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A STUDY OF VERNON LOUIS PARRINGTON'S METHOD  
OF LITERARY CRITICISM: ITS ORIGIN,  
ITS CONTENT, ITS INFLUENCE

GEORGE R. CERVENY



Submitted in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree of Doctor of  
Philosophy in the School of Education of  
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1938

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## PREFACE

Professor Vernon Louis Parrington's book came to my attention when I was an undergraduate at the University of Idaho. It was my first intimation of the fact that the University of Washington was more than a point of departure for efficient athletic expeditions. The sincere humanity revealed in Parrington's work, and the insight he provided into American thought and literature almost at once reconciled for me Idaho's defeats by Husky raiders. Main Currents in American Thought is a book I needed then and still do.

It has been a pleasure for me to make this study of Parrington's work and of the principle of economic determinism of literary expression. I owe much to the following teachers for their patience and their wisdom: Dr. Allen Rogers Benham of the University of Washington; Dr. Oscar Cargill of Washington Square College, New York University; Professor L. W. Boardman, Dr. Walter Barnes, Dr. H. H. Horne, and Dr. Charles Skinner, all of the School of Education, New York University.

GEORGE R. CERVENY

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PART I  
INTRODUCTION

Purpose

The purpose of this dissertation is to examine the principles of literary criticism and historical analysis used by Professor Vernon Louis Parrington in Main Currents in American Thought. Chiefly involved is the general principle that objective forces, sociological, biological, and physical, markedly influence, dominate, or determine the content, form, and style of literary expression. The inspiration for such an examination as is here proposed stems largely from Professor Parrington's book and will cover three general problems: (1) an historical view of the development of the elements of the principle Parrington followed; (2) Parrington's modification and use of the principle; and (3) Parrington's influence on critical points of view.

Method of Procedure

Before the three major portions of the dissertation can be begun, it will be necessary to outline some background material. This will form Part I and will consist of the following topics: standard critical points of view; Parrington's chief critical tenets; Main Currents in American Thought; and the man, Vernon Louis Parrington. After the introductory material has been presented, Part II, the historical view of



"objective" criticism will be attempted. The method of developing this section will be to search primary sources, with some attention to secondary sources, for the origin and development of the principle and its elements. Part III, Farrington's modification and use of the principle, is to be chiefly an analysis of Main Currents in American Thought. Secondary sources will be used. Part IV, the estimate of Farrington's influence will come from all the primary and secondary evidences that may be found among critics and their work.

### Background Material

#### Standard Critical Points of View

For the sake of general comparison, the more usual of the standard critical points of view should be outlined. The first of these is that known as classical. Generally it is thought to be dogmatic. It sets up a body of rules regulating expression and then judges an artist by his control of material within the limits of the rules. The rules are thought to be aesthetic absolutes fixed in nature. The Greek and Latin classicists are believed to have best learned and applied the rules; hence the term "classical criticism." Aristotle's Rhetoric and his Poetics form a leading source of rules. Aristotle drew them from the writings of such men as Homer, Aeschylus, and Euripides. Thus he followed a different procedure than do those who study him for authority. Boileau in France, Pope in England, and Babbitt in modern America are classical critics. The following lines from Pope's "Essay on Criticism" illustrate

the type:

Learn hence for ancient rules a just esteem;  
To copy Nature is to copy them.

A second and popular critical point of view is that called impressionistic, or appreciative. This method is characterized by a lack of critical dicta other than the taste of the individual critic. It puts the basis for judgment on the critic's personality. He likes the work of art, or he does not like it. The critical judgment is essentially part of the emotional response of the critic to the literary work. The criticism is more concerned with the critic and how he felt than it is with the object of criticism. An outstanding impressionistic critic is Anatole France. Another is Lemaitre. J. E. Spingarn, in a lecture entitled "The New Criticism", said of this type,

To have sensations in the presence of a work of art and to express them, that is the function of criticism for the impressionistic critic.<sup>1</sup>

A third critical point of view is that employed by partisans of a particular social movement. It receives its greatest attention from artists of the proletariat. This type of criticism frankly states that art is a weapon in the battle for social reform. Art is good or bad as it takes a pro or contra position in relation to the critic's position on the social problem involved. If the critic is "proletarian" he takes the additional position that economic factors form the basis of all ideologies. Granville Hicks in America and Ralph

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1. In Edwin Berry Burgum's The New Criticism: An anthology of Modern aesthetics, p. 4.

fox in England are critics who follow the partisan theory.

A fourth critical point of view is that frequently called "objective" or "scientific." In this type the critic attempts to explain scientifically the creation of the art object. Psychology, biography, sociology, history--all form a sort of environmental aura within which art develops and from which art gets its impulse. Any one critic may emphasize one or more of these elements; and his criticism will take its name from the emphasis, being called historical, psychological, biographical, or even economic. The critic refrains from outright judgment. He explains.

#### Parrington's Critical Theory Outlined

Professor Parrington's critical principles may now be introduced. It should be pointed out that Professor Parrington did not write a generalization of his critical tenets except by implication in his discussion of how he would treat American literature. It is possible to reach his philosophy only through his statements about the method and the purpose behind his approach to American literature and through his actual critical conclusions regarding his material. It is not as abstract theory, then, but in relation to American literature that a discussion of Parrington's critical beliefs must begin. The following are the points to note:

1. American literature was shaped by forces anterior to it.
2. The primary shaping forces were two:
  - A. The economic situation rising from natural conditions in America.
  - B. The transplanted ideals from Europe, which remotely or closely contained their own economic implications.

3. These two sets of forces are particularized in social movements: religious, political, and economic (the word "economic" is to be separated from the primary meaning used above, and to mean here philosophies supporting, or movements of, industrialization, agrarianism, plantation aristocracy, etc.). The forces may be grouped under the term socio-economic.
4. These particularized forces were actually groups of people in conflict for supremacy of power.
5. Literature in America achieves its fullest significance when seen as growing out of the conflicts and developing with them. Literature in America is thus partly to be thought of as partisan and active in the conflicts.
6. The belletristic in America is subordinate to economic realities, but it is not denied a place.

As additional explanation of Parrington's position, the following points should be noted:

1. The emphasis on an economic interpretation of the forces which underlie American literature is not to be taken as a crass attitude that ignores the spiritual qualities given to art by the artist. That economics has spiritual significance is self-evident. It would be difficult to find an historian who valued the spirit more than Parrington did, or to find a book that exhibits more of it than does Main Currents in American Thought.
2. Parrington said little about the belletristic in American literature because the economic approach seemed to him to be richer in reward and because the belletristic approach had been already widely used.
3. It is hard to say whether or not Parrington denied freewill to the individual or whether or not he said that economic forces determine the whole content of an individual's thought. Probably his position is like that of Marx and Engels, who permitted individual freewill but argued that it counts for little in social movements. Parrington did at least imply a belief that the economic realities underlying American life impose themselves on the attention of the individual and of society by sheer weight. It is not clear that Parrington believed that a writer in America will necessarily have to be an economic liberal or an economic con-

servative. It does appear clear, however, that Parrington believed it has been empirically impossible for the significant body of American writers to escape the economic environment. Thus American literature is conceived as having been formed in an economic mold.

The following generalization is possible: Professor Parrington believed that American thought found its fundamental materials in the ideologies of socio-economic situations and interests, out of which conflicts developed. Politics, religion, art, and economic movements found their points of view in the conflicts, and were as well forces causing social changes that seem removed from economic problems. American literature embodies the ideologies rising from these conflicts and social changes. The belletristic is of secondary consideration in any attempt to explain and unify the history of American literature.

#### Main Currents in American Thought (1927-1930)

Professor Vernon Louis Parrington produced but one chief work, a three volume book entitled Main Currents in American Thought. The titles and dates of the three volumes are these: Volume I, The Colonial Mind, 1927; Volume II, The Romantic Revolution in America, 1927; Volume III, The Beginnings of Critical Realism in America, 1930. Volumes I and II were given the 1927 Pulitzer prize for history. Volume III was only half finished when Professor Parrington died. It was completed by E. H. Eby, a student and colleague of Parrington's at the University of Washington, in Seattle. The expedient devised for finishing was that of editing Parrington's remaining material and publishing it as fragments, foregoing

any effort at unified assimilation. The result is a rich, but somewhat incoherent third volume. The main purpose in Parrington's mind as he gathered his material was to write a history of American thought. He defined literature so as to include such matters as political arguments and essays on systems of taxation, thus making conventional literature but one phase of the broad stream of thought agitating American life.

Vernon Louis Parrington (1871-1929)<sup>1</sup>

Vernon Louis Parrington was born in Aurora, Illinois, on August 3, 1871. He died in England on June 16, 1929. His father, who had been a Union captain during the Civil War, was principal of schools in Aurora. His mother was a McClellan, a relative of General George B. McClellan.

Vernon Louis Parrington received his A.B. degree from Harvard University in 1893. He took his M.A. degree at the College of Emporia in 1895. From 1893, immediately upon leaving Harvard, until 1897 he was instructor in English and French at the College of Emporia. In 1901 he married Julia Rochester Williams. During 1903-1904 he studied at the British Museum, London, and at the Bibliotheque Nationale, Paris.

In 1897 Parrington became an instructor in English and modern language at the University of Oklahoma, and in 1898 he was promoted to Professor of English.

Professor Parrington went from Oklahoma to the University of Washington as Assistant Professor of English in 1908. In

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1. Basic outline taken from Who's Who in America, Volume 15, 1928-1929.

1912 he became a full professor. He remained at the University of Washington for the rest of his teaching life except for a summer session at the University of California in 1922, one at Columbia University in 1923, and one at the University of Michigan in 1927. He was on a vacation trip to England and the continent at the time of his death, June 16, 1929.

By nature Professor Parrington was an aesthete.<sup>1</sup> One of his hobbies was architecture. Another was painting. He was something of a poet. He was impatient of theoretical philosophy. His religious affiliations were Episcopalian. In politics he called himself a Democrat, and he thought of himself as a liberal of the Jeffersonian variety. He feared a centralized government. He had a deep sense of the humane. City life accented in him a love of the soil and the small farm, and at Seattle one of his cherished activities was flower gardening. In the classroom he combined his kindness, his homely qualities, his aesthetic appreciations, his liberalism, his keen wit, and his scholarship into a weapon to be used on and with his students that won a loyalty from them which has steadily increased.

At the University of Washington Professor Parrington found a congenial place for the development of his intellectual life. The university, comfortably watched over by the State of Washington and serving both an agrarian and industrial community, lies on a beautiful hillside above a lake. It has spiritual aspirations that are symbolized in its buildings and in the

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1. Much of the following is from E. H. Eby's appreciation of Parrington, printed in the foreword of Volume III.

up-reaching fir trees on its campus. Its link with the native, more pragmatic qualities that motivate the political and industrial ideals of a state in constant liberal-conservative turmoil is visible in the students who come and go from those buildings and fir trees, and in the activities of the students. Seattle itself is the breeding and testing place for liberal and radical movements. The university, though essentially conservative, works surrounded by vital struggle, and the intellectual life of the school does not escape the struggle. Those who know the campus recognize on it a fusion of pragmatism and idealism that seems well balanced. The result is that a kind of religious fervor for modifying American life, or for preserving elements of it, may be detected here and there.

In this place Professor Parrington grew to his fullest height. Stimulated by conservative opposition, aided by liberal inspiration, he worked out the method he believed would give a significant unity to a history of American thought. His general information gave him a knowledge of critical methods. The university gave him a long friendship with J. Allen Smith, a political scientist who used economic forces as the fundamental basis of political realities. The university, furthermore, gave him students from the frontier and from the more stable and cultured cities. Some of those students demanded from their instructors more than just facts. Professor Parrington tried to supply the demand from his own synthesis of intellectual and factual materials. In the final analysis it might not be inaccurately said of Parrington that he can be explained in the same way he tried to explain others. Born



in the west, partaking of the rise of the west in its economics and in its culture, he seems to illustrate the pragmatic elements of his environment. He was an aesthete driven into pragmatism.

Nearly everything Harrington wrote found a place in Main Currents in American Thought, but the following titles may be distinguished:

"The Puritan Divines", a chapter in the Cambridge History of American Literature, Volume I.

"The Development of Realism", a chapter in Norman Foerster's The Re-interpretation of American Literature.

"An Introduction", in the volume The Connecticut Wits, 1926.

"Sinclair Lewis, Our Own Diogenes", a brochure, 1927.

Main Currents in American Thought, 1927-1930.

It is a small list to represent a scholar's labor; but the importance of the works and their principles warrants their full examination.

PART II  
HISTORICAL BACKGROUND  
OF  
PARRINGTON'S THEORY

It is now proposed to examine the important historical facts in the development of Professor Parrington's critical theory. The theory reduces itself to three propositions. Each of these is traceable in history and will be kept distinct until it is no longer practicable to do so. The propositions are these:

1. Literature is related to social institutions; it embodies institutional ideologies; it is affected by institutions; and it affects institutions.
2. The ideologies of social institutions are determined by economic forces.
3. The ideologies are in a state of conflict.

In developing this section of the dissertation attention will be given primarily to literary critics; but it will be necessary to examine others, such as Marx and Engels, because they originated theories that were borrowed by critics or because they had direct, personal influence on Parrington.

The Relationship of Literature to Institutions

The first proposition to be examined historically states that literature is related to social institutions by causal connection and by being the embodiment of institutional ideologies. In general the social institutions are thought by critics who use this theory to be government, law, politics, religion, and economic systems--such as, capitalism and social-

ism. It does not harm the theory, however, to expand the list to include such relatively narrow fields as systems of education, charity, or industrial set-ups. Literature, according to this theory, is not a matter of aesthetics. It is fundamentally a matter of content, the meaning, the significance expressed, of which the form, or aesthetic, is secondary. The political tract and Milton's Paradise Lost are alike literature. The theory, or proposition, is not concerned with definitions so much as with the belief that such works as the political tract and Paradise Lost sprang from the social institutions that formed the environment of the tract and the epic. It is this idea that is now to be traced.

#### Giambattista Vico (1668-1744)

The first historian, in the modern era, to say that literary art is not owed entirely to the individual artist was Giambattista Vico. His book, La scienza nuova, 1725, was an effort to explain the forces that underlie human history. Speaking of literature, he said that Homer and Orpheus should be considered as representatives of an epoch, not as individuals, and that Homer's poems

must henceforth be considered as two treasure hoards containing the customs of the ancient Greeks.....  
 .....[furthermore].....The habit of considering the Homeric poems as the work of a single, eminent poet has kept us from knowing the innate laws of the people of Greece.<sup>1</sup>

The quotation contains two remarkable implications: Homer's

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1. La science nouvelle de Vico. Traduite par l'auteur de l'essai sur la Formation du dogme catholique, p. 517. Investigator's translation from the French.

poems have a definite relationship with Greek life and manners; and the poems may not be the work of one man.

Thomas Blackwell (1701-1757)

Following the Scienza nuova and one of the important books involved in the history of criticism is Thomas Blackwell's An Enquiry into the Life and Writings of Homer, 1736. It is a full length volume treating Homer as a product of his environment plus a rare natural genius. Homer is conceived to be, not a gift from heaven, but the product of a "concourse of natural causes."<sup>1</sup>

Blackwell's book develops itself along two sets of conditions that are said to have great effect upon us and under the general principle that minds

are apt to receive such strong impressions from the circumstances of the country where they are born and bred, that they contract a mutual kind of likeness to those circumstances.....<sup>2</sup>

Implicit in this quotation is the principle that social institutions have a real relationship with literature; the principle, however, becomes explicit when Blackwell generalizes on the sets of conditions he proposes to examine for their influence on Homer. Note that the specific social institutions having influence are named. The two conditions are

First, the state of the country where a person is born and bred; in which I include the common manners of the inhabitants; their constitution civil and religious, with its causes and consequences.... Next, the manners of the times; or the prevalent humours or professions in vogue:-The two are publick and have a common effect on the whole generation.

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1. Blackwell, T., An Enquiry in the Life and Writings of Homer, p. 4.
  2. Ibid., p. 11.

Of a more confined nature is, first, private education; and after that, the particular way of life we choose and pursue, with our fortunes in it.<sup>1</sup>

Of particular interest is the paragraph that follows the one above.

From these accidents men in every country may be justly said to draw their character, and derive their manners. They make us what we are, in so far as they reach our sentiments, and give us a peculiar turn and appearance: A change in anyone of them makes an alteration upon us; and taken together we must consider them as the moulds that form us into habits and dispositions,<sup>2</sup> which sway our conduct, and distinguish our actions.

In his development of this thesis as it applies to Homer, Blackwell considered the influence of climate, religion, government, language, and an audience on writing.<sup>3</sup> These are said to have a deep influence. Concerning Homer's social status and its effect, Blackwell wrote:

Homer's being born poor, and living a wandering indigent bard, was, in relation to his poetry, the greatest happiness that could befall him.<sup>4</sup>

A further influence on Homer was his own travelling and that of the strangers who came his way.<sup>5</sup> Blackwell considered this so important that he made careful maps of Homer's supposed trips.

In summation, and adding the point of international relationships and their influence on literary content, Blackwell wrote:

By these steps, then, Homer is become the parent of poetry, and his works have reached their exalted station: By the united influence of the happiest climate, the most natural manners, the boldest lan-

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1. Ibid., p. 12.
  2. Ibid., p. 12.
  3. Ibid., p. 12.
  4. Ibid., p. 12.
  5. Ibid., Cf, pp. 43-122.
- Ibid., p. 105.  
Ibid., p. 145.

guage, and most expressive religion: When these were applied to so rich a subject as the war between Greece and Troy, they produced the Iliad and the Odyssey.<sup>1</sup>

Thomas Blackwell, who probably did not know it, clearly followed Vico's lead in saying that Homer was a product of the customs of the Greeks. Blackwell is, however, the first to write a full length study of a literary figure, employing the principle that literature is formed by the environment in which it appears. He preceded Montesquieu's work on climate by twelve years, and Herder's work on racial and social influences by a half century.

#### C. A. Helvetius (1715-1771)

Of some importance because of the influence of Helvetius on the philosophy of materialism is De l' esprit. In this book Helvetius said that genius is the product of environment.

The man of genius is the product of the circumstances in which he is found.<sup>2</sup>

This is not a statement that the arts, specifically literature, are expressions of social institutions. It says only that genius, the rare ability to do exceptionally well what another man does less well, is the product of environment. Genius depends upon government, the century, the education, and the greatness of the ideas with which a man meets.<sup>3</sup> To complete the principle that environment determines literature, one would have to add that besides causing genius it gave genius the sub-

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1. Ibid., p. 345.

2. Helvetius, C. A., De l' esprit, p. 257. Investigator's translation.

3. Ibid., p. 256.

jeot matter with which to work and determined the result. The latter half is not clearly implicit in Helvetius' remark.

Johann Gottfried Von Herder (1744-1803)

Continental references to social influence on literature remained scattered and vague until the time of Johann Gottfried Von Herder. He was largely responsible for the first German movement toward nationalism in literature. Kuno Francke, a recent sociological critic, wrote that Herder considered all the achievements of civilization--language, religion, law, customs, poetry, art--to be the natural product of collective human life.<sup>1</sup> It is true: Herder did hold to the theory of a national type of literature blossoming from genetic racial roots modified by climate, by history, and by national culture. A glance at Herder's exposition reveals the influence of Rousseau's primitivism and Montesquieu's theory of the influence of climate on laws. The idea of the influence of national culture springs from Blackwell and from Herder's own mind. The theory is developed in Ideas of the Philosophy of the History of Humanity, 1784-1791.

In Ideas of the Philosophy of the History of Humanity Herder is inductively trying to discover the mainsprings of history. He believed that God created the forms of life, but that He no longer interferes. Man was given at his primal source the ability to reason, to exercise art, and to use language.<sup>2</sup> All men and races have a primal equality, but climate and

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1. The Warner Library, Vol. 12, p. 7272.

2. Herder, Johann Von Gottfried, Ideas of the Philosophy of the History of Humanity, Translated by T. Churchill, pp. 71-82.

geography develop inequality by modifying human organs. Nature, that is, the natural environment, made some races well formed.

From

the region of well formed people we have derived our religion, our arts, our sciences; the whole frame of our cultivation and humanity, be it much or little.<sup>1</sup>

Genetic ability modified by environment is the process by which Herder believed civilization was created. Of the two forces, the genetic is the "mother of all forms upon earth" with climate acting as auxiliary or as antagonist.<sup>2</sup>

From here on Herder's book increasingly called attention to the influence of tradition and custom on civilization. The common sense wisdom of the human species, for instance, is said to be a "son of tradition and custom."<sup>3</sup> Happiness, also, is "the offspring of practice, tradition, and custom."<sup>4</sup> Concerning man's attitude toward civilization Herder said that man is ready to imagine he produces everything from himself; but in reality

he is nevertheless dependent on others for the development of his faculties.....the whole structure of his humanity is connected by a spiritual birth with education, with his parents, teachers, friends; with all circumstances of his life, and consequently with his countrymen and their forefathers; and lastly with the whole chain of the human species....<sup>5</sup>

Man does not live alone. He is a complex, and his actions grow out of his complexity. Herder's principle of history takes cognizance of this. Herder stated it thus:

- 
1. Ibid., p. 145.
  2. Ibid., p. 177.
  3. Ibid., p. 202.
  4. Ibid., p. 218.
  5. Ibid., pp. 225-227.



That everywhere on our earth whatever could be has been, according to the situation and wants of the place, the circumstances and occasions of the times,<sup>1</sup> and the native or generated character of the people.<sup>1</sup>

An event in history is seen to depend upon primitive racial traits, upon the material environment, and upon the character of social institutions. Following his statement of the principle, Herder applied it to various nations in an effort to show its truth. In his discussion of the Greeks and their art and poetry he came directly to the problem of social influences. The Greeks, he said, gained their poetry, their myths, their language from

the genius of nature, their country, their way of life, the period in which they lived, and the character of their progenitors.<sup>2</sup>

Homer was conceived to have been a child of nature. The Grecian games, political institutions, religion, and climate are all thought to have promoted Grecian art. Rules could not have done it; rather it was the product of circumstances. We now can not ever succeed in imitating the Greek spirit, for the genius of those times is gone by.<sup>3</sup>

Herder carried this philosophy into all his writing about literature. He fought against all imitation as such. Literature, if it were truly significant, sprang from a race true to genetics, to history, to national traditions, and to institutions. Herder accused the French classicists of performing mere exercises. He praised Shakespeare for being true to English history

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1. Ibid., p. 348.

2. Ibid., p. 359.

3. Ibid., pp. 360-369.

and English ideals. People who prefer not to imitate, he said, would

invent, as far as possible, a drama according to their own history, to the spirit of the times, to the customs, opinions, language, national prejudices, traditions and hobbies....<sup>1</sup>

Herder's philosophy of literary criticism came to be known as the "historical method." To understand the literary art of a time the critic must include with his equipment an understanding of the race, the place, and the social institutions that produced the art. Herder, although not the originator, gave historical criticism its completest definition and its first wide popularity.

