the second part, said to be so "real," was mere abstraction, one more example of our public idea of ourselves and our national life.

Trilling, in this and other essays, is concerned with the social aspects of literature, but it would be wrong to infer that this means a lack of concern with the structure of the literary work. Trilling, as in his examination of deficiencies in character drawing in the latter part of Helen Howe's novel, is showing how social attitudes affect the very structure of a work.

v

Ours is a political century, and it has probably been inevitable that political considerations would frequently masquerade as literary considerations. During World War II,

for example, a group of critics decided that modern authors were too pessimistic. Archibald MacLeish in *The Irresponsibles* (1940), Van Wyck Brooks in *The Opinions of Oliver Allston* (1941), and Bernard De Voto in *The Literary Fallacy* (1944) attacked Eliot, Pound, Faulkner, Hemingway, Lewis, and others for not being more affirmative about the virtues of Western democratic life. MacLeish even suggested that such writers had helped make us an easy target for the totalitarian countries. Allen Tate satirized the illogic of such a position in "Ode to the Young Pro Consuls of the Air":

> Sad day at Oahu
> When the Jap beetle hit!
> Our Proustian retort
> Was Kimmel and Short.

The other fallacy in such criticism is in the assumption that any line, affirmative or otherwise, can be dictated to the author with the expectation that his imagination will find it engaging and will thereupon proceed to transmute it into literature. The important question—why in all its complexities modern literature is what it is—seemed not to concern these critics. It is worthy of comment that this criticism by Brooks, MacLeish, and De Voto has a conservative tendency —which might suggest that those concerned with maintaining the freedom of the artist to create his vision of the world have no inevitable allegiance either to the Right or to the Left. For their own social or political ends, such critics wished to dictate the kind of literature American authors should write. They were not willing to allow a literature collectively to tell the whole, interrelated, and necessarily complex truth.

8

PSYCHOANALYSIS AND MYTH

PSYCHOANALYTIC criticism in the United States owes its first impulse to the Freudians, who emphasized language and the unconscious; its second to the Jungians, who have concerned themselves primarily with symbol and myth. There has been only an incidental concern with Gestalt and Adlerian psychologies. Two of our most perceptive students of psychoanalysis and literature, Frederick J. Hoffman[1] and Lionel Trilling,[2] have pointed out that Freud himself was indebted to a *Zeitgeist* which included not merely Schopenhauer and Nietzsche and their concern with passion and desire as prime movers, but poets and critics of the entire nineteenth century who sought to

1 *Freudianism and the Literary Mind* (Baton Rouge, Louisiana State Univ. Press, 1945).

2 "Freud and Literature," *The Liberal Imagination* (New York, Viking, 1950).

probe and understand the powers for wisdom, as well as the satanism and irrationalism hidden in the unconscious parts of the mind. Preoccupation with the affective life, with dreams, with the association of ideas is common to romantic and symbolist literature; and many contemporaries of Freud who might seem to be were not indebted directly to him. With critics, the indebtedness is likely to be much clearer and often explicit. References to Oedipus complex, manifest and latent dreams, specific symbols in dreams, displacement, condensation, and the like usually imply a first-hand acquaintance with Freud's theories. Similarly, critical awareness of archetypes and mythical patterns is likely to imply some acquaintance with Jung and other students of myth.

The Poetic Mind (1922) by Frederick C. Prescott was the first careful American adaptation of Freudian theory to literature. It remains among the best of them. (He had published "Poetry and Dreams" in *Abnormal Psychology* as early as 1912.) Prescott develops the analogy between dreams and poetry, leaning especially on Freud's observation, which he called "condensation," that in dreams several characters, words, or objects often telescope or fuse. The language of poetry, Prescott says, also shows condensation. "Of these various meanings one may be the primary denotation, the other secondary, suggested, or connoted. But often the surface meaning will be of less importance than the latent ones; the idea having true poetic significance and bearing the emotional emphasis will not be said but suggested, and the real poetry will be between the lines; the secondary meaning may be the one of prime importance." Prescott also reminds us that condensation is a part of Freud's theory of wit. One of Prescott's illustrations is from a speech of Hotspur's against Henry IV:

> We must have bloody noses and crack'd crowns
> And pass them current too. God's me, my horse.

"Here the 'crack'd crowns' are first cracked coins, secondly broken heads, and thirdly royal crowns upset. Note too that the third meaning is at once farthest from the literal, the most latent, perhaps the most unconscious (in Hotspur's mind), and the most far-reaching (involving the whole dramatic action)." This passage also illustrates Freud's principle of "displacement," a shift in emphasis whereby the important is made to seem inconsequential. Prescott also relates other principles of psychology to poetry and to prose fiction, but with less conspicuous success. Prescott anticipated in part the kind of critical analysis associated with Robert Graves and Laura Riding, I. A. Richards and William Empson. His work deserves more recognition than it has commonly had. Unfortunately, the critics who leaned on psychology did not follow up the remarkable beginnings made by Prescott, especially his attempts to use Freud's theories with precision.

Strangely, the influence of Marx on American criticism was closely related to the influence of Freud. For the most part, the two systems are not easily reconciled or made compatible. The one tends to emphasize the determining powers of economic and social factors and to see them as analyzable and subject to change and manipulation; the other tends to see many of man's problems as inherent, hidden, and ineradicable. The one emphasizes the group and patterns of external relationships; the other, the personal and idiosyncratic. Marx's system tends to view the future as utopian; Freud's, to see man's fate as a tragedy to be alleviated wherever possible. But Marx and Freud have been frequently accepted as twin engines moving to destroy the bourgeois

economic structure and bourgeois moral conventions. For example, Max Eastman and Floyd Dell, editors of *The Masses,* were among the first popularizers of Freud and psychoanalysis. Marx and Freud have been seen as liberators, helping society to throw off its shackles, or, as the phrase had it, "to escape from its *repressions.*" These repressions were at once economic, moral, and sexual, and since the attack on the middle-class mores was more negative than constructive, most of the critics who merged Marx and Freud did not worry unduly about the inconsistencies. A few of them, of course, insisted that the systems were incompatible.

The chief symbol of repression was a composite figure called "the puritan," apparently the creation of Randolph Bourne in "The Puritan's Will to Power" in *The Seven Arts* (April 1917). Van Wyck Brooks, Waldo Frank, Mencken, and many others, as we have seen, took up the cry. By December 1920, Charles Beard protested that the term had become merely a symbolic scapegoat: "By the critics it is used as a term of opprobrium applicable to anything that interferes with the new freedom, free verse, psycho-analysis, or even the *double entendre.*"

The puritan—sometimes it was the pioneer—also sacrificed art, the natural graces, personal freedom, and so forth to making money. Worst of all, he was complacent. The era of Coolidge, priding itself on being "a business civilization," which could suffer Bruce Barton to write a popular study of Jesus as a supersalesman, undoubtedly deserved much of the attack it received. Naturally, too, complacency about the spirit of business and practicality having the sanction of Christianity easily became righteousness about the proprieties and all moral issues. The reaction, by insisting on the place of sex as a determining force in the writer's

life and work, frequently was excessive and a little glib. It was obviously an easy matter to relate the puritan to psychoanalysis and especially to Freud, whose *Three Contributions to a Theory of Sex,* translated in 1910, stated that neuroses invariably had a sexual basis.

In England in 1910, Professor Ernest Jones published his study of the Oedipus complex in *Hamlet,* finding the cause of Hamlet's inability to act in his unconscious feeling of guilty love for his mother. Thus, too, Hamlet's jealousy of Claudius became an added element in Hamlet's avenging his father's death. Jones tended to reduce the play to the Oedipus complex but he, like Prescott, was a sober and responsible student. Neither Prescott nor Jones allowed his general acceptance of Freudian theory to warp his judgment or induce him to use terminology glibly. Albert Mordell, who wrote *The Erotic Motive in Literature* (1919) was less careful. His manner and tone are suggested by this passage:

> The influence of the writer's attitude towards his father or mother appears in his literary work. Stendhal has left us a record of the intense child love he had for his mother; he hated his father. One can see the results of these conditions in his life, work and beliefs. He became an atheist, since people who throw off the influence of their fathers often cast aside also their belief in a universal father. This also explains largely the atheism of Shelley, whose relations with his father were not cordial.

