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The New Humanists in Nebraska: A Study of the Mid-West Quarterly (1913-1918)

R.D. Stock

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R. D. Stock

The New Humanists
in Nebraska:
A Study of the
Mid-West Quarterly
(1913-1918)

new series no. 61

University of Nebraska Studies

1979

**The New Humanists
in Nebraska**

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The New Humanists in Nebraska

A Study of the
Mid-West Quarterly (1913-18)

university of nebraska studies : new series no. 61

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For Louis A. Landa

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Introduction

The University of Nebraska . . . has just issued the first number of the *Mid-West Quarterly*, a magazine interesting in itself and even more interesting as a sign of the times. . . . the articles might be called academic by those who have become accustomed even to the better of our commercial magazines, but they are addressed . . . to the smaller public, and they are academic in the good sense of the word—thoughtful discussions of the deeper problems of the day as seen from the angle where literature and education and life meet and cross one another. This Quarterly will be taken by some as a confirmation of the common opinion that the brains of the country are draining from our Eastern to our Western institutions. But that is another, and very tangled, story.

Nation, 20 November 1913

PAUL ELMER MORE, the editor of the *Nation*, had several motives for celebrating the birth of the *Mid-West Quarterly*. He was a close friend of its editor, Prosser Hall Frye, and he believed it would contribute signally to a movement of which he and Irving Babbitt, more than a decade before, had been the pioneers: the new, or neo-, humanism. More himself was just completing a two-year stint as editor of the *Nation*, and under his guidance it had become not only the most intelligent conservative journal in America, but also, in the opinion of many, the best literary review in the English language. More would be resigning its editorship, however, by the time the second issue of the *Quarterly* appeared in January 1914, and the *Nation* would feel his loss. In 1914, too, was founded the *New Republic*, another, but very different, “sign of the times.”

Frye had come to know More through his brother, Louis Trenchard More, then teaching, like Frye, at the University of Nebraska, and Frye had been on intimate terms with Paul since 1899, when he and his new wife visited the More brothers at Paul’s retreat in Shelburne, New Hampshire. They corresponded frequently and

at length until Frye's death in 1934.¹ A glance at his essays or the Frye-More letters will show Frye's loyal but lively allegiance to neo-humanism. His dedicating to More his most famous book, *Romance and Tragedy* (1922), elicited one of More's best-known remarks: "I am obliged to say that the dedication may work you a mischief. I have gained the rather sad preeminence of being at once the least read and the worst hated author in the country."² A year earlier, when Frye had sought his permission for the dedication, More observed that "our only hope of accomplishing anything at all is to give the impression that there is a considerable group of us hanging together." He describes the neohumanists as an embattled group (H. L. Mencken had recently fulminated against them) and welcomes into "the circle of the damned" Frye's colleague, S. B. Gass, the second most important contributor to the *Quarterly*.³ It is not strange, then, that the new humanism should find ample space on the pages of Frye's journal.

But Frye was a pioneering scholar and critic in his own right. One of his most illustrious colleagues, H. B. Alexander, described him as "the dean of the group of critical and belles-lettrist authors which the University of Nebraska has produced." Many years later he is still recalled as one of the leaders of a "vital literary movement." And the highly respected first editor of the *Prairie Schooner*, Lowry Wimberly, considered him "the most intellectual man he had known."⁴ Under his direction, the *Quarterly* became for a few years one of the most articulate organs of the new humanism. Both S. B. Gass and P. M. Buck, good friends of Frye and prolific writers for the journal, were some dozen years his juniors and were clearly influenced by his thought. Other contributors, whether Nebraskans like Louise Pound and Langworthy Taylor, or outsiders like Robert Shafer and Hardin Craig, also reflect the values of neo-humanism. There are of course a great variety of articles and viewpoints, and Frye was no tyrannical editor, but the only significant contributor who is not patently a neohumanist is H. B. Alexander. The *Quarterly* was published by G. P. Putnam's, the same conservative house that had been issuing More's *Shelburne Essays*, and the *Quarterly*, like the *Essays*, was an important medium for the early expression of neohumanism.

It is no part of my purpose to undertake a history of the new humanism. That has already been adequately done, and several good articles and books have appeared on its chief advocates, Babbitt and More.⁵ Moreover, in the course of analyzing Frye's *Quarterly* essays, it will be possible to identify many of the central posi-

tions of neohumanism. Nevertheless, some preliminary definitions may be useful.

The *Quarterly* ran from 1913 to 1918. The intellectual currents in these years have been examined very carefully by Henry F. May in *The End of American Innocence: A Study of the First Years of Our Own Time, 1912–1917*. May argues that the striking changes in American culture and philosophy found in the twenties can be traced, not merely to the Great War, but to the years immediately antecedent. Before 1912 Americans subscribed, he says, to three basic articles of faith: absolute moral values (moralism), the inevitability of progress, and, to a lesser degree, culture. Other related ideals were democracy, uplift, optimism, reform. The unfair but popular caricature of Woodrow Wilson represents the type. European, particularly British, culture was admired, and especially the Victorian humanist Matthew Arnold, although commentators generally affirmed the superiority of America in its political and social dimensions. It was, May says, a time of “sureness and unity, at least on the surface,” but the intellectual consensus was too facile, and would be challenged, well before the war, from several different directions. For example, the classical, conservative notion of education as transmitter and preserver of culture was doubly attacked: by the Deweyites in the interests of pragmatism, and by others on behalf of vocationalism. Naturalism in its many forms (Marxism, behaviorism, pragmatism, the novels of Zola and Dreiser, the “Ash Can” school of painting) undermined conventional notions of man as a spiritual and moral being. Moral norms also seemed to be assaulted by revivals of romantic aestheticism, Nietzschean egoism, critical impressionism. Anglo-Saxon traits were depreciated in favor of fashionably “oppressed” races or nationalities: not so much the Negro as yet, but chiefly the Italians and the Slavs. The Boas school of cultural relativism prevailed among much of the intelligentsia. The intuitionism of Bergson, and new movements in poetry such as imagism and free verse, threatened the ideals of order and rationality. Even the motion picture was hailed as revolutionizing education, and Edison proclaimed the obsolescence of books in the classroom. Of course conservatives and traditionalists, the “defenders of culture” as May terms them, reacted to all these assaults, but May urges that their cause had been fatally weakened by their own superficiality, and that the Great War only accelerated its ultimate collapse.

May gives surprisingly little space to the new humanism, however. One reason may be that the movement itself failed to gain

momentum till the twenties and thirties, well beyond the compass of his study. But it is also true that on the few occasions when May mentions Babbitt or More, he has trouble categorizing them. To be sure, they are in some ways conservatives; yet they loathed as much as any of the rebels the vapidness and optimism of the "defenders of culture." He remarks that Babbitt and More were defending, not, like the other conservatives, American nineteenth-century culture, but "much older forms and beliefs," and this may explain why "their conservatism survived the overthrow of the culture of 1912."⁶ Writers for the *Quarterly* oppose most of the new currents charted by May: vocational or pragmatic theories of education, the many faces of naturalism, irrationality, imagism, and *vers libre*. The motion pictures, just maturing in 1914 with *Birth of a Nation*, are mentioned only twice, both times briefly and disparagingly (the sarcastic title of one article is "Movie Democracy"). Like other conservatives, the neohumanists of the *Quarterly* defend traditional morality, admire Arnold and other elements of European culture (even British spelling is regularly adhered to), take pride in the Anglo-Saxon heritage and character. On the other hand, the *Quarterly* writers do *not* share with some other conservatives an uncritical allegiance to: the inevitability of progress, the self-evident superiority of American democratic institutions, the optimism, the belief in reform or "moral uplift." Furthermore, most of the major articles are sensitive, intelligent expositions, not knee-jerk reactions or diatribes. Thus the *Quarterly* not only is neohumanist in its bent, but shares conspicuously in the strengths of that movement. As a consequence, many of its articles have retained a freshness and even relevance despite the lapse of nearly seventy years.

Humanism is a term most recalcitrant to definition. Self-proclaimed humanists are found on all sides of the prewar intellectual picture as May presents it, and the term, unqualified, means little more than a disposition to view the arts as an important expression of man's nature and a central part of his education and culture. A humanist can be politically liberal or conservative; he can admire or condemn Bergson or the movies. But neohumanism can be defined more rigorously, for as More's remarks quoted earlier show, it was a distinctive movement or school, led nationally by Babbitt and More, and at the University of Nebraska by Frye. My discussion of Frye will, I hope, identify more precisely some of the central tenets of neohumanism; and an examination of the other contributors will suggest the range of disagreements possible within it, for even movements or schools have their dissentient

voices. Suffice it for now that the new humanism was opposed to most of the modernist tendencies described so accurately by May. But it was an attack at once more penetrating and universal than most of the other conservative, prewar reactions, and it avoids in the main the triteness, the complacency, or the righteous indignation so often a part of those reactions. The new humanism emanated from the East, and especially from Babbitt's Harvard, where three of the six scholars featured in Chapter 1 earned degrees. The *Quarterly*, along with the books of Babbitt and More then appearing, represents an important early phase in the development of that movement. It also reflects a significant and hitherto unexplored phase in the intellectual life of the University of Nebraska.

Frye was by disposition a reticent classicist, and he imparted to his journal a tone of sober and earnest disquisition. Among its pages shall be found no editorials, no profiles of contributors, and assuredly nothing so casual and informative as a department of letters. No file of correspondence has apparently survived which would illuminate the quotidian business of its existence, although it is clear that Frye was chiefly responsible for its inception and continued life. The recollection of S. B. Gass, twenty years later, is of interest:

In 1913 the University undertook the most ambitious adventure in publication of its career—*The Mid-West Quarterly*. The conception was Mr. Frye's, and the execution was his. For four years he labored at it writing for it, reading contributions, accepting or rejecting, sometimes virtually rewriting them, editing, proof-reading. And the reward was a critical journal of highest character that at once won general acclaim. The reward was also a breakdown that sent the editor south for a year's leave of absence. The "Quarterly" survived for another year, but proved to be one of the casualties of the war.⁷

What the records show is this: that P. M. Buck and H. B. Alexander successfully requested Chancellor Avery to submit to the board of regents a proposal for a university quarterly which would provide a "medium for the literary output of some of our professors, to extend the influence of the University in academic circles." This item was duly placed on the agenda of the board of regents for 2 May 1913, and that body tentatively approved the publishing of a 112-page quarterly of one thousand copies for the first half-year, and after that for as many copies as subscriptions required, but under no circumstances for fewer than five hundred. The university was instructed to appropriate fifteen hundred dollars annually for two years to cover printing costs, and all earnings of the journal were to be turned over to the cash fund of the university.⁸

A committee, established to investigate further, reported back favorably, stipulating that "Professor Frye will be in immediate charge of the publication."⁹ This recommendation was made on 17 June, and the first number, dated October, appeared in early November.¹⁰

The *Quarterly* was well received. The student newspaper notes, on the appearance of the second number, that "many favorable and commendable [*sic*] letters have been received. Favorable comments have also been made in the critical columns of well know[n] newspapers and magazines of the country."¹¹ Olivia Pound supports this assertion a few years later: "The *Quarterly* has contained contributions from writers and scholars of note, and has received much commendation from *savants* in many parts of the United States."¹² The puff in the *Nation* was thus not unique or outrageously partial. Financing was apparently no problem,¹³ and worthy submissions were not far to seek. The quality remains high to the end, and although Lincolnites occupied the entire first number, the *Quarterly* was soon publishing articles from all over the country.¹⁴

Frye's health, however, proved to be an insuperable difficulty. He requested, and the board of regents approved, a "leave of absence . . . on account of ill health" at the end of 1916.¹⁵ As frequently befalls publications in such circumstances, printing schedules lapsed or were abandoned. According to the *University Journal*, the January 1918 issue appeared in October of that year, and the July 1918 issue is reported as "just off the press" in October 1919.¹⁶ P. M. Buck became editor in its last year, but after he secured the deanship of the Arts and Sciences College in 1919, his energies were doubtless diverted to more exigent matters. No one else, apparently, was eager to take up the task, and of course the war interfered. Except for occasional reminiscences by a few contributors, the *Quarterly* seems to have dropped quickly from the remembrance of posterity.¹⁷

The *Quarterly* was intended, according to Avery's agenda for the regents, to be a medium for the "literary output" of Nebraska professors to enhance the academic prestige of the university. Frye's own statement of purpose, proclaimed on the back covers of the magazine, is loftier in phrase and sentiment:

The Mid-West Quarterly has been established by the University of Nebraska in the belief that there exists in this country a quantity of excellent writing for which there is no adequate medium of publication. While exact scholarship, the discovery and verification of fact, has received any amount of encouragement and stimulation, the cultivation of general ideas, the free play of the intelligence, what Matthew Arnold would broadly call criticism, has met of late years with neglect if not with actual

disfavor. The results of "scientific" investigation and research, if valuable at all, are pretty sure of being taken up by some of the journals devoted to the application of special methods to special subjects. For the intellectual essay of a critical character, however, there is small opening. . . . it is the hope of enlarging the opportunities of those who are interested in this manifestation of mental activity, irrespective of territorial limitations, which has led to the establishment of *The Mid-West Quarterly*.

In the agenda description can be detected the pragmatism of an administrator, and in Frye's the idealism of a novice editor. But in truth Frye's is the more nearly accurate. The *Quarterly* did become more than a regional magazine, though the Nebraska contributors set the general tone, and the emphasis in the articles, as Frye claims, is on literary, philosophical, pedagogical, and occasionally, historical or sociopolitical subjects of scholarly import but general appeal. Frye's reference to Arnold suggests its neohumanist bent. Aside from its importance in the history of neohumanism, then, there are several reasons for being interested in the *Quarterly*.

It was, for example, published at the term of the university's "golden years" and hence affords insight into the caliber and concerns of the faculty at that time.¹⁸ Many controversial issues are debated *in extenso*: the Great War, changing conceptions of the liberal arts curricula, modernism in the arts, feminism, socialism, and pacifism, the role of historical scholarship and linguistics in literary criticism.

Then too, Frye was an exacting stylist and thinker, and this scrupulosity can be discerned in his selection and editing of articles. The general excellence of the magazine becomes particularly conspicuous when it is compared with a similar publication, *Quarterly Journal of the University of North Dakota*, for the same years. The essays there are narrowly conceived, largely parochial and ephemeral. For this reason I have spent some time examining the major arguments of the most important articles. This is the only way to get a sense of what the magazine represented, and the points of view propounded are frequently quite germane to our present controversies. I have also, usually in the notes, glanced at some subsequent expressions or developments of its authors' ideas to suggest something of the pioneering role of the *Quarterly* and its connection with later neohumanism.

