

SARAH TRYPHENA PHILLIPS LECTURE

NATIONALISM AND THE LITERATURE
OF THE UNITED STATES

BY DOUGLAS GRANT

Read 28 June 1967

I HARDLY know where to begin. I have only myself to blame. I chose my subject myself—it was not given to me—but I chose heedlessly, if not thoughtlessly. I wanted a subject that would be on a level with this lectureship, but I should have been content with something less grand than ‘Nationalism and the Literature of the United States’. I find myself with the whole of American literature on my hands.

I can say ‘the whole of American literature’ because I think it could be shown—indeed it *has* been shown—that the history of American literature is inseparable from the idea of American nationalism. The demand for a national literature—a literature that would be as distinct as the Roman and the French and (a more puzzling requirement) even the English—was made almost on the signing of the Declaration of Independence. It went on being made, in one form or another, down to yesterday. The demand has been met, even if all its original terms have not been satisfied, but its effects both upon American literature itself and upon its interpretation will persist until the Apocalypse, speaking critically.

‘A country which has no national literature,’—I am quoting a nineteenth-century critic—‘or a literature too insignificant to force its way abroad, must always be, to its neighbours, at least in every important spiritual aspect, an unknown and mis-estimated country.’ The critic was not an American, but Thomas Carlyle, writing in 1827—not on American literature, but on the state of German literature. He might just as well have been discussing American literature. Carlyle was a prophet in the United States long before he was acknowledged to be one at home, where prophecy was a profession and the competition heavier; and his views on national literature, which, as far as theory went, were taken from German critics, romantic and nationalistic, helped to make clear to ambitious and intelligent young Americans the grounds of their discontent with the state

of their own culture. He helped to rouse them to try and satisfy somehow the literary expectations that had accompanied their country's rise from colonial dependence to independent power.

The United States had no national literature yet, but the opportunities presented to American writers appeared to be richer than any that had inspired the writers of other nations to write greatly in the past. They lived among Nature in its grandest forms: forests, cataracts, prairies, mountains . . . wherever they looked they could read the Creator and experience the Sublime. And their polity matched their estate: they were born to freedom and the popular version of history assured them that wherever freedom reigned, poetry dwelt. They were the heirs of the future by right of renouncing the past and had been given 'possibilities' in exchange for 'precedents'. Nature, democracy, and the future: what more could be wanting for an *Aeneid* of the Western World, except the master poet himself?

I have grown rhetorical, I am afraid, in sympathy with the exhortatory tone of early nineteenth-century American criticism, as it urged men-of-letters to be prompt and forthcoming. American literature was loaded with great expectations from the start.

Unfortunately, the advantages surrounding the American writer were only supposed. The repeated wonders and multiplied extent of the continent would not turn spontaneously into literature merely upon being observed. William Wordsworth did not depend upon the Cumbrian pikes for his stature; their slopes towered up mountainously and portentously in response to his genius. The Lake District was an assembly of very ordinary hills compared with the Catskills and Alleghanies, but until those greater, unspoilt ranges became 'the trouble' of an American poet's dreams, they would remain natural obstacles and little more—and obstacles, too, in the further sense of suggesting to the poet that he had failed to rise to the American scene. "Twas a pity," ran the motion that Ralph Waldo Emerson moved for debate at a meeting of the Transcendental Club in 1836, 'that in this Titanic continent, where nature is so grand, genius should be so tame.'

The egalitarian and industrious temper of American society proved to be as doubtful an advantage to the impatient men-of-letters as the inexpressible wonders of Nature. However exhilarating liberty was as a republican ideal, it turned out to be less attractive when translated into the practices of a democracy. While democracy might satisfy the people's wishes for justice

and equality, it need not equally please the novelist, who was meant to declare and illustrate those virtues. 'I have never seen a nation so much alike in my life, as the people of the United States,' wrote James Fenimore Cooper in 1828, only a year after Carlyle's stern observation on national literature; 'and what is more,' Cooper went on with mounting irritation, 'they are remarkably like that which common sense tells them they ought to resemble.' Cooper's complaint against American society, that it wanted the variety and depth that the novelist required, was to be repeated in one form or another for a century, and led some American novelists to abandon their country altogether in despair.

