On the Politics of the New Humanism

Eric Adler
The University of Maryland

Scholarship assessing the nature of the so-called New Humanism, an informal school of literary and social criticism led by Irving Babbitt (1865–1933) and Paul Elmer More (1864–1937), has routinely characterized it as politically conservative, reactionary, or extremist. In a book devoted to the thought of More, for example, Robert M. Davies contended that the New Humanists, although chiefly interested in literary subjects, agreed with More's "extreme economic conservatism."[1] According to the historian Michael Jay Tucker, furthermore, "There is a longing in the New Humanists for a landed, noncommercial, pre-industrial aristocracy—like that of Regency England or the American Antebellum South—which would, by virtue of its superior education, breeding, and intelligence defend Tradition and Virtue from the grubby paws of the vulgar mob."[2] Less polemically, J. David Hoeveler, the author of the only full-scale intellectual history of the New Humanist movement to date, concluded that its participants were as a group "neo-Burkean in their political and social views."[3]

Eric Adler is Professor and Chair of Classics at the University of Maryland.

[1] Robert M. Davies, *The Humanism of Paul Elmer More* (New York, NY: Bookman Associates, 1958), 17.

[2] Michael Jay Tucker, *And Then They Loved Him: Seward Collins and the Chimera of an American Fascism* (New York, NY, and Washington, DC: Peter Lang, 2006), 92.

[3] J. David Hoeveler, Jr., *The New Humanism: A Critique of Modern America, 1900–1940* (Charlottesville, VA: University Press of Virginia, 1977), 3. For other examples of unnuanced discussions of the politics of the New Humanism, see W. M. Frohock, "What about Humanism," *Southwest Review* 25.3 (1940), 329; Albert E. Stone, Jr., "Seward Collins and the *American Review*: Experiment in Pro-Fascism, 1933–37," *American Quarterly* 12.1 (1960), 12; Alfred Kazin, *On Native Grounds: An Interpretation of Modern American Prose Literature* (San Diego, CA, New York, NY, and London, UK: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich,

Such scholarly assessments appear in-tune to varying degrees with the bellicose criticisms Babbitt, More, and their followers weathered during the late 1920s and early 1930s, when the New Humanism became a major topic of discussion in American intellectual circles. The New Humanists' sudden and unanticipated fame encouraged numerous culture warriors to provide venomous critiques, which distorted the movement's principles and aims with ferocity.[4] According to the liberal critic and editor Henry Seidel Canby (1878–1961), for instance, the New Humanism was "violently anti-democratic."[5] The progressive journalist Malcolm Cowley (1898–1989) disparaged the New Humanists as a passel of reactionary snobs.[6] "And so these angry professors," he wrote, "in following the usage of the city, have come to defend the social and intellectual prejudices of the universities where they teach and the churches where some of them worship."[7] The modernist author and critic Kenneth Burke (1897–1993) denigrated the New Humanists by likening them to the French reactionary Charles Maurras, whose far-right political movement Action Française was steeped in monarchism and anti-Semitism.[8]

This article aims to show that such appraisals of the political character of the New Humanism are highly misleading. Although it has long been acknowledged that the polemical detractors of the New Humanists often distorted their opponents' ideas,[9] it will be argued that even more fair-minded and serious assessments of New Humanist politics prove insufficiently nuanced. As we shall see, the small core group of New Humanists embraced a surprising variety of political perspectives. Some New Humanists appear to have harbored views associated with

---

1982; originally published in 1942), 291–311.

[4] On this topic, see, e.g., Eric Adler, *The Battle of the Classics: How a Nineteenth-Century Debate Can Save the Humanities Today* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2020), 187–88.

[5] Henry Seidel Canby, "Post Mortem," *The Saturday Review of Literature* 6.47 (1930), 1122.

[6] Malcolm Cowley, "Humanizing Society," in *The Critique of Humanism: A Symposium*, ed. C. Hartley Grattan (New York, NY: Brewer and Warren, 1930), 73–74.

[7] Ibid., 73.

[8] Kenneth Burke, "The Allies of Humanism Abroad," in *The Critique of Humanism*, ed. C. Hartley Grattan, 171–72. For a refutation of this charge, see T. John Jamieson, "Babbitt and Maurras as Competing Influences on T. S. Eliot," in *Irving Babbitt in Our Time*, eds. George A. Panichas and Claes G. Ryn (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 1986), 155–75.

[9] As noted by Claes G. Ryn, "Introduction to the Transaction Edition," in *Rousseau and Romanticism*, by Irving Babbitt (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 1991), xi. See also Stephen L. Tanner, *Paul Elmer More: Literary Criticism as the History of Ideas* (Provo: Brigham Young University, 1987), 2.

the political left; others advocated positions on then-contemporary politics otherwise at odds with conclusions Babbitt and More championed. Although individual figures in New Humanist circles offered some perspectives that were identified with American political conservatism at the time, these were far from the lone positions articulated within the movement. Moreover, we shall see that in the early twentieth century vitriolic critics unfairly denigrated the New Humanism by associating it with a variety of problematic views (e.g., Fascism, racism, and anti-Semitism) often linked to the far-right.[10] A careful consideration of the politics of the New Humanists will demonstrate that such associations are untenable: regardless of where the New Humanists fell on the political spectrum, there seems to have been little to no support for extremist and bigoted positions amongst their ranks. Overall, then, detailed analysis of various figures in the New Humanist movement calls into question previous scholarly assessments of its political character.

The unearthing of the more variegated ideological proclivities of the New Humanists provided by this article will hopefully contribute to a subtler and more accurate portrait of the movement. Additionally, this article helps provide a firmer understanding of Babbitt and his intellectual aims. Observers have often contended that Babbitt failed to lead a longstanding literary and social movement in part because he was too narrow and dogmatic. As G. R. Elliott (1883–1963), a prominent New Humanist, contended, Babbitt "wanted more Irving Babbitts."[11] Thus, towards the end of his life, Babbitt, pining to produce intellectual clones, supposedly grew dispirited by various defections from his ranks. Although this perception of Babbitt, provided by some who knew him first-hand, must possess at least a kernel of truth, this article will demonstrate that on the political front Babbitt appears to have been much more

[10] It should be acknowledged that such problematic views are not necessarily "conservative" in any way, and many of them, unfortunately, can be found in a wide variety of political movements; see, e.g., James A. Gregor, *Faces of Janus: Marxism and Fascism in the Twentieth Century* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2004). Still, critics have often associated these views with the right and thus linking them to the New Humanism was a way of delegitimizing the movement as inherently dubious and extremist.

[11] G. R. Elliott in *Irving Babbitt: Man and Teacher*, eds. Frederick Manchester and Odell Shepard (New York, NY: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1941), 163. In his personal copy of this book (now in the hands of the author of this article), Odell Shepard underlined this phrase and scribbled in the margins "yes!" Other contributors to *Irving Babbitt: Man and Teacher* provided compatible perspectives on this topic: see, e.g., sentiments found in the essays by Norman Foerster (97), Henry William Taeusch (174), Austin Warren (214), and Warner G. Rice (256).

willing to countenance deep-seated disagreement among his ilk than has been previously acknowledged. It is to be hoped that such a conclusion will lead other scholars to contribute more careful appraisals of Babbitt as the primary leader of the New Humanism.

To make its case, the article will proceed as follows. We shall first complicate the notion that one can safely characterize Babbitt's and More's political views as *conservative* or *reactionary*. Then, we shall highlight a fact alluded to by some earlier scholarship—that the New Humanism did not aim to advance a particular political program. The article will then turn to an examination of the political views of a variety of core New Humanist followers, whose writings demonstrate striking ideological heterodoxy. After suggesting some potential reasons for the simplistic (and, in some cases, patently unfair) political labeling of the New Humanism in much previous scholarship, the article will conclude by underscoring the broader influence the movement could have in the future, provided its applicability to non-conservatives or the actual meaning of Babbitt's supposed conservatism—both historically and today—are sufficiently recognized.

I.

Although many assessments of the New Humanism would lead one to think otherwise, it is no simple matter to characterize the movement as *conservative* or *reactionary*. Issues of definition alone greatly complicate this task. First, it must be noted that Babbitt—its chief intellectual inspiration—did not identify himself in this manner. In a letter to his friend More from 1916, in fact, Babbitt explicitly rejected such a label. "To admit at present that one is a Tory or even a reactionary," he wrote, "is in my opinion to commit a tactical mistake of the first order. One is at first put on the defensive; and in the war of intellect as in other forms of warfare the advantage belongs with the offensive—especially when it takes the form of an unexpected flanking movement."[12]

Nor was Babbitt's dismissal of monikers such as *Tory* or *reactionary* merely tactical in inspiration. Throughout his work, Babbitt proved critical of reactionaries, contending that their aim for a wistful return to bygone days was arid, the product of a foolish failure to link the best of the past to the needs of the present. Commenting on the politicized anti-romanticism of French critics such as Pierre Lasserre in *The New*

[12] February 13, 1916, letter from Babbitt to More, found among the Irving Babbitt Papers (HUG 1185; henceforth IBP) in the Harvard University Archives (henceforth HUA), Box 9; courtesy of the HUA.

Laokoon, for example, Babbitt wrote, "Now I for one regret that a legitimate protest against certain tendencies of nineteenth-century life and literature should be thus mixed up with what we may very well deem an impossible political and religious reaction. A movement would seem needed that shall be somewhat less negative and more genuinely constructive than the one M. Lasserre and his friends are trying to start in France: a movement that shall preserve even in its severest questionings of the nineteenth century a certain balance and moderation, a certain breadth of knowledge and sympathy, and so seem an advance and not a retrogression."[13] Similarly, in *The Masters of Modern French Criticism*, Babbitt criticized Joseph Joubert, a writer he otherwise esteemed, for his sterile traditionalism. "The other extreme towards which Joubert himself inclines," Babbitt averred, "is to impose the past too despotically on the present. Though he vivifies tradition with insight, more perhaps than any other French reactionary, he is nevertheless too resolutely traditional . . . Joubert tends to see only the benefits of order just as Emerson tends to see only the benefits of emancipation."[14]

More, to be sure, differed from Babbitt in his embrace of the mantle of Toryism. In a reply to Babbitt's aforementioned letter, More commented, "I for one am not afraid of being called a reactionary, if only the word is properly taken. I am reactionary in wishing to bring people back to a proper, not a superstitious, respect for sheer authority. Without that we must fall into the disintegration of an absolute individualism."[15]

Yet even More's qualified acceptance of this label does not imply that one can unproblematically deem him a reactionary or a conservative. As the Babbitt scholar Claes G. Ryn has observed, *conservative* has long been a word "of many and even contradictory meanings."[16] Take, for

[13] Irving Babbitt, *The New Laokoon: An Essay on the Confusion of the Arts* (Boston, MA, and New York, NY: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1910), xiii.

[14] Irving Babbitt, *The Masters of Modern French Criticism* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1977; originally published in 1912), 40. For another example of Babbitt's criticisms of reactionaries, see Irving Babbitt, *Spanish Character and Other Essays*, eds. Frederick Manchester, Rachel Giese, and William F. Giese (Boston, MA, and New York, NY: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1940), 90.

[15] March 6, 1916, letter from More to Babbitt, IBP, box 9. For More's further discussion of the label *reactionary*, see Paul Elmer More, *Shelburne Essays, Seventh Series* (Boston, MA, and New York, NY: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1910), 267–68.