I take up in the first chapter the most significant of the Nebraska humanists at that time, a group about which little has been written collectively or individually. Here I have attempted to assess their major contributions to the journal and to adumbrate similarities and distinctions among them. To represent more adequately the entire range of the magazine, however, I have judged it necessary

to include a second chapter, organized around subjects rather than authors, where I consider less prolific Nebraska humanists and non-Nebraskans. No attempt has been made to discuss every article in the magazine. There are some too slight, ephemeral, or repetitive of other essays to merit attention; there are others, good enough in themselves, but too specialized to interest even the reader of this monograph. Since no index has ever been assembled for the *Quarterly*, I have provided one, and there, of course, the entire contents may be surveyed. This index includes the volume number and dates of all the articles; hence, the references to articles in my text will include only page numbers.

I am indebted to the University of Nebraska Research Council for a Fling Summer Fellowship which enabled me to complete this study. I must also thank Professor Robert E. Knoll and Professor Joseph Svoboda, for their assistance and advice.

1. The Nebraska Humanists

SECTION ONE: PROSSER HALL FRYE

A STUDY OF THE *Quarterly* must begin with Frye. It was clearly his conception, and it bears everywhere the impress of his thought. Born in New York City in 1866, educated at Trinity College, Connecticut, Harvard, and the University of Strasbourg, he came to Nebraska in 1896 and by 1910 was head of the Department of Rhetoric. He was a pioneer in studies of comparative literature, and published incisive essays in such places as the *Independent*, the *Bookman*, the *Nation*, and the *University of Nebraska Studies*. These in due course were collected in three books: *Literary Reviews and Criticisms* (1908), *Romance and Tragedy* (1922), and *Visions and Chimeras* (1929). A posthumous volume of essays on Plato was published in 1938. I have elsewhere discussed the entire range of Frye's criticism.¹ But since he published in the *Quarterly* several of his most representative and substantial essays, an examination of these will provide at once a satisfactory introduction to Frye, to the predominant themes in the *Quarterly*, and to the neohumanists in general. Frye's first essay defines a polarity fundamental to neohumanism, romanticism versus classicism; the second essay argues in detail the inferiority of romanticism; the third proposes a neohumanist critical theory; the last pieces take up two philosophers who best embody the classical and the romantic ideals, Plato and Nietzsche.

Frye's most seminal essay introduces the first number. Entitled "The Terms 'Classic' and 'Romantic,'" it sets forth the philosophical and aesthetic *point d'appui* of Frye and most of the other neohumanists.² Romanticism is of course their great antagonist, and one cannot do better than to quote Frye's own catalog of its qualities:

A susceptibility to irregular beauty, a fondness for the striking and the unusual even at the expense of regularity and order, a preference for fascinating detail above symmetry and proportion, a predilection for the coruscations of style—for the glittering word and phrase, for the exotic and exquisite epithet, for everything that

touches and thrills and dazzles, a hunger for sensation, even when these desires lead to a dissipation of the attention—such are its external qualities as far as it is profitable to analyse them at present. [P. 10]

Allied with romanticism is naturalism. These may at first seem to be opposites: the one esteems subjectivity and passion, and the other tends to see man as shaped by external forces; the one traces back to Rousseau, the other to Bacon; at their most extreme, the one defies emotion, the other produces the zealous technocrat or behaviorist. Yet both view man as too much a part of nature and deny the rational, moral, or supernatural elements which make for the distinctly *human*. In addition, they both confound literature with “life” (defined as subjective feeling by romanticism, or confined to what is empirically demonstrable by naturalism), and consequently they have sundered modern literature from the moral idea, which in classical literature rightly predominates. To put it another way, truly classical or humanistic literature is concerned more to interpret life in the light of ethical ideas rather than “neutrally” to image or represent it. Romanticism or naturalism, however, is more interested in life as sensation or spectacle, or at most as an illustration of some allegedly scientific or physical law; when it trenches on morality, it seldom offers more than trite sentimentality or humanitarianism. The journalist is the basest of this type, but even the best writers share in his defects, and, for Frye, these include Shakespeare, Hugo, Tolstoy, and Zola.

To the classicist, however, “life is at bottom an illustration of moral principles, whose main interest is human and rational” (p. 20). From classical literature we expect an “unflinching moral vision” characteristic of such writers as Sophocles; from romantic writers we get only the protean and nebulous perspectives of subjectivity. To speak more precisely, in the classical literature we observe an Oedipus, condemned by his deeds despite his good intentions; in the romantic we have a Hamlet, in whom we are invited to pity that very irresoluteness and quivering sensibility which a Sophocles would likely have scorned. The *Oedipus Rex* is thus an “ideal” tragedy, while *Hamlet* is merely a naturalistic tragedy of character strongly enforcing no certain moral norms. Sophocles views life from an ethical vantage; Shakespeare, like the “amoral” romantic or naturalist, throws himself uncritically into its multifarious and fluctuating phenomena.

We are at present in a romantic and naturalistic period, but Frye sees romanticism and classicism *sub specie aeternitatis*. They represent for him two perennial “dispositions of spirit,” and he desires a

new "fundamental literary criticism" which will be cognizant of these two dispositions and scrutinize literature in its unique capacity as a medium of moral ideas. As such a medium, literature differs from the other fine arts, which are not directly ideational, and also from the flux and chaos of life (as the romanticist-naturalist defines it). Comparative literature, Frye correctly predicts, will be particularly suited to perform this function, for we can define certain universal ideas and moral principles only by contrast.

"German Romanticism," the lead essay in the second number, dissects more precisely the romantic extreme. Like the romanticists arraigned in the first essay, the German writers confuse together man and thing. As naturalists they view morality as merely an illusion at whose source are the galvanic responses of the ego; yet as romantics they praise these responses—inconsistently in view of their mechanistic beliefs—as liberating or self-fulfilling. For Americans, Emerson is the most familiar embodiment of these views. He has the same "sententious, fragmentary manner":

What New England transcendentalism amounted to in the end . . . was, like German romanticism, the apotheosis of a purely ideal and sentimental ego above character and conduct at large, and the arbitrary elevation of the dicta of this ego into a code of morality. . . . It is just the philosophy for a race and a generation . . . which wishes to be free to defraud its neighbours in the morning and boast of its moral elevation in the evening. [P. 117]

To this view Frye opposes, not the Greek classicism celebrated in his previous essay, but Hinduism with its stress on man's spiritual withdrawal into the ideal world from the flux of outward circumstance. The dualism inherent in the Hindu scheme particularly appeals to him. It properly distinguishes between man and nature and emancipates man from the "law for thing, the mechanical determinations of a material cosmos" so beloved of the romanticist-naturalist (p. 118). Yet in that very emancipation it gives man power over himself: self-control. Thus this essay, like the first, opposes romantic egoism and naturalist materialism. Here, however, he bears down on the nineteenth-century Germans and transcendentalists as specific embodiments of this "disposition." And he joins to the Greek classicism of the first essay the Hindu expression of the same. In this way he demonstrates that classicism is indeed a perennial pattern manifested in many ages and cultures.

Introducing the third number is his "Literature and Criticism," and it follows logically the first two. Frye is assiduous to distinguish true criticism from both impressionism (romanticism) and historical scholarship (naturalism). Historical scholarship is concerned

with the facts or origin of works of art, true criticism with interpretation; and if, as Frye has posited in the earlier essays, literature belongs to the moral rather than the naturalistic or scientific sphere, then criticism, though not as "scientific" as scholarship, has yet a noble purpose: "to liberate the idea, to set free the message [the work] has to communicate" (p. 188). The other extreme—impressionistic criticism—is patently but a manifestation of romanticism in which the reader's ego is substituted for a disinterested study of the work. In stressing that criticism should examine the work itself, and especially the moral conception of life set forth therein, Frye strikingly anticipates the concerns of the "New Critics," though he would be wary of the sterile *explication de texte* and avoidance of value judgments characteristic of some of that school. But if we are to appreciate his courage and iconoclasm, we must recall that Frye was, indeed, writing before the rise of that movement, at a time when historical scholarship was generally esteemed above "mere" criticism. For Frye, good literary criticism, like classical literature, maneuvers between the Scylla of romanticism and the Charybdis of naturalism (two monsters which for the neohumanists have combined to form a third):

And inasmuch as the life which is both the subject and object of literature, is neither scientific nor yet unprincipled but broadly moral; our criticism will be neither scientific nor impressionistic, but will consist in a free play of the intelligence just as life does. It will be based on general principles, which, though elastic, are broader than the observation of a single case, and which are capable of being explained and justified, as our conduct is, rationally and intelligibly, if nothing more. [P. 196]

Frye's last essays take up Plato and Nietzsche, philosophers who exemplify the two antithetical dispositions of spirit. Although some may view Plato, the architect of the Republic, as a utopian and protosocialist, Frye and the neohumanists regarded him as a classicist. The Republic is not to be taken literally, but as a kind of allegory of the mind or human society. Frye admires in Plato what he praised in Hinduism: the stress on the superiority of ideas to the mundane flux and on the supremacy of order and hierarchy in the individual soul and in society. He also shares Plato's distrust of the egalitarian ideal, the product equally of romantic and naturalistic prejudice. He concedes that Plato's hierarchical scheme appears at times too rigorous and petrific, and that its socialistic propensities are apt to obscure the value of the individual. Yet finally Plato, in his politics, is like the good writer and the good critic. In emphasizing the human and the ethical element, he preserves government from becoming either an undisciplined democracy in which the lower passions prevail, or a "meré technology."

Frye's last substantial essay is a full-dress assault on romanticism and—in Frye's view—its most noisy and notorious prophet. The first section, a biography proper, is an artful and engrossing narrative, pervaded by a delicate irony, though indeed the second section, addressing Nietzsche's thought, is no less ironical. Nietzsche is portrayed as the opposite of Plato: a disbeliever in the Ideas, even in truth as such, and a romantic enthusiast of the emotions and the ego. At the same time, he is the supreme naturalist in his yearning for a superman who will manage and purify society. And just as Plato, the more Frye contemplated him, seemed a source of true wisdom, so in Nietzsche "almost all our modern heresies . . . find an oracular mouthpiece—with the one exception of social democracy. He was born to be the prophet of the one-sided and unbalanced" (p. 332).

Frye's essays, placed as they all are at the beginnings of the earliest issues, deliberately propound a coherent and sophisticated point of view. In the first, the chief oppositions of the classic and romantic sensibilities are delineated. In the rest of the essays, the classical mode is exemplified by Hinduism, Platonism, and Sophoclean tragedy, while egotism, naturalism, and scientism are embodied variously in such men as Shakespeare, the German romantics, and Emerson. The series concludes with a penetrating and acidulous study of Nietzsche as the great heresiarch and prophet of modernism.

Through these essays run principles and preoccupations commonly discovered in the neohumanists: an emphasis on the moral and ideational aspects of literature joined with a distrust of literature or criticism concerned with mere spectacle, the physical world, or emotion; a belief in the inherent veracity of dualism with its distinctions between reason and passion, man and nature, the one (the central, the universal) and the many (the flux); a distrust of emotionalism and egotism and subjectivism, whether in literature, criticism, or life, accompanied by a concern for self-restraint, the inner check—in short, for personal, social, and philosophical *order*; a distrust also of the more exorbitant claims of positivism and scientism, but at the same time a refusal to appeal explicitly to the theologies or dogmas of conventional religion (in their place we are offered Eastern religion, Platonism, or Arnold's free play of the moral intelligence). These positions are occupied with great intricacy of analysis and forcibleness of style, and though Frye possessed firm views, the scholar and critic seldom sink into the partisan. Frye's very *point d'appui*—the distinction between classicism and romanticism—was from the start attacked as too rigid, and later

scholars have argued strongly for abolishing the terms altogether. Yet they have continued to be useful, and many critics, in their efforts to shun them, have lapsed into an even less helpful and more repulsive jargon. Moreover, there is much to be said for Frye's belief that the terms denote two perennial philosophies or at least sensibilities, similar in essence if different in details. The distinctions between the two, which may seem heavy-handed in summary, seldom strike one as so in Frye's practical criticism. He is weakest, I believe, on Shakespeare, though it is not uncommon for classicists to be immune from that "Shakespeare idolatry" still very powerful among professors of English. Certainly his views on the German romantics and the transcendentalists are very plausible. I shall consider in my general conclusion his refusal—and that of the neohumanists in general—to appeal to Christian theology.

Perhaps in the end style is Frye's best claim to distinction among his fellow neohumanists. Elegant without decadence, subtle in vocabulary but vigorous in tone, it has the confidence but not, in the main, the distracting vaticinations and tendentiousness of Babbitt's. P. E. More's style, at least in his later works, seems more effortless but also less memorable and pungent.

SECTION TWO: SHERLOCK BRONSON GASS

S. B. Gass was born in Ohio in 1878, studied at the University of Chicago, and came to Nebraska in 1905. He was self-professedly a neohumanist and recognized as such in the 1930 manifesto *Humanism and America*. He is recalled by a colleague as "one who could question currently fashionable opinion."³ His essays are not mere echoes of Frye, but also show the influence of the less belligerent, more diffusive humanism of H. B. Alexander.⁴ He is less vehement in his tone than Frye, and more psychological than philosophical in his manner.

Gass is most clearly Frye's protégé in his first article, "The Intrusions of Science." This appeared in the first number with Frye's piece on classicism and romanticism, and it elaborates several themes introduced in that essay. Agreeing that the naturalist and the romantic are congeners, he reproaches the arrogance and dogmatism of the scientist, who, he argues, is particularly vulnerable to the blandishments of romanticism; the scientist has developed no classical sensibility to withstand them.⁵ In a very acute

analysis, Gass shows how the sciences shade off into the humanities as their subjects become increasingly connected with life and hence less susceptible to the imposition of strict categories (for example, mathematics is more "exact" than biology, which is more so than history, which is more so than sociology, and so on) (pp. 67-68). Literary scholars, in endeavoring to be scientists, have thus conceived a scorn for the "inexact" art of criticism. But the critic, argues Gass, understands his own province and is concerned with determining the true value and significance of a work. The naturalistic scholars make a fuss over the historical circumstances of a *Hamlet*, for example, but to what end unless someone is also prepared to delineate the essential value of the play itself (pp. 69-70)? Like Frye, Gass thus anticipates in some respects the "New Critics." The quasi-scientific procedures employed by literary historians have promoted a decline or even desuetude of critical judgment, so that the slightest work may be prized, not for any inherent merit, but because it is old and thus provides grist for the ever grinding mills of the historical scholars. Criticism must understand its purpose better and resist the supposedly value-free methods of naturalism.

