

## THE ANTI-ROMANTIC REACTION IN MODERN(IST) LITERARY CRITICISM

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### Abstract

While the antagonism of modernism to realism has often been commented upon, its equally vehement rejection of romanticism has not been as widely discussed. Yet, if modernism compromised at times with realism or, at least, with a "naturalistic" version of realism, its total antipathy to the fundamentals of romanticism has been absolute. This was a modernist trend that covered both literature and criticism and a modernist characteristic that extended from German philosophers, French poets to British and American professors of literature. Names as diverse as Paul Valery, Charles Maurras and F.R. Leavis shared a common anti-romantic outlook. Many of the important modernist literary trends like the Anglo-American imagism, French surrealism, German expressionism and Italian futurism have been antagonistic not only to ordinary realism as a relic of the 19th century, but also, and fundamentally, to that century's romanticism. In nihilistically breaking with everything from the past, or at least the immediate past, they were by definition anti-romantics. Even writers like Bernard Shaw or Bertolt Brecht and critics like Raymond Williams or George Lukacs, who would generally be regarded as in the pro-realist camp, have, at times, exhibited, to the extent that they were afflicted with the modernist ethos, strong anti-romantic tendencies.

**Key words:** Romanticism, anti-romanticism, modernism, New Criticism, classicism, conservatism

### INTRODUCTION

In the second half of the nineteenth century and after the two major literary movements in European Literature, romanticism and realism, had reached their peak, a new wave of literary trends appeared which were, in the main, *opposed* to those two great movements.

If by realism we mean, in general terms, the faithful reproduction of reality as colored naturally by the writer's personal viewpoint and outlook, and if we regard romanticism as, fundamentally, a great intuition of change in nature and society and a great striving for the creation of a new world where those contradictory dualities in nature and society are resolved, thus giving rise to a new view of poetry as a union of

opposites, then we must regard the main literary trends of the late 19th century, naturalism and symbolism, as a retreat from the positions and the achievements of both realism and romanticism.

Similarly, just as the new realism of the twentieth century is often defined as the combination of romanticism and realism, elevated on the basis of a new world outlook to depict the new historical conditions, so can the various modernist trends of the 20th century be seen to be, in the main, a reaction against both realism *and* romanticism and a retreat intellectually from the ideological standpoint of both movements. And just as, in strictly formal terms, romanticism and realism are the ancestors of 20th century realism, so are naturalism and symbolism the progenitors of the various trends of 20th century modernism.

While the antagonism of modernism to realism has often been commented upon, its equally vehement rejection of romanticism has not been as widely discussed. Yet, if modernism compromised at times with realism or, at least, with a “naturalistic” version of realism, its total antipathy to the fundamentals of romanticism has been absolute. This was a modernist trend that covered both literature and criticism and a modernist characteristic that extended from German philosophers to French poets to British and American professors of literature. Names as diverse as Paul Valery, Charles Maurras and F.R. Leavis shared a common anti-romantic outlook. Many of the important modernist literary trends, like the Anglo- American imagism, French surrealism, German expressionism and Italian futurism, have been antagonistic not only to ordinary realism as a relic of the 19th century, but also, and fundamentally, to that century’s romanticism. In nihilistically breaking with everything from the past, or at least the immediate past, they were by definition anti-romantics. Even writers like Bernard Shaw or Bertolt Brecht and critics like Raymond Williams or George Lukacs, who would generally be regarded as in the pro-realist camp, have, at times, exhibited, to the extent that they were afflicted with the modernist ethos, strong anti-romantic tendencies. It may suffice here to mention, as an example, that de-heroification, which has been a common characteristic of nearly all the various types of modernist literature, is an obvious undercutting of an important aspect of the romantic outlook of the nineteenth century.