[16] Claes G. Ryn, "Definitions, Please!" *The American Conservative* 19.4 (July/August, 2020), 56. See also George H. Nash, *The Conservative Intellectual Movement in America, Since 1945* (Wilmington, DE: Intercollegiate Studies Institute), xii: "I doubt that there is any single, satisfactory, all-encompassing definition of the complex phenomenon called conservatism, the content of which varies enormously with time and place."

example, Babbitt's and More's stalwart anti-imperialism. Both leaders of the New Humanism, outspoken opponents of American involvement in World War I and full-throated critics of the Wilsonian approach to foreign affairs, argued that states' expansionistic proclivities stemmed from their leaders' disinclination to rein in their base impulses and their instinctive will to power.[17] Although this perspective fits with a branch of Anglo-American traditionalist conservatism, the triumph of neoconservatism in the Republican Party during the latter decades of the twentieth century has rendered Babbitt's and More's approach anathema to many contemporary right-wingers in the US. Indeed, in post-Vietnam-War America, their conclusions about foreign policy often betray greater affinities with voices on the far Left.[18]

Certainly, one can point to the impact of Edmund Burke's political philosophy on both Babbitt and More. Although Burke was by no means the lone political thinker to inspire the leaders of the New Humanism, his influence seems sufficiently strong that one could call them both Burkeans. Yet even this conclusion does not necessarily tell us much about an appropriate ideological label for the New Humanist leaders. Burke, after all, was a Whig, not a Tory, and Burkeans can conceivably be of a variety of political stripes.[19]

Without a doubt, Babbitt's and More's chief claim to the *conservative* moniker remains their robust anti-statism and concomitant disdain for both socialism and Communism. More expressed this disdain most pugnaciously in an oft-quoted (and oft-decontextualized) sentence from his controversial collection of political essays, *Aristocracy and Justice*: "To

[17] For Babbitt's views on the nature of imperialism, see, above all, Irving Babbitt, *Democracy and Leadership* (Boston, MA, and New York, NY: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1924). An especially helpful examination on Babbitt's approach to foreign affairs is provided by William S. Smith, *Democracy and Imperialism: Irving Babbitt and Warlike Democracies* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 2019). For More's views on war and imperialism, see, above all, Paul Elmer More, *Aristocracy and Justice: Shelburne Essays, Ninth Series* (Boston, MA, and New York, NY: Houghton Mifflin, 1915), esp. 221–43.

[18] Cf. James Seaton, "Irving Babbitt: Midwestern Intellectual," in *Midamerica XVIII: The Yearbook of the Society for the Study of Midwestern Literature*, ed. David D. Anderson (East Lansing, MI: The Midwestern Press, 1991), 25: "Babbitt's critique of imperialism . . . today sounds like a critique 'from the left' yet it is straightforwardly derived from the basic tenets of Babbitt's humanism."

[19] As J. G. A. Pocock notes in his introduction to Edmund Burke's *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Publishing Company, 1987), vii, for example, Burke was not *conservative* in the sense of "the word in the contemporary United States: a blend of American patriotism, evangelical religion and free-enterprise values." On Burke's variegated political legacy, see, e.g., Emily Jones, *Edmund Burke and the Invention of Modern Conservatism, 1830–1914* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2017).

the civilized man *the rights of property are more important than the right to life*."[20] But even in regard to Babbitt's and More's economic views one detects complications. The progenitors of the New Humanism—in sympathy with an earlier strain of Toryism—expressed serious reservations about *laissez-faire* economics. To this end, in another essay from *Aristocracy and Justice*, More likened Manchester economics to the "materialistic and pseudo-scientific philosophy" of naturalism, an obvious New Humanist bugbear.[21] Similarly, Babbitt dismissed the value of the discipline of political economy as accepting "humanitarian substitutes for the principle of control."[22] We can safely conclude that these men were by no means libertarians in the most common sense of the term and would feel out of step with a major thrust of contemporary American conservatism.

It should also be noted that the New Humanism did not advance any specific political program. Even some of its caustic critics recognized this essential feature of the movement. In his contribution to *A Critique of Humanism*, C. Hartley Grattan's combative edited collection, for instance, Lewis Mumford noted, "While the New Humanism has been allied, more or less overtly, with a defense of the privileged classes—I would cite, for example, Professor Babbitt's shrill vituperations against those who would endanger the sanctity of private property by a social interpretation of the Constitution—the connection is a social accident, rather than a logical necessity, and it is conceivable that a New Humanist might hold most of Mr. Babbitt's doctrines without being any more impressed by the sacredness of private property than Plato was."[23] Hoeveler came to similar conclusions on this score: he contended that the "political program" appearing in the writings of Babbitt and More "was not in fact implicit in" the New Humanist "position on literature and criticism."[24]

[20] More, *Aristocracy and Justice*, 136 (emphasis in the original).

[21] Ibid., 169. For similar criticisms on More's part, see, e.g., [Paul Elmer More], "The Gospel of Wealth," *The Independent* 53 (May 30, 1901): 1263–64 and Paul Elmer More, "Wealth and Culture," *The Independent* 54 (May 1, 1902): 1058–62.

[22] Babbitt, *Spanish Character and Other Essays*, 214. For other examples of Babbitt's criticisms of free-market economics and commercialism, see Irving Babbitt, *Literature and the American College: Essays in Defense of the Humanities* (Washington, DC: National Humanities Institute, 1986; originally published in 1908), 107, *The New Laokoon*, 233, and *Spanish Character and Other Essays*, 209, 214.

[23] Lewis Mumford, "Towards an Organic Humanism," in *A Critique of Humanism*, ed. Grattan, 341.

[24] Hoeveler, *The New Humanism*, 125. This conclusion seems overstated, however, since implications for political life abound in Babbitt's and More's criticism. For numerous examples of the relevance of Babbitt's thought to democratic polities, see Claes G. Ryn, *Democracy and the Ethical Life: A Philosophy of Politics and Community* (Baton Rouge, LA:

As we shall see below, an examination of some of Babbitt's and More's epigones demonstrates the salience of Hoeveler's contention. Although the two principal New Humanists advanced some arguments on political topics that, at some times and in some circumstances, could reasonably be deemed *conservative*,[25] their approach to politics, almost always pitched in a theoretical manner removed from the quotidian workings of American electoral concerns, appealed to people from a variety of ideological orientations.

II.

An examination of some voices in the New Humanist fold will do much to underscore the political heterodoxy amongst their ranks. The art critic, journalist, and professor Frank Jewett Mather, Jr. (1868–1953) was, after Babbitt and More, the third most significant member of the New Humanist inner circle.[26] He was also one of the movement's initial enthusiasts;[27] Mather met Babbitt when both men began teaching at Williams College in 1893.[28] Although Mather had previously earned a Ph.D. in English philology from the Johns Hopkins University,[29] he, always a man of catholic tastes, grew increasingly disenchanted with narrow, professionalized academic scholarship. Mather thus hit it off with Babbitt, who had proven hostile to the so-called Philological Syndicate at Harvard from his undergraduate days.[30] Disillusioned with academic life, Mather left his position at Williams in 1900 to join the world of jour-

---

Louisiana State University Press, 1978).

[25] In this context, the adjective *conservative* chiefly describes two attitudes Ryn ("Definitions, Please!" 56) associates with political conservatism: support for "limited government" and "a wish to *conserve* something, the best of a heritage" (emphasis in the original).

[26] For scholarly discussions of Mather, see, e.g., H. Wayne Morgan, *Keepers of Culture: The Art-Thought of Kenyon Kox, Royal Cortissoz, and Frank Jewett Mather, Jr.* (Kent, OH: The Kent State University Press, 1989), 105–49; A. Richard Turner, "Mather, Frank Jewett, Jr.," *American National Biography* (1999): https://www.anb.org/view/10.1093/anb/9780198606697.001.0001/anb-9780198606697-e-1700557.

[27] On Mather's stature as part of the Humanist "old guard," see [Seward Collins], "Chronicle and Comment," *The Bookman* 71 (March, 1930), 75.

[28] Morgan, *Keepers of Culture*, 106; Dora Babbitt in *Irving Babbitt*, eds. Manchester and Shepard, xii. See also Arthur Hazard Dakin, *Paul Elmer More* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1960), 81–82.

[29] Morgan, *Keepers of Culture*, 106.

[30] For examples of Babbitt's criticisms of this Syndicate, see, e.g., Babbitt, *Literature and the American College*, 141, 148. See also William F. Giese in *Irving Babbitt*, eds. Manchester and Shepard, 1; Harry Levin, "From Bohemia to Academia: Writers in Universities," *Bulletin of the Academy of Arts and Sciences* 44.4 (1991), 28.

nalism in New York City.[31] As a writer and editor at the *Nation* and *The New York Evening Post*, Mather befriended More, who eventually became his co-worker. An art collector from a young age, Mather demonstrated increasing interest in art criticism during his tenure at the *Post* and the *Nation*. While on an extended stay in Italy (which he commenced after an attack of typhoid fever in 1905),[32] Mather was courted to join Princeton University's Department of Art and Archaeology in 1910.[33] He taught there until his retirement in 1933 and served as the director of the Princeton University Art Museum from 1922 to 1946.[34] More was sufficiently close to Mather that, upon More's retirement from the *Nation* in 1914,[35] he moved to Princeton, New Jersey, in part to be near Mather and his family.

Although these days overshadowed by Babbitt and More, Mather over the course of his career developed an enviable reputation as a highly respected art critic and historian. He composed numerous monographs that became standard college textbooks. In 1916, Mather delivered the prestigious Lowell Lectures at the Lowell Institute in Boston.[36] More would not win this honor until 1934;[37] Babbitt never did so. Mather revised and expanded his Lowell Lectures into a book called *Modern Painting*, which appeared in 1927. Since the book broadcasts various New Humanist views on aesthetics and morals, it is unsurprising that Mather dedicated it to Babbitt. In this dedication, Mather informed his old friend, "It is largely your example that has heartened me to extend to the field of modern painting that criticism of ideas and ideals which you have so brilliantly applied to modern literature, morals and politics."[38] Penning a sentence that encapsulates his relationship to the New Humanism, Mather further told Babbitt, "You will find me more indulgent than yourself towards the pleasanter by-products of error, less hopeful, perhaps, of truth's prevailing through polemic, but you will also find me fighting beside you for such art as is humanistic, traditional and socially

[31] Morgan, *Keepers of Culture*, 108.

[32] The typescript copy of Babbitt's September 28, 1905, letter to More (IBP, box 9), notes that Mather was suffering from typhoid fever.

[33] Morgan, *Keepers of Culture*, 112.

[34] Ibid., 140.

[35] Dakin, *Paul Elmer More*, 144–46.

[36] Frank Jewett Mather, Jr., *Modern Painting* (Garden City, NY: Garden City Publishing Co., 1927), ix.

[37] Dakin, *Paul Elmer More*, 341.

[38] Mather, *Modern Painting*, viii.

available."[39] The jovial and puckish Mather remained on good terms with Babbitt and More throughout their lifetimes;[40] the Babbitt–More correspondence teems with supportive references to Mather and his family.

Despite his proximity to the New Humanism's leading lights, Mather differed sharply from Babbitt and More in his political inclinations. Although, like most of the New Humanists, he seldom wrote about political matters, his few (often brief) discussions of the topic, combined with hints from other sources, paint a picture of a man who disagreed profoundly with his close friends. One can find inklings of Mather's ideological proclivities in works devoted to other topics. In his aforementioned monograph *Modern Painting*, for example, Mather, discussing neoclassical art, contended, "Just as a strong central government befits a democracy, so this kind of standardization befits an individualistic period of art."[41] He further intimated his support for government funding for the arts.[42]

Mather's few direct discussions of politics provide a similar impression. In 1931, he published an article in the *Atlantic Monthly* about a recent trip to the Soviet Union. His reflections differ sharply from the anti-Bolshevism Babbitt and More espoused. "As it stands," he wrote, "the superb Red Army does not seem to me to offer a serious military menace off its own soil. Its scope is defensive, as the policy of the Soviet Republic is defensive."[43] Weighing the perspective of a Russian he met, Mather remarked, "My apparent Communist had his emphatic views about Bolshevized Russia. There was neither liberty nor prosperity (in this he was right), and no equality (in which I think he was wrong)."[44] Although by no means the work of a Communist fellow traveler, the piece proves less critical of the USSR than do the political writings of Babbitt[45] and More.[46]

---

[39] Ibid.