The influence of Frye also dominates another essay, "Literature as a Fine Art."⁶ Gass sees romanticism as an assertion of the senses against the intellect, and develops further Frye's distinctions between literature and the other arts. Literature communicates ideas or thoughts; it is essentially intellectual. A picture, on the other hand, does not directly convey ideas, for that is the province only of language: the same may be said of music, sculpture, architecture; hence they appeal especially to the romantic. Of course these arts may *evoke* ideas, and much thought may have entered into their execution; that is another matter (pp. 280-82). We must not, he continues, acquiesce in the flux of sublunary reality as the romanticist-naturalist does. Rather, reason must postulate stable prototypes in defiance of the flux, and this it should do even if we are not totally convinced of the actual reality of the ideal prototype (p. 285). Classic literature must try to apprehend the universal ideas and types, but modern, neoromantic trends like imagism are quite unsatisfactory; obsessed as they are with particularity, they have abandoned the ideational purpose of literature (pp. 287-88).

One should note two aspects of Gass's thought particularly. For developing more relentlessly than Frye the distinctions between literature and the other arts, Gass would no doubt be rebuked by a number of modern critics. In the face of semiotics and a more

flexible understanding of the meaning of symbols, Gass's distinctions seem now too facile and uncompromising. Second, when discussing the imposition of types or ideas on the universal flux, Gass occupies a significantly more subjective or psychological position than Frye. Frye seems to believe that Plato viewed the Ideas as a means of apprehending true reality, and he seems to have shared that belief. Gass, on the other hand, tends to see our *construction* of the prototypes as a way of rendering reality intelligible. This is an important if complicated difference, the difference between perception and projection; but Gass does not indicate explicitly that he understands the philosophical distance between him and Frye on that matter. It must be conceded, of course, that scholars have not agreed on what Plato himself meant by the Ideas: perhaps Gass recognized this coil and decided it would be inutile to pursue the distinction.

In "The Comedy of the Arts College" Gass addresses an altogether fresh topic and exhibits a greater independence of thought. The arts college had once a high calling, for once "it had stood in the midst of the chaos of life, stably anchored in the flux, offering to those who came to it that detached, clarified vision and perspective to which it itself had attained." But now, in courting "the current romantic eccentricity," it has abandoned its traditional concern and assumed "the intense and baffled look of the subject of comedy" (p. 268). Gass believes that students actually expect from the arts college some coherent and unified discipline. This coherence will also assist the teacher, for he will have a better notion when he enters his classroom of the preparation of his students and can therefore function more effectively as an instructor. A set curriculum, then, provides some order for the student, and at the same time allows the teacher to construct his course upon a sound foundation. The elective system, however, not only ensures aimlessness in the curriculum, but compels the professor, like the merchant, to survive by attracting customers. It is "a system calculated to exercise every human weakness of both instructor and student" (p. 274). Gass perceives the liabilities of a fixed curriculum—narrowness, inelasticity, etc.—but regards as worse the chaos inherent in the elective system (p. 277). Irving Babbitt had already denounced that system as "educational impressionism" in *Literature and the College* (1908), but Gass's criticism is arguably more subtle than Babbitt's, and really one of the shrewdest analyses of the elective system.

Gass's last two major essays, "A Modern Paradox" and "A Liberal

Experience,” best embody his tentative and psychological approach. These both use narrative and dialogue and were later incorporated into a curious, philosophical novel, *A Lover of the Chair*. They are the most original of his contributions to the *Quarterly*, but also the least amenable to paraphrase. In both, the elements of narrative and dialogue are intrinsic to the theme and impart to the pieces a suggestive and hypothetical tone conspicuously different from the energy and aggressiveness of Frye. The first essay concerns methods of education, and concludes that democracies, to survive, must train their majorities to govern themselves. A purely vocational education cannot accomplish this, for it appeals chiefly to the private, selfish interests—the “needs” they would be called today—of the people. A democracy will destroy itself if it becomes too narrowly “practical” in its educational policies. At the same time, a separate, aristocratic education clashes too sharply with the ideals of a democracy. Hence the paradox: an egalitarian society must preserve in its educational system an “elitist” element if it is to ensure a body of citizens educated in the loftier ideals and prepared to sacrifice material benefits for them. In “A Liberal Experience” Gass touches again on the fragmentary nature of modern education, and chides liberalism for having at its center no moral idea, but only a sympathy for the poor: a virtue, doubtless, but no philosophy.⁷

Gass’s first two essays show the intelligent pupil expounding on the favorite themes of his mentor: the liabilities of romanticism, the preeminence of the moral idea in literature. The essay on the arts college, however, is an impressive defense of a traditional curriculum, argued not only on conservative Platonic, but on liberal psychological, grounds (a set curriculum truly gives the students what they both want and need, and makes for more effective teachers as well). But Gass is most innovative in the last two essays, which are in effect little dramas or dialogues decorated with characters individualized just enough to intrigue us without distracting us from the philosophical issues. These dramatic essays work towards an indirect, gentle criticism of liberal humanitarianism. Always there is the reluctance to offend, to be churlish or uncharitable, to deny the good feelings and genuine altruism of the other side; hence the dialogue form, delicate and psychological in its nature, is no mere factitious embellishment, but an integral part.

Gass’s contributions do at least two things: they build on and develop ideas introduced in Frye’s series of essays, and they employ

a manner better calculated to appeal to the hesitant but open-minded reader. Frye is the more expert writer and possibly the more rigorous thinker; yet he pursues a more treacherous path. His essays will inspire, excite, and probably sophisticate, those who are already receptive to his philosophy. But some will be alienated by a sort of testiness of style. It is not altogether fanciful to see in Frye the Juvenalian, and in Gass the Horatian, arm of neohumanism, Nebraska chapter.

SECTION THREE:
PHILO M. BUCK, JR.

Philo M. Buck, Jr., was Gass's exact contemporary. Born in New Jersey in 1877, he was graduated from Ohio Wesleyan and Harvard, and came to Nebraska in 1910. Presently he became involved in administrative work, and in 1926 left to be chairman of the Department of Comparative Literature at the University of Wisconsin. Buck was one of the associate editors of the *Quarterly*, and its chief editor during Frye's leave of absence. He wrote many essays for it reflecting a neohumanist perspective, and it is arguable that these pieces remain his best work.⁸

In "Literature and Anti-Intellectualism" he attacks Bergson, who had been lecturing in 1913 at Columbia. Bergsonism is anti-intellectual in its romantic intuitionism and its belief in ultimate reality as movement or pure flux. Such a reality, Buck argues, can have no signification, for "the restless, ever-changing flux of life, as we perceive it in our emotions or our intuitions, has no more stable ground for its truth than our reasoned abstractions" (p. 83). Imbued with the modern repudiation of reason and intellect, naturalism has persuaded us that we can have no definitive ethical standards. All that remains for us, then, is emotional value: "Hence the ruck of pictures, poems, and stories dealing with idiots, paupers, monsters, misfits generally, in bizarre, demoralizing, or dehumanising situations. Emotional significance is the only test the [romantic] school can find, and to realise it art and literature must seek the lives of those who defy humanity and the human tradition" (p. 89).⁹ Buck's point is that the Bergsonian anti-intellectual and the scientist or naturalist conciliate too eagerly the ethical neutrality of the physical world. Regardless of whether moral order can be demonstrated to be "in nature" or not, man has a natural craving for it that must be satisfied. The purpose of art is to de-

lineate the distinctively *human* qualities such as “character, reason, ideals, morals.” These, “though we may look in vain for them in the flux, though they may be conventions or more or less inadequate generalisations, must not be regarded as a flippancy, an irrelevancy, a cosmic jest. And it is with these human things that art and literature have to do” (p. 92). Buck is closer to Gass than to Frye in affirming only tentatively the absolute existence of moral ideas. Indeed, he sometimes seems to lapse into what Frye or Babbitt would have denigrated as modernist subjectivism and to admit that we impose our own “absolutes” on the universal chaos. But even at such moments he urges that we respect such impositions because they are intrinsically and imperatively human.

Buck’s other major essays are dialogues, a form which he adopts, like Gass, to give his views dramatic appeal and resilience. In “Curbs” he accuses the *vers libristis* of discarding all tradition and pandering to the worst in modern thought: the slipshod, the facile. Though they claim to be egalitarian, they are in fact aristocratic, and none indeed more so than Whitman, strutting in his most unplebeian white suit. In abandoning all rules or curbs, they are sequestering themselves from humanity and the authentic life of the humane tradition and seeking solace in subjectivism and irrationalism: “Pretty soon someone will advocate an abandonment of language, and insist that true poetry consists in the rhythm of gestures and facial expression” (p. 202). It is evident that this aspersion of free verse—an assault, by the way, not merely academic but fortified by some practicing poets like Frost—grows naturally out of the suppositions of his earlier article. Indeed, though he never quotes it, Buck seems to be arguing Burke’s famous aphorism, “Art is man’s nature”—far from being false to nature, we are being true to ourselves when we construct order (societies, moral systems, symbols) around us. Despite the naturalist skepticism of a moral design intrinsic to nature, man has a natural need for such a pattern, and art must answer that need.

Two of Buck’s most inventive essays concern education. “Mag-nacum Confusione” laments the chaotic college curricula, affirms the utility of classical education in the democratic state, and argues that while progressive educators may oppose the hidebound traditionalism of a classical education, they call at the same time for such state supervision and control as may foster a tyrannical and narrowly utilitarian pedagogy.

In “Puero Reverentia” Buck dramatizes with wit and sensitivity two fundamental and probably antithetical attitudes towards ele-

mentary education. We are shown on the one hand the zealous proponents of the Montessori method, for whom the child is a free soul to be joyously educated in all its spontaneity and innocence. On the other hand, we have those who advocate discipline and direction to overcome the natural debilities of childhood: "Do we think that deep in the hidden recesses of the child's soul lies hid the germ that shall one day blossom out in multiplication tables and trigonometric formulae? Is the love of grammatical forms and graphs innate and imbedded in a child's nature? Can we call out the resolute will to face stern duty by morning romps over castles of cardboard?" (p. 178). True, we must sometimes have the sugar-coated pill, but some pedagogues confound the sugar with the substance. Through the dialogue form, Buck tolerantly but facetiously dramatizes the essential incompatibility of these two attitudes: attitudes between which the pendulum of pedagogical fashion still swings regularly if in ever widening arcs. The weakest claim of the apologists of Montessori, he contends, is that it is universally applicable and can be extended into the upper reaches of education: "There comes a time, and that earlier than most of us suspect, when the child must turn inward as well as outward. The baby is probably right in regarding itself as the centre of the universe, but age should learn better" (pp. 185-86).

In "Americanism" he criticizes "the amazing ease with which we change our opinions and our parties, tinker with our constitutions, make and unmake laws, and regard with ill-concealed contempt all the government machinery and laws we have set up as mere experiments whose worth is only to be measured by their immediate results" (p. 259). Like Frye, he uses Plato to censure the extremities, vacillations, and hypocrisies of the democratic system.

Buck, then, is a neohumanist in his preference for order over flux, his skeptical view of the pretensions of naturalism and progressive education, his concern that literature remain true to the values traditionally attached to humanism. And as the last essay illustrates, his conservatism, like all good conservatism, promulgates no obdurate adherence to the status quo. While he never attacks democracy in itself, he is alert to its opacities and enthusiasms, and swings willingly the hammer of the iconoclast.¹⁰ Buck's essays serve much the same function as Gass's: he develops Frye's ideas, applies them to matters ignored by Frye, and employs a more ingratiating and tentative manner. Finally, it is interesting to note that just as Gass's most useful contribution to neohumanist thought is his critique of the university elective system, so Buck's is

his good-natured but penetrating analysis of the limitations and doubtful assumptions of Montessori.

SECTION FOUR:
HARTLEY BURR ALEXANDER

H. B. Alexander, like Buck an associate editor of the *Quarterly*, was a regular contributor and one of the best known nationally of the Nebraska humanists. A native of Lincoln born in 1873, he studied at Nebraska and Columbia, then returned to the Department of Philosophy at Nebraska. Without becoming a dilettante, he pursued an astonishing range of interests, publishing widely in the areas of lexicography, aesthetics, philosophy, folklore, mythology, and political theory. He was an active humanitarian and a practicing poet. In 1925 he lectured at the Sorbonne on the American Indian. In addition, he was much interested in architecture, supplying the inscriptions and contributing to the symbolism of the Nebraska State Capitol and other public buildings.¹¹ His pieces in the *Quarterly* show him to be a resolute humanist, but markedly different from Frye, Gass, and Buck.

The differences are clearly established in his first essay, "The Socratic Bergson," where he quite disagrees with Buck's denigration of that philosopher. Instead, he includes Bergson within the humanist tradition along with Socrates, Augustine, Descartes, and Kant; each "sought to know first of all his own soul." In addition, they were all concerned with moral knowledge as it pertained to conduct, "knowledge that joins to action"; this is the only truly humanistic sort (p. 33). He chiefly admires Bergson for refraining from abstract and dialectical thought, a virtue allegedly shared by Alexander's other favorite thinkers. Mental gymnastics can doubtless be good exercise, "but it is God alone who can always geometrize. For mere mortals the urgency of conduct is fundamental in life . . . ethics is the essential science; ontology and logic are luxuries of the fortunate" (p. 34).¹² Like Frye and the others, he often appeals to Platonism, but in his discussions he commonly emphasizes Socrates the teacher rather than his brilliant but more systematic pupil. This bias preponderates in all of Alexander's works: a strong distrust of overconceptualizing and excessive analysis. In his magnum opus, for example, *God and Man's Destiny*, he takes up the personhood of the Deity and the existential drama of Christianity, deliberately ignoring, almost contemning, its

dogma and theology. Alexander thought naturally in architectural symbols, and in the present essay he offers as an example of rampant schematizing the Mormon Temple at Salt Lake:

the most horrible monument I have ever beheld. . . . it is built with deadly symmetry of line and angle, every joint conspicuous and every unity in relief,—exactly as a child might build with blocks; and what makes it so horrible is just that it is infantile in conception and monstrous in size . . . we get from it the very shiver which the deeds of the Cyclopes gave the Greeks. [P. 41]¹³

He esteems in Bergson, then, precisely those qualities repugnant to a Frye or Buck. Bergson, for Alexander, is not anti-intellectual. His intuitionism is a proper, humanist recognition of the limits of rationalism. His stress on movement is not a pusillanimous concession to the flux but a sign of his realism and a “studied protest against the artifice and inconsequence of our mental legerdemain” (p. 42).