Anti-romanticism, then, has been a strong tendency in modernist literature and literary criticism. Modern Anglo-American criticism, to which this essay limits itself, has played an important role in establishing and strengthening this tendency. Prominent poets like T.S. Eliot and Ezra Pound, renowned critics like F.R. Leavis and Cleanth Brooks, and reputable scholars like Irving Babbitt and Arthur Lovejoy have been its advocates. As a result, romanticism suffered a great setback and romantic writers, particularly Shelley, were dislodged. Even when, decades later the tide was reversed and romanticism reinstated, this tendency still remains, almost preventing the progress of objective literary and historical investigations in the field. To this day, essays and studies are produced that bear the marks of the early, modernist anti-romantic bias. The aim of this essay is to show, through tracing the rise and development of anti-romanticism in modern Anglo-American criticism, that any progress in this area can only come about by discarding the old assumptions and the old prejudices, by looking at the whole field with fresh eyes, and by continuing the work of genuine, objective scholarship.

## THE FIRST SHOTS: IRVING BABBITT AND T.E. HULME

The beginning of the attack on romanticism in modern Anglo-American literary criticism can be traced back to Irving Babbitt.

Through his immediate and easily identifiable impact on T. E. Hulme and T.S. Eliot, Babbitt must be regarded as initiator of this widely-influential critical trend. Although, as Albert Gérard points out (265), Babbitt's own sources are ultimately French, indebted as he is to Pierre Lasserre's vigorous and copious indictment, *Le romantisme français*, published in 1907, Babbitt remains the pioneer in the Anglo-Saxon world.

In his books, *The New Laokoon* (1910) and, particularly, *Rousseau and Romanticism* (1919), Babbitt launched an all-out offensive against romanticism accusing it of confused thinking, sham spirituality and, most damagingly, of being the sign of the juvenile and immature mind. "The person who is as much taken by Shelley at forty as he was at twenty", he wrote, "has, one may surmise, failed to grow up" (290).

Reducing romanticism simplistically to a primitive endeavor to oppose imagination to sense and reason, Babbitt made the rejection of that antithesis the excuse for the rejection of romanticism itself, thus all too hastily throwing away the baby with the bath-water. Yet, Babbitt's own prejudices are very much on the classical side with its emphasis on order, limitation and depersonalization. And while he was initiating, quite unawares, a uniquely modernist anti-romantic trend, his project was still largely expressed in the terms of the old classic-romantic opposition.

The identification of the modern outlook with a new kind of classicism or even with classicism *tout court* is sharply, and often epigrammatically, expressed in the works of the influential figure of T.E. Hulme. The very opening sentence of his essay entitled "Romanticism and Classicism" published in his *Speculations* of 1924, resoundingly states, "I want to maintain that after a hundred years of romanticism, we are in for a classical revival, and that the particular weapon of this new classical spirit, when it works in verse, will be fancy" (113).

As it turns out, the rather time-worn distinction between fancy and imagination is not at all the main focus of Hulme's essay. His critique of romanticism is on a much wider philosophic, social and, indeed explicitly political, front. Only after he has emptied all his arsenal on these various tasks does he come out toward the end with his call for dry, hard, classical verse to replace the sloppiness and sentimentalism of decadent 'romantic' poetry of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century.

Clearly, then, for Hulme, the deeper philosophic and political disagreements with romanticism lie behind the technical objections. Here, it is very much the case of content preceding form. Like Babbitt, Hulme also focuses on Rousseau. He turns Rousseau's famous thesis that man is by nature good, but is debased by unsatisfying social conditions, upside down, and argues that, on the contrary, man is 'extraordinarily limited' and that only by tradition and social organization that 'anything decent can be got out of him'. Hulme here is very consciously adopting a conservative standpoint and is, indeed, reviving the old Christian doctrine of Original Sin. He has no objections at all to real religion; what he does not like is what he calls the 'spilt religion' of romanticism, a poor substitute that in the name of 'liberty and individualism, according to Hulme, threatens to upset the social order. Similarly, Hulme is very well aware that

this position goes directly against the general scientific outlook, as well as the current scientific theory, exemplified in this case by the Darwinian evolutionary framework. He simply gets out of it by taking refuge in what he calls 'the contrary hypothesis' of De Vries' mutation theory.

