

THE AMERICAN TRADITION IN CONTEMPORARY LITERATURE

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Too much has perhaps been said of new departures in American literature. Like the New Deal, they are new in America only in so far as twentieth century man has encountered new problems and invented new ways of thinking about them. This nation has been incredibly urbanized by the factory, the automobile, the moving picture, and the radio. Racial minorities, with traditions other than Anglo-Saxon, have become articulate and given to American literature, not so much a new accent, as new materials upon which the imagination can work. Yet it is questionable whether American literature owes much that is distinctively American to these influences. Joyce has worked more powerfully in our fiction than the radio broadcaster; New York Jews, Minnesota Scandinavians, Mississippi Negroes, Boston Irish, when they begin to write, prove to be more American than foreign, sometimes, I think often, more American than the Anglo-Saxon strain. If we are to seek for a national character in American literature, giving it qualities not dependent upon its English backgrounds and the doctrines of the twentieth century, it must be in the American tradition. This is not a dead hand reaching from out of our past, but a force that is alive and, like all living things, growing and changing, while preserving a pattern that can be recognized and defined.

There have been many attempts to define the American tradition, but the best have been protests against some other defi-

nition, and have suffered from oversimplification. Turner's famous exposition of the frontier spirit was a correction of an overemphasis upon our European origins; Parrington's study of democracy in American literature was an attack upon the New England successors of the Federalists, who had been indifferent to democracy. The recent Marxian school has lit obscure corners of economic influence without supplying any formula broad enough for an Emerson, a Cooper, or a Whitman. In a brief paper like this one, I cannot hope to analyze, and much less to challenge, all these explanations of what it means to be an American. Yet it is possible to break down some of this conflicting testimony, and describe a group of traits that we can all agree are distinctively American, and then see how far they continue to live in the vivid, vigorous, if often disorderly, and sometimes noisy, literature of our own contemporaries in the twenties, thirties, and forties.

I shall not try to be original in this portrait of the American tradition, unless in a fresh application to books and people of our time. Probably the job could be done with different classifications, and certainly more classifications are possible. That is not important. If the traits I describe are true and significant, they are enough for an experiment in literary criticism. If any one wishes to deny that the categories that follow are intensely American he will need a powerful argument. Some of them are English or French or Russian traits also, but not to the

same degree, not in the same way, not so significantly. Taken together, they spell in outline the name of our country when it thinks, feels, imagines, judges, expresses itself in literature.

The first and probably the most deep lying of these characteristics is expansiveness. Naturally, our conquest of a continent conditioned us to expansiveness, but the inheritance goes much further back. It is probably true that the vast majority of immigrants to these shores, from the seventeenth century on, came because they felt they had to come. But it is not so often remembered that an equal, and perhaps a much greater number, under like compelling circumstances, stayed at home. We got the restless, we got the seekers, we got the rebels, we got the oppressed who were willing to escape. When the first Swedish colonists landed from the Delaware, they brought with them some Finns who had been jailed for their undue energy in girdling and burning Her Majesty's forests in Sweden. Criminals at home from too much expansiveness, they became ace settlers on the Delaware, where burning, girdling and chopping were the preliminaries to every crop of corn. The story is typical. And if, by the eighteenth century, expansiveness on land had subsided east of the Alleghenies, the burst through to the west, and the conquest of sea routes, renewed it in full vigor. Franklin's "Poor Richard" is intended as a brake on expansiveness. With Jonathan Edwards, hell itself became expansive. "Rip Van Winkle" is serio-comedy of expansiveness. Cooper's Natty Bumppo symbolizes the conflict between the expansive soul seeking the freedom of the wilderness, and an expanding civilization always at his heels. Emerson is a spiritualist expansionist. Thoreau wrote "Walden" to turn expansion inward. Mark Twain's boys are always going places, and Whitman's "Song of Myself" links Brooklyn, human nature, the West, and the universe.

But how vitally this trait persists in our

literature today! If there is one trend, for example, in American fiction that has amounted almost to a folk lore in this decade, it is the historical novel, which has pushed for its sources backward and left and right across the continent. And note, that these novels, from *Northwest Passage* and the innumerable narratives of prairie settlers, to *Gone With the Wind*, have been stories of expansion, of conflict, and of building. It is the re-creation, the expansion, of the new South after the war that is the original and memorable part of *Gone With the Wind*, and both hero and heroine are identified with salvage and reconstruction, not with memory and loss. Note again the contrast of this school of history in fiction with the great European novelists of a century earlier. It is lost causes, defeated countries, or heroes in their last stand, that Sir Walter Scott chooses for subjects. With him and with Dumas, the vane points always to the past. The theme in the American books is preparation for a future expansiveness.