Alexander’s disagreement with the neohumanists is even sharper in “‘Laokoon’ and the Prior Question.” There he examines recent aesthetic theories of poetry, including Babbitt’s *New Laokoon*, and discerns in them all the sin of overdichotomizing. Babbitt, he says, claims to be both a classicist and a humanist, and he argues for restraint, the inner check, concentration of the will, etc. On the other hand, H. N. Fairchild, another humanist, palpably espouses romantic notions, and admires in poetry such qualities as self-projection and self-realization. And yet, Alexander argues, the “prior humanistic maxim, ‘Know thyself,’” supports the contentions of *both* Babbitt and Fairchild. Moreover, these apparently opposed critics drive toward similar humanist conclusions. For Babbitt (and using Babbitt’s own words), the “mediation between the One and the Many . . . is the highest wisdom of life”; for Fairchild (again using his own words), the true value of poetry lies in the “feeling of unity attained and continuity of experience emphasized.” Alexander finds in these statements a difference that is “verbal rather than speculative” (p. 347). He concludes that the neohumanist opposition between classical and romantic dispositions is inutile: “The sharp antithesis of sense and intellect, feeling and will, imagination and reason, we must reject as inherently false, and conducive only to hypostatical idols and epithetical combats” (p. 355).

These dichotomies at bottom, he maintains, merely contrast the particular with the general, or the changing with the changeless. The dialectical terms *classic* and *romantic* refer to attitudes toward experience and methods of presenting impressions drawn from nature, and he agrees with Frye that, *mutatis mutandis*, they are

perennial. But neither method, approaching experience from the general or the particular, can justly claim to be the true source of all wisdom. And if what is called romanticism can degenerate into the egotistic and subjective, classicism can become superficial and rigid (pp. 355–56). A true humanist, Alexander believes, will not feel threatened by the new areas excavated by modern thought. The neohumanists “are too often men made timid by possessions, fearful of venturing the new lest they cease to prize what they already have”; they are too eager to reduce romanticism to arrogance or lunacy (pp. 356–57). “‘Laokoon’ and the Prior Question” is thus a superb complement and contrast to Frye’s fundamental essay on the terms *classic* and *romantic*. Frye is the pugilist, alert to differences and keen to draw lines; Alexander is the moderator, sensible of the similarities among humanists and zealous for the common ground: the fundamental or “prior” question, Do I understand myself? From Frye’s perspective Alexander is something of a monist, though Alexander himself would probably have denied that epithet.

Alexander’s other essays, though less substantial, are consistent with the humanism displayed in the first two. In “Music and Poetry” he is less critical of nineteenth-century romanticism than the neohumanists: at least it was willing, despite its faults, “to dare all things” (p. 143). In “The Philosophy of Tragedy” he defines Aristotelian catharsis as the production in the audience of “something of a broader understanding of life, something of the divine compassion for all things human”—an interpretation of the term by now sufficiently orthodox, but first promoted by theorists inclined toward romanticism.¹⁴ In “Enemy Language” he takes up a question glanced at by Gass and Buck: What are the social and political values, in a democracy, of foreign language study? Although America may be truly styled the great melting pot, Alexander prefers variety to uniformity. We cannot expect every citizen to be “melted down to the hue of the Revolutionary Anglo-Saxon.” We should encourage the immigrants to bring with them the best from their traditions, and the best is usually formulated in the best literature. “Traditions are not made in a day, and traditions which are ideals purified out of centuries of experience are treasures not to be disregarded” (p. 109). There is no doubt he would applaud the current emphasis on polylingualism in education.

Alexander is thus a very different species of humanist from those we have been considering. He challenges their classic-romantic dichotomies; he is not so distressed by the sublunary flux—indeed sometimes he delights in it—or by the audacities of naturalism. His

Platonism, with its characteristically Socratic bent, does not bring with it the familiar, neohumanist distrust of democracy; and his admiration of Bergson certainly sets him apart.¹⁵ His criticism of the “melting pot” theory of cultural assimilation—a criticism common enough nowadays—was unusual at the time, and at odds with the neohumanist bias towards uniformitarianism. Through his essays in general there circulates a freer and less fervid air than that to be sniffed among the neohumanists. The grinding of axes is less obtrusive. An advocate of the “prior maxim,” he is conciliatory in tone. One admires, finally, the balance he achieved in his own career between the active and the contemplative life.¹⁶

Yet there are weaknesses allied to these virtues, of which the greatest is imprecision and nebulosity. If Socrates, Descartes, Kant, and Bergson are all humanists because they are great truth-seekers occupied with what is essentially human, it is difficult to imagine any thinker of stature who might be excluded from this tradition. Indeed, to denominate it a tradition in the first place is otiose, for it wants uniqueness. On what grounds, for example, does a foe of systematizing like Alexander choose to include Descartes in his pantheon? Then, too, there is a kind of quiet optimism winding through his essays which contrasts with the darker premonitions of the neohumanists and which, depending on one’s view, is either healthy or complacent. Indeed, it all depends on one’s view whether Alexander be considered tolerant, open-minded, and resilient, or, at times at least, fuzzy and sentimental, with an aptitude, quite absent in the likes of Frye, to lapse into trite passages of “moral uplift.” Is his contempt for analytics and dialectics a sign of philosophical emancipation or, rather, symptomatic of a refusal to think and discriminate precisely? Is he, in fine, a complex, category-defying sage like Samuel Johnson, or a more talented but intellectually befuddled second-rate dilettante like Elbert Hubbard? No doubt he is somewhere in between; and in any event, he is the only one of the Nebraska humanists who represents that more relaxed and diffusive sort of humanism to which the majority of academics in the twentieth century have probably subscribed.

SECTION FIVE: LOUISE POUND

Like Alexander, Louise Pound was a native of Lincoln, born a year before him in 1872. She studied at Nebraska and the University of

Heidelberg, then returned to Nebraska to produce over two hundred articles and books on linguistics and folklore. Her four pieces in the *Quarterly* are fine examples of her earlier work, and the best two, on ballads, reflect strongly her interests at this time. In 1915, for example, she published a monograph, *Folk-song of Nebraska and the Central West*, to be followed by *Poetic Origins and the Ballad* (1921) and a collection, *American Ballads and Songs* (1922). All four of the *Quarterly* essays are neohumanist in outlook.

In her first, "The Literary Interregnum," she attempts to explain the present dearth of talented writers by arguing that this is a transitional period in which the old material has been worn out and the new not yet developed. There will, inexorably, be new thoughts, needs, and so forth, but the odds for poetry are not good. The public demand is for prose, and so to prose, she correctly predicts, the ablest writers will repair. Again correctly, she foresees for poetry "the rhymeless lyric verse" and the general abandonment of conventional poetic diction. Finally, she agrees explicitly with Babbitt that, having endured a centrifugal period during which artists were enticed with eldritch and eccentric themes, we may now anticipate a counter, centripetal movement "in the direction of centralisation, instead of miscellaneous expansion" (p. 81).

Her next essay, "Emerson as a Romanticist," shows even more strongly the influence of Babbitt and, probably, Frye. In Frye's vein she sees Emerson, like Whitman, as an exponent of the Roussellian *culte de moi*; far from being a democrat, he was unsocial and a snob to boot. The Victorians may have profited from his advice to leave books and rely on intuition, but "to the modern reader, in reaction from individualism, Arnold seems the wiser guide. The mediocre must not be encouraged to trust themselves too confidently, rejecting the help which may come from culture" (p. 190). Also, Emerson's benevolism and optimism now seem pathetically dated. Emerson, for Pound, is the chief American adherent of that European romanticism castigated by Frye, and she concludes her piece by contrasting the emotionalism and self-consciousness of the nineteenth-century poets with the superior detachment and impersonality of the great writers, such as Homer, Chaucer, and Shakespeare (p. 194).

Her last two essays are more typical of her later work. In "New-World Analogues of the English and Scottish Popular Ballads" she challenges two prevailing theories respecting the evolution of English popular ballads in the Old and New World: first, that those ballads originated communally; and second, that the period of bal-

lad making is over. Her evidence and train of logic defy brief summary. She argues, basically, that poems of clear communal origin are deficient in facture, style, imagery, whereas the well-constructed ballads point to a single, educated author (for example, the songs of Stephen Foster are apt to endure much longer than the "inconsequent creations emerging from the 'communal improvisation' of the negroes themselves" [p. 178n]). Moreover, the factitious ballads are usually about the upper classes, while authentic people's ballads are about themselves, and are artistically inferior. Popular literature that has stood the test of time shows certain signs, if not always of genius, at least of professionalism. She concludes that the best western American folk songs "are not those which are the work of uneducated people of the Middle West or the South, in spontaneous collaboration," but are the performance of individuals, or adaptations from English and Scottish works, themselves produced by individuals. She also argues that the making of ballads is by no means over. However, communal theories of origins "have emerged from and . . . belong to a period which deliberately preferred the vague and the mystical, for all problems of literary and linguistic history," and hence those theories are "out of key in a distinctly anti-romantic period like our own. . . . Perhaps when the cloud of romanticism overhanging it has vanished utterly, we may again come to look on balladry as did the cultivated world in the days of humanism" (p. 187).

"Ballads and the Illiterate" gives further arguments and examples to fortify her thesis that unlettered compositions are in fact rudimentary, and that the theory of "minstrel authorship" is far more persuasive than the communal theory (pp. 284-85). Moreover, earlier versions of ballads are commonly superior to the later, and exhibit unmistakable signs of artistry (pp. 287-88). "The songs which impress the folk and find vitality among them are not the uninteresting and nearly negligible kind of thing which they are able to produce themselves" (p. 286).

With the possible exception of Alexander, Pound is more interested in popular literature and linguistics than the other Nebraska humanists. There is a notable freshness in both her style and her choice of topics, especially in the last two essays. But her values and attitudes are much closer to those of the neohumanists than to Alexander's. The influence of Babbitt and Frye is quite apparent. Like them, she is tired of the romantic chaos and looks forward to a period of discipline and concentration; like them, she finds little inspiring in the Emerson-Whitman side of the American tradition,

preferring the more conservative Matthew Arnold. Her essays on ballads, it should be noted, have a particularly antiromantic cast. A pioneer in the scholarly study of popular literature, she is not seduced, like some who have followed her, into sentimental cant about "people's literature." Genuinely admiring the good old ballads, she pays them the honor of believing that they were produced by talented individuals and did not erupt mysteriously out of some amorphous and chthonic imagination. She is always determined to discriminate the good from the mediocre or bad, and never permits these distinctions to be obscured by the glamour of egalitarian aesthetics.¹⁷ In fine, she understands that superior works of art, whether in the popular field or not, are exertions of the individual will, organizing into significant patterns the flux of existence. In this she is one with the other neohumanists, and her theories have been largely favored by supervening scholarship.¹⁸

SECTION SIX:
W. G. LANGWORTHY TAYLOR

Because Taylor was in the Department of Economics and Political Science, it may seem odd to consider him a humanist. However, he explicitly identified himself with conservatism¹⁹ and wrote on humanistic subjects as well as those within his competence professionally. He is the oldest of the academics surveyed here, having been born in 1859 in New York City. He was educated at Harvard, studied in Paris and the University of Leipzig, and joined the University of Nebraska in 1893. Though he became professor emeritus in 1911 (at fifty-two), he continued to be very industrious, publishing his most important book, *The Credit System*, in 1913. Shortly after his major articles appeared in the *Quarterly*, he became a most voluble proponent of Woodrow Wilson's war policies and an acidulous critic of those of his colleagues allegedly tainted by pacifism or socialism.²⁰ His two most interesting contributions to the *Quarterly* are long dialogues featuring, as a persona or spokesman, "the Man from the Moon." In the old, theological astronomy all things above the moon were held to be permanent, and all things below (sublunary) were subject to the flux. I have already noted how strongly the neohumanists detested the flux and its apparent apologists (for example, Bergson). It is therefore appropriate that Taylor's persona should be a denizen of the moon, for

as such he exhibits a perspective akin to that of the eighteenth-century "spectator": detached, self-possessed, sometimes ironic.

The philosophical dialogue, as a genre, is quite versatile, and certainly Taylor's dialogues could not be more different from those of Gass and Buck. He does not, like them, exploit the form to illuminate the intellectual and psychological complexity of the issue under consideration; his tone is not, like theirs, tentative; there is no compassionate survey of both sides while, Horatian-like, gently drawing the reader to the better one. On the contrary, Taylor's style is by comparison peppery, crisp, wittily assertive. The dialogues of Buck and Gass draw their force from their probing of subtleties and nuances of disputation and personality; despite their authors' dislike of romanticism, the essays themselves seem curiously romantic, even Keatsian, in their protean and resilient form. Taylor, on the other hand, is hard, opinionative, sometimes abrasive. He is, *au fond*, a satirist who in tone and technique is somewhere between Addison and Aristophanes, though to be sure on a lower plane than both.

The first essay is entitled "The Man from the Moon, a Jeffersonian, and a Socialist." Despite his individualism, Jefferson has been momentarily entranced by socialism and its apparent concern for the commonality. But the man from the moon, attempting to exorcise this fascination, argues that capitalists indeed contribute to the welfare of the state and manage economic affairs with infinitely more sagaciousness than any state bureaucracy might do. State socialism, he believes, cannot pay its own way, and such forms as we have of it depend in reality on private enterprise. Further, there is no reason to imagine that the state would be a more benevolent employer than the capitalist, or that there would be no strikes in such a scheme: "the abuse of the convict in the chain gang gives some idea what is in store for the government employee who happens to belong to a political minority or to some department of production or class of the population which is not in favour" (p. 302). The general public is persuaded by newspapers, professors, and politicians always to side with the workman, but we should rather admire the captain of industry, who must needs "extract a social service from a horde of half-savage anthropoids, eager to murder or dynamite upon an artful suggestion applied to their unresisting, inflammable nerves." We should respect those employers who daily risk their lives facing down mobs and bearing "the brunt of an unsympathetic public opinion, worked by yellow journalism" (p. 302). After all, it is necessary that *somebody* organize

labor, and there is much evidence to show that capitalists are more interested in the permanent betterment of the people as a whole, even while they work for their own interests, than are the trade unions or government bureaucracies.