Thus having recruited both science *and* religion to his classical cause, Hulme does not hesitate to underline the political nature of his anti-romanticism. He begins to generalize what is a peculiarly French characteristic into a wider European phenomenon. The association of historical romanticism with the French Revolution becomes for him a principle that links all romanticism with revolution generally. He likes the state that he sees in France, where "they hate the revolution, so they hate romanticism", dominate everywhere. This anti-democratic and counter-revolutionary bias of Hulme's anti-romanticism will become, as we shall see later, the deep undertone of the whole Anglo-Saxon critique of romanticism from Eliot to the American New Critics, just as it had its prelude in the general elitist outlook of the neo-humanist critics like Babbitt.

### THE FULL OFFENSIVE: T.S. ELIOT AND MODERNIST CRITICS

The most important figure to take up the anti-romantic offensive initiated by Babbitt and Hulme is, undoubtedly, T.S.Eliot. With an attitude, and a style very reminiscent of Hulme's, Eliot declares in his very first collection of critical essays that:

Romanticism is a short cut to the strangeness without the reality, and it leads its disciples only back upon themselves ... there may be a good deal to be said for romanticism in life, there is no place for it in letters. (1920, 32)

There are two main points that clearly link Eliot and Hulme in their attack on romanticism. The first is the rather empty, epigrammatic style that really says far less than it at first promises. The declarations of both men have the air of belonging to a partisan and momentary manifesto rather than to a rational and fully-argued analysis. The second point is the one-sided view of poetry as consisting exclusively of sharp images—"the dry, hard, classical verse" of Hulme—that was later to give rise to a whole poetic movement with the derivative name of Imagism. It is one of the criteria that lie behind Eliot's championing of the metaphysical poets against the romantics and of Dante against Milton. Whatever uses it may have had for the new, practicing generation of poets, the doctrine of imagism rests, philosophically, on a false epistemology that can only have, if, taken literally, the most damaging effect on poetry. It relies ultimately on two devitalizing and trivializing reductionisms: The reduction of all poetry to images (i.e. to the exclusion of ideas, emotions, etc.) and the reduction of all images to visual images.

On one point that was to be enormously important for subsequent Anglo-American literary criticism, however, Eliot sharply departs from Hulme. While Hulme lifts the banner of a new classicism against what it regards as a moribund romantic tradition, Eliot considers both romanticism *and* classicism as debased after-effects of what he calls a 'dissociation of sensibility' that is supposed to have occurred sometime

in the seventeenth century. (Thus Eliot, even though he at times describes himself as a classicist, hardly ever talks about any classicist or rather neoclassicist English poet or critic in the same way that, for example, he talks about the Metaphysicals or about Matthew Arnold). Prior to that time there was a unified sensibility which could encompass different states of mind simultaneously and could even hold together contraries like thought and emotion, thus providing the necessary creative source for much Metaphysical and Elizabethan poetry. For several reasons, according to Eliot, this sensibility was split or “dissociated”, and thought and emotion were disunited thus creating the condition for the decline of English poetry ever since. Milton was the major figure who first exhibited this phenomenon, both in his sensibility and in his poetry, and the romantics, particularly, Shelley, were the other major generation of poets who were plagued by it.

Now this doctrine of such a cataclysmic split of sensibility has long been rejected in literary scholarship, nor is there any likelihood that it was ever literally accepted even by those who, like the American New Critics, paid great lip-service to it and even applied it as a matrix for the re-writing of English literary history. There was always the suspicion that the statement belonged to the category of the temporary, passionate declarations of a practicing poet or generation of poets to serve their primary aim of writing new poetry and hence was very much subject to subsequent changes of taste and fashion rather than to the category of deeply thought-out argument.

For these reasons, it is a great pity that this “doctrine” of the dissociated sensibility has had such an enormous influence on Anglo-American criticism in the first half of the 20th century and, more relevantly to our theme, has been used as such a ready stick with which to beat the Romantics.