[40] For a portrait of Mather's personality in relation to More's, see Edmund Wilson, *The Triple Thinkers: Twelve Essays on Literary Subjects* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1948), 3–14.

[41] Mather, *Modern Painting*, 41.

[42] Ibid., 378.

[43] Frank Jewett Mather, Jr., "Glimpses of Russia," *The Atlantic Monthly* 148.2 (October, 1931), 472.

[44] Ibid., 476.

[45] E.g., Babbitt, *Democracy and Leadership*, 186: "The choice to which the modern man will finally be reduced, it has been said, is that of being a Bolshevist or a Jesuit. In that case (assuming that by Jesuit is meant the ultramontane Catholic) there does not seem to be much room for hesitation. Ultramontane Catholicism does not, like Bolshevism, strike at the very root of civilization."

[46] On More's disdain for Bolshevism, see, e.g., Barrows Dunham, "Paul Elmer More," *The Massachusetts Review* 7.1 (1966), 162.

As the historian H. Wayne Morgan has demonstrated, Mather's conclusions about the Soviet Union fit with other progressive views he championed. Highly critical of Germany during World War I, Morgan notes, "Mather readily joined various academic groups committed to assisting the Allies with their propaganda while the United States was neutral."[47] He heartily disagreed with academics and intellectuals (such as Babbitt and More) who opposed American entry in the war[48] and disliked the Republicans' antagonism to the founding of the League of Nations in 1919, viewing Wilson's critics, in Morgan's words, as "stupid in the extreme."[49] Mather also made clear his political differences with More in a postmortem tribute to his old friend. In this piece, Mather deemed More's *Aristocracy and Justice* "ultraconservative" and concluded that it contains "Paul More's least satisfactory essays."[50] Not for nothing, then, did Arthur Dakin, More's biographer, conclude that Mather "scarcely agreed with More on anything."[51] Regular lunch companions during their days in journalism, Mather and More bickered about socialism, since More proved so critical of it.[52]

Despite espousing views on affairs of the day anathema to Babbitt and More, Mather always got along with them personally. And he never retreated from the New Humanist ranks. After all, his perspectives on art, education, and scholarship remained broadly compatible with those of his dear friends.[53] Mather, indeed, comes across in many respects as a milder New Humanist: more restrained in views and expression, he agreed in spirit with many New Humanist tenets but bemoaned what he viewed as his friends' penchant to overstate their case with brawling polemic.

Mather was thus the perfect figure to defend the movement in left-leaning circles when it suddenly became the target of ferocious attacks in 1930. He, for example, reviewed *A Critique of Humanism* in the pages of the *New Republic*.[54] Deeming himself "a Humanist of the extreme

[47] Morgan, *Keepers of Culture*, 119.

[48] Ibid., 134–35.

[49] Ibid., 135.

[50] Frank Jewett Mather, Jr., "Paul Elmer More (1864–1937)," *Proceedings of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences* 72.10 (May, 1938), 370.

[51] Dakin, *Paul Elmer More*, 373.

[52] Ibid., 88–89.

[53] For an example of Mather's views on scholarship and education, see [Frank Jewett Mather, Jr.], "Higher Education Made in Germany," *The Nation* 72.1869 (April 21, 1901), 332–33.

[54] Frank Jewett Mather, Jr., "The Babbittiad," *The New Republic* 63 (June 25, 1930): 156–59.

left,"[55] Mather suggested his sympathy with some of Grattan's contributors, but stressed that their criticisms were actually "more verbal than real."[56] He demonstrated, for instance, the positive qualities of the New Humanist "inner check" and stressed that the movement, its detractors notwithstanding, does not ignore the plight of "the common man."[57] In a statement that may hint at his personal political attachment to the New Humanism, he averred, "The Humanist is not hostile to that improving of the environment which the socialist urges, but he is skeptical of any permanent moral gain arising simply from material betterment."[58]

In another defense of the movement in the *Atlantic Monthly*, Mather again stressed his objections to the bellicosity of some New Humanists but underscored the movement's inherent reasonableness.[59] For example, he noted that some critics disparaged Babbitt's appropriation of historical humanism, especially in its ancient and Renaissance manifestations. "Such an objection is hardly serious," Mather responded. "We do not chide the Salvation Army for using the word 'army' in an unusual sense."[60] He contended that "Words have their fates, and it may seem lucky for the word 'humanism' that, falling into Mr. Babbitt's hands, it came to have a meaning again."[61]

III.

Although, as mentioned above, many New Humanists left few clues about their overall approach to politics, in some instances one finds in their published work perspectives that clash notably with those of Babbitt and More. This appears to be the case with William F. Giese (1864–1943), Babbitt's longstanding friend and follower. Influenced by Babbitt's thought as far back as their early undergraduate days at Harvard, Giese became a professor of French and Spanish at the University of Wisconsin and a New Humanist literary critic.[62] When Babbitt's first book, *Literature*

[55] Ibid., 156.

[56] Ibid., 159.

[57] Ibid.

[58] Ibid., 158.

[59] Frank Jewett Mather, Jr., "Humanism—Attitude or Credo?" *The Atlantic Monthly* 145 (June, 1930), 741–48.

[60] Ibid., 742.

[61] Ibid.

[62] On Giese's life, see his valuable, semi-autobiographical contribution to *Irving Babbitt*, eds. Manchester and Shepard, 1–25; Stephen C. Brennan and Stephen R. Yarbrough, *Irving Babbitt* (Boston, MA: Twayne Publishers, 1987), 10–12, 21, 23, 26. Scholarship on Babbitt has considered Giese a Humanist: e.g., Michael R. Harris, *Five Counterrevolutionists in Higher Education: Irving Babbitt, Albert Jay Nock, Abraham Flexner, Robert Maynard Hutchins,*

and the American College (1908), proved a commercial failure, Giese lent Babbitt $500 to get his next monograph in print.[63] He co-edited Babbitt's posthumously published essay collection, *Spanish Character and Other Essays* (1940), along with his colleague Frederick A. Manchester and his daughter Rachel Giese.

Giese's criticism advertises his orthodox New Humanist perspective on literature. His book *Victor Hugo: The Man and the Poet* (1926), for example, provides a spirited attack on romanticism and commences with an epigraph from Babbitt's work.[64] "In studying Hugo's poetry I have attempted," Giese wrote in the book's preface, "incidentally at least, to study that larger phenomenon which Hugo so brilliantly represents, romanticism. In dwelling as insistently as I do on Hugo's characteristics and limitations, I hope to make more clear the characteristics and limitations of that romantic literature whose spell, at once so potent and so questionable, has for more than a century been re-shaping our whole modern life and thought as well as our literature."[65] Similarly, Giese's *Sainte-Beuve: A Literary Portrait* (1931) is chock-a-block with New Humanist-inspired analysis of one of Babbitt's and More's most esteemed critics. In a characteristic example of praise for a man he called "one of the great gentlemen of letters,"[66] for instance, Giese suggested, "Sainte-Beuve believes too much in the action of the individual to grant that history can be reduced to the operation of general laws, ethnologic, economic, or geographic, or to a naturalistic fatalism of any kind."[67]

Despite his patent sympathy for the New Humanist outlook on literature, Giese expressed views on American foreign policy almost diametrically opposed to those of Babbitt and More. In 1918, the Committee on Public Information, President Woodrow Wilson's government agency aiming to gin up support for American involvement in the Great War, published Giese's pamphlet *German Autocracy and Militarism*.[68] It pro-

---

Alexander Meiklejohn (Corvallis, OR: Oregon State University Press, 1970), 49 n. 1; Thomas R. Nevin, *Irving Babbitt: An Intellectual Study* (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 1984), 37.

[63] Brennan and Yarbrough, *Irving Babbitt*, 23.

[64] William F. Giese, *Victor Hugo: The Man and the Poet* (New York, NY: Lincoln Mac Veagh, the Dial Press, 1926), iii.

[65] Ibid., vi.

[66] William Frederick Giese, *Sainte-Beuve: A Literary Portrait*, University of Wisconsin Studies in Language and Literature no. 31 (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin, 1931), 3.

[67] Ibid., 165. Elsewhere in the book (140), Giese called Babbitt "One of the profoundest of modern thinkers."

[68] W. F. Giese, *German Autocracy and Militarism*, University of Wisconsin War Pamphlets, no. 15 (Madison, WI: The University [of Wisconsin], 1918). The book's cover notes that this

vides a truculent attack on German culture. "The German spirit," Giese exclaimed, "as represented by the Kaiser, is the child of Absolutism and Militarism; we cannot have it without having them also."[69] The pamphlet criticizes, *inter alia*, the social and economic inequality it spies in Germany. "The complete subordination of the lower classes, of the poor who do the world's work, is the indispensable condition of German imperialism," Giese contended. "They are educated to think only as their masters wish them to and thus become docile and unquestioning upholders of the existing order of things, contented with their humble lot and without aspirations toward democratic liberty and equality."[70] Giese further excoriated Kaiser Wilhelm II for contemning the left-wing German Social Democrats, "the only influential party in Germany that stands for liberty and the rights of the common man."[71]

The expression of such views did not turn Giese into a New Humanist apostate. On the contrary: Babbitt maintained his warm feelings for his old friend throughout his life. In a letter to More from 1926, Babbitt provided qualified praise for Giese's latest monograph. "Have you seen Giese's book on Victor Hugo?" he asked. "One gets the effect of too much of a muchness, as one usually does in G's writing; yet the book abounds in smashing epigrams; and so far as Hugo's reputation is concerned, impresses one as being something definitive."[72] Babbitt expressed similarly positive sentiments about Giese's later efforts in a missive to More from 1932. "I judge Giese's *Sainte-Beuve* rather more favorably than you do," he wrote. "Perhaps I am unduly affected in my estimate by old friendship. My acquaintance with him antedates by several years even, my first meeting with you."[73]

IV.

Even New Humanists whose political outlooks seem closer to those of Babbitt and More could express reservations about the economic and social views of the New Humanism's leaders. The Canadian-born G. R. Elliott, a professor of English and literary critic, witnessed one of Babbitt's class lectures at Harvard during a visit to Cambridge and ultimate-

pamphlet was "approved by the Committee on Public Information, Washington, D.C."

[69] Ibid., 3.

[70] Ibid., 11.

[71] Ibid., 5. For another rare glimpse at Giese's political leanings, see Giese, *Sainte-Beuve*, 173, where he criticized the Jacobins and lamented Sainte-Beuve's brief support for Napoleon III.

[72] December 19, 1926, letter from Babbitt to More, IBP, box 9.

[73] June 12, 1932, letter from Babbitt to More, IBP, box 9.

ly became a prominent second-generation New Humanist.[74] Elliott composed many books and essays, such as *The Cycle of Modern Poetry* (1929) and *Humanism and Imagination* (1938), the latter of which focuses partly on his estimation of the New Humanist movement. A man of Anglican leanings,[75] Elliott attempted to calm the religious disputes over the New Humanism.[76] Although he seldom touched directly on political matters,[77] Elliott occasionally provided hints about his ideological proclivities.