Far too much is made of the Oedipus complex and what Mordell calls the brother-and-sister complex. In terms of the latter, for example, the gentleness, kindliness, and moral tone in Renan's writing are explained as "due to [an] attachment to his sister." And the persistence with which Mordell looks for sexual significance causes him to explain complex poems in a crudely reductive way, as when he says

Shelley's "Ode to the West Wind" is essentially a plea for free love. Mordell succumbed to the excitement of psychoanalytical criticism in a way described by Maxwell Bodenheim in 1922 as being all too common: "Art, philosophy, mysticism—all are dismissed as mere sublimations of the sexual impulse and men write ponderous books in which they frantically attempt to unearth an erotic motive in every kind of literature and art."

Bodenheim's criticism applies to the later work of Ludwig Lewisohn. In this work, especially *Expression in America* (1932), Lewisohn was less preoccupied with political and social questions than he had been during his period with *The Nation*. Lewisohn concentrated on problems, one in particular, that affected the psychological well-being of the individual and was only slightly concerned with the economic, social, and impersonal forces by which, as the Marxist critics would say, the writer is formed. More specifically, Lewisohn concentrated on the ways in which sexual inhibitions had affected the writing of American literature. There is no understanding the quality of a man's style, the degree of his commitment to life, or the intensity of his being, Lewisohn holds, unless one knows what he is sexually. "Sex, contrary to the common uninstructed opinion, is not peripheral and localized, but pervasive. It is like one drop of the most powerful coloring matter in the world dropped into a great jar of colorless water. It tinges every atom of the water." The thesis tends to dominate, to be the central consideration in his history of American literature, but Lewisohn is a perceptive critic. His discussions of James and Sherwood Anderson do not, as is the case with a few of their other critics, concentrate on the psychology of sex at the expense of the question of talent.

The biography *Margaret Fuller* (1920) by Katharine An-

thony is one of the first to make use of psychoanalytic interpretations. Thus Margaret Fuller's dream of following the body of her mother to its grave is explained by Miss Anthony: "She had a primeval murderous wish to attend the funeral of her beloved mother," and of being trampled by horses: "The vision of the trampling horses is an erotic phantasy common among hysterical maidens." Margaret Fuller's marriage to young Assoli, the indigent Italian nobleman, is accounted for in similar terms: "He filled up the place left vacant in her life by her favorite brother Eugene and she restored in his the long cherished maternal image." But the biography, despite its avowed dependence on "modern psychological analysis," is really an attempt to save the reputation of an ardent feminist from a legend "created mainly by unemancipated men."

Van Wyck Brooks wrote perhaps the most influential of the psychoanalytical biographies in which repression, either explicitly sexual or as enforced respectability, played a primary part in the writer's career and in which *a* significant event is made a key to the writer's entire career. *The Ordeal of Mark Twain* (1920) gives a vivid account, as Twain himself had to his biographer, of the deathbed scene of his father at which his mother had made him promise he would not break her heart. The experience was crucial, Brooks said, making it easier for Twain to succumb to the respectability of his later advisers, his wife and his friend Howells. Brooks may well have had hold of a significant episode, but he pushed his thesis too hard by insisting that none of Twain's books was successful and that, free from such repressive conditions, Twain would have been a very great and different kind of writer.

Raymond Weaver's *Herman Melville: Mariner and Mystic* (1920) and Lewis Mumford's *Herman Melville* (1929)

participate in the Brooks tradition of explaining the partial failure of American writers in terms of the debilitating effects of the Gilded Age, but they also introduce the suggestion that sex in Melville's novels and poems is always referred to in a mood of disillusion. In *Pierre,* for example, Mumford reads a period of regression for Melville: "Sex meant marriage; marriage meant a household and a tired wife and children and debts. No wonder he retreated: no wonder his fantasy attached him to a mother who could not surrender, to a half sister who could not bear children." Some years later F. O. Matthiessen admitted that it was evident Melville was "tormented by the ambiguity of sexual relations as they revealed the impossibility of ideal truth," but biographies tend to dissolve the literary work into merely a series of psychoanalytical hunches and guesses. Even a highly trained psychiatrist could make out only a hypothetical case.

But the temptation to explain works of art in terms of the author's sex life was apparently very great. According to Thomas Beer, the preoccupation of Henry Adams with the mechanization of America and with the unity of thirteenth-century Europe is easily explained. Painfully "deprived of a charming wife," Adams began "to discover the sexlessness of American literature," and finally he became "the chivalrous rhapsodist of the medieval Virgin." Beer's *The Mauve Decade* (1926), written for a popular audience, suggests the ease with which the historian or critic could thus account for a writer's most significant work.

One of the most fascinating of these studies is Joseph Wood Krutch's *Edgar Allan Poe—A Study in Genius* (1926). Poe invites psychoanalytical criticism, and it is tempting to move beyond the evidence of the stories and poems themselves to discuss Poe's personal abnormalities. Krutch is

fairly insistent that he has hit upon the source of the abnormalities:

> Poe could not love in the normal fashion and the reason lay or seemed to him to lay [*sic*] in the death of some woman upon whom his desire had irrevocably fixed itself. If we knew who lay behind the doors of that tomb in the ghoul-haunted woodland of Weir, we should know the answer to the greatest riddle of Poe's life.

Even if one is hesitant about accepting Krutch's theory, his general interpretation sets up the contrast between the rational themes, commonplace settings, normal motivations, and the abnormalities of Poe's work.

Houston Peterson in *The Melody of Chaos* (1931) describes Conrad Aiken, the center of the study, thus: "An extreme introvert with a critical turn of mind that is brutally objective, he is well qualified to understand cases of morbid repression, multiple personality and the whole literature of spiritual ambiguity." It is assumed, although not insistently, that Aiken as the favorite child of a beautiful mother developed an Oedipus complex which "turned his longings away from Reality to the dark subjective world of the lyric artist." Much of the book is in a similar vein. If one makes allowance, however, for the exuberance or excesses generated by the period in which it was written, the book is valuable for its account of the self in modern literature, a subject of central importance. Also valuable in its way is Edward Dahlberg's *Do These Bones Live?* (1941). It is a strangely impressive yet perverse book, not a little like the criticism of D. H. Lawrence,[3] in which the critic's own

[3] Studies of Lawrence thus far have been more biographical than critical. Horace Gregory's *Pilgrim of the Apocalypse: A Critical Study of D. H. Lawrence* (1933) is critical, but it does little with Lawrence's preoccupation with sex and nothing with the mother-son relationship. Nor, unlike Maud

message and style always dominate the occasion. The consequence of the denial of the flesh is the theme. Thus, of Hawthorne: "There is not a human pollution in any of his novels. His most evil pages distil an endemic miasma instead of rank protoplasm." Of Poe: "Could Edgar Poe have spoken out of himself, out of remembered nature, as he does in the Letters pooled with anguishing tears and loneliness, he might have uttered a minor faustian tragedy, made a lovely sensual Margaret, instead of lacquering seraphic and sepulchral mannikins who have ventriloquistic shudders, so like the much smaller gothic 'bioloquist' Charles Brockden Brown, lo, the 'Father of the American Novel'!" Dahlberg never considers that his own prophetic vision might be darkening the landscape just a little. But, as E. M. Forster says, it is hard to read a prophet without first suspending one's sense of humor.

More than any other critic of equal stature, Edmund Wilson has employed the psychoanalytical method. Some of his earlier essays, as those on A. E. Housman and Samuel Butler from *The Triple Thinkers* (1938), attempt to relate the life to the work, but in *The Wound and the Bow* (1941) the method is more explicitly psychoanalytical. "Dickens: The Two Scrooges" and "The Kipling that Nobody Read," especially the latter, are brilliant studies. The key to Dickens's fiction is said to be the six months that nine-year-old Dickens spent working in a rat-infested warehouse while his father was in the Marshalsea for debt. "Dickens' seizures in his blacking-bottle days were obviously neurotic symptoms;

Bodkin's *Archetypal Patterns in Poetry* (1934), did Gregory attempt to relate Lawrence's symbols to Jung's primordial images. Hoffman's *Freudianism and the Literary Mind* provides the fullest account of Lawrence's knowledge of and reaction to Freud and Jung and suggests that most likely the final draft of *Sons and Lovers* saw a clarification of the mother-son theme as a result of conversations about Freud which Lawrence had been having.

