IRVING BABBITT AND PAUL ELMER MORE

ON

THE ENGLISH ROMANTIC POETS

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By

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INTRODUCTION

Professor Irving Babbitt's well-known general condemnation of Romanticism as an ism needs no documentation. In fact, his virulent strictures on the evils of Romanticism, centering on the figure of Rousseau, once gave rise to the humorous comment that Babbitt had created a sort of new devil with which humanity must, perforce, grapple.

Paul Elmer More, whose literary manner of attack on certain aspects of Romanticism was perhaps less overtly aggressive than Babbitt's was nevertheless almost as formidable, in his way, as Babbitt.

To make a thorough study of the accusations and charges flung at Babbitt (and his replies) would constitute an education in invective. It seems that those interested have been either strongly "pro" or "anit." But a study of the criticism of Babbitt and More as pallied specifically to Romantic poetry may show that they were by no means condemning Romantic poetry *in toto*, as has sometimes been thought. Babbitt himself said explicitly:

> My method is indeed open in one respect to grave misunderstanding. From the fact that I am constantly citing passages from this or that author and condemning the tendency for which these passages stand, the reader will perhaps be led to infer a total condemnation of the authors so quoted. But the inference may be very incorrect. I am not trying to give rounded estimates of individuals--delightful and legitimate as that type of criticism is--but to trace main currents as a part of my search for a set of principles to oppose to naturalism. I call attention for example to the Rousseauistic and primitivistic elements in Wordsworth but do not assert that this is the whole truth about Wordsworth. One's views as to the philosophical value of Rousseauism must, however, weigh heavily in a total judgment of Wordsworth. Criticism is such a difficult art because one must not only have principles but must apply them flexibly and intuitively. No one would accuse criticism at present of lacking flexibility. It has grown so flexible as to become invertebrate. One of my reasons for practicing the present type of criticism is the conviction that because of a lack of principles the type of criticism that aims at rounded estimates of individuals is rapidly ceasing to have any meaning.

> I should add that if I had attempted rounded estimates they would often have been more favorable than might be gathered from my comments here and elsewhere on the romantic leaders. One is justified in leaning toward severity in the laying down of principles, but should nearly always incline to indulgence in the application of them.[1]

Though I find no such inclusive apologia in More's writings, he made it amply clear that he and Babbitt were at least always against the same things:

> . . . nothing should be interpreted as indicating a rift between myself and my comrade-in-arms of long standing, Mr. Babbitt, in our attitude towards the combined forces of anti-humanism.[2]

One may cite, for example, More's reference to Romanticism as a "malady . . . which came into the world with Rousseau, the morbid exaggeration of personal consciousness. In Rousseau, whose mission was to preach the essential goodness of mankind, the union of aggravated egotism with his humanitarian doctrine brought about the conviction that the whole human race was plotting his ruin."[3]

The divergences of opinion among the "New Humanists" were concerned chiefly with the "relation of humanism to religion."[4] Babbitt has some pretty caustic strictures on religion as it actually works in the modern world, though not opposed to it as properly conceived and applied. More, whose chief interest always lay in metaphysical and religious directions, and who definitely accepted certain portions of Christian doctrine, believed that religion was important to humanism.

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[1] Irving Babbitt, "Introduction," Rousseau and Romanticism, Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1919, pp. xvi-xvii.

[2] Paul Elmer More, "A Revival of Humanism," On Being Human, New Shelburne Essays, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1936, Vol. III, p. 13.

[3] More, "Correspondence of William Cowper," Shelburne Essays, Third Series, Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1906, pp. 13-14.

[4] More, On Being Human, New Shelburne Essays, p. 13.

Of Babbitt, More said:

> . . . he seems to have sprung up, like Minerva, fully grown and fully armed. No doubt he made vast additions to his knowledge and acquired by practice a deadly dexterity in wielding it, but there is something almost inhuman in the immobility of his central ideas. He has been criticized for this and ridiculed for harping everlastingly on the same thoughts, as if he lacked the faculty of assimilation and growth. On the contrary, I am inclined to believe that the weight of his influence can be attributed in large measure to just this tenacity of mind. In a world visibly shifting from opinion and, as it were, rocking on its foundation, here was one who never changed or faltered in his grasp of principles, whose latest word can be set beside his earliest with no apology for inconsistency, who could always be depended upon.[1]

As to the originality of this firmly held position, it has been suggested by Bernard Smith that Babbitt's ideas may stem from Lowell:

> Toward the end of the piece on Thoreau, Lowell stated his whole thesis: "I look upon a great deal of the modern sentimentalism about Nature as a mark of disease. . . . Those who have most loudly advertised their passion for seclusion and their intimacy with nature, from Petrarch down, have been mostly sentimentalists, unreal men, misanthropes on the spindle side, solacing an easy suspicion of themselves by professing contempt for their kind. It is true of Rousseau, the modern founder of the sect. . . ." Two years later (1867 he [Lowell] returned to his thesis and enlarged it into a long essay, "Rousseau and the Sentimentalists," in which he added Jefferson and Tom Paine in politics to Byron and others in literature to show how numerous were the ideological offspring of the vile Genevan. Babbitt's Rousseau and Romanticism, published fifty-two years later, is the ultimate expansion of this thesis, leaving none of its implications unexplored.[2]

Though a full discussion of critical opinion of the contribution of Babbitt and More is beyond the scope of this investigation, two appraisals of their general position, one favorable and one hostile, are illuminating.

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[1] Ibid., p. 29.

[2] Bernard Smith, Forces in American Criticism, New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1939, p. 484.

According to O. W. Firkins,

> When all has been said, the humanist movement contains, I believe, three excellent things. . . . All three are attributes of the spirit. The first is independence, the throwing off of the yoke of the motor car and the test-tube, the affirmation that the ends of the spirit shall be fixed by the spirit.x. . . The second is inwardness, the assertion that to the mind sunk in its own thought. . . . the resonance of the airplane is as idle as the buzzing of the fly. . . . The third of the three traits is discipline. The criticisms of Messrs. More and Babbitt is a brave and wise stand against that great literary evil of the last century and a half, which alike in the physical sense of dispersion and in the moral sense of wayward self-indulgence, we may represent by the word dissipation.[1]

One of the most vicious criticisms to appear was that of C. Hartley Grattan:

> Babbitt still envisages himself as the great Harvard Socrates. He still thinks that civilization is a purely verbal structure that can be wrecked or saved by a definition. He is still content to base his case on a purely verbal psychology. . . . He is still willing to scramble the ideas of the world in the hope that by a marvel of verbal prestidigitation he will produce something that will save civilization from the fate he sees ahead for it.[2]

Yet it is significant that Grattan recognized, even though sarcastically, the unswerving, unchanging nature of Babbitt's ideas:

> As if to prove his point that there is something fixed and permanent in the midst of seemingly universal flux, Dr. Irving Babbitt publishes a new book _On Being Creative_ which is so much like every other book he has printed since _Literature and the American College_ of 1908 that one is at a loss how to review it.[3]

Grattan went on to accuse Babbitt of being totally irrelevant to contemporary life, and suggested that his works might be dismissed as a part of the "cultural lag"--exploiting, as it were, the "adventitious and honorific value allegedly inherent in literary or verbal learning as opposed to the learning brought to us by the scientific method."[4]

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[1] A review of _Humanism At Bay_ (ed. Grattan, New York: Brewster and Warren, 1930) in _SRL, VI_ (June 14, 1930), 1124.

[2] C. Hartley Grattan, "On Being Repetitive," _The Nation_, CXXXV (July-December, 1932), 148.

[3] _Ibid._

[4] _Ibid._

It is to be hoped that this thesis will tend to show the essential relevance of Babbitt's ideas as well as to clarify some of the misunderstanding concerning the nature of Babbitt's criticism--this misunderstanding consisting, chiefly, of the notion that Babbitt was a sort of unaesthetic moralizing crank who condemned Romantic poets and poetry, and who, with a grim-set jaw, failed to respond to poetry itself.

This paper, then, is designed to show

(1) that Babbitt's--and, secondarily, More's--work constitutes a healthful, astringent, corrective commentary on Romantic poetry, offsetting the purely appreciative school of criticism of that and the preceding period;

(2) that Babbitt's ideas are relevant to the present scene; and

(3) that Babbitt and More were demonstrably responsive to aesthetic values, and did not, as has been thought, condemn the Romantic poets and poetry *en masse*.

It is not proposed in this study to attempt a re-evaluation of humanism, old or new, or to explore the philosophical, literary, or historical ramifications of humanistic thought--except as these enter into the specific literary criticisms under consideration. It is proposed--by way of method--to bring together and evaluate (in the light of the objectives previously stated) some of the actual critical statements made by Babbitt and by More in regard to four Romantic poets: namely, Wordsworth, Shelley, Keats, and Byron.

It is to be hoped that this limitation of the discussion will make possible an appraisal of the critical method used by Babbitt and More as it functioned in practice.

WORDSWORTH AND COLERIDGE

"Few poets have ever striven harder than Wordsworth to be philosophical," said Babbitt. "In itself his ambition to write verse that was not only delightful but wise was perfectly legitimate."[1] Babbitt's estimate of Wordsworth was based on Wordsworth's works and on the philosophy expressed through those works rather than on what Babbitt termed "biographical irrelevancies." He said:

> Different ages have different ways of being pedantic or, if one prefers, of losing their sense of proportion. A favourite was in our own age is to attach an exaggerated importance to the merely historical and biographical element in literary criticism.
>
> This unbalanced type of criticism has been especially evident in recent studies of the romantic movement and can be shown to derive largely from it.[2]

Babbitt mentioned the work of Bernbaum, de Selincourt, Harper, Legouis, Read, and others; and he deplored Read's "attempt to dispose of Wordsworth psycho-analytically" by drifting "away from critical evaluation toward biographical irrelevancies" (in this case, the Annette Vallon affair and its effects, which, Read thought, formed the basis of Wordsworth's psychology).[3] G. R. Elliott (who was prominent among those who took an interest in the "New Humanism") said that Babbitt

> . . . was never tired of declaiming upon the unethical twist in the imagination of the time of Wordsworth, so fruitful, he thought, of ill results at the present day. But he poohpoohed the fuss that arose upon the discovery of the poet's liaison with Annette Vallon. Why refuse to recognize a malady in the plant and then get loudly excited over the withering of a petal. He was far more intolerant of warped ideas than of irregular conduct.[4]

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[1] Babbitt, "The Primitivism of Wordsworth," Bookman, LXXIV (Sept., 1931), p. 3.

[2] *Ibid.*, p. 1.

[3] *Ibid.*, p. 2.

[4] G. R. Elliott, "Irving Babbitt as I Knew Him," *American Review*, VIII (Nov. 1936--Mar. 1937), pp. 45-46.

Babbitt's statement that "this unbalanced type of criticism. . . can be shown to derive largely from" the Romantic movement is somewhat clarified, though the reference is to later varieties of romantic art, in More's essay entitled "The Modernism of French Poetry,"[1] wherein More refers to the overly personal and psychological type of criticism as "pseudo-science in the most blatant form."[2] This phrase More used in connection with his objection to one Dr. Rene Laforgue's criticism of Baudelaire. More defined Dr. Laforgue's work as "an arbitrary mixture of insight and baseless theory, of critical acumen and pseudo-science."[3] He objected, not to a recognition of sex as a factor in Baudelaire's life, nor to a recognition of the importance of Freudianism, but rather to the extreme lengths to which Laforgue carried his interpretations of Baudelaire's works in terms of his life.