The subject is then shifted to foreign affairs, and Jefferson proudly if tritely proclaims that he is in favor of Mexico for the Mexicans. But the Moon Man responds that the "white man is on trial. Can he carry his burden? He cannot evade it. Having worked out, in a measure, the problem of justice and spiritual uprightness at home, he must not be indifferent to the needs of the rest of the world. He cannot shut himself off from extra-territorial mankind. He cannot meekly let them dispel him. He *must* conquer, but like a crusader" (p. 306). Jefferson asks if he believes in war, to which he replies that the word *believe* is inappropriate. He faces reality. Idealists pronounce war an anachronism, but wars are more frequent than ever. Thus we must make the best of it: our soldiers are not only more up-to-date, but more humane, than those of the barbarous countries, and can set a good example for them. In dealing with the tropical races especially, "the white soldier exerts, on the whole, an elevating influence. . . . the white conquerer is little disposed to excesses. The brown man knows no self-restraint toward the vanquished. Moreover, the white man is rich enough to reward as well as strong enough to punish. Paternal treatment calls for both methods" (pp. 308-9).

The cast of the second dialogue is "The Man from the Moon, an American Citizen, a Bull-mooser, and a Suffragette." The Bull Mooser of course attacks capitalists as robbers, and the moon man defends them; he also defends parliamentary or representative government over populism, and the short ballot (less demanding of the typical citizen) over the long one. In the most developed section, he chides a suffragette. He warns her not to eradicate the proverbial, golden-egg-laying goose. Many laws protect women—in the factory, in domestic life, and so forth. What, in the name of pure equality, will become of these prerogatives? Moreover, he notes a deterioration of marriage and the family for which "the spirit of suffragism is largely responsible" (p. 165). Well, he later concedes, perhaps he is overestimating the effect of female suffrage: if the "poor dears" want it, let them have it. But, he warns, "men think there is rampant a disposition to ask for everything, giving nothing in return. Women will be more than ever, under suffrage, exposed to the vicissitudes of competition" (pp. 166-67).

He then jocosely inquires how much wages the housewife should

receive; and the suffragette, more conventional than some of her present-day sisters, agrees that the very suggestion is absurd, though of course she argues for just pay for true work. The moon man concludes on a philosophical note. There is rampant in the land, he observes, the notion that the individual is everything and should not be expected to accommodate himself to his surroundings. In other words, the world owes him a living, and if it does not afford him the living he wants, he will revenge himself on it. But, says the moon man, this is the argument of the "Apache" or the adherent of the IWW who deludes himself into thinking "that capital has been robbed from the poor, not created by the capitalist. Hence he proposes to destroy capital by violating his solemn word, as understood in every contract of service, to respect his employer's property. The ends justify the means." To this pernicious viewpoint the feminist movement shows signs of succumbing. He concludes:

Prosperity destroys your world and calls for a new infusion of religion, as erstwhile, in the time of the Nazarene. But the readjustment is likely to be unpleasant; it certainly has in store some surprises. . . . I start for the moon this instant else I shall be drawn into the campaign of *suffretage* and *sabotage* on earth. [P. 169]

Taylor's other essays, which are not dialogues, express views congenial with these. There is consequently no reason to doubt that the man in the moon is Taylor's own persona. Otherwise, so extravagant are some of his opinions, and so provocative some of his rhetoric, that one might be tempted to argue that the persona, like the projector in Swift's "Modest Proposal," is to be taken ironically: that is, that Taylor himself is perhaps clandestinely a liberal ridiculing the troglodytic views of the right wing. But even taken straight the essays are quite entertaining and display a zest and humor uncharacteristic of the *Quarterly*. Although the man in the moon sometimes calls himself a progressive,²¹ he obviously adheres to conservative positions. He is critical of trade unions, socialism, egalitarianism, egotistic individualism, and he favors capitalism, private property, enlightened colonialism, traditional concepts of society and the family. But although we are to take the persona seriously, we are not on that account to overlook its use of irony and deliberate exaggeration. Taylor's attitude toward the socialists, internationalists, wobblers, and suffragettes is similar to that of Aristophanes, in *The Clouds*, toward Socrates, Sophists, the physical philosophers: it is a mixture of authentic disapproval and intentional hyperbole. Like Aristophanes and that whole tribe of satirists, Taylor knew that outrageous assertion is one of the best

means of ridiculing and enraging an opposition deficient in humor but not in self-importance. In the political and economic nature of his subjects, as in the facetiousness of his style and tone, he is a refreshing complement to the other more philosophical and literary Nebraska humanists.

2. Major Themes and Other Writers in the *Mid-West Quarterly*

SECTION ONE: PHILOSOPHY, AESTHETICS, LITERARY CRITICISM

THE SIX SCHOLARS surveyed in Chapter 1 exerted the greatest influence on the tone and slant of the *Quarterly*, and they were the most noteworthy of the Nebraska humanists at that time. But to get a complete notion of the subjects and themes stressed in the journal, it is necessary to examine some intelligent articles by less prolific Nebraskans and non-Nebraskans.

E. Benjamin Andrews was sometime professor of philosophy, political science, homiletics, and history. As an educator and a controversial chancellor of the University of Nebraska, he won a national reputation. But he had retired and was quite elderly when he wrote for the *Quarterly*, and his humanism strikes one, after reading Frye or Alexander, as somewhat unsophisticated. An article on Greek nationalism is representative of his thought. Had Greece—instead of Rome—unified herself, he argues, and prevailed over the future of the West, we would now enjoy a civilization “dominated by mind and not by brawn.” This hypothesis is perhaps plausible, but hardly substantial enough to support such an elaborate thesis as Andrews constructs. He ends, too, on a highly theoretical and optimistic note, urging us, surrounded as we are by “matter, crass, dull stuff,” to “ram it full of mind” (p. 314). In “The Renaissance” there is a similar optimism. He disparages the medieval period as intellectually barren and devoid of genius: *The Canterbury Tales* is in the main “a simple reproduction of Boccaccio’s *Decameron*”; Petrarch is more advanced than Dante in his humanism (pp. 141–42). In the Renaissance, he concludes, “all Western humanity . . . started up to put away childish things. . . .

Not in a day, not in a century, was the old-time narrowness, crudity, heathenism of religious thinking to pass away. Alas, it lingers still. The mills of God grind slowly. But every moment since the Renaissance it has felt and been realizing its doom" (pp. 150, 155). Perhaps his most developed piece concerns "Art and Character," where he argues that art improves us morally (p. 240). The truth of the "moral theory of beauty," although not demonstrable mathematically, can be apprehended intuitively. The aesthetic sense is not altogether to be identified with the moral sense, but it is similar and should be cultivated. Appealing to Plato, he urges that our love of physical beauty should lead to love of spiritual beauty; but his discussion acquires a decidedly romantic and Wordsworthian tone: there are "sermons in stones and brooks and flowers and hills, which we have no more right to ignore than we have to stop our ears before a prophet of God" (p. 246). He believes that country folk are on the whole morally superior to city folk because of their aesthetically preferable environment (p. 247), and though he admits that our civilization somewhat resembles that of Rome just before its fall, he ends, as in his other essays, hopefully: we have hardly yet begun to apply the "art power and the consequent moral power of our education," and if we begin to do this, we may hope for the best (p. 250).

Andrews is clearly a humanist in his use of Greek culture and Platonism as a standard, and in his belief in the connection between ethics and aesthetics. Yet the greater sophistication of Frye or Gass, for example, in their analysis of the ethical elements in art is most apparent. Andrews's facile depreciation of the middle ages, his confidence in the future—these are attitudes quite uncharacteristic of neohumanism. Writing at the end of his life, Andrews could look back upon a career full of signal achievements, and his essays, sometimes pensive, sometimes optimistic, lack those acidulous aspersions of materialism, modernism, and democracy so frequent in *Babbitt*, *More*, and *Frye*. The essays have the idealism and eloquence of age, but are tinged or tainted by superficiality, sentimentality, and complacency. This mellowness, to characterize it generously, is very different from the brittle and strident style sometimes employed by the younger humanists; yet they were understandably more sensitive than he to those dislocations—whose preliminary tremors they had already detected—of the twentieth century. Of all the younger humanists, H. P. Alexander is most like him, though much more in touch with current thought; and it is only just to record that it was Andrews who as chancellor appointed

the outspoken Alexander to the Philosophy Department over the strong protestations of its chairman.¹

There are no religious essays in the *Quarterly*, although two pieces by Hutton Webster, the first professor of anthropology at Nebraska, concern the philosophy of religion. In "Savage Spiritualism" Webster undertakes a very tolerant analysis of psychic phenomena in primitive societies; he is aware of the investigations of the Society for Psychical Research, and while he places weight on the psychological explanations of these phenomena, he leaves open the possibility of supernatural intervention. In "Newman on the Development of Christian Doctrine" he traces the antecedents of Newman's theory in Petarius, de Maistre, and so forth, and compares Newman's procedure in his sphere with that of Darwin and Spencer in theirs. On the whole, Webster is more conservative than Newman, whose *Essay on the Development of Christian Doctrine* contains "from the point of orthodoxy . . . dangerous conclusions." What most distresses him is that Newman's theories expose the Catholic church itself to the flux of sublunary life. What the Christian believes now may be but a phase, and the "impregnable rock" of Christianity might years hence look very different. Hence Newman's own doctrine takes the first perilous step toward "rationalism and liberalism" (p. 25). Webster is the only *Quarterly* writer to take an overtly favorable view of orthodox Christianity, but his fundamental theme is philosophical and typically neohumanist: distrust of the flux.²

The essays on aesthetics and criticism show the influence, but not always the particular opinions, of Frye, Buck, and Gass. "Movie Democracy" by Lewis Worthington Smith (Drake) is representative. Smith attacks impressionism in poetry, since that school manifestly disdains human concerns and values. He laments a general disintegration and "feminization" of the arts, and arraigns *vers libre* as a symptom of that process (pp. 337-39). He takes the motion pictures as characteristic of modern art and its effect on life: "shifting, uncertain, aimless, indecisive, [modern art] presents a series of kaleidoscopic impressions passing over us as vainly as the shadow of the villain across the screen at the theatre. Slipping from movie to movie is an easy sort of self-indulgence, as any student of the city streets knows, and the impulses so engendered are certainly impulses of disintegration" (p. 339). Romanticism and democracy cooperate, sometimes, in fortifying selfish, individual obsessions. Smith is not antidemocratic, but believes that in a democracy it is especially essential "that each man should search, not for anything

'through which he can most surely be himself,' but for that form of expression and that way of living that most happily relates him to his fellows" (p. 343). The values of the Anglo-Saxon culture, particularly its "active and constructive" insistence on personal liberty and the "higher faculties," are preeminently important in American society. These values should be reinforced by healthy art, lest we become "a conglomerate without homogeneity" (p. 345).

The other *Quarterly* critics, various and lively, nevertheless share Smith's neohumanism. For example, Margaret Lynn (University of Kansas) deplors the narrowness and provincialism of our native literature by comparison with the European: its superficial optimism, lack of sophistication and a tragic sense of life. F. B. Kugelman attacks Shaw's relativistic humanism. Hardin Craig contends that the philosophies of a Carlyle or a Nietzsche are now superannuated: "It is no doubt a splendid thing to make one's way in the primeval forest with the bright efficiency of the timber wolf: but after all, our teeth are not equal to it, and we are subject to rheumatism" (p. 166). Robert Shafer, a staunch neohumanist later to be quite a force in the movement, regards both archaeology and naturalism as heirs of romanticism in their emphasis on the flux and the ephemeral. Like Samuel Johnson and the old humanist critics, he argues that great literature is "the expression of the thing that everybody has believed or felt." T. K. Whipple attacks spineless, impressionistic criticism and promotes Arnold as a model—who, however, is now disparaged by moderns because he tried to "get definite results" in his criticism.³

Although many of the essays are broadly theoretical, Bert Emsley (University of Wisconsin) shows in his "Poetry of William Vaughn Moody" how neohumanist principles can be applied to a specific figure. Regionalism has appealed to many American critics, but not to Emsley, for whom it is part of the flux. Consequently he does not censure Moody for his antiregionalism: indeed, "there could be little in the country home to hold a man of Moody's highly cultivated tastes" (p. 224). Moody's predecessors were Lowell and Longfellow, embodiments, like him, of transplanted European culture. Emsley admires these writers, but wistfully (and correctly) predicts that these poets will probably give way eventually in our schools to "native writers like Mark Twain and Whitman . . . undistinguished in style but genuinely American in inspiration." Generally, Emsley is suspicious of sentimentalism and prefers poems on universal themes. Like Louise Pound and Margaret Lynn, he is indifferent toward "nativists" like Whitman, but he recognizes that

he is probably on the losing side in aesthetics. In pedagogy, too, he prefers—but senses that it is a futile preference—the classical ideal. “And even in education the native school is already getting the lead by shifting the emphasis in liberal studies toward history, politics, sociology, and modern literature, as far away as possible from ‘the glory that was Greece and the grandeur that was Rome’ ” (p. 229).

In the main, then, the critics of the *Quarterly* are neohumanist in bent. The Emersons and Whitmans are not, they believe, what the twentieth-century American needs. Disposed as he is by nature toward lawlessness and provinciality, the modern American requires the conservative balance found in the more mature European literature and its American transplants. More Arnolds, not more Whitmans, are to be desired. The *Quarterly* critics are firm in their defense of western, and specifically Anglo-Saxon, cultural values; and some of them foresee—but only to reject—the now fashionable praise of pluralism and the concomitant loathing of anything even remotely “chauvinistic.”

SECTION TWO: EDUCATION

Most of the essays on education show a familiar, neohumanist mistrust of centrifugal or fragmentary societies, but at the same time they are often bold in their criticism of fashionable methodologies and vocationalism. In “The Public School and the Painter,” Horace M. Kallen (University of Wisconsin), occupying a position similar to Smith’s “Movie Democracy,” takes the motion picture as representative of modern life and art: it disintegrates “all the movements into a series of isolated and motionless fixtures, machine-made, and machine-controlled in reproduction” (p. 20). America especially lacks a central, inward character and integrity. Only in the public schools have we an instrument for forging true national identity, but we are on the verge of abandoning ourselves to a mindless and anarchistic vocationalism. The public school, allied with the artist, should foster Americanization and generate a set of symbols that will profoundly express “the Nation’s common and constant mood and her central vision” (p. 25). Kallen is no crude advocate of melting-pot acculturation—indeed, he is now remembered as one of its earliest opponents. And he strongly opposes simpleminded political propaganda in education and art. But like the other humanists, with the possible exception of Alexander, he is more fearful than enamored of pluralism.