and the psychologists have lately been telling us that lasting depressions and terror may be caused by such cuttings-short of the natural development of childhood." The shame and humiliation, Dickens himself said, haunted him all his life. Wilson does a good job of relating many of Dickens's subjects, themes, moods, and characters to this experience. Yet, about halfway through the essay Wilson explains the extremes of good and bad, of comic and serious melodrama—with evil characters becoming good and comic characters becoming serious—in terms of Dickens's emotional instability. A page or so later Dickens is revealed as a "victim of a manic-depressive cycle, and a very uncomfortable person." It is certainly true that sweetness and perversity, beneficence and maliciousness, along with other dualisms, run through the novels. But we are not told what the extremes of Dickens's own personality and fictional creations have to do with his original wound, the traumatic experience of his childhood—whether, that is, there was one wound or two. The Kipling study, which is more consistent, also depends on a childhood trauma. Kipling and his sister were mistreated by an aunt with whom they lived for a number of years; Kipling was physically weak, had had very bad eyesight, was abused by his schoolmates, suffered a nervous breakdown which was accompanied by hallucinations, and so forth. As a young man he was caught between allegiance to the English and to the Hindus. He solved his conflicts personally by siding outright with authority, with the strict schoolmaster, and with the imperialist. For all his gifts of imagination and craftsmanship, Kipling writes a fiction, especially after his initial successes, that lacks tension, fundamental conflict—"because Kipling would never face one." Wilson's thesis sounds plausible in that it explains not only Kipling's wound but what was wrong with his bow! The essay on

Edith Wharton almost falls outside the plan of the book. Her nervous breakdown early in her marriage is mentioned, but she is treated merely as the historian of her own world. She "is a brilliant example of the writer who relieves an emotional strain by denouncing his generation." Her relationship with Walter Berry and her conflicts between love and marital obligation (this is suggested by her fiction), which a wound-and-bow theory invites, are not discussed. Sensitivity to suffering, a kind of masochism, as well as a general exhilaration with physical well-being, seems to be the key to Wilson's discussion of Hemingway. There are a number of shrewd observations in the essay, but the thesis is not probed and developed with any care. The piece on *Finnegans Wake,* "The Dream of H. C. Earwicker," does not attempt to psychoanalyze Joyce. It calls attention to the Freudian themes and furnishes, especially considering that it appeared shortly after the book, an able general account of its subject and method.

The final chapter of *The Wound and the Bow* is an examination of the Philoctetes myth as a figurative expression of the theory that the suffering and neurosis of the artist are the cause and subject matter of his art. Philoctetes's suppurating wound makes him offensive and he is exiled, but he has a bow that never misses its mark. Only Philoctetes can use the bow. Before there can be art there must be the suffering artist. Philoctetes, after being accepted by his fellows, is eventually cured. He retains the bow and with it serves his people.

D. H. Lawrence said that a writer "sheds his sickness" in his books. Freud, in his early work at least, believed the artist serves the pleasure principle by creating fantasies. And Adler was sure that all artists suffer from a sense of inferiority. There is obviously something to the theory, if

only that artists, like anyone else, will write about what interests them, and that, being sensitive, they will suffer perhaps more often or more intensely than their fellows. Yet not all neurotics are artists, and there must be many artists who are not especially troubled by their own or the world's problems.

Even if accepted in its broad outlines, the Philoctetes myth has certain limitations. For example, the bow (his art) continues its effectiveness after the wound of Philoctetes is healed, and he had had the bow before the wound. In the myth there seems to be no causal connection between the wound and the bow. And, as implied above, the presence of a wound does not assure the possession of a bow.

Lionel Trilling's "Art and Neurosis," the fullest and most intelligent discussion of the entire question, suggests that the wound-and-bow theory, which implies mental illness, is misleading. "The reference to the artist's neurosis," he writes, "tells us something about the material on which the artist exercises his powers, and even something about his reasons for bringing his powers into play, but it does not tell us anything about the source of his power, it makes no causal connection between them." Then Trilling makes this significant point: There "is in fact no causal connection between them. For, still granting that the poet is uniquely neurotic, what is surely not neurotic, what indeed suggests nothing but health, is his power of using his neuroticism. He shapes his fantasies, he gives them social form and reference." Following Freud, Trilling points out that everyone, including the non-artist and the half artist, has neurotic symptoms. Therefore, neurosis "cannot uniquely account for genius." Finally, he objects to the conception of the neurosis as a wound because it suggests passivity rather than a

conflict, which leads to control of or coming to terms with whatever is causing the conflict.[4]

Wilson's "The Ambiguity of Henry James" in *The Triple Thinkers* has begotten a little library of criticism devoted to *The Turn of the Screw*.[5] Edna Kenton first suggested that it is not the children but the governess who is haunted by the ghosts, but Wilson much more explicitly made her "a neurotic case of sex repression," tabulated the Freudian symbols, and tried to establish that the story can be read either as a ghost story or as the story of a neurotic governess with hallucinations. Mark Van Doren, Allen Tate, and others have disagreed with the Freudian interpretation, and Robert Heilman's *"The Turn of the Screw* as Poem"[6] attempts to show that the meanings imbedded in the imagery of the narrative establish it as a ghost story concerned with the conflict of good and evil. Wilson himself subsequently decided that the Freudian analysis is at least dubious, but two other critics, Leon Edel, who edited *Ghostly Tales of Henry James* (1948), and Matthiessen in *American Renaissance* incline toward the belief that James was deliberately—Wilson thought it unintentionally—ambiguous. Edel points out that James probably knew a good deal about the psychical researches of J. M. Charcot and of his own brother William; that all the changes of phrases in the New York edition are from the governess's

4 A number of articles have been written about this subject, among them these: W. H. Auden, "Psychology and Art Today," *The Arts Today*, ed. Geoffrey Grigson (London, John Lane, 1935); R. G. Davis, "Art and Anxiety," *Partisan Review*, XII (Summer 1945), 310–21; William Barrett, "Writers and Madness," *Partisan Review*, XIV (Winter 1947), 5–22.

5 For a list of these articles, see Glenn A. Reed, "Another Turn on James's 'The Turn of the Screw,'" *American Literature*, XX (January 1949), 413–23.

6 *Forms of Modern Fiction*, ed. William Van O'Connor (Minneapolis, Univ. of Minnesota Press, 1948).

reporting to *feeling,* not what she *observed* but what she *felt;* and that James published the story with *The Aspern Papers,* a story of curiosity that becomes a mania, and *The Liar,* about a pathological liar. As evidence of the deliberate ambiguity Matthiessen quoted this sentence from the Preface: "Make [the reader] *think* the evil, make him think it for himself, and you are released from weak specifications." Even though one may not be able to establish the legitimacy of the psychological interpretation with any conclusiveness, it teases the reader's mind and enriches the story.

ii

Despite all the general interest in the method, the number of good psychoanalytical essays is relatively small. Among these is the excellent "Prince Hal's Conflict" by Ernst Kris,[7] a good piece on Stendhal by William Troy,[8] a highly perceptive study of James, "The Ghost of Henry James," by Saul Rosenzweig,[9] and a study of the early poems of Yeats, "A Psychoanalytical Study," by M. I. Seiden.[10] One of the few books consistently employing a psychoanalytical method is Roy Basler's *Sex, Psychology and Literature* (1948).

Basler's book is a little more modest in tone than are most such studies. He sees Freudian psychology as "a key," not "the key," to a critical understanding of literature, and he examines only poems which invite such treatment. He makes explicit the nature of Christabel's sexual enchantment with Geraldine, gives a fairly detailed account of the psychosis of the hero of Tennyson's *Maud,* makes clear that

7 *Psychoanalytic Quarterly,* XVII (October 1948), 489–506.
8 *Partisan Review,* IX (January-February 1942), 3–22.
9 *Partisan Review,* XI (Fall 1944), 436–55.
10 *Accent,* VI (Spring 1946), 178–90.

Poe was preoccupied with the *idée fixe* as a persistent theme, and does a convincing analysis of Prufrock as a man desirous of living in his precious dreamworld. The latter is probably the best of his studies. Nor does Basler attempt to psychoanalyze the poets. He restricts attention to the literary works themselves.

The Demon Lover (1949) by Arthur Wormhoudt seems almost a parody of the psychoanalytical method. The thesis derives from the "breast complex" theory of Edmund Bergler, who subsequently published *The Writer and Psychoanalysis* (1950). Words and milk are said to become identified by the infant because "oral and gustatory sensations" are confused by the gradually developing psyche, and so on. Eventually we are informed that the Muses are "pregenital mother symbols," the mountains breast symbols, and the springs are milk which issues from the breast. Such unchecked fancy makes the medieval bestiary writers seem lacking in ingenuity. The oracular tone of Bergler and the bland assurance of Wormhoudt that he is serving objective fact are almost frightening. The kind and degree of their excesses are undoubtedly rare; but the psychoanalytical critics appear to be especially susceptible to an egregious self-assurance.