> The first step toward a comprehension of Baudelaire and of the literary movement starting from symbolism is to distinguish between the falsehood and truth of a Dr. Laforgue and to lay bare the motives that lie even deeper than sex and are the real springs of individual and group psychology.[4]

More quoted Baron Ernest Seilliere's pronouncement that there are two impulses in the human soul: "imperialism," and "mysticism." The first--which may be called the "lust for power"--when "reinforced by a belief that the lust of domination is corroborated and sanctified by the ultimate forces shaping our destiny,"[5] has a tendency to become the second--mysticism--and is identifiable with the "lust of irresponsibility"[6]--a phrase describing the evil of which, Babbitt claimed, Rousseau was the chief proponent.

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[1] In More's _On Being Human, New Shelburne Essays_, pp. 97-116.

[2] _Ibid._, p. 107.

[3] _Ibid._, pp. 105-106.

[4] _Ibid._, p. 109.

[5] _Ibid._

[6] _Ibid._, p. 111.

It may be seen, then, how Babbitt and More came to the conclusion that a type of criticism which deals too much in terms of the vagaries and irresponsibilities of unleashed human nature does indeed stem from the type of movement, or thinking, that advocated this same undue lack of restraint.

It will be seen throughout this paper how Babbitt and More attempted to criticize literature on its own merits rather than on a basis compounded of historical or biographical trivia tangential to that literature. If Babbitt's criticism tended to be philosophic, and if, moreover, it was fully conscious of historical frameworks and settings, it was, nevertheless, based on what was expressed through literature itself. That Babbitt did not judge an individual poem on philosophic grounds alone I shall attempt to show further on. To be sure, in his general estimate of Wordsworth, Babbitt does to a large degree judge the poetry by the philosophic substratum:

> One's opinion as to the measure of his Wordsworth's success will depend on what one thinks of the philosophy he held during his most creative years (approximately 1797-1807), a philosophy which may be defined as primitivism. . . . Primitivism won its decisive triumphs in the eighteenth century. By their denial of a transcendent element in man Locke and others seemed to have written over what had been traditionally regarded as the ascending path to wisdom: No thoroughfare. The rationalism that they offered as a substitute was found to be unsatisfying; above all, it did not satisfy man's deep-seated craving for immediacy; so that presently he began to turn for this immediacy and also, as he hoped, for wisdom, to that region of impulse and emotion that lies below the rational level.[1]

Babbitt recognized that

> Wordsworth's primitivism. . . . is not only a reaction from the excess of abstraction and analytical reasoning that has been encouraged during the period of European culture known as the Enlightenment, but also from the neo-classic decorum and imitation.[2]

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[1] Babbitt, Bookman, LXXIV, p. 3.

[2] Ibid.

a type of decorum and imitation, which, Babbitt admitted, became exceedingly artificial. One statement of More's regarding the relative merits of romanticist and neo-classicist seems less nicely balanced than Babbitt's characteristic view:

> On the whole I am inclined to believe that the justice of tradition has come nearer to suffering a real perversion from these romantic sentimentalists than from the rationalists of the pseudo-classical school.[1]

Babbitt thought on the other hand that

> Because the neo-classicist held the imagination lightly as compared with good sense the romantic rebels were led to hold good sense lightly as compared with imagination. The romantic view in short is too much the neo-classical view turned upside down; and as Sainte-Beuve says, nothing resembles a hollow so much as a swelling.[2]

There is good everyday common sense in Babbitt's statement that

> Both words and imagery are regarded by the neo-classicist as being laid on from the outside; they are not, in Wordsworthian phrase, the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings; they lack the vital thrill that would save them from artificiality.[3]

Babbitt's general estimate of Wordsworth's philosophy did not at all inhibit his sensitivity to certain poetic values in Wordsworth's poetry:

> . . . Wordsworth not only theorizes about spontaneity but often actually achieves it. One cannot read the best of the verse that he wrote during his inspired period without feeling that the contrast between the artificial and the natural that is all-pervasive in the primitivistic movement is something more than a philosophical speculation. Matthew Arnold, who has done more than any other one person to mould our conception of Wordsworth, has rightly emphasized this point. His verses at their best have, he says, the virtue of inevitableness. Arnold has described admirably in his Memorial Verses the total effect of Wordsworth's primitivism when it thus receives perfect expression. . . .

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[1] More, Demon of the Absolute, New Shelburne Essays, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1928, Vol. I, p. 17.

[2] Babbitt, Rousseau and Romanticism, p. 14.

[3] Babbitt, The New Laokoon, Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1910, p. 24.

Yet he adds (surely in line with the commonly accepted view of even Wordsworth's staunchest admirers):

> It is well to remember that in this matter of inevitableness or spontaneity the gap between Wordsworth's best poetry and his worst is abysmally wide; and even in poems that may seem sufficiently inevitable there is room for difference of opinion--[1]

statements which would appear at least to take the edge off Miss Elsie Duncan-Jones's accusation: namely, that

> The chief defect of Mr. Babbitt's literary criticism is, I think, his insistence upon the solidity of Romantic literature, which he treats as though it were a single work.[2]

She herself admits that Babbitt's philosophic method is a "natural bias" which Babbitt "does his utmost to allow for," and that he is "vastly more sensitive than most professedly 'literary' critics."[3]

More, too, was aware of the extremely uneven achievement of Wordsworth:

> Yet withal I trust I am not blind to the great, if spasmodic, accomplishment of Wordsworth. It is perfectly true that we may read through pages of weary metaphysics and self-maunderings of tortured prose, and then suddenly come upon a passage whose inevitable beauty flashes upon the soul like a burning searchlight; . . there are amid his lesser works that waver "between silliness and pathos," whole poems--it is unnecessary to name them--of a lyric grace that forever sings itself in memory, or of a naked classic grandeur that awes and subdues the mind.[4]

The effect of the French Revolution on Wordsworth has been variously interpreted. Babbitt saw an extremely close connection between revolutionary France and Wordsworth:

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[1] Babbitt, Bookman, LXXIV, 5.

[2] Elsie Duncan-Jones, RES, X (July, 1934), 369-370.

[3] *Ibid.*

[4] More, "Wordsworth," Shelburne Essays, Seventh Series (1910), p. 44.

> It is . . . important to note that the wave of emotion that finally swept away poetical diction in England came from France. Guilt and Sorrow, the first poem in which Wordsworth attains directness and sincerity of expression, was written, not primarily under the influences of the ballads, or Milton, or Spenser, but under the emotional stress of the French Revolution; and Wordsworth is the father of nineteenth century English poetry.[1]

Babbitt said:

> In the first flush of his revolutionary enthusiasm, France seemed to him to be "standing on the top of golden hours" and pointing the way to a new birth of human nature:
>
> Bliss was it in that dawn to be alive,
> But to be young was very heaven! O time
> In which the meagre stale forbidding ways
> Of custom, law and statute, took at once
> The attraction of a country in romance!
>
> When it became evident that the actual world and Utopia did not coincide after all, when the hard sequence of cause and effect that bind the present inexorably to the past refused to yield to the creations of the romantic imagination, what ensued in Wordsworth was not so much an awakening to true wisdom as a transformation of the pastoral dream. The English Lake Country became for him in some measure as it was later to be for Ruskin, the ivory tower into which he retreated from the oppression of the real. He still continued to see, if not the general order of society, at least the denizens of his chosen retreat through the Arcadian mist, and contrasted their pastoral felicity with the misery of men "barricadoed in the walls of cities." I do not mean to disparage the poetry of humble life or to deny that many passages may be cited from Wordsworth to justify his reputation as an inspired teacher; I wish merely to point out. . . what is specifically romantic in the quality of his imagination.[2]

Babbitt recognized, as most critics have, that certain pronounced changes came about in Wordsworth's outlook; that Wordsworth returned "gradually to the traditional forms" until radicals came to "look upon him as the 'lost leader.'" However, Wordsworth according to Babbitt, looked back longingly and found it hard to "wean his imagination from its primitivistic arcadias; so that what one finds in writing like the Ecclesiastical Sonnets, is not imaginative fire, but at best a sober intellectual conviction, an opposition between the head and the heart. . . ." Babbitt added:

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[1] The New Laokoon, p. 26-27. Wordsworth himself indicated that the poem was written under the Revolutionary influence. See Cambridge Edition of Wordsworth (Wordsworth's Complete Poems), p. 20.

[2] Rousseau and Romanticism, p. 83.

> If Wordsworth had lost faith in his revolutionary and naturalistic ideal, and had at the same time refused to return to the traditional forms, one might then have seen in his work something of the homeless hovering of the romantic ironist. If on the other hand, he had worked away from the centre that the traditional forms give to life towards a more positive and critical center, if in other words, he had broken with the past, not on Rousseauistic, but on Socratic lines, he would have needed an imagination of different quality, an imagination less idyllic and pastoral and more ethical than he usually displays.[1]

Babbitt recognized that Wordsworth was individual in his application of romantic ideas:

> Revery is variously modified not only by individual but by national temperament. If it is voluptuous in Rousseau, and sentimental and pedantic in the Germans, in an Englishman like Wordsworth it tends to become austere and ethical.[2]

And More says that

> such revery as he [Wordsworth] taught is but a surrender to the ever-intruding sense of the world's defeat, and human fate is something greater than stocks and stones, the stars that control our destiny are higher than the constellation of mountain flowers, and the meaning of mankind is better guessed in the clamour of society or in the still voice of the heart withdrawn into its own solitude than in the murmur of the evening wind; but all of us may drink in fresh courage and renewed vigour from seasons of wise passiveness. In this view his reproach is not, like Shelley's, a question of essential falseness, but of exclusion on the one side and of exaggeration on the other. His excess may be our balance, and in his inspiration we may learn to regulate the gusty self-wearing passions of the mind. . .[3]

Such poems as Resolution and Independence, The Idiot Boy, Heartleap Well, and Peter Bell, Babbitt called "primitivistic." He poked fun at one of them:

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[1] Rousseau and Romanticism, pp. 249-250.

[2] Literature and the American College, Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1908, p. 257.

[3] More, Shelburne Essays, Seventh Series, p. 47.

> . . . Peter Bell "had a dozen wedded wives," and had committed other heinous offenses. . . (the most heinous, of course, being his failure to transcendentalize "a primrose by a river's brim"). All might have been different with Peter Bell if he had only felt the "witchery of a soft blue sky."[1]

Babbitt was also amused by--and objected to--the humanitarian extremes of certain of Wordsworth's poems; as, for example the instances wherein Wordsworth attempts

> . . . to bestow poetical dignity and importance upon the ass, and to make it a model of moral excellence, also to find poetry in an idiot boy and to associate sublimity with a pedlar in defiance of the ordinary character of pedlars. In general Wordsworth indulges in paradoxes when he urges us to look to peasants for the true language of poetry and would have us believe that man is taught by "woods and rills" and not by contact with his fellow men. He pushes this paradox to a point that would have made even Rousseau "stare and gasp" when he asserts that
>
> One impulse from a vernal wood
> May teach you more of man,
> Of moral evil and of good
> Than all the sages can.
>
> Another form of this same paradox that what comes from nature spontaneously is better than what can be acquired by conscious effort is found in his poem Lucy Gray:
>
> No mate, no comrade Lucy knew;
> She dwelt on a wide moor,
> The sweetest thing that ever grew
> Beside a human door!
>
> True maidenhood is made up of a thousand decorums; but this Rousseauistic maiden would have seemed too artificial if she had been reared in a house instead of "growing" out of doors; she might in that case have been a human being and not a "thing" and this would plainly have detracted from her spontaneity.[2]

Wordsworth, Babbitt thought, was

> prone to fall into what M. Laserre calls l'emphase romantique, romantic fustian; which may be defined as the enormous disproportion between emotion and the outer object or incident on which it expends itself.[3]

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[1] Literature and the American College, p. 257.