Elliott offered a rare glimpse at his impressions of foreign policy in 1916, when his essay *Our Progress-Idea and the War* was published.[78] Here he embraced a dovishness in tune with Babbitt's and More's perspectives. Elliott, for example, pointed the finger at a romantic faith in progress as responsible for the advent of World War I. During the romantic period, he contended, "Men endeavored to test the value for human progress of every factor at work in the complex of modern civilization."[79] According to Elliott, a naïve presumption of ineluctable progress "has at once its result and its refutation in the present war."[80] His opposition to the war betrays a cosmopolitanism characteristic of Babbitt's and More's outlooks. "Rational cooperation among nations," he wrote, "is essential to the highest development of each, and to that of mankind as a whole. Ultimately the individual nation is of value only in so far as it contributes to the progress of our greatest species, mankind."[81]

Elsewhere in his writings Elliott demonstrated sympathy for other views Babbitt and More articulated. For example, he criticized what he

---

[74] G. R. Elliott in *Irving Babbitt*, eds. Manchester and Shepard, 144–46. On Elliott, see his partially autobiographical contribution to this volume (144–64); anonymous, "George Elliott, Educator, Dies," *The New York Times* (October 19, 1963), 20; and the references to Elliott in Brennan and Yarbrough, *Irving Babbitt*.

[75] See G. R. Elliott, *Humanism and Imagination* (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 1938), 245–46.

[76] See, e.g., G. R. Elliott, "The Religious Dissension of Babbitt and More," *The American Review* 9.2 (Summer, 1937), 252–65.

[77] In this regard, as noted above, Elliott was typical of most Humanists. For examples of such rare mentions of political topics on the part of Babbitt's and More's followers, see, e.g., Prosser Hall Frye, *Romance and Tragedy* (Boston, MA: Marshall Jones Company, 1922), 33–34; Sherlock Bronson Gass, *The Criers of the Shops* (Boston, MA: Marshall Jones Company, 1925), 81–125; Alan Reynolds Thompson, "Farewell to Achilles," *The Bookman* 70.5 (January, 1930), 469; Robert Shafer, "Dean Inge and Modern Christianity, Part II," *The American Review* 5.2 (May, 1935), 217 and *Paul Elmer More and American Criticism* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1935), 197, 201, 204–5, 231.

[78] George Roy Elliott, *Our Progress-Idea and the War: An Essay Concerning Recent Literature* (Boston, MA: Richard G. Badger, 1916).

[79] Ibid., 10.

[80] Ibid., 38.

[81] Ibid., 40.

took to be the sentimental democratic enthusiasms of the critics W. C. Brownell and Stuart P. Sherman.[82] He expressed disdain for socialism and Communism,[83] though he also appeared amenable to a more even distribution of goods.[84] Elliott, it should also be noted, contributed articles on literature and education to Seward Collins's right-wing *American Review*,[85] a magazine that, as we shall discuss below, tarnished the reputation of the New Humanism more successfully than the movement's most vehement critics could have imagined.

Yet even Elliott conveyed reservations about the most important and influential political tract associated with the New Humanism. In the context of a discussion of Sherman's democratic idealism, Elliott contended that Babbitt's *Democracy and Leadership* suffers from "serious faults."[86] Nowhere did Elliott expand on his criticisms of the book. But clearly his political views differed from Babbitt's in at least some respects. Elliott's position was not a carbon copy of Babbitt's.

The same may be said of Austin Warren (1899–1986), a second-generation New Humanist who transformed into a famed early advocate of the New Criticism.[87] Born in Waltham, Massachusetts, Warren attended Wesleyan University (A.B., 1920) before earning an A.M. in English from Harvard (1922). At Harvard, he studied with Babbitt, whom Warren later called "My one great 'official' teacher."[88] "By Irving Babbitt," Warren noted, "I had been converted from sheer romanticism to what was at first merely a doctrinal classicism."[89] Babbitt's influence was sufficiently strong that Warren followed his advice in transferring from Harvard (whose English department Babbitt loathed) to Princeton, where War-

---

[82] G. R. Elliott, *The Cycle of Modern Poetry: A Series of Essays toward Clearing Our Present Poetic Dilemma* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1929), 73 n. 4. On Sherman's relationship with the New Humanism, see below.

[83] Elliott, *Humanism and Imagination*, 175.

[84] Ibid., 225.

[85] E.g., G. R. Elliott, "President Hyde and the American College: I. Collegiate Magnanimity," *The American Review* 2.1 (November, 1933), 1–26, "T. S. Eliot and Irving Babbitt," *The American Review* 7.4 (September, 1936), 442–54, and "More's Christology," *The American Review* 9.1 (April, 1937), 35–46.

[86] Elliott, *Humanism and Imagination*, 77.

[87] On Warren's life, see, e.g., *Teacher and Critic: Essays by and about Austin Warren*, eds. Myron Simon and Harvey Gross (Los Angeles, CA: The Plantin Press, 1976); Myron Simon, "Warren, Austin," *American National Biography* (1999), https://www.anb.org/view/10.1093/anb/9780198606697.001.0001/anb-9780198606697-e-1602668. See also Aaron Urbanczyk, "Professing Literature: The Example of Austin Warren," *Humanitas* 35.1–2 (2022), 80–92.

[88] Austin Warren in *Teacher and Critic*, eds. Simon and Gross, xiii.

[89] Ibid., 22.

ren earned his Ph.D. in 1926. Warren taught at a variety of institutions throughout his long career, including at Boston University (1926–39), the University of Iowa (1939–48), and the University of Michigan (1948–68).

By the mid-1930s, Warren had turned to the New Criticism. But before then he remained sympathetic to the New Humanism. Upon contributing literary criticism regularly to the *American Review*,[90] Warren grew increasingly drawn to right-wing social thought. About the various groups that wrote for the *Review*, Warren remarked in an autobiographical reflection, "Though I had started from Babbitt, I found the other groups also congenial. It was in the pages of the *Review* that I had first met with the Distributists, and the Regional Agrarians; and I assimilated their doctrines, becoming a New England regional humanist, Catholic-minded. I read every number of the *Review* from cover to cover."[91] From his participation in the *Review*, Warren added, "I had derived an important general cultural education, especially in social thinking, in which I had hitherto taken little interest."[92]

In his esteem for Distributism, Warren clashed with More, who deemed the movement, with its aim to turn back to the clock through a reintroduction of medieval-style guilds, unbecomingly utopian. Commenting on the political program of the *American Review* in a May 14, 1933, letter to Babbitt, More suggested that "it seems to me that [Hilaire] Belloc and his henchman [G. K.] Chesterton in their scheme of 'distributism' do not reckon with the necessary economic changes since the Renaissance and with the fact that machinery and mass production render any return to the old system practically impossible."[93]

In any case, despite his affection for an assortment of right-wing views, Warren ultimately indicated his misgivings about the politics of the New Humanism's leaders. In a tribute to More from the *Southern Review*, published two decades after his passing, Warren took aim at More's *Aristocracy and Justice*. Echoing Mather's criticisms, Warren announced, "This is not its author's strongest book; More's conservatism is of an old-fashioned and unreformed variety. He does not distinguish between

[90] E.g., Austin Warren, "George Herbert," *The American Review* 7.3 (Summer, 1936), 249–71 and "The Novels of E. M. Forster," *The American Review* 9.2 (Summer, 1937), 226–51.

[91] Warren in *Teacher and Critic*, eds. Simon and Gross, 35.

[92] Ibid.

[93] May 14, 1933, letter from More to Babbitt, IBP, box 9. As we shall mention below, by the time the first issue of Collins's *American Review* saw the light of day, Babbitt was near his deathbed and thus appears not to have written back to More. But we have every reason to believe that he would have concurred with More's estimation of Distributism, given Babbitt's skepticism of reactionary perspectives ill-attuned to the needs of the present.

private property in its strict Distributist sense and finance-capitalism; nor does he adequately differentiate aristocracy from plutocracy."[94] Even a New Humanist drawn to right-wing perspectives proved critical of More's outlook on economic affairs.

V.

Odell Shepard (1884–1967), another former student of Babbitt linked to the New Humanist movement, disagreed with his mentor's political inclinations, despite his high regard for him as a teacher and thinker. Born on a farm outside of Chicago, Shepard was the son of a Methodist bishop.[95] After studying at Northwestern University, he earned a B.A. (1907) and M.A. (1908) in philosophy from the University of Chicago. Shepard then taught English at the University of Southern California from 1909 to 1914. Upon reading Babbitt's *Literature and the American College* while on the West Coast, he decided to embark on further studies at Harvard,[96] where he received a doctorate in English literature in 1916. In Cambridge, Shepard further latched onto the New Humanism,[97] although his support for the movement appears to have been qualified. An accomplished poet, biographer, literary critic, local historian, and pianist, Shepard taught English literature for many years at Trinity College in Hartford. His biography of Bronson Alcott won the Pulitzer Prize in 1938.

Shepard's politics were decidedly different from his mentor Babbitt's. From 1941 to 1943, Shepard served as the Democratic Lieutenant Governor of Connecticut, after his book *Connecticut, Past and Present* (1939) convinced Governor Robert A. Hurley to choose him as a running mate. According to Kelly Cannon, while a faculty member at Trinity College, "Shepard sparked controversy in the Hartford academic and business communities because of what some considered to be his excessive devo-

---

[94] Austin Warren, "Paul Elmer More: A Critic in Search of Wisdom," *The Southern Review* (Autumn, 1969), 1106.

[95] On Shepard's life, see, e.g., anonymous, "Odell Shepard, Writer, Is Dead; Won '37 Pulitzer for Biography," *The New York Times* (July 20, 1967), 37; Kelly Cannon, "Shepard, Odell," *American National Biography* (1999), https://www.anb.org/view/10.1093/anb/9780198606697.001.0001/anb-9780198606697-e-1602237.

[96] Shepard, in his personal copy of *Irving Babbitt*, eds. Manchester and Shepard, seeing a reference to *Literature and the American College* handwrote the following: "This book took me from California to Harvard" (325). Cf. his similar handwritten note on 312.

[97] For an example of Shepard's use of Humanist terminology in his criticism, see, e.g., Odell Shepard, "Robert Bridges," *The Bookman* 71.2 (April/May, 1930), esp. 152.

tion to New Deal politics."[98] Shepard's views on banking, business, and utilities proved so unpopular with the conservative businessmen serving on Trinity's executive committee that they failed to support him in his dispute with George Funston, Trinity's president. He thus resigned from the college in 1946.

Shepard was sufficiently close to Babbitt that he co-edited *Irving Babbitt: Man and Teacher* (1941), a collection of reflections on Babbitt's life and character written by various friends and former students. In his personal copy of this book, Shepard offered an even clearer hint of their proximity. Scribbled beneath the biographical sketch Dora Babbitt, Irving's widow, contributed to the collection, Shepard wrote, "Mrs. Babbitt told me, some days later [i.e., after Babbitt's death], that I.B. had expressed a wish on his death-bed that I should write his biography. This I could not do, partly because there were too many stripes of opinion to be reconciled, partly because—in spite of my great debt to him—I was unsympathetic. This book was the compromise fondly made."[99]

As both his biography and this comment intimate, Shepard, despite his affection for his former mentor, disagreed with Babbitt in important respects. Shepard's handwritten comments in his copy of *Irving Babbitt: Man and Teacher* provide a valuable glimpse of these disagreements, since they contain sentiments he would have been unlikely to advertise publicly.[100] At the start of C. K. Judy's chapter of the volume (139–43), for example, Shepard wrote that Judy was "my friend in Pasadena—a poor teacher at 'Cal Tech'" (139). Upon finishing the chapter, he added, "a better job than I expected from Judy" (143). In such private notes, Shepard was disinclined to pull his punches.