#### Madame de Stael (1766-1817)

Following Herder and of great importance is Madame de Stael. Like Herder, she was influenced by Rousseau, for she saw in the primitive source of the race one of the determining factors of intellectual history. Like Herder, she was a nationalist; and she looked, in part, as he did, to primitive racial origins to explain differences in national literatures. She said

....the variety of tastes....derive not only from accidental causes, but also from the primary sources of the imagination and of thought.<sup>2</sup>

This being so, one should judge a nation's taste on a basis of the racial, historical, and institutional environment that produced it.<sup>3</sup>

Madame de Stael's important contribution to the theory of

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1. Herder, J. G., "Essay on Shakespeare", Fischer, A. D., a dissertation and translation, p. 28.
  2. Madame de Stael, D'Allemagne, Oeuvres, Tome 3, p. 128. Investigator's translation.
  3. Ibid., p. 329.

a relationship between social institutions and literature is the book De la littérature considérée dans ses rapports avec les institutions sociales, 1800. This is a thorough analysis of the effect she believed social institutions have on literature and the effect literature has on social institutions. She said that the two interact. In her preliminary discussion she wrote

I propose to examine the nature of the influence of religion, customs, and laws on literature, and the nature of the influence of literature on religion, customs and laws.<sup>1</sup>

It seemed to Madame de Stael that the writers of her day had not "sufficiently analyzed" the political and moral causes that modified literature, and how the human faculties had gradually been developed in their turn by all types of literature since the days of Homer.<sup>2</sup> Madame de Stael had observed, as has been pointed out, differences in national tastes in literature. Part of her explanation of the differences lies in her theory of racial beginnings; but an additional cause lies in her concept of institutional relationships with literature. She thought herself able to show

that political and religious institutions had the greatest part in these constant diversities.<sup>3</sup>

Her attempt in De la littérature was to develop this idea. Her problem was to show the character that such and such form of government gave to eloquence, the moral ideas that such and such religious beliefs developed in the human spirit, and the mode of civilization that had the best effects on literature.<sup>4</sup>

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1. Madame de Stael, De la littérature, Oeuvres, Tome II, p. 149.  
 2. Loc. cit.  
 3. Loc. cit.  
 4. Ibid., p. 163, Cr.

Her problem also was to show the obverse of this: the effect of literature on social institutions.

Madame de Staël was a relativist. She had no dogmatic standards to be applied to every nation alike. She believed that literature was national and that the differences between tastes sprang from racial beginnings, from the events that modified the race, and from the existing social institutions. Her emphasis was on the social institutions.

Prosper de Barante (1782-1866)

A book that is comparatively unknown, but which deserves recognition for its subject matter no less than for its method, is Prosper de Barante's A Tableau of French Literature in 18th Century, 1808. This work does for a particular period of French literature what de Staël attempted for the whole of world literature. It gives what Barante considered a thorough reflection of 18th century French society in French literature of the same period. There were persons, Barante said, who considered the French Revolution to be the product of literary attacks, but such was not so; literature having only conformed to the state of society.<sup>1</sup>

The impartial observer of the Revolution would consider literature neither an enterprise of conspiracy to overturn a government nor a noble effort to benefit humanity. He would consider it only as the expression of society. He

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1. Barante, Prosper de, A Tableau of French Literature, p. ix, Translated from the 4th edition De la littérature française pendant le dix-huitième siècle. Translator not given.

would see, that letters, instead of regulating.... the thoughts and actions of a people, were very often the result, and immediately consequent upon them;.... . . . . . He would see how public opinions formed themselves, how writers adopted and developed them, and how the direction in which writers travelled was marked out to them by the age. It was a current which they navigated.<sup>1</sup>

Speaking of particular writers, Barante's whole effort was to relate them to the "currents" of particular societies. Voltaire was said to be greatly the product of his circumstances.<sup>2</sup> And Montesquieu was said to present to the same remarkable degree the traces of the times in which he lived.<sup>3</sup>

Barante's book is a small one, but it reads as though it were currently written. His position as a historian and as a member of French governmental circles gave him facts of real validity. His method coupled with his learning gave his book dignity.

#### Victor Cousin (1792-1867)

During the years 1828-1829 Victor Cousin gave a course of lectures in Paris published under the title The Course of the History of Modern Philosophy. Because he approved of Vico, Montesquieu, and Herder, it is safe to say that he was under their influence. He credited Vico with being the first to say that Homer was a product of his times.<sup>4</sup> He approved warmly of Herder's effort to show that all the environmental factors, natural and sociological, are interrelated, mutually affecting

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1. Ibid., p. 6.

2. Ibid., p. 35.

3. Ibid., p. 54.

4. Cousin, V., The Course of the History of Modern Philosophy, p. 220.

each other.<sup>1</sup> For himself, he added the belief that a nation is called to represent an idea. The idea would unfold in industry, the state, art, religion, and philosophy. The historian would follow the progress of this idea in each of five elements: the useful, the just, the beautiful, the holy, and the true--that is, in the social institutions: industry, the state, art, religion, and philosophy. But, and herein lies the statement of institutional interrelationships,

It is not sufficient for the philosophy of history to examine these five elements one after the other, it is necessary that it should compare them with each in order to seize their relations, for these relations are far from being insignificant.<sup>2</sup>

Cousin was one of the popular and influential philosophers of his time, and he did a great deal to spread the idea of environmental influence upon human thought and action. This idea was not new with him; and as far as he dealt with literature, he was general. It was Sainte-Beuve and Taine who in France erected a complete critical theory upon the general historical principle of environmental necessity.

#### Augustin Sainte-Beuve (1804-1869)

Sainte-Beuve did not write much concerning his critical theories, but they are implicit in nearly all of his critical output. For sheer artistry, volume, and acumen Sainte-Beuve has few equals. His famous Lundis were written week after week for years. His method was "scientific." It is said of him that he

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1. Ibid., p. 222.  
2. Ibid., p. 176.

prepared the chosen people of literature (with Taine for their Joshua) the Canaan of critical naturalism.<sup>1</sup>

In "A Critic's Account of his own Critical Method", written in 1862, Sainte-Beuve wrote

For me, literature--literary production--is not distinct, or at least not separable, from the rest of the man and from its environment.<sup>2</sup>

That remark contains the heart of the "scientific" method. A check over any of the essays in the famous Lundis, indicates, however, that Sainte-Beuve's scientific interest was in the psychology of a writer more than in the relation of the writer to social institutions. This is not to mean he completely slighted the social environment. He said in his essay on Taine, 1864, that whatever a man desires to do, to think, or to write depends in a more or less intimate manner on his race and the natural attributes he draws from race, and

not less does it depend on the kind of society and civilization in which he was educated and also the time, and incidental circumstances and events which occur daily in the course of life.<sup>3</sup>

In order to know a man, Sainte-Beuve said, one must approach him from many sides. The man's relationship to social institutions is one of these. What did he think about religion? How was he affected by the spectacle of nature? Was he rich? These questions answered indicate in part the man's relationship with the natural and social environment.<sup>4</sup> To get at a writer nowadays we examine as far as possible

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1. Wells, Benjamin, Warner Library, p. 12661.

2. Ibid., p. 12663.

3. Sainte-Beuve, A., Essays, translated by E. Lee, p. 229.

4. Sainte-Beuve, A., "A Critic's Account of his Own Method", Warner Library, p. 12665.

the individual in his education, culture, life and origins,<sup>1</sup>

and if the attempt is complete, we round out a picture of the sources of the psychology that was the author.

In this much, then, it can be said that Sainte-Beuve's critical theory included the relationship of a writer to the social institutions. The writer cannot be separated from them.

#### Hippolyte Adolphe Taine (1828-1893)

It is said of Hippolyte Adolphe Taine that he claimed only to have coordinated and systematized the scientific method latent in Sainte-Beuve.<sup>2</sup> A comparison of Taine with Cousin, however, will reveal that the latter probably had considerable influence. Cousin and Taine have decided similarities.<sup>3</sup> There seems little doubt, however, that Taine's ability to generalize, as exemplified in his History of English Literature, 1863, caused more commotion in the literary world than did either Cousin or Sainte-Beuve. The History of English Literature, especially the "Introduction", is now generally thought to be one-sided and too rigidly clinging to a narrow principle, but it was and still is influential.

Taine was a scientific positivist, believing that the basis of knowledge was scientific fact gained from the minute analysis of phenomena. Genuine history, he believed,

is brought into existence only when the historian begins to unravel....the living man, toiling, impassioned, entrenched in his customs, with his voice

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1. Sainte-Beuve, A., Nouveaux lundis, IX, 71. From MacClintock, Sainte-Beuve's Critical Theory and Practice after 1849, p. 31. Investigator's translation.
  2. Babbitt, Irving, Masters of French Criticism, p. 218.
  3. See Cousin's History, p. 168.



and features, his gestures and his dress, distinct and complete as he from whom we have just parted in the street.<sup>1</sup>

Taine found three primal mainsprings of human action: race, surroundings, and epoch. Race is for him the same as it was for Herder. Epoch, as for Cousin, is to be explained in terms of a master idea. Surroundings include the natural and the sociological. Man, Taine said,

is not alone in the world; nature surrounds him and his fellow men surround him; accidental and secondary tendencies come to place themselves on his primitive tendencies, and physical or social circumstances disturb or confirm the character committed to their charge.<sup>2</sup>

Again, concerning social interrelationships, Taine said that there was a law of mutual dependence:

A civilization forms a body, and its parts are connected with each other like the parts of an organic body.<sup>3</sup>

When there is a change in one of the organs of an animal, all the organs compensate; and

even so in a civilization, religion, philosophy, the organization of the family, literature, the arts, make up a system in which every local change induces a general change....<sup>4</sup>

In such remarks as these Taine revealed his philosophy of literary criticism.

With his philosophy stated, Taine is ready to apply it to literature. He selected English literature, and the question propounded by his method is this:

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1. Taine, H. A., History of English Literature, translated by N. Van Laun, p. 2.
  2. Ibid., p. 14.
  3. Ibid., p. 22.
  4. Loc. cit.

Given a literature.....what was the moral condition which produced it? What the conditions of race, epoch, circumstance, the most fitted to produce this moral condition?<sup>1</sup>

It is this question that Taine tried to answer in his History of English Literature. The historical significance of Taine is his method of accounting for literature by accounting for the author as genes modified by environment and epoch. Taine, after Blackwell, Herder, de Stael, and Sainte-Beuve, called new attention to the thesis that man is a social being and that man's art is related to social institutions.

#### Kuno Francke (1855-1930)

In Kuno Francke we come to another of the important 19th century names in sociological literary criticism. Kuno Francke was Professor of German Culture in Harvard University. His important book is A History of German Literature as Determined by Social Forces, 1896. The book followed the example set by previous sociological critics. Though wider in scope, it seems similar to Barante's A Tableau of French Literature in the 18th Century.

Francke's purpose and method are clearly stated in his "Preface." He wished to take the point of view of the student of civilization rather than the point of view of the linguistic scholar or of the literary critic. He was interested in substance instead of form. He saw in literature primarily the working of "popular forces", and he considered it "chiefly as an expression of national culture."<sup>2</sup> The relation with Herder

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1. Ibid., p. 24.

2. Francke, Kuno, A History of German Literature as Determined by Social Forces, p. v.

is obvious.

There were, so Francke thought, enough books dealing with the history of German literature from the linguistic or the literary point of view. There needed to be one

which should point out the mutual relation of action and reaction between these [intellectual movements] and the social and political condition of the masses from which they sprang or which they affected.<sup>1</sup>

The forces, or conditions, Francke generalized under the terms "social," "religious," and "moral." He stated that they "determined the growth of German literature as a whole." As a further determining force he added

the incessant conflict of two elemental human tendencies: the tendency toward personal freedom and the tendency toward collective organization.<sup>2</sup>

As examples of Francke's interest in and acceptance of this principle of criticism might well be quoted his warm commendation of Herder. Francke wrote, for instance,

It is in this intuitive grasp of the organic unity of all mankind, of the inevitable interdependence of the individual, the nation, and the race which has made Herder the father of the modern evolutionary view of history.<sup>3</sup>

Again he wrote,

He for the first time clearly and systematically considered all literature as the expression of living forces, as the reflex of the whole of the national civilization.<sup>4</sup>

In such a manner Kuno Francke planned and wrote his history of German literature. The fact that he wrote the book while

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1. Ibid., p. v.
  2. Ibid., p. vi.
  3. Ibid., p. 319.
  4. Ibid., p. 320.

in America gives him additional importance in that he influenced Allen Rogers Benham, whose work probably had influence on Parrington.

Georg Brandes (1842-1927)

A standard work which seems to have exerted influence upon Parrington<sup>1</sup> is Georg Brandes' six volume study entitled Main Currents in Nineteenth Century Literature, 1872-82. The title of Parrington's book is obviously a copy of Brandes'. There is, also, considerable similarity of purpose and method in the two works. Each proposed to trace the main currents of thought in certain eras and places. Brandes, however, made no effort to keep aesthetic criticism out of his discussion, although his main interest was on the psychology of a writer. Brandes located the germinal sources of the nineteenth century trends of thought in a reaction, fostered by political upheavals, against the formalism of eighteenth century French thought. Basically Brandes studied literature in the light of social phenomena. He tried to see the social phenomena as an individual psychology reflected them.

There are spiritual qualities in a writer belonging to him even though he does represent an age and an idea. Brandes wrote that

Literary history is, in its profoundest significance, psychology, the study, the history of the soul.<sup>2</sup>

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1. Guérard, A., Literature and Society, Appendix, p. 412.
  2. Brandes, Georg, Main Currents in 19th Century Literature, p. x.

It is true that this is scientific criticism, but it includes more than the materialistic critic will allow. Brandes meant by this statement of the soul that more than materialistic causes serve to explain an idea, or to explain the book that embodies an idea. In fact, he allows three types of explanation: the aesthetic; the environmental, which is both physical and social; and the psychology of the author. The following quotation shows Brandes' concept:

Regarded from the merely aesthetic point of view as a work of art, a book is a self-contained, self-existent whole...But looked at from the historical point of view, a book...is only a piece out out of an endlessly continuous web. Aesthetically considered, its idea...may satisfactorily explain it, without cognisance taken of its author or its environment as an organism; but historically considered, it implies, as the effect implies the cause, the intellectual idiosyncrasy of its author, which asserts itself in all his productions.<sup>1</sup>

Noticeable in Brandes' critical work, as in the quotation just given, is the fact that he considered both aesthetics and environment inadequate to explain a book. He said "merely aesthetics." He said that the idiosyncrasy of the writer will "assert itself." This seems to characterize his tendency. He did the type of criticism that Sainte-Beuve did with complete mastery.

Bliss Perry (1860- )

In 1912, Bliss Perry, American critic, published a small book called The American Mind, the contents of which are re-

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1. Ibid., pp. x-xi.

lated to the stream of sociological criticism as it descends from Taine. Indeed, the first paragraph discussed Taine and concluded in these words:

Latitude and longitude, soil and rainfall and food supply, racial origins and crossings, political and social and economic conditions, must assuredly leave their marks upon the mental and artistic productiveness of a people and upon the personality of individual writers.<sup>1</sup>

One is not to conclude from this, though, that Perry went as far and as dogmatically as did Taine. Blood will tell, a race or a nation will impose its mark; but there are limitations to these things. They do not tell the whole story of cause and effect; for there are men, such as Keats and Poe, who are outside history and race.

Perry discussed these blind places and danger spots in the philosophy of sociological criticism and then stated its positive aspects, in words that clearly antedate Parrington.

A history of American literature must include

the social and economic and geographical background of American life.....; the passion of old political battles; the yearning after spiritual truth and social readjustment; the baffled quest of beauty. Such a history must be broad enough for the Federalist and for Webster's oratory.....It must picture the daily existence of our citizens from the beginning.<sup>2</sup>

Perry's second chapter, "The American Mind" is an attempt to state the traits of character that are typically American and that as such ought to exist in typically American litera-

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1. Perry, B., The American Mind, p. 4.  
2. Ibid., p. 42.

ture. His last chapter, "Individualism and Fellowship," is Whitmanesque in its thesis. The individual personality in its highest development is a copy of national character. There is no longer room in America for the old individualism, either in literature or in the general activities of society.<sup>1</sup> In the place of this old type of individualism there will be a body of individuals united by spiritual democracy. American literature as a result will be, as it has in part been, a citizen literature.

Aside from a few masterpieces of lyric poetry and aside from the short story as represented by such isolated artists as Poe and Hawthorne, our literature as a whole has this civic note.<sup>2</sup>

As Perry saw it, the American mind and conscience were becoming socialized; and as a consequence

The needs of the worker, his problems, his hopes, his untold longings, his sacrifices, his triumphs, all of these are the field of the art of the future.<sup>3</sup>

The artist is to submerge his individualism in national brotherhood. Then literature and art will function as instinctive expressions of a national civilization:

With fellowship based upon individualism, and with individualism ever leading to fellowship, America will perform its vital tasks, and its literature will be the unconscious and beautiful utterance of its inner life.<sup>4</sup>

Perry held that an American art must be made of American materials by artists who had become imbued with the spirit of

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1. Ibid., p. 229.  
 2. Ibid., p. 230.  
 3. Ibid., p. 239.  
 4. Ibid., p. 249.

American democracy. He was not a strict determinist. The will could operate in a choice of materials.

#### Summary

The discussion of the leading exponents of the sociological in literary criticism is not complete; the remaining critics, however, are so much more interested in economic forces, said to be the foundation of all social institutions, that it is not practicable to demand a separation of the two theses any longer. The persons already discussed ignored or did not think of economics in terms of art criticism. They seem to have conceived of the artist as having been a racial representative drawing upon his natural and sociological environment for his genius and his materials. Blackwell and Perry alone had something to say about economics. Barante and Franke noticed that literature has a tendency to take sides in social conflict. Where necessary, the men treated thus far will be called upon again; but for the most part they will not need additional development. Their places in sociological criticism have been shown.

#### The Determination of Ideologies by Economic Forces

The second proposition in Parrington's critical philosophy to be examined historically states that ideologies are the expression of social institutions, which are determined by economic forces. Still being considered is the theory that literature is related to social institutions. The additional thesis is that social institutions have an economic basis which shapes them, determines their ideologies, and provides literature with con-



tent. It is the critic's function now not only to show that literature affects and is affected by social institutions, but to go deeper and to show that the whole complex is a phenomenon caused by economic forces. It is the purpose of this section of the dissertation to give a general historical background of this economic theory and to deal specifically with the men who had a direct influence on Professor Parrington. No attempt will be made to exhaust the list of materialist philosophers and of economists who wrote on the subject.

#### Some General Background

The search for the relationship of economics to ideologies finds a good beginning in the discovery that climate has an influence on social institutions. If literature is the mouth-piece of social institutions, and if they are determined by economic forces, as Marx believed, for instance, then the economic influence of climate and geography is an obvious starting point, for it was early revealed that climate and geography are economic factors.

It is generally convenient to call first attention to Hippocrates and his famous Treatise. It seems, however, that he was more concerned with the influence of climate on men's spirit than on their wealth. After Hippocrates, Montesquieu receives next attention, his connection with Bodin and Chardin being pointed out. Montesquieu's Esprit des lois: du rapport que les lois doivent avoir avec la constitution de chaque gouvernement, les moeurs, le climat, la religion, etc., 1748, does contribute to the development of the economic principle.

But there is an earlier, little known work which preceded Montesquieu by twelve years: Thomas Blackwell's An Inquiry into the Life and Writings of Homer, 1736. Important enough in this book is the attention given climate and Homer, but more important here is a paragraph concerned with the direct influence of wealth on literary content. Such a statement as this by Blackwell will not be found again until comparatively modern times:

But let us be ingenuous, My Lord, and confess, that while the moderns admire nothing but pomp, and can think nothing great or beautiful, but what is the product of wealth, they exclude themselves from the pleasantest and most natural images that adorned the old poetry. State and form disguise man; wealth and luxury disguise nature. Their effects in writing are answerable: A Lord-Mayor's show, or grand procession of any kind, is not very delicious reading, if described minutely, and at length; and great ceremony is at least equally tiresome in a poem, as in ordinary conversation.<sup>1</sup>

There is more than inference here. This is an explicit statement that the economics of an age, creeping into the minds of people, helps determine what will go into the literature those people will read. In the society Blackwell complains about it is no longer possible for literary artists to use the type of content that the Greeks could. English social life, centered on wealth, bored readers.

Now one glance at Montesquieu to put him in his chronological position. His principle, elaborated in 1748, said that from the different human wants attributable to differences in climates have arisen different ways of living, which have

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1. Blackwell, T., An Inquiry, etc., p. 25.

resulted in different systems of laws and governments. The laws of a people, he said,

have a very great connection with the fashion by which divers peoples procure their subsistence. A people attached to commerce and to the sea need a more extensive code of laws than a people content to cultivate their lands.<sup>1</sup>

Montesquieu did not apply his theory to literature. He pointed that some social institutions have an economic connection with climate.

In the tradition of Montesquieu is Henry Thomas Buckle, whose Introduction to the History of Civilization, Volume I, 1857, and Volume II, 1861, is an attempt to create a philosophy of history on a synthesis of statistically ascertainable facts. All the events that happen to the human race, according to Buckle, are the fruit of a double action:

An action of external phenomena upon mind, and another action of the mind upon phenomena.<sup>2</sup>

Buckle's theory of the influence of climate and geography upon history and social institutions has two parts. First, climate, food, and the fertility of soil form a combination of economic forces that determine the original foundation of wealth. Second, such aspects of nature as storms, mountains, deserts, and coastal plains influence the accumulation of thought.<sup>3</sup> The combination of these two kinds of effects of nature forms the original pressure that produces social institutions: religion, literature, government, etc. When Buckle came to speak particularly of

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1. Montesquieu, C., Esprit des lois, p. 360.
  2. Buckle, H. T., Introduction to the History of Civilization, p. 20.
  3. Ibid., pp. 118-119.

literature, he made a remark that might properly belong with the previous section except that he is concerned with economics. Note that he nearly phrases the concept that literature is the mouth-piece of social institutions:

Literature [everything written--an application of letters to the record of facts or opinions], when it is in a healthy and unforced state, is simply the form in which the knowledge of a country is registered; the mould in which it is cast.<sup>1</sup>

This completes for Buckle the logical connection of literature with economic forces, although it must be stated that he keeps human spirit, conceived to be natural in itself, distinct from economic forces. Literature is a reflection of civilization. Civilization is determined by wealth and by human imagination. Wealth and imagination spring from two effects of nature upon man, the economic effect and the spiritual effect.

There is one more name to add to this general background: John William Draper, an American scholar. The book under consideration is The History of the Intellectual Development of Europe, 1858. Draper accounted for ethnological differences between races on a basis of climate and geography. He spoke of Greek mythology<sup>2</sup> as a reflection of the period that saw its creation.<sup>3</sup> The discussion was not of economic forces, however;

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1. Ibid., p. 266.

2. Ibid., p. 42.

3. A book that should not be completely ignored by this study is The Relations of Geography and History by the Reverend H. B. George. It presents no especially new materials; yet its original date, 1901, and its subject warrant mention. "History," said Mr. George, "is not intelligible without geography." The book does exactly what the title indicates, and only the dullness of repetition keeps the book from elaboration in these pages.

and not until he spoke of the influence of the printing press did he reach economics in connection with literature. To quote:

...to print a book not only implies literary capacity, but all the connections of business and trade, and hence works are more likely to be issued in places where there is a mercantile activity...<sup>1</sup>

This is an early hint of an idea that will be clearly developed by Professor Benham eighty years later; and it, though fragmentary, does have historical significance: printed literature is at least partly determined by economic forces.

When he came to speak of drama, Draper made a distinctly economic allusion, very much like that made by Blackwell in 1736:

.....since the art of reading was by no means generally cultivated in the seventeenth century, the most ready method of literary communication was through theatrical representation. It was for that reason that play-writing was the best means of literary remuneration, if we except the profit derived from the practice which, to some extent, survives, though its disgraceful motive has ceased, of dedicating books to rich men for the sake of the fee they would give. It is said that books have actually been printed in consideration of the profits of the dedication. Especially in the composition of plays was it judged expedient to minister to the depraved public taste by indecent expressions, or allusions broad and sly. The playwright was at the mercy of an audience who were critical on that point...<sup>2</sup>

Draper's chief interest while discussing literature was to show that it follows a development similar to that followed by nations, but it is clear that he suspected a relationship between the art of writing and economic forces.