[2] Rousseau and Romanticism, p. 248-249.

[3] The New Laokoon, p. 246.

Babbitt considered that poetry, according to Aristotle, "does not portray life literally but extricates the deeper or ideal truth from the flux of circumstance,"[1] and that classicism "does not rest on the observance of rules or the imitation of models," but rather "on an immediate insight into the universal."[2] He had, therefore, no petty objections to subject-matter as such. He objected, not to Wordsworth's characters or subjects, but to the treatment of them.

Furthermore, Babbitt himself found pleasure in nature. More once referred to ". . . the magic charm of nature, to which Babbitt was always warmly responsive."[3] Babbitt's brief critical paragraph on *I Wandered Lonely as a Cloud* would seem to suggest his normal, almost naive response to the poem that so many have enjoyed:

> Romantic word-painting. . . is not merely the art of suggesting images to others, but first of all suggesting them to one's self. Wordsworth, for example, begins by seeing the "host of golden daffocils," and then later--
>
> > They flash upon the inward eye
> > Which is the bliss of solitude;
>
> finally he succeeds in conveying the vision in all its freshness to us.[4]

The only objection Babbitt had to the revelations of the inward eye was the possible abuse of "This new sense. . . in itself delightful and legitimate," whereby the romantics might (and occasionally did) "make of this revery the serious substance of life instead of its occasional solace."[5]

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[1] *Rousseau and Romanticism*, p. 18.

[2] *Ibid.*

[3] More, "Irving Babbitt," *On Being Human*, p. 40.

[4] Babbitt, *The New Laokoon*, p. 131.

[5] *Ibid.*

The quotation blocked in above, concerning romantic word-painting, contains what is almost an application of Wordsworth's own "emotion recollected in tranquillity." Yet, Babbitt felt that there was a "wide gap" between Wordsworth's definition and Aristotle's (of poetry as the imitation of human action according to a probability or necessity). He recognized, nevertheless, that "one may prefer Aristotle's definition. . . and yet do justice to the merits of Wordsworth's actual poetical performance."[1]

As we have noted, Babbitt did not ridicule Wordsworth's spontaneity; rather did he object to that philosophy which would make spontaneity an end in itself. He was, in fact, so well aware of the importance of spontaneity that he said:

> A study of Wordsworth's life shows that he became progressively disillusioned regarding Rousseauistic spontaneity. He became less paradoxical as he grew older and in almost the same measure, one is tempted to say, less poetical.[2]

The changes which are manifested in Wordsworth's poetry itself, Babbitt interpreted as follows:

> Wordsworth himself came to have doubts about the communion with nature as a basis for the moral and spiritual life of man. At the time of writing the Ode on Intimations of Immortality he is already turning away, though regretfully and with many a longing look behind. . . from the primitivistic gospel of spontaneity.
>
> . . .
>
> The first retreat of Wordsworth on making a. . . discovery as to the inadequacy of the gospel of spontaneity is to Stoicism (Ode to Duty and Laodamia) and then finally to traditional religion (Ecclesiastical Sonnets). Our last picture of him is with his white head bowed in the little church at Grasmere. During this last period he not only became the reactionary and "lost leader," but in almost the same measure was forsaken by his muse.[3]

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[1] Rousseau and Romanticism, p. 249.

[2] The New Laokoon, p. 246.

[3] Bookman, LXXIV, 6.

This would seem to constitute an admission that, unsound as the Romantic gospel may have been, Wordsworth produced his best poetry under its *aegis*. However, such an interpretation would be exactly the kind of "grave misunderstanding" which Babbitt deplored. Good poetry, he felt, may be a matter of spontaneous insight; but he also thought that any theory which would make emotion--over-flowing, humanitarian, dispersive--an end in itself, is neither correct nor of itself productive of good poetry. In other words, true insight, according to Babbitt, is more a matter of seizing upon the "universal" than of emotional outburst.

That Babbitt treated Wordsworth as an individual, and his poems as individual poems--and not simply as totally condemned offshoots of a despised philosophy--is evident in his criticisms of the famous *Intimations* ode:

> Of course, things are not so clear-cut in concrete human nature as they are in our formulae. The sense of what is above the reason sometimes merges bewilderingly into the sense of what is below the reason. There are, for example, touches of true mystical insight in Wordsworth, along with other passages almost equally admirable as poetry, if not equally wise, but passages that are more Rousseauistic than Platonic. Thus the famous Ode is a curious blend of Plato and Rousseau,--of the Platonic doctrine of reminiscence of previous existence and the Rousseauistic reminiscence of childhood as the age of freshness and spontaneity.
>
> To the belief that "our birth is but a sleep and a forgetting" Plato would of course have assented; but the assertion that children of six are "mighty prophets, seers blessed," would we fear, have seemed to him portentous nonsense; and there are doubtless still a few persons left who would agree with Plato. Wordsworth indeed has so mingled the things that are above with the things that are below the reason as not merely to idealize but to supernaturalize the child, and this probably would have dissatisfied Rousseau as well as Plato.[1]

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[1] Babbitt, *The New Laokoon*, pp. 93-94.

More was evidently attracted to the Intimations ode. His customary suavity--which seldom if ever manifested itself in the creation of crude categories--resulted, when More chose to speak of the Ode, in certain remarks which need interpretation. In the Ode, he says that

> . . . the beauty of childhood is seen frankly through the medium of memory, and there is no attempt to deny or escape the burden of experience.[1]

Further on, he adds:

> . . . we fall back on the poets who accept fully the experience of the human heart. We find something closer to our understanding, something for that reason wholesomer, in men like Wordsworth and Goethe. . . .[2]

These statements would seem to show that Wordsworth was here--to More--something of a realist, dealing in actual experience, rather than in escapist unrealities. Apparently More found an undeniable genuineness and solid worth in some of Wordsworth.

Babbitt, too, had moments of pure appreciation:

> No finer lines on solitude are found in English than those in which Wordsworth relates how from his room at Cambridge he could look out on
>
> The antechapel where the statue stood
> Of Newton with his prism and silent face,
> The marble index of a mind forever
> Voyaging through strange seas of thought alone.[3]
> (Prelude, III, 61-63)

More realized that Wordsworth was, in his own way, ethical, philosophic, and that he produced on occasion lines of great poetry:

---

[1] More, "William Blake," Shelburne Essays, Fourth Series (1906), pp. 237-238.

[2] Ibid.

[3] Babbitt, Rousseau and Romanticism, p. 328, n.1.

> Too commonly the fire [of Wordsworth's inspiration] merely glimmered and smoked. . . but, at times and without warning. . . suddenly the wayward breath of heaven blew upon him, the flame leaped up clear and warm, and the miracle of perfect verse was wrought. . . It is, in Arnold's image, almost as if Nature at these times took the pen out of his hands and made him her spokesman, in spite of his self-willed consecration.
>
> And for us may be the profit of those golden moments. For with all the talk of these years the world is indeed too much with us, and little we see in nature that is ours.[1]

It should be clear that Babbitt and More did not condemn Wordsworth. They even considered, rather, that he was ethical in his way; that he strove to be philosophic; that he produced lines of inspired poetry; that his theories did not necessarily coincide with or cause the excellence or ineptitude of his verse; that he was, practically speaking, neither made nor broken by "biographical irrelevancies"; and that, according to Babbitt, he was the father of nineteenth-century poetry. Yet they felt bound to say that his work ranged from the sublime to the ridiculous; that he was in part dominated by a Rousseauistic, extremistic humanitarianism; that the tenor of his work manifested a great change, if one compares the first of it with the last and that his later work was, regardless of anyone's theories, relatively uninspired.

This critical view, I believe, demonstrates balance, discrimination, judgment, and sensitivity; and is by no means the work of rabid, unpoetic individuals. Such criticism would, and does tend to offset a purely lyrical appreciation which would swallow the bad with the good;(and, incidentally, serves only to bolster the current but not always voiced conviction that much of Wordsworth is not good) and to offset the sort of criticism which contents itself with pseudo-psychological probings.

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[1] More, "Wordsworth," Shelburne Essays, Seventh Series, pp. 46-47.

It may or may not be obvious that a criticism which is based on central ethical values takes precedence over the criticism of mere emotion. If such criticism is of a more permanent nature, dealing, as it does, in permanent values, we may then assume its greater relevance to literature.

It is well-nigh impossible, in a discussion of Wordsworth, to omit some mention of Coleridge. Because of the limitations of this thesis I am primarily concerned with Coleridge the poet rather than with Coleridge the philosopher and critic, although the two are so closely related as to render any ultimate dichotomy unwise. Nevertheless, Babbitt's essay, Coleridge and the Moderns,[1] is more relevant to this paper as a discussion of The Ancient Mariner than as a critique of Coleridge's criticism--although both are involved in the essay. In connection with the latter, it may be said that Babbitt agreed, generally speaking, with Coleridge's criticisms of Wordsworth--as expressed in the Biographia Literaria.

> Indeed the chapters in which Coleridge deals on Aristotelian grounds with the paradoxes into which Wordsworth had been betrayed by his primitivism constitute the chief islet of this kind to be found in his writings.

Babbitt, however, added that

> Though Coleridge's critique of Wordsworth is thus Aristotelian in its details, transcendentalism would seem to reappear in its conclusion. . . . If Coleridge had been a more thorough-going Aristotelian, he might have found that the chief source of "mental bombast" in Wordsworth arises from the disproportionate significance that he had been led by his transcendental philosophy to attach to natural appearances.[2]

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[1] In the Bookman, LXX (October, 1929), pp. 113-124.

[2] Ibid., pp. 116-117.

After having duly complimented Professor Lowes on his Road to Xanadu, Babbitt took issue with him on the matter of whether or not The Ancient Mariner had "high seriousness."

> He [Lowes] says in his preface that he does not propose to consider whether The Ancient Mariner is classic or romantic or whether it meets the Aristotelian test of high seriousness. Actually, he has answered these very questions by implication in the body of the book when he mentions the poetical Coleridge in the same breath with Homer, Dante, and Milton and uses the phrase "supreme imaginative vision" in connection with The Ancient Mariner. My own endeavour will be to show that the imagination displayed in The Ancient Mariner is qualitatively different from that displayed in poetry that may be regarded as highly serious.[1]

In the course of this "endeavour" Babbitt said:

> In its [The Ancient Mariner's] psychology and incidents and senic setting it marks the extreme sacrifice of the verisimilar to the marvelous. It is at a far remove from the Aristotelian high seriousness, which not only requires relevancy to normal experience but a relevancy tested in terms of action. Apart from the initial shooting of an albatross, the Mariner does not do anything. . . .
>
> Perhaps no work embodies more successfully than The Ancient Mariner the main romantic motif of solitude. . . . Here if anywhere the soul is a state of the landscape and the landscape a state of the soul--the outer symbol of a ghastly isolation. The mood of solitude based on the sense of one's emotional uniqueness is closely interwoven. . . with the instinct of confession. Rousseau himself says of certain childhood experiences: "I am aware that the reader does not need to know these details but I need to tell him." In much the same fashion the Wedding Guest does not need to hear the Mariner's tale but the Mariner needs to relate it to him.[2]

Babbitt apparently felt that the poem was artistic but not profound. He said:

> Like many other works in the modern movement, the poem lays claim to a religious seriousness that at bottom it does not possess. To this extent at least it is an example of a hybrid and ambiguous art.
>
> By turning their attention to the wonder and magic of natural appearances, Wordsworth and Coleridge and other romantics opened up an almost inexhaustible source of genuine poetry. Wonder cannot, however, in this or any other form serve as a substitute for the virtues that imply a something

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[1] Ibid., p. 114.