Or let us choose an individual writer, regarded by many of the younger generation as their leader, Thomas Wolfe. Here is expansiveness incarnate, even as in Whitman, even as in the westward pioneers who lived for frontier experience and moved on when stability caught up with them. Wolfe could write only one book and that was his whole expanding life. His work has a beginning and many middles but no end anywhere. Its faults are apparent, its virtue is an insatiable zest for experience, an expanding ego to which every happening seems important because it happens to Tom Wolfe. Asheville, the railroad, the Harvard library, New York, and love and hate and human nature, all open illimitably when he reaches them. Everything is continental to his view, and he is as immune to classical restraint as a Mohawk chieftain, or Anthony Wayne, or Colonel Sellers, or Moby Dick. He ravaged his country for words, as the lumberman ravaged its forests, leaving desert wastes and blacked

confusion behind, but also roads and magnificent vistas. This is expansiveness run wild in the fourth century of our exploitation of a continent, in the second century of our national literature.

I could add many more examples, John Dos Passos, Faulkner in his way, Hemingway in his, Benét's *John Brown's Body* in its way, Hervey Allen, Robinson Jeffers emphatically and, like Wolfe, to his own damage, Marc Connelly's *The Green Pastures*, or Richard Wright's recent *Native Son*, a study of expansiveness thwarted and poisoned by racial prejudice.

I dislike applying a term such as equalitarianism, with its strongly European connotations, to the next American trait to be discussed, but I can think of no other word so applicable. Nevertheless, American equalitarianism is very different, both in origins and in results from the European variety. It had to wait for no French Revolution in order to flourish. The first Swedish governor in Delaware complained that he could not keep his peasants within the stockade: they insisted upon establishing themselves in the forest where they could become land holders like their superiors at home. The Quakers of Pennsylvania were radically equalitarian, and even when many of them grew rich, remained so within their own sect. The eighteenth century aristocracy of Virginia and New England came from small people seeking equality with their betters in the old country, and was submerged in New England and segregated in Virginia by new waves of equalitarians. Given easy access to land and water, if not at home then just over the hills, an equalitarianism was as inevitable as an increase in national wealth. We have been conditioned by it in our formative centuries.

One result of this long-continued and dangerously successful attempt to make the Smiths as good as the Joneses, is the dominantly bourgeois nature of the American tradition. Where so many have had—in the past at least—an opportunity to rise in the economic scale, there will be neither an

aristocracy nor a plutocracy with that sense of security which produces a class. Equalitarianism and exclusiveness are mutually incompatible, and privilege, which has supported aristocracies elsewhere, becomes a reward of ability, not a heritable right. Plutocracy is less vulnerable here than aristocracy, but it is clear that even our plutocrats have been forced to establish foundations rather than families, in order to perpetuate their names.

But I am using "bourgeois" in no unfavorable sense. "Middle class" is the more usual term, and, indeed, fits perfectly the economic aspirations of the American millions since we began. It is too narrow a word, however, to apply to literature. Our literature has had the bourgeois virtues, which are real and valuable. It has never been successfully heroic, although intellectually it has reached, especially in our earlier New England, formidable heights. But on the austere pinnacles of thinking an Emerson and a Thoreau, if not a Hawthorne, wrote definitely for the community of all men of good will, and believed them capable of good will. So did Jefferson, although himself a product of our Southern experiment in making an aristocracy by the plantation and slavery system, an experiment already failing in his time. It was, indeed, the so-called Virginia aristocracy which founded the political party which has made a political program of equalitarianism.