Even I.A. Richards, one of the chief founders of modern Anglo-American criticism, who apparently is least swayed by passion or ideological bias and most prone to rational, “scientific” argument, lends support, albeit in different terminology, to that same “doctrine”. Parallel to Eliot’s united versus dissociated sensibility, Richards uses the terms “synthetic” and “exclusive”, together with a manner of presentation borrowed oddly enough from the German romantic poets and philosophers, by way of Coleridge, to condemn implicitly the English Romantics, particularly Shelley, and to reinforce the case and the “arguments” put forward by Eliot. The insistence on the unity of thought and feeling, on the ability to combine contrary moods and disparate states of mind and to express them simultaneously; in other words, the arguments for complexity and heterogeneity used by Eliot as criteria for the new poetry, as well as for elevating the Metaphysicals and dislodging the Romantics, are all subsumed in Richards’s principles of synthesis and irony. Thus, in words very reminiscent of Eliot’s earlier essays on the Metaphysicals and Marvell, Richards defines irony as “the brining in of the opposite, the complementary impulses” and continues to declare, “that is why poetry which is not exposed to it is not of the highest order, and irony itself is so constantly a characteristic of poetry which is” (197). Here, perhaps unintentionally, Richard helps to launch the new cult of complexity and obscurity in modern poetry coupled with irony and even a certain amount of world-weary sarcasm that became the catchwords of modern criticism. Anything that did not fit those criteria was condemned as sentimental, vague, cloudy and dissociated—all epithets later to be used over and over again against the Romantic poets.

One of the most glaring faults of the “doctrine” of the dissociation of sensibility is that those who subscribe to it fail to agree on when it actually occurred and who was responsible for it. According to Eliot himself, this split occurred in the seventeenth century and was “aggravated by the influence of the two most powerful poets of the century, Milton and Dryden” (1976, 288). Thus rationalism, which dominated in the 18th century, and emotionalism, which dominated in the 19th, were both symptoms of this split from which the poetry of both centuries suffered, and which it was the task of the poetry of the modern epoch to seek to put right. However, according to Cleanth Brooks, one of the leading American New Critics, the split was due mainly to Hobbes and to the rise of scientific thought. Romanticism was not a symptom but an attempt at a remedy, however unsuccessful. L.C. Knights, an important modern English critic, on the other hand, sets the date back earlier putting the blame mainly on Francis Bacon. While the influential modern critic, F.R. Leavis, exonerates nearly everyone else by bringing it forward till much later so that it is foisted only upon the poor romantics. “What they (the English romantic poets) have in common”, Leavis declares, “is that they belong to the same age; and in belonging to the same age they have in common something negative: the absence of anything to replace the very positive tradition (literary, and more than literary—hence its strength) that had prevailed towards the end of the eighteenth century” (185). What this ‘positive tradition’ means is characteristically never explicitly stated. But for anyone at all acquainted with modern Anglo-American critical parlance, it stands for notions like unified sensibility and organic community that all, presumably, held sway sometime in the pre-industrial, pre-democratic, pre-mass society epoch, and are to be used constantly against any contemporary values and phenomena to which the modern critic feels averse.

The vagueness and the inability to withstand rational scrutiny of the criteria established by Eliot and the modern critics in order to attack romanticism did not prevent the attempt to use those criteria, particularly by the more academic New Critics in America and the *Scrutiny* group in England, for a total re-writing of English literary history. This was strongly implicit in such important works as *Revaluation*, *The common Pursuit*, and *New Bearings in English Poetry* by F.R. Leavis and in *Modern Poetry and Tradition* by Cleanth Brooks. In the case of Brooks, the aim, in fact, was perhaps too shallowly on the surface. “In our revised interpretation of English literature”, he declares, “the romantic movement obviously is to be classed as an antiscientific revulsion. It retreated, as we know, from the rationalistic, the ordered and the classified. But it did not have the capacity to undo the damage done by Hobbes ... It substituted romantic subjectivism for neoclassic objectivism instead of fusing the two as they were fused in a great dramatic period such as the Elizabethan. ... If, as Eliot has pointed out, wit is a quality that is lacking in the romantic poets, one can point to a concomitant lack of the dramatic, etc.” (8). Here we clearly see the cluster of anti-romantic ideas initiated by Babbitt and Hulme, and further advanced by Eliot, clearly hardening into the rigid system, and later the new orthodoxy, that ruled over the Anglo-American departments of English for over two decades.