[2] Ibid., p. 119.

> in man that is set above the phenomenal order. . . . The attempt to base religion on wonder becomes positively grotesque when Walt Whitman declares that "a mouse is miracle enough to stagger sextillions of infidels." The underlying confusion of values has, however, persisted in less obvious forms and is indeed the most dubious legacy to our own time from the romantic age.[1]

Displaying his customary caution in regard to poetic values, Babbitt said:

> It follows from all that has been said that The Ancient Mariner judged by the quality of the imagination that informs it, is not only romantic but ultra-romantic. One should not therefore disparage it, or in general regard as the only test of poetry its degree of conformity with the model set up by Aristotle in his Poetics. One must insist that in the house of art are many mansions. It does not follow that the mansions are all on the same level or of equal architectural dignity. That The Ancient Mariner is good in its own way--almost miraculously good--goes without saying. The reason for thinking that this way is inferior to the way envisaged by Aristotle is that it is less concerned with moral choices in their bearing on the only problem that finally matters--that of man's happiness or misery.[2]

The foregoing paragraph aroused George Boas to say sarcastically:

> Let us paraphrase. There are two ways of measuring lengths, the metric system and the English system. Both are equally good. But the English system is better because real lengths are expressible only in yards.[3]

However, I find no inconsistency in Babbitt's method; there are indeed many mansions in the house of art, and Babbitt proved the catholicity of his taste by finding poetic value in a work the underlying philosophy of which he did not approve.

The Bookman essay proceeds to combine a critique of Wordsworth with that of Coleridge:

> The chief instrument of escape is the imagination--a certain quality of imagination. . . . It becomes dubious only when put at the basis of what purports to be idealism or even religion. . . . The results that follow from indulging this type of imagination are scarcely of a kind to satisfy either

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[1] Ibid., p. 118.

[2] Ibid., p. 119.

[3] George Boas, MP, XXX (August, 1932-May, 1933), pp. 220-221.

> the humanist or the man of science. . . . The "liberty" and "intensest love" to which Coleridge lays claim as a result of "shooting his being through earth, sea, and air" are accomplished only in dreamland. Like the Wordsworth of "*Tintern Abbey*," Coleridge is setting up in this passage of *France: An Ode*, pantheistic revery as a substitute for true meditation.
>
> This is of course not the whole truth about Wordsworth or Coleridge. There is more in a poem like *Tintern Abbey* than the "egotistical sublime" of which Keats accused Wordsworth. There is at times genuine sublimity.[1]

Babbitt quoted Wordsworth's statement that, on discovering the small celandine, he will "make a stir like a sage astronomer," and added:

> The stir would seem justified only in case it could be shown that, through imaginative communion with the small celandine, he attained a real spiritual unity. But what proof is there of the reality of a communion achieved in that way? One may perhaps best reply in the words of Coleridge:
>
> Oh, William, we receive but what we give,
> And in our life alone does nature live,
>
> In that case the nature. . . is not nature as known to the impartial observer but merely a projection of one's own mood on outer objects--in other words, a form of the pathetic fallacy. It follows that the unity thus achieved is not real but fanciful, so that the distinction between imagination and fancy that both Wordsworth and Coleridge strove to establish breaks down at the center. . . . Communion with nature of the transcendental sort would appear to be only a new and fascinating mode of escape.[2]

Perhaps the most interesting criticism of Coleridge is that which would make him a spiritual ancestor of the "moderns":

> The sacrifice of human substance to the Moloch of spontaneity is even more manifest in the contemporary French group known as the "super-realists" (surréalistes), affiliated in point of view with the English and American writers who abandon themselves to the "stream-of-consciousness."

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[1] Babbitt, *Bookman*, LXX, 118.

[2] *Ibid.*, p. 117.

> I am not going too far afield in speaking of the *surréalistes* *apropos* of Coleridge. . . . *Kubla Khan*. . . Probably remains the best example of a spontaneity that, so far from having been disciplined to either humanistic or religious purpose, has not even undergone any technical shaping of the kind one finds in *The Ancient Mariner*. It illustrates what Coleridge himself calls the "streamy nature of association" in revery at least as well, and far more agreeably, than, let us say, the closing pages of Joyce's *Ulysses*.[1]

As More's criticisms of Coleridge (expressed in More's *Demon of the Absolute*, p. 19 ff) are concerned chiefly with his philosophy of criticism, I shall not present them. Suffice it to say that More found in Coleridge both Aristotelian and naturalistic elements, as did Babbitt.

For Babbitt, Coleridge's poetry presented an ultra-romantic aspect, involving beauty, wonder, and a technique which, as we have seen, Babbitt thought essentially anticipated two of the modernist schools of writing.

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[1] *Ibid.*

SHELLEY

The name of Shelley usually connotes lyric poetry and a sort of confusion of ethical idealism with freedom from restraint. Benjamin P. Kurtz called Shelley "a superlative minstrel and tragic perpetrator of idealism."[1] Kurtz, who was a Shelley-scholar, the author of The Pursuit of Death, a Study of Shelley's Poetry, and who edited Shelley's poetry, said:

> The one great mistake that he made was the typical mistake of the idealist in all ages: Shelley underestimated the selfishness and cowardice of mankind. The mistake was that of the subjective fallacy: he took for granted that others, like himself, once shown the beauty of an ideal would forsake all to pursue it. That mistake was the fountain of the tragedy of his life, and of the peculiar greatness of his poetry. In the matter-of-fact world he dealt none too wisely with his fellow-creatures because he assumed for a while, until tragic results taught him better, that they were at heart altruistic and fearless. He thought that his immediate associates, who were but superficially allured by the glamour of his own philosophy, were each in fact a potential Prometheus, ready to risk all possessions, comforts, and conventions for an ideal good. When he acted hastily upon these assumptions, tragic catastrophes ensued. Then, in the removed world of poetry he enshrined with aesthetic allurement the ideas that were too difficult for ordinary men and women.[2]

The foregoing paragraph constitutes a fairly accurate statement of the error--as Babbitt and More saw it--of Rousseauistic humanitarianism; an error--whether manifested in either literature or life--directly opposed to the humanistic doctrine of discipline, as enunciated by Babbitt and More.

The humanists would ask: is this "one great error" mentioned by Kurtz--and admitted by him to be the well-spring of Shelley's poetry--first to be glossed over as the unfortunate extremity of youthful idealism, and next to be admired and accepted? or is it to be condemned as being consonant with undisciplined emotion, verging on the pathological, and disguised as a sort of new religion? And, they would ask, is this "error" productive of great poetry, or does it in fact inhibit the poetic faculties?

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[1] B. P. Kurtz, "Introduction," Shelley, New York: Oxford University Press, 1933, p. xxv.

[2] Ibid., p. xxvii.

According to Babbitt,

> Shelley. . . illustrates in his imaginative activity the confusion of values that was so fostered by romanticism. Here again I do not wish to be too absolute. Shelley has passages especially in his "Adonais" that are on a high level. Yet nothing is more certain than that the quality of his imagination is on the whole not ethical but Arcadian or pastoral. In the name of his Arcadia conceived as the "ideal" he refuses to face the facts of life.[1]

In another work Babbitt said that the true humanist is the man who is sympathetically selective, and has his standard within him--"living, flexible, intuitive";[2] and in yet another work he referred to the humanist as the one who "maintains a just balance between sympathy and selection,"[3] and as the one who is interested in the "perfecting of the individual rather than in schemes for the elevation of mankind as a whole."[4]

More thought that the romantic philosophy had both good and bad effects on Shelley's work:

> Of Shelley, taken merely as the author of a group of lyrics, brief in compass, but exquisite in melody and feeling, quite another account might be given than this I am writing. Here, whether in independent songs or in short strains that can be detached from their context without any mark of incompleteness, here, when he expresses a purely personal joy or sorrow, love or regret, his genius suffers no let or thwarting; it is even strengthened by that romantic acceptance of the emotions. That is the Shelley of the young man's and the maiden's passionate admiration. . . . But it is necessary to add that even this wonderful lyric vein is subject at times to a kind of defeat from excess of the very power that produced it.[5]

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[1] Babbitt, Rousseau and Romanticism, pp. 358-359.

[2] Masters of Modern French Criticism, Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1912, p. 374.

[3] Literature and the American College, p. 10.

[4] Ibid., p. 8.

[5] More, "Shelley," Shelburne Essays, Seventh Series, p. 22.

Babbitt and More were in absolute agreement as to the underlying nature of Shelley's philosophy. Babbitt wrote:

> The romantic moralist. . . instead of building himself an island is simply drifting with the stream. For feeling not only shifts from man to man, it is continually shifting in the same man; so that morality becomes a matter of mood, and romanticism. . . might be defined as the despotism of mood. At the time of doing anything, says Mrs. Shelley, Shelley deemed himself right. . . .[1]

And, in the same vein, More, who of course, knew, that Shelley was not "by nature base or sensual," and that ". . .his life was ennobled by many acts of instinctive generosity, and his feelings were normally fine,"[2] said regarding the temperamental ethics of the emotions:

> By Shelley each emotion as it arose in his breast was accepted as justified in itself, without pausing to consider its cause of consequence. The full meaning of this emotionalism can be grasped only by a long view into the past. To the great writers of the seventeenth century, human nature was a thing to distrust as containing tendencies of ruinous evil.[3]

Shelley's longings for the infinite and ultimate, his idealistic views of inferior personalities, and his almost pathological hatred for what he deemed tyranny did not establish him as a sound philosopher in the eyes of Babbitt and More--nor did they think that this "philosophy" necessarily improved his poetry. They distinguished, apparently, between Shelley's poetic genius and his philosophy, as did Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine, which, N. I. White has said, "continued its policy of mixing stern criticism of Shelley's ideas with enthusiastic praise of his genius, and sought once more to win from his errors a poet 'destined to leave a great name behind him.'"[4]

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[1] Babbitt, Rousseau and Romanticism, p. 16.

[2] Shelburne Essays, Seventh Series, pp. 8-9.

[3] Ibid., pp. 10-11.

[4] N. I. White, Shelley, New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1940, Vol. II, p. 301.

Babbitt knew very well that Shelley wrote much that is of itself beautiful. He referred to the

> . . . boat revery in Prometheus Unbound in which an Arcadian nature and the dream companion mingle to the strains of music in a way that is supremely romantic,[1]

and opined, later, that there is no reason why, in a "recreative mood one should not imagine one's soul an enchanted boat and float away in a musical rapture."[2] But he objected mightily to Professor C. H. Herford's statement that Shelley, in Prometheus Unbound, gave "magnificent expression to the faith of Plato and of Christ." Said Babbitt: "Such a statement in such a place [the Cambridge History of English Literature] is a veritable danger signal, an indication of some grave spiritual bewilderment in the present age." Babbitt spoke of the "flimsiness" of Prometheus as a "solution of the problem of evil." He said:

> What is found in this play is the exact opposite of imaginative concentration on human law. The imagination wanders irresponsibly in a region quite outside of normal human experience. We are hindered from enjoying the gorgeous iridescences of Shelley's cloudland by Shelley's own evident conviction that it is not a cloudland, an "intense inane" but a true empyrean of the spirit.

Besides, Babbitt did not like the way in which Shelley "puts the blame for evil on society," thereby relieving the individual of responsibility.[3]

The play itself Babbitt called an "ethereal melodrama" and said that it lacked reality--"that the unaccountable collapse of Zeus, a monster of unalloyed and unmotivated badness, is followed by the gushing forth in man of an equally unalloyed and unmotivated goodness"[4]--and this vision, Babbitt said, of a "humanity released from all evil artificially imposed from without"[5] is essentially Rousseauistic.