From here on the problem of tracing the historical back-

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1. Draper, J. W., History of the Intellectual Development of Europe, Vol. II, p. 199.
  2. Ibid., p. 245.

ground of the theory of economic determinism of literature becomes more specific. The comments made have been spasmodic and without clear connection. The line of development does have a plain path, however; and it began even before Montesquieu. It has been shown how literature has been thought to be a social institution with definite relationships with other institutions. Now the emphasis will be on the thesis that literature is the mouthpiece of social institutions, a crystallization of their ideologies, and that the foundation of the whole is economic.<sup>1</sup> The history of this thesis begins with the discussion of government and its economic sources.

James Harrington (1611-1677)

James Harrington, author of The Commonwealth of Oceana, 1656, was first to write the complete theory that wealth in the shape of land ownership is the determining factor in the control of government, and in the type of government.

Such as is the proportion or ballance of dominion or property in Land, such is the nature of the Empire. If one man be sole Landlord.....his Empire

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1. The phrase "economic forces" is general. Such a force is any object that directly or indirectly influences the relationship between man's needs and the material satisfaction of those needs. Systems of production and distribution (Marx), land (Harrington), natural resources, banks and bank credits are illustrations of economic forces. It is the influence that these forces have on ideologies that forms the general background of this dissertation. Those who use economic determinism in an absolute sense must argue that all of man's relations with his environment are primarily economic.

is Absolute Monarchy....If the whole people be Landlords....the Empire is a Commonwealth.<sup>1</sup>

Again Harrington wrote:

If the people hold three parts in four of the territory, it is plain there can neither be any single person nor nobility able to dispute the government with them; in this case, therefore, except force be interposed, they govern themselves.<sup>2</sup>

James Harrington is important to Professor Parrington, because the latter interpreted the foundation of American government, and thus in part the foundation of American literature, as being determined by conditions of land ownership, with the frontier as the natural focus because it was the greatest economic element in American history to date. If Professor Parrington is correct, James Harrington has been enormously influential in shaping the political theories developed in America. The history of that influence extends, to use the summary of the Italian economist Achilles Loria, through the following names and groups of people: Harrington, Davenant, Dalrymple, Sir James Stewart, Herzberg, John Adams, the Physiocrats, Adam Smith, Arthur Young, Burke, Fox, Gentz, Haller, Daniel Webster, Proudhon, Marx, Engels, Lassalle, Scheel, De Molinari, De Greef, and Grumplowicz. The list, of course, should include Loria himself.<sup>3</sup>

The persons of this list who seem to have had an important and assignable contact with Parrington are these: Harrington, John Adams, Webster, Marx and Engels, and Loria; with the addi-

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1. Harrington, J., Oceana, p. 4.

2. Quoted in Main Currents in American Thought, Vol. I, p. 26.

3. Loria, A., Economic Foundations of Society, pp. 333-337.

tion of some lesser names: Seligman, Ogburn, Smith, Turner, and Beard of America; and James K. Thorold Rogers of England. They are all political and economic philosophers.

John Adams (1735-1826)

Harrington's influence seems to have reached Professor Parrington in part through John Adams. In discussing John Adams, Parrington wrote it was the former's belief that

control of property means control of men, for sovereignty inheres in economics.<sup>1</sup>

This is Harrington's thesis in Oceana. For himself Adams wrote that wealth has a "natural and inevitable influence in society."<sup>2</sup> The type of government and the type of activity permitted the government is a resultant of opposing types of property holders: land holder groups versus mercantile and industrial groups.

Such it was in the beginning, is now, and I fear, ever will be, world without end.<sup>3</sup>

Again Adam stated his conviction

That property has been, is, and everlastingly will be, a natural, and unavoidable cause of aristocracy.<sup>4</sup>

Aristocracy he defined as any group able to control more votes --he was speaking of aristocracy in "democratic" societies--or to gain more votes than its own.<sup>5</sup> The direct meaning of this is that property controls the electorate of a democracy and thus determines governmental form and activity.

A matter considerably closer to the thesis of economic

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1. Parrington, V. L., Main Currents, Vol. I, p. 313.
  2. Adams, John, Works, Vol. IV, p. 504.
  3. Ibid., p. 507.
  4. Ibid., p. 512.
  5. Ibid., p. 451.



determinism in literary content is Adams' belief regarding the "press" and wealth. He granted that the press is a powerful "governor,"<sup>1</sup> but he added emphatically that the press is governed by property:

It is certain that property is aristocracy, and that property controls the press.<sup>2</sup>

Although Adams was arguing that wealth promotes knowledge, the inference is that wealth also can define knowledge by determining what is to be printed.

Adams was a doughty rebel whose political philosophy was frankly based on Harrington's thesis that land ownership determined control of government.

#### Daniel Webster (1782-1852)

Daniel Webster is another of the important Americans whose political philosophy contains elements of Harrington's. Professor Parrington calls Webster a disciple of Harrington, "accepting the doctrine of economic determinism as it had been elaborated in the Oceana."<sup>3</sup> Webster accounted for the rise of republicanism in New England on the basis of popular ownership of land. He said that the situation of the colonists demanded that land be parceled and that this "necessary act fixed the future frame and form of their government."<sup>4</sup> The administrative details of the government in their turn made land easier of transfer. This fact reacted to make popular ownership even easier. Said Webster:

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1. Ibid., p. 513.
  2. Ibid., p. 514.
  3. Parrington, V. L., Main Currents, Vol. I, p. 25.
  4. Webster, D., Works, Vol. I, pp 35-36.

The consequence of all these causes has been, a great subdivision of the soil, and a great equality of conditions; the true basis, most certainly, of a popular government.<sup>1</sup>

To show how thoroughly Professor Parrington understood the historical relationship of Adams and Webster with the thesis of land determinism and to serve as a transition to Marx and Engels the following quotation taken from Parrington's "A Chapter in American Liberalism" is appropriate:

The current conception of the political state as determined in its form and activities by economic groups is no modern Marxian perversion of political theory; it goes back to Aristotle, it underlay the thinking of Harrington and Locke and the seventeenth century English school, it shaped the conclusions of Madison and Hamilton and John Adams, it ran through all the discussions of the Constitutional Convention, and it reappeared in the arguments of Webster and Calhoun.<sup>2</sup>

#### Karl Marx (1818-1883) and Frederick Engels (1820-1895)

The person tracing Parrington's intellectual ancestry has to face the problem of Marx and Engels' connection. The theory of land determinism as set down by James Harrington in Oceana is closer to Parrington's general philosophy than is the Marxian concept that productive forces are the determining factor. Yet it was certainly Marx and Engels who most fully developed the idea that economics form the foundation of all social institutions. Three of the Marxian tenets are identical with the three main tenets in Parrington's critical philosophy. These are the three:

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1. Ibid., p. 36.

2. Parrington, V. L., Main Currents, Vol. III, p. 408.

1. Economic forces determine history.
2. Economic forces determine social institutions and their ideologies.
  - a. State
  - b. Law
  - c. Politics
  - d. Philosophy
  - e. Religion
  - f. Art--including literature
3. Society is a turmoil of class conflicts.

To Marx and Engels the primary source of all social relationships is the economic foundation of life. The final cause of all social changes and political revolutions is to be sought in the economics of each particular epoch. There are two elements in this economic basis: production and exchange of goods.<sup>1</sup> Underneath these, providing the material upon which they work, are two natural facts--man himself with his wants and needs, and man's "geologic, oro-hydrographic, climatic" environment. The economic mainspring determining history, however, is not man's desire and need nor the basic materials used in satisfaction of them; but it is the method man employs in producing and in handling the objects of satisfaction. There is no history until this third element joins the two natural facts.

Writing in a preface to The Communist Manifesto, Engels said that

.....in every historical epoch, the prevailing mode of economic production and exchange, and the social organization necessarily following from it,

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1. Engels, F., Socialism: Utopian and Scientific, p. 54.

form the basis upon which is built up, and from which alone can be explained, the political and intellectual history of that epoch....<sup>1</sup>

This confirms point number one: Marx and Engels believed that economic forces determine history.

Concerning the economic foundation of social institutions and their ideologies, Marx has a complete statement:

In the social production which men carry on they enter into definite relations that are indispensable and independent of their will; these relations of production correspond to a definite stage of development of their material powers of production. The sum total of these relations of production constitutes the economic structure of society--the real foundation, on which rise legal and political superstructures and to which correspond definite forms of social consciousness. The mode of production in material life determines the general character of the social, political and spiritual processes of life. It is not the consciousness of men that determines their existence, but...their social existence determines their consciousness.<sup>2</sup>

In Ludwig Feuerbach Engels wrote that the state, the will of the state, and public law are determined in the last resort by the development of the productive forces and relations of exchange.<sup>3</sup> This is a re-statement of Marx's general principle. In the same discussion, he wrote

If the state and public law are determined by economic relations, so, too, of course is private law.<sup>4</sup>

Concerning philosophy and religion, Engels said:

Still higher ideologies [higher than legal systems], that is, such as are still further removed from the material, economic basis, take the form of philosophy and religion. Here the inter-connection between

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1. Marx, K., Capital and Other Writings, p. 7, edited by Max Eastman.
  2. Marx, K., Critique of Political Economy, p. 11.
  3. Engels, F., Ludwig Feuerbach, p. 63.
  4. Loc. cit.

the ideas and their material condition of existence becomes more and more complicated, more and more obscured by intermediate links. But the inter-connection exists.<sup>1</sup>

These are complete statements of the inter-relationship of social institutions and of their economic foundations, and the statements could hardly be more positive and sweeping in their assertions. All institutions are related, said Marx and Engels. All ideologies spring from the institutions and their relationships. Economics is the foundation of institutions and historical events.

The element of class conflict in its ideological forms, so essentially a part of Marxism--and of Parrington's philosophy--is illustrated in the following quotation:

At a certain stage of their development, the material forces of production in society come in conflict with the existing relations of production...With the change of the economic foundation the entire immense superstructure is more or less rapidly transformed. In considering such transformations the distinction should always be made between the material transformation of the economic conditions of production which can be determined with the precision of natural science, and the legal, political, religious, aesthetic or philosophic--in short ideological forms in which men become conscious of this conflict and fight it out.

It might be appropriate now to glance at a summary of Marx and Engels' philosophy written by H. E. Sée:

Their theory is that economic phenomena determine all other historical facts.....The economic foundation has always determined all legal and political institutions, all intellectual facts such as those of literature and art, all that superstructure which up to that time had been exclusively considered by

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1. Ibid., p. 65.

2. Marx, K., Critique of Political Economy, p. 12.

historians. The latter had been blind to all save ideology. Whereas this ideology was merely the product of the fundamental phenomena related to the satisfaction of the essential needs of subsistence and reproduction.<sup>1</sup>

One additional point now needs to be made to explain exactly how far Marx and Engels meant economic determinism to be taken as the foundation of all social phenomena. In a letter to J. Bloch, written in 189-, Engels wrote:

According to the materialist conception of history the determining element in history is ultimately the production and reproduction in real life. More than this neither Marx nor I have ever asserted. If therefore somebody twists this into the statement that the economic element is the only determining one, he transforms it into a meaningless, abstract and absurd phrase. The economic situation is the basis, but various elements of the superstructure--political forms of the class struggle and its consequences, constitutions established by the victorious class after a successful battle, etc.--forms of law--and then even the reflexes of all these actual struggles in the brains of the combatants: political, legal, philosophical theories, religious ideas and their further development into systems of dogma--also exercise their influence upon the course of historical struggles and<sup>2</sup> in many cases preponderate in determining their form.

The conclusion is to be reached then that upon a foundation of economic forces social life expands until the various elements of it reach a point where they themselves may be said to have become forces in their own right, modifying, and even determining social forms and movements. It is this conclusion that is closest to Parrington.

Achilles Loria (1857- )

Professor Allen Rogers Benham, who appears a little later

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1. See, H. E., The Economic Interpretation of History, p. 53.
  2. Quoted from Fox, R., The Novel and the People, p. 21.

in these pages, stated in an interview with the investigator that Achilles Loria, an Italian economist, was one of the men who helped him (Benham) to reach a critical philosophy. It is therefore necessary to discuss Loria's book, The Economic Foundations of Society, 1898.

The book had first been outlined in 1885. It develops the thesis that "the antecedents of society are strictly economic in character"--this from the translator's preface.<sup>1</sup> Loria's theory of property control of government is similar to that of Harrington's: land is the source of control of the state; but the theory of an economic foundation of all social institutions is like that of Marx. Loria stated the latter element of his main principle thus:

All the non-economic factors running through the social system would seem to be ultimately derived from underlying economic conditions which alone furnish an adequate explanation of their complicated mechanism.<sup>2</sup>

Loria's logic supporting his thesis that social institutions are at basis economic is simple. Modern society is capitalistic. Capitalism is possible only by the suppression of free lands. But

in order to support itself, capitalistic property must furthermore have recourse to a series of what we may call connective institutions, whose function it is to guarantee property against all reaction on the part of those excluded from the possession of the soil. The most important of these so-called connective institutions are: morality, law and politics.<sup>3</sup>

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1. Keasbey, L. M., p. viii.
  2. Loria, A., The Economic Foundations of Society, p. 380.
  3. Ibid., p. 9.

Morality, with Christian religion as ally,

is made up of a series of regulations, imposed by the owning classes upon the labourers in opposition to their real egoism, and upon their own numbers in opposition to their immediate interests; and...it is these regulations which succeed in guaranteeing the persistence of capitalistic society.<sup>1</sup>

However, there will be some who rebel against moral regulations, and the law steps in to handle them. The law stands for the justification and support of economic privilege:

the law is really derived from economic conditions,  
...the law is a monopoly of wealth.<sup>2</sup>

And finally, to make the laws after its own pattern and to preserve the law, capital must control politics. Our political system is the necessary outgrowth of our capitalistic system.

In this fashion Loria argued for the thesis of the economic foundation and inter-relationships of social institutions. He seems to have been under the influence of James Harrington and of Karl Marx. He exerted influence in this country.

#### James E. Thorold Rogers (1823-1890)

Attention must now be given to the English economist James E. Thorold Rogers, whose book, The Economic Interpretation of History, 1888, was a favorite of Harrington's.<sup>3</sup> It well could have been, for its method and ideology are similar as far as two books on different subjects can be. In addition to Rogers' direct influence is the influence that came indirectly through Professor J. Allen Smith, a close friend of Harrington's and a political economist who accepted all the implications of Rogers'

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1. Ibid., p. 69

2. Loc. cit.

3. From an interview with Benham, who knew Harrington many years.



theory.

As the title indicates, Rogers is trying to explain history by an approach through the economic conditions of a period or of a nation. His material deals with England, and it is founded on the facts collected in his history of prices.<sup>1</sup> There is no need to elaborate his thesis; but because the kinship with Smith and Harrington is close, some of Rogers' chapter headings might well be inserted here, for comparison with Harrington:

- I. The Economic Side of History
- II. Legislation of labor and its Effect
- IV. The Social Effect of Religious Movements
- XII. Historical Effect of High and Low Prices
- XVI. Laissez Faire: Its Origin and History

These problems, with application to a different locality, of course, and as will be seen in the analysis of Harrington's work, form part of the subject matter of Main Currents in American Thought. Compare the titles with such as these from Harrington's first volume:

- a. Greenbackism and Peter Cooper
- b. Proletarian Hopes
- c. The New England Conscience and Capitalism

An additional point in Rogers' theory that should be mentioned is his strict adherence to the "law" of cause and effect, and of the permanence of effect after the original cause has been removed:

We are what we are by virtue of causes which have had an historical beginning...and...the analyst of history soon discovers that effects endure after causes have, to all appearances, wholly passed away.<sup>2</sup>

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- 1. Rogers, J. E. T., The Economic Interpretation of History, p. x.
  - 2. Ibid., p. 2.

The long train of cause and effect as it is revealed in thought is exactly what Professor Parrington tried to examine. For that reason Rogers, because he was a favorite of Parrington's, is important in this study.

Frederick Jackson Turner (1861-1932)

In Frederick Jackson Turner, Professor of history at the University of Wisconsin, Parrington seems to have found one of his fruitful sources of inspiration: a complete exposition of the influence of the frontier on American ideologies and social institutions. Professor Parrington mentioned Turner only twice in three volumes: once to say that it was Edwin Lawrence Godkin who first stated the theory Turner used, and once to acknowledge Turner's help in discovering a theory of American social evolution. Yet it is undeniable that Turner speaks with a loud voice in Main Currents in American Thought. The frontier is a fairly constant element in the American mind as Parrington interpreted it.

Two volumes contain the best of Turner: The Rise of the New West, 1906, and The Frontier in American History, 1920, the latter a collection of previously published essays that began in 1893 and ended in 1918. An essay with great value is entitled "The Significance of the Frontier in American History." It was a paper read at the meeting of the American Historical Association, July 12, 1893; and it has since been widely published, recently gaining the dignity of a position beside O. Henry in a college anthology of American literature.<sup>1</sup>

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1. Foerster, N., American Prose and Poetry.

Professor Turner is a little vague concerning his theory of economic forces. At times he wrote as though he considered such forces to be the foundation of society; at other times he gave the impression that economic forces form but one of the determining elements. In spite of the ambiguity, however, he is to be taken as primarily like the other men in this study. He is without question like Marx in believing that the ultimate element in history is the economic force, and like him in believing that other institutions are forces in their own right. The distinguishing trait is that Turner spoke about American history in terms of socio-economic forces released by the frontier. One quotation from Turner's preface to The Rise of the New West will reveal the ambiguity:

In the present volume I have kept before myself the importance of regarding American development as the outcome of economic and social as well as political forces.<sup>1</sup>

That Turner considered the frontier as an economic influence, however, is easily discovered. In his essay "Pioneer Ideals," 1910, he said that the American ideal of democracy, along with many others, was the result of vast areas of free land.<sup>2</sup> American political forms, legal systems, and educational patterns are, furthermore, all products of the ideal of democracy.<sup>3</sup> Understanding Turner in this, it is safe to say that he primarily believed American society to have an economic foundation.

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1. Turner, F. J., The Rise of the New West, p. xvii.

2. Turner, F. J., The Frontier in American History, p. 274.

3. Ibid., p. 282.

Turner's theory was completely stated when he wrote that

...The existence of an area of free land, its continuous recession, and the advance of American settlement westward, explain American development.

Behind institutions, behind constitutional forms and modifications, lie the vital forces that call these organs into life and shape them to meet changing conditions...the expansion westward...furnishes the forces dominating American Character.<sup>1</sup>

The effects of the frontier on American character were extensive. First, said Professor Turner, was the composite nationality made possible because frontier conditions promoted an easy mixture. Another was the lessening of American dependency on England by the development of frontier resources. A third effect, through the conditioning qualities of the frontier, was the legislation which most developed the national government. Along with this was the prevention of sectionalism by the economic needs of the frontier itself.<sup>2</sup> But

the most important effect of the frontier has been the promotion of democracy here and in Europe...So long as free land exists, the opportunity for a competency exists, and economic power secures political power.<sup>3</sup>

After speaking of political effects, Turner reached his discussion of the intellectual traits nourished by the frontier.

These effects are summed as follows:

That coarseness and strength combined with acuteness and inquisitiveness; that practical, inventive turn of mind, quick to find expedients; that masterful grasp of material things...; that restless, nervous energy; that dominant individualism, working for

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1. Ibid., pp. 1-3.
  2. Ibid., pp. 22-27.
  3. Ibid., p. 32.

good and evil, and withal that bouyanoy and exuberance which comes with freedom--these are traits of the frontier, or traits called out elsewhere because of the existence of the frontier.<sup>1</sup>

Such in brief is Professor Turner's principle of the fundamental force in American history, and the effects of that force on the character of American social institutions. Turner holds a high and original place in American intellectual history. Any study of Harrington must recognize Turner as one of the progenitors of the former's history of the nation's mental activities. The two men belonged to similar schools of thought.

E. R. A. Seligman (1861- )

In 1901 and 1902 Professor E. R. A. Seligman published in the Political Science Quarterly, Vols. XVI and XVII, a series of articles called "The Economic Interpretation of History." The articles were a summary of the theory and its history, and they were important because they had a decided effect later on Brander Matthews, who apparently was the first professional critic in America to state the theory of economic determinism in literature.

In his summary of the history of the idea Seligman said that Aristotle pointed out the essential inter-relation of politics, ethics, and economics. Buckle is given credit for having been the first really to state the inter-relation of society, wealth, and the physical environment. But it was Marx, Seligman said, who took the theory, gave it its fullest expres-

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1. Ibid., p. 37.

sion, and used it for a complete interpretation of history and society. Feuerbach is credited by Seligman as having modified Hegel's absolute idealism into a social idealism, which is a materialistic point of view. Marx accepted the materialistic implications in this and on them founded scientific socialism.<sup>1</sup> Further developing his analysis of Marx, Seligman said that the former was convinced that all social relations are intimately connected with the productive forces of society, and that social ideologies are similarly connected. Seligman then gave Marx credit for being the originator of the economic method of historical interpretation.

When he came to his own position, Seligman accepted the principle with the same reservations that Engels held: forces now removed from their economic source--religion, aesthetics, etc.--may act in their own right. Seligman wrote that civilization must fight for its material needs, and

As long, however, as this conflict endures, the primary explanation of human life must continue to be the economic

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1. Of some interest, partly because it shows to what length an idea may be carried, is W. F. Ogburn's essay in the American Economic Review Supplement, Vol. IX, No. 1, March 1919, "The Psychological Basis for the Economic Interpretation of History." Mr. Ogburn was on the University of Washington faculty at the time this was written. His purpose is "to set forth certain of the newly discovered mechanisms, the unconscious, the censor displacement, projection, compensation, the use of symbols and rationalization, which have been developed by Freud, Jung...and to show how the instincts function through them, and how these mechanisms offer an explanation of the social behavior, called the economic motivation." The way these mechanisms work out collectively, through the social mind, is as follows: Certain individuals prepare opinions which hide their selfish motives. These opinions are accepted by the masses, who do not penetrate the disguises. The first safety movements, for instance, were promoted as altruistic; but they did not begin until compulsory insurance laws, etc., made accident prevention profitable.

explanation--the explanation of the adjustment of material resources to human desires. This adjustment may be modified by aesthetic, religious and moral...forces; but in last resort it still remains an adjustment of life to the wherewithal of life.<sup>1</sup>

This is a fair statement of the principle as Engels wanted it. All one needs is to apply it to literature, which was done by Brander Matthews in 1910 and by Allene Gregory in 1915. From these last two sprang Professor Benham's essay "The Economic Interpretation of Literary History." But first the remainder of the historians who influenced the principle in America.

#### J. Allen Smith (1860-1926)

Professor J. Allen Smith and Professor Parrington were friends for many years, travelling similar intellectual roads; and a reader of the works of these two men is at once aware how alike they were in ideals and in manner of presentation. Their conclusions are similar, and so are the materials used to reach them. Smith was particularly interested in the problems of government and its relationship with democracy. Parrington was particularly interested in the total of American thought as it stemmed from what he took to be its main sources. Of the two men, the debt is owed from Parrington to Smith, for the latter's influence on Main Currents in American Thought is great. Smith helped develop in Parrington political liberalism and wisdom in interpreting political institutions.