What sorts of criticisms about Babbitt did Shepard articulate in his copy of the book? Given the political distance between the two men, it is striking that Shepard's censures are overwhelmingly aesthetic in character. In the first essay in the collection, Giese, Babbitt's undergraduate friend, wrote, "He [Babbitt] scented a questionable dilettantism in the artist's love of expression for expression's sake, of words for their music or their remote suggestiveness" (11–12). Underlining this sentence, Shepard scribbled, "true; and so he never should have suggested Odell Shepard should write a book about him" (12). When K. T. Mei stressed

[98] Cannon, "Shepard, Odell."

[99] Shepard's copy of *Irving Babbitt*, eds. Manchester and Shepard, xiii.

[100] A reader will come to this conclusion after comparing Shepard's own contribution to *Irving Babbitt*, eds. Manchester and Shepard (298–305) with the handwritten notes discussed below.

in his chapter Babbitt's "fine feeling for style," Shepard scrawled a question mark in the margins (113). G. R. Elliott contended in the volume that Babbitt believed only in "moral facts," not "poetic facts," and this remark compelled Shepard to pen the following:

> "Why, Mr. Shepard, you don't think Shelly was a great poet, do you?"
>
> "Yes, Mr. Babbitt, I do indeed."
>
> "Why, Mr. Shepard, I am surprised!"[101]

In short, as Shepard complained in the margins of Warner G. Rice's chapter, "I have sometimes felt that I.B. cared almost nothing for literature as such—as an art."[102]

To be sure, in at least once instance Shepard offered comments in the book that may speak to the ideological distance between him and his former mentor. When James Luther Adams and J. Bryan Allin in their contribution mentioned Babbitt's esteem for Jacques Maritain's *Trois réformateurs: Luther, Descartes, Rousseau* (1925), Shepard scribbled in response, "A book I detest" (278). But, given the ample opportunities *Irving Babbitt: Man and Teacher* presented to Shepard to express political disagreement with its subject, it is notable that he almost never took the bait. Indeed, Shepard, in his copy of the book even once expressed political *agreement*. When Louis J. A. Mercier, Babbitt's former colleague in the Harvard French department, mentioned Babbitt's "impatience with the tendency of the Protestant churches to become purely humanitarian," Shepard wrote in the margins, "Out of Babbitt's teaching, perhaps, came my denunciation of 'humanitarianism' in the Methodist Church . . . at Crown Point, 1941, at a 'retreat' of Methodist preachers. Bishop Hughes did not like it" (206). In fact, in personal notes found in his copy of the book, Shepard defended Babbitt from charges that he was a lifeless conservative. To those who examined Babbitt's ideas and found them "reactionary, Puritanical, negative, and wholly unsuited to contemporary needs," Shepard replied, "there can be no doubt . . . that many persons have discovered in neo-humanism a way of life and it must be the wish of all these that B's message should be extended as far as possible."

Shepard disliked Babbitt's discomfort with disagreement among those in his circle. He assented, for example, to Henry William Taeusch's suggestion in *Irving Babbitt: Man and Teacher* that "if friends took a stand different from his own on major questions, such as religion, Babbitt felt

[101] Ibid., 146 (emphasis in the original).
[102] Ibid., 259 (emphasis in the original).

alienated from them" (174).[103] Yet, for all his supposed concern for molding acolytes, Babbitt always numbered Shepard amongst his followers, despite Shepard's reservations about the New Humanism.[104]

VI.

Perhaps the best documented example of the varied political inclinations of the New Humanists is that of Gorham B. Munson (1896–1969).[105] Born in Amityville, New York, a graduate of Wesleyan University (B.A., 1917), Munson had an unusual background for a second-generation New Humanist. A prolific author and critic, in the early 1920s Munson lived in Europe, where he founded the avant-garde literary magazine *Secession*,[106] which featured modernist writers such as Hart Crane (Munson's good friend), Wallace Stevens, and William Carlos Williams. Originally a bohemian and a Dadaist, by late in the decade he had made a decisive break with his radical past and became a qualified champion of the New Humanism.[107] Although Munson did not classify himself as "an orthodox Humanist,"[108] he expressed deep sympathies for the ideas of Babbitt and More and contributed a chapter to *Humanism and America* (1930), Norman Foerster's collective manifesto that helped catapult the movement into the public eye.[109] Munson taught writing for decades at the New School for Social Research in New York City, prior to shorter stints at Wesleyan and Hartford University.

Given his departure from the ranks of the modernist avant-garde, it is understandable that Michael Jay Tucker believed Munson drifted

[103] Shepard's comment in response reads: "Yes. P. E. More, for example."

[104] Harry Hayden Clark, one of Shepard's former students at Trinity College, who later studied with Babbitt at Harvard, wrote in his chapter of *Irving Babbitt: Man and Teacher* that "my transition to Babbitt's classroom had been prepared by the influence of one of his most gifted disciples" (266), to which Shepard responded in the margins, "i.e.—Odell Shepard!"

[105] On Munson's life, see, e.g., anonymous, "Gorham Munson, Critic, Dies at 73," *The New York Times* (August 17, 1969), 80; Hoeveler, *The New Humanism*, 22–23, 31–32. For many interesting autobiographical reflections, see Gorham Munson, *The Awakening Twenties: A Memoir-History of a Literary Period* (Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University Press, 1985).

[106] On the founding of *Secession*, see Munson, *The Awakening Twenties*, 163.

[107] Munson (*The Awakening Twenties*, 243–44) reported that the radical author Edwin Seaver, an enthusiastic former student of Babbitt at Harvard, introduced him to Humanism by lending him a copy of Babbitt's *Rousseau and Romanticism*. This is one more hint of Babbitt's appeal to an ideologically broad audience.

[108] Gorham Munson, *The Dilemma of the Liberated: An Interpretation of Twentieth Century Humanism* (Port Washington, NY: Kennikat Press, 1930), vii; cf. 274.

[109] For scholarship grouping Munson among the Humanists, see, e.g., Harris, *Five Counterrevolutionists in Higher Education*, 49 n. 1; Hoeveler, *The New Humanism*, 22–23.

rightward in his politics in the late 1920s.[110] But a careful consideration of Munson's writings after he switched literary camps demonstrates that no such drift occurred. Even as a New Humanist, Munson hewed to a leftist, quasi-revolutionary outlook on politics starkly at odds with those of Babbitt and More.

Munson underscored these differences most fully in *The Dilemma of the Liberated* (1930), a book that provides Munson's perspective on the New Humanism. Otherwise supportive of Babbitt's and More's views, the monograph heavily criticizes the leaders of the New Humanism for their approach to politics and economics. In the case of More's *Aristocracy and Justice*, for example, Munson argued that its author "has not dealt with the purely theoretical analyses of capitalism. I do not say he is unable to, or unfamiliar with the arguments: the fact is that he has omitted a theoretical justification. To those who believe that the critique of capitalism has been a devastating one, this is an inexcusable omission."[111] Too focused on the individual level, contended Munson, More in his economic thought demonstrated an uncharacteristic reticence to explore a philosophical rationale for his defense of capitalism.

Although more impressed by Babbitt's *Democracy and Leadership*—which he called "perhaps the weightiest book in its field written by an American"[112]—Munson spied similar downsides in its author's economic vision.[113] Overall, he concluded, "I have gone into details of criticism in order to show that the New Humanists are fairly caught on the capital charge of *failing to recognize the economic problem*. However sensitive they may be to the 'excesses' of capitalism, they accept it and the financial system with it as the defensible status quo, and with no great marshalling of reasons either."[114] Clearly, despite his support for their philosophical, moral, and aesthetic views, Munson differed profoundly with Babbitt and More in the political realm.

What sort of political vision did Munson espouse? In this context, we must mention a different influence on him, that of the British socialist

[110] Tucker, *And Then They Loved Him*, 93.

[111] Munson, *The Dilemma of the Liberated*, 218.

[112] Ibid., 231.

[113] Ibid., 231–41.

[114] Ibid., 135 (emphasis in the original). Munson's mention of "the economic problem" seems like an invocation of Babbitt's introduction to *Democracy and Literature*, the third sentence of which reads: "When studied with any degree of thoroughness, the economic problem will be found to run into the political problem, the political problem in turn into the philosophical problem, and the philosophical problem itself to be almost indissolubly bound up at last with the religious problem" (1).

and theosophical writer A. R. Orage (1873–1934). A former schoolteacher in Leeds, Orage grew famous in his country's intellectual circles as the editor of the *New Age*, a small-circulation magazine heralding British modernism and radical politics, with contributors such as T. E. Hulme, Ezra Pound, and Herbert Read. In this capacity, Orage became the first prominent supporter of Social Credit,[115] a nominally apolitical approach to economic reform founded by Major C. H. Douglas (1879–1952). Although Douglas, a military engineer turned intellectual, advertised Social Credit as an economic technique, the movement betrayed a variety of influences, including guild socialism, Marxist syndicalism, Fabian socialism, anarchism, and Adlerian psychology.[116]

Douglas bemoaned workers' lack of purchasing power in a capitalist system, a predicament that industrialization only worsened. According to the scholar Tim Armstrong, "Douglas proposed a variety of cures for this situation: firstly, a National Dividend, which would both place purchasing power in the hands of workers and distribute the shared inheritance of past knowledge . . . Secondly, a government office which would set prices and pay manufacturers a fee representing the difference between production costs and available purchase power. The result would be to increase economic turnover and wrest control from the banks."[117] Like a varied cast of intellectuals in his day, Orage, an erstwhile Fabian socialist with an anarchist streak, viewed Social Credit as a solution to the ills of capitalism that would not usher in a totalitarian state. Although Social Credit never won a large following in either the United Kingdom or the United States, its influence could eventually be detected in Keynesian economics, the New Deal in the US, Canadian politics, and the British Labour Party.[118]

Munson met Orage when both men were living in New York City in the 1920s. At this time, Orage was on a different intellectual and spiritual mission: proselytizing for the so-called Gurdjieff system.[119] After selling the *New Age* in 1922, Orage studied in France at the Institute for the Har-

[115] See John L. Finlay, *Social Credit: The English Origins* (Montreal, QC: McGill–Queen's University Press, 1972), 62. Finlay notes that Douglas converted Orage to Social Credit by the end of 1918.

[116] On Social Credit, see, above all, Finlay, *Social Credit*. See also Tim Armstrong, "Social Credit Modernism," *Critical Quarterly* 55.2 (July, 2013), 50–65, who highlights the movement's appeal among modernist authors.

[117] Armstrong, "Social Credit Modernism," 51.

[118] Ibid., 50–51. The more recent movement in favor of a Universal Basic Income also overlaps with the Social Credit philosophy.