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[1] Rousseau and Romanticism, p. 281.

[2] Ibid., pp. 359-360.

[3] Ibid., p. 189.

[4] Ibid.

[5] Ibid., p. 137.

More also felt that Shelley's viewpoint was unrealistic, and--except in rare instances--a hindrance to his poetry:

> As Shelley judged his friends from the immediate emotions they aroused in him, or from some fanciful association with the emotion dominant in his mind, without a care for the various and real springs of action in himself or them, so he created his poetical characters.[1]

This attitude toward life and people was all-pervasive in Shelley's poetry, More thought:

> Shelley, indeed, grew in metrical skill and power of expression, but from first to last his procedure was essentially unaltered: his Prometheus is only Queen Mab writ large; his Epipsychidion re-echoes in firmer strain the vagaries of Alastor. Always his philosophy, whether magnified into a shadowy mythology or expressed in human drama, whether it be the love or hate of Prometheus or his own relation to mankind, is the voice of enthusiasm, of unreasoned emotion.[2]

And, in agreement with Babbitt, More referred to the "childlike credulity" with which Shelley accepted the notion that "mankind is naturally and inherently virtuous, needing only the deliverance from some outwardly applied oppression to spring back to its essential perfection."[3]

The ramifications of the humanism of Babbitt and More are too many to be followed beyond whatever application they may have to the Romantic poets under consideration. However, it is worth while to note that More--and Babbitt also--considered that Rousseau was a spiritual ancestor of Nietzsche and Marx[4] and that ". . . sympathy, as the controlling principle of morals" passed from Rousseau into Germany "and became one of the mainsprings of the romantic movement."[5] Socialism, More thought, was a product of humanitarian romanticism. Ancient Alexandria, More said, was the "chief centre and workshop" of a "widespread revolution of sentiment"; there occurred a "wild amalgamation of Eastern and Western creeds that was sending out a stream of Gnostic and Manichean heresies." This condition, More thought, was the ancestor "of what after many centuries was to be called romanticism--the infinitely craving personality, the usurpation of emotion over reason, the idealization of love, the confusion of the sensuous and the spiritual, the perilous fascination that may go with these confusions."[1]

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[1] Shelburne Essays, Seventh Series, p. 16.

[2] Ibid., pp. 13-14.

[3] Ibid., p. 7.

[4] "Rousseau," Shelburne Essays, Sixth Series (1909), p. 236.

[5] "Nietzsche," Shelburne Essays, The Drift of Romanticism (1913), p. 168.

In the light of these phrases it may be seen how More tended to look upon Shelley as a direct inheritor and apostle of "the perilous fascination. . . ."

To the poetry itself, however, More was sensitive, though he was not in final sympathy with it:

> . . . granted that Adonais may occasionally descent into bathos, if it contains also images of pure and radiant beauty, why not give ourselves to these, and pass the errors by? Doubtless that is the part of wisdom, so far as it is feasible; but here again we are blocked by certain insurmountable exclusions of taste. There is pleasure, the highest critical joy, in the perfection and harmonious unity of such work as Milton's Lycidas and he who has trained his mind to respond to that joy has by the very process rendered himself sensitive to false and obtrusive notes. He simply cannot read the stanza quoted from Adonais [the forty-fifth--"far in the unapparent"] without suffering from the spirit of perversity at work within it.[2]

Newman Ivey White, who certainly could not be accused of being anti-Romantic, said that "a severe critic might find slight flaws of proportion and emphasis in Adonais, regarded by Shelley as his 'least imperfect' poem."[3] Babbitt said:

> . . . the Greek beauty resided in proportion and proportion can be attained only with the aid of the ethical imagination. With the elimination of the ethical element from the soul of art the result is an imagination that is free to wander wild with the emancipated emotions. The result is likely to be

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[1] Ibid., pp. 28-30.

[2] Shelburne Essays, Seventh Series, p. 25.

[3] N. I. White, op. cit., Vol. II, pp. 452-453.

> art in which a lively aesthetic perceptiveness is not subordinate to any whole, art that is unstructural, however it may abound in vivid and picturesque detail; and a one-sided art of this kind the romanticist does not hesitate to call beautiful. "If we let the reason sleep and are content to watch a succession of dissolving views," says Mr. Elton of Shelley's Revolt of Islam, "the poem is seen at once to overflow with beauty."[1]

White said that "Shelley's sense of structure was often notably inferior to his genius for verse harmony";[2] and suggested that it was a question as to "whether the fourth act of Prometheus Unbound--save for the final speech and the lines leading up to it--was altogether well-advised."[3]

Babbitt said: "What first strikes onein Rousseau's attitude towards love is the separation. . . between the ideal and the real."[4] It is significant that Shelley's ability to discover a soul-mate in first one woman and then another--even though these attractions were perhaps spiritual in character--finally gave rise to Shelley's own remark, quoted in many biographies:

> I think one is always in love with something or other; the error. . . consists in seeking in a mortal image the likeness of what is perhaps eternal.[5]

Babbitt called Shelley's lines,

> The desire of the moth for the star,
> Of the night for the morrow,
> The devotion to something afar
> From the sphere of our sorrow,

"the most perfect expression of romantic longing"; and said that "the sphere of Shelley's sorrow at the time he wrote these lines to Mrs. Williams was Mary Godwin. In the time of Harriet Westbrook, Mary had been the 'star.'"[6]

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[1] Babbitt, Rousseau and Romanticism, pp. 205-206.

[2] White, op. cit., p. 452.

[3] Ibid.

[4] Rousseau and Romanticism, p. 220.

[5] White, op. cit., p. 442.

[6] Rousseau and Romanticism, p. 226.

Epipsychidion, written when "the magic vision happened to have coalesced for the moment with Emilia Viviani," about whom Shelley was finally disillusioned, "might be used," Babbitt said, "as a manual to illustrate the difference between mere Arcadian dreaming and a true Platonism."[1]

Babbitt, we may assume, had no particular interest in the details of Shelley's life--but he did object to an art which, far from discerning, always, the universal in the particular, became at times simply a projection of mood, a wallowing in the subjective.

Shakespeare's Sonnets come naturally to mind as the criterion of poetry which presumes to universalize particular experiences. One may legitimately wonder, at least, whether, in the general light of the Sonnets, such a poem as Epipsychidion rises to the heights, or whether it is too suggestive of "biographical irrelevancies." That Shelley turned from Harriet Grove to Harriet Westbrook to Mary Godwin to Emilia Viviani to Jane Williams--either physically of spiritually--is not necessarily the concern of the critic; but if a man's poetry does not always rise superior to his life, if it sometimes manifests the "flux" and changing factor--if it, in short, lacks the centrality of universality, we may--or the humanists may--object to the philosophy of that poetry on classical grounds (according to the humanist definition of "classical").

The general drift of Babbitt's and More's criticism in regard to Shelley is fairly clear: for them, Shelley exemplified, more than any other, the Rousseauistic philosophy of dispersive, diffusive, unselective humanitarianism, coupled with Arcadian longings and a confusion of the ideal with the real. This philosophy, they thought, hindered more than it helped Shelley's poetry--poetry, which, in the light of humanistic criticism, may be said to be a natively beautiful artistic manifestation partially strangled by its accompanying philosophy. Babbitt said:

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[1] Ibid., p. 228.

> It may, however, appear some day how much the great romantic leaders, Shelley for example, suffered from the absence of just what Lessing called criticism.[1]

No impertinent claims should be made for the finality of the criticism of Babbitt and More; yet, it would appear that their criticism does, in the case of Shelley, perform a real service by presenting grounds whereon we may reject certain elements without losing the whole, whereby we may become sympathetically selective rather than sentimentally sympathetic.

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[1] Babbitt, Literature and the American College, p. 224.

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KEATS

Selectivity implies flexibility. If Babbitt was something of a relativist, it was not because his philosophy lacked centrality, but rather because his philosophy took honest cognizance of the apparent duality of human nature--and, it should be added, of the "unity at the heart of the change."

> Perhaps the most positive and critical account of man in modern literature is that of Shakespeare:
>
> We are such stuff
> As dreams are made on, and our little life
> Is rounded with a sleep.
>
> But, though strictly considered, life is but a web of illusion and a dream within a dream, it is a dream that needs to be managed with the utmost discretion, if it is not to turn into a nightmare. In other words, however, much life may mock the metaphysician, the problem of conduct remains. There is always the unity at the heart of the change. . . .
>
> . . .
>
> Man. . . may, I have tried to show, lay hold with the aid of the imagination on the element of oneness that is inextricably blended with the manifoldness and change and to just that extent may build up a sound model for imitation.
>
> . . .
>
> The supreme maxim of the ethical positivist is: By their fruits ye shall know them. If I object to a romantic philosophy it is because I do not like its fruits. I infer from its fruits that this philosophy has made a wrong use of illusion.
>
> . . .
>
> Aristotle has laid down once for all the principle that should guide the ethical positivist. "Truth," he says, "in matters of moral action is judged from facts and actual life. . . . So what we should do is to examine the preceding statements of Solon and other wise men by referring them to facts and actual life, and when they harmonize with facts we may accept them, when they are at variance with them conceive of them as mere theories."
>
> It is in this sense alone that I aspire to be called an Aristotelian; for one risks certain misunderstandings in using the name of Aristotle.
>
> . . .

> It was no doubt natural enough that the champions of the modern spirit should have rejected Aristotle along with the traditional order of which he had been made a support. Yet if they had been more modern they might have seen in him rather a chief support. They might have learned from him how to have standards and at the same time not to be immured in dogma. As it is, those who call themselves modern have come to adopt a purely exploratory attitude towards life. "On desperate seas long wont to roam," they have lost more and more the sense of what is normal and central in human experience.[1]

Babbitt believed that the critic may have standards without being "immured in dogma."[2] He understood the need for the gentle application of severe principles, as may be seen in his following paragraph concerning Keats:

> Keats himself may serve as a type of the new imaginative spontaneity and of the new fullness and freshness of sensuous perception. If Johnson is wise without being poetical, Keats if poetical without being wise, and here again we need to remember that distinctions of this kind are only approximately true. Keats has written lines that have high seriousness.[3]

For Babbitt was fully aware of the aesthetic values in Keats:

> The pure aestheticism of Keats was perhaps a legitimate reaction from the dryness and didacticism of certain pseudo-classicists, who. . . did not even know how to make a right appeal to any one sense.[4]

And, making a comparison that goes to surprising lengths, Babbitt continued:

> The great poets of the past have practical suggestiveness, but only as one element of their art and with infinitely greater sobriety than our modern romanticists. It is doubtful if any one of them can rival, in this respect, the "fine excess" of Keats; whether any one of them devised so many "subtle hieroglyphs," to use Diderot's term,--so many words or phrases that evoke some object before the inner eye, or charm the ear by an unheard melody; that invite, in short, to intense aesthetic contemplation.[5]

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[1] Babbitt, Rousseau and Romanticism, pp. xiv-xxii.

[2] Ibid., p. xxii.

[3] Ibid., p. 357.

[4] The New Laokoon, p. 130.

[5] Ibid.