The future, with its boundless possibilities for the display of American genius, as it was always to be realized, ought to have escaped the disappointment of both Nature and democracy. But what could be learnt by the novelist and poet from its bland permissiveness? They would not acquire their art by self-projection, but by studying 'monuments of unageing intellect'. In practice, promises were nothing compared with the admonitions of the past.

The failure of the early American writers to take advantage of their tantalizing opportunities could not be attributed to any weakness in the national genius, but only to the depressing influence of the English tradition. English literature alone was preventing American literature from realizing itself. Shakespeare was harder to depose than George III. 'We are now the literary vassals of England', Orestes Brownson exclaimed in 1838. 'We cannot become independent and original, till we have in some degree weakened its empire.'

The argument about the proper degree of American dependence on English literature continued for a century. At one extreme, it was argued that American literature was necessarily a branch of the parent stock and derived its strength from the connexion, however flourishing its local growth. At the other, it was strenuously asserted that America must throw off 'the tyranny' of 'the imperious genius of the Old World' and discover itself, in obedience to a sense of 'national mission'. The attitudes encouraged by these views varied from acceptance to exasperation. 'Nothing American . . . succeeds,' one patriot critic exclaimed comically, in protest at the preference shown by American readers for English books; 'not even with the Ladies; one English rake being equal to twenty Americans of pure morals.'

The literary relation between England and America might be translated into the basic political terms of 'liberty' and 'tyranny' by the more polemical critics. The more thoughtful realized that it imposed an additional strain upon American writers. W. D. Howells, who was as much stirred by nationalism as he was by any other passion, said, simply and harmlessly, that 'American literature was not derived from the folk-lore of the Red Indians, but was . . . a condition of English literature, and was independent of our independence.' 'Independent of our independence': neatly put; but the implications for writers not blessed with Howells's easy acceptance of the fact is indicated in Wallace Stevens's brusque observation that 'Nothing could be more inappropriate to American literature than its English source since the Americans are not British in sensibility.'

The argument about identity that hung over American literature from the beginning concealed for a time the emergence of an American literary sensibility—if not of a successful, independent literature. James Fenimore Cooper is not Walter Scott; R. W. Emerson is not Thomas Carlyle, nor is Nathaniel Hawthorne Anthony Trollope; H. W. Longfellow is not Alfred Tennyson: all these Americans are related to each other in terms of a common sensibility as much as the Britons are between themselves. The two groups are unmistakably distinct. The shared identity of the Americans helps to make clear the slightly bitter truth of Wallace Stevens's remark. The self-conscious air of Cooper and his compatriots may be due to their feeling that while they share the same tradition as their British colleagues, they have come in at a second sitting.

The classic American writers may demonstrate a common sensibility, but when we turn to their achievement and view it reasonably rather than critically, it clearly falls short of the immediate expectations for an American literature, however unusual its values may have more recently been proved to be. The American scene is displayed in all its noble extent of forests and lakes in Fenimore Cooper's 'Leatherstocking' romances; the spirit of American democracy distinguishes Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter* and Herman Melville's *Moby Dick*; the idea of an American future flashes continually over Emerson's darting speculations; but none of these writers, even in his entirety, came anywhere near to meeting the form which the demand for a national literature had taken. They are all too partial or metaphorical or discontinuous—or seem to be so without the right preparation.