The study of the anxieties and neuroses as well as the complex symbolism in Franz Kafka's fiction obviously invites psychoanalytical interpretations. A volume such as *The Kafka Problem* (1946), edited by Angel Flores, contains interpretations which account in a convincing way for what would otherwise remain obscure and difficult. Inevitably, however, certain critics become rigorously orthodox, working out a one-to-one relationship between Freudian symbols and each element in a story. Charles Neider in *The Frozen Sea* (1948), for example, flatly denies the presence of

any religious symbolism in Kafka's work and proceeds with a strictly Freudian interpretation. To take one quotation:

> A castle, like village, town, citadel and fortress, is a symbol of woman and mother. A count is a father symbol, like emperor, king and president. The count's permission is necessary for K. to enter the castle; i.e., the father's permission is necessary for the son to possess his mother incestuously. Land too is a symbol of woman and mother, as indicated by the expression "mother earth." A land surveyor is therefore one who measures the mother—the incestuous implication is obvious. . . .

Such a rigorous account assumes, first, that the Freudian hypotheses are invariably correct and, second, that Kafka, accepting them entirely, deliberately employed the appropriate symbolism down to its last detail. On the other hand, when the critic is not rigid but capable, as Kenneth Burke is, of grasping and applying the complexities of Freud's view of the mind, there is danger of deviousness and of gratuitous ingenuity. For example, Burke's preoccupation with Coleridge's sense of guilt causes him to see the Pilot's boy in *The Ancient Mariner* "as a scapegoat for the poet alone," a "vessel for drawing off the most malign aspects of the curse that afflicts the 'greybeard loon.' " This identification, Burke continues, enabled him to understand the phrase "silly buckets," which has been variously interpreted. "The structure [of the poem] became more apparent: the 'loon' —atic Mariner begins his cure from drought under the aegis of a moon that causes a silly rain, thence by synecdoche to silly buckets, and the most malignant features of this problematic cure are transferred to the Pilot's boy who doth crazy go." But the phrase can be accounted for easily enough in its context without worrying the problem in such fashion.

The influence of psychoanalysis on literature has been very great. In Freud, Jung, and others, writers in the romantic tradition found a sanction for their concern with the

hidden elements in the human mind, confused motives, perversity, and rationalizations. The novel and poetry have learned how to treat receding consciousness, to investigate the ways of association, the ambiguities of language, and to see the work of art as in some ways analogous to the dream. Certain writers have gone even further and accepted and used some of the more debatable theories—the Oedipus complex, the search for the father, retreat to childhood and the womb, or the images and symbols held to be primordial in the collective unconscious. William York Tindall, for instance, has pointed out the specific indebtednesses of Joyce to Freud and also suggested that D. H. Lawrence employed the primitive myths and symbols of Quetzalcoatl in *The Plumed Serpent* after reading Jung. Even when writers are not consciously indebted to specific works in psychoanalysis they are likely to have a secondhand or cultural indebtedness for the obvious reason that such concepts and terms as compulsion, neuroticism, complex, repression, and libido have become current and have won general acceptance.

Gestalt psychology has, for the most part, been a peripheral concern. One of the few critics who have referred to it is Herbert J. Muller, who has called it a "congenial psychology" for students of literature. In *Modern Fiction* (1937) he related it to impressionists like Lawrence and Virginia Woolf, pointing out that in *Mrs. Dalloway,* for example, the latter "stressed all the disorderly particulars, the discontinuous 'quanta' of experience, that had been blurred by the generalizations of the realist" school. Gestalt psychology, Muller says in his fuller account in *Science and Criticism* (1943), helps to restore the prestige of concrete, immediate sense experience. The phenomena with which the artist deals correspond with the "kind of reality conceived by scientists today." If this psychology, however, encourages us to grasp the work as a whole in its "spread and

pervasion of meaning" it should also warn us against abstracting properties—the didactic, the grotesque, or the romantic—and insisting on them as invariables. Muller also says that an unsympathetic view of the wholeness of a writer's work can "raise havoc with excessive writers like Dostoyevsky, Lawrence, Proust." Their excesses are often inseparable from their peculiar strength.

Susanne Langer in *Philosophy in a New Key* (1942) pointed out that Gestalt psychology explains the *why* of art expression and thereby makes untenable the assumption that a poem or piece of fiction has philosophical significance only when adequately paraphrased. Import is implicit in the particular form, "*the way the assertion is made,* and this involves the sound, the tempo, the aura of associations of the words, the long or short sequences of ideas, the wealth or poverty of transient imagery that contains them, the sudden arrest of fantasy by pure fact, or of familiar fact by sudden fantasy, the suspense of literal meaning by a sustained ambiguity resolved by a long-awaited key word, and the unifying, all-embracing artifice of rhythm."

Jung's concern with a "collective unconscious" bearing within it recurrent images (for example, devils, heroes, and gods), and archetypal patterns (guilt and expiation) has helped to furnish literary criticism with an even larger framework of psychoanalytical theory. Maud Bodkin in *Archetypal Patterns in Poetry* explained that while she accepts most of Freud's theories she feels that "the concentration of Freudian writers upon the physical relation of parent and child cuts off [an] equally valid viewpoint," namely, the tremendous influence upon the child or individual of "the community and the stored achievement." In other words Miss Bodkin would study mythical patterns in literature. Earlier, of course, there had been Jessie Weston's

influential *From Ritual to Romance* (1920), a work indebted to English anthropological studies. American criticism has been much slower and much more tentative about such borrowings.

William Troy and Francis Fergusson were among the first to perceive that valuable critical insights might lie in a study of ritual and myth. Troy's articles and reviews have not been collected in book form, and therefore it is difficult to see clearly what the essentials of his position are. "The Lawrence Myth"[11] treats the phenomenon of the Lawrence cult: "the persecutions and humiliations, the journeys by water, the agonies in the wilderness, the betrayals and final apotheosis at the hands of his disciples." Troy is concerned with the view Lawrence took of himself as the "reincarnation of the dying god," of Dionysius, and of the effect it had upon his art; Lawrence would not bring his emotions and his beliefs to rest in aesthetic form because: "As soon as I have finished a mental conception, *a full idea even of myself,* then dynamically I am dead." "Lawrence spent his entire career combatting what he believed was a undue stress [on scientific rationalism] at the expense of the animal nature in man." And the resulting myth has objective value. "Thomas Mann: Myth and Reason"[12] gives a detailed and convincing reading of *Death in Venice* as initiation ritual and the Joseph novels as a complex social myth. "To Mann," Troy says, "must be credited the abundantly fertile suggestion that only in the myth do we get the dialectical process working itself out on the whole ground of human reality. In the myth the interplay is between the constructions of the mind and the immediate presentation of experience at any given moment of history, between the principle

11 *Partisan Review,* IV (January 1938), 3–13.

12 *Partisan Review,* V (June 1938), 24–32.

of form and the principle of life." Troy has written in somewhat similar terms about the fiction of James, Joyce, and Fitzgerald.

Francis Fergusson in *The Idea of the Theater* (1949), which may well be the best volume of drama criticism published in its generation, has studied *Oedipus the King* as ritual drama and has commented on ritualistic elements in *Hamlet* and other plays. Ritual and myth as parts of the meaningful structure of a drama are considered throughout the volume but probably nowhere more effectively than in the chapter on *Hamlet,* where an account of the rituals helps to demonstrate the nature of the play's unity and to avoid the various reductive theories which lead to the conclusion that the play is a failure structurally.

Philip Wheelwright and Mark Schorer have also written instructive essays on myth. Wheelwright's "Poetry, Myth and Reality" in *The Language of Poetry* (1942) regards the loss of myth as the "most devastating loss humanity can suffer." Myth consciousness, he argues, "is the bond that unites men both with one another and with the unplumbed Mystery from which mankind is sprung and without reference to which the radical significance of things goes to pot." Schorer's essay, a chapter in *William Blake* (1946), makes clear the dependence of the poet on myth: "The myths of one age are better than those of another; that is, some myths include more of the total experience of a culture than others, and in the great ages, ages of amplitude and spaciousness, they include everything. Then poetry attains its full stature: its vitality is not lessened by shifts of sensibility, because it has achieved density, strata of various meaning." Cleanth Brooks had treated this subject, in a somewhat narrower focus, in his chapter on Yeats in *Modern Poetry and the Tradition* (1939). These essays clarify the problem of

belief in relation to poetry as well as telling us a good deal about the general character of English poetry in its various periods. There are also many suggestive comments and insights about myth during the Enlightenment in Louise Bogan's "The Secular Hell," printed in *Chimera* (Spring 1946), the issue in which Troy, Jacques Barzun, Joseph Campbell, and others discussed myth. Campbell's essay discusses *Finnegans Wake,* relating it to Freud and Jung, as "symbolic archetypes of mythology and metaphysics, familiar to mankind for milleniums and throughout the world." One's sense of the nature of myth and the comic grandeur of Joyce's imagination are greatly enlarged by the essay.