Babbitt even dared to say that

> Sophocles and Dante are not perhaps more poetical that Keats--it is not easy to be more poetical than Keats. As Tennyson says, "there is something magic and of the innermost soul of poetry in almost everything he wrote.[1]

The absence of certain qualities in Keats did not blind Babbitt to the importance of Keats' natural genius:

> The ordinary man can no more by any effort of his own be as aesthetically perceptive as Keats, let us say, than he can be as spiritually perceptive as Emerson. The undertaking in either case is of the same order as that of adding a cubit to one's stature. To be completely equipped for criticism one should possess in some measure both kinds of perceptiveness.[2]

And this genius, Babbitt said,

> . . . is precisely that part of him that cannot be explained by the fact that he was the son of the keeper of a London livery stable. In this sense we may say with Emerson that "great geniuses have the shortest biographies."[3]

These passages alone should serve to obviate any charge that Babbitt was not responsive to poetic values. It is true, however, that he ranks Sophocles and Dante as being, generally speaking, superior to Keats because the ethical quality of imagination in their work (which, we have seen, Babbitt considered important to an apprehension of the underlying unity of things) made for a higher art,--an art, which, in the case of Dante, had "the support of a great and generally accepted tradition"; and the support of a "critical keenness" that enabled Sophocles "to work out a wise view of life in a less traditional age than that of Dante."4 Babbitt felt that the great ancient poets had something higher than a mere aestheticism--an aestheticism which, if accepted as final, would "turn poetry into a sort of lotus-eating."[1] As in the case of Shelley, Babbitt felt that Keats was not so much interested in the end as in the "incidents and delights of the journey."

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[1] Rousseau and Romanticism, p. 358.

[2] Masters of Modern French Criticism, p. 375.

[3] Ibid., p. 161.

[4] Ibid., p. 357.

> He [Keats] cares little for the logical linking up of his story, if only it afford him an opportunity to travel in the realms of gold. Poetry thus understood is less a progress toward a specific goal than a somewhat disconnected series of beautiful words and beautiful moments.[2]

Babbitt admitted the beauty of Isabella; but he reminded us that Arnold

> . . . goes on to show how inferior the story is in Keats to the same story in Boccaccio, "who above all things delineates his object; who subordinates expression to that which it is designed to express."[3]

It is interesting that Babbitt did not stress the autobiographical factor in Lamia. He simply suggested that the romanticist is ever ready "to fly into the arms of a false enchantress rather than to submit to 'cold philosophy'";[4] whereas, Murry has said that "Lamia. . . is imaginative autobiography, and of the most exact and faithful kind. Keats is Lycius, Fanny Brawne is the Lamia, and Apollonius is Charles Brown. . . ."[5] And Bush said that "the fire. . . in Lamia. . . came from the divided soul of a lover."[6] (Keats was having his troubles with

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[1] The New Laokoon, p. 130.

[2] Ibid., p. 76.

[3] Ibid., pp. 130-131.

[4] Babbitt, The New Laokoon, pp. 79-80.

[5] J. M. Murry, Keats and Shakespeare, London: H. Milford, Oxford University Press, 1935, pp. 157-158.

[6] D. Bush, Mythology and the Romantic Tradition, Harvard University Press, Harvard Studies in English, Vol. 18, p. 110.

Fanny at the time of composition of Lamia). Amy Lowell felt that Keats, in the poem, posed the question as to whether it would not have been better for Lycius to have dwelt with Lamia in ignorance, rather than to have suffered disillusionment brought about by the "cold, stark light of truth."[1] Babbitt, I believe, was a truer critic in taking the poem as a poem without attempting to push interpretation too far.

More and Babbitt were in agreement as to Keats' essential genius and greatness. More said:

> . . . in 1820, when he was not yet twenty-five, there followed that wonderful book which has assured to him the passionate desire of his life, a place "among the English Poets." No poet of England at that age, barely four or five at any age, had published such works as these,--Lamia, Isabella, The Eve of St. Agnes, Hyperion, and the great Odes.[2]

More knew, too, that the name of Keats will forever conjure up in the minds of poetry--lovers certain images, associations, ideas:

> It [On Looking into Chapman's Homer] is the sonnet that to most people probably comes first to mind when Keats is named and his destiny remembered. There is about it the golden flush and wonder of youth--it was written in his twentieth year--and one catches in it also, or seems to catch, a certain quickness of breath which forebodes the rapture so soon quenched. The inspiration of unsoiled nature and England's clear-voiced early singers is here mingled as in no other of our poets.[3]

More found that Keats was affected by "the same emotional philosophy" that appeared in the works of other Romantics--but it was counterbalanced in a different way. Wordsworth's humanitarianism had an "admixture of Puritanic asceticism which made of it a kind of passive discipline"; Byron was humanitarian, but with a "saving self-reproach and cynicism"; in Keats, the Rousseauistic philosophy

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[1] Amy Lowell, John Keats, Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1927, Vol. II, p. 308.

[2] "Keats," Shelburne Essays, Fourth Series, pp. 106-107.

[3] Shelburne Essays, Fourth Series, p. 100.

> . . . was qualified by an aesthetic humility which rendered him in the end curiously docile to tradition. Few things are more significant in the romantic poetry of England than the change in Keats' versification from the license of his rhymed couplets in Endymion to the almost Drydenian regularity of Lamia. Whether or not that change will appear altogether a profit, it must be admitted that no such organic development can be discovered in Shelley. . . .[1]

Nor does one find, says More, anything in Shelley's correspondence

> . . . comparable to the long letter of Keats to Reynolds (3 May 1818) in which he questions the very principles of his poetic theory.[2]

The matter of Keats' versification and poetic theory suggests to More the question of his diction, which he said,

> . . . was in large measure the influence of a remote age--which may be taken as another lesson in the nature of originality. The effect is as if the language were undergoing a kind of rejuvenation and no dulness of long custom lay between words and objects. Wordsworth's endeavour to introduce the speech of daily use is in comparison the mere adopting of another artifice. It is scarcely necessary to add that this spontaneity in a mind so untrained as Keats' often fell into license and barbarism. From the days of the first reviewers his ill-formed compound terms and his other solecisms have, and quite rightly, been ridiculed and repudiated.[3]

But More adds--and it is important that he does add it:

> Sometimes, indeed, his super-grammatical creations have a strange quality of genius that rebukes criticism to modesty.[4]

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[1] Ibid., p. 13.

[2] Ibid., pp. 13-14.

3Ibid., pp. 102-103

[4] Shelburne Essays, Fourth Series, pp. 102-103.

The events of Keats' life did not hold much interest for More. Keats' letters to Fanny, More said, resembled Hazlitt's Liber Amoris--"they have the same uncontrolled passion and the same unfortunate note of vulgarity," which, it is worth noting, More attributed "not so much to the exuberance of his emotion as to the lack of any corresponding force in the woman." More spoke of the "flaccidity" of Fanny's temperament, which "deprives the episode of tragic ideality, and lowers it to the things of the street." The unfortunate love affair helped to change what More called Keats's "master-vision to something approaching a sickly sentimentality" and helped to kill the poet in him."[1]

This sentimentalism was seen, More said, in Keats' lines to Fanny: "I have two luxuries to brood over in my walks, your Loveliness and the hour of my death."[2]

More felt that it was not correct to call Keats a Greek, "as Shelley did explicitly and as Matthew Arnold did by implication," chiefly because Keats was not a scholar; and More quotes Mr. Basil de Selincourt:

> . . . and of the literature in which the Greek spirit found true expression he could know nothing. But just as it was through his devotion to Spenser that he became a poet, so was it through his kinship, both in spirit and taste, with the Elizabethans that he became a poet of ancient Greece.[3]

More analyzed rather carefully Keats's relationship to the Elizabethans and Greeks. He knew that Keats sought after knowledge, but that when

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[1] Ibid., pp. 119-120. If More had had the advantage of the later work of Amy Lowell and others on Keats' romance with Fanny Browne, his conclusions in this regard might have been different.

[2] Ibid.,

[3] Ibid., pp. 101-102.

> . . . he came to put his half-digested theories into practice, he turned, not to the moral drama of the Greeks or to the passionate human nature of the Elizabethans, but to the humanitarian philosophy that was in the air about him; and, accepting this, he fell into a crude dualism. "I find there is no worthy pursuit," he writes, "but the idea of doing some good to the world. . . . I have been hovering for some time between an exquisite sense of the luxurious and a love for philosophy.[1]

Babbitt interprets this sort of sentence more sensitively to some extent:

> There are signs that Keats himself would not have been content in the long run with a purely recreative role. . . .[2]

However, he feels forced to confess that the

> . . . evidence is rather that Keats would have succumbed to his own poetical detriment, to some of the forms of sham wisdom current in his day, especially the new humanitarian evangel.[3]

And in a footnote, Babbitt said that Keats's "attempt to rewrite *Hyperion* from a humanitarian point of view is a dismal failure."[4] More argued that Keats, in writing *The Fall of Hyperion*, tried to "pass from the inspiration of Milton and Shakespeare to that of Wordsworth," to the detriment of the poem, and "against the native grain" of his own genius.[5]

Almost every critic of Romanticism with whose works I am acquainted has had to deal somehow or other with Keats's famous identification of truth and beauty. Babbitt very simply said that Keats was wrong; that such an identification "was disproved for practical purposes as far back as the Trojan War"; and he adds almost flippantly: "Helen was beautiful, but was neither good nor true."[1] More delivered his opinion on the point via a curious comparison between Keats and Poe:

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[1] *Shelburne Essays, Fourth Series,* p. 123.

[2] *Rousseau and Romanticism,* p. 114.

[3] *Ibid.*

[4] *Ibid.*, n. 1.

[5] *Shelburne Essays, Fourth Series,* p. 128.

> Taking truth and beauty as Poe did and as Keats did, Poe, I hold, was the more honest and the less mischievous theorizer than Keats. For taking truth and beauty as they did, Poe was manly and clear-headed in opposing them one to the other; whereas Keats delivered a doctrine as dangerous as it was misleading when he threw out those memorable words. . . .[2]

Keats was most closely akin to the Elizabethans, More said, in his constant "association of the ideas of beauty (or love) and death." More thought that

> in the dramatists that association attained its climax in the broken cry of Webster, which rings and sobs like a paroxysm of jealous rage against the all-embracing power:
>
> Cover her face; mine eyes dazzle; she died young.[3]

"But for the tedium of repetition," More said, one could go through Keats' 1820 volume and "show how completely the pattern of that book is wrought on the same background of ideas," and he refers to the two stanzas which relate how Isabella unearths the body of her lover, as exemplifying particularly the "poignant meeting of the shapes of loveliness and decay," which, More said, "is the inheritance of the middle ages." The Greeks had their version of this theme, and, More said, "in the story of Persephone and Dis gave it its most perfect mythological form. But its interest with them lay primarily in its ethical associations. . . ." "No Greek," More added, "could have so gloated over the purely physical contrast of ideas--'a skull upon a mat of roses lying.'"[4]

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[1] Rousseau and Romanticism, p. 357.

[2] Demon of the Absolute, p. 85.

[3] Shelburne Essays, Fourth Series, p. 114.

[4] Ibid., p. 114-116.

Keats descended occasionally into a sort of "bastard or Cockney" Elizabethanism, More thought, because he

> was never quite able to distinguish between the large liberties of the strong and the jaunty flippancy of the underbred; his passion for beauty could never entirely save him from mawkish prettiness, and his idea of love was too often a mere sickly sweetness.[1]

Babbitt felt that to speak of Keats as "an Elizabethan born out of due season" was partially to miss the mark--Keats having regretted his "horrid morbidity of temperament"--a kind of morbidity from which, Babbitt said, the Elizabethans probably did not suffer.[2] However, in a footnote, Babbitt modified his charge:

> I believe he had a vein of essential manliness that was a counterpoise to the "horrid morbidity." As a matter of fact, the Rousseauistic temperament was far more marked in Shelley than in Keats.[3]

Whether or not Matthew Arnold's "touchstone" theory is acceptable to all or not, it constitutes a sort of critical method that for good or bad depends wholly upon aesthetic perceptiveness. It is interesting that More suggested that Keats was separated from the Elizabethans by his lack of ability to strike the note found in the following lines of Ford:

> For he is like to something I remember
> A great while since, a long, long time ago.[4]

Always, when this note is struck, says More, "a curtain is drawn from behind the fretful human actors, and we look beyond into infinite space."[5] In one other instance More's criticism depends at least in a measure on this sort of feeling for poetic values. He said:

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[1] Ibid., pp. 108-109.