Like Buck and Gass, Alfred D. Sheffield, "College Study of English," recommends a fixed curriculum and a unifying "idea" for college education. To be sure, Sheffield concedes, one can educate oneself merely by reading magazines, but the distinction of college training lies in its producing order, coherence, and direction, a "winnowed experience" (p. 202). He also attacks "professors who emit personality directly through class-room sermonettes," and questions the value of "leisure and spontaneous reading as the really fruitful things in a college career" (p. 200). But Sheffield is no stodgy pedant. He censures survey and period courses as ineffective, at least on the lower levels, and he disapproves of an excessive and sterile emphasis on mere facts. We should first offer courses in how to recognize and read literature, and those ends can be met only if we appeal to the students' own limited knowledge and work from there. Thus Sheffield gives qualified approval to what are now known as "relevance courses." Nevertheless, like other neohumanists, he is most concerned with the values and ideas in literature. Hence writers like Fielding, Dickens, Masfield, and H. G. Wells, although rewarding subjects for leisure reading, are too insubstantial to be accommodated by the formal curriculum.

Perhaps the most unconventional article is "Personality and Education" by H. K. Wolfe (University of Nebraska). Like Buck, Gass, and Kallen, Wolfe opposes rampant vocationalism and, defending education on humanist grounds, urges that it inculcate moral values. But unlike some of the humanists, he advocates considerable flexibility in education: "Difference instead of uniformity will be the aim of each teacher. The child will advance, not with his class, but according to health, strength, ability, and willingness" (p. 270). Wolfe admits that some restrictions on individual freedom are necessary "in our moral and social worlds," but these restrictions are not so requisite in our educational institutions. "The ideal of completest personal development requires that every impediment be removed from the life of the child, and that he be neither hindered nor deformed by extraneous forces" (p. 271). Of course authority must be revered, but the value of obedience has been exaggerated in our pedagogy. The child should not be drilled in blind obedience, but rather be encouraged to develop self-control (p. 272). Wolfe, whom H. B. Alexander called in his obituary a Socratic, is hardly to be identified with the more radical modern educators; but his essay contrasts strikingly with, for example, Buck's "Puero Reverentia" (see chap. 1, Sec. 3). Wolfe was, for a variety of reasons, a controversial teacher,⁴ and it is appropriate

that Alexander should have executed his obituary for the *Mid-West Quarterly*. Like Alexander, Wolfe represents a distinctly more libertarian strain of humanism.

Other essays touch variously on education. There is a defense of the professor who publishes (more information is always useful, no matter how trivial it may seem, and a published professor wins more admiration and authority in the classroom).⁵ The president of the board of regents argues that universities and colleges have a civilizing effect on societies, but should retain their aloofness and refrain from religious and political entanglements.⁶ One essay advocates something like a code of professional ethics for teachers.⁷ A professor at Missouri recognizes and deplores those teachers who “are experiencing a sort of *crise de conscience* with respect to literature”—who are uncertain what to teach, or even what teaching is. He thus anticipates, and condemns, a very modern syndrome. But, significantly, he puts in a good word for popular literature and contemporary, undergraduate interests: “the age and the student have their rights. Let us meet them half-way; ultimately, we shall have to do even more than that.”⁸

One of the liveliest essays is Bert Emsley’s on “Freshman English and Creative Teachers.” There he recounts, with some intentional hyperbole, the burdens of a young instructor teaching freshman composition, an occupation which produces in him the decay of all idealism, creativity, and sense of style. Emsley urges that we adopt, not necessarily a new official program, but at least a more enlightened attitude which, less preoccupied with historical and philological subjects, would not condemn the young teacher to hurry off “his theme work in ten hours in order to devote two hours at night to counting syllables in a Middle English alliterative romance” (p. 310). Such harried teachers should, rather, be encouraged to read widely and to develop further their creative and cultural interests.

I have deliberately used Bert Emsley to conclude the first two sections of this chapter. He is one of the better and wittier of the minor contributors. But more important, his two essays—the one on Moody, the other on freshman English—show a characteristic pattern in neohumanist thought. In his essay on literary criticism he emerges as a conservative classicist whose enthusiasm for the romantic, nativist American tradition is decidedly restrained. Yet in his article on education he is quite “progressive,” questioning the value of the then regnant historical and philological biases and adopting an unorthodox view of how a young teacher should oc-

copy himself—in cultural self-development rather than desiccated scholarship. This union of classical literary tastes and unconventional educational theory may seem odd, but one can observe it in the leaders of the neohumanist movement as well. Both Babbitt and More incurred the dislike of their fellow academicians as much for their censure of modish educational schemes as for their philosophical conservatism; both argued especially for fundamental changes in the graduate programs of American universities. Such viewpoints, conservative in one way and iconoclastic in another, are reflected in the *Quarterly* articles. Although the writers on education generally favor a central and unifying curriculum, they by no means espouse a rigid methodology. In several instances they advocate as much individualizing of education as possible without lapsing into total anarchy. They are tolerant of, and indeed support, some kinds of curricular reform. Emsley's two articles, then, exemplify a pattern found generally in neohumanism: a traditional or classical aesthetics infused by heterodox, or at least unconventional, pedagogical views.

SECTION THREE:
POLITICAL PHILOSOPHY:
JUSTICE, COLONIALISM, THE FIRST WORLD WAR

There are two essays on justice, one by William Granger Hastings (University of Nebraska), the other by Roscoe Pound (Harvard).⁹ Both are in the natural-law tradition of Edmund Burke. Hastings's is well written but conventional in its emphasis on consensus and prescription. Pound's is more venturesome and addresses a pervasive dissatisfaction with the efficiency and justness of American courts. He recognizes that there are some new problems which courts, established for the pioneer and agricultural communities of the early nineteenth century, cannot easily accommodate. Hence it is natural that today a "law-ridden people," finding the system too sluggish or even comatose, should construct alternative instruments of justice: boards and commissions, juvenile courts, and so forth. This is a dangerous development, for jurisprudence may then yield to politics, the judge to the administrator, the court to the judicial referendum (p. 225). The solution is to endeavor, through good training in the law schools, to make judicial justice more responsive, for we cannot, finally, have justice without law:

“No form of conservation is more important than the conservation of social institutions. And no social institution is of more value than the legal tradition” (p. 233). Pound’s argument, more intricate than a paraphrase can suggest, is distinctly Burkean. He is opposed to unprofessional, impressionistic interpretations of the law, but also to a rigid and rationalistic set of rules claiming universality and produced “by purely logical processes” (p. 230). He favors a flexible, organic, natural-law tradition, responsive to changing times but ensuring security and continuity.¹⁰

The question of colonialism and subjugated peoples is taken up by two writers. J. E. Miller’s “The English in Egypt” concedes that because the world war has exposed the evils of race rivalry and intolerance “our instinctive prejudice against the control of one people by another has been very greatly deepened” (p. 332). Still, not all people in the world should necessarily be given the right to govern themselves. Besides, who *has* a right to govern Egypt? The Turks? The Greeks? The Egyptian people, through history, have never shown a great aptitude for self-rule. The English are not altogether altruistic, but they are demonstrably more enlightened and humane in their colonial supervision than the other potential overseers (pp. 332–33).

In “Race Contact and Mixture in Colonies” Minnie Throop England (University of Nebraska) speaks unhesitatingly of “inferior races,” and though she opposes prejudice, she recognizes a rooted antipathy between the races, especially those that differ in striking, physical ways. Despite a terminology that is now unfashionable, England’s analysis of race relations is quite equitable and reasonably objective. Some would consider her a racist in her belief that primitive peoples are often stimulated by contact with superior ones and that “the Negro, with his inherited tribal instinct and longing for a chief or leader, has always submitted to the supremacy of the white man as a natural state of affairs, and prospers” (p. 171). In addition, she disapproves of race mixtures and argues that even slavery had its advantages for the subjected class.¹¹ At the same time, however, she attacks “the degraded communism of Indian reservation life” and urges that educated Indians “be mingled as common citizens of the Republic” (p. 176). She opposes exploitation, and closes on a “progressive” note: continuing studies in environmentalism may show “in time that races potentially are more nearly equal than is generally believed. The capabilities of the inferior peoples have rarely if ever been given a fair test.” Both Miller and England are pragmatic, largely unideological defenders

of colonialism as facilitating stability and justice. Both, like other neohumanists, see no reason to question the excellence of their own civilization and culture.

The articles on the war fall into two phases: those in the first phase analyze the various historical, economic, and diplomatic causes; the later ones debate America's role in the conflict and, more specifically, the relative merits of belligerency and pacifism. The April 1915 *Quarterly* was given over almost entirely to the war, but since America was then neutral, the essays represent chiefly the first phase.

The lead article is "The Diplomatic Background of the European War" by Bernadotte E. Schmitt (Western Reserve University). This is a sober dissection of the preliminary events, laying stress on economics as well as diplomacy. Schmitt cannot be pronounced altogether neutral: she reproaches German officials for being inflexible and unconciliatory (pp. 213–16). But she is signally impartial on the point of expansionism, contending that at one point or another *all* the powers have "been arrogant and unscrupulous, and to this extent all are equally responsible for the war" (p. 217). It is true that Germany has not had the same opportunity as some other nations to expand, and we must admit that "*Deutschland über Alles* [is] as reasonable a slogan as *Britannia Rules the Waves*"; nevertheless, this misfortune of Germany's cannot excuse or even extenuate unjust aggression (pp. 218–19). Another important cause of the war, though, was the growth of the German navy, worrisome to England because of her dependency on the sea. Schmitt also chastises the incendiary press of both Germany and England, which made "the negotiation of an agreement, or at least a *détente*, unusually difficult, if not impossible" (p. 222). We must agree that England is in the right, Schmitt decides, but she concludes on another tack, asserting that far from being antiquated, war is now more ubiquitous than ever. Modern democracies have shown themselves to be conspicuously chauvinistic; and, moreover, "one cannot help feeling that behind the mazes of diplomacy and the ambitions of nations, there has long existed on the part of governments and peoples alike . . . a subconscious desire to make use of the colossal armaments accumulated during the last generation" (p. 229).

The next essay, "Colonial Aspects of the War" by Cephas D. Allin (University of Minnesota), is equally moderate. He allows that English colonialism is highly enlightened, but also praises Germany: "She has accomplished in the higher realm of thought and feeling what England has in the lower world of politics—a true master of

the souls of men" (p.236). But Germany is young as a nation, and emerged out of "autocracy, not of democracy; of blood and iron, not of constitutional agitation" (p.237). On top of this, she "has inherited the splendid ideals of Roman culture and organization, of the supreme but beneficent rule of a superior race. In this imperial conception there is no room for a competing civilization" (p.237). This view naturally collides with English notions of individual and national liberty. Allin sympathizes, like Schmitt, with Germany's desire for colonies, and censures the Monroe Doctrine for intercepting her logical expansion in South America. But he cannot condone her militarism, and he believes that the colonial allies of England are defending, not merely the British Empire, but "the constitutional principles of national liberty on which that empire is based" (p. 248).

"German *versus* English Aggression," by A. D. Schrag (University of Nebraska), is of all the essays the most sympathetic toward Germany. He urges that we examine the present situation historically and objectively. If we do this, we shall see that England over the years has been as aggressive as Germany—indeed, she has been more so. Hence aggressiveness should not be viewed as a German racial trait. He then dilates on the controversies surrounding Schleswig-Holstein and Alsace-Lorraine with a view to exculpating Germany. Like Schmitt and Allin, he argues that, because of historical circumstances, Germany has been defrauded of a natural colonialism, and that she subsequently took only what had been discarded or disdained by others (p. 261). England is chiefly interested, not in a balance of power, but in her own supremacy, and to maintain this supremacy she has resorted to high-handedness and deceit; consequently, her attacks on Germany's morality are hypocritical. In fact, most people in England and America asperse Germany for her alleged *philosophy*—in other words, for her doctrine of life. "Germany is condemned to-day not for what she has done or is doing, but for what people consider to be her intentions. Germany, accordingly, finds herself in the position of the heretic in the Middle Ages, who was persecuted not for his immoral deeds but for his distasteful ideas" (p. 263).

A short piece by Sherlock Bronson Gass concludes this issue of the *Quarterly*. In "The Ideal of Peace" he calls for calm, lucid thought and an understanding of Germany's position. Why do we praise the French for preserving her treaties with Russia, but condemn Germany for keeping them with Austria? Why do we praise the efficiency of *our* activities but condemn that of the German

army? Why do we not recognize that "Germany is the only one of the fighting nations that since her formation in 1871 has not made aggressions" (p. 290)? Moreover, though we claim to be peace lovers, yet our history shows we are not in principle against war. We have always been willing to violate the "ideal of peace" in order to make "our ideas of right prevail by force of arms." Life is not "nice." Until human nature shall alter itself, there will always be occasions when two peoples, genuinely committed to causes, are prepared to fight for them. At such times, at least, there can only be the ultimate arbiter of war (pp. 292-93). If we hope Germany is defeated because we happen to admire France or England as superior civilizations, we are conceivably rational, though perhaps unfair. But to hope for the defeat of Germany because this will produce universal peace is naive and fallacious. Universal and permanent peace presupposes a world in which all nations think alike, and that is a mere chimera. We can work for relative peace only when we recognize that "in the presence of diverse knowledge and diverse thinking, war is humanly inevitable." And once we recognize *that*, the "first result . . . would be to give the German cause a fairer consideration than it has yet received at our door" (pp. 294-95).¹²

Gass's discussion of pacifism introduces the second phase of the controversy. His colleague P. M. Buck's "Pacifism and Ideas" (found in "Screenings [No. 2]") may well be the most sensitive contribution to that debate. Buck identifies an idealistic pacifism which, however contradicted on every page of history, has at least a quixotic beauty and appeal. But there is another, repulsive kind, an "economic pacifism" which fastens on the economic cause of war as the only cause. This pacifism is as unrealistic as the first, and much more ignoble. Were economic factors indeed the sole or even chief cause of war, such pacifism would carry weight. But in fact people go to war because they see that *ideas* are involved, and, as creatures with a moral sense, they believe that it is important which ideas prevail. Economic pacifism is a manifestation of that cynical materialism which has "sunk deep roots into our whole theory of life and civilization" (p. 373). Modern educational theories emphasize making people economically efficient, and this "trade school ideal" has crept into even our best universities and contributed to the appeal of economic pacifism (p. 373). This species is most vigorous in the Middle West, where we contemplate complacently our growing affluence and are insulated by geography from the rigors of the conflict. Economic pacifism deplors the waste of wealth and life entailed by war; but waste is a law of nature:

For every oak tree there are a myriad of unfruitful acorns and a forest of blighted saplings. . . . And what a terrifyingly uneconomic thing a mere courtship is with its thousands of useless presents, its wasted sighs, and its perfunctory wedding fees. . . . those who value our civilization only for its material benefits and social comities, have at least one thing to learn . . . that even the most transient of these are things to gain which even the most pacific of men must sometimes risk even their lives. (P. 376).¹³

The most indefatigable writer on this subject was Charles Kuhlman, who produced three sometimes intemperate, sometimes acute articles in which he denominates war a "great historic institution" and enumerates its virtues. War has discouraged alcoholism, especially in Russia, and has stimulated inventions; it does not cause the races to degenerate, but quite the reverse; it often brings about social and political readjustments necessary "to give freer play to the creative forces" of man; it can advance civilization, as we see in the conquests of ancient Rome. Kuhlman sometimes lapses into the ridiculous, as when he argues that the war "is not producing hatreds. . . . [it] is creating mutual understanding and respect as each [enemy] discovers unsuspected virtues in his antagonist." Yet he shows sense in denying that this war will end all wars; there will always be new soldiers and new antagonisms. And there is much to be said for his view that the only alternative to war may be a federal police force that would rule by might or whim rather than by justice, and under which freedom of local institutions and the right of self-government might be suppressed or inexorably decay. He remarks that it is naive to believe republican states are ipso facto more pacific than monarchical ones. And with respect to Christian idealism, he develops intelligently the distinction between the personal morality of the Sermon on the Mount and that practical morality which must be exercised in the outer world of compromises and conflicting interests.¹⁴

Only Francis T. Philbrick (University of California), in "Rational Bases for Ultimate International Peace," advances a moderate pacifist line. He believes that "democracy and liberalism" are rapidly unifying the world, and that pacifism is implicit in liberalism. There is much nobility in nationalism, he concedes, and national cultures are richer than any international one might be. Hence he agrees with conservatives on one point: doctrinaire pacifists are misguided in desiring to eradicate all national cultures. But the aggressive aspects of nationalism must be repressed. We must establish some sort of international league and educate men to sacrifice themselves for the commonweal rather than the nation,

and to have a will to change the social order rather than meekly to acquiesce in it.¹⁵

These political essays, at first glance, may seem to express ideas now in academic disfavor. Apologies for colonialism and war are not welcomed at present in the professional journals. Yet on further consideration they seem quite objective in the best scholarly tradition. True, only one substantial essay supports pacifism, but none of the articles, not even Kuhlman's, is conspicuously belligerent or incendiary. Indeed, the essays preponderate toward tolerance, calmness, equity, and include much admiration of German culture and sympathy for her historic situation. There is no jingoism here, and no inconsequent optimism about the inherent peacefulness of democracies. The University of Nebraska, like many similar institutions during the Great War, was widely suspected by the general public of disloyalty. With that in mind, the tone of these essays is especially noteworthy. Certainly they are far removed from the strong anti-German sentiment apparently rife at American universities even during the period of neutrality.¹⁶ At least two reasons may account for this moderation. In 1915-16 the Middle West was notably less keen than the East to enter the war, owing to its remoter location and ethnic composition. In addition, the neohumanists, though in one way more extreme than moderate conservatives of the time, were also less naive and optimistic, and so less subject to fads and fanaticisms. It was precisely the *moderate* conservatives who were apt to become, by 1917, the super patriots; and no one more angrily denounced the pacifists than John Dewey.¹⁷

On pacifism, then, as on the plight of Germany, the essays are evenhanded enough. Those by Gass and Buck best express the neohumanist view that pacifism is unrealistic in light of human nature; that, being unrealistic, it is not effective; that much pacifism derives from the superordination of individual life over ethical imperatives; and that even man's most hideous actions find their source, not in economics or biology, but in morality and idealism.

Conclusion

SELF-DISCIPLINE AND THE AFFIRMATION of a moral order: these are probably the most fundamental imperatives of neohumanism. "Civilization, at bottom, rests on the recognition of the fact that man shows his true liberty by resisting impulse, and not by yielding to it, that he grows in the perfection proper to his own nature not by throwing off but by taking on limitations."¹ This belief is promoted by all the major contributors to the *Quarterly*. It is seen in their distinction between the restraining classical and the expansive romantic sensibility, in their commitment to the higher reality (the One) over the sublunary flux (the Many) and to the superiority of a disciplined, liberal-arts education over vocationalism. It is seen also in their concern for ethical norms in the arts and for self-sacrifice in war. Of course there are disagreements. Alexander questions Frye's classic-romantic dichotomy; Wolfe favors more individualism in education than Buck or Gass; Taylor promotes capitalism and colonialism more explicitly than the others. But the philosophical orientation of *Quarterly* must be plain by now; like that of neohumanism in general it is at odds with the prevailing tendencies of twentieth-century thought.

In an elaborate memorandum to Chancellor Avery, H. B. Alexander once suggested a variety of university reforms. Heading the list of proposed "scholarly enterprises" was:

An interpretation of English culture. We have heard much of German "Kultur" in the past years, and have actually, in our schools, known more of it than of the Anglo-American tradition. There is no reason why Nebraska should not be a leader among American universities in so interpreting English history, law, literature, and the native American expansions of these, that our work should be everywhere recognized. . . . Once begun the work could make the *Mid-West Quarterly* its organ, and give the whole middle west a tone of distinction which it lacks.²

This memorandum is undated, but it was probably prepared in the summer of 1920. If so, the document tells us several useful things. It suggests that the final number of the *Quarterly*, dated 1918 but

actually published in 1919 (see Introduction), was not viewed at the time as its last. The memorandum also shows that Alexander, one of the journal's associate editors, had special plans for it. How the *Quarterly* should have become an organ for interpreting the "Anglo-American tradition" Alexander never explains. But one guesses, in view of his other writings, that he might have made it less exclusively neohumanist. Under his direction it might have addressed, with less argumentative flourish, the "native American expansions" of English traditions; and at the same time it might well have become more regional in its focus (it is to "give the whole middle west a tone of distinction"). As a classicist and Platonist, Frye had resisted such regionalization, but Alexander was a rather different sort of humanist from Frye.

Because the *Quarterly* did not survive, these are of course mere conjectures, and they are not advanced with any great confidence. After all, Alexander did believe in humanism, despite his disagreements with the Babbitt-More version. If his memorandum is any sign, he would have featured the affiliations and ligatures between British and American traditions, however different the minor emphases might have been. Thus his intentions for the *Quarterly* might not have altered drastically its actual course. The major contributors, as I have noted, had been educated in the eastern regions of the country, often at Harvard, or, like Alexander and Louise Pound, were Lincolmites who had done graduate work in the East or abroad. There is clear evidence in their articles that they considered it important to support and consolidate the supremacy of Anglo-American values in the plains. One might note, too, that Alexander employs the phrase "native American" in its then common acceptation: it refers to Anglo-Americanism. In the remark of another Nebraska humanist nearly sixty years later, the phrase itself has acquired a very different meaning, and the viewpoint, too, contrasts with Alexander's: "For Nebraskans, the past which is ours is that of the great Native American [that is, Indian] civilizations of the Plains, and of the transformed Mexican, Black, Scandinavian, Slavic, German, and Irish folk cultures whose self-consciousness was formed in the nineteenth century liberal revolutions."³ Alexander was one of the first humanists to examine sympathetically the cultures of the American Indians; and as has been noted, he prized the variety and individuality of the unassimilated ethnic groups. But as a humanist he valued above these the greater universality, in some cases the greater sophistication, of the Anglo-American tradition. Even for Nebraskans, he seems to be

saying, it is *that* civilization which is quintessentially theirs, and that to seek stability in peripheral or decayed cultures is not conservatism but nostalgia.

Of course one can also feel nostalgia toward that "genteel tradition" for which, unsympathetic critics might say, Alexander wished to make the *Quarterly* an organ. As George Santayana was even then arguing, this genteel tradition was already "at bay." In his view, nineteenth-century humanism had terminated in an arid agnosticism and idolatry of culture. The neohumanists of the early twentieth century, he rightly believed, reacted against this conclusion, a conclusion no less lame and impotent for all the eloquence and repute of Matthew Arnold. Santayana concurs with the newer humanists that "the gist of modern history would seem to be this: a many sided insurrection of the unregenerate natural man, with all his physical powers and affinities, against the regimen of Christendom."⁴ But he contends that if the American neohumanists wish to assert an absolute criterion of taste and morals against the flux and chaos of modernity, they must embrace supernaturalism. They should turn, in fact, to that form of supernaturalism most readily accessible to modern man: Christian Platonism, which recognizes a supernatural order but preserves a humanistic orientation.⁵ Santayana's diagnosis seems sound enough, however doubtful his prescription. He has clearly identified the central dilemma, possibly the paradox, of neohumanism: it would eschew cramping, theological dogmatism (hence remaining true to the humanist ideal), yet at the same time construct absolute moral criteria and standards of self-discipline against the corrosive relativism and permissiveness of our age. Babbitt, to be sure, explicitly opposes the thesis of Santayana's *Genteel Tradition at Bay*, asserting that one may center on man, dispense with theological absolutism, and still preserve firm standards.⁶ But the animadversions of Santayana, and the like strictures of T. S. Eliot, have retained their force.⁷

Of course I would urge that the neohumanists were offering more than Santayana's dessicated genteel tradition. Their toughness of thought enabled them to survive the collapse of Victorian conservatism after 1912, as Henry F. May has noted. They were at their strongest, indeed, in the twenties and early thirties, though P. E. More indicates in his letters to Frye that they were even then an embattled minority. Their great weakness lay not in an effete gentility, but in their reluctance or inability to ground their arguments in a coherent religious or metaphysical scheme. By the Second World War neohumanism had spent itself. Those that continued

its assaults on relativism, materialism, and naturalism often wrote from a religious perspective: T. S. Eliot, C. S. Lewis, Eric Voegelin, Reinhold Niebuhr, Malcolm Muggeridge, and others. The *Quarterly* betrays this weakness, for it contains no significant articles on religion or theology. The foremost theoreticians among the Nebraska humanists are Frye and Alexander. Frye draws his metaphysics chiefly from Plato, ignoring even that Christian Platonism recommended by Santayana. Alexander is still less satisfactory. Actively hostile to any particular metaphysics, he advocates a humanism consisting of a diverse and often contradictory congeries of thinkers.

The new humanists, it must be admitted, shunned deliberately any distinct, philosophical scheme. They wished to meet the twentieth century head-on, and most of them believed that an overt appeal to Christian or any other traditional metaphysics was ill advised; it would represent a "retreat to the past." After the defalcation from Christianity of the eighteenth-century "Enlightenment" philosophers, after the naturalist-romantic triumph in the nineteenth century, modern man (they felt) could never find solace in a dogmatic and traditional faith. But in aiming at a true catholicism, the neohumanists seem to have failed, perhaps for being too abstract and rationalistic. Whether there will be an enduring revival of orthodox Christianity no one can say. But it is clear that the vacuum left by an active and historic faith has been occupied, not by humanism, but by varieties of two rampant dispositions. There are on the one hand secularized religions like Marxism, radical psychoanalysis, transcendental meditation; there are on the other peculiar religious or quasi-religious sects: the charismatic movements, occultism, Gnosticism, and so forth. None of these satisfies the universalist aims of neohumanism, and a number of them promulgate the opposite of Babbitt's ideals of civilization, preaching emancipation rather than restraint, alleged self-fulfillment instead of self-denial, the vagaries of emotionalism in place of the enduring certitudes of classicism.

Long before its excesses were apparent, Goethe termed romanticism a disease. The neohumanists of course agreed with this, but their own view of romanticism has now been denounced a caricature, while at the same time their detested romantics have been rehabilitated as authentic conservatives.⁸ Other neohumanist principles, whether in the areas of philosophy, criticism, education, politics, have been greatly aspersed. The aesthetics of the *Quarterly* writers must seem ludicrously antiquated in an academic world

presided over by the Northrop, not the Prosser Hall, Fries.⁹ The new humanism was moribund by 1940; the *Quarterly* lasted but five years; the names of the Nebraska humanists are known only to the specialist. This movement, surely, cannot claim exorbitant importance. But at the same time the impartial observer might recognize signs of a reaction against allegedly value-free formalist criticism and of a new emphasis on the “human” or ethical aspects of art. He may also conclude that the neohumanists were properly alarmed at the destabilizing tendencies of relativism and subjectivism, irrespective of whether they were right in tracing the sources of these to the romantics.