Smith's The Spirit of American Government, 1907, may be briefly summarized in order to establish the similarity of Parrington's thought and in preparation for a statement of Smith's

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1. Seligman, E. R. A., Economic Interpretation of History, p. 155.

actual theory of economic determinism. The central thesis of the book is that American government is essentially a system of checks and balances designed to keep capitalist minorities in control. Smith first of all attempted to show that English government was undemocratic in spirit, and that this spirit was carried over into American colonial government, where it was fought by a rising spirit of democracy. The American Revolution was part of a democratic movement checked finally by aristocratic reaction. The reaction revealed itself, according to Smith, in such federal instruments as the Constitution, the Supreme Court, and the Electoral College. The fixed and difficult process of constitutional amendment is also assumed part of a design to thwart popular will. All through the book Smith tried to show that the power that dictated each element of the Federal government, or shaped the compromise, was wealth.

The following excerpt not only shows Smith's thesis, but it contains an interesting allusion to Rogers. Smith is here speaking of the spirit of English government:

That the House of Commons was not democratic in spirit is clearly seen in the character of parliamentary legislation...While the interests of the land-holding aristocracy were carefully guarded, the well-being of the laboring population received scant consideration...The landlord and capitalist classes controlled the government and, as Professor Rogers observes, their aim was to increase rents and profits down to the lowest pittance. "I contend," he says, "that from 1563 to 1824, a conspiracy, concocted by the law and carried out by parties interested in its success, was entered into, to cheat the English workman of his wages, to tie him to the soil, to deprive him of hope, and to degrade him into irremediable poverty." (Work and Wages, p. 398)...Both the common and the statute law of Eng-



land reflected in the eighteenth century the political supremacy of the well-to-do minority.<sup>1</sup>

Professor Smith accounted for the rising democratic spirit in America, reaching its climax in the American Revolution, by the conditions of wealth distribution at the time. He believed that political equality follows the condition of economic equality.<sup>2</sup> Speaking of liberty and the Constitution, Smith made the following remarks about the influence of wealth:

It may be said without exaggeration that the American scheme of government was planned and set up to perpetuate the ascendancy of the property-holding class in a society leavened with democratic ideas. ...The Constitution was in form a political document, but its significance was mainly economic. It was the outcome of an organized movement on the part of a class to surround themselves with the legal and constitutional guarantees which would check the tendency toward democratic legislation.<sup>3</sup>

Clearly Smith followed the lead set him by Rogers.

In 1930 appeared posthumously Smith's Growth and Decadence of Constitutional Government. Of chief interest at this time is the introduction, written by Professor Parrington. The last paragraph will serve to summarize Smith's significance for Parrington:

I have written these few meagre pages of comment on the life-work of a courageous and self-sacrificing scholar with a deep sense of personal loss. For nearly twenty years Professor Smith was my colleague and friend, and our intellectual interests and political sympathies travelled congenially the same paths.<sup>4</sup>

#### Charles A. Beard (1874- )

Attention may now be turned to the last of the historians to be discussed here, Charles A. Beard. Beard's first important

1. Smith, J. A., The Spirit of American Government, p. 11.

2. Ibid., p. 12.

3. Ibid., pp. 298-299.

4. Smith, J. A., Growth and Decadence of Con. Government, p. xvi.

contribution in his field is An Economic Interpretation of the Constitution of the United States, 1913. As he said in his introductory essay, the book was designed to suggest to other writers new lines of historical research. To quote him:

I print it in the hope that a few of this generation of historical scholars may be encouraged to turn away from barren "political" history to a study of the real economic forces which condition great movements in politics.<sup>1</sup>

For his method and for much of his material he acknowledged Turner, Libby, Ambler, and Schaper. He was aware of Seligman's article in the Political Science Quarterly and quoted from it; but nowhere in the volume does he seem to have heard of Smith's work in 1907, The Spirit of American Government, which certainly did exactly the same thing that Beard claimed to be inaugurating in 1913.

Concerning his sources, Beard said that James Madison realized that economic forces were involved in governmental forms. Of closer sources, Beard wrote that Turner had done extremely significant work.

Beard's similarity to Smith and the others of this school of historians is easily shown. Observe some of his chapter headings:

- a. A survey of Economic Interests in 1787
- b. The Economic Interests of the Members of the Convention
- c. The Economic Conflict over Ratification as viewed by Contemporaries

One quotation will suffice:

The Constitution was essentially an economic document based upon the concept that the fundamental private

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1. Beard, C. A., An Economic Interpretation etc., p. v.

rights of property are anterior to government and morally beyond the reach of popular governments.<sup>1</sup>

The last few pages have been given to historians primarily. They belong here because they took leading parts in developing in America the thesis that social life is determined by economic forces. They had, furthermore, as has been shown, a close connection with Farrington's intellectual life.

From here on, however, the persons considered will be literary figures involved in the thesis that economic determinism controls literary phenomena. These persons are William Morris, Brander Matthews, Allene Gregory, and Allen Rogers Benham. They will conclude this section of the dissertation.

#### William Morris (1834-1896)

The study of literary critics who saw an economic determinism, partial or complete, in art forms and content must include the school of socialists banded against the spiritual degradation of machine slavery. In England Ruskin and Morris were leaders. Professor Benham, a colleague of Farrington's, stated that Farrington acknowledged some influence from Morris; for that reason it is appropriate to examine Morris's philosophy.

It is part of Morris's basic point of view that riches-- which he defined as wealth used as a means of gaining power over men--destroy decent living. Riches degrade society to low spiritual and physical levels. The fundamental spiritual qualities that must go into great, or just good, art can not be released

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1. Ibid., p. 324.

by a society based on commercial competition. Riches force artists to work by command rather than by individual impulse toward creation.<sup>1</sup> Economic forces, then, are to be conceived as being a temporary determining influence. In the proper society art will spring from the human soul; and economics instead of being the fundamental creative power, will serve merely as the guarantor of creative freedom.

The essays in which this thesis receives its fullest elaboration are these: "Art, Wealth and Riches," 1883; "Art Under Plutocracy," 1883; "Art and Socialism," 1884; and "The Aims of Art," 1886.

Riches, by destroying natural beauty and by destroying the laborer's joy in his work, have ruined the well-springs of art. Man's instinct for beauty is submerged in ugliness and hateful work. Competitive society is the cause; and, according to Morris,

so long as the system of competition in the production and exchange of the means of life goes on, the degradation of the arts will go on.<sup>2</sup>

Art is man's expression of his joy in his work.<sup>3</sup> If there is no joy in work there can be no art; and if a competitive society persists,

Art will utterly perish, as in the manual arts so in literature, which will become, as it is indeed speedily becoming, a mere string of orderly and calculated ineptitudes and passionless ingenuities.<sup>4</sup>

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1. Morris, W., Works, Vol. XXIII, p. 146.
  2. Ibid., p. 172.
  3. Ibid., p. 173.
  4. Ibid., p. 95.

This is the pessimistic outcome of existing economic conditions. Morris's hope for all art was in the substitution of a guild socialism for competitive capitalism. It might be argued from this that economic forces are still at the bottom of art if art can exist only in a certain economic environment. It should be said again, however, that spiritual forces as Morris saw them would be the creative impulse. There is nothing absolute in his theory that economic forces destroy art, for the theory applies only to competitive capitalism.

Brander Matthews (1852-1929)

Brander Matthews was one of America's leading literary critics during his time, and his vast amount of critical work has had an important influence on students and on creative writers alike. For this dissertation, however, the outstanding essay by Matthews is a presidential address to the Modern Language Association in December, 1910, "The Economic Interpretation of Literature."

This essay is frankly based on Seligman's "The Economic Interpretation of History," written in 1901 and 1902. The first part of Matthews' work is given to an analysis and summary of Seligman's. Seligman hesitated to say that art has an economic foundation, but Matthews did not. Of the theory in general as an aid in historical interpretation, Matthews wrote:

Underlying many, if not supporting most of the significant events in human history we can find, if we seek it diligently, an economic explanation.....  
A majority of the mighty movements of mankind and of

the salient struggles of the race, the stalwart efforts for freedom and for expansion, including not a few of those which may seem purely political, or intellectual, or even religious, have also their economic basis...<sup>1</sup>

This excerpt might well have been written to explain Professor Parrington's book and intentions. When Matthews became specific with his theory of economic determinism in literature, however, he was less comprehensive. It was his belief that a writer writes what he can sell and under the conditions regulating his selling; such as copyright laws, financial reward, and editorial restrictions.

The impulse for self-expression and the desire to accomplish an immediate purpose are both potent, but neither is as insistent and as inexorable as the necessity for money.<sup>2</sup>

This allows other forces, and it merely says that out of a body of subject matter a writer will select what will sell the best. It does not say, as is implied in his acceptance of the historical principle advanced by Seligman, that the body of ideas is originally determined by economic forces. Continuing in this strain, he said:

Literature cannot help being more or less aristocratic in its tone when the man of letters must look for his living to a pension from a monarch or to a guerdon from a noble patron. Literature becomes democratic inevitably when the man of letters is released from this servitude to a social superior and when he finds himself free to appeal for support to the public as a whole. Economic and political and legal conditions need to be taken into account by all historians of literature, ancient and modern.<sup>3</sup>

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1. Matthews, B., "The Economic Interpretation of Literature," North American Review, Vol. 193, p. 229.
  2. Ibid., p. 233.
  3. Ibid., p. 240.

Matthews is somewhat like Blackwell, Adams, and Draper in his discussion of the economic compulsions that work upon a writer. He did, however, go further. He said that at least in part many important intellectual movements had an economic origin. He said in addition that "economic and political and legal conditions" must be considered by literary historians in any account of literature. Matthews' speech before the Modern Language Association reached a wide audience. He called attention to the theory as few other American critics could have during his time.

Allene Gregory (1890-\_\_\_\_\_)

The name of Dr. Allene Gregory is little known in the field of American literary criticism, for she has been scant of production. Her "Introduction" in her The French Revolution and the English Novel, 1915, is of special interest here. It is entitled "On the Economic Interpretation of Literature." It is a mid-point between Matthews and Benham.

Dr. Gregory made a separation between the economic interpretation of literature and the already common historical interpretation. History, she said, has been a gainer by the sociological and economic methods of interpretation. Literature should also gain.

It may be objected that all this is included in the accepted historical interpretation of literature. That is not altogether true. Economic changes and the resulting social conditions do undoubtedly affect literature through the medium of the general events which they cause. But they also

affect literature in a more direct way, without the intervention of those political occurrences which determine the chronology of historical epochs.<sup>1</sup>

The point Dr. Gregory is getting ready to make is similar to that made by Parrington. He implies that literature is made of materials that arise in social conflicts primarily caused by economic conditions. Dr. Gregory found illustrations of these economic conditions in the Peasants' Revolt and in the rise and fall of the Guilds. Each of these had economic motivation, and each was reflected in literature. She wrote that

An examination of almost any one of the generally recognized movements in literature will show that it was immediately preceded by some economic or industrial change of significant nature, involving a change in the relative power of the economic groups in the state.<sup>2</sup>

Dr. Gregory did not account for the presence of an idea by an economic force; rather she said that the ideas are present and that economics determines which one will be given emphasis:

We may say that various ideas being present in the national mind, the economic condition is a prime factor in determining which ones shall be emphasized.<sup>3</sup>

At this point Dr. Gregory went to Marx for authority to support the "popular theory" known as economic determinism. She answered the protests of the romanticists and the humanists and then stated her purpose in the book:

In the following discussion of the "tendenz" novels

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1. Gregory, A., The French Revolution and the English Novel, p. 2.
  2. Ibid., p. 4.
  3. Ibid., p. 4.



of Revolutionary England we shall endeavor to illustrate to some extent the practical application of the method here suggested. To a consideration of the English history of French Revolutionary philosophy, and of the stimulus given to English radicalism by the example of France, we shall add some observations of the social maladjustments arising from the Industrial Revolution and their influence on the thought of the time.<sup>1</sup>

Allen Rogers Benham (1879- )

With Allen Rogers <sup>Benham</sup> ~~is~~ reached the last of the formulators of the theory of economic literary criticism before Parrington. The problem of Benham's influence on Parrington is controversial. A student-colleague of Parrington's, Professor E. E. Eby, editor of the third volume of Main Currents in American Thought, said<sup>2</sup> that a poem written by Parrington in 1908 contained by implication the economic theory elaborated years later. Benham's influence would have had to come after that, for his most important works, using or expounding the method, were published in 1916 and in 1922. Parrington's poem is lost, or unavailable. There can be no doubt, however, that Benham's critical work precedes Parrington's. The two men, furthermore, worked together on a dissertation committee in which the student involved used the method jointly held by the two men.<sup>3</sup>

1. Ibid., p. 13.

2. In an interview the investigator had with Eby.

3. K. L. Gregg's dissertation: Thomas Dekker: A Study in Economic and Social Backgrounds, 1924. In her acknowledgment she said: "I wish again to thank my friends and teachers at the University of Washington, Dean Frederick M. Padelford, Professor Vernon L. Parrington, and Professor Allen R. Benham, for guidance and encouragement." Concerning her purpose Miss Gregg wrote: "This study is an attempt to apply the economic theory of history to literary criticism."

Benham's first book for discussion here is English Literature from Widsith to the Death of Chaucer: A Source Book, 1916. Benham's intellectual antecedents, as he gave them in an interview, are Kuno Francke, with whom he had contact as a student of German literature at Harvard in 1898-1900; J. H. Robinson's Readings in History; Charles A. Beard's Readings in Modern European History; and Edward P. Cheyney's Readings in English History. With the exception of Francke these men wrote source books of the same type as Benham's From Widsith to Chaucer. Benham naturally was familiar with the development of historical criticism of literature. James Harrington, in Oceana, made the earliest statement that he, Benham, was aware of that political and economic factors are necessary for an interpretation of history. As will appear later, Benham knew the articles by Seligman, Matthews, and the chapter by Dr. Gregory. At the present moment the object of interest is From Widsith to Chaucer. Of this Benham wrote:

The title of this venture is to be taken seriously; the work is a source-book, not an anthology nor a text-book; it exemplifies and urges in literary history the same methods that have long been successfully used in constitutional or political history.<sup>1</sup>

After defining his terms, Benham reached his exposition of his method. Literature, he wrote,

is not produced in a vacuum; it is a social institution in a real world, affecting and picturing men who have real problems and real outlooks which we must see if we are to draw sound conclusions. Hence, most of the space in this book is given to the backgrounds,--political, social, industrial, and cultural,

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1. Benham, A. R., From Widsith to Chaucer, p. ix.

--which largely determine the literary output.<sup>1</sup>

In 1922, Professor Benham published an essay called The Economic Interpretation of Literary History. In this he summarized the literature on the subject, presented his objections, and added the elements he thought necessary. The literature he summarized consisted primarily of Seligman's, Matthews', and Gregory's articles.

The main function of the essay is to explain the complexity of nineteenth century English literature. Benham found partial explanation in the greater freedom of printing and publishing than ever existed before; the rise of magazines; the settlement of the copyright question; the expansion of the reading public; and the spread of the spirit of political reform.<sup>2</sup>

However,

The trend of all the evidence adduced so far in my attempt to explain the complexity of nineteenth century English literature should have by this time prepared you for my next step, which is that the principal cause of the social complexity of the nineteenth century England was the Industrial Revolution, an economic cause.<sup>3</sup>

It is at this point that Benham discussed the articles already written by his contemporaries and presented his objections. Matthews, he said, applied his economic theory to literary form only. Gregory did not carry her theory into the field of outstanding artists, failing to tell us how the great literary figures and works are related to the economic back-

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1. Ibid., p. x.

2. Benham, A. R., The Economic Interpretation of Literary History, p. 2.

3. Ibid., p. 12.

ground.<sup>1</sup> Benham's chief criticism of Matthews is revealed in the following excerpt, which contains as well a statement that economic forces partly determine literary content:

...he confines himself too much to an account of literary forms and omits the significance of the subject matter altogether. My contention is that the subject matter quite as much as the form of literary work is largely determined by economic causes.<sup>2</sup>

Some pages later we find another statement of the determined element in literary material:

We should like to think of the writer as the pioneer doing as he likes and in any given case one can undoubtedly do as he likes; but what determines his likes and dislikes. Undoubtedly his heredity and environment.<sup>3</sup>

Benham was cautious in his remarks concerning economic determinism in literature. He issued no dogmatic statements of absolute necessity. Rather he said that literary content and form are "quite largely" or "in part" determined by economic forces. This is a contrast with the economic historians Rogers, Smith, and Beard, who seemed much more certain of the truth of their theories.

#### Summary

The discussion of the thesis that literary subject matter and form are determined by economic forces is finished. During the early period of the history of this thesis writers with suggestions to make about it were scarce and vague. Blackwell,

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1. Ibid., p. 16.
  2. Ibid., p. 17.
  3. Ibid., p. 25.

Buckle, and Draper each had something to say directly. When the thesis began to attract real attention, however, it found its greatest nourishment from such economists, historians, and politicians as Harrington, John Adams, Marx and Engels, Loria, Turner, Seligman, Smith, and Beard. Based on the work of these men, and of course on that of Herder, de Stael, Taine, and the others, such literary figures as Matthews, Perry, Gregory, and Benham erected critical philosophies that took account of the influence of economic forces in determining literary subject matter and form. None of these literary people were absolutists-- that is, they in some degree observed that other than economic forces act as determining factors.

#### Literature an Expression of Conflict

The third major point in Professor Parrington's critical philosophy is that literature reflects and takes part in social struggle. The author defends or attacks a position of some sort. The thesis is self-explanatory. There is partisanship within the church, the school, the cooperative movement, and in abstract philosophy, as well as in the broader social institutions clearly economic. It is true that economic conflict reveals itself most obviously in class conflict. It is further true that Marxian traditionalists believe that such things as the church, the school, and philosophy have an economic foundation. In this sense all social conflict may be said to be economic in origin, and it is this sense that most interested Professor Parrington; therefore, his emphasis was on the broad

divisions of economic classes and class conflict in America and the resultant effect, as he saw it, in American literature.

The actual history of the theory that literature is active in economic struggle is slight if one attends strictly to the economic interpretation. Though there has never been a lack of artists ready to attack or support social institutions, it has generally been considered by critics that such attacks need not be considered by critical theories. Criticism has dealt chiefly with form and genius. It ignored what is obviously a marked characteristic of a huge proportion of literature: that many authors have been deliberately attempting to change social and individual institutions and ways of living. Such typical examples as Aristophanes, Swift, and Tolstoi attest the truth of this. They deliberately propagandized ideas that have clear socio-economic implications. There are now many proletarian critics, but Upton Sinclair is the important figure before Parrington.

It will be useful to call brief attention to some of the men who influenced Parrington in other ways and to see how they stood on the matter of conflict.

First, John Adams: John Adams was thoroughly convinced that society was filled with conflicts. In one of his letters he wrote:

I hope that my last convinced you that democracy is as restless, as ambitious, as warlike and bloody, as aristocracy or monarchy.<sup>1</sup>

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1. Adams, J., Works, Vol. VI, p. 486.

In another letter he wrote that business was at war with business or oppressive groups of other types. He concluded this discussion with a sweeping remark that claimed strife for all sorts of men:

Are not men of letters,--philosophers, divines, physicians, lawyers, orators, and poets,--all over the world, at perpetual strife with one another?<sup>1</sup>

It was Adams' belief they were.

Second, Kuno Francke: Kuno Francke saw literature as the expression of two great forces in conflict. This does not necessarily say that literature is aggressive in the conflict; it says that literature is formed, content and spirit, as a result of two great forces in conflict. The forces observed by Francke are the tendencies toward personal freedom and toward collective organization. The first of these leads toward individualism and realism in literature. The latter leads to the beautiful, the universal, the ideal. Great literature will belong to the age which most evenly balances these two forces.<sup>2</sup>

Third, Charles A. Beard: Beard, in speaking of the theory of the economic interpretation of history, said that it rests

upon the concept that social progress in general is the result of contending interests in society--some favorable, others opposed to change.<sup>3</sup>

Here Beard used a Marxian concept that though the individual has free will, he can not will a result and get it, because of interference by other individual wills. A conclusion is to be

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1. Ibid., p. 521.

2. Francke, K., Social Forces in German Literature, pp. v-vi.

3. Beard, C. A., An Economic Interpretation, p. 19.

thought of as a resultant. It is what remains of desired goals after all the opposing forces have been balanced.

Fourth, Karl Marx and Frederick Engels: These two men are the chief developers of the philosophy of class conflict. To them conflict is inherent in the modern system of production and exchange of goods and is made manifest in the active hostility of proletariat and bourgeoisie.<sup>1</sup> Classes are caused by economic forces. Rival interests bring these classes into conflict. Also fundamental in historical movement, according to Marx and Engels, is the dialect of motion, or of process. That is to say, inherent in a social phenomenon is the antagonistic force that will rise to destroy the phenomenon. Every movement or social object carries the potential of its own destruction. History, or society, is thus to be thought of as a complex of inevitable conflicts that bring about constant social evolution.

Upton Beal Sinclair (1878- )

Upton Sinclair has devoted a considerable portion of his writing effort to prove that literature is a reflection of class conflict and an actor in it. His Mammonart: An Essay in Economic Interpretation, 1924, is a long book in which he states the argument and then re-interprets the history of world literature. Money Writes, 1927, does exactly the same thing for the history of American literature. This book, coming just the year before Parrington's work appeared, could not have had any influence on Parrington.

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1. Engels, F., Socialism: Utopian and Scientific, p. 59.



It is Sinclair's belief that artists, because they are specialists who would perish if out of their work, are the slaves of the men who pay for their products. The artist is under the necessity of pleasing his employer. It is, further, Sinclair's belief that honor and success in art go only to those artists who can appeal to the ruling classes. If an artist rebels against the ruling class, he must take his chances of recognition and support with the class with which he is aligned.<sup>1</sup>

In Mammonart Sinclair presented an interpretation of the arts from the point of view of the class struggle. He studied the artists who were recognized by critical authority and showed how he conceived them to be the servants of ruling class prestige and the instruments of ruling class safety.<sup>2</sup> He took as possible of demonstration the following points:

1. The artist is a social product, his psychology and that of his art being determined by the economic forces prevailing in his time.
2. The established artist of any period is a man in sympathy with the ruling classes of that time, voicing their interests and ideals.
3. The step to the understanding of art, and the history of art periods past and present, is to understand the economic forces controlling mankind; the evolution and the struggle of the classes.<sup>3</sup>

Note that Sinclair talked about art and the evolution and struggle of the classes. That is the essential element of this interpretation of art: class conflict. Sinclair further wrote:

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1. Sinclair, U. B., Mammonart, p. 7.  
 2. Ibid., p. 8.  
 3. Ibid., p. 21.

All art is propoganda. It is universally and inescapably propoganda; sometimes unconsciously, but often deliberately, propoganda.<sup>1</sup>

Sinclair expected the "sarcastic critic" to say that this theory makes the artist a knavish and dangerous person. In reply, Sinclair said that that may be so, but the artist's

knaveries are class knaveries, collective cruelties, conventions and attitudes to life which have been produced as automatic reactions to economic forces.<sup>2</sup>

To Sinclair, then, the literary artist is a warrior. He stands for or against. His sword is his pen.

Little can be said in summary beyond the obvious fact that though writers have long been engaged in social conflicts, critics have not attempted to include conflict in critical theory. The modern concept of class conflict belongs chiefly to Marx and Engels. In America Sinclair is the leading exponent of the theory before the appearance of Parrington.

### Summary of Part II

The function of the dissertation up to this point has been to outline the development of the principle of socio-economic determinism as it has been applied to literary criticism. Three distinct theses have been traced: (1) that literature is related to social institutions; (2) that the ideologies, which form the material of literature, are economic in origin; (3) and that conflict is a characteristic of social ideologies. These three theses combined form the socio-economic principle being examined.