[2] The New Laokoon, pp. 112-113.

[3] Ibid., n. 1.

[4] Shelburne Essays, Fourth Series, pp. 122-123.

[5] Ibid. I have wondered whether or not the last stanza of The Eve of St. Agnes has something of this quality.

> With Wordsworth and Shelley, even with Byron, some thought of man's sufferings and aspirations rises between the poet's eye and the vision of Nature, but with Keats she is still a great primeval force, inhuman and self-centred, beautiful, and sublime, and cruel by turns. One catches this note at times in the earlier poems, as in the largeness and aloofness of such a picture as this:
>
> On a lone winter evening, when the frost
> Has wrought a silence. . . .[1]

In his relation to nature, Keats "stands curiously apart from his age," More said--in that "his verse is still unsubjected to the destinies of mankind."[2]

Synthesizing the criticisms of Babbitt and More, it would appear that, to them, Keats was unsurpassed in the purely aesthetic aspect of poetry; that he was influenced by the Greeks and Elizabethans on one hand, and by Rousseauism on the other; that he was separated from the Greeks by his lack of education and lack of a unifying philosophy (a philosophy which in time he might have gained); that his genius was not explainable in terms of the events of his life, but was superior to them; that he was "too sturdy to be snuffed out by an article and had less of the quivering Rousseauistic sensibility than Shelley himself";[3] and that he did attain to a high place among the English poets. As More said:

> . . . to the world, not Death but eternal Loveliness carried the palm. We think of him as the Marcellus of literature, who could not break through the *fata aspera*, and as one of the "inheritors of unfulfilled renown"; and still we know that he has accomplished a great destiny. His promise was greater than the achievement of others.[4]

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[1] *Ibid.*, pp. 107-108.

[2] *Ibid.*, pp. 112-113.

[3] *Rousseau and Romanticism*, p. 321, n. 1.

[4] *Shelburne Essays, Fourth Series*, p. 121.

We see again that the two humanists applied the corrective of their criticism by recognizing genius while deploring the absence of a true philosophy which might have ennobled that genius; and that they treated the poet, his works, and the influences upon them individually rather than sweepingly or rigidly.

BYRON

Babbitt, like More, as we shall later see, observed both classic and romantic elements in Byron. Of the former, he said:

> . . . Byron's laudation of the old literary order actually corresponds to something in his creative writing. . . . [1]

Yet Byron's irony, directed against his contemporaries, savored of both the classic and the romantic.

There is a good deal of difference, according to Babbitt, between the Socratic irony and Romantic irony. "Socrates," said Babbitt, "professes ignorance, and this profession seems very ironical, for it turns out that his ignorance is more enlightened, that is, more central than other men's swelling conceit of knowledge."[2] Whereas,

> In the extreme type of romantic ironist not only are intellect and emotion at loggerheads but action often belies both; he thinks one thing and feels another and does still a third. The most ironical contrast of all is that between the romantic "ideal" and the actual event.
>
> . . .
>
> The crumbling of the ideal is often so complete indeed when put to the test that irony is at times, we may suppose, a merciful alternative to madness. When disillusion overtakes the uncritical enthusiast, when he finds that he has taken some cloud bank for terra firma, he continues to cling to his dream, but at the same time wishes to show that he is no longer the dupe of it; and so "hot baths of sentiment," as Jean Paul says of his novels, "are followed by cold douches of irony."[3]

Of the Byronic irony, Babbitt said:

> Byron's irony is prevailingly sentimental, but along with this romantic element he has much irony and satire that Swift would have understood perfectly.[4]

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[1] Masters of Modern French Criticism, p. 64.

[2] Rousseau and Romanticism, pp. 243-244.

[3] Ibid., p. 264.

[4] Ibid., p. 266.

There is no extended discussion of *Don Juan*; but he praised the poem--in a sort of left-handed way--by saying that, exotic as Don Juan's tastes were, he "is not on the whole nympholeptic. . . .[1] Babbitt also said and not complimentarily, as the previous references to Romantic irony would indicate--that "some of the best examples are found in that masterpiece of romantic irony, *Don Juan*."[2]

Byron's sympathy with the neo-classics (one instance in which Byron's revolutionary spirit was directed apparently against the poets of his own age), was only half-convincing to Babbitt, who said:

> Byron exalted Pope in theory while he was actually overthrowing him in his practice. "I look upon this as the declining age of English poetry," he Byron says in his letter to Bowles, and he goes on to express his shame that he himself had been one of the builders of the new Babel.[3]

Byron's revolutionary spirit, though in consonance with Romanticism, broke out in unusual directions. His "laudation of the old literary order" set him somewhat apart from the other romantic poets, as did his overt activity on behalf of the Greeks (an activity which is almost Elizabethan in its forthrightness and adventuresomeness). But Babbitt thought that there was "eleutheromania" in Byron's ideal of liberty, though Byron was somewhat justified by reason of the "counter-excess of Toryism" then prevalent in society.[4]

Babbitt said of Byron that he

> helped forward the revolt against all kinds of authority, including literary authority. . . .[5]

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[1] *Rousseau and Romanticism*, p. 332.

[2] *Ibid.*, p. 266.

[3] *Masters of Modern French Criticism*, p. 61.

[4] *The New Laokoon*, p. 197.

[5] *Masters of Modern French Criticism*, p. 82.

and compared him to Chateaubriand:

> The relationship to Rousseau is the common bond between Chateaubriand and Byron. They differ from one another. . . . Byron waged war on authority and tradition. In both men we have Rousseauism with an added touch of wildness and misanthropy. They both suffer like Rousseau from an unreconciled antinomy between thought and feeling.[1]

However, Babbitt felt that Byron himself--whether he approved of Rousseauism or not--had a fairly correct estimate of its nature.

> . . . in the very passage where Byron calls Rousseau a lover of ideal beauty he writes that
>
> . . . he knew
> How to make madness beautiful, and threw
> O'er erring thoughts and deeds a heavenly hue.[2]

Babbitt felt that Byron's line,

I love not man the less, but nature more,

indicated the poet's opposition to the "somewhat conventionalized human nature" of the neo-classics, and his approval of the "cult of primitive nature." Babbitt, of course, frequently admitted that there was "undeniably an element of narrowness and artificiality" in the neo-classic conception of nature as found in Pope and Boileau.[3]

In Childe Harold (Canto II, xxxvii), Byron gave, said Babbitt, magnificent expression to the "most untenable of paradoxes--that one escapes from solitude by eschewing human haunts in favor of some wilderness." And, referring to Canto IV, clxxvii, Babbitt added:

> In his less misanthropic moods the Rousseauist sees in wild nature not only a refuge from society, but also a suitable setting for his companionship with the ideal mate, for what the French term la solitude à deux.[4]

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[1] Ibid., p. 61.

[2] The New Laokoon, pp. 104-105.

[3] Rousseau and Romanticism, pp. 268-269.

[4] Rousseau and Romanticism, p. 280.

Babbitt's general tone, as well as his specific statements--in regard to Byron would seem to indicate that, for him, Byron was extremely individual in his manifestations of classic and romantic influences; that he was less the metaphysical escapist and "nympholept," and more the man of the world, the man of action; that he had a more clear-cut conception of the natures of the two opposites, classicism and romanticism. One cannot help concluding that Babbitt was much amused by the lines in which Byron lambasted his fellow Romantics. Though there was more theatricality, there was perhaps less sickly sweetness and sentimentality in Byron than in some of the other poets; and of this, too, Babbitt no doubt approved.

In an irony-laden but cheerfully-amused passage of his own, Babbitt said:

> The victim of romantic melancholy is at times tender and elegiac, at other times he sets up as a heaven-defying Titan. This latter pose became especially common in France around 1830 when the influence of Byron had been added to that of Chateaubriand. Under the influence of these two writers a whole generation of youth became "things of dark imaginings," predestined to a blight that was at the same time the badge of their superiority. One wished like Rene to have an "immense, solitary and stormy soul," and also, like a Byronic hero, to have a diabolical glint in the eye and a corpse-like complexion, and so seem the "blind and deaf agent of funereal mysteries."[1]

It is convenient to separate, to some extent, the criticisms of Babbitt and More in regard to Byron, chiefly because More was a Byron specialist. Before taking up More's criticism of Byron, I wish to present as briefly as possible certain biographical data which may suggest the reason for More's early interest in Byron (an interest which might seem at least surprising in view of More's later criticisms of the Romantics) and at the same time shed some general light on More's whole approach to criticism.

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[1] Rousseau and Romanticism, p. 318.

If Babbitt's system sprant out of his head like Minerva full-armed, it may be said that More, from his youth up, accustomed himself, like Coleridge, to the habitual consideration of the vast. Though his philosophy changed and developed tremendously in the course of his life, the changes were not the result of his deflection of interest in the direction of something merely novel or news; they were rather his convictions gradually shaped out of the analyses of a mind which was, one may say, literally interested in everything all the time. William Lyon Phelps said:

> Dr. More was one of the most learned men in the world. He was a scholar in Sanskrit and in some other oriental languages; he was a first-class scholar in Greek and Latin, and of course at home in the principal modern European tongues; he was familiar with the history of human thought from the dawn of philosophy to the latest contemporary conjecture. . . .
>
> . . .
>
> The range of his mental interests is shown by the fact, that although his heart lay in the study of philosophy, metaphysics and theology, he once wrote a biography of Benjamin Franklin, who, disgusted with the uncertainties of those studies, said that he quitted them for others more satisfactory.
>
> . . .
>
> Dr. More was one of the greatest living authorities on the history of the early Christian Church; and during the last twenty years of his life, Christian faith held complete possession of his heart. . . . And there is not the slightest doubt that the most precious treasure in his mature and in his closing years was his belief in the Incarnation, which he had come to believe in after a long early period of agnosticism.[1]

Folke Leander quotes More as having said of himself (in the posthumously published Pages from an Oxford Diary, Princeton, 1937) that he passed through the stages of "childish faith, romanticism, rationalistic scepticism, critical curiosity, classical taste, Platonism."

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[1] William Lyon Phelps, "Paul Elmer More," Commemorative Tributes, New York, Academy Publication No. 92, 1938.

Leander says:

> It was a revival of his romantic interests. . . that liberated More from the chains of scientific materialism. The relation between this romanticism and his Hindu mysticism [More was at one time very much interested in Hindu philosophy, as his essays and his knowledge of Sanskrit clearly show] seems to have been one of mere juxtaposition, somewhat after the manner of Emerson. At least we know from his own testimony that such was the case at the time when he was first acquainted with Irving Babbitt. "I am afraid that I held for him then the place afterwards occupied by Rousseau." Gradually, through Babbitt's influence, romanticism was expelled from his system; and thus he finally arrived at the view of life which has been embodied in the ten first volumes of the Shelburne Essays and in his book on Platonism. The Oriental element remained in his religious background, but the further one reads in the Shelburne Essays the more apparent does it become that his heart is now rather in a Platonism seen against the background of Oriental religion than in Oriental religion for its own sake. The famous philosophy of the "inner check," as summarized in the Definitions of Dualism, was now the very center of his view of life.[1]

That More progressed to his belief in Christian faith, Phelps pointed out; but we have also More's Skeptical Approach to Religion (New Shelburne Essays) which is of itself sufficient testimony in regard to More's interest in Christianity.