Only one of these classic writers satisfied, more or less, the general stipulations for a national literature, and the course of his reputation in this bardic role is instructive. Walt Whitman is the poet of Nature, democracy, and the future, in their American significance. He listed the States and the principal territories like a gazetteer, attaching a typical view to almost every one in turn, and though the process often seems mechanical, he succeeds in giving a sense of the land as a power in the imagination—at times, in poems like ‘Crossing Brooklyn Ferry’, and ‘When Lilacs last in the Dooryard Bloom’d’, with luminous intensity. Such a land, Whitman went on to proclaim, deserved such a people. He had no doubts about American democracy. He was the volunteer poet of ‘the divine average’, and celebrated in his charitable and expansive verse all classes and occupations, from the trapper on the frontier to the prostitute in the city. And he claimed the future in their name. He forecast the rise of the nation to greatness in fulfilment of its destiny, but, with more of the impartial visionary, he also foretold the coming into existence of a universal democracy, based upon true comradeship, which was already anticipated in the generous hearts of American democrats.

The portrait of himself which Whitman placed in front of the first edition of *Leaves of Grass*—the one which shows him in casual dress, striking a challenging, democratic pose—states almost as emphatically as the verses themselves his claim to be the national poet for whom America had waited so long. America disregarded his claim. He experienced how much easier it is to satisfy requirements than expectations. Ezra Pound may assert that ‘the vital part’ of Whitman’s ‘message’ was ‘taken from the sap and fibre of America’, but the ordinary reader of the time—the very person whose identity Whitman thought he was expressing—either overlooked him, or dismissed him as eccentric and immoral. The national scope and relevance of *Leaves of Grass* were too clouded by an intense, singular personality for it to stand generally as the American epic.

At the end of the nineteenth century, American critics were still forlornly anticipating a great work of national literature, though they no longer expected that it would be written in verse. The novel had replaced the epic as the highest expression of national consciousness. The French novel was a bold demonstration of Gallic intelligence; the Russian novel was a generous exposure of the tormented Slavic soul (and the Russians were as late starters as the Americans); the game English novel

rescued the English consciousness from death by pomp and circumstance. But where was the American novel—or, more cogently, *the* great American novel?

Frank Norris, writing in 1902, almost at the end of his life, sadly concluded that not only did the great American novel not exist, there was not even a distinct school of American fiction. Nathaniel Hawthorne himself cannot claim 'a vigorous original Americanism', he argued; *The Scarlet Letter* is not an American story, but a tale about 'an English colony on North American soil'. James Fenimore Cooper is American enough as far as his backgrounds are concerned, but his characters, both white men and red men, are patently compounded out of Bulwer Lytton and Byron and Walter Scott. America had had only one good novelist and had lost him—Henry James.

And America had lost its chance of a great national novel, Norris went on, persisting in his unflattering charges, when it had allowed 'the conquerors of the West' to 'have gone to their graves unsung, save in the traducing falsifying dime-novels which have succeeded only in discrediting our one great chance for distinctive American literature'. Homer himself, Norris asserted, had had no greater theme or materials than the conquest of the West, but instead of addressing themselves to it, American writers had 'niggled and potted and puddled about'. Norris thought that the great American novel could have been written; W. D. Howells, who like almost everyone else joined in the discussion, thought, in a more informal mood, that it could not be written because if it were seriously attempted and consequently stuck to the truth of American society, it would 'be incredible'.

Norris was quite clear about why there had not yet been a great American novel; it must wait until 'the development of the great national spirit'. 1902: Norris made his complaint in 1902. Seventy-four years earlier—a world away; before the Civil War and the advent of the Gilded Age—the Transcendentalist, William Henry Channing, had exclaimed in a review of R. W. Emerson's address, 'The American Scholar': 'We look, we say, for an American literature. . . . We shall never have a healthy American Literature, unless we have an American Spirit, an American Manner of Life.' These two observations, the one made close to the beginning and the other almost at the end of the effective century of American literature, illustrate how little the problem seemed to have changed. American literature in 1902 was still a matter of expectations: an American school of

fiction 'will come in time—inevitably', was Norris's hopeful conclusion to his sombre review, the same presumption as Channing's.