In the beginning of sociological criticism, the critics

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1. Ibid., p. 9.  
2. Ibid., p. 27.

were not concerned with economics except casually. The chief point of interest was the influence of social institutions on a writer, who was conceived as being a representative of his race and time working in a particular environment; and the influence of the writer on the institutions. The critics of importance to sociological criticism during this period were the following: Thomas Blackwell, who studied Homer in his physical and social environment; Johann Gottfried Von Herder, who followed Blackwell's lead and in addition widely disseminated the special point of view of nationalism; Madame de Steel, who studied the inter-relations of literature and institutions; Prosper de Barante, who wrote a special study of French literature in the eighteenth century and the relation of literature to French society of that period, paying close attention to political situations; Sainte-Beuve, who emphasized psychological factors in an author's work; Hippolyte Adolphe Taine, who as a positivist studied the work of a writer as springing from the primal sources of race, surroundings, and epoch; Kuno Francke, who interpreted the whole history of German literature in terms of the social forces working upon it; Georg Brandes, a Danish writer who separated the main currents of European thought during the nineteenth century in much the same fashion that Professor Parrington later did it for the history of American thought; and Bliss Perry, who, borrowing from Turner, fully developed the characteristics of American personality and asked that literature and its criticism be not separated from the social, economic, political, and geographical factors in Amer-

ican life. Of these men Taine has been said to be a dominant influence on Parrington. The others undoubtedly had indirect influence.

All of these are background figures. They developed the sociological in literary criticism, creating the tendency away from aesthetic absolutes and toward the materialistic point of view, of which the theory of economic determinism is an extreme development. It is true that from the beginning of modern criticism there have been allusions to the influence of economic conditions on human thought and spirit, but only recently has there been developed a critical science employing the principle of economic determinism. Logically, it started among political and economic philosophers rather than among literary critics; and it seems that the influence of climate and geography on government was the first problem of this nature to receive considerable attention. Montesquieu, Herder, Buckle, and Draper are leading figures developing this problem. The clear line of the principle of economic determinism in government and law, however, begins with James Harrington and reaches its fullest development with Karl Marx. Intermediately there is a host of names. Those that concern this dissertation are John Adams, Daniel Webster, Frederick J. Turner, Thorold Rogers, Achilles Loria, Allen Smith, Charles A. Beard, and E. R. A. Seligman. These men followed for the most part the thesis that the ownership of land is the source of governmental power and form; but Rogers, Seligman, Smith, and Beard were less concerned with land than with wealth in general. Professor Parrington was

strongly influenced by this group of theorists, coming under the sway of Harrington's thesis as it reached him through them.

In the literary field the names that preceded Farrington and had influence on him are the following: William Morris, Brander Matthews, Bliss Perry, Allene Gregory, and Allen R. Benham. All of these developed the theory of economic determinism from one or both of two points of view: that economics determines what a writer thinks or that the commercial nature of authorship limits a writer's field of thought to what can be sold at a profit. In all cases these persons were modest in their presentation of their theories and in the amount of work devoted to illustration.

The element of class conflict that is a part of the principle of economic determinism has received but little attention from literary critics until the last few years. In America Upton Beal Sinclair is the man who most developed the partisanship nature of literature before Farrington, who broadened the thesis from one of proletariat-bourgeoisie conflict to include the complex of struggle within each social philosophy as well as among all of them. The history of this thesis in literary criticism is just beginning, but the socio-economic type of criticism has had a steady development since early in the eighteenth century.

### PART III

#### PARRINGTON'S APPLICATION OF ECONOMIC CRITICISM TO AMERICAN LITERATURE

The theory of literary interpretation the history of which has just been outlined is a part of the more general philosophy of materialism. Parrington applied the critical theory to American literature on the pragmatic basis of richer rewards than would be gained from a belletristic approach. It is now proposed to analyze direct and indirect evidence in order to develop the documentary exposition of Parrington's critical philosophy, including an estimate of Parrington's work and of his philosophy. The chief aim of the first point is to discover to what extent Parrington was an economic determinist, and the aim of the second point is to estimate the value of Parrington's contribution to literary criticism as a method. Most of the documentation will come directly from Main Currents in American Thought. That which is indirect will come for the most part from sources closely connected with Parrington: his colleagues and his reviewers. The estimate will gather and judge criticism of Parrington and of the materialistic philosophy he employed, in so far as it applies to literature.

#### Documentary Definition of Parrington's Critical Tenets

Karl Marx is generally accredited with having reached the most definitive position in modern materialistic philosophy as it applies to the economic structure of society. The basic

concept is that economic forces are the primary creative elements causing sociological phenomena. Parrington carried this point of view into the specific phenomena of thought and literature. He did not write out and defend his philosophy of criticism, but the philosophy is nevertheless apparent in his intentions and in his treatment of American thought. Fundamentally he believed that the shaping impulses behind the broad intellectual movements characteristic of America are economic in origin. It is true that Parrington discussed experiments in pure social idealism; but it was to show, in part at least, how each experiment met its master in a belligerent economics that assumed varied disguises and attacked with a multitude of subtle weapons. Even in discussing social idealism, however, Parrington's economic implications are apparent. He indicated that the ideals originated as responses to social conditions frankly unsatisfactory in certain of their economic relations, and he said many times that idealistic movements owed their force to their having been borrowed to cloak an economic movement with an ideology. The absence of actual contrary argument, plus the heavy weight of implication makes it seem probable that he intended his work in Main Currents in American Thought to be unified by the principle of economic determinism, although at times he spoke of social forces as distinct from economic forces. The social forces, however, are to be understood as having a primary economic base. Parrington was by nature an aesthete; and he did not as a general principle deny aesthetics a place in art. But it was not his purpose in Main Currents in American Thought

to discuss aesthetics or the creative function of the mind, and he denied them a place only in the subject matter immediately at hand.

In general it is to be said that Professor Parrington believed that certain old world philosophies, with their original economic implications, were modified in the new world by a native economics, primarily the frontier and its free land, with resulting forms of thought that are typically American in character. The new philosophic forms found expression in new institutions, which were vital, often bitterly antagonistic and frequently schismatic. Politics, religion, industrial systems, law, government--all found their sides in inevitable conflict and were in themselves new forces creating new changes. Literature, which Parrington believed to be the written record of all thought, could not escape the domination of these influences. By the sheer weight of propinquity if by nothing else economics (as the basis of social problems) kept American writers out of ivory towers and forced them to engage in local or national battles for this or that point of view. The ideologies of these conflicts form, except in rare instances, the material content of American literature. Even in these instances Parrington attempted to find negative reflections of economic situations. Thus the belletristic is of secondary importance in any effort to explain and unify the history of American thought, for, from the beginning of American life, pragmatic necessity has been weighted against aesthetic absolutes in favor of social partisanship. This does not deny any man his full



spiritual dignity. Add to such generalizations as these an openly avowed Jeffersonian, liberal outlook on the American scene and Parrington's attempted point of view is complete.

This exposition of Parrington's tenets will develop the following topics: (1) Parrington's general aims in Main Currents in American Thought; (2) Economic character of the ideals brought to America; (3) Economic forces native to America; (4) The economic origins of institutions; (5) American literature and its relation to social conflict; (6) Parrington and aesthetics; (7) Parrington's liberalism; (8) Estimate of Parrington's critical position.

#### Parrington's General Aims in MAIN CURRENTS

The introductions to the three volumes of Main Currents in American Thought are explicit concerning Parrington's general aims. He wanted to give an account of the beginnings and of the development of the ideas traditionally thought of as American, the opposition they met, and their influence on typically American ideals and institutions.<sup>1</sup> In outlining his task, he said that he chose

to follow the broad path of our political, economic, and social development, rather than the narrower belletristic; and the main divisions of the study have been fixed by forces that are anterior to literary schools and movements, creating the body of ideas from which literary culture eventually springs.<sup>2</sup>

How much this is a statement of an intention to use the principle of economic determinism will be clear when it is shown to what ex-

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1. Parrington, V. L., Main Currents, Vol. I, p. 111  
(hereafter indicated by volume number and page).

2. Loc. cit.

tent Parrington conceived American political and social movements to have been determined by economic forces.

An additional element in Parrington's general intentions is the desire to allow Jeffersonian liberalism, frankly admitted, to condition his final judgments. In a foreword he wrote:

The point of view from which I have endeavored to evaluate the materials, is liberal rather than conservative, Jeffersonian rather than Federalistic.<sup>1</sup>

This general aim and the Jeffersonian tendency indicate that Parrington set out to trace the history of liberalism in America, showing the initial impulses of liberalism, its enemies, and its fate.<sup>2</sup>

Each of the three volumes in Main Currents in American Thought fits this general aim in its particular fashion. Volume I took the account from its earliest beginnings in Puritan New England as far as the "triumph of Jefferson and back-country agrarianism." The intellectual struggles of this period, as Parrington saw them, were between a liberal political philosophy and a reactionary theology fighting for supremacy in an environment dominated by the frontier.

I have considered (Parrington wrote) the incoming into America of certain old-world ideals and institutions, and the subjection of those ideals and institutions to the pressure of a new environment, from which resulted the overthrow of the principles of monarchy and aristocracy, and the setting up of the principles of republicanism.<sup>3</sup>

Such was the aim of the first of the three volumes.

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1. Ibid., p. 1.
  2. See Eby's estimate of Parrington, Vol. III, p. x.
  3. Ibid., Vol. II, p. iii.

Volume II treated the next phase of the liberal-conservative conflict as it met the creative force of French romantic theories, the rise of capitalism, and the transition from an agricultural to an industrial order.<sup>1</sup> These forces, treated by Parrington as fundamentally economic--French romanticism included--provided the impulse that produced the romantic revolution in America.<sup>2</sup> This volume, then, concerned itself with the buoyant spirit of hopefulness that expressed itself in democratic programs and in faith in a benevolent progress.<sup>3</sup>

The purpose of Volume III was to deal with the slow decay of romantic optimism; and the subject of chief interest was the three-fold cause of this phenomenon, the

stratifying of economics under the pressure of centralization; the rise of a mechanistic science; and the emergence of a spirit of skepticism which, under the pressure of industrialism, the teachings of physical science, and the lessons of European intellectuals, is resulting in the questioning of the ideal of democracy...., and the spread of a spirit of pessimism.<sup>4</sup>

Before leaving the aims behind the writing of these three volumes, and before examining the extent that Parrington conceived economic forces to have dominated American thought, one more point must be made: Parrington was not writing a history of American literature. He can be quoted exactly:

It ought not to be necessary to add that in these volumes I have not essayed to write a history of American literature...but to repeat...that I have been concerned...with the total pattern of American thought--the broad drift of major ideas.<sup>5</sup>

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1. Ibid., Vol. III, p. 111.
  2. Ibid., p. xix.
  3. Loc. cit.
  4. Loc. cit.
  5. Ibid., p. xx.

Two questions rise from what is revealed of Professor Parrington's aims: were the old world ideals that came into America economic in character, including the nineteenth century sciences and the lessons of European intellectuals; and were the forces that shaped these ideals into characteristic American patterns also economic? That is, to what extent did Parrington conceive the ideals and native forces to be economic in character?

Parrington was not a strict economic determinist in spite of what a friend has written about him.<sup>1</sup> Parrington himself said, "I hold no brief for a rigid scheme of economic determinism."<sup>2</sup>

#### Economic Character of Ideals Brought to America

American thought, according to Professor Parrington, is the bequest of two interweaving forces: idealism from the old world and a native economics.<sup>3</sup> Professor Parrington did not state his theory of the relationship between ideals and economics except indirectly, but examination of his exposition indicates that he considered several specific ideals to have had an economic character in that they were appropriated by economic movements and in that they were antagonists of certain economic circumstances. These ideals, with explanation by Parrington, of their economic implications, are treated for the most part as forces in their own right. He spoke of French romanticism,

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1. Ibid., p. x.

2. Blankenship, R., Parrington was "frankly a liberal and an economic determinist." Nation, Vol. 129, p. 142.

3. Parrington, Vol. I, p. 3.

for instance, and its effect on American thought; he spoke also of the effect politics, social development, and economics had on literary culture. In every instance, within the limits to be shown later, it was his belief that these forces had an economic character; but he used the terms as the names of forces in their own right.<sup>1</sup>

The ideals of which Parrington spoke were generalized as the body of thought and customs brought from the old home.<sup>2</sup> In particular they were these: English Independency, French romantic theory, the industrial revolution and laissez faire, nineteenth century science, and Continental theories of collectivism.<sup>3</sup> Each of these will now be discussed for economic implications as Parrington saw them.

#### English Independency

The first of these ideals to reach America was English Independency, part of the total movement of Puritanism. It arrived as the radical doctrine of natural rights as clarified by Roger Williams and John Locke, and it was entangled with the conservative element of Puritanism: the absolutist theology. Parrington thought Puritanism to be the legacy

of a hundred years of English idealism, struggling with the knotty problems of a complex modern society in transition from the old static feudal order to the modern capitalistic.<sup>4</sup>

The immediate origin of Puritanism was theological,<sup>5</sup> but the

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1. See quotation from Engels, p. 47 of this dissertation.
  2. Parrington, Vol. I, p. 3.
  3. Ibid., p. 111.
  4. Ibid., p. 5.
  5. Loc. cit.

movement itself can not be understood unless one keeps in mind the social forces that found it convenient to dress themselves in Puritan clothes. Theology must be put aside and attention fastened on the economics and politics of the Puritan struggle, for here economics and politics joined with theology.<sup>1</sup> Parrington thought that

On the whole it is no mistake to regard the Puritan revolution as primarily a rebellion of the capable middle class, whose growing trade interests demanded a larger measure of freedom than a paternal king and a landed aristocracy were willing to grant...<sup>2</sup>

Parrington also thought the significant gifts of Puritanism to social development were the system of capitalism and the system of parliamentary government.<sup>3</sup>

Parrington's thesis is that a rising capitalistic system borrowed the idealism of Puritanism, originally theological, and provided the energy that made the Puritan movement. Implying that there is more than theology in the form of Puritanism, Parrington said that in its primary assumptions it was a composite of oriental despotism and sixteenth-century monarchism, modified by the medieval conception of a city-state. The Calvinistic principle of absolutism came down through the Roman Empire and the Roman Church, and

it was interwoven with all the institutions and social forms against which the Reformation was a protest.<sup>4</sup>

The following quotation shows how Parrington accounted for the

- 
1. Loc. cit.
  2. Ibid., p. 7.
  3. Loc. cit.
  4. Ibid., p. 13.

acceptance of Puritan theology by a movement primarily economic:

From the Puritan conception of the stewardship of talents came a new ethic of work that provided a sanction for middle-class exploitation, by supplanting the medieval principle of production for consumption with the capitalistic principle of production for profit.<sup>1</sup>

All of this indicates how thoroughly Harrington conceived Puritanism to be intertwined with economic elements. Even in defeat Puritanism survived and effected a revolution in English social character of an economic sort.

It permeated the rising tradesman class, stimulated its ambition, and gave it an ethics precisely fitted to its needs...In the sanction of such an ethics, wealth became the first object of social desire; and this ideal...was preached under the authority of religion.<sup>2</sup>

In general the dominant theology in early America was Calvinistic absolutism. It was conservative. Much of the liberalism that was suppressed in Massachusetts and harried into the wilderness of Connecticut and Rhode Island, Harrington traced to Luther. There he left it, saying that political freedom was inherent in Luther's doctrine of the sufficiency of the individual.<sup>3</sup> Later, however, English liberalism in the shape of direct political theories reached America and added a new moulding force to American ideals. The philosophy of this liberalism derived largely from James Harrington, Locke, and Adam Smith. These men founded their liberal political theories on economic theories. Harrington was concerned with

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1. Ibid., p. 7.  
 2. Ibid., p. 268.  
 3. Ibid., p. 11.

a land economy, and Locke was taken up by the "money economy." Parrington did not state his conception of the way Harrington and Locke originated their philosophies. The liberalism of this group reached its high point in the doctrine of laissez faire, a doctrine that dominated American thought for a long time.<sup>1</sup> It is seen from Parrington's discussion of Puritanism and of the political theories of the English independency movement that he believed them to have essentially an economic character.

#### French Romantic Theory

French romantic theory, according to Parrington, also had its economic implications; but here the movement was humanitarian in purpose instead of aiming at security of property. Rousseau, a disciple of Locke, went further than his master and turned politics and economics into sociology.<sup>2</sup> The movement was radical. At root it was anarchistic. Its ideal was an agrarian society of free-holders.<sup>3</sup>

The New England Renaissance, of which Emerson was a high point, had, according to Parrington, part of its origins in European thought. Was this thought the result of economic forces? Again Parrington did not speak directly concerning ultimate causes, but it seems apparent that he meant only to say that the ideas became economic because they could be and were used to clothe economic aims. Three strands of European

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1. Ibid., pp. 269-271, Cf.

2. Ibid., p. 271.

3. Ibid., p. 272.



thought entered into the New England Renaissance: social Utopianism from revolutionary France; idealistic metaphysics from revolutionary Germany; and the culture of literary romanticism. These strands interweave and make varying patterns in the new-world. They stem from a movement that runs back into European history of the preceding century:

a movement that in transferring economic and political mastery from the aristocracy to the middle class, in destroying the worm-eaten feudal order and clearing the way for the new capitalistic order, laid open a broad path into the nineteenth century.<sup>1</sup>

This movement was taken up in America because the same sort of economic transition was occurring here:

The extraordinary appeal of this vast movement to the liberal mind of America resulted from the fact that an identical revolution was under way here. In New England, perhaps more dramatically than elsewhere in America, aristocratic ideals were disintegrating, and the hopes of men were running high.<sup>2</sup>

It is unfortunate that Parrington left his position somewhat obscure. It appears that he did not deny the existence of creative individualism in the important continental philosophies, but by the very weight he gave the economic element in the social development of such philosophies he indicated that as movements they owed their force to economic sources. The creative individualism that might be at the ultimate basis of French humanitarianism, for instance, was lost sight of by mass acceptance of an available philosophy that could be used as an aid in reaching fundamentally economic goals.

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1. Ibid., Vol. II, p. 319.  
2. Ibid., p. 319.

### The Industrial Revolution and Laissez Faire

The industrial revolution, as another European contribution, is explicitly an economic movement, and nowhere did Parrington feel the necessity so to argue it. By definition it is the revolution in production and distribution of consumer goods brought about by modern capitalism in substituting machine labor for manual labor. The fundamental philosophy of capitalism, Parrington said, is the sacred nature of property and of the right to the acquisition of property, promulgated by Locke. This philosophy postulates a government set up to protect, not to hinder, the individual in his commercial enterprise. Adam Smith completed the philosophy in Wealth of Nations. Government was to let business enterprise alone. French humanitarianism, on the other hand, had its principle of laissez faire based on the theory that the government that governed the least was the most profitable in terms of individual happiness. It was the English laissez faire that the industrial revolution in America followed. The result was vast centralization of wealth and government responsive to the needs of wealth. The movement is economic, though Parrington does not deny its spiritual reverberations.<sup>1</sup>

### Nineteenth Century Science & Continental Theories of Collectivism

Parrington did not live to complete his exposition of the influence of European forces on American thought. Book Three

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1. Ibid., Vol. I, pp. 267-273, Cf.

of Volume III was to have been given to the subjects of modern science and theories of collectivism. From the printed table of contents of materials intended to be developed in this book it may reasonably be inferred Parrington intended to show, in part at least, that the European intellectuals came to America through the American left-wing writers: Walter E. Weyl, Thorstein Veblen, Charles A. Beard, Herbert Croly, Randolph Bourne, Van Wyck Brooks, and Waldo Frank.<sup>1</sup> What Parrington had to say about these men is only to be inferred, but it appears from the Table of Contents that he intended to discuss them as critics of the industrial civilization in America.

Concerning science, the occasional remarks that Parrington made on the subject do not indicate that he believed economic forces to have been basic in the origins of science. Spencer he discussed without relations to economics.<sup>2</sup> The rise of mechanistic psychology was referred to similarly.<sup>3</sup> It seems, then, that Parrington did not clarify his opinion; and that, if a judgment must be ventured, he aimed to treat science as an individual force allied with the industrial revolution in bringing about the spirit of pessimism that characterized American thought during the period being examined.<sup>4</sup> He said this:

The incoming of science had two immediate results: the application of technology to industry that was to further the Industrial Revolution; and the impact on speculative thought of the newly discovered laws of science that was to create a new philosophy.<sup>5</sup>

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1. Ibid., p. xxxvii.
  2. Ibid., Vol. III, p. 197.
  3. Ibid., p. 413.
  4. Ibid., p. 327.
  5. Ibid., p. 190.

In addition to this it should be pointed out that Parrington probably believed that the forces of capitalism borrowed the force of science in much the same fashion as it took over the idealism of Puritanism. This conclusion is supported by one of his outlines of the unfinished materials in which he put the following topic for elaboration: "The appropriation of science by the middle class."<sup>1</sup>

Had Parrington been pressed it is likely he would have acknowledged economic determinism to be but one force in the creation of human thought, and as far as American thought is concerned probably the greatest. Professor Eby, writing in his estimate of Parrington, made a remark that indicates the truth of this conclusion. He said that it was Parrington's belief that

The economic forces imprint their mark upon political, social, and religious institutions; literature expresses the result in its thought content.<sup>2</sup>

Note that here it is indicated that the forces of economics seem to be working on existing objects, and not creating them. One certainly, aside from this, does not have grounds to claim Parrington was a strict determinist, for he denied that himself. The passage is of interest, for it shows that he knew his method was rather weak in treating such men as Poe:

...I hold no brief for a rigid scheme of economic determinism. I recognize the rich culture potentialities that inhere in individual variation from type.....But in such a study as I have undertaken,

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1. Ibid., p. xxvi.  
2. Ibid., Vol. III, p. x.

individual variation is significant not for its own sake, but rather for the help it may offer in determining the type.<sup>1</sup>

Parrington indicated here that he had undertaken a definite type of study, limiting himself to showing the economic imprint on American thought and institutions. He did it on the pragmatic grounds that American literature and thought gain their greatest significance when studied from the point of view of economic determinism. The weight of all the evidence here presented indicates at best that Parrington believed that the European ideals imported to America were economic in character, not that they were determined entirely by economics.

#### Economic Forces Native to America

The second great influence in determining the shape of American ideals and institutions was the "silent pressure of a free environment."<sup>2</sup> By free environment Parrington was thinking of the frontier and all that it implies in its influences on the psychology of individuals, on philosophy, on politics, and on methods of originating wealth. The frontier evolved a way of living and thinking. It is to be taken primarily as an economic force. It was a store of natural resources free to be exploited by any who would make the attempt. In fashioning the mind of New England, as an instance, European idealism and the native economic conditions were the determining factors. The latter made freehold tenure of land possible. The land itself, rather sterile, forced people to look in part

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1. Ibid., p. xx.

2. Ibid., Vol. I, p. 3.

to mercantile activities for livelihood. Out of this developed a gentry and a group of capable merchants who dominated the commonwealth from early days to the rise of industrialism. The net result of these two classes was a spirit of democracy.<sup>1</sup>

Speaking in general of the frontier, Parrington said that it created the psychology of democratic individualism. Ancient habits of thought, old social customs brought over from Europe, were destroyed by the frontier. The creative outlines of our history were shaped there:

American ideals and institutions emerged in large part from the silent revolution which during the middle eighteenth century differentiated the American from the transplanted colonial; a change that resulted from an amalgam of the older English stock with other races, and the subjection of this new product on a great scale to the influence of diffused landholding.<sup>2</sup>

Thus under the influence of the frontier the principles of monarchy and aristocracy were overthrown, and the principle of republicanism was set up. Democracy is natural to the frontier.<sup>3</sup>

The frontier was, also, the chief factor in nineteenth century American nationalism.<sup>4</sup> In addition, the defeat of the theocratic program of the Presbyterian church was implicit in the decentralized land system adopted. These are but isolated instances of frontier dominance over American ideals and institutions. Parrington's work exhibits considerable of his interest and belief in the frontier as an economic force.