Could anything be more bourgeois in a good sense than the books of Mark Twain? I do not refer to the obvious leveling of *A Yankee in King Arthur's Court* but to more instinctive because less conscious expressions of equalitarianism. Consider the theme of *Huckleberry Finn*, which must certainly be regarded as one of the most typical as well as one of the best creations of the American imagination. The theme of that book is the conversion of Huck to the bourgeois virtues. He has inherited an outmoded equalitarianism, the faith of his poor-white father that he is as good as any man—and indeed he is, in a frontier society

where good hunting and good fishing and a body inured to cold and bad whiskey guarantee independence. But Hannibal is not frontier any more. The border ruffian is out of date. All he can do is to boast and go to the lock-up. If Huck is to climb on the American band wagon, he has to learn how to keep up with a new set of Joneses, and his difficulties and backslidings make the story. Mark Twain doubts the values of Hannibal society, and it is possible to read both *Tom Sawyer* and *Huckleberry Finn* as satires of that society, but he never doubts—or never doubted until toward the end of his life—the duty and privilege of every good American to become as rich and independent and successful as the Judge Thatchers, whoever they might be, of the time. Huck grown up will be a better bourgeois than the rest.

How strong this equalitarian *motif* is in the majority of American books need not be emphasized here. The difficulty is to find American books of vitality in which it is not a moving force. Poe, who belongs to another phase of the American tradition, is one example. Melville may be regarded as another, Hawthorne as a third, Henry James as a fourth. But Poe was a pathological romanticist, Melville and Hawthorne were skeptics, and James an internationalist. And even these men were all specialists in that inevitable accompaniment of bourgeois equalitarianism, the emphasis upon the individual and individualism. Far from having subsided with the closing of the frontier and the economic changes which have so clamped down on American opportunity, this trait has merely changed its metabolism in the imagination.

The novels of Sinclair Lewis, for example, are essentially studies in the pathology of American ambition. In every important story, from *Main Street* on, he has described the American passion to get on, to be as good as the current Joneses, to conform to success and share it. But the societies that Lewis describes have got their values wrong. They want, like Babbitt,

tokens of success, which prove to be only ends in contriving efficient means. Or, as in *Arrowsmith* or *Elmer Gantry*, they have paid a heavy price for an equality of low ideals and an unworthy success. It is never the right of the American to have what the best have, which Lewis questions. His heroes are all go-getters in their own right. But Americans have gone after the wrong values. He scorns them, *not* because they are going places, but because they have lost their way. In all of this, though with less satire and more philosophy, Thoreau, in *Walden*, was his predecessor.

A less important but very cogent instance may be found in a book just published, which, with its renewal of the theme of "Huckleberry Finn," shows how heavily this national problem still weighs upon our imagination. Jesse Stuart, the Kentucky poet of the mountains, has written a novel in poetic prose called *Trees of Heaven*. It is a notable contribution to those books sprung from the American soil, styled by it, and rich in essential character, which prove that the virility and energy of the new American fiction is not to be confined to ideology, sophistication, or fictionized history. But *Trees of Heaven*, unlike *The Yearling* with which it may be compared, has a theme. Anse, the mountain farmer, is an equalitarian determined to lift his family to economic security. In contrast, the squatters, who once had been free pioneers, are poor whites on the way out to relief or vagabondage. Boliver, whose daughter is so beautiful, is Huck's father over again, with a difference. He can work, he can create a good life, but the particular bourgeois ideals that Anse has acquired from the Joneses of his neighborhood, send Bolly back to drunkenness with his bare feet hanging over the porch. This American type must have freedom to enjoy life, as his ancestors had freedom to live their own life in the woods. The wrong kind of equalitarianism makes him into a bum.

The will to be equal, which is so strong

in the American tradition, has become a critique of equality; but the will is still there. You will find it as the motive of Richard Wright's Negro story, *Native Son*. You will find it, subtly displayed, in Thornton Wilder's *Our Town*, you will find it dramatically spoken by Mrs. Joad in *The Grapes of Wrath*. We are mature as a nation, but this obsession is the same as in our youth.

Picking and choosing among the other outstanding attributes of the American tradition, I take next its most puzzling element. Not puzzling in how and why it came about, but puzzling in its action and its unexpected strength and weakness. We are a humanitarian nation, even more so than the British—one might say, the tougher we are, the more humanitarian.