## THE SIDE ATTACKS: MARIO PRAZ, F.L. LUCAS AND ARTHUR O. LOVEJOY

Parallel with this main attack on romanticism, which through Eliot and the Anglo-American critics following him took an increasingly literary and formalist character, even though it was based on very clear, but not fully articulated, philosophic and political assumptions, there was another line of attack on romanticism on psychological grounds. One of the main exponents of this line is Mario Praz who takes as his starting point Goethe's definition of Classic art as healthy and Romantic art as sick. He regards as one of the major characteristics of romanticism what he calls 'the erotic sensibility', which he finds to be common also to the kindred decadent movement of the end of the 19th century. In fact, in their general psychological tendency, based as it is on the mysterious bond between pleasure and suffering, romanticism and decadence are virtually indistinguishable according to Praz<sup>1</sup>.

Although attacks on romanticism on psychological grounds have not been uncommon, the one by F.L. Lucas<sup>2</sup> is perhaps the most extreme. Lucas too refers to Goethe's depiction of romanticism as disease and calls it a form of dream and intoxication. Lucas rightly recognized the characteristic ability of romanticism to tap the unconscious levels of the mind, but he sees a danger in surrendering 'too much to the unconscious', 'in becoming too much of a child once more' and 'in falling victim to neurotic maladies'. Lucas goes just a little bit too far when he blames romanticism for Napoleon and, in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, for Hitler, whom he calls, rather unbelievably, 'a perverted romantic'.

The primary, and perhaps most obvious, objection to the psychological critique of romanticism is that it regards romanticism not as a specific literary movement bound to a definite historical epoch, but as a recurring psychological tendency and a permanent state of mind and mode of behavior. It is, in fact, on this very point, i.e. whether and to what extent one can speak of romanticism as one unified literary concept and a movement with clear-out historical boundaries, that the most fruitful debates on romanticism in modern literary criticism have taken place. It has also provided the setting for the third line of attack on romanticism, the critique on philosophic ground, initiated by Arthur O. Lovejoy and ably answered by René Wellek.

In an important essay<sup>3</sup>, published in the same year as T.E. Hulme's attack in romanticism to which we have already referred, Lovejoy argues, as a historian of ideas, for the abandonment of the whole concept of a unified romanticism because having come 'to mean so many things, by itself, it means nothing'. He seems to think that the variety of the previous definitions of the term is sufficient reason for declaring the concept useless and invalid, preferring to forget that the most controversial, and very often most fruitful, concepts in history have exhibited this very characteristic. Still, Lovejoy's essay was well-argued and original enough in that it by-passed the purely literary critical controversy, which he rightly regarded as irredeemably plagued by moral and philosophic prejudices, and opened the way for a more objective, historical examination of the facts and issues involved.

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<sup>1</sup> Mario Praz, *The Romantic Agony*. (London: Oxford University Press, 1933).

<sup>2</sup> F.L. Lucas, *The Decline and Fall of the Romantic Ideal*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1936).

<sup>3</sup> Arthur O. Lovejoy, "On the Discrimination of Romanticisms", *PMLA*, 39 (1924), 229-53.