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1. Ibid., p. 3, Cf.
  2. Ibid., p. 131.
  3. Ibid., Vol. II, p. 111.
  4. Ibid., p. 137, Cf.

### The Economic Origin of Institutions

The two major sources of American thought and their relation, in Parrington's mind, to economic forces have been set forth. It is of interest and importance to attempt now to see in what manner Professor Parrington attributed to economic forces the nature of such specific institutions as American politics and government, law, and literature.

#### Politics and Government

Politics are here understood as the science and art of government, of which the ideological background is the theory upon which government is set up and made to function. Government is the embodiment of the theory, the instrument or the system by which society or some of its members carry out the principles of politics. Politics is the theory. Government is the form in which political theory is put into practice. A reader of Parrington will find abundant reference to an economic origin of political theory and governmental form, and nearly always with specific reference to the United States of America.

As has already been pointed out, Parrington found the spirit of American democracy in the spirit of individualism that was created by the pressure of a free, economic environment. This individualism was created out of two major facts: a new race, the original elements of which had immigrated to America almost wholly from an economic motive,<sup>1</sup> and the free environment. Out of these came the social and political philosophy of the older America--characterized as democracy.<sup>2</sup> Opposing

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1. Ibid., Vol. I, p. 133.

2. Ibid., p. 132.

the democratic spirit was the Tory philosophy. This philosophy, originating in the mercantile class, which owed its origins to the frontier, compressed into a single sentence is the will-to-power of the wealthy.<sup>1</sup>

Stated thus the philosophy does not appear to advantage...In consequence, much ingenuity in tailoring was necessary to provide it with garments to cover its nakedness. Embroidered with patriotism, loyalty, law and order, it made a very respectable appearance, and when it put on the stately robe of the British Constitution, it was enormously impressive. The Tory theory of the British Constitution may well be regarded as a masterpiece of the gentle art of tailoring.<sup>2</sup>

Parrington's words here could hardly be called respectful, but they help to reveal what he considered a fundamental split in the Tory and Democrat ideas of the purpose of government. What is exhibited by the democratic group and the Tory group as Parrington saw it, is a conflict of interests that will result in a theory of government suitable to the dominant group. The two groups represent lesser property and greater property, and the actual conflict between them at the close of the War of the Revolution was over the form of government that would rule the United States.

Although the problem was political, the forces that were driving to a solution were economic, and were commonly recognized as such. Agrarian and mercantile interests opposed each other openly and shaped their political programs in accordance with their special needs...The struggle between these two schools of thought determined the final outcome of a long and acrimonious contest.<sup>3</sup>

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1. Ibid., p. 197.

2. Loc. cit.

3. Ibid., p. 267



The progress of this struggle was marked by the conflict of Jefferson and Hamilton; which must

be reckoned, in part at least, a conflict between the rival principles of...an agrarian and a capitalistic economy.<sup>1</sup>

The outcome of this struggle will be shown in the discussion on law immediately to come. Here the point has been made that Parrington saw that the forces that shaped American political and governmental theories and forms were economic in purpose. Earlier it was shown that Parrington saw economic implications of a dominant nature in the continental theories brought to America. Here, in politics and governmental form, there is more than implication. There is outright economic determinism in the struggle of two opposing schools of economic thought.

#### Law

Is the origin of law interpreted in the same manner as the origin of politics and government? It would seem corollary to answer yes, for if the purpose of a government is economic in origin, the acts of government would be consistent with its economic interests. At any event, this is Parrington's position.

The Constitution is the basic law of the United States. It was, said Parrington, the first response to the current demand for a safeguard against tyranny, "but it was aimed at the encroachments of agrarian majorities rather than at Tory minorities."<sup>2</sup> The Tory proponents of the Constitution privately

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1. Ibid., p. 346.  
2. Ibid., p. 279.

acknowledged their economic motives and their class interests.<sup>1</sup> The Tory leaders were Hamilton and Madison, and Parrington made it clear that he believed them to be after a basic law that would protect their property rights and aims. Hamilton was summarized in these words:

As the creative organizer of a political state answering the needs of a capitalistic order...he seems the most modern and the most American of our eighteenth century leaders, one to whom our industrialism owes a very great debt, but from whom our democratic liberalism has received nothing.<sup>2</sup>

Opposing the Tory interests in the formation of the Constitution were the agrarian interests, led by Jefferson, who wished to preserve a social structure based on small land holdings. Notice the kind of basic laws Jefferson wanted, according to Parrington, and that, though antithetic to the laws Hamilton wanted, they reflect economic aims:

A free yeomanry he regarded as the backbone of every great people, the producers of the real wealth, the guardians of manly independence; and the number of factory workers measured for him the extent of social disease. It is this Physiocratic conception that explains his bitter hostility to protective tariffs, national banks, funding manipulations, the machinery of credit, and all the agencies of capitalism that Hamilton was skillfully erecting in America.<sup>3</sup>

The Constitution as finally adopted was a compromise between the forces of Federalism and agrarianism.<sup>4</sup> The result of the conflict is a basic law that is economic in origin, if

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1. Ibid., p. 281.  
 2. Ibid., p. 307.  
 3. Ibid., p. 347.  
 4. Ibid., p. 302.

Parrington's earlier premises are correct. Parrington, right or wrong in his theories, is to be understood as having followed Smith and Beard in their conclusions regarding the origin of American law. As conclusion to this, there can be quoted what Parrington wrote of John Marshall, who had considerable to do with fashioning American law after the establishment of the Constitution. The situation was a suit over the validity of contracts. Said Parrington:

The agrarian and capitalistic economies were engaged in a mortal duel; that it should have been a Virginian who saved the day for the Hamiltonians, erecting the old Federalism into the law [investigator's italics] of the land, and conducting by his decisions straight to an augmented, consolidated state, under the shadow of whose power the development of corporate finance might go forward without agrarian let or hindrance, was a bitter brew for the Jeffersonian planters to drink.<sup>1</sup>

#### Economic Determinism of Literature

It has already been indirectly shown to what extent Parrington thought religion and religious movements economic in character. There remains to show how far he carried economic determinism into the field of literature. Use has been made of the following quotation; but its repetition is worthwhile, for it provides a direct, though general, answer to the problem under discussion:

I have chosen to follow the broad path of our political, economic, and social development, rather than the narrow belletristic; and the main divisions of the study have been fixed by forces that are anterior to literary schools and movements, creating the body of ideas from which literary culture eventually springs [investigator's italics].<sup>2</sup>

1. Ibid., Vol. II, p. 26.

2. Ibid., Vol. I, p. iii.

This is not to say that aesthetics or that the spiritual qualities of art do not belong to the art form and to the artist, but that the literary content comes from the vital economic, political and social sources of American ideas, out of which literary culture springs. Parrington here uses the terms "political" and "social" on the same level as the term "economic" and as though they are distinct items. As has been shown, he believed that the dominant character of American politics, government and law is economic. Political and social forces are thus to be considered, though economic in primary character, as forces in their own right. The term "socio-economic" is appropriate to indicate this.

Parrington, it must be noted, is concerned with more than what is ordinarily thought of as literature. For instance, in announcing his subject matter for Volume II, he said:

The literature of this extraordinarily vigorous period [following the American Revolution] we are now to deal with, not in the narrow field of belles lettres alone but in the outlying fields of social and political philosophies.<sup>1</sup>

Further developing this concept of literature Parrington said that our literary historians have ignored the

world of masculine intellects and material struggles. They have sought daintier fare than polemics, and in consequence mediocre verse has obscured political speculation, and poetasters have shouldered aside vigorous creative thinkers.<sup>2</sup>

The term "literature" is to be taken broadly; and broadly these two quotations just used reveal Parrington's socio-

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1. Ibid., Vol. II, p. ix.

2. Ibid., Vol. I, p. vi.

economic point of view.

But how did Parrington apply economic determinism to individual writers? In a discussion of pre-revolutionary literature, Parrington wrote that culture and patriotism kept their eyes on the counting house:

No sooner had business come out for independence than culture swung over; the wit which would gladly have remained loyal applauded the comments of the countinghouse, and the newspaper essay reflected the new patriotic sentiments.<sup>1</sup>

This is general; but of Francis Hopkinson, stated by Parrington to have been a leader of whiggish culture in Philadelphia, it was said that his

Whiggery was probably commercial in origin, a reflection of the economic interests of the merchant class with which he mingled.<sup>2</sup>

Speaking of Dr. Hopkins' The Anarchiad in a chapter entitled "The War of Belles Lettres," Parrington said,

Scarcely another New England satire reflects so sharply the class consciousness that underlay the bitter struggle between agrarianism and capitalism. It is a slashing attack upon agrarian economics and democratic liberalism, a versified echo of the anger of creditors who were fighting the measures of populist legislatures.<sup>3</sup>

And in general of the Hartford Wits, of which Dr. Hopkins was a member, Parrington said that they never sulked when their economic interests were touched.<sup>4</sup>

It might be argued that these men were first of all anything but literary figures. What about the more genuine

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1. Ibid., p. 252.  
 2. Ibid., p. 254.  
 3. Ibid., p. 365.  
 4. Ibid., p. 367.

artists, the romantic figures? Did Parrington believe they could be explained by economic determinism? The romantic movement itself was so conceived:

The grapes from which the wine of romance is vinted ...are rooted in the common earth...There is no more fruitful source of romantic hope than a fluid economics.<sup>1</sup>

The ebullient romanticisms, which in politics, economics, theology, and literature, foresook the homespun past, were the product of a nation obsessed over the opportunity for economic self-exploitation. From this condition emerged,

as naturally as the cock from the mother egg, the spirit of romance, gross and tawdry in vulgar minds, dainty and refined in the more cultivated, but always romance. The days of realism were past...<sup>2</sup>

Now observe what Parrington had to say about individuals assigned to the romantic movement: First Bryant, who is treated as more than a versifier of American scenery:

A trenchant critic of the rising capitalism, delighting in exposing the fallacies of the new economics and in pricking the bladders of political reputations...Bryant was perhaps the most distinguished of the liberals created by the revolutions that were enthroning the middle class in power.<sup>3</sup>

Of Washington Irving:

His cheerful optimism was little more than the optimism of the prosperous.<sup>4</sup>

Of Herman Melville, who was interpreted as an escapist:

When he returned disillusioned from the South Seas, ...when he discovered his transcendental craftsmanship driving on the rocks of economic necessity, when

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1. Ibid., Vol. II, p. iii-iv.

2. Ibid., p. v.

3. Ibid., p. 246.

4. Ibid., p. 208.

the public rejected his mystical dreams and he was inexorably 'damned by dollars', he perforce turned in upon his own broodings and sought solace in Plato.<sup>1</sup>

Of James Fenimore Cooper:

His busy life covered the middle years of the great shift from an aristocratic order to a capitalistic order, and this revolutionary change provided him ample materials for brooding speculation.<sup>2</sup>

The "ideal" seems to have been so dominant an element of the work of such persons as Emerson and Thoreau that one wonders whether or not Parrington included them among those webbed by economic forces. He did. The New England Renaissance, a part of the general romantic movement in America, is itself explained by economic forces: the textile system that had swept over Massachusetts. Out of this arose a new pattern of life; and a new Utopia, approached by way of the industrial revolution, revealed itself. The static order of agricultural ways was shattered, and, said Parrington,

with the social disruption came naturally an intellectual disruption...The result was a long battle of ideas, a fierce struggle between the old deterministic theology and the new romantic philosophy, with the victory slowly inclining to the latter.<sup>3</sup>

The New England Renaissance produced varied classes of writers. Some of them were Anti-slavery militants. Slavery was not destroyed by these men, acting as the New England conscience, but by the economics of free labor.<sup>4</sup> Thittier was Anti-slave. He was a Quaker, whose religion of peace and good will had

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1. Ibid., p. 261.
  2. Ibid., p. 223.
  3. Ibid., p. 318.
  4. Ibid., p. 360.

been nourished by a narrow domestic economy and by social non-conformity.<sup>1</sup> In another group was Emerson, forced to become a critic of American life. He calmly pronounced judgment upon the idols of his time,

upon State Street and Beacon Street, upon Webster and Clay and Douglas, upon Everett and Choate, upon black slavery and white, upon the Mexican War and the Fugitive Slave Bill, upon the stolid poor and the callous rich.<sup>2</sup>

Henry Thoreau, during forty years of exceptional activity, sought to find an economy that would provide a satisfactory life:

Walden is the handbook of an economy that endeavors to refute Adam Smith and transform the round of daily life into something nobler than a mean gospel of plus and minus.<sup>3</sup>

The romantic period in American life came to an end following the defeat of western agrarianism by eastern capitalism.<sup>4</sup> The result of capitalism's victory was an America so crude and strident that a spirit of pessimistic criticism rose in bitter protest. Added to the pessimism created by economic conditions was the pessimism that followed the biological sciences and their apparent definition of man as an automaton. Literary realism took the place of romanticism, and became the speaking agent against the progress of industrialism and crude individualism that eventuated in the standardization of American life. Modern American literature found its leading character-

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1. Ibid., p. 361, Cf.
  2. Ibid., p. 397.
  3. Ibid., p. 400.
  4. Ibid., Vol. III, p. 316.



istic, so Parrington indicates, in this combination of protest and philosophic disillusion:

The mind of the artist is more susceptible to concrete social fact than to abstract physical principle, and the swift centralizing of economics in the eighties and the nineties provided the stimulus for the extraordinary reversal of thought marked by the contrast between Emerson and Dreiser...Dreiser was the first spokesman of a later America once more falling within the shadow of the pessimism that springs from every centralized society shut up within the portals of static economics...<sup>1</sup>

There is another side to this story of socio-economic domination of the significant body of American literature. It should be remembered that Parrington had limited his problem to this characteristic of American thought. His application of the limitation naturally forced him to leave holes in his discussion of American literary writers. There is no difficulty of this sort in Volume I, for the few writers of the period easily slip into Parrington's classification; but in Volume II, Parrington is forced to ignore by under-emphasis writers whose work has had standard recognition for qualities that are distinct from social philosophies and conflicts. Poe, though treated in two pages, was acknowledged to possess aesthetic interest. Longfellow was treated briefly--and gently; but the discussions of Irving, Henry James, Hawthorne, and Holmes, even though complimentary in places, leaves the impression that Parrington thought them to have been weak writers. It may be that they were, but the inference is that their weakness consisted of a failure or a refusal to enter with a degree of

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1. Ibid., p. 319.

firmness and conviction into contemporary social struggles. Harrington found what he could of social implications in the writings of these men, approved, and gave the impression that he felt disappointed because there was no more to say. The following quotations will reveal the attitude. Of Irving:

The industrial revolution might work itself out as it would. The seventeen years he spent abroad on his great pilgrimage were black years for England. Wretchedness and poverty were all about him if he chose to see...But he did not choose to see and his conscience was untroubled. As he idled about the countryside or visited the hospitable manor houses, his eye was caught by the grace of medieval spires...etc.<sup>1</sup>

Of Hawthorne:

He was the extreme and finest expression of the refined alienation from reality that in the end palsied the creative mind of New England. Having consumed his fancies, what remained to feed on?<sup>2</sup>

Of Holmes:

Romantic garments fitted him ill, yet he persisted in trying them on. He even got to like them, and came finally to prefer "The Chambered Nautilus" above his other poems--a strange perversion of taste for a rationalist. "The One-Hoss Shay" is worth a volume of such pretty moralizing.<sup>3</sup>

And of Henry James:

The spirit of Henry James marks the last refinement of the genteel tradition, the completest embodiment of its vague cultural aspirations. All his life he dwelt wistfully on the outside of the realm he wished to be a free citizen of. Did any other professed realist ever remain so persistently aloof from the homely realities of life?...how unlike he is to Sherwood Anderson, an authentic product of the American consciousness!<sup>4</sup>

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1. Ibid., Vol. II, p. 204.
  2. Ibid., p. 450.
  3. Ibid., p. 453.
  4. Ibid., Vol. III, p. 240.

The conclusion to draw from the varied excerpts used above is that Parrington, while aware of obvious exceptions to his rule, believed that literature, like politics, government, law, and religion, carried with it the significant imprint of economic situations. In addition literature is to be thought of as influenced by social forces acting in their own right. Thus in literary movements and in individual writers, the socio-economic character is to be sought by the literary scholar.

#### American Literature and Its Relation to Social Conflict

To Parrington the significant American writers presented and defended programs of a social nature, or else spent a large part of their energies in attacking existing social conditions. This is a natural corollary of the socio-economic principle. The greatest part of Parrington's work that he devoted to literary figures and works was spent discussing the evidence of conflict. When Parrington found a writer who baffled such interpretation, he was forced to present a distorted picture. From artists who were characteristically belletristic or ethical--such as, Irving, Poe, Longfellow, and Hawthorne--he squeezed what was to be found of a social program or gave up with short expositions. Again it should be pointed out that this is more the result of control set by method and theory, rather than the result of Parrington's natural inclination, for as will be shown immediately after the close of this division of the study, Parrington was not unaware of aesthetics and their value.

The basic structure of Parrington's work is the conflict

between liberal and conservative forces. Anyone familiar with the history of the United States is aware of the character of this struggle. Parrington began his discussion of American literature--here the term "literature" has its conventional meaning--with a chapter entitled "Literary Echoes," the reference being to the growing revolutionary spirit among the English colonies:

Clever young men were turning moderns and making ready to wage a new battle of the books.<sup>1</sup>

They took sides, lined up in opposition consciously. John Trumbull and Francis Hopkinson were with the Whigs. Jonathan Odell and Samuel Peters were with the Tory, or loyalist forces. Of Odell's "The American Times," Parrington wrote:

Jefferson, Paine, Morris, Adams, Washington, and a host of others, are shallow creatures, in the judgment of Odell, bereft of reason, void of honor, the very scum of the revolutionary pot...The attack is rankly and grossly partisan, with no saving grace of humor or humanity.<sup>2</sup>

After the successful conclusion of the Revolution, the history of liberalism and reaction continued under a different guise; but literature remained partisan:

To turn from the field of political theory to the realm of polite literature is not to quit the partisan battle-ground. The long struggle between Federalist and Democrat was too bitter and absorbing...not to conscript gentlemen of culture equally with politicians. Every available quill was called to the colors, and a civil war of belles lettres broke out, that exceeded in animosity any other known to our literary history.<sup>3</sup>

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1. Ibid., Vol. I, p. 248.

2. Ibid., p. 259.

3. Ibid., p. 357.

One side in the battle were the Hartford Wits, nearly all of whom were Yale men,

Calvinistic, Federalistic, admirable representatives of the oligarchical upper class of the provincial Connecticut society.<sup>1</sup>

The Wits were partisan rather than intellectual.<sup>2</sup> Opposed to them was the French group, led by Freneau, poet of two revolutions, and Joel Barlow. Freneau championed the cause of democracy, and along with that a score of lesser causes: Unitarianism, deism, anti-slavery, Americanism in education. The poet was deeper in Freneau's spirit than partisanship, but partisanship dominated his age and made his life a stormy one.<sup>3</sup>

Upon moving into the period following the Revolution, the historian comes upon the conflict between the North and the South, treated by Parrington as a conflict of economic systems. The literature of both regions reflected partisanship, conciliatory or violently antagonistic. In the early days of this conflict Caruthers and Kennedy wrote romances that reflected their positions. Of Kennedy, Parrington said,

The satire is a capitalistic counter to the agrarian attack on the rising money power, and it is colored by the chagrin of gentlemen who find themselves displaced by plebeians.<sup>4</sup>

On the frontier rose the Davy Crockett myth. This, Parrington wrote, and denied the possibility of his being in error, was in its later development a deliberate fabrication

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1. Ibid., p. 359.
  2. Ibid., p. 367.
  3. Ibid., pp. 368-380, Cf.
  4. Ibid., Vol. II, p. 55.

in the service of an interest frankly partisan. It was the work of politicians. It was a masterpiece of Whig strategy to gull the simple.<sup>1</sup>

In the North, when the gathering forces of the war of the Rebellion were springing up, literary work was markedly partisan; and even such aloof members of the Brahmin caste as Holmes during this period took part in a conflict: he was an unsparing critic of romantic equalitarianism.<sup>2</sup>

One of the great figures in American literature is Mark Twain. Parrington said that much of Twain's work is critical of the America in which he lived. The Gilded Age, Huckleberry Finn, and The Connecticut Yankee, to mention only the most popular of Twain's work, embody reaction to contemporary economic, political and philosophical ideals. In the instance of the latter, there is hatred for a Christian civilization that pretends to love God while it enslaves the children of God.<sup>3</sup>

With the complete ascension of the middle class to power in America and with the corresponding failure in the aims and hopes of the social idealists who had prayed for an America with a wide base of social justice, a class of critics rose that made necessary a class of defenders of the thing criticized: capitalism. One of the first important literary defenses of capitalism was Hay's The Breadwinners. It is Parrington's opinion that this book is

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1. Ibid., pp. 173-177, Cf.

2. Ibid., p. 456.

3. Ibid., Vol. III, pp. 86-101, Cf.

clearly a partisan defense of economic individualism, an attack upon the rising labor movement, a grotesque satire smeared with an unctuous morality...a perfect expression of the spirit of the upper-class America in those uneasy eighties with their strikes and lock-outs and Haymarket riots.<sup>1</sup>

In the early eighties a reaction against capitalism came from the agrarians in the middle west. Harold Frederic, Joseph Kirkland, and Hamlin Garland were spokesmen. They provided

the first conscious literary reaction to the subjection of agriculture to capitalistic exploitation and it was marked by the bitterness of a decaying order.<sup>2</sup>

Edward Bellamy's Looking Backward is a good example of the role partisanship can take in literary form. It is an advocate of a certain sort of society, and it is so interpreted by Professor Parrington.<sup>3</sup>

The last words in Parrington's manuscript reveal his concept of how American literature entered into social conflict.

Oddly enough it was in the West that the new spirit first expressed itself most adequately;...Frank Norris in California, Dreiser in Indiana, Sherwood Anderson in Ohio, Masters and Sandburg and Vachel Lindsey in Illinois, were the spokesmen of the resentment welling up in the American heart at the loss of the older freedom and individual dignity.<sup>4</sup>

These men were the opponents or proponents of capitalism and its methods. They illustrate for Parrington the essential element in the social relationships between the American artist

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1. Ibid., p. 174.
  2. Ibid., p. 288.
  3. Ibid., p. 315.
  4. Ibid., p. 319.

and his environment. The individual artist, such as Freneau, may have wished to spend his time searching for and contemplating beauty, but economic conditions led him into a fight in which art was the weapon. Only such rare individuals as Poe could stand in steadfast, though bitter solitude against the pressure of environment; but not even Poe, Parrington said, could escape being violently damned and emotionally lost in an economics that has had no time for loveliness, and if he is to be understood, he must be studied by the psychologist and by the aesthetic critic.<sup>1</sup>

#### Parrington and Aesthetics

One of the things that strikes a reader of Main Currents in American Thought is the fact that Parrington felt the tug of aesthetics. It is not that he said so, but that the tug was communicated to his pen. Often he took the aesthetic critic to task, scolding him for our failure to understand Bryant, saying that the belletristic impatience of any incursion into matters of fact is to blame.<sup>2</sup> He said in another place that an exaggerated regard for esthetic values has been the handicap of genteel tradition.<sup>3</sup> Yet one comes upon such remarks as the following about Mrs. Stowe without a sense of inconsistency, for they come from a natural instinct in Parrington's heart:

Richly endowed though she was her work has suffered the fate that pursues those who forget that beauty alone survives after emotion subsides.<sup>4</sup>

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1. Ibid., Vol. II, pp. 58-59.
  2. Ibid., p. 239.
  3. Ibid., Vol. I, p. vi.
  4. Ibid., Vol. II, p. 378.