Our record for tough ruthlessness is not a pretty one. If fewer Indians were massacred in Anglo-Saxon than in Spanish territories, it is chiefly because there were fewer Indians to massacre. If we did not reduce the remainders to slavery, they were equally exploited and much more thoroughly dispossessed. The type bad-man of modern literature comes from our West. The gunman and gangster were American specialties until Germany capitalized them for political purposes. If the factory system at its beginning was more ruthless in England, that was simply because British men, women, and children were more helpless. There was less room and less food. The most influential humanitarian book in English, one of the most effectively moving books of all time, "Uncle Tom's Cabin," was directed not so much at slavery as such, as against the ruthless exploitation of the Negro for quick profits in the boom cotton lands of the frontier. We have never been slow with knife, pistol, or whip.

And yet never was a nation so readily touched emotionally to humanitarian ends as the American since the nineteenth century made the idea of humanitarianism familiar. The North took back the South after the Civil War without a proscription,

an unheard of thing then, before, or after, in a Civil War. If there was oppression and exploitation later, that came from the other strain in our make-up. Our foreign-mission effort, of which at least two-thirds was humanitarian in its appeal, has been vast in proportion to means and population. No cause that awaked pity or sympathy has ever failed of support in this country, and as we grow rich, our contributions to world suffering have expanded out of proportion. The type political machine of the United States, Tammany, to whose methods the Nazis owe much, was built upon a basis of genuine humanitarianism combined with exploitation without scruple.

The cause, of course, of this deep-set trait is no superior quality of mercy in the stocks that settled America. However, the fact of settlement itself made them will to re-form themselves and their circumstances. Newcomers, torn from a settled environment, facing new conditions of living, separated from the tradition of stable communities upon which law and custom is based, they *had* to re-form themselves, and sooner or later re-form their neighbors. The frontiers of the United States have usually been advanced by pioneers who, having re-formed themselves once to the freedoms and necessities of the wilderness, did not choose to re-form themselves again to suit an approaching civilization. Reform in its broadest implication is in our blood because we have been conditioned by it for generations. It has become traditional, and this tradition the experiences of the latest immigrants into our industrialized society has not invalidated. They also have had both the opportunity and the necessity of re-forming themselves.

But this reforming habit of mind did not have to become humanitarian. It did not have to become moral. It was the influence, undoubtedly, of the strong Protestant tradition of a reforming ethics which made our tradition of reform so moral in its implications. An interesting comparison can be made here between the re-forming of Latin

civilization in both North and South America, and our own. With the Latins, the ethical element in reform was weak, even though the religious element was durable. They sought a rich life rather than a good one.

And it was the influence of abundant opportunity in a continent working upon this ethical prepossession that seems to have made the peculiarly American blend of humanitarianism. It is more sentimental than the English because, except perhaps in the question of slavery, it has never been harshly tested. It is notably more widespread, being not confined to a class, as in the humanitarianism of the Victorian middle class, but even more characteristic of the worker than of the *rentier* or successful exploiter. It is more generous among men and women of small means because our opportunities have been more generous. We have never had to be stingy or mean, at least as a nation. Economically it may ruin us yet, for it is behind the easy good nature that, quite as much as predatory politics, is responsible for such disastrous hand-outs as our pension system and the uncritical character of much of our relief.

To stretch out the long list of notable American books which carry on the tradition of this humanitarianism is quite unnecessary. There are, as a matter of fact, few really hard-boiled books in the American tradition. Those which appear to be so, usually under scrutiny show, like Poe's stories of terror, a shrinking sensitiveness to pain, or like Hemingway's tough episodes, a defensive mechanism against fear. But in the main stream of tradition, the trait is self-evident. Curiously enough, the two great men of Concord, Emerson and Thoreau, have the least of it. They have good will toward all good men, yet, Thoreau especially, are not easily moved to emotion by ills not spiritual in origin. But there is passionate and uncritical humanitarianism in Walt Whitman. There is sentimental humanitarianism in Bret Harte, whose stories of the easily aroused pity of

gold-diggers and camp prostitutes seem to have had sufficient base in reality. There is a passionate and unsentimental humanitarianism in Mark Twain—at its best, I think, in *Huckleberry Finn*, where it is veiled by irony. And, coming to our own times, regard again for an instant Sinclair Lewis, whose *Babbitt*, felt at the time of its publication to be a document in reform, seems now to be not so much a satire as a lament for the good American warped by the irresistible pressure of commonplace ideals. Or consider Theodore Dreiser's *American Tragedy*, which, for all its appearance of callous documentation, is at base pity for an ordinary man caught in tragic circumstances and doomed by his public's pathological craving for sensation to relieve its own dull lives.