Richard Chase in articles, a book on Melville, and especially in *Quest for Myth* (1949) holds that "myth is only art," a certain kind of literature, and is therefore incompetent to perform the duties of science and philosophy. He does not believe there ever was a "mythopoeic age," and he deplores the attempt to make myth autonomous, a "religion without calling it a religion." Myth cannot enable us to perceive reality as the rational objectivity of the mind perceives it. Myth does not belong with the intellectual, the scientific disciplines of history, anthropology, psychoanalysis, and philosophy. Chase seems to be saying that myth is an imaginative statement which evokes a sense of the uncanny and portentous in "the crises of birth, infancy, initiation, marriage, death and so on." The marriage of Charles and Emma Bovary is not mythical, but Edmund Spenser's *Prothalamion* and John Donne's *Epithalamion* are. "And they are mythical because they contain epiphanies of the Uncanny." Chase, quite understandably, does not want the hard-won methods of the objective disciplines to be relaxed. But he does not face the issue that the "uncanny" element is partly the result of coming to terms with the "crisis," con-

trolling mysterious forces by *imagining, asserting,* and *accepting* a way of belief or action. Spenser and Donne, with the strength of a complex body of Christian tradition behind them, *assert* the beauty, loveliness, and sanctity of marriage. The symbols, the rhythms, and the drama of the two poems give the assertion its luminous quality, its "epiphanies of the Uncanny." The rational disciplines can be employed to criticize the weight of the assertion, to modify it. They cannot, unless we are to have a science of the imagination and perhaps not even then, supersede the myth itself.

Valuable as these various studies of myth have been, they rarely give the reader a sense of completed, rounded knowledge. Even those works written by the anthropologists and professional students of myth seem in part elusive and tenuous. Perhaps the difficulty, as Joyce said of his own fiction, is not in the author's thought but is inherent in the subject. This seems to be true of psychological theory generally. Despite the relevance of psychological theory to literature, literary criticism with a psychological or psychoanalytical emphasis has not been conspicuously successful.[13]

Quite possibly one of the reasons for the paucity of good studies is that few critics ever get beyond the amateur stage in their knowledge of psychoanalysis.[14] Psychoanalysts-turned-critic, on the other hand, are too often insensitive to

[13] This is as true of English as it is of American criticism. I. A. Richards once attempted to treat the poem as though it were a complicated mechanism with the function of arousing psychological states and bringing them to rest. Even with the presence of diagrams and the scientific air of the discussion, little or nothing came from this part of his criticism. Herbert Read wrote a fairly interesting account of the dream element in one of his own poems, and William Empson interpreted Alice's trip into Wonderland as a Freudian dream. It may be that his knowledge of Freudian theory had earlier helped Empson, as well as Robert Graves and Laura Riding before him, to hit upon the phenomenon of ambiguity.

[14] Three recent critical biographies depend on the psychoanalytical method. They are: John Berryman's *Stephen Crane,* Newton Arvin's *Herman Melville,* and Irving Howe's *Sherwood Anderson.*

aesthetic and literary values and are inclined to treat imaginative characters, who "live" only in relation to the theme, plot, and other characters, as though they were actual case studies. There is also a tendency in psychoanalytical criticism to make the writer a passive agent, to overemphasize the part played by his unconscious. Too often a novelist's characters are seen as swarming in a ready-made fantasy, or the poet's lines are seen as coming to him almost as automatic writing. We have already observed the tendency of psychoanalytical biographers to equate a literary work with the psychological hurt (or wound) of the author as well as to state its meaning solely in psychological terms. Frederick J. Hoffman in "Psychoanalysis and Literary Criticism"[15] warns that the critic "certainly ought not to think of art *in terms* of neurosis; in so doing he is confusing genesis with the work itself, or considering the work as justified only in terms of the circumstances in which it was produced."

Modern literature is intimately related, directly and indirectly, to modern psychological movements. Freud, as Trilling has pointed out, "has not merely naturalized poetry; he has discovered its status as a pioneer settler and he sees it as a method of thought." Freud's principles are broad, "clearly in the line of . . . classic tragic realism." Again, Gestalt psychology has helped us to see that literature has its own mode of discourse. Lastly, Jung and other students of myth have told us a good deal about the nature of "meaning" in literature. When the critic respects his own task, literary criticism, he is free to draw upon this impressive body of knowledge and theory.

[15] *American Quarterly*, II (Summer 1950), 144–54.

9

ANALYTICAL CRITICISM

WILLIAM MORTON PAYNE, as we have seen, believing that the concept of evolution would make for a new critical method, had spoken about a new criticism around the turn of the century; Joel Spingarn, finding Croce's doctrine of expressive form equally promising, had written "The New Criticism" in 1910. But the term "new criticism" as used more recently derives from John Crowe Ransom's *The New Criticism* (1941), a volume in which he discusses I. A. Richards, William Empson, T. S. Eliot, Yvor Winters, and a few other critics. The characteristic common to all these latter critics is intensive analysis of the literary work. A designation more useful than "new criticism" would be "analytical criticism."[1]

[1] No relatively brief discussion of this criticism can take into account the many and divergent lines of inquiry which one or another of its practitioners has investigated. Because the bulk of contemporary criticism is so great,

In William Elton's *A Glossary of the New Criticism* (1948) there is a lineal table of contemporary criticism listing Pound, Eliot, and the Southern Regionalists in direct descent from Coleridge; and Richards, Burke, and Empson in direct descent from Jeremy Bentham. There are also collateral influences, with the British critics Richards (who is also indebted to Coleridge) and Empson influencing Brooks and Warren, and Yvor Winters being at once in the debt of Burke and Eliot. But if one remembers that John Stuart Mill called Coleridge and Bentham the two seminal minds of the nineteenth century, the table, although interesting, merely implies that contemporary criticism is involved in the philosophical, sociological, psychological, and aesthetic currents of its time.

The interests of T. E. Hulme, who is commonly held to have influenced Pound,[2] Eliot, and others in the years immediately prior to World War I, may be taken as representative. In his *Speculations,* published posthumously, there are dicta, sometimes worked out, sometimes not, about scientism, romanticism, the structure of poetry, and the need for a system of religious values. Hulme discussed the breakup of religious belief and the awful burden thereby thrown on the individual poet to establish not only his own scale of values but the vehicles for giving them literary expression. He attempted to define the contemporary sensibility and to help "make conscious the 'standards' " in it. Like many another critic, Hulme was concerned with the

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there are many works which must be left out of the present discussion, which is concerned to point out merely the dominant lines and influential texts. It is also necessary to introduce such British critics as Hulme, Richards, and Empson. The bibliographies appended to M. D. Zabel's *Literary Opinion in America* and to Robert Stallman's *Critiques,* anthologies of contemporary criticism, list hundreds of articles and books.

2 For Hulme's influence on Pound, see the latter's *Pavannes and Divisions.*

way cultural developments are manifest in language and literary forms.

I. A. Richards, whose *Principles of Literary Criticism* (1924) was equally influential with Eliot's *The Sacred Wood* (1920), has been greatly concerned with the role of literature in a scientific-minded world. In *Science and Poetry* (1926) he discussed as pseudo statements those statements which are not verifiable in scientific terms but which satisfy our emotional needs. Poetic statements were useful but not true. The later Richards of *Coleridge on the Imagination* (1935) and *Philosophy of Rhetoric* (1936) got away from the notion that poetry although valuable in ordering our minds is irrelevant to the real world. In the volume on Coleridge he says, *"Poetry is the completest mode of utterance."* He places poetic language in the realm of myth, with no such pejorative connotations as those clinging to the term "pseudo." Myths, he adds, "are those hard realities in projection, their symbolic recognition, coordination and acceptance. . . . Without his mythologies man is only a cruel animal without a soul . . . a congeries of possibilities without order or aim."

ii

Eliot too, of course, has been preoccupied with literature in relation to its own generation and the generations preceding it. His first book, *The Sacred Wood,* ended for many, particularly for younger readers, the era of Victorian literary standards. He became a symbol of an intellectual criticism that drew on the scholarship of various fields as well as a knowledge of Sanskrit, Greek, Latin, Italian, and French. For many years he was the leader of the younger generation, ignored by those whose tastes had been formed before

World War I and occasionally attacked by those who misunderstood the pessimism of *The Waste Land,* as well as by those who disapproved of his growing religious interests, his politics, or his unsettling of Victorian literary standards. Recently the controversies have been less heated, but his work continues to be studied and to be influential.