I said at the start that I found myself with the whole of American literature on my hands. I cannot so far have done more than remind you of some of the reasons for the extraordinary self-consciousness of American writers. They have all been made aware from the beginning that they were required to contribute deliberately to a literature that would both do honour to their country abroad, in competition with other literatures, and translate for their countrymen themselves the principles of American society into convenient terms of the imagination. As the standards were impossibly high, they could not help falling short of them, and a sense of inadequacy haunted them, even when they were far from failure.

The relation between the American writer and the American public cannot fairly be put in such a simple way, even from the outset, and as the nation established itself as a great power, the social and political complexities make such a reduction even more unsatisfactory; but when Ernest Hemingway, in a well-known passage, exclaims against the harsh fate of the American writer, always being killed by American society with one or another of those deadly Hemingway weapons, drink, women, or success, he is putting in modern terms the same notion that impossibilities are required of the American writer. And the writer has not only this discouragement; he has the further distraction of knowing that the original tradition in which he has to work is not really his own—at least, in its sensibility, as Wallace Stevens suggests. 'From the beginning I felt I was not English,' if I may quote from William Carlos Williams, in support of Stevens; 'If poetry had to be written I had to do it my own way.' The American writer has had added to his national burden the problem of identity.

I have been speaking about the American writer and meaning the poet and the novelist, but the literary situation equally includes the critic and historian; and in the creation and definition of a national literature the historian and critic (to put them in their proper order) are of special importance. They have certainly been important in American literature.

I suppose that it may never have occurred to us to ask ourselves whether or not we have a great literature. We assume that we have—with absolute certainty. Were we to be asked if our literature expressed 'a great national spirit', we should turn

the question aside as unnecessarily embarrassing. At the best, we might go no further than to murmur something like Dryden's remark on Chaucer: 'We have our Forefathers and Great granddames all before us.' We are not at all worried to admit that the English novel is a lesser thing than the French or the Russian. We cannot have everything. Ours is good enough in its way—and we always have Shakespeare. We hardly notice our self-assurance, but it deeply affects our criticism. We can afford to be particular. We can dispense with Milton, and abuse Shelley, and discharge all but a handful of novelists, and smile at pastoral poetry, and groan at the weighty notion of general prose—the historians and essayists and travellers; endless ranks, repeatedly subdivided. And what we do read we can study scrupulously for immutable, trans-national verities, either of form or of character. We can best understand American criticism of American literature if we keep ourselves in mind.

I remarked earlier that Frank Norris's complaint about the lack of the great American novel was made in 1902. Whether or not Norris was right about the great novel, it was obvious by then that an American literature existed. The writers of the Colonial period might not be comparable as poets and preachers and chroniclers to George Herbert and Jeremy Taylor and Bishop Burnet—I am choosing almost at random, the choice is so wide and any comparison odious—but they took on an intense interest, if not for their own sakes, then in the context of the times and as illustrations of the development of an American consciousness.

After the Revolution and the rise of New England to intellectual supremacy the writers acquired the additional interest of recognizable achievement. Wherever they were to be placed in the international scale of greatness, or even in relation only to their English contemporaries, Emerson was an accomplished essayist and Hawthorne at least a comparable novelist. As discriminating an observer as Matthew Arnold, whose detachment so infuriated some Americans, had affirmed coolly that Hawthorne's 'literary talent is of the first order'; and that while Emerson could no more than Marcus Aurelius be ranked as 'a great philosophy-maker', he was like the Roman emperor 'the friend and aider of those who would live in the spirit'. In poetry there was Edgar Allan Poe; and in both verse and prose a score of others, of similar standing, not to mention the ruck of journalists who also go to make up a body of literature. In other words, there could be a history of American literature, and

a history that was deeply serious, in spite of any alleged poverty of materials, because it described the intellectual coming of age of the greatest national power that the world had yet seen.