No better example, however, could be found of the persistence of this tradition in what we profess to think is a new and different America, than the resounding success of John Steinbeck's *The Grapes of Wrath*. Here is a book which breaks the laws of the genteel Medes and Persians who, until this decade, have always dominated our literature. It offends decency, not only by deeds, which has always been permissible, but by words. Its language sets new standards of realism for the American novel. Here, also, is a book which attacks the economic theories which have been orthodox in American literature, and attacks them, not by argument, but by precisely that kind of sentimental generalization upon a society of mutual love and help which has always driven the practical American business man into a contemptuous fury. Nevertheless, in spite of some natural local objection in the communities described, the book has made its way wherever a book can in America. And why? Its sometimes uncertain art aside, I am sure its success is due to a reforming humanitarianism in the exact American tradition which produced *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. We may shrug our economic shoulders over the problem of migratory labor, but we cannot

guard our imagination against Mrs. Joad, who wanted only to make good Americans of her family, and could not. We are sorry for the Joads because they were deprived of what has made our tradition a generous one—opportunity. And this pity stirs on to reform.

I shall choose for my last earmark of the American tradition—youth. With more time and analytical shrewdness, it might be possible to distinguish a dozen more, but this one cannot be neglected. Perhaps it is the most important, probably it is the most determining characteristic of all. I am not so naive as to speak of America as a young nation politically and economically. Politically we are matured, though, one hopes, not crystallized. Only the British regime shows an equal correspondence between the will of the people and the direction and control of government. And this constitutes maturity in politics, even though strains and stresses show the vital need of more growth and adaptiveness. France is still experimental by comparison. The totalitarian states are in the crude youth of violence and compulsion, where evolution has scarcely begun its work, and order comes from forced obedience, not from custom and free acceptance. Nor are we young economically. On the contrary, our capitalist system, slowly absorbing ideas and practices of socialism, is certainly the most developed of its type, and if it lags behind the industrial revolution, has not found it necessary to change our ways of life in order to survive.

But in literature—and the arts in general—we are still extraordinarily young. In fact, it is obvious that we have been growing younger and younger as decade by decade we have wrenched further and further away from European, and especially English tradition. Jonathan Edwards and Benjamin Franklin were European minds only slightly affected by a new environment. Irving and Cooper are still old minds functioning with new material. Emerson and Thoreau are full of new sap, but their

youthfulness is not in manner; it is hope in the one and rebellion in the other. With Mark Twain and Whitman a raw kind of youthfulness appears—brash, vulgar, disregardful of the rules. They write like youngsters even when they are old. Energy begins to be the chief attribute of great Americans, a crude and wasteful energy, not regardful of the labor-saving devices of classicism. Such men write both badly and well, and on the same page. The vigorous, pushing imaginations grow more and more experimental, more and more indifferent to anything but quick expression. It is not literature that excites them any more, but the country. They go to it for news, and their reporting in prose or poetry is news, with the equality of journalism, which becomes an American art. The proportion of the writers who work in the great literary tradition to the innovators and expressionists grows steadily less. Finally, in our own time, the public taste itself changes and readers fall avidly upon the sensations of their own land.

What is young here is, of course, the imagination, which at last is beginning to construct its images in terms of a new continent. And there are many other signs of youth in this imagination besides its reckless and untiring energy. American writing for a half century has tended to begin everything and finish it fast. In fiction, the short story has been its chosen form, and its very best writers—even such classicists as Willa Cather—have been at their best in briefish stories. Others, like Caldwell, Faulkner, Hemingway, Wilder, Steinbeck, Sherwood Anderson, have begun to falter every time they have tried to sustain their work in the dimension of a complete novel. Their great success is in the short story, single or compounded. It may be that this results in part from the unheroic character of the equalitarian American mind, but that is not enough explanation. Our social structure is, apparently, still too youthful, too fluid to bear the weight of a great reconstruction in terms of art. Light craft go better.