Writing the Preface in 1928 for a new edition of *The Sacred Wood,* Eliot stated that the volume had as its center "the integrity of poetry" and that he was much indebted to Rémy de Gourmont. In the volume appear "Tradition and the Individual Talent" (which epitomizes many of the themes that run through his work), pieces on the art of criticism, as well as brief studies of Dante, Marlowe, Shakespeare, Jonson, Massinger, Blake, Swinburne, and others. Many of the subjects which recur in his later work are here: the objective correlative, the impersonal nature of art, the need for a sense of history, a pointing to the most usable parts of the literature of the past, and the meaning of tradition.[3]

Homage to John Dryden (1924), which included essays on Marvell, the metaphysical poets, and Dryden, established even more clearly Eliot's belief that the most usable part of the English literary tradition was the literature of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Subsequently it has become evident that Eliot's criticism was not entirely, in Arnold's sense, *disinterested.* His discovery of certain poets and his comments about them were grist for himself as a working poet. There are immediately evident connections between statements in "The Metaphysical Poets" and his own practice in *The Waste Land.* There are connections

[3] For these and other terms and questions discussed by Eliot, see Robert W. Stallman's *The Critic's Notebook* (Minneapolis, Univ. of Minnesota Press, 1950).

between "Song for Simeon," "Journey of the Magi," as well as "Gerontion" and the title essay in *For Lancelot Andrewes* (1928). And there are connections between *Dante* (1929) and *Ash Wednesday*. In his Milton lecture, delivered several times in the United States in 1947 and published in *Sewanee Review,* Eliot explained his earlier playing-up of the metaphysicals and playing-down of Milton. In the 1920's one of the principles stressed by Pound and Eliot was that poetry should have the virtues of prose, that "the subject-matter and the imagery of poetry should be extended to objects related to the life of a modern man or woman." In neither respect would the study of Milton have helped their contemporaries. Eliot concluded the lecture by saying, "it now seems to me that poets are sufficiently removed from Milton, and sufficiently liberated from his reputation, to approach the study of his work without danger, and with profit to their poetry and to the English language." In "The Function of Criticism" in *The Sacred Wood,* Eliot stated that "the poetic critic is criticizing poetry in order to create poetry." In other words, Eliot's earlier criticism records the growth of his own mind and the development of his sensibility at the same time that it records the direction of one of the most significant lines of development in modern poetry and criticism.

The method of his criticism is less easy to characterize. First and foremost, he requires the co-operation of his reader. He analyzes and compares. Quite often Eliot's own comments, in a restricted and transparent style, simply prepare the reader for a long quotation. The reader is obliged to engage himself with the passage in order to relate it to what Eliot has said. That this is his intention seems to be indicated in another sentence from "The Function of Criticism": "In matters of great importance the critic must not

coerce and he must not make judgements of worse and of better. He must simply elucidate: the reader will form the correct judgement for himself." The occasionally cryptic expressions, according to his own statement in *Homage to John Dryden,* are intentional. Certain notions presented as cryptograms would, if expressed directly, "be destined to immediate obloquy, followed by perpetual oblivion." He generally uses a historical method, not in the sense of establishing the milieu of a given work but by drawing upon poems of various periods in order to distinguish the character as well as the level of excellence of the given work. In his later criticism, as in *The Use of Poetry and the Use of Criticism* (1933) and *After Strange Gods* (1934), he is likely to be closer to the method of Arnold than to an aesthetic emphasis or an analytical method.

iii

Arnold, of course, was preoccupied with the culture of Victorian England and tended to see literary works as they related to it. He was able to perceive many of the qualities that differentiated one writer from another, but he rarely discussed these differences in other than moral, social, or cultural terms. Samuel Johnson, on the other hand, was much more likely to focus attention not only on moral earnestness but also on metaphor, diction, metrics, and so forth—in other words, on form. But it is probably Samuel Taylor Coleridge who furnishes the most characteristic example of the method and considerations which recur in the new criticism, especially in the study of "Venus and Adonis" in *Biographia Literaria.* He treats of imagination as it relates to versification and the ability to reduce a multitude of

feelings to their proper proportion in relation to the total unity of the work; dissociation of the literary work from its origins in the writer's own life, so that the work, as Eliot has demanded, lives impersonally and with its own kind of wholeness; dramatization, or as James would say, rendering not reporting;[4] union of "creative power and intellectual energy," or as we say more commonly now, the union of thought and feeling; complexity in the sense that one perceives "the flux and reflux of the mind in all its subtlest thoughts" and in the sense that imagery, versification, tone, and other things contribute in the most minute ways to the dominant feeling and thematic lines unifying the work.

Richards and Hulme are both indebted to Coleridge. So too are later critics like Herbert Read and Kenneth Burke. In fact, Coleridge is so much a part of the preconceptions in contemporary criticism that there is probably no critic who is not greatly in his debt. In this sense, then, the new criticism is not *new*—it is a continuation of nineteenth-century English criticism. It is undoubtedly more intensive than Coleridge's. And it is undoubtedly new in that it borrows from contemporary anthropology, philosophy, and psychology—just as Coleridge borrowed from German philosophy. However, it is hardly just to consider contemporary critics members of a literary guild. One might think of T. S. Eliot (at least in his earlier work), William Empson, R. P. Blackmur, Robert Penn Warren, Cleanth Brooks, and John Crowe Ransom as being in agreement about most of their critical standards. Undoubtedly there is a considerable body of agreement among them, but anyone reading through Ransom's *The New Criticism* will also be struck by the extent of their disagreements. Ransom's theory, most neatly

[4] In praising "Venus and Adonis," Coleridge said, "You seem to be told nothing but to see and hear everything."

expressed in "Criticism as Pure Speculation,"[5] that much of the concrete detail of the poem is to be looked upon as interesting and pleasant in its own right but irrelevant to the logical or prose meaning of the poem, is not evident in the work of these other critics; some of them are explicitly in disagreement with it. *The Anatomy of Nonsense* (1943) offers abundant evidence that Yvor Winters is in very considerable disagreement not merely with Ransom's theory but with that of most of their contemporaries.

A simple way of demonstrating the diversity in method among contemporary critics is to compare the work of R. P. Blackmur and Kenneth Burke. Blackmur's criticism is eclectic, indebted to Eliot, Richards, Empson, Burke, and others and is perhaps impossible to label easily. Like James, whose prefaces he has edited, he has insisted on the high value of art. And, as witness his work in *The Double Agent* (1935) and *The Expense of Greatness* (1940), he has insisted on arduous labor in criticism. He wants the critic "constantly to be confronted with examples of poetry" for the practical purpose of helping readers to understand its meaning and value. In explicating a poem by Wallace Stevens or Hart Crane he explores all possible meanings in a word in terms of its context. Ransom opens his account of *The New Criticism* by presenting Blackmur's analysis of a poem by Emily Dickinson as a distinguished example of the illumination possible as the result of close and imaginative reading. Blackmur's readings are usually detailed and subtle, but too often his prose is unnecessarily contorted and difficult. In staying close to the specific work of literature or to the work of a specific writer, Blackmur typifies the practice of many contemporary critics. Burke, on the other hand, is

[5] *The Intent of the Critic,* ed. Donald Stauffer (Princeton, N. J., Princeton Univ. Press, 1941).

more characteristic of the movement in its liking for critical terminology.

In his later books like *A Grammar of Motives* (1945) and *A Rhetoric of Motives* (1950), Burke is a theoretician of a kind almost unique among literary critics. Aside from whatever values Burke's "dramatism," as he calls his generating principle, may have in settling or precluding the quarrels between the positivist-minded and their critics over the claims of poetry or the other arts to be called "knowledge," his critical observations are usually shrewd and sometimes transferable to other contexts. In "Musicality in Verse" from *Philosophy of Literary Form* (1941), for instance, he says there is a "concealed alliteration" in Coleridge's "bathed by the mist" because *b* and *b* are "close phonetic relatives" of *m*. " 'B-b-the-b-' would be blunt. But in deflecting the third member from a *b* to an *m*, the poet retains the same phonetic theme, while giving us a variation upon the theme." In "Caldwell: Maker of Grotesques," from the same volume, Burke furnishes clues that plausibly explain some of the effects Caldwell frequently manages. Caldwell's characters, Burke says, are to real people as deracinated frogs are to whole frogs. What they lack in humanity the reader supplies. "When the starved grandmother in *Tobacco Road* lies dying, with her face on the ground into the soil, and no one shows even an onlooker's interest in her wretchedness, we are prodded to anguish. When these automata show some bare inkling of sociality, it may seem like a flash of ultimate wisdom." With this as a beginning, one could read much of Caldwell with an increased critical awareness. Burke is hard reading for the most part, however, because he is working out, as he says, a "theory of the criticism of books (a theory that should be applicable, *mutatis*

mutandis, to any specific cases)." When he has completed his work, much that now appears scattered and piecemeal will probably be more coherent and readily useful.