Certainly it was not on the basis of beauty that Parrington undertook to evaluate American thought and literature, but rather on the basis of Jeffersonian liberalism. In such sympathetic statements as the following about Freneau one sees again the tug of aesthetics on Parrington:

After all, the poet in Freneau was deeper than the partisan...In moments of release from cares he found solace in the poetry that welled up from the unembittered depths of a rich and generous nature.<sup>1</sup>

Of Cabell, Professor Parrington wrote in an essay that seems to this writer primarily aesthetic appreciation and to illustrate Parrington's tendency in the aesthetic direction, this line:

I have called Mr. Cabell a poet, and the justification lies in his persistent idealization of life in terms of beauty.<sup>2</sup>

And this of the same "poet":

The practical, the conventional, are alien to the deeper reality which is shadowed forth by emotions and dreams; which refuses to disclose itself nakedly, but hides behind symbols, haunting the mind even while one is pottering among inconsequentials.<sup>3</sup>

Form in art, or aesthetics, is undoubtedly more than a boundary circumscribing factual content. It is an attempt by the use of symbols and shapes to disclose the reality that transcends the practical and the conventional. When Parrington directs his attention to this, he is being the aesthetic critic. The aesthetic undercurrent runs through all of Parrington's work.

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1. Ibid., Vol. I, p. 380.  
 2. Ibid., Vol. III, p. 337.  
 3. Ibid., p. 339.

Parrington's Liberalism

Parrington's liberalism is important because it gave the angle to his critical inclination.

Professor Parrington was a Jeffersonian democrat;<sup>1</sup> and to Parrington, Jefferson, of all the great thinkers of the constitutional period, was the most vital and suggestive, the one to whom later generations could return most hopefully.<sup>2</sup> This means that Parrington's liberal roots go back to the French Revolution and the humanitarian ideals that inspired it.

Jefferson was an agrarian, "the most original and native of the political leaders of the time."<sup>3</sup>

Far more completely than any other American of his generation he embodied the idealisms of the great revolution--its faith in human nature, its economic individualism, its conviction that here in America, through the instrumentality of political democracy, the lot of the common man should somehow be made better.<sup>4</sup>

Jefferson found his ideals in the "back-to-nature" philosophy with its "corollary of agrarian economics."<sup>5</sup> He substituted the "pursuit of happiness" for "property." He sought decentralization of government and a decentralized system of economics based on small land holdings. He believed that centralized economics brought centralized political control with a corresponding political tyranny. He was physiocratic in his hatred of Federalistic economic machinery: tariffs, banks,

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1. Ibid., Vol. I, p. 1.

2. Ibid., p. 356.

3. Ibid., p. 342.

4. Ibid., p. 343.

5. Loc. cit.

credits, funding manipulations. He conceived the truly productive form of labor to be agricultural. Bankers, manufacturers, and middlemen were thought to be sterile. Government, he believed, is inherently at war with natural freedom: thus government should be kept at a minimum and should be terminable.<sup>1</sup>

The social idealism of the Jeffersonians, according to Parrington, did not suffer in a comparison with the social idealism of the Hamiltonians. Parrington wrote:

It is a contrast in social culture, in humane ideals, in interpretations of the native genius of America; and in the comparison it is not the Virginia Republican who suffers.<sup>2</sup>

It is this spirit and this philosophy that animated Parrington. Yet he was not optimistic. He was nearly ready to concede defeat, and at times the bitterness of frustration entered his words in cutting complaint against the superior power of the economic forces that created Federalism in America and gave it the victory over Jeffersonianism. He said of Thomas Paine:

Like all idealists he made the mistake of underestimating the defensive strength of vested interests, and their skill in arousing the mob prejudice. His thousands of followers among the disfranchised poor could not protect his reputation against the attacks of the rich and powerful. Although reason may "make its own way," it makes its way with wearisome slowness and at unreasonable cost.<sup>3</sup>

And speaking of slavery, he wrote,

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1. Ibid., Vol. II, pp. 10-14, Cf.
  2. Ibid., p. 19.
  3. Ibid., Vol. I, p. 341.

After the Emancipation Proclamation came the Fourteenth Amendment, and out of that came the triumphant gospel of "due process of law." The devil understands the ways of the world too well to become discouraged at a temporary set-back, for if righteousness succeeds in breaking the bonds that bind a generation, he knows that the market place carries an ample stock of new cords to replace those that are broken.<sup>1</sup>

And of Thoreau, these pessimistic words reveal the bitterness that at times pervaded Parrington's soul:

He was the completest embodiment of the laissez-faire reaction against a regimented social order, the severest critic of the lower economics that frustrate the dreams of human freedom. He was fortunate in dying before the age of exploitation had choked his river with its weeds; fortunate in not foreseeing how remote is that future of free men on which his hopes were fixed.<sup>2</sup>

Part of Parrington's pessimism can be laid to the psychology of the individual who makes up the masses. Pessimism was in part his reaction to mechanistic science. Where does political equality and even ultimate human perfection come into a society that is made up of biological unequals and of low-grade automatons?

If the mass--the raw materials of democracy--never rises much above sex appeals and belly needs, surely it is poor stuff to try to work up into an excellent civilization, and the dreams of the social idealist who forecasts a glorious democratic future are about as substantial as moonshine. It is a discouraging essay.<sup>3</sup>

The intellectual history of American liberalism, Parrington said, covering three hundred years, has manifested three phases. It started with Calvinistic pessimism, went into romantic optimism, and has now embraced mechanistic pessimism. It was a

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1. Ibid., Vol. II, pp. 360-361.

2. Ibid., p. 413.

3. Ibid., Vol. III, p. 413.

sorry trip, but is the end as now known the actual finish of the adventures of liberalism attempting to fashion a new society out of a new, virgin world? This much is clear:

An industrialized society is reshaping the psychology fashioned by an agrarian world; the passion for liberty is lessening and the individual, in the presence of creature comforts, is being dwarfed; the drift of centralization is shaping its inevitable tyrannies to bind us with. Whether the quick concern for human rights, that was the noble bequest of our fathers who had drunk of the waters of French romantic faith, will be carried over into the future, to unhorse the machine that now rides men and to leaven the sodden mass that is industrial America, is a question to which the gods as yet have given no answer. Yet it is not without hope that intelligent America is in revolt. The artist is in revolt, the intellectual is in revolt, the conscience of America is in revolt.<sup>1</sup>

Though Parrington's book is a history of the defeats of liberalism, the lesson is one of hope. The years since Parrington died would surely have disturbed him, but perhaps he would have seen them with the long view and have found comfort in the thunder of attack and counter attack that terrifies the world. All is not lost until hope is gone, and in spite of his bitterness Parrington hoped. He could not have written Main Currents in American Thought merely as the burial ground of his Jeffersonian liberalism.

#### Estimate of Parrington's Critical Position

The estimate of Parrington's critical position consists of two parts. The first of these is an estimate of Parrington's rank among his colleagues. This can be ascertained by

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1. Ibid., p. xx.

examining the reviews written of Main Currents in American Thought and by gathering comments from acknowledgments or from references in books on literature. The second estimate is concerned with the logical validity of the philosophical concept of economic determinism of ideas. There seems to have been no such analysis applied to Parrington's work. The investigator will undertake to state the factors that enter the problem. It is to be understood that his statements are expressions of his personal opinion.

#### Parrington's Rank Among His Colleagues

The first two volumes of Main Currents in American Thought appeared early in 1927. The reviews, though at times adversely critical in matters of style, were complimentary. The following excerpts reveal how Parrington's work was received: Carl Van Doren in the New York Herald Tribune wrote,

The influential American writers are individually considered with freshness and brilliance. But the treatment as a whole goes decidedly beyond most literary history.<sup>1</sup>

W. Brown in the Canadian Historical Review wrote,

Scant attention is given to the discussion of form, and writers whose literary merit would scarcely justify passing notice are given a place because of their importance in moulding or handing on ideas. Canadian readers will find here much valuable comment on American influences which have affected Canadian history, and on ideas which have run a more or less similar course in Canada and the United States. The author's style is pungent and clear, although nothing would have been lost had he more often restrained his love of polysyllables.<sup>2</sup>

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1. Van Doren, C., New York Herald Tribune: Books, May 1, 1927, p. 5.
  2. Brown, W., Canadian Historical Review, Sept., 1927, Vol. 8, p. 269.

Helen Houston in the Independent wrote,

This is by no means a new subject, but it takes on new life under a vivid imagination, a lively sympathy, a well-stored mind, and a graceful and forceful use of English.<sup>1</sup>

C. P. Fadiman in the Literary Review wrote, after his summary of Main Currents in American Thought,

This skeleton summary gives no hint of the richness of the book, its evocation of a host of minor figures, its rediscoveries of lost literary gold mines, the meticulousness of its formal pattern. Consequently criticism may seem captious. Yet one can hardly refrain from comment on a few confusing ambiguities...But these are minor objections to a work which offers so sweeping yet meticulous an interpretation of our America; whose sober and chaste prose (not always as concise as it might be) rounds out half a hundred representative Americans; which, like Dr. Beard's history, consummates a critical movement and indicates a thousand paths for future interpreters.<sup>2</sup>

C. A. Beard wrote in the Nation,

In carrying out his project he has written a truly significant book; according to the signs on every hand, a work that promises to be epoch-making, sending exhilarating gusts through the deadly miasma of academic criticism.<sup>3</sup>

P. H. Boynton in the New Republic wrote,

On the whole, he has shown a surprising disregard for the importance of the frontier as introduced into history by P. J. Turner...Yet...Mr. Parrington's undertaking is an impressive one, impressively carried out through two of the announced volumes. It does not need current report to reveal that it has been the work of years. No book of such substance and such sustained quality could have been turned out in short order or under high pressure...It takes its place worthily in the ranks of the various broad surveys of history, philosophy, science, religion and literature which are a significant sign of the times.<sup>4</sup>

A reviewer in the New York Times wrote,

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1. Houston, H., Independent, Oct., 1927, Vol. 119, p. 412.
  2. Fadiman, C. P., Literary Review, April 30, 1927, p. 2.
  3. Beard, C. A., Nation, May 18, 1927, Vol. 124, p. 560.
  4. Boynton, P. H., New Republic, July 6, 1927, Vol. 51, p. 181.

Professor Parrington's volumes form an admirable supplement to the Beards' work. It is much more exhaustive in its treatment of the Colonial period and in its discussion of the ideas which were carried to this country from abroad. The outstanding contribution of 'The Rise of American Civilization' is its interpretation of the economic forces which have created the American of today; Professor Parrington, while not undervaluing the idea of economic determinism, has given fuller consideration to political theory as such, and has made a much wider and more thorough examination of general cultural ideas as expressed in our literature.<sup>1</sup>

An unsigned review in Outlook contains this statement:

Here is fresh and original interpretation of the more influential tendencies in American thought and sentiment from colonial days to the outbreak of the Civil War. Though professedly written from a Jeffersonian standpoint, the real attitude is ultra-modern, and the text indubitably dates itself as post-war.<sup>2</sup>

K. B. Murdock in the Yale Review wrote,

Main Currents in American Thought will interest students of history; it should awake historians of American literature to the possibilities in a new method of approach; and to all its readers it will bring a generally accurate tracing of significant lines in the growth of American ideas and a series of valuable brief discussions of certain men of letters.<sup>3</sup>

And H. S. Canby wrote in the Saturday Review of Literature,

This is a work of the first importance, lucid, comprehensive, accurate as sound scholarship should be, and also challenging, original in its thinking, shrewd, and sometimes brilliant. It is the book which historians and critics of American literature have been waiting and hoping for.<sup>4</sup>

When the third volume of Parrington's work appeared in 1930, reviews greeted it with approbation. Carl Van Doren wrote in the New York Herald Tribune.

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1. Unsigned, New York Times: Books, May 1, 1927, p. 3.
  2. Unsigned, Outlook, July 27, 1927, Vol. 146, p. 418.
  3. Murdock, K. B., Yale Review, Jan., 1928, Vol. 17, p. 382.
  4. Canby, H. S., Saturday Review of Literature, June 25, 1927, Vol. 3, p. 925.



If he had lived to finish this third volume it would have been the best treatment of these matters ever written.<sup>1</sup>

E. F. Brown in Current History wrote,

One may well regret that the author did not live to complete his great study of American thought, but even in its present form it is a stimulating and valuable contribution towards an evaluation of American intellectual history.<sup>2</sup>

J. D. A. in the New York Times wrote,

Professor Parrington's work will stand unquestionably as a vital and original contribution to our cultural history. No critic, it may be ventured, can henceforth work in the same field without debt to the author.<sup>3</sup>

Harry Hansen in the New York World wrote,

Unfortunately it is fragmentary, and even the completed essays lack the convincing character of those in the first volumes. But while not the capstone to his life work, this book reveals how much American criticism lost by Parrington's early death.<sup>4</sup>

And in Survey Leon Whipple wrote,

Parrington in these three volumes offers the largest view of American culture we possess. His criticism is informed and in perspective. He is no respecter of persons, old or new. The view he urges is perhaps too predominantly economic; he was alien in thought to our modern psychology of individuals. But he had scope--and we need scope!<sup>5</sup>

Several judgments were discovered in the books examined for traces of Parrington's influence. Such judgments are useful in arriving at a decision regarding Parrington's rank among his colleagues. Percy H. Boynton, in Literature and American Life, remarked that Parrington was the most substantial historian of the whole course of American letters.<sup>6</sup> Reuben Post Halleck, in

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1. Van Doren, C., New York Herald Tribune: Books, Nov. 30, 1930, p. 4.

2. Brown, E. F., Current History, Dec., 1930, Vol. 33, p. 10.

3. J.D.A., New York Times: Books, Nov. 9, 1930, p. 1.

4. Hansen, H., New York World, Oct. 23, 1930, p. 14.

5. Whipple, L., Survey, Jan. 1, 1931, Vol. 65, p. 396.

6. Boynton, P. H., Literature and American Life, p. 71.

The Romance of American Literature, wrote that only recently and through the work of Parrington has it become possible to classify American authors in a new, simple, and more logical way: by the dominant movements of an age.<sup>1</sup> Russell Blankenship wrote in American Literature as an Expression of the National Mind that Parrington's work was "monumental."<sup>2</sup> John Macy, editor of American Writers on American Literature, wrote in his preface that "the best work by one man is Vernon Louis Parrington's Main Currents in American Thought...He was scholar and teacher."<sup>3</sup>

An examination of these remarks and excerpts makes the following conclusion possible: Parrington was accepted by his colleagues with only minor reservation. He was criticized for occasional inaccuracy, for occasional ambiguity, and for over-emphasis of his point of view; but the main tenor of all the criticism was to accept his work as a brilliantly written, valuable contribution to the history of American culture.

#### An Estimate of the Principle of Economic Determinism of Thought

In estimating Parrington's position on the principle of economic determinism of thought it should be kept in mind that Parrington did not exclude aesthetics from a complete picture of literary art. What he actually believed concerning economic determinism is not clear. He wrote, however, with a fairly consistent economic point of view; and he asserted that socio-e-

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1. Halleck, R. P., The Romance of American Literature, p. 111.
  2. Blankenship, R., American Literature as an Expression of the American Mind, p. viii.
  3. Macy, J., American Writers on American Literature, p. xvi.

conomic forces were the substructure out of which literature and literary movements spring.<sup>1</sup> In another place he wrote that he held no brief for a strict application of economic determinism;<sup>2</sup> yet Blankenship, who knew Parrington, has written that Parrington was "frankly a liberal and an economic determinist."<sup>3</sup> The following estimate of the principle of economic determinism is therefore made with this uncertainty in mind, and the principle is treated as an abstraction rather than as a specific Parringtonian tenet.

The principle of economic determinism of ideas holds that ideologies find their primary creative forces in economic situations. This is to say that thought is not, even in part, a creative function of the mind, and that it is created only by economic factors outside the mind. Probably most modern thinkers are willing to say that economic forces explain a considerable element of social and human phenomena; but by no means is everyone willing to allow economic determinism to hold the absolute position frequently claimed for it. To me the dogma of absolutism is illogical. To say that economic forces are the primary source of thought is to fall into the error of oversimplification. It is to draw a sharp line where lines are vague. It is to ignore factors hard to explain, simply by refusing to consider them. It is to state as a fact something that has never yet been satisfactorily demonstrated in any other

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1. Parrington, Vol. I, p. 111.

2. Ibid., Vol. III, p. xx.

3. Blankenship, R., Nation, Vol. 129, p. 142.

field of thought: that a first cause is known.

Are there no non-economic forces that might influence the creation of thought? Are there no thoughts that require other than an economic explanation?

Economic forces themselves are meaningless except in terms of a society or of an individual. To leave out the individual, who is the ultimate unit of social life, who really is the mechanism responding to stimuli, will result in distortion of philosophic concepts--unless it is true that the individual is absolutely unable to provide for modification of responses. Even granting that all the external stimuli which produce thought are economic, which I do not, it still seems to me that the individual modifies the responses. There appear to be non-economic elements in personality, and that this would make the total response of the individual only partly economic in character.

The human will and the ideal goal of the will are strong elements conditioning response to stimuli. Not even Marx and Engels denied the existence of individual will power. Their claim was that no single will could reach its goal because of interference by other wills. The goal actually reached would necessarily be a resultant of all wills acting within the sphere of interest. Yet obviously the goal is influenced by human will.

An individual is a complex system of instincts upon which a superstructure has been raised. In no case, however, does it seem to me that the individual may be explained by isolating and tagging the instincts and the elements of the super-

structure. The whole system of items forms a self. A response by any one of the mechanisms of the system will meet the critical judgment of the self and be found satisfactory or not on a basis of the self's interests, and not on a basis of the instinct responding. The interest of the self is an outgrowth of the self's interpretation of values of its own good. As the self develops its will, or its consciousness of the values that satisfy the will, it learns to set up objective standards of all values that eventually may become an ideal, material or abstract, toward which the individual strives. When this has happened, the individual has a policy which sets the standard upon which the will chooses its responses and judges the amount of satisfaction gained.

The implication of this system of instincts controlled by a will conscious of its policies is that there is a fixed element in human nature that helps determine what the response to a stimulus will be. The whole story does not reside in the nature of the stimulus. The individual, faced by economic situations, and sensitive to the demands of the will, may very well add to his response something that is not owed to the economic situations. It is my belief that the individual does add to his responses. Put into generalization this means that any explanation of an institution or ideology that leaves man out is only a partial explanation. There are plausible forces in man that should be considered.

The same general conclusion may be reached by examining the character of man's needs. Are all needs economic in charac-

ter? It seems to me that to say man's wants and the possible objects of satisfaction are all economic is to take too narrow a view of man himself. It is, of course, recognition of the obvious to say that a great deal of man and his activities is concerned with the economic. The business of keeping alive is largely that. But there are other factors that enter into man, even into his keeping alive. Because of the fact that these factors appear always to have been part of human nature, it seems to me that we may call them innate. The human need to satisfy such interests as those of sex, rhythm, simplicity, harmony, and sociability is probably as potent as the need to satisfy economic interests; and if need and the objects that satisfy the need are able to give the creative impulse to thought, it is not logical to exclude all needs except the economic when stating the theory.

Sex and harmony are extremely powerful elements in a system of human wants. The literature of sex, implying as it does a body of thought created to make the literature, can not be explained in all of its characteristics by economic factors. There is something in it that belongs only to the need and to the objects of satisfaction. As for harmony, it, with its clear connection with rhythm, simplicity, beauty, and other aesthetic elements, would appear to be part of the root of artistic and intellectual expression. It is not only because of a future good to humanity that an individual seeks to discover the laws of the universe and to find in them the controlling principles of human activity. There is in man the need to discover harmony

and meaning for the sake of the experience of discovery as well as for the sake of better control of environment. The response that follows an experience with intellectual beauty is valuable in itself; and it is not illogical to wonder whether the theory of economic determinism, a magnificent conception, finds its greatest source in man's need for experience in harmony, rather than entirely in his need to act in economic terms. Mathematics quite likely rises from man's quest for intellectual beauty fully as much as it rises from economic necessity. A work of scholarship, like a work of art, is undoubtedly in part an effort to reach the satisfactory glow that comes from having reduced a problem to its principles. The principles do not need to be applied in order to produce the glow.

Surely it is a narrow view of human nature that says its only needs are economic. Do thoughts of death rise only out of the bread and butter conditions of life? Is there not an inescapable element of innate curiosity, and of poignancy at having to say farewell to a state of being which in the main is satisfactory and which the poet, or thinker, would like to keep for non-economic values. The literature of death, like that involving sex, forms so large a portion of human culture that it can not be ignored by a theory accounting for the origin of ideas. Economic determinism does not appear to explain such a literature.

A specific example of ideas that do not have a complete explanation in economics may help. It has never been demonstrated just how the mind works, but a common sense understand-

ing of the principle of economic determinism does not show any way to account for the whole of the following poem by George Santayana, which, as the chance has fallen, is itself a statement of how ideas originate:

O world, thou chooshest not the better part!  
 It is not wisdom to be only wise,  
 And on the inward vision close the eyes,  
 But it is wisdom to believe the heart.  
 Columbus found a world, and had no chart,  
 Save one that faith deciphered in the skies;  
 To trust the soul's invincible surmise  
 was all his science and his only art.  
 Our knowledge is a torch of smoky pine  
 That lights the pathway but one step ahead  
 Across a void of mystery and dread.  
 Bid, then, the tender light of faith to shine  
 By which alone the mortal heart is led  
 Unto the thinking of the thought divine.<sup>1</sup>

The material of this poem rises from human need, but the need does not seem to have an economic source. Without intending to open the debate over the origin of the spiritual qualities in humanity, the need defined by Santayana's poem transcends factual reality and rises from the human desire to set up explanations that will give order to the complexity of the universe. As I have said, order is more than an economic necessity in successful living. It seems to me to be the essence of being alive.

The conclusion to these speculative inferences would seem to be that the principle of economic determinism does not hold the absolute position frequently claimed for it. It is undoubtedly an explanation of many phenomena, but it does not have a demonstrated claim as a total explanation of all phe-

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1. Santayana, George, "O World, Thou Chooshest Not the Better Part." Taken from L. Untermeyer, Modern American Poetry, p. 136.



nomena. Man apparently has non-economic characteristics which modify all of his relationships with his environment, including the subject matter of his literary arts.

Parrington was safe when he disclaimed a rigid economic determinism at work on American literature. But he inevitably appears to give a one-sided interpretation to his subject by excluding the aesthetic from his discussion. As a consequence, and as he well knew, he must be read as presenting to the scholar's attention one view of American thought. It is a view that must be corrected for perspective by application of different angles of sight.

#### Summary

The documentary exposition of Parrington's tenets has developed eight topics. The chief effort has been to find the philosophic concepts that underlie the plan of Main Currents in American Thought.

It was Parrington's general intention to discuss American thought not as a problem in belles lettres, but as rising from social, political, and economic sources. As an additional element in his intentions was the use of Jeffersonian liberalism as a criterion of value.