The drive behind the historical study of American literature may be disparagingly described as chauvinistic, but, while national spirit should not be discounted, in our impartial brooding upon style and moral sensibility and similar profundities, we tend to forget, as I have already suggested, that there may be other values in literature, less absolute, perhaps, but also important. George Santayana can hardly be held to have been partial towards his native land and its culture, but he observed with his accustomed wisdom, that 'When a way of thinking is deeply rooted in the soil, and embodies the instincts or even the characteristic errors of a people, it has a value quite independent of its truth; it constitutes a phase of human life and can powerfully affect the intellectual drama in which it figures.' In other words, American literature was important because it was the literature of a great emergent people and ought to be studied as the only record of the national character, from its beginnings to independence and maturity. The study required no further justification, and the uncritical, self-defensive enthusiasm which led some American scholars to assert that the quality of the literature itself was the source of its attraction was really unnecessary.

Professor Howard Mumford Jones, in his book on *The Theory of American Literature*, has called attention to the remarkable development in the study of American literature, once the national imagination began to insist upon the reassurance of an independent past. The second Chair in American literature in an American university was not established until 1917. Fifty years later American literature was being taught everywhere, supported by histories and bibliographies and checklists and journals. Edward Taylor had been discovered, Emily Dickinson appreciated, Herman Melville apotheosized; and writers, such as Hawthorne, who had always held their place, had been completely revalued.

The same national spirit that has established American literature in the universities at home has carried it with missionary zeal abroad. A country 'with a literature too insignificant to force its way abroad', wrote Carlyle, 'will be an unknown and misestimated country' by its neighbours. American pride has taken Carlyle's message to heart. Walt Whitman is analysed in Paris; Emerson is discussed in the sympathetic air of New Delhi;

Mark Twain is the scholarly amusement of the savants of Japan. Wherever the American presence is felt, it offers in self-explanation a library of American books.

The triumph of nationalism, in the exoneration and promotion of American literature, has also seen its eclipse—at least, according to Professor Jones. ‘Questions of literary nationalism’, he writes, in his account of the development of American literary studies, ‘have been replaced by systems of interpretation essentially unhistorical in character . . . nationalism in American writing is either taken for granted or is set aside as a pseudo-problem. Consequently, American writing is now commonly looked upon not as the product of the unique experience of a people living in a representative republic, but mainly as a branch of Western literature or of the literature of “modern” man.’ Professor Jones writes as an American, as an American of old-fashioned, republican, and scholarly virtues, who expects to recognize facts in literature as in life for what they are; but to an outsider the developments which he sees as dispensing with nationalism appear to assert it more powerfully than ever before, however covertly. Instead of being an immediate assertion of national identity, or even a ‘branch of Western literature or of the literature of “modern” man’, as Professor Jones protests, American literature is now being advanced as the condition of modern literature.

The licence for this changed and generous reading of American literature was issued, ironically enough, by an Englishman—D. H. Lawrence. ‘Never trust the artist. Trust the tale’, was one of the key aphorisms in his great *Studies in Classic American Literature*; and in the same work he made each of his selected American writers, beginning with Franklin, illustrate a phase in the sloughing off of the old consciousness and the emergence of the new. American literature thus became a parable of the birth of modern man, who is therefore metaphorically an American. Lawrence’s argument was intensely personal, but it offered truths which had escaped more orthodox commentators and it demonstrated that American literature, read in something like the same intuitive spirit, could be endowed with transcendental modernity.

W. D. Howells, in his good-natured simplicity, had affirmed that the sombre and perturbed vision of a Dostoevsky was impossible in the cheerful and hopeful environment of his own country and, while no doubt regretting the absence of such genius, gave the impression of congratulating his countrymen

on not having a Siberia for their Alaska. But Dostoevsky is one of the chief architects of the modern spirit; even today, a hundred years after its first appearance, *Crime and Punishment* is a text for our violent and guilty societies. If the smiling sameness of American life had precluded such intuitions as Dostoevsky's then American literature must be said to be peripheral to the spiritual disorder of the modern world.