Such differences in belief and method could be documented at length. On the other hand, it should be noted that most contemporary critics do attempt to analyze the literary work carefully and in detail. Despite the varying approaches implied by a critic's emphasis on texture, tension, ambiguity, expressive form, pseudo reference, paradox, irony, or other such terms,[6] each critic is attempting to establish a body of definable criteria. Each is concerned with developing useful terms and techniques so that the reader may be able to explore the complex parts of the literary work and to make some attempt to evaluate its worth.

There has been a good deal of attention paid in recent years to what W. K. Wimsatt and M. C. Beardsley, in a widely read article, called "the intentional fallacy." The general point is that critical inquiries about the meaning of a poem are not to be settled by consulting the intention of the author. (The British critic C. S. Lewis in *The Personal Heresy* disagreed with E. M. W. Tillyard's contention in *Milton* that *Paradise Lost* is about the state of Milton's mind when the poem was written. Lewis says it is about Satan, the angels, and so forth. And he adds: "Every work of art that lasts long in the world is continually taking on . . . colors which the artist neither foresaw nor intended.") In the final section of his essay on *The Ancient Mariner,* "A Poem of Pure Imagination: An Experiment in Reading" (1946), Robert Penn Warren has made a neat summary of most of the issues relevant to the problem of intention. The pri-

[6] See William Elton, *A Glossary of the New Criticism* (Modern Poetry Assoc., 1948).

mary consideration, he concludes, is the criterion of "internal consistency."[7]

Because of the concern of critics with literature as literature, it was inevitable that there would be protests against centering the critical process in the antecedents or origins (the intentional fallacy) of the work as well as against centering it in the psychological reactions or responses to it (the affective fallacy). Wimsatt and Beardsley define the affective fallacy as "a confusion between the poem and its results (what it *is* and what it *does*). . . . It begins by trying to derive the standard of criticism from the psychological effects of the poem and ends in impressionism and relativism." As a result, "the poem itself, as an object of specifically critical judgement, tends to disappear." Examples of affective criticism are Emily Dickinson's remark that in reading genuine poetry she had the sensation that the top of her head was taken off and A. E. Housman's comment about feeling a shiver run down his spine when he recalled a good line of poetry. References to one's feelings in the presence of a literary work will indicate approval or disapproval of some kind, but they are likely to be vague and untranslatable into cognitive terms.

[7] The problem of internal consistency is often raised in conjunction with the problem of multiple interpretations. For instance, in his analysis of *The Tempest*, Mark Van Doren makes these comments: "*The Tempest* does bind up in final form a host of themes with which the author has been concerned. . . . One interpretation of *The Tempest* does not agree with another. And there is a deeper trouble in the truth that any interpretation, even the wildest, is more or less plausible. . . . Any set of symbols, moved close to the play, lights up as in an electric field. Its meaning, in other words, is precisely as rich as the human mind, and it says that the world is what it is. But what the world is cannot be said in a sentence. . . ." Obviously, not every play or poem is as rich in multiple meanings as *The Tempest*. Although it seems likely that a play or poem rich in meanings is likely to last a longer time, it does not seem necessary to add that the presence of multiple meanings, which could be fatuous and confused, is not an indisputable test of literary value. In other words, multiple meaning of itself is no test of greatness.

iv

Many contemporary critics also object to the old dichotomy of content and form. Like the earlier proponents of organic form and expressive form they believe that if the writer alters his expression he has probably affected not merely the appropriateness of his manner or style but the actual meaning of what he has said.

The dichotomy of content and form is seen as a Cartesian and Kantian inheritance. Meaning was commonly held to have a mind-body relationship; rhetorical figures were a dress put upon meaning, like the glove put on the hand. (The attempted divorce of meaning from matter, which was a part of the effort to achieve mathematical unfeeling or objectivity, is discussed in the new criticism usually as a part of the phenomenon labeled by T. S. Eliot the "dissociation of sensibility.") The concern with structure in the new criticism implies some degree of recognition that abstraction emerges from matter. Walter J. Ong in "The Meaning of the 'New Criticism' " (1943) writes: "The understanding is defective if it does not observe that, however they may be handled in mathematics and minor logic, the most abstract abstractions always come to us in ways which reflect their origins out of material existents. . . . Abstractions cannot be preserved and packaged, but are known and used only as they are being drawn in some way or another out of matter." Form or structure is understood not as an envelope or even as a vehicle of the total meaning or total abstraction the writer has made available. As Yeats wrote in "Among School Children":

> O body swayed to music, O brightening glance
> How can we know the dancer from the dance?

I. A. Richards was the first of the contemporary critics to address himself to the problem of "total meaning."

In *Practical Criticism* (1929), Richards considers meter, diction, metaphor, and methods of organizing the poem not as ornaments but as parts of the total meaning. The poet's attitude toward his subject matter is, or should be, implicit in his meter (the use of the spondee, for example, to slow the metrical movement) and in his diction (the "Mister Death" phrase in Cummings's poem on Buffalo Bill, for example, suggests the poet's attitude toward death in this particular context). The meter and the diction are among the factors that produce the tone. The method of organizing the elements in the poem—the incidental ironies, the juxtaposing of unlike elements, the bringing together of homogeneous elements, the use of alliteration, of internal rhyme, and so forth—also contribute to its meaning. The employment of assonance, for example, can enable a poet to echo and stress a word he does not want to repeat explicitly. The interest in total meaning is related to the belief that, ideally, in literature there can be no true separation of form and content.[8]

Empson in *Seven Types of Ambiguity* (1930) extended Richards's work by demonstrating that language tends to be highly connotative, or, in Wheelwright's term, "plurisignificant." The older preconception was that cognitive language implies simple denotation. But Empson took words like "rooky" from *Macbeth* and demonstrated that *all* of the meanings listed by the Arden editors were plausible. If they seemed plausible to the various editors they would have seemed plausible to the first-night audience and would have

[8] Tate in "Longinus" (*Lectures in Criticism*, 1949), however, writes: "The fusion of art and nature, of technique and subject, can never exceed the approximate; the margin of imperfection is always there—nature intractable to art, art unequal to nature."

"seemed plausible to Shakespeare himself, since he was no less sensitive to words than they." (Ong quotes Hugh Blair, a late neoclassic rhetorician whose *Lectures on Rhetoric* was widely studied in the nineteenth century: "Simple expression just makes our ideas known to others; but figurative language, over and above, bestows a particular dress upon that idea; a dress, which both makes it to be remarked and adorns it.") Empson, by showing that the new meaning (tenor) and metaphor (vehicle) interact, thereby suggesting a considerable number of meanings (abstractions), is showing that meanings have their origins in matter, in the concrete. Meaning is involved with structure or form down to the slightest connotation or suggestion.[9]

After Richards and Empson, criticism became much more conscious of the details which carry the meaning of a poem. In "Hardy's Philosophic Metaphors" (*Reason in Madness,* 1941), for example, Tate criticizes "Nature's Questioning" on the ground that its structure, the metaphors, contradicts the working content—Hardy's belief in a deistic unknowable God. Hardy conceives a God who in one place is an automaton, in another an imbecile, but in still another a schoolmaster. "Even in the magnificent image of the 'Godhead dying downwards' we get a certain degree of contradiction between tenor and vehicle: in order to say that God has left the universe to chance after setting it in motion, Hardy can merely present us with the theistic God as blind and imbecile." To this Tate adds: "So generally of Hardy

[9] Critics like Ransom and Tate have stressed particularity or the concrete and insist on its value as a contribution to our knowledge. In myth and archetypal images, in our affective responses to color and image, and in the way our sensibilities are aroused by what Ransom has called "the world's body," they want to find evidence of the ways in which literature gives us a kind of knowledge with which science and philosophy are not concerned. See especially Ransom's "Criticism as Pure Speculation," *The Intent of the Critic,* and "The Literary Criticism of Aristotle," *Lectures in Criticism,* ed. Elliot Coleman (New York, Pantheon, 1949).

it may perhaps be said that his 'philosophy' tends to be a little beyond the range of his feeling: his abstractions are thus somewhat irresponsible, since he rarely shows us the experience that ought to justify them, that would give them substance, visibility, meaning." Similarly, Tate's analyses of verses by Edna St. Vincent Millay, James Thomson, and John Donne in "Tension in Poetry" are examinations into patterns of coherent relationships between denotative and connotative meanings in poetry.