[119] Munson, *The Awakening Twenties*, 253–54, stresses that he first met Orage in February of 1924.

monious Development of Man at Fontainebleau.[120] The Russian mystic G. I. Gurdjieff (d. 1949) founded this school (where Munson would also study during the summer of 1927) and two years later sent Orage to the US as his apostle.[121] There Munson joined one of Orage's Gurdjieff groups, which included such major cultural figures as Van Wyck Brooks and Herbert Croly.[122] Orage, a talented speaker blessed with a capacious intellect, had tremendous influence on Munson, who devoted an entire chapter of his memoir to his former teacher.[123]

Although Orage did not formally lecture in New York on Social Credit until after his break with Gurdjieff in 1930,[124] Munson's *The Dilemma of the Liberated* demonstrates that Orage had influenced Munson's political views prior to that time. The book's criticisms of Babbitt and More lean heavily on authors who had shaped Orage's enthusiasm for Social Credit. Hence Munson's invocation of Georges Sorel, the Marxist syndicalist popular amongst many of Douglas's minions.[125] Indeed, in *The Dilemma of the Liberated* Munson attempted to persuade his readers that Sorel's radical thought proved compatible with the New Humanism. According to Munson, Sorel "was miscomprehended by many for the sole reason that he was a revolutionary classicist, which is not a paradoxical combination."[126] Further, Munson suggested, "Sorel made a new coupling, the Homeric hero and the social revolutionist, a combination that I happen to think would bode better for the future."[127] Even more strikingly, in the book Munson concluded that the French utopian socialist Pierre-Joseph Proudhon had much in common with the New Humanism. "Proudhon," he argued, "had tried to combine the classical ideal with socialism, and Sorel seems to have taken his first direction from Proudhon."[128]

Munson vouched for a brand of revolutionary New Humanism that could combine Babbitt's and More's insights about the dualistic character of human nature with a political approach in line with the Social Credit movement. Contending that leftists have much to learn from the New Humanism, Munson wrote:

[120] Finlay, *Social Credit*, 122–23.
[121] Munson, *The Awakening Twenties*, 257–58.
[122] Ibid., 258, 261.
[123] Ibid., 253–83.
[124] Ibid., 283.
[125] See, e.g., Finlay, *Social Credit*, 71–74.
[126] Munson, *The Dilemma of the Liberated*, 222.
[127] Ibid., 229.
[128] Ibid., 223.

> The question is: can Humanism and the revolutionary movement join hands? Extremely unlikely, of course, and yet I can conceive of a Humanist revolutionary. He would have convinced himself that in the clash on first principles of political economy (between first principles there can be no mediation) the revolutionaries were right, and he would therefore oppose the forces of capitalism as strongly as More opposes socialism. But in any revolutionary party he joined, he would have an Augean stable of illusions to clear out before he could satisfy himself that the revolutionists could really fulfil their pledges of a better society. He would have to persuade his comrades to throw out the accumulated rubbish of humanitarianism, the naïve notions of goodness at the heart of the proletarian, the intellectual fallacies, the spilth of feeling that you will find rampant in a writer like Upton Sinclair. This clearing away of sloppy sentiment and fuzzy ideas would be of enormous advantage to the revolutionary movement, but, as I say, it is extremely unlikely that a Humanist Hercules will rise to perform it.[129]

Perhaps Munson envisioned himself as a "Humanist Hercules," since he became a promoter of a variety of American Social Credit organizations in 1932.[130]

As hinted at above, Social Credit boasted an odd mix of supporters, from Communists to those who would ultimately abandon the movement in favor of Fascism. It seemed to resonate more often with the radical Left (especially amongst self-professed socialists), but Social Credit's ties to guild socialism and Distributism speak to its possible appeal on the Right as well. Munson himself, though, provided evidence of his quasi-socialist, leftist orientation. In *The Dilemma of the Liberated*, for instance, he proclaimed his antipathy to both Fascism and Communism, two movements that "have died as a political theory in becoming a political fact."[131] Munson, furthermore, cast his discussion of Babbitt's and More's economic thought in *The Dilemma of the Liberated* as an opportunity for the political Left to learn from the New Humanism. "There is," he pleaded, "much of a medicinal nature that the best minds among our social revolutionaries can absorb from their opponents, More and

[129] Ibid., 229.

[130] On Munson's role in the Social Credit movement in the US, see his papers in the special collections at Wesleyan University (https://archives.wesleyan.edu/repositories/sca/resources/gorham_b_munson_papers_social_credit).

[131] Munson, *The Dilemma of the Liberated*, 220. Munson was a consistent critic of anti-Semitism, a feature of some Distributist, Fascist, and even Social Credit thought. See, e.g., Gorham Munson, "A New Attack on Anti-Semitism," *Opinion: A Journal of Jewish Life and Letters* (September, 1939), 13–16, *12 Decisive Battles of the Mind: The Story of Propaganda during the Christian Era with Abridged Versions of Texts that Have Shaped History* (New York, NY: The Greystone Press, 1942), 5, and *The Awakening Twenties*, 118, 159–60.

Babbitt, without undergoing a conversion to conservatism."[132]

In any case, Munson's invocation of Proudhon as a potential New Humanist *avant la lettre* shows his distance from the economic thought of Babbitt and More. The French utopian socialist, after all, famously proclaimed that property is theft;[133] whereas More, as we noted previously, combatively opined that private property was more essential to the continuance of civilization than was the right to life. And yet Munson remained welcome in the New Humanist fold. Hence Norman Foerster, among the more orthodox New Humanists, tapped Munson to contribute to *Humanism and America*, the movement's collective *cri de coeur*. To be sure, Seward Collins—who published many thoughts on the New Humanism in the pages of the *Bookman*—contended that Munson was merely a New Humanist fellow traveler.[134] But, as we shall discuss below, Collins was a singular figure in that his interest in the New Humanism was overwhelmingly political.[135] Collins, furthermore, did not long remain a New Humanist, and others in the movement appear to have harbored reservations about him.

VII.

Given the varied political proclivities of the New Humanists, one may reasonably wonder: why did the movement become pigeonholed as *conservative* and *reactionary* or even *extremist*? Many possible reasons suggest themselves, and we can explore a few pertinent ones. One surrounds the attention-grabbing semi-defection of Stuart P. Sherman (1881–1926) from the New Humanist ranks.[136] A native of Anita, Iowa, Sherman had a hard-scrabble peripatetic early existence. A graduate of Williams College (B.A., 1903), he headed to Harvard University to earn a Ph.D. in English literature. There Sherman studied with Babbitt and became an enthusiastic convert to the New Humanism. From 1907 to 1924, he taught English at the University of Illinois.[137] A seemingly effortless writer, Sherman was courted by the journalistic world: after a summer working for the *Nation* and the New York *Evening Post*,[138] in 1909 Paul

[132] Munson, *The Dilemma of the Liberated*, 230.

[133] Pierre-Joseph Proudhon, *What Is Property?*, edited and translated by Donald R. Kelley and Bonnie G. Smith (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1994), esp. 198.

[134] [Seward Collins], "Chronicles and Comment," *The Bookman* 71 (March, 1930), 76.

[135] Collins, it should also be noted, did not contribute to *Humanism and America*.

[136] On Sherman's life, see, above all, Jacob Zeitlin and Homer Woodbridge, *Life and Letters of Stuart P. Sherman*, 2 vols. (New York, NY: Farrar and Rinehart, 1929).

[137] Ibid., 158, 643.

[138] Ibid., 174.

Elmer More unsuccessfully tempted Sherman to take up a permanent position as an editor in New York.[139] More, then the editor-in-chief of the *Nation*, continued cultivating Sherman's critical talents as a contributor to his magazine. He considered Sherman a promising intellectual in the New Humanist mold, and Sherman appreciated More's wide learning and editorial acumen. Ultimately, Sherman—always more interested in producing accessible criticism than narrow academic writing—left Illinois to take a job as the editor of *Books*, the weekly literary supplement of the New York *Herald Tribune*.[140] He held this position for only a short time; Sherman drowned on August 21, 1926, in a canoeing accident while vacationing in Michigan.[141]

During what may be termed his New Humanist phase, Sherman published a monograph on Matthew Arnold[142] and a collection of essays called *On Contemporary Literature* (1917), which extends New Humanist literary doctrines to an array of modern authors. *On Contemporary Literature* generated the New Humanism's greatest stir in American intellectual circles prior to the hullabaloo surrounding Foerster's *Humanism and America* in 1930.[143] And no wonder: unlike Babbitt and More, who had little appetite for dilating on recent authors, Sherman in *On Contemporary Literature* took aim at many then-fashionable writers, notably attacking Theodore Dreiser for his "barbaric naturalism."[144] "The impressive unity of effect produced by Mr. Dreiser's five novels," he wrote, "is due to the fact that they are all illustrations of a crude and naively simple naturalistic philosophy, such as we find in the mouths of exponents of the new *Real-Politik*. Each book, with its bewildering mass of detail, is a ferocious argument in behalf of a few brutal generalizations."[145]

But Sherman ultimately drifted away from the New Humanist camp. Given the kerfuffle his prior criticism had caused, some in the American press relished his supposed defection from the New Humanism.[146] Al-

[139] Ibid., 178.

[140] Ibid., 643–45, 649.

[141] Hoeveler, *The New Humanism*, 17.

[142] Stuart P. Sherman, *Matthew Arnold: How to Know Him* (Indianapolis, IN: The Bobbs-Merrill Company, 1917).

[143] On the reception of Sherman's book, see, e.g., Zeitlin and Woodbridge, *Life and Letters of Stuart P. Sherman*, 339–40.

[144] Stuart P. Sherman, *On Contemporary Literature* (New York, NY: Henry Holt and Company, 1917).

[145] Ibid., 91.

[146] On the mixed reception of Sherman's change in critical attitudes, see, e.g., Zeitlin and Woodbridge, *Life and Letters of Stuart P. Sherman*, 701–9, 715.

though he remained on friendly terms with Babbitt and More,[147] various New Humanists deemed him an intellectual turncoat and criticized his later work. According to Foerster, for example, Sherman left the New Humanists in favor of "an ever vaguer faith in the common man."[148]

As Foerster's contention suggests, some presumed that Sherman's intellectual shift was political in inspiration.[149] Hence, Sherman's turn to compose "liberal" criticism helped solidify the right-wing bona fides of the New Humanism. To some degree, at least, such observers were correct: there *was* an ideological component to Sherman's change of heart. He had always proven more populist in his enthusiasms, a tendency only intensified by Sherman's happy career at a Midwestern state university. In addition, Sherman's fervent support for Woodrow Wilson during World War I further marked his distance from the dovish Babbitt and More.[150] The publication of his essay collections *Americans* and *The Genius of America* in 1923 solidified Sherman's democratic idealism—an idealism out of step with the more aristocratic ethos of the New Humanism's leaders. To Foerster, this democratic idealism helped suggest that Sherman had morphed into a humanitarian[151]—a cardinal sin for Babbitt, More, and many of their followers.

Sherman's break with the New Humanists had other important dimensions, however. First, one should note that Sherman always seemed to differ in his political views from Babbitt and More and had long betrayed a populist streak. In 1914, Henry Holt, the publisher of the *Unpopular Review*, invited Sherman to contribute to his magazine, for which More would write regularly and serve in an editorial capacity.[152] Sher-

[147] See ibid., 555, 716–17, 767–68.

[148] Norman Foerster, "Preface," in *Humanism and America: Essays on the Outlook of Modern Civilization*, ed. Norman Foerster (New York, NY: Farrar and Rinehart, 1930), ix. For other Humanist criticisms of Sherman's post-Humanist phase, see, e.g., Norman Foerster, "Humanism and Religion," *The Forum* 82.3 (September, 1929), 149; Collins, "Chronicle and Comment," 75; Elliott, *Humanism and Imagination*, 66–85. Hoeveler (*The New Humanism*, 144) correctly notes that Sherman's intellectual path demonstrates that Humanism did not necessarily entail a Burkean political perspective.

[149] See, e.g., Nevin, *Irving Babbitt*, 94, 121–22.

[150] See, e.g., Stuart P. Sherman, *American and Allied Ideals: An Appeal to Those Who Are Neither Hot Nor Cold*, War Information Series, no. 12 (Washington, DC: The Committee on Public Information, 1918), a propaganda pamphlet for the Wilson administration. See also Zeitlin and Woodbridge, *Life and Letters of Stuart P. Sherman*, 302; Elliott, *Humanism and Imagination*, 73.

[151] Foerster, "Humanism and Religion," 149.