Another trait which seems to me characteristically youthful is the curious duplex quality of the American imagination. Ever since the beginnings of our national literature this has been manifest. In the upper story we tend to be cheerful, generous, optimistic, humorous. But downstairs, writer after writer has been caught, sometimes fatally, by the macabre, the satiric, the sardonic, the horrible. It is surely strange that Poe and Ambrose Bierce and the Twain of "The Mysterious Stranger" and James of "The Turn of the Screw," and Faulkner, who wrote that terrible book *Sanctuary*, and Hemingway, who specializes in cruelty, should all be Americans! Not strange, however, if one remembers the contrasts between freedom, success, degeneracy, and violence, all existing on the frontier, or in a boom industrial city. Not strange either, if one considers the hurry of our development which has been built over bog and cesspool, as well as good firm ground.

And, indeed, these almost hysterical relapses into fear and disgust, so characteristic of American writing, are certainly aspects of a youthful imagination that, until recently, has never had to take stock. If it assumed a culture as its basis, it was a European culture, and in this it was like a youth who assumes his parents' stability as groundwork for his own activities. And as with that youth, when America showed itself as not according to European specifications, there has been a quick disillusionment and a tendency to rush into extremes of despair or abuse. It is hard to tell where one gets the most untrustworthy pictures of American life—in the too wholesome, too complacent books of the Age of American Confidence, or in the hysterical studies of disorganization, depression, exploitation, and violence, so current today.

The truth is, that since the American imagination really began to busy itself with America as a subject for literary interpretation, it has been going places with such youthful and nervous rapidity that relapses into pessimism or distrust or plain hysteria

were inevitable. It has, as I have said, been primarily engaged with news, and what has been found has been described more often than interpreted. Mark Twain and Whitman were like that. Thoreau's *Walden* was a protest against going places until you know your own, and if there had been a more vigorous literature extant might very well have been aimed in that direction instead of at mercantilism. Much as he admired Whitman's passionate individualism, Thoreau took issue with him on just this point. Why praise the hurrying crowds until we know the man?

Look once again at Thomas Wolfe. Could anything be more youthful in good and bad senses, or more illustrative of the American way of attempting a great theme, than his work? His achievement is to describe Tom Wolfe going places and recording his reactions in contact with a continent. His writing boils with energy, it is all news, it descends from ecstatic enthusiasm to the macabre or the despairing, it has, as I have said, beginning and middle, but no sign of the ending which to an older imagination would have been implicit in the first chapter. Not a truly successful writer, Wolfe, in his faults and in his virtues, is symptomatic of what we are imaginatively, and that is the reason for his powerful grip upon young artists of this generation.

I might add, of course, to this picture, of youth the moving picture, an American art, still dominated by Americans, as a more complete, and even more cogent example of the young imagination of America, although the tight grasp of profit makers has almost, but not quite, suppressed relapses into disgust or despair. Particularly when the American movie is not literature at all, which is usually, the mental age of its imagination can scarcely be more than twelve. And that, of course, is because the producers, however sophisticated in techniques, have spiritually and morally not yet reached adulthood, and so welcome the immature as well as the energetic in the American imagination.

The moral I have tried to draw in this paper is a very simple one. In our culture, we are definitely a nation in the making, and this is our tradition, and still governs us. This culture has had two climaxes. The first was just before the Civil War, when, still largely English in civilization, but feeling our new environment, we broke into extraordinary waves of duplex energy, some material, some spiritual. The second climax, I suspect, we are living in now, and European chaos may hasten its movement.

In both climaxes, the formative elements of our tradition are powerful. We have lost little from these, and are steadily adding to a distinctive heritage. It is not a literary culture to boast about yet, as one can boast of our political and economic progress even while deploring our errors. But it still expansive, and perhaps never so interesting to a student of criticism as now.

You get one aspect of it today in the cheaply optimistic magazine, which is all wish psychology, like the pioneer. You get

another in our ironical, sophisticated books, and magazines like "The New Yorker," where idealism is handled skeptically by a good-natured fellow who does not intend to be fooled. You get still another in deadly serious reformers, like Steinbeck. You get still another in brutal, tough guys, who easily turn tender. Still another in the vulgar smartness of gossip columns, the trim emptiness of Broadway plays, the mechanical short story.

But make no mistake. The expansiveness of a hearty America, good-willed, hopeful, energetic, is not dead. Tom Wolfe echoes Whitman; Steinbeck, Harriet Beecher Stowe. When this generation gets through with going places, we may expect another period like that really great New England stir of the imagination which was frustrated by materialism and war. Unfortunately, there is another war on, but I doubt whether any European involvement can now change the direction, though it may add to the qualities, of our American tradition.