The reader of *The Well Wrought Urn* (1947) will be able to observe that Cleanth Brooks also thinks of the poem as a structure or form in the sense indicated above. He justifies his use of "paradox" and "irony" as the most available terms to suggest the kinds of indirection and the kinds of qualification he has observed to be characteristic of the total statement (or structure) that composes the poem. To substitute a paraphrase, a simplified meaning, is to destroy a part of the structure and therefore a part of the meaning.

Structure or form is also a key concept in the criticism of the novel. A novelist succeeds or fails in terms of his structure. Mark Schorer in "Technique as Discovery"[10] says: "What we need in fiction is a devoted fidelity to every technique which will help us discover and evaluate our subject matter, and more than that, to discover the amplifications of meaning of which our subject matter is capable." To take a specific instance, Robert Penn Warren's Introduction to Hemingway's *A Farewell to Arms* has as its center the concept of an appropriate structure. He explains first what he calls the "characteristic Hemingway 'point' ": this includes comments on the initiates in Hemingway's God-abandoned world, the hard-bitten, disciplined men and

10 *Forms of Modern Fiction*, ed. William Van O'Connor (Minneapolis, Univ. of Minnesota Press, 1948).

women who savor not only drinking and sex but who have a sharp awareness of the physical world and of light and darkness. Drinking and sex are dramatized as forces that dull the sense of *nada* (death and the meaninglessness of the physical world), except that with love a margin of human significance or meaning is achieved, and so forth. The successful Hemingway stories occur, Warren says, when "the essential limitations of his premises" have been accepted. The "failures occur when we feel that Hemingway has not respected the limitations of his premises." In the failures not merely the moral significance or judgment, which we expect to be implied in the action, becomes blurred, but the characteristic irony and the simplified style sound empty and pretentious. Warren's focus, in other words, is on the structure of the stories. Joseph Warren Beach, R. P. Blackmur, M. D. Zabel, and comparable critics, we may assume, look to James and to Conrad, because in them they find artists who have learned how to inform a given subject matter with maximum resonance, meaning, and significance.

v

An argument sometimes directed against such criticism is that by emphasizing form it fails to emphasize moral values and other extra-aesthetic values (content). This argument, again, is dependent upon the old assumption that form and content are readily separable. The analytical critics might, in reply, point to their concern with synthesis, tension, irony, complexity, and inclusiveness, as opposed to the sentimental, the arbitrary, the merely asserted, and so forth. The maturity, as Henry James insisted, with which a moral or political view emerges from the aesthetic form is dependent in part on how well, how impressively, and

how vividly the view has been investigated and refracted through the aesthetic medium. The nature of literary form, demanding as it does stylization, that is, selection of detail, understatement, parody, or the manipulation of characters within a given concrete situation, precludes the possibility of its offering easy rules of thumb for moral, political, or social action. (It may develop that critical studies in the immediate future will furnish further studies of literary conventions and, more particularly, what is implied by the term "stylization.") In the final analysis, statements about the moral or philosophical elements in a literary work are made inside an aesthetic framework, in terms of the structure that makes these elements available for discussion.

Another argument directed against this criticism is that it is antihistorical and antibiographical. The argument probably oversimplifies the attitudes of most of the analytical critics since they, as well as other students of literature, understand with Mme de Staël that there are reciprocal relationships between literature and a society's laws, manners, and religion, just as they understand the general significance of Taine's oversimplified statements about a work of art being the product of "race, milieu, and moment," or just as they understand, with Arnold and Sainte-Beuve, that a writer's work can often be better interpreted in the light of his personal life. Yet most of them would insist that historical studies can be, and frequently have been, carried on in such a fashion that they become almost divorced from any significant concern with the values of literature as literature. They would also insist that scholarship divorced from an aesthetic criticism will fall into the genetic fallacy, will attempt to explain a piece of literature not in terms of what it is but in terms of its social or biographical origins.

In their *Theory of Literature* (1949), René Wellek and

Austin Warren have mediated these arguments by treating the poem, or literary work, as a thing in itself, as unique but also with characteristics common to its genre, and as having persistent as well as shifting meanings depending upon the audience and historical context in which it is read. "A poem, we have to conclude, is not an individual experience or a sum of experiences, but only a potential cause of experiences. . . . Thus the real poem must be conceived as a structure of norms, realized only partially in the actual experience of its many readers." They discuss the division of the literary work into such factors as sound, meaning, character, setting, and point of view, each factor having its subordinate considerations and each interrelated with the other factors. It is true, they admit, that each work of art has unique aspects, but to overstress uniqueness invites complete critical relativism and an indifference to the similarities and common elements that would make it possible to discuss not merely genre but literature in general. "The work of art, then, appears as an object of knowledge *sui generis*. . . ." Wellek and Warren admit that the *Iliad* as understood by the Greeks is not identical with the *Iliad* we are capable of understanding. Nonetheless, there must be a "substantial identity of 'structure' which has remained the same throughout the ages." Again, not all the viewpoints in terms of which the "structure" is seen will be equally capable of grasping it most meaningfully. Therefore, some "hierarchy of viewpoints," a criticism of the grasp of norms, is implied in the concept of the "adequacy of interpretation." This dependence on a "system of norms" more or less completely realized by various generations of readers (as well as by individuals) would avoid the extremes of absolutism and relativism. It would seem to follow also that one might, after all, by knowing a good deal about the

potentialities of literary form or structure be able to say that particular generations of poets or novelists or dramatists held viewpoints that enabled them to make excellent or relatively poor use of their medium.

vi

The job of the critic is to help us perceive the nature and worth of the literary work. It is not his function to offer us coherent systems of philosophy, coherent theories of the nature of language, or even ideological systems that include accounts of poetry as a substitute for religion and the relation of the poet to the economic order. He can use all the information he can get, but he can employ his knowledge, as a critic, only insofar as it is relevant to the particular work or works he is discussing and attempting to make more available to the reader. Occasionally someone offers to subsume the study of literature under sociology—which would mean the end of the study of literature as an art. It would be ironic if a few zealots in criticism managed to raise a complex edifice composed of interrelated lines of knowledge of philosophy, anthropology, and linguistics that was so massive that the literary work beneath it became merely an excuse for the superstructure. Almost everyone in the twentieth century is looking for a kind of knowledge that will be as a Second Coming. It is too much to hope that such knowledge will arise from critical analyses, that it is resting like a genie in the bottle labeled the "new criticism." In "The Function of Criticism," Eliot refers to a criticism that is self-serving as autotelic. Tate, in a more homely phrase, has compared such criticism to the picture apologizing to the frame.

Probably it is true, as some of its practitioners claim, that no body of criticism in the history of English and American

literature is comparable in bulk, variety, or intensity to the criticism produced in our half century. Since this accomplishment is likely to invite a considerable degree of smugness among those who sympathize with the movement, it may be well to close this survey with a little fable devised by Robert Penn Warren:

Critics are rarely faithful to their labels and their special strategies. Usually the critic will confess that no one strategy—the psychological, the moralistic, the formalistic, the historical—or combination of strategies, will quite work the defeat of the poem. For the poem is like the monstrous Orillo in Boiardo's *Orlando Innamorato*. When the sword lops off any member of the monster, that member is immediately rejoined to the body, and the monster is as formidable as ever. But the poem is even more formidable than the monster, for Orillo's adversary finally gained a victory by an astonishing feat of dexterity: he slashed off both the monster's arms and quick as a wink seized them and flung them into the river. The critic who vaingloriously trusts his method to account for the poem, to exhaust the poem, is trying to emulate this dexterity; he thinks that he, too, can win by throwing the lopped off arms into the river. But he is doomed to failure. Neither fire nor water will suffice to prevent the rejoining of the mutilated members to the monstrous torso. There is only one way to conquer the monster: you must eat it, bones, blood, skin, pelt, and gristle. And even then the monster is not dead, for it lives in you, is assimilated into you, and you are different, and somewhat monstrous yourself, for having eaten it.

So the monster will always win, and the critic knows this. He does not want to win. He knows that he must always play stooge to the monster. All he wants to do is to give the monster a chance to exhibit again his miraculous powers.

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