The question was not allowed to stand unresolved. The first colonists of New England, the Puritans, had speculated momentarily upon sin and guilt and redemption, and though the Calvinist tradition was in decline by the beginning of the nineteenth century, Hawthorne had brilliantly, though often arbitrarily, made use of it in his short stories and in his novels, especially in *The Scarlet Letter*. The mood of Hawthorne's genius is retrospective; its tone is melancholy, its range limited; and its psychology charitable, however searching; but in a famous review of *Mosses from an Old Manse*, Herman Melville had singled out the 'great power of blackness' in Hawthorne's imagination and had ferociously translated this quality into the symbols of his own 'hell-fired' allegory, *Moby Dick*. The Puritan tradition ceased at once to be the rather sullen effect of a unfashionable theology and became activated in the damned and furiously courageous figure of Captain Ahab pursuing ambiguous truth through a metaphysical sea. The American consciousness was personified in as sombre and protesting a figure as the Russian, Raskolnikov. The Puritan tradition had been rescued from antiquarianism and given a startling contemporary relevance.

The attribution of the singular, demonic vitality of the American imagination to Puritanism was not everywhere accepted. William Carlos Williams, in his very Lawrentian study, *In the American Grain*, published in 1925, tried to fabricate an alternative Catholic mythology, originating in the golden figures of the Conquistadors and their fated victims, the Red Indians. Puritanism is the curse on America, Williams insisted; the cause of its imaginative sterility. But his view of the American, as 'an Indian, but an Indian robbed of his world,' is just as extreme as the other, of the American as doomed from birth by 'Innate Depravity and Original Sin'. The two interpretations—and all the others, equally related, that present the American as if he was radical Innocence, or else Promethean Impotence in some Gothic morality—are not really contradictory: they all serve to absolve the national character from ordinariness and present it as symbolically and crucially involved in the welter of our fateful age.

Hawthorne is a 'writer of the first order'; Melville a genius 'immensely loftier, and more profound, too, than any other American', to apply to him his own enthusiastic praise of Hawthorne—to the degree that art is always potentially relevant, it is hardly surprising that American nationalism has been able to use Hawthorne and Melville and a few more writers to justify itself in competition with other literatures. But a literature is not composed only of two or three, or even six or seven, exceptional writers; behind these usually stand a diminishing and hardly to be numbered file of supporting figures. In the case of American literature, the minor writers have been marshalled into a tradition in obedience to the same collective impulse as the one that animates the major. The unanimity proves that the minor writers, too, in spite of their appearance, are as ideally relevant to the modern world.

The direction of American literature has always from the start been assumed to be forward. 'Who can doubt that poetry will revive and lead in a new age. . . ?' Emerson inquired in his famous address of 1837; mine is 'a word of the modern', Whitman affirmed at the outset of his astonishing career in 1855; and by adapting the old claim to be the inheritors of the future to the notion of the modern, Professor Roy Harvey Pearce in his book, *The Continuity of American Poetry*, transmutes the whole body of poetry written in the United States, from Ann Bradstreet down to Wallace Stevens, into modern poetry, collecting on the way poets whose work would try even strenuous enthusiasm. 'The "Americanness" of American poetry is, quite simply,' Professor Pearce expounds, 'its compulsive "modernism"—or, with some poets in the twentieth century,' he adds, 'with the skill of a man who can see danger round corners, its compulsive "traditionalism" which is, ironically enough, a form of "modernism".'

The unambiguous identification of American literature with the modern, prose as well as verse, has allowed critics to readjust completely the relative standing of individual writers, as well as to interpret anew the entire tradition. Professor Charles Feidelson frankly acknowledges that Hawthorne and Whitman, Melville and Poe are 'minor disciples of European masters . . . they wrote no masterpieces; the relative immaturity of the American literary tradition cannot be denied'. But all these writers habitually thought in symbols and by their title to be called symbolists they 'look forward to one of the most sophisticated movements in literary history'. By thoroughly exploring

the ramifications of this notion in his study, *Symbolism and American Literature*, Professor Feidelson can come to the astonishing conclusion that American literature is a major phase 'in a long, rather covert historical movement', which leads to the establishment of modern literature.