Lovejoy's controversial conclusion is that for romanticism to be of any use at all it must be spoken of in the plural and not in the singular—different romanticisms, presumably of different writers and different countries, and not one unified concept of romanticism. Thus, under the cover of bringing more scientific and historic rigor into discussion, Lovejoy's essay is actually another form of the modern attack on romanticism, a new and subtle form that reaches out for a quick and easy victory by simply pretending *that the enemy does not exist*. For, in fact, it is not very difficult to see that romanticism differing inevitably from country to country, poet to poet and *even* epoch to epoch, could not be spoken of as romanticism unless it retained certain common characteristics. Even if we go outside Europe, where a unified European romantic movement, as René Wellek<sup>4</sup> has shown, is easily demonstrable, we can still speak of romanticism as a meaningful concept and an international literary movement in spite of the vast distances in time and space. The call for plurality, in the manner presented by Lovejoy, will only be an immediate step to the call for negation.

The essay, however, has done its work. Lovejoy's argument reigned and perhaps still reigns in one way or another in academic literature circles. It is as if academia were waiting for the one scholarly attack on romanticism to make the variety of the previous anti-romanticisms more respectable and more easily absorbable into the prevailing ethos. The fact that René Wellek's able and far more erudite refutation of Lovejoy's arguments was largely ignored reveals that academia, too, was acting on prejudice in this case and that it was simply being swept by the wider passions of the anti-romantic tide of modernist literature.

For, in fact, Lovejoy's essay when looked at carefully is not at all that original in its main impulse. It follows very closely from the anti-romantic tirade already well advanced and performed, first, by the French academic Pierre Lasserre (in his *Le romantisme français* of 1919) and earlier Ernest Seilliere (in his revealingly entitled *La mal romantique* of 1908), and later by the American so-called neo-humanist critics like Paul Elmer More and Irving Babbitt and by the early essays of T.E. Hulme and T.S. Eliot that were coming out in the nineteen-twenties, all of which Lovejoy had carefully read and absorbed. The service that Lovejoy rendered for the cause of anti-romanticism was to provide a scholarly "argument" that was more easily acceptable than the earlier attacks which were so obviously marred by the imprint of social and political prejudice.

In fact, it can be demonstrated that the transformation of romanticism from a well-defined historical movement with its own general philosophy and outlook on life into an abstract tendency, a shift (usually morbid or regressive) of sensibility or a vague psychological impulse has characterized the modernist attacks on romanticism with roots that go back perhaps even earlier to estheticism and symbolism. Thus Pater argued, back in 1889<sup>5</sup>, that romanticism 'although it has its epochs' was essentially a spirit which showed itself at all times and among all kinds of artists. So, there were 'the born romanticists and the born classicists'. And Herbert Grierson<sup>6</sup> had already, the year

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<sup>4</sup> René Wellek, "The concept of Romanticism in Literary History" (1949) reprinted in *Concepts of Criticism*. (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1963), 128-98.

<sup>5</sup> Walter Pater, "On Classical and Romantic" in *Appreciations* (New York: Macmillan, 1889), 241-61.

<sup>6</sup> H.J.C. Grierson, *Classical and Romantic: A Point of View* (The Leslie Stephen Lectures, London: Chatto and Windus, 1923).



before Lovejoy's essay was published, made *his* scholarly attempt to extend romanticism into a recurrent tendency in literature and thought with not just one but three major movements extending all the way from Euripides to modern times. Thus, the road was paved for modern critics like, for example, Mario Praz, Herbert Read and F.L. Lucas to identify romanticism with 'erotic sensibility' (Praz), 'the creative impulse' (Read), and 'intoxicated dreaming and surrender to the unconscious' (Lucas)<sup>7</sup>.