[152] On More's role at Holt's *Unpopular Review/Unpartizan Review*, see, e.g., Dakin, *Paul Elmer More*, 188, 190; Francis X. Duggan, *Paul Elmer More* (New York, NY: Twanye Publishers, 1966), 190.

man responded to Holt that he had no desire to pen pieces for a "Tory Quarterly."[153] In a letter to Holt composed a few months later, Sherman explained his refusal: he did not "want to enter the camp of the conservatives and accept their label."[154] So, well before the reading public caught on to his critical change of position, Sherman had disagreed with More on the political front. When Sherman became exasperated by Babbitt's political views, furthermore, he wrote to Mather to complain about them.[155] And Mather, as we have already suggested, always remained a loyal New Humanist.

Arguably, Sherman's *volte face* on the subject of literature was more central to his growing distance from the New Humanism. In his later criticism, Sherman came to embrace authors such as Sinclair Lewis, whose naturalism drew heated rebukes from the New Humanists.[156] Sherman's hagiographical take on Emerson in his book *Americans*,[157] furthermore, marked his disagreement with key New Humanist principles; whereas both Babbitt and More greatly admired aspects of Emerson's writings, they concluded that his rosy Transcendentalism suggested an author who failed to understand human nature in profound respects.[158] Sherman's *Americans* also contained "An Imaginary Conversation with Mr. P. E. More," an affectionate but partly satirical critique of More's *Shelburne Essays*.[159] More, Sherman charged, expresses himself in a highfalutin manner unbecoming in a democratic nation. "He writes as if unaware that our General Reading Public is innocent of all knowledge of the best that has been said and thought in the world," Sherman suggested.[160] Although Sherman's piece seems not to have troubled More (who

---

[153] See Sherman's January 4, 1914, reply to Holt in Stuart P. Sherman and Paul Elmer More, "Correspondence," ed. Jacob Zeitlin, *The Bookman* 70.1 (September, 1929), 52.

[154] Ibid., 53 (from March 16, 1914, letter from Sherman to Holt).

[155] See Nevin, *Irving Babbitt*, 122–23.

[156] See Zeitlin and Woodbridge, *The Life and Letters of Stuart P. Sherman*, 504–5. For Babbitt's criticisms of Lewis, see, e.g., Babbitt, *Democracy and Literature*, 261–62; *On Being Creative and Other Essays* (New York, NY: Biblo and Tannen, 1968; originally published in 1932), 210–11, 218, 226, 230. For More's criticisms of Lewis, see, e.g., Paul Elmer More, *The Demon of the Absolute: New Shelburne Essays, Volume 1* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press), 63, 69.

[157] Stuart P. Sherman, *Americans* (New York, NY: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1923), 63–121.

[158] See, e.g., Paul Elmer More, *Shelburne Essays, First Series* (New York, NY, and London, UK: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1904), 71–84: ("To suppose [as Emerson did] that you and I and our neighbour can at our sweet will cast off the impediments of sin and suffering is a monstrous self-deceit") (81); Babbitt, *The Masters of Modern French Criticism*, 345–46.

[159] Sherman, *Americans*, 316–36.

[160] Ibid., 330.

was forced to endure far harsher criticisms),[161] its open acknowledgment of disagreement drew attention to Sherman's apostacy. Had Sherman not aired his reservations in print, it appears reasonable to presume that Babbitt and More—given their embrace of "non-orthodox" New Humanists such as Mather and Munson—would have continued to welcome him in their ranks. Perhaps we can conclude, then, that the leaders of the New Humanism did not cast Sherman out of their camp; rather, Sherman noisily advertised his departure.

It should also be stressed that in some respects the political disputes between Sherman and the progenitors of the New Humanism elude simplistic classification. Along with Sherman's democratic idealism came a suspicion of immigrants in marked contrast to Babbitt's cosmopolitanism.[162] In his 1918 pamphlet of self-professed propaganda for the Wilson administration,[163] Sherman fretted that newcomers from foreign countries lacking a Puritan inner check were spreading anarchy in America. "We have had anarchy," he opined, "we are now in the presence of anarchy, and we shall continue to have anarchy till we recognize and act upon the principle that the American who has not been thoroughly indoctrinated with American ideals is a menace to the Republic."[164] In part for this reason, Sherman labeled all immigrants to the US who aim to retain their native languages "deliberate colonists for a foreign empire, and enemies of the American Republic."[165] Babbitt's repeated warnings against Occidental ethnocentrism render Sherman's perspective distinctly nativist by comparison.

If Sherman's departure from the New Humanism influenced some observers to connect the movement to political conservatism, the press surrounding the temporary association of a man called Seward Collins (1899–1952) with the New Humanists played the key role in pigeonholing it as extremist, anti-democratic, and otherwise dubious in nature. A native of upstate New York and scion of a tobacco fortune (his father became a high-powered executive at the United Cigar Stores), Collins

[161] In a February 9, 1923, letter to Babbitt, More wrote about Sherman's *Americans*, "The sketch of myself seemed to me quite the most brilliant piece of writing in the volume, though naturally I do not altogether enjoy that sort of caricature" (IBP, box 9).

[162] The most famous example of Babbitt's cosmopolitanism appears at the start of his essay "Buddha and the Occident," (65), found in Irving Babbitt, *The Dhammapada: Translated from the Pāli with an Essay on Buddha and the Occident* (New York, NY: New Directions Publishing Company, 1965; originally published in 1936). For a discussion of Babbitt's cosmopolitan approach to humanism, see, e.g., Adler, *The Battle of the Classics*, 180–85.

[163] Sherman, *American and Allied Ideals*, 3.

[164] Ibid., 10.

[165] Ibid., 7.

was a wealthy socialite, journalist, and editor.[166] He drifted erratically in his political commitments, from progressivism, Southern Agrarianism, the New Humanism, and Distributism, to a flirtation with a self-styled American Fascism. In the early 1920s, when still affiliated with the political Left, Collins had denigrated More's work in his column for a newspaper called the *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*.[167] Collins was then a member of the progressive journalistic smart set in New York City, on good terms with, for example, his old college chum Edmund Wilson (who had procured for Collins a position at *Vanity Fair*)[168] and Dorothy Parker (whom he almost wed).[169]

By 1929, however, Collins had shifted to the Right, for a spell embracing the New Humanism with notable enthusiasm.[170] In fact, around this time Collins had transformed the *Bookman*, the journal he owned and edited,[171] into a veritable monthly organ of the movement, routinely featuring articles and reviews from its exponents and excoriating its detractors with gusto.[172] As Babbitt and More's correspondence attests[173] and Collins himself lamented,[174] the leaders of the New Humanism appeared skeptical of him. Even so, perhaps pleased to have a regular outlet in which to publish, they and some of their followers continued to pen pieces for the *Bookman*.

As of 1933, Collins, by now enthralled with Distributism and so-called Fascism, shut down the *Bookman* and launched the *American Review* in its stead. A more deliberately political enterprise, Collins deemed

---

[166] On Collins, see above all Albert E. Stone, "Seward Collins and the *American Review*: Experiment in Pro-Fascism, 1933–37," *American Quarterly* 12.1 (Spring, 1960), 3–19; Tucker, *And Then They Loved Him*. See also Hoeveler, *The New Humanism*, 24.

[167] See Seward B. Collins, "The Eagle Eye," *The Brooklyn Daily Eagle* (February 11, 1922), 11 and "The Eagle Eye," *The Brooklyn Daily Eagle* (March 18, 1922), 3. On More's reaction to such criticism from Collins, see Dakin, *Paul Elmer More*, 217.

[168] Tucker, *And Then They Loved Him*, 57.

[169] Ibid., 70–71.

[170] Ibid., 91–92.

[171] Collins purchased the *Bookman* in July of 1927 (anonymous, "Rascoe Quits the Bookman," *The New York Times* [April 17, 1928], 31; Stone, "Seward Collins and the *American Review*," 4). When its editor, Burton Rascoe, resigned on April 13, 1928 (Tucker, *And Then They Loved Him*, 86), Collins took over his position.

[172] For examples of Collins's (often excruciatingly prolix) attacks on critics of the New Humanism, see, e.g., Seward Collins, "Criticism in America: I. The Origins of a Myth," *The Bookman* 71.3 (June, 1930), 241–56, 353–64, "Criticism in America: II. The Revival of the Anti-Humanist Myth," *The Bookman* 71.4 (July, 1930): 400–15, and "Criticism in America: III. The End of the Anti-Humanist Myth," *The Bookman* 72.2 (October, 1930), 145–64, 209–28.

[173] See More's November 18, 1932, letter to Babbitt about Collins (IBP, box 9).

[174] Tucker, *And Then They Loved Him*, 94.

the *Review* a "Right-Wing miscellany"[175] that would feature contributions from Distributists, Southern Agrarians, neo-scholastics, and New Humanists, among others.[176] Its pages included some disturbing views and rhetoric, not least from Collins himself, who had by then drifted away from the New Humanism towards some branch of monarchism. About Hitler's rise in Germany, for example, Collins wrote in the May 1933 issue, "One would gather from the fantastic lack of proportion in our press—not to say its gullibility and sensationalism—that the most important aspect of the German revolution was the hardships suffered by Jews under the new régime. Even if the absurd atrocity stories were all true, the fact would be almost negligible beside an event that shouts aloud in spite of the journalistic silence: the victory of Hitler signifies the end of the Communist threat, *forever*."[177] Other contributors to the *American Review* ventured similarly troubling perspectives. The Southern Agrarian historian Frank L. Owsley, for example, broadcast his anti-Black racism in a discussion of the infamous Scottsboro trial.[178] R. L. Burgess took to the *Review*'s pages to wax historical on the supposed superiority of American Protestants to Catholics and Jews. Protestants such as himself, Burgess counseled, should admit that "there is a rough truth to the essentials of the [Ku Klux] Klan position" on racial matters."[179]

Babbitt was gravely ill by the time Collins abandoned the *Bookman* for the *American Review*. Although Collins published Babbitt's essay "Buddha and the Occident" in two installments in its pages after the author's death,[180] Babbitt never actively contributed to the magazine. Moreover, the New Humanist pieces in the *American Review*, confined to literary criticism, educational animadversions, and reflections on Babbitt and More, appear entirely unobjectionable.[181] But it remains a black mark on

[175] S[eward] C[ollins], "The American Review's First Year," *The American Review* 3.1 (April, 1934), 118.

[176] On the groups Collins hoped to feature in the magazine, see [Seward Collins], "Editorial Notes," *The American Review* 1.1 (April, 1933), 122–27.

[177] S[eward] C[ollins], "The Revival of Monarchy," *The American Review* 1.2 (May, 1933), 247–48 (emphasis in the original).

[178] Frank L. Owsley, "Scottsboro, the Third Crusade: The Sequel to Abolition and Reconstruction," *The American Review* 1.3 (June, 1933), 257–85.

[179] R. L. Burgess, "The Protestant Garrison in America," *The American Review* 2.4 (February, 1934), 450.

[180] Irving Babbitt, "Buddha and the Occident," *The American Review* 6.5 (March, 1936): 513–45 and "Buddha and the Occident: Part II," *The American Review* 6.6 (April, 1936), 66–97.

[181] Contributions by the Humanists to the *American Review* include G. R. Elliott, "President Hyde and the American College: I. Collegiate Magnanimity," *The American Review* 2.1 (November, 1933), 1–26, "President Hyde and the American College: II.

the movement that so many figures associated with it continued to write for Collins's periodical after he and some of his contributors trumpeted their unsavory opinions.

The choice of many New Humanists to stick with the *American Review* became an obvious tactical blunder. In February 1936, the journalist Grace Lumpkin published an interview she conducted with Collins in the pro-Communist journal *Fight*. Collins, who was tricked into believing that Lumpkin was a political ally, let loose all sorts of offensive and foolish beliefs. "Yes, I am a fascist," he told Lumpkin. "I admire Hitler and Mussolini very much."[182] Lumpkin's piece, soon picked up by the New York press, contributed to the Southern Agrarian defection from the *American Review*.[183] Collins's magazine, now starved of contributors, ceased publication in 1937. Despite the controversy, some of the New Humanists continued to publish in the *Review* until its demise.