But even at the start, More's romanticism was of a very mild variety. In his edition of Byron's Complete Poetical Works (1905), he gave ample evidence that even at that date (before Babbitt had had time to influence him) he clearly distinguished between the classic and romantic strains in Byron, and approved the former. In fact, the groundwork of his later anti-Rousseauism may be clearly seen in his editorial notes, etc., in the Byron edition.[2] One could almost be sure, that, Babbitt or no Babbitt, More would have progressed in his chosen direction anyhow. And if Babbitt influenced More somewhat in the direction of anti-Rousseauism, we may be sure that More's tremendous knowledge of historical Christianity was not without its effects on Babbitt.

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[1] Folke Leander, "More--'Puritan a Rebours,'" American Scholar, VII (1938), 441-442.

[2] In More's essay, "Humanitarianism," in the Shelburne Essays, First Series, we find as early as 1904 his objections to humanitarianism as a substitute for religion.

One comes to think of the two men as great and independent forces moving in parallel lines, rather than as a sort of commercial firm engaged--as some of their critics would have us believe--in cavilling at a certain literature.

Fore More's criticism of Byron I am dependent on his edition of Byron, and on his essay entitled "Don Juan" in the Shelburne Essays, Third Series. The former was published in 1905 (although More had prepared the text "some seven or eight years" before[1]); the latter in 1906; these years, with the seven or eight preceding years, probably constituted the period of More's greatest interest in Byron.

In the edition of Byron, More aimed at "chronology and convention," in his arrangement of the poems. He felt that the generally chronological sequence would show how "Byron's manner passed from genre to genre as his genius developed."[2]

In his biographical sketch of the poet, More did not care to probe too deeply the details of Byron's life. For example, of Byron's divorce, More said, tersely: "Into the causes and mysteries of the divorce we may not enter. Byron was wild and his wife a prude; it would seem that nothing more should need be said." Moreover,

> But to do anything like justice to the psychology to Byron would require a separate study in itself; and if the subject is here passed lightly over, this is because it seems, on the whole, less important to-day than the analysis of his art. Everyone recognizes at a glance the tormented personality and the revolutionary leaven in Byron's spirit; not every one, perhaps, would comprehend immediately the extraordinary result

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[1] More, "Editor's Note," p. v, in Byron's Complete Poetical Works, Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1905.

[2] Ibid. More grouped the poems as follows: Childe Harold's Pilgrimage; Shorter Poems; Miscellaneous Poems; Domestic Pieces; Hebrew Melodies; Ephemeral Verses; Satires; Tales, Chiefly Oriental; Italian Poems; Dramas; and Don Juan.

> produced by the union of these with his classical method,--a result so peculiar as alone to lend permanent interest to his work. And this interest is heightened by the rapid change and development in his character.[1]

It Is significant that both Babbitt and More consistently found the analysis of art more important than the analysis of the author's personality.

More found "four pretty clearly defined periods" in Byron's life:

(1) "the youthful satirist lashing friend and foe with savage bitterness. . . baying at the world";

(2) Byron "taking pleasure in melodramatic isolation from society, exulting in moody revenge and unutterable mysteries, stalking the world in gorgeous Oriental disguise";

(3) Byron "of the later Childe Harold, who would unburden his soul of its self-engendered torture in solitary communion with nature"; and,

(4) the "self-mocking Don Juan, with his strange mingling of sweet and bitter, infinitely heavy-hearted at bottom. . . ."[2]

More said that the basis of Byron's character "was undoubtedly a proud sincerity"[3] and that "the two master-traits of Byron's genius are the revolutionary spirit and classical art." Amplifying this in a headnote, More said:

> Two distinct, and sometimes hostile, veins are to be noted in Byron's genius,--one romantic and lyrical, connecting him with the revolutionary poets of the day, the other satirical and neo-classic, deriving from the school of Queen Anne. In

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[1] Ibid., "Biographical Sketch," p. xxi.

[2] Ibid.

[3] More thought that Byron was never completely self-deceived, and quoted Byron's Epistle to Augusta to show that Byron deemed himself "the careful pilot" of his own woe--that, in a word, Byron blamed himself for his own misfortunes (See "Biographical Sketch," p. xviii).

> Childe Harold and the Tales ["Tales, Chiefly Oriental"--see "Table of Contents" in More's Byron] the first vein is to be seen almost pure; in the Satires the second reigns practically unmixed; in Don Juan the two are inextricably blended, giving the real Byron, the full poet.[1]

Of Byron's neo-classicism, More said:

> It was in no mood of mere carping at the present that Byron condemned the romantic spirit, and waged continuous, if often indiscreet, warfare for Milton and Dryden and Pope.

and More added:

> He perceived clearly a real kinship, on one side of his genius, with the writers of Queen Anne, and was unflagging in his efforts to follow them as models. He was saved from their aridity by his revolutionary spirit, which was equally strong within him. . . .[2]

More defined the word "classical" as meaning

> a certain predominance of intellect over the emotions, and a reliance on broad effects rather than on subtle impressions; these two characteristics working harmoniously together and being subservient to human interest.[3]

This sort of classicism More found in Manfred, in Marino Faliero, in Don Juan, and others; he knew, however, that though Byron had a "marvelous sweep and force," he lacked the "iridescent style" of Shelley and Keats.

> Had his genius possessed also the subtle grace of the more romantic writers, he would have been classical in a still higher and broader sense; for the greatest poets, the true classics, Homer as well as Shakespeare, have embraced both gifts. As it is, we are left to contrast the vigorous, though incomplete, art of Byron with the wayward and often effeminate style of his rivals.[4]

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[1] Ibid., headnote to "Satires," p. 240.

[2] Ibid., "Biographical Sketch," pp. xiii-xiv.

[3] Ibid., "Biographical Sketch," p. xii.

[4] Ibid., "Biographical Sketch," p. xiii.

The revolutionary spirit in Byron which saved him from the aridities of the neo-classics was nevertheless the basis of his errors in conduct and art, says More--errors reflecting an undisciplined temperament, errors involving bad grammar, slipshod construction, etc. Byron only rarely attained a complete "self-restraint and harmony of form,"[1] but he did, however, manifest great development in technique--except in the drama. More said that though Manfred is in its own sphere superb, the dramas which followed it---Cain, Heaven and Earth, and The Deformed Transformed--are "each a step below the other in excellence," as were the dramas which followed Marino Faliero. But, said More,

> In all other branches--lyric, reflective, satiric, narrative--Byron's work progresses in mastery with almost as perfect a regularity, though his nearest approach to perfection may have come in each genre just before the end. This difference between his development in the drama and in the other forms of poetry is no doubt due to the undramatic nature of his genius.[2]

The "Italian Poems"--The Lament of Tasso, Beppo, and others--More considered "the least valuable portion of Byron's work."[3] The "Tales, Chiefly Oriental"--including The Giaour, The Bride of Abydos, The Corsair, The Prisoner of Chillon, and others--are important, More said, because

> they represent the revolutionary side of Byron's character,--the insolent disregard of custom, the longing for strange adventure, the passion for vivid color, the easy sentimentality. . . .

These poems, More thought, had "a popularity almost unparalleled" because of their "tremendous flow of life," and "superb egotism."[4]

It was, however, when this romantic strain mingled with the classic to form Don Juan that Byron reached his height as a poet. Of Don Juan, More wrote in the Shelburne Essays:

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[1] Ibid., "Biographical Sketch," p. xix.

[2] Ibid., headnote to "Dramas," p. 478.

[3] Ibid., headnote to "Italian Poems," p. 436.

[4] Ibid., Headnote to "Tales, Chiefly Oriental," p. 309.

> Out of the bitterness of his soul, out of the wreck of heroic passions which, though heroic in intensity, had ended in quailing of the heart, he sought what the great makers of epic had sought,--a solace and sense of uplifted freedom. The heroic ideal was gone, the refuge of religion was gone; but passing to the opposite extreme, by showing the power of the human heart to mock at all things, he would still set forth the possibility of standing above and apart from all things. He, too, went beyond the limitations of destiny by laughter, as Homer and Vergil and Milton had risen by the imagination. And, in doing this, he wrote the modern epic.[1]

And in a passage of criticism which is in itself artistic, More said:

> We are learning a new significance of human life. . . and the sublime audacities of the elder poets in attempting to transcent the melancholia of their day, are growing antiquated, just as Byron's heroic mockery is turning stale. . . . Meanwhile it may not be amiss to make clear to ourselves the purpose and character of one of the few, the very few, great poems in our literature.[2]

Don Juan was, for More, in a class by itself.

> . . . it might be argued that *Don Juan*, in its actual form, was the only epic manner left for a poet of the nineteenth century to adopt with power of conviction. In one sense *Don Juan* is a satire, to many critics the greatest satire ever written; but it is something still more than that. It is the epic of modern life.[3]

It is perhaps unnecessary to summarize More's criticism of Byron or to attempt to compare More's work--on Byron--with that of Babbitt. This much may safely be said: Both scholars found in Byron classic and romantic elements; although it is probable that More, by reason of his extensive and intensive work on Byron, had a more accurate estimate of the extent to which these two elements appeared, blended and otherwise, in Byron's poetry.

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[1] *Third Series*, p. 176.

[2] *Ibid.*

[3] *Byron's Complete Poetical Works*, headnote to *Don Juan*, p. 744.

CONCLUSION

It should be clear that Babbitt and More proceeded very carefully from what they considered broad classical principles to detailed critical conclusions, in the light of which Wordsworth (and Coleridge), Shelley, Keats, and Byron--so far from being lumped together and condemned--become living poets, each inhabited to a different degree by poetic genius, which was inhibited (or sometimes helped) to a degree by the prevailing Romantic spirit.

It was l'emphase romantique to which the two scholars generally objected. Generally; because both knew the pure aesthetic value of the short romantic lyric. They did not feel, however, that a false philosophy should be permitted to dominate a literature to its and the world's detriment.

It has been charged that Babbitt was a moralizer,--narrow, verbalistic, puritanic, and unappreciative--and that More was aloof, glacial, and given to ex cathedra pronouncements on literature. A careful study of a portion of the work of these two men would seem to indicate that they took a firm stand for what will, to the self-deluded escapist mentality, ever seem untrue: namely, the truth that freedom exists only within the law.

The two scholars seemed to find that what might be called moral law is consonant with the greatest literature and literary values--aesthetic and otherwise. This critical view--to them a certainty--did not in any way obviate their apprehension of the innate poetic genius of the great Romantics. As we have seen, they knew the "inevitableness" of Wordsworth at his best; the lyric grace of Shelley; the great beauty of Keats; the broad sweep and satire of Byron.

Yet, so flexible was the humanist criticism that Babbitt and More were able, while recognizing poetic virtue, to shear away the useless, or to indicate how it might be done--to present a critical basis which is greater than that constituted by a mere appreciativeness involving emotionalism, escapism, mere relativism.

This critical process and its results form what may be called a valuable corrective, offsetting, to a degree, both Rousseauistic philosophy and the elements in literature and in criticism stemming from it. No claim is made here for the absolute finality of any criticism, but only for the valuable work done in what would seem to be a sane, healthy, classical direction.

Assuming that a Sophocles and a Shakespeare manifested an ability to seize upon the universal in things, to observe a moral order--its operations and consequences, and to display great poetic and lyrical genius, it would seem that a criticism professedly stemming from these phenomena would tend to have, in a measure, the same ageless and timeless applicability and worth as the literature on which it rests, and hence a greater relevance to the literary science. Greater, perhaps, than a critical method which might be unduly personal, emotional (or, it could be added, sociological, economic, or psychiatric), in spite of the valuable contributions these changing, expanding viewpoints have no doubt made.

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