#### THE DEFENSE: RENÉ WELLEK AND THE CONTEMPORARY CRITICS

Similarly, it can be argued that the return to the study of romanticism in a clear socio-historical setting is the first sign of a more balanced view of romanticism, leading to what one might even call a post-modernist *defense* of romanticism as can be seen particularly in the works of René Wellek already referred to<sup>8</sup> and later in works by Northrop Frye<sup>9</sup>, M.H. Abrams<sup>10</sup> and Albert Gérard<sup>11</sup>. Frye, for example, unhesitatingly declares in the very opening page of an article on 'the revolutionary element romanticism' that: "Romanticism has a historical center of gravity, which falls somewhere around 1790-1830 period. This gets us at once out of the fallacy of timeless characterization" (1). While Abrams concentrates his attention on the long-neglected social and political views of the English romantics, Albert Gérard develops the proper perspective from which to regard the modernist attack on romanticism as, a passing phase that should lead the way to a more 'balanced view, coming up with an admirable definition of romanticism as "fundamentally the intuition of a cosmic unity: The intuition that the universe is not an intelligible chaos, not a well-regulated mechanism, but a living organism, imbued throughout with an idea which endows it with its unity, its life and its harmony" (265).

With the single and important exception of René Wellek, however the fall-out from Lovejoy's essay left its traces in post-modernist criticism. Wellek's argument was overwhelming and irrefutable. He had met Lovejoy's challenge declaring himself on the side of those who "still consider the terms (romantic and romanticism) useful and will continue to speak of a unified European movement" (1963, 128). He then proceeded, with a great deal of erudition to show that "the major romantic movements form a unity of theories, philosophies and style, and that these, in turn, form a coherent group of ideas each of which implicates the other" (129).

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<sup>7</sup> For Praz and Lucas see notes (1) and (2) above and for Read see his introduction to André Breton, *Surrealism* (London: Faber and Faber, 1936).

<sup>8</sup> See also the essay "Romanticism Re-examined" in *Concepts of Criticism* as well as his (together with Austin Warren) *Theory of Literature* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1949) and his *History of Modern Criticism*, Volume 2: The Romantic Age (London: Jonathan Cape, 1955).

<sup>9</sup> See particularly, "The Drunken Boat: The Revolutionary Element in Romanticism Reconsidered" in *Selected Papers from the English Institute*. Ed. N. Frye (New York: Columbia University Press, 1963), 1-25.

<sup>10</sup> See, in addition to his widely known books on romanticism, *The Mirror and the Lamp* (London: Oxford University Press, 1953) followed by *Natural Supernaturalism* (New York: Norton, 1971), his essay entitled, "English Romanticism: The Spirit of the Age" in *Romanticism Reconsidered*, 26-72.

<sup>11</sup> See, in addition to his essay referred to earlier, his book *English Romantic Poetry* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1968).

One of the conclusions that Wellek reaches after some brilliant hopping among most of the major European literatures is that “all the great romantic poets are mythopoeic, are symbolists whose practice must be understood in terms of their attempt to give a total mythic interpretation of the world to which the poet holds the key” (188). Later on, through the painstaking research of his four-volume history of modern criticism, of which the second was devoted to romantic criticism, Wellek wrote brilliant historical and analytic essays on all the major romantic critics coming up with this admirable definition of the romantic view of literature:

Thus one can speak of a romantic movement in criticism in two very different senses: in a wider sense it was a revolt against neoclassicism, which meant a rejection of the Latin tradition and the adoption of a view of poetry centered on the expression and communication of emotion. It arose in the 18th century and forms a wide stream flooding all countries of the West.

In a more narrow sense we can speak of romantic criticism as the establishment of a dialectical and symbolistic view of poetry. It grows out of the organic analogy, developed by Herder and Goethe, but proceeds beyond it to a view of poetry as a union of opposites, a system of symbols. (1981, 3)

As far as European romanticism is concerned, Wellek’s statements have a well-deserved air of definitiveness. Yet, of course they can by no means be the end of the line. There are still largely unexplored areas in the field of romanticism as an international movement, particularly in the countries outside Europe where romanticism appeared at a much later date, and in different social and political conditions. Even in Europe, there is still much to be said about romanticism outside the literature of the major three countries of that epoch—England, France and Germany. In addition to all this there are areas, such as the oriental dimension of European romanticism, which are untouched by Wellek. Within these limits, however, Wellek’s work remains the most powerful argument for romanticism as a concrete historical movement with ‘a closely coherent body of thought and feeling’.