Emerson was addicted to symbols, in the older sense of the word, and he is the principal figure in the argument. (Interestingly enough Longfellow, who wrote plainly, that 'All things are symbols', is not mentioned by Professor Feidelson at all: the symbolist tradition is apparently not quite ready for such a genteel recruit.) 'I do not belong to the poets, but only to a low department of literature,—the reporters, suburban men', Emerson said, beautifully and modestly, about himself. Matthew Arnold thought that his old teacher was being unduly modest, and he praised highly 'the beauty and grace of passages in his poems', and the exceptional purity of his diction, but he could not allow him to be a good poet because he is not 'plain and concrete'. 'And a failure of this kind goes through almost all his verse, keeps him amid symbolism and allusion and the fringes of things, and, in spite of his spiritual power, deeply impairs his poetic value.' Professor Feidelson uses 'symbolism' in quite another way to Arnold—in the modern way—and comes up with a different view of Emerson's poetry: his works, he affirms, 'are like a continuous monologue in which the genesis of symbolism is enacted over and over'. At once, the true symbolists are magically ranged below him, in order of priority as well as of time.

Professor Pearce and Professor Feidelson have both written interesting books and have greatly contributed to our understanding of American literature. They may seem impartial scholars, however enthusiastic, but the nationalistic impulse behind their criticism, and their determination to claim the modern world for American literature, is unmistakable. 'Wallace Stevens,' writes Professor Pearce disingenuously, 'like Emerson and Whitman before him, dared search for the ground on which the modern American self might base its sense of its own identity and so carry out its historical mission—to project itself into the future and into the world at large. The American was fated to be Everyman of the modern world.'

Professor Pearce arrived at 'Everyman' by reading American poetry in terms of myth. 'Everyman' is only one of the recent personifications of the American; another is Adam. Professor R. W. B. Lewis is primarily responsible for the establishment of

this particular figure, in his persuasive essay, *The American Adam*. He argues that the American was mythologized as the new Adam almost from the start in order to express the situation of the settlers and their descendants in the circumstances of the New World—an 'individual emancipated from history, happily bereft from ancestry, untouched and undefiled by the usual inheritances of family and race; an individual standing alone, self-reliant and self-propelling, ready to confront whatever awaited him with the aid of his own might and inherent resources'. Professor Lewis acknowledges that this myth is difficult to distinguish in its entirety and that it 'must be pieced together out of an assortment of essays, orations, poems, histories, and sermons'. In this respect, it differs from other national myths—from the Roman myth, for instance—in not being expressed in a single great poem—in an *Aeneid*, to keep to the Roman example. But the American myth is equally potent. 'We are the Romans of the modern world', exclaimed an American critic in 1856—the comparison is an old one. The lack of a single great national work in American literature, an epic or a novel, has always been deplored, but Professor Lewis succeeds in providing it by translating the whole of American literature into a gigantic fable, describing the progress of the American—who is Everyman; who is Adam; who is Modern Man. Could nationalism go further?

Professor Jones lamented the decline of historical studies, and the accompanying disappearance of nationalism. I am surprised that he could have been so misled. Both Professor Jones and his younger colleagues speak exactly the same language, with the same intention. 'As Europe sinks to the level of a secondary continent . . . it is increasingly evident that the United States has become the heir of Europe', writes Professor Jones, and Professor Lewis responds in the same melancholy, imperial tone: 'The peculiar and rather terrible fate of the modern American [is] that he feels himself required by history to assume the burden of representative Western man.' I think the two critics are speaking the same language. I even think that they would have been understood and applauded by Noah Webster, who first energetically proclaimed in 1783 that the United States ought to be 'as independent in *literature* as . . . in *politics*—as famous for *arts* as for *arms*'.