Parrington believed that American thought owed its primary source to two sets of forces: (1) European ideals and movements imported to America, and (2) a native economics. It was Parrington's concept that these forces were dominately economic in the forms that reached America. This economic character

left its imprint on American thought, having worked through such institutions as politics, government, and law. A further development of Parrington's socio-economic principle was found in his concept that American thought has been in a large part concerned in the conflicts that have characterized American history, American thought being partisan and critical.

In spite of Parrington's interest in socio-economic determinism there is in his work an under-current of the aesthetic, indicating that he was not completely comfortable within the limitations he had set for his task. Even within his philosophy of Jeffersonian liberalism, he was not too well at ease, for his liberalism was strongly marked with pessimism.

Main Currents in American Thought met with approval in America; and Parrington, though his book is not a complete picture of American thought, is given by his colleagues and his reviewers an important rank as an historian. His theory deals with an important segment of intellectual activity, its causes and its history. He adds a necessary element in the total explanation of American culture.

## PART IV

### PARRINGTON'S INFLUENCE

The purpose of this section of the dissertation is to make an estimate of Parrington's influence on literary critics and historians. Specifically this means an examination of critical and historical work following the publication of Main Currents in American Thought in 1927. There is an imponderable amount of influence that results from the use of Parrington's work in college class rooms, but it is inadvisable to attempt an estimate of this.<sup>1</sup> The influence certainly exists, however, for Main Currents in American Thought is now a standard bibliographical item in its field.

Parrington's influence on critics and historians is of two kinds: he has directly influenced the points of view of critical and historical writers; and he is used as an authoritative reference. To reach this conclusion bibliographies on literature and criticism were searched for book titles issued since 1927. The books themselves were examined for assignable traces of Parrington's work. The following books exhibit such traces:

1. J. E. Flitcroft, Outline Studies in American Literature, 1930.

The author stated, while acknowledging the sources upon which he drew, "I have also made occasional use of Parrington..."<sup>2</sup>

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1. In this connection the investigator would like to say that Parrington's own classes have had influence. The investigator knows several of Parrington's students. Most of them are "left wing," and it is the belief of some of them that Parrington increased this tendency.
  2. Flitcroft, J. E., Outline Studies in American Literature, p. iv.

There seems to have been no use made of the point of view employed by Parrington. This is primarily a school text.

2. Russell Blankenship, American Literature as an Expression of the National Mind, 1931. This book received great inspiration from Parrington. The author acknowledged three sources, and said, "The second is the monumental work by Vernon Louis Parrington on Main Currents in American Thought."<sup>1</sup> The author further stated that in the course of this task "a brief association with the late Vernon Louis Parrington as instructor and friend was by far the strongest and most beneficial influence that he received. The indebtedness to Professor Parrington goes far beyond the limits indicated in either the preface or the body of this book."<sup>2</sup>

The plan of Blankenship's book, although different in arrangement, parallels Parrington's in general topic and point of view. Parrington's influence appears even in the section titles. (Compare the sections on New England.) This is a college text.

3. Norman Foerster, American Poetry and Prose, 1934. This college anthology has considerable of Parrington's influence. Foerster uses the same divisions of the history of American literature that Parrington used: "Colonial Mind"; "Romantic Movement"; "Realistic Movement." The introductions to each section draw upon Parrington for authority. The explanation given of the Puritan mind is the same as Parrington gave:

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1. Blankenship, R., American Literature, p. vii.  
 2. Ibid., p. x.

"America furnished a geography. Europe sent people and ideas:" Puritanism, English independency, French romantic theories.<sup>1</sup> Parrington is quoted in the explanation of these contributions.<sup>2</sup> Parrington's phrase "Transcendental economist" applied to Thoreau is similarly applied by Foerster.<sup>3</sup> The Parrington phrase "Greek democracy," applied to the South, is used by Foerster. Foerster quoted Parrington on the frontier, using the phrase "preemption, exploitation, progress."<sup>4</sup> Speaking of the realistic revolt, Foerster quoted Parrington's summary of the causes and then spoke his own and identical opinion: "Economic disillusionment doubtless came first; social and biologic discontent followed on its heels. Mechanism, Russian naturalism, Marxian social science, and later Freudian psychology united to prick the bubble of national optimism and to call for a re-appraisal of surroundings."<sup>5</sup> Foerster did not insist on the socio-economic interpretation of American literature as the only, or best one. He added the socio-economic to belleslettres.

4. Reuben Post Halleck, The Romance of American Literature, 1934. The author wrote, "It has only recently become possible through the studies of Vernon L. Parrington and other scholars, to classify American authors in a new, simple, and more logical way."<sup>6</sup> The method is to use the dominant move-

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1. Foerster, N., American Prose and Poetry, p. 5, Cf.  
 2. Ibid., p. 6.  
 3. Ibid., p. 275.  
 4. Ibid., p. 981.  
 5. Ibid., p. 983.  
 6. Halleck, R. P., The Romance of American Literature, p. 11.

ments of an age as the focal point.<sup>1</sup> The author paid some attention to politics. His unit VII, "Transition", seems Parringtonian in its analysis of the influences promoting change: (1) the Civil War; (2) new western frontiers; (3) the new industrial revolution. The book is a secondary school text.

5. Harry Hartwick, The Foregrounds of American Fiction, 1934. The author of the foreword, H. H. Clark, wrote that Hartwick's purpose has been to explain recent novels "in relation to their whole social, economic, religious, philosophic, and literary environment."<sup>2</sup> The Parrington influence seems implicit. The book devotes considerable space to backgrounds, but it does not keep to a narrow, or single, point of view in its interpretations. Parrington is quoted on determinism.<sup>3</sup>
6. James McDonald Miller, An Outline of American Literature, 1934. This is a college text, an outline emphasizing all the social elements used by Parrington, plus belles lettres. The master idea is that the literature given a place in the book should reveal some phase of the national mind.<sup>4</sup> Parrington is cited in the general bibliography and in many of the specific bibliographies. An outline of the points one must appreciate in order to understand American literature reveals Miller's similarity to Parrington. The points fol-

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1. Ibid., p. 111.

2. Hartwick, H., The Foregrounds of American Fiction, p. vi.

3. Ibid., p. 7.

4. Miller, J. M., An Outline of American Literature, p. 1.

low: (1) the Puritan struggle in New England; (2) the mercantile and industrial ideas of the Middle East; (3) the plantation ideas of the South; and (4) the independent individualism of the frontier.<sup>1</sup> These points seem implicitly Parringtonian in their relationships.

7. Dudley C. Gordon, V. R. King, and William W. Lyman, Today's Literature, 1935. This is an anthology. Of interest is a printed essay taken from Volume II of Main Currents in American Thought: "Liberalism and the Social Conscience." This is the only Parrington selection the investigator discovered in an anthology.<sup>2</sup>
8. Granville Hicks, The Great Tradition, 1935. Hicks wrote, "I am particularly indebted to...V. L. Parrington's Main Currents in American Thought, especially Volume III, 'The Beginnings of Critical Realism.'"<sup>3</sup> Hicks takes the same general attitude toward the creative forces that shaped American literature as Parrington took, and accepted the theory that American literature is traditionally critical of social institutions.<sup>4</sup> It seems to this investigator that Marx is responsible for Hicks' theories and that Parrington is the source of factual material.
9. F. L. Pattee, The First Century of American Literature, 1935. This book contains an occasional reference to Parrington, but any other influence is vague.<sup>5</sup>

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1. Ibid., p. 37.

2. Gordon, King, Lyman, Today's Literature, p. 984.

3. Hicks, G., The Great Tradition, p. 331.

4. Ibid., p. 329.

5. Pattee, F. L., The First Century. Seepp. 258 and 297.

10. Charles Angoff, A literary History of the American People, 1936. This is a scholarly exposition with many references to Parrington, some in disagreement,<sup>1</sup> but the most in deep approval.<sup>2</sup>
11. Percy H. Boynton, Literature and American Life, 1936. This is another of the scholarly expositions that make considerable reference to Parrington's work. Boynton referred to Parrington as an insistent interpreter of American thought in terms of political theory.<sup>3</sup> He called Parrington the most substantial historian of the whole course of American letters.<sup>4</sup> There were many such references, but there were no attempts to use Parrington's point of view as a guiding principle.
12. Jay B. Hubbell, American Life in Literature, 1936. This is an anthology. Whatever influence Parrington had here is as an authority.
13. D. Nutes, H.C. Poolcy, E. Greenlaw, Literature and Life, 1936. There is in this high school text much emphasis on the social background. The three editors wrote in the preface that their book is "founded upon the truth that literature arises out of the experience of the author and the life of the people and that it consequently interprets some aspect or quality of the age in which the author lived. The selections are accordingly arranged to represent the

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1. Angoff, C. A Literary History, Vol. I, p. 331

2. Ibid., p. 210, and Vol. II, p. 58.

3. Boynton, P. H., Literature and American Life, p. 10.

4. Ibid., p. 71.



development of American civilization, to trace the unity of spirit and shifting interests."<sup>1</sup>

14. W. F. Taylor, A History of American Letters, 1936. Mr. Taylor wrote, "I have attempted to tell, clearly and impartially, the story of our literature in its historical developments, and its relation to the cultural forces out of which it grew."<sup>2</sup> Considerable space was given to the economic forces, and the two section titles below attest to the point of view that inspired them: "Romantic Art in an Agrarian Republic;"<sup>3</sup> and "Toward Realistic Art in an Urban Industrialism."<sup>4</sup>
15. R. Blankenship, R. L. Lyman, H. C. Hill, American Literature, 1937. As one would expect in a book with Blankenship as an editor, there is some Parrington influence in this, a high school text. The book embodies two aims: (1) to reveal the social significance of literature, (2) to reveal the aesthetic. "All in all," Blankenship wrote in the foreword, "American literature closely reflects and interprets American life."<sup>5</sup> The book includes a section on the frontier and one on how America made a living.
16. H. C. Schweikert, R. B. Inglis, J. Gehlman, N. Foerster, Adventures in American Literature, 1937. This book, also a high school text, has remarked, as preface, that "a new

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1. Nutes, Pooley, Greenlaw, Literature and Life, p. vi.  
 2. Taylor, W. F., A History of American Letters, p. v.  
 3. Ibid., p. 75.  
 4. Ibid., p. 241.  
 5. Blankenship, Lyman, Hill, American Literature, p. xi.

section, 'The Growth of the American Spirit,' reveals the development of the American tradition in its social, political, and economic aspects."<sup>1</sup> A general statement of a similar nature follows on a later page: "The history of American literature has been entirely rewritten...It is not an encyclopedia of names and dates, but a readable story of political, social, and economic developments which helped to produce characteristic American literature."<sup>2</sup>

17. H. R. Warfel, R. H. Gabriel, S. T. Williams, The American Mind, 1937. The American Mind is an anthology based in part on a socio-economic interpretation of American thought. The illustrations and the announced purpose of the authors indicates that literature is defined in Parringtonian fashion: "This book exhibits, for the first time in American literature, the writings of Americans for the purpose of defining and illustrating American literary progress in relation to American intellectual progress...Here are presented, in addition to an adequate collection of acknowledged masterpieces, such further materials as will clarify changing American concepts of religion, political independence, democracy, economics, humanitarian striving, education, and literary theory."<sup>3</sup> Parrington's book has a constant place in the bibliographies of this work. The introductions to each section reveal the sociological interest of the authors,

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1. Schweikert, Inglis, Gehlman, Foerster, Adventures in American Literature, p. iii.  
 2. Ibid., p. iv.  
 3. Warfel, Gabriel, Williams, The American Mind, p. v.

but no attempt is made to use economics as fundamental to social movements. The conflicting interests of various groups have prominent places. Although the authors did not acknowledge an indebtedness to Parrington, the anthology clearly supplements by illustration the pattern of thought dealt with in Main Currents in American Thought.

The following conclusions are possible: Seventeen books-- histories, criticisms, outlines, and anthologies--written in the field of American literature since 1927 have assignable marks of Parrington's influence. The majority of these books is designed for college use, although some of the books that have appeared since 1935 are for secondary school use. It is in the schools, then, that Parrington's influence is to be chiefly observed at present.

Two college anthologies, that by Foerster and that by Warfel, Gabriel, and Williams, have strong Parrington influence. Each has much of the socio-economic, and each has drawn much on Parrington for critical inspiration. It must be observed, though, that each went further in the belles lettres than Parrington did. One general anthology included an essay by Parrington, but the anthology itself is not socio-economic in its plan. One other general anthology has traces of Parrington's influence.

Of the books presenting outlines, history, and criticism, nine show Parrington's influence in the selection of material, in general principle, or in the use of his critical authority. In this group Russell Blankenship's book corresponds with Par-

rington's work in all respects except that of proportionate emphasis given to conventionally literary figures. Blankenship is the more conventional.

Four high school anthologies and texts--the two in a combination--reveal that literature classes in the secondary schools have since 1935 taken an increasing interest in the socio-economic. It is noteworthy that Blankenship is an editor of such a high school text and that Foerster is an editor of another.

These findings indicate that to date the most of Parrington's influence has been in the schools. There Parrington has won considerable support. The influence of these books on students and through them on the future is imponderable, but it can be said that it will exist. Parrington is a recognized authority in his field. He is having considerable vogue as a shaping force in textbook making. The heightened interest in socio-economic forces in literary phenomena is in part due to his work.

PART V  
GENERAL SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

The Problem.

The problem was to examine the principles of literary criticism followed by Professor Vernon Louis Parrington in his book Main Currents in American Thought. There were three divisions made of the problem: (1) an historical view of the principles Parrington followed; (2) Parrington's modification and use of the principles; and (3) Parrington's influence on critical points of view.

Parrington, deliberately ignoring bolles lettres, worked from three basic generalizations. They formed the limits within which he studied American thought and literature. The three generalizations, together spoken of as the socio-economic principle of literary interpretation, are conceived as explaining the primary creative sources of American thought. The generalizations are these:

1. Literature is related to social institutions: it embodies institutional ideologies; it is affected by institutions; and it affects institutions.
2. The ideologies of social institutions are determined by economic forces.
3. The ideologies are in a state of conflict.

These generalizations explain literature and thought in America. When Parrington found it worthwhile to judge the value of a contribution, he did it from the point of view of a Jeffer-

sonian liberal.

### Historical Background of Parrington's Theory

The historical view outlined the development of the three generalizations Parrington employed and pointed out which men influenced Parrington. It was found that the socio-economic principle of literary interpretation had its real beginning in the seventeenth century.

### The Relation of Literature to Institutions

In the beginning of sociological criticism, the critics were not concerned with economics except casually. The chief point of interest was the influence of social institutions on a writer, who was conceived as being a representative of his race and time working in a particular environment; and the influence of the writer on the institutions. The critics of importance to sociological criticism during this period were the following: Thomas Blackwell, who studied Homer in his physical and social environment; Johann Gottfried Von Herder, who followed Blackwell's lead and in addition widely disseminated the special point of view of nationalism; Madame de Stael, who studied the inter-relations of literature and institutions; Prosper de Barante, who wrote a special study of French literature in the eighteenth century and the relation of literature to French society of that period, paying close attention to political situations; Sainte-Beuve, who emphasized psychological factors in an author's work; Hippolyte Adolphe Taine, who as a positivist studied the work of a writer as springing from the

primal sources of race, surroundings, and epoch; Kuno Francke, who interpreted the whole history of German literature in terms of the social forces working upon it; Georg Brandes, a Danish writer who separated the main currents of European thought during the nineteenth century in much the same fashion that Professor Parrington later did it for the history of American thought; and Bliss Perry, who, borrowing from Turner, fully developed the characteristics of American personality and asked that literature and its criticism be not separated from the social, economic, political, and geographical factors in American life. Of these men Taine has been said to be a dominant influence on Parrington. The others undoubtedly had indirect influence.

#### The Determination of Ideologies by Economic Forces

All of the men mentioned in the preceding summary are background figures. They developed the sociological in literary criticism, creating the tendency away from aesthetic absolutes and toward the materialistic point of view, of which the theory of economic determinism is an extreme development. It is true that from the beginning of modern criticism there have been allusions to the influence of economic conditions on human thought and spirit, but only recently has there been developed a critical science employing the principle of economic determinism. Logically, it started among political and economic philosophers rather than among literary critics; and it seems that the influence of climate and geography on government was the first problem of this nature to receive considerable attention. Montesquieu,

Herder, Buckle, and Draper are leading figures developing this problem. The clear line of the principle of economic determinism in government and law, however, begins with James Harrington and reaches its fullest development with Karl Marx. Intermediately there is a host of names. Those that concern this dissertation are John Adams, Daniel Webster, Frederick J. Turner, Thorold Rogers, Achilles Loria, Allen Smith, Charles A. Beard, and E. R. A. Seligman. These men followed for the most part the thesis that the ownership of land is the source of governmental power and form; but Rogers, Seligman, Smith, and Beard were less concerned with land than with wealth in general. Professor Parrington was strongly influenced by this group of theorists, coming under the sway of Harrington's thesis as it reached him through them.

In the literary field the names that preceded Parrington and had influence on him are the following: William Morris, Brander Matthews, Bliss Perry, Allene Gregory, and Allen R. Benham. All of these developed the theory of economic determinism from one or both of two points of view: that economics determines what a writer thinks or that the commercial nature of authorship limits a writer's field of thought to what can be sold at a profit. In all cases these persons were modest in their presentation of their theories and in the amount of work devoted to illustration.

#### Literature as an Expression of Conflict

The element of class conflict that is a part of the principle of economic determinism has received but little attention



from literary critics until the last few years. In America Upton Beal Sinclair is the man who most developed the partisanship nature of literature before Parrington, who broadened the thesis from one of proletariat-bourgeoisie conflict to include the complex of struggle within each social philosophy as well as among all of them. The history of this thesis in literary criticism is just beginning, but the socio-economic type of criticism has had a steady development since early in the eighteenth century.

#### Parrington's Application of Economic Criticism to American Literature

The purpose of this section was to examine and document Parrington's three critical principles, which were here broadened and discussed in their topical application to American thought and literature.

Fundamentally Parrington believed that the shaping impulse behind the broad intellectual movements characteristic of America was economic in origin. His work in Main Currents in American Thought was unified by the principle of economic determinism, although he frequently spoke of political and social forces as distinct from economic forces.

The exposition of Parrington's tenets developed the following topics: (1) Parrington's general aims in Main Currents in American Thought; (2) Economic character of the ideals brought to America; (3) Economic forces native to America; (4) The economic origins of institutions; (5) American literature and its relation to social conflict; (6) Parrington and aesthetics; (7) Parrington's liberalism; (8) Estimate of Parrington's critical position.

Parrington's General Aims in Main Currents

Parrington wanted to give an account of the beginning and the development of the ideas traditionally thought of as American, the opposition they met, and their influence on typically American ideals and institutions. Interpreted from the point of view of Jeffersonianism, Parrington's aim was to trace the history of liberalism in America, showing its initial impulses, its enemies, and its fate.

Economic Character of Ideals Brought to America

American thought, according to Parrington, is in part the bequest of imported ideals from the old world. He did not directly state his general theory of the relationship between ideals and economic forces, but the examination of his treatment indicated that he considered several specific ideals to have had an economic character in that they were appropriated by economic movements and in that they were antagonistic toward certain economic circumstances.

The ideals of which Parrington spoke were generalized as the body of thought and customs brought from the old home. In particular they were these: English Independency, French romantic theory, the industrial revolution and laissez faire, nineteenth century science, and Continental theories of collectivism. Obviously some of these are clearly economic movements. The others are economic in that they were borrowed by economic movements. Had Parrington been pressed it is likely that he would have acknowledged economic determinism to be but one force in the creation of human thought and institutions,

but as far as American thought is concerned the greatest force. He held no brief for a rigid scheme of economic determinism, and said so.

#### Economic Forces Native to America

In addition to the imported ideals, American thought was determined by the silent pressure of the frontier, conceived by Parrington as an economic force. The frontier evolved a way of life: of acting and of thinking. It promoted individual attitudes that resulted collectively in the spirit of republicanism ascendent over the spirit of aristocracy. Parrington further said the philosophy of paternalism in government is owed in part to the frontier and the stimulus of its vast economics.

#### The Economic Origin of Institutions

The institutions of politics and government, of law, of religion, and of literature were all conceived by Parrington to have a primary economic character. Economic forces in conflict shaped American political institutions and through them the laws of the country. Literary movements, the broad periods unified by characteristic traits, had in America an economic basis. So also did the significant writers. It was Parrington's conclusion that the socio-economic was the best approach to understanding American institutions.

#### American Literature and Its Relation to Social Conflict

To Parrington the significant American writers presented

and defended programs of a social nature, or else spent a large part of their energies in attacking existing social conditions. This is a natural corollary of the socio-economic principle. The greatest part of Parrington's work that he devoted to literary figures and works was spent discussing the evidence of conflict. When Parrington found a writer who baffled such interpretation, he was forced to present a distorted picture. From artists who were characteristically belletristic or ethical--such as, Irving, Poe, Longfellow, and Hawthorne--he squeezed what was to be found of a social program or gave up with short expositions. It should be pointed out that this one-sided emphasis is the result of the control set by method and purpose, rather than by Parrington's natural inclination.

#### Parrington and Aesthetics

Parrington was instinctively aesthetic, and at times aesthetic criticism was close to forcing him out of his self-imposed limits of socio-economic determinism. He scolded the aesthetic critic at times; yet an aesthetic undercurrent ran all through his work. He was not comfortable within his limits.

#### Parrington's Liberalism

It was early made apparent that Jefferson was the basis of Parrington's liberal point of view. Jefferson was Parrington's ideal. This means that Parrington's ideals go back to the French Revolution and its humanitarian hopes. Parrington hoped for a decentralized society based on small economic units. Yet he was not optimistic. The defeats of liberalism that he recorded in Main Currents in American Thought left him little room for more

than a forlorn hope that a country whose artists are in revolt may yet achieve its ideals.

#### Estimate of Parrington's Critical Position

The estimate was divided into two parts: (1) an objective estimate of Parrington's rank among his colleagues, drawn from comments by his colleagues; (2) the investigator's personal opinion of the logical validity of economic determinism of ideas.

The examination of a significant quantity of critical reviews and of remarks made in books on American literature revealed that Parrington was accepted with only minor reservation. He was criticized for occasional inaccuracy, for occasional ambiguity, and for over-emphasis of his point of view; but the main tenor of all the criticism was to accept his work as a brilliantly written, valuable contribution to the history of American culture.

In the investigator's opinion it seems that the principle of economic determinism does not hold the absolute position frequently claimed for it. It is undoubtedly an explanation of many phenomena, but it does not have a demonstrated claim as a total explanation of all phenomena. Man apparently has non-economic characteristics which modify all of his relationships with his environment, including the subject matter of his literary arts.

#### Parrington's Influence

The purpose of this section of the dissertation was to make an estimate of Parrington's influence on literary critics and historians. This meant an examination of work produced since 1927. The following conclusions are possible:

Seventeen books--histories, criticisms, outlines, and anthologies--written in the field of American literature since 1927 have assignable marks of Parrington's influence. The majority of these books is designed for college use, although some of the books that have appeared since 1935 are for secondary school use. It is in the schools, then, that Parrington's influence is to be chiefly observed at present.

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Four high school anthologies and texts--the two in a combination--reveal that literature classes in the secondary schools have since 1935 taken an increasing interest in the socio-economic. It is noteworthy that Blankenship is an editor of such a high school text and that Foerster is an editor of another.

These findings indicate that to date the most of Parrington's influence has been in the schools. There Parrington has won considerable support. The influence of these books on students and through them on the future is imponderable, but it can be said that it will exist. Parrington is a recognized authority in his field. He is having considerable vogue as a shaping force in textbook making. The heightened interest in socio-economic forces in literary phenomena is in part due to his work.

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