We have no reason to suspect that the New Humanists agreed with Collins's extremist views. One notes, for example, in the work of Babbitt, More, and Munson, antipathy to anti-Semitism.[184] In fact, Collins's newfound anti-Jewish prejudices stemmed from his embrace of Hilaire Belloc, a Distributist who expressed anti-Semitic views.[185] Babbitt's focus on what he termed the Platonic Problem of the One and the Many, furthermore, demonstrated his inclination to stress the similarities between peoples from different cultures. Key to the New Humanism, indeed, was a critique of the pseudo-science of eugenics and social Darwin-

Collegiate Curriculum," *The American Review* 2.2 (December, 1933), 143–69, and "*Othello* as a Love-Tragedy," *The American Review* 8.3 (January, 1937), 257–88; Norman Foerster, "Education Leads the Way," *The American Review* 1.4 (September, 1933), 385–408 and "The Religious Dissension of Babbitt and More," *The American Review* 9.2 (Summer, 1937), 252–65; Paul Elmer More, "James Joyce," *The American Review* 5.2 (May, 1935), 129–57 and "The Modernism of French Poetry," *The American Review* (Summer, 1935), 329–48; Austin Warren, "Mr. Norton of Shady Hill," *The American Review* 8.1 (November, 1936), 86–114.

[182] Grace Lumpkin, "I Want a King," *Fight* 3.4 (February, 1936), 3.

[183] Stone ("Seward Collins and the *American Review*," 16–18) portrays the Southern Agrarian break from Collins as ideological in character. According to Tucker (*And Then They Loved Him*, 155–57), however, the Agrarians were mainly fed up with Collins's editorial deficiencies.

[184] Both Babbitt and More sided with Dreyfus and his supporters in the Dreyfus affair. See, e.g., Paul Elmer More, "Zola's Truth," *The Independent* 55 (March 5, 1903), 562–64; Babbitt, *The Masters of Modern French Criticism*, 315. More also disparaged anti-Semitism: e.g., Paul Elmer More, *The Christ of the New Testament* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1924), 28. Cf. Dakin, *Paul Elmer More*, 10, 167. For examples of Munson's criticisms of anti-Semitism, see above.

[185] Tucker, *And Then They Loved Him*, 145–46, 193.

ism.[186] Babbitt and More had also advertised their preference for democratic republicanism over monarchy.[187] As More contended in *Aristocracy and Justice*, "The cure of democracy is not *more* democracy, but *better* democracy."[188] The two leaders of the New Humanism, moreover, with their hostility to nationalism, imperialism, and warmongering, were deeply hostile to Fascism.[189]

But the Humanists' cavorting with Collins allowed their critics to paint them as dodgy political extremists. Even before the birth of the *American Review*, naysayers denigrated the New Humanism by associating it with the truculent Collins. In a letter to the editor appearing in the *New Republic*, for example, a man named Alter Brody wrote that, "Stripped, with Mr. Collins' aid, of its philosophic verbiage, the New Humanism emerges as the intellectual program of the Boston Chapter of the Daughters of the American Revolution, differing from the Ku Klux Klan by being more exclusive."[190] Similarly, in the Marxist journal *New Masses*, V. F. Calverton concluded that, "In the final analysis . . . the new humanists are the intellectual fascists of the present (and forthcoming) generation."[191] Such charges were off-base and unfair, but they helped minimize the New Humanism's intellectual and cultural influence.

Detractors' polemical attacks on the perceived political character of the New Humanism appear greatly to have affected the movement's afterlife. Although Babbitt and More influenced a broad array of scholars and intellectuals, those not self-identifying as conservatives often seem to have shied away from open acknowledgment of their impact. Major thinkers such as Arthur O. Lovejoy and Walter Lippmann drifted further in the direction of the New Humanism in some respects, for example, without drawing much attention to the movement's influence on them.[192] Indeed, mostly self-professed conservative thinkers—such as T. S. Eliot, Russell Kirk, and Peter Viereck—have trumpeted the New Humanism as

---

[186] On this topic, see Adler, *The Battle of the Classics*, 180–85.

[187] See, e.g., Babbitt, *Democracy and Leadership*; More, *Aristocracy and Justice*.

[188] More, *Aristocracy and Justice*, 29.

[189] Hoeveler, *The New Humanism*, 181.

[190] Alter Brody, "Humanism and Intolerance (letter to the editor)," *The New Republic* 61 (January 29, 1930), 278.

[191] V. F. Calverton, "Humanism: Literary Fascism," *New Masses* 5 (April, 1930), 10. For other attempts to discredit the New Humanism by invoking Collins, see, e.g., Frohock, "What about Humanism," 329; Kazin, *On Native Grounds*, 293.

[192] See, e.g., Ryn, "Introduction to the Transaction Edition," x and "Introduction to the Transaction Edition," in *Character and Culture: Essays on East and West* by Irving Babbitt (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 1995), xxii n. 5.

key to their ideas.[193] This, in turn, has underscored the (partly unfounded) notion that the movement was inherently right-wing.

VIII.

Our examination of the varied political proclivities of the New Humanists allows us to come to some important conclusions. First, we can safely presume that Babbitt and More did not aim primarily (or even secondarily) to create a political movement. Indeed, the intellectual careers of Babbitt and More do not provide a picture of thinkers whose concerns were overwhelmingly focused on international affairs or domestic governance. Without the impetus of the Great War, it is unclear whether either man would have concentrated his efforts on political theory: both More's *Aristocracy and Justice* and Babbitt's *Democracy and Leadership*—their authors' only book-length analyses of politics—appeared in the context of World War I and its aftermath.[194] Babbitt and More had been advancing New Humanist principles in print as far back as the 1890s; their comparatively tardy interest in politics helps demonstrate that the New Humanism was cast overwhelmingly as a literary and social movement. Indeed, given the ideological heterodoxy found amongst their ranks, it is clear that Babbitt and More never required their followers to support any particular political program. Leftists such as Mather, Munson, and Shepard appear to have felt comfortable in the New Humanist fold.

This conclusion helps qualify some impressions about Babbitt as the New Humanism's prime leader. Despite his intellectual combativeness, Babbitt was *not* interested in creating veritable clones, who merely parroted the perspectives of their master. Provided they believed in certain core tenets—for example, a dualistic human nature and the necessity of an inner check on impulse—a varied cast of characters was welcomed among the New Humanists. Prospective New Humanists need not have agreed ideologically with Babbitt in almost any respect.

---

[193] For Kirk's supportive discussion of the New Humanism, see, e.g., Russell Kirk, *The Conservative Mind: From Burke to Eliot*, 3rd revised edition (Chicago, IL: Henry Regnery Company, 1960; originally published in 1953), 477–504. For Viereck's discussion of Babbitt and More, see, e.g., Peter Viereck, *Conservatism: From John Adams to Churchill* (Princeton, NJ: D. Van Nostrand Company, 1956), 104–6. On Babbitt's influence on Viereck, see especially Claes G. Ryn, "The Legacy of Peter Viereck: His Prose Writings," *Humanitas* 19.1-2 (2006), 38–49. Eliot wrote a good deal about the influence of Humanism on his thought. See, e.g., T. S. Eliot, "Paul Elmer More," *Princeton Alumni Weekly* 37.17 (February 5, 1937), 373–74 and in *Irving Babbitt*, eds. Manchester and Shepard, 101–4.

[194] As Smith (*Democracy and Imperialism*, 103) rightly notes in the case of Babbitt.

It remains unfortunate, then, that close to a century after its *floruit*, the New Humanism has had a far greater impact on conservatives than on thinkers elsewhere on the political spectrum. This partisan reception has served to minimize the influence of a compelling intellectual and spiritual system that has much to offer a broad array of thinkers today. As far back as 1930, Gorham Munson pined for the creation of variegated approaches to the New Humanism. "If American Humanism spreads," he wrote:

> my prediction is that we shall eventually see its adherents manifest as a rich variety stemming from certain conventions of thought, feeling and discipline as we perceive in Renascence Humanism. We shall see humanistic disciples of Thoreau doggedly resisting the pleas of the Doing-Good professors, liberal Humanists annoying by their socratic [sic] tendencies the orthodox liberals, detached Humanists accused of defeatism and retreating to ivory towers of thought, Socratic Conservatives like More and Babbitt, and perhaps even a few Humanists with the religious view of politics and government.[195]

Perhaps it is not too late to hope that Munson's prediction will come to pass.

It should be stressed that the purpose of this article has not been to rank the ideas of scholars more or less closely associated with American Humanism or systematically to assess how well they have understood and applied the thought of the movement's two leaders. Instead, the emphasis has been on the variety of opinions among the New Humanists and on demonstrating that, contrary to common presumptions, there was no perceived demand for the New Humanists to adhere strictly to particular political beliefs.

A reflection does emerge from this survey of thinkers, however, that it would be overly reticent not to mention. What explains the great variety of political opinions among the New Humanists? Naturally, many possible rationales present themselves. As we have detailed above, numerous American Humanists seem to have been overwhelmingly focused on literary matters and possibly had little stomach for political theory. Thus, they may not have much considered the potential applicability of New Humanist principles to the political realm. Since Babbitt and More typically discussed political questions in a broad and philosophical manner, moreover, they allowed their followers the opportunity to come to a cornucopia of conclusions about the quotidian workings of American governance. It should also be stressed that the first- and sec-

[195] Munson, *The Dilemma of the Liberated*, 251.

ond-generation New Humanists lived through especially volatile times. In the early 1930s, when the New Humanism made its greatest impact on American and European intellectual circles, the Great Depression encouraged many intellectuals of disparate outlooks to ponder radical political solutions for the perceived failings of capitalism. Some New Humanists' embrace of socialism and Social Credit, for example, must be seen in this context.

Our investigation into the politics of the New Humanist movement, however, suggests in at least some circumstances an alternate explanation for its ideological heterodoxy. We call thinkers and artists great in proportion as the depth and scope of their understanding of the human condition surpass the rest of us. The goal of thought and art, Babbitt believed, "is to see life steadily and see it whole."[196] A case can be made that Babbitt himself had a largeness, wholeness, and originality of mind beyond that of his admirers. Students from the East regarded him as no less than a sage.[197] Babbitt's official academic discipline and his reputation as a literary scholar and cultural critic do not convey the entirety of his intellectual range. Not even Paul Elmer More, a thinker of great discernment and scholarly distinction in his own right, could quite match Babbitt's acuity and perspicacity. It is inevitable that people will to some extent misunderstand thinkers of exceptional insight and absorb their work only partially. In Babbitt's case, his style of writing complicated the task of his readers.[198] Unlike systematic philosophers, he did not penetrate central topics in detail before moving on to other ones. He would discuss aspects of a problem in a general way in a particular place and then elaborate on the problem in a different context.

Babbitt's achievement is thus difficult to appreciate without viewing his ideas against the background of his work as a whole. Partly because of his manner of composition, it takes considerable diligence fully to unravel the creativity of this synthetic, ground-breaking thinker. The variety and even dissonance of political or other views among the New Humanists is undoubtedly due in part to individual New Humanists not recognizing the deeper coherence of Babbitt's thought and its implications or relevance for areas of special interest that Babbitt seems to them to avoid or ignore.

---

[196] Babbitt, *Literature and the American College*, 83.

[197] See, e.g., George A. Panichas, *The Critical Legacy of Irving Babbitt: An Appreciation* (Wilmington, DE: ISI Books, 1999), 146.

[198] On this topic, see, e.g., Adler, *The Battle of the Classics*, 198–99.