In the end, the intellectual battles of the twentieth century are but a part of a much broader and inexorable conflict between naturalism or secularism, and faith in a transcendental or supernatural world. What is more, in any age Santayana’s “unregenerate natural man” is always threatening, and the “genteel tradition”—let us define it, departing from Santayana, as the tradition of civilization, self-restraint, recognition of a higher law—is always at bay. Viewed thus, the *Quarterly* may seem a momentary diversion in a minor skirmish; but its resolute and fastidious editor might have found in these lines a satisfactory epitaph for his journal:

There is only the fight to recover what has been lost
And found and lost again and again: and now, under conditions
That seem unpropitious. But perhaps neither gain nor loss.
For us, there is only the trying. The rest is not our business.¹⁰

Notes

INTRODUCTION

1. See Arthur Hazard Dakin, *Paul Elmer More* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1960), p. 72 and passim.
2. Quoted in *ibid.*, p. 208.
3. Quoted in *ibid.*, pp. 191–92.
4. See: H. B. Alexander quoted in Volta Torrey, "Familiar Campus Personages," *Nebraska Alumnus*, October 1925, p. 338; WPA, *Nebraska: A Guide to the Cornhusker State* (New York: Viking, 1939), p. 137 (this work also cites the *Quarterly* as one of Frye's major accomplishments); Lowry Wimberly quoted in Rudolph Umland, "Lowry Wimberly and Others: Reflections of a Beerdrinker," *Prairie Schooner* 51 (1977): 33.
5. See: J. David Hoeveler, Jr., *The New Humanism: A Critique of Modern America, 1900–1940* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1977); on More, Dakin, *More*, and Francis X. Duggan, *Paul Elmer More* (New York: Twayne, 1966); on Babbitt, George A. Panichas, "The Critical Mission of Irving Babbitt," *Modern Age* 20 (1976): 242–53. One should also consult the neohumanist "manifesto": Norman Foerster, ed., *Humanism and America: Essays on the Outlook of Modern Civilisation* (1930; reprint ed., Port Washington, N.Y.: Kennikat Press, 1967); and, for a concise statement of the central ideas of the movement, Norman Foerster, *American Criticism* (1928; reprint ed., New York: Russell and Russell, 1962), chap. 5.
6. Henry F. May, *The End of American Innocence: A Study of the First Years of Our Own Time, 1912–1917* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1959), p. 353.
7. *Nebraska Alumnus*, December 1933, p. 3. See also the introduction by Gass, Kenneth Forward, and Clarence Allen Forbes, to Frye's posthumous *Plato*, University Studies, O.S., Vol. 38, nos. 1–2 (Lincoln: Published by the University, 1938), p. v.
8. University of Nebraska Archives, Board of Regents Papers, box 24, folder 179.
9. University Archives, Board of Regents Papers, box 24, folder 181.
10. See the *Daily Nebraskan*, 14 November 1913, p. 6.
11. *Daily Nebraskan*, 15 January 1914, p. 2.
12. Louise Pound, ed., *The Semi-Centennial Anniversary Book: The University of Nebraska, 1869–1919* (Lincoln, 1919), p. 91. See also *University Journal*, December 1913, p. 48: "It has received much favorable criticism and will no doubt fill an important place, not limited to the middle west."
13. The *Quarterly* is mentioned routinely among the expense items in the Biennial Reports of the Board of Regents for 1915 and 1917; it does not appear in the Regents' agenda as an item of controversy.
14. Of all the contributors, thirty-six have been definitely identified as University of Nebraska faculty, ex-faculty, or Lincolniters; fifty have no apparent connection

with the university or the state, although some may have been students or residents at one time. Most of the contributors have some academic affiliation.

15. University Archives, Board of Regents Papers, box 26, folder 193.

16. *University Journal*, October 1918, p. 19, and October 1919, p. 7.

17. Even as early as 1926 it is overlooked in a catalog of *The Learned and Scientific Publications of the University of Nebraska (1871–1926)*, ed. Jacob Henry Gable (Lincoln: University of Nebraska, 1926); yet the same publication provides complete information on, for example, the University Studies series. The “Bio-Bibliographies” prepared by the University Reference Department in the 1930s for the Archives files on faculty members routinely omit mention of even substantial articles contributed to the *Quarterly* (see, e.g., the bibliographies prepared for H. B. Alexander and E. Benjamin Andrews).

18. The phrase “golden years” is Robert N. Manley’s. See his *Centennial History of the University of Nebraska, vol. 1, Frontier University (1869–1919)* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1969), pp. 147–48.

CHAPTER 1

1. R. D. Stock, “Prosser Hall Frye: Conservative Humanist,” *Modern Age* 19 (1975): 61–70.

2. See the introduction to his *Plato*, p. v.

3. Manuscript recollection of Gass by Kenneth Forward, University of Nebraska Archives file on Gass.

4. Gass later dedicated one of his critical books, *The Lover of the Chair* (1919) to Frye, and another, *The Criers of the Shops* (1925) to Alexander. It will be more appropriate to discuss in Chap. 2, Sec. 3, Gass’s two essays on pacifism. Aesthetics and pedagogy, his chief concerns, are examined here.

5. For a later, fictional embodiment of this type of scientist, see the character Mark Studdock in *That Hideous Strength* (1945) by C. S. Lewis. Lewis’s attitude toward naturalism and scientism, best expressed in *The Abolition of Man* (1943), closely resembles that of the neohumanists.

6. This essay was later incorporated into chap. 7 of his *Criers of the Shops*.

7. This essay significantly anticipates Lionel Trilling’s critique of liberalism in *The Liberal Imagination* (1950). The dialogue “A Modern Paradox” touches on matters to be developed by Ortega y Gasset in his well-known *Revolt of the Masses* (1930).

8. Buck’s *Literary Criticism: A Study of Values in Literature* (New York and London: Harper Brothers, 1930) and his ambitious literary survey, *The Golden Thread* (New York: Macmillan, 1931), are well written but finally quite elementary. The essays in the *Quarterly* have a crispness in both style and thought curiously diminished in his “major” works. As with Gass, I shall consider an essay of Buck’s on pacifism in Chap. 2, Sec. 3.

9. From a similar vantage, Samuel Johnson had praised Shakespeare’s characters as being species, not individuals (i.e., eccentrics experiencing odd or abnormal emotions) (*Preface to Shakespeare*). This is a continuous line of argument in humanist critics: see, e.g., Duncan Williams’s *Trousered Apes* (New Rochelle, N.Y.: Arlington House, 1972).

10. His iconoclasm is seen, too, in a little essay on “The Hunting of the Dean” (in “Screenings [No. 1]”) where he vehemently depreciates the importance of the university-administrator class, urging that good professors be rewarded equally with deans. He laments that ambitious professors now aspire to advance, not through

scholarship but bureaucratic expertise, so that they may at length achieve the crown of a deanship. Buck himself achieved this crown in 1919.

11. For a concise account of Alexander's multifarious achievements, see *In Memoriam Hartley Burr Alexander, 1873-1939* (Claremont, Calif.: Scripps College Bulletin, Memorial Number, 1940).

12. Cf. Samuel Johnson's famous remark: "We are perpetually moralists, but we are geometricians only by chance."

13. Alexander's discussion of the Mormon Temple strongly resembles Edmund Burke's observation about the false sublime in architecture: "Designs that are vast only by their dimensions are always the sign of a common and low imagination" (*On the Sublime and Beautiful*, pt. 2, sec. 10). By the same reasoning, Alexander argues in *God and Man's Destiny* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1936) that fine architecture (e.g., the Nebraska State Capitol) symbolizes man's noblest aspirations.

14. See R. D. Stock, *Samuel Johnson and Neoclassical Dramatic Theory* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1973), pp. 110-16, 122-24.

15. See his essay, "Art and Democracy," in the Scripps College Bulletin, cited above, n. 11. A distrust of Bergson was shared by such otherwise dissimilar humanists as Babbitt and Julien Benda; hence the defense of Bergson by Alexander points to a significantly different philosophical bias.

16. At a time (1918) when there was widespread criticism of allegedly disloyal or unpatriotic comments by university professors, Alexander made a spirited defense of freedom of speech and the importance of professors participating in civic affairs (see Manley, *University of Nebraska*, pp. 225-26). He was no dogmatic libertarian, however, for he also deplored the decadence of students' values, as detected in their use of profanity at football games, and their publishing lewd and salacious material in the 1912 Cornhusker yearbook. Like Buck, he lamented the decline of the arts college and the growing impersonality and ethical neutrality of the university (Manley, *University of Nebraska*, p. 272).

17. This is characteristic of the neohumanists: both Babbitt and Frye, for example, ridiculed the Anglo-Saxon cultists that placed *Beowulf* on the level of the *Iliad*.

18. E.g., at the end of "New-World Analogues" she dismisses briefly the theory of the "multi-handed composition of the Homeric poems" as mystical and romantic; the consensus of later scholars supports this view.

19. See his *Quarterly* essay, "Spiritualism, Pacifism, Socialism," p. 11.

20. See Manley, *University of Nebraska*, pp. 214, 221, 222.

21. See the "Suffragette" dialogue, pp. 157-58.

CHAPTER 2

1. See Manley, *University of Nebraska*, p. 170.

2. It is appropriate to mention here one other philosophical approach to the problem of the flux: Horace M. Kallen's "Pragmatic Interpretation of the History of Philosophy." If one may be permitted an apparent oxymoron, Kallen is a positivist neohumanist. He is as concerned as the other neohumanists with "the ultimate victory of man over the flux," but contemning the superstitions of the ancient Greeks and primitive Christians, he argues we can only achieve this victory through modern science, which has truly enabled us to control the flux (p. 87).

3. Louise Pound, it has been noted, and other neohumanists appealed to Arnold's example as a critic. See also, in the *Quarterly*, the article by Edward A. Thurber (p. 248-49); and cf. G. R. MacMinn, who considers Babbitt an important

modern critic trying to establish rational bases of criticism ("Criticism and the Comic Spirit," p. 96-97).

4. See Manley, *University of Nebraska*, pp. 119, 120, 214, 217, 223, 224.
5. Alvin S. Johnson (Cornell), "In Defense of the Professor who Publishes."
6. Charles Sumner Allen, "The Over-Social Function of the State University."
7. Edgar L. Hinman (Nebraska), "Professorial Ethics."
8. J. Warshaw, "The Aesthetic Fallacy in Literary Appreciation" p. 362.
9. Hastings, "Justice"; Pound, "Justice According to Law."
10. Burke's influence is not much felt in the neohumanists of the early part of the century, but he becomes very important for their successors, scholars and political theorists like Michael Oakeshott and Peter J. Stanlis. Pound significantly anticipates their viewpoints.
11. England's remarks on the advantages of slavery, unpalatable as they will seem to many, have been partly supported by such recent studies as *Time on the Cross*, by R. W. Fogel and Stanley L. Engerman (Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 1974).
12. Of all the contributors to the April volume, only Charles Sumner Allen (president of the Board of Regents, University of Nebraska) condemns Germany unequivocally ("Some Legal Aspects of the Invasion of Belgium," p. 288); and even he is no saber rattler, admitting in a later essay that "it was an altruistic aim that prompted the sinking of the *Lusitania*" ("The Rationalization of Methods of Controversy," p. 348). One other essay in the volume, however, is uncritically patriotic: J. E. Le Rossignol's "Canada and the War." Finally, a later article by Gass develops further some of the ideas introduced in his first one: pacifism does not work, does not in fact lead to peace, and is itself a species of decadence, for "to commit oneself to the hope for permanent peace is to belittle the importance of moral ideas themselves" ("Tolstoi and the Doctrine of Peace," p. 15).
13. W. G. Langworthy Taylor, "Spiritualism, Pacifism, Socialism," agrees that pacifists are idealists, but is severer on them than Buck: they are Quixotes that drag the rest of us down to destruction.
14. See Kuhlman's three essays passim (listed in the Index to the *Quarterly*). On the Sermon on the Mount and practical morality, cf. a more recent but similar analysis by Eric Voegelin, *From Enlightenment to Revolution* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1975), ed. John H. Hollowell, p. 220. Paul H. Grumann's review of *Ground Arms* in the *Quarterly* also enumerates possible advantages of war. Grumann later got into trouble over expressing allegedly pro-German sentiments and was defended by H. B. Alexander (see Manley, *University of Nebraska*, pp. 213, 217, 220, 221).
15. Randolph S. Paul, "Made in Germany," attacks Preparedness and minimizes the danger of a German attack. This is the only other piece in the *Quarterly* that might by some stretch be considered pacifistic.
16. See Carol S. Gruber, *Mars and Minerva* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1975), for a general account of political attitudes at the universities around World War I. For the situation at Nebraska, see Manley, *University of Nebraska*, chap. 19 passim. For a dramatic illustration of how high the feelings ran in the faculty, see the minutes, for 9 April 1918, of Professor F. S. Sanford, secretary of the Patriotic League of the University of Nebraska. There he recounts a serious argument between himself and others and C. E. Persinger, who is accused of having a "soft" attitude toward the war and of feeling that patriotism merely masked a fundamental intolerance of Germany (University of Nebraska Archives, Board of Regents Papers, box 27, folder 200). Many members of the university's Patriotic

League also contributed to the *Quarterly*: Alexander, Guernsey Jones, Le Rossignol, Persinger, Minnie Throop England. None of the *Quarterly* articles, however, either before or during the war, exhibits fanaticism.

17. See May, *End of American Innocence*, pp. 354, 370–75.

CONCLUSION

1. Irving Babbitt, "Genius and Taste," in *Criticism in America: Its Function and Status* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Co., 1924), p. 171.

2. See University Archives, "Alexander" in Avery Correspondence, 1908–1928.

3. Paul A. Olson, "The Humanist in Nebraska," *Nebraska Humanist* 1, no. 1 (1978): 4.

4. George Santayana, *The Genteel Tradition at Bay* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1931), pp. 17–18. He first advanced this view in 1913 in *Winds of Doctrine*.

5. *Ibid.*, p. 41.

6. Irving Babbitt, *On Being Creative* (1932; reprint ed., New York: Biblio and Tannen, 1968), p. xxii.

7. See T. S. Eliot, "The Humanism of Irving Babbitt," and "Second Thoughts about Humanism," in *Selected Essays* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Co., 1950), pp. 419, 429. For a good, recent defense of Babbitt, see Claes G. Ryn, "The Humanism of Irving Babbitt Revisited," *Modern Age* 21 (1977): 251–62.

8. See M. H. Abrams, *Natural Supernaturalism: Tradition and Revolution in Romantic Literature* (New York: W. W. Norton and Co., 1971). This is the most sophisticated recent study of English romanticism and its German affiliations. Abrams's thesis, in direct contrast to that of Frye, is that the romantics wished to defend "traditional concepts, schemes, and values" (p. 13); the neohumanists' view of the romantics he dismisses briefly as a "caricature" (p. 447). A knowledge of Abrams's book is essential to anyone who aims at an honest and thoughtful appraisal of romanticism. His title (an apt one) would have seemed oxymoronic to Frye, and certainly a denial of his fundamental principle of dualism. But actually the neohumanists would have found much to agree with in this study; for after all, they alleged, and Abrams graphically shows, that the romantics tried to overturn the usual distinctions between supernatural and natural. It is just that Frye denounces what Abrams prefers to admire, or at least to defend as a healthy response to rationalism.

9. On the democratic implications of Northrop Frye's criticism, see Geoffrey H. Hartman, "Ghostlier Demarcations," in *Northrop Frye in Modern Criticism*, ed. Murray Krieger (New York: Columbia University Press, 1966). See also Northrop Frye, "The Critical Path: An Essay on the Social Context of Literary Criticism," in *Issues in Contemporary Literary Criticism*, ed. Gregory T. Polletta (Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 1973), pp. 50–57.

10. T. S. Eliot, *The Four Quartets: East Coker*.

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The *Mid-West Quarterly* was published by G. P. Putnam's Sons (Knickerbocker Press) from October 1913 to July 1918 (through the last few issues were delayed by editorial complications and the war). It is arranged in five volumes of four numbers each (October, January, April, July), continuously paginated; individual issues average slightly less than one hundred pages. All the items, unless otherwise described in brackets, are expository essays. They are identified first by volume number, followed by issue, date, and pages.

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