Wellek’s pioneering essays, followed by full-length works from such renowned critics as Northrop Frye, M.H. Abrams and Harold Bloom did a great deal to rehabilitate romanticism and the romantic poets. Since then, studies of romanticism have so multiplied as to make the area one of the most widely researched in English literary history and to persuade one that the modernist anti-romantic arguments have become totally obsolete. Yet, those old arguments too had done their work, and the effects of the damage done still linger on even in quite recent work on romanticism.

The main tendency of the anti-romantic position still lies in the reluctance to accept romanticism as a coherent literary and intellectual movement and to study it within a clear socio-historical perspective, all of which is a sad testimony to the lingering after-effects of Lovejoy’s article. Thus, an important collection of essays,<sup>12</sup> for example, in which many of the leading pro-romantic critics like Harold Bloom, Geoffrey Hartmann, W.K. Wimsatt, Frederick Pottle and others participated, fails to take up the

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<sup>12</sup> David Thorburn and Geoffrey Hartman, eds. *Romanticism: Vistas, Instances, Continuities* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1973).

argument from where René Wellek had left it and, in fact, might even be regarded as taking up some positions that are more Lovejoyan in allegiance.

Thus while the editors of the collection begin with the salutary statement that, "it is time to acknowledge that Babbitt's "Rousseau" is as defunct as Eliot's "Shelley" or Yvor Winters's "Emerson" "(7) they take a number of steps back when they imply that it is not possible or even desirable to reach an agreement concerning the nature of romanticism. And they end up in a position that, regrettably, goes even beyond Lovejoy in its dilution, one might even say debasement, of romanticism and the romantic period when they declare that their essays constitute collectively "a rejection of older, more restrictive views, in which Romantic writers could be decisively distinguished from (say) Victorian or modern ones, or in which a relatively contained span of years during the earlier nineteenth century could be confidently designated as the Romantic period"(9). And so we are back to square one where romanticism could almost be anything and could be discovered in different writers in almost any epoch.

Examples of a similar watering-down of romanticism can be found in even more recent studies. Marilyn Butler, for instance, in a well-known work declares on the very first page that: "We have come to think of most of the great writers who flourished around 1800 as the Romantics, but the term is anachronistic and the poets concerned would not have used it themselves"<sup>13</sup> picking out a rather old chestnut. She goes on to state in the body of her work that: "Romanticism is inchoate because it is not a single intellectual movement but a complex of responses to certain conditions which Western society has experienced and *continues* to experience since the middle of the eighteenth century" (my italics, 184), and we are back again with the notion of romanticism as the permanent impulse and the recurring tendency that could not be restricted to any historical moment or even to any coherent description. Yet another recent collection of essays<sup>14</sup> explicitly declares (also on its very first page) and at this *late date* that "there is, in fact, remarkably little agreement on what constitutes "Romanticism". And continues, after having deprecatingly put the term between inverted commas, to endorse the familiar anti-romantic positions of critics like Lovejoy, F.L. Lucas *and even* T.E. Hulme (1-14). Other better-known critics like Ian Jack<sup>15</sup> Lilian Furst<sup>16</sup> and Earl Wasserman<sup>17</sup> have also taken up similar positions.

## CONCLUSION

One of the first things that we may conclude from this survey is that romanticism, more than two hundred years now after its first appearance in western literature, is still very much a hot issue. The changing pattern of its fortune in the 20th century, the revival of scholarly and critical interest in it in its last decades and even the excessive vehemence of the attack on it in its first decades all testify to the enduring inter-

<sup>13</sup> Marilyn Butler, *Romantics, Rebels and Reactionaries* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982).

<sup>14</sup> Stephen Prickett (ed.) *The Romantics* (London: Methuen, 1981).

<sup>15</sup> See his *Oxford History of English Literature*: Vol. 10 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1963).

<sup>16</sup> In her two books, *Romanticism* (Methuen: London, 1969), and *Romanticism in Perspective* (London: Macmillan, 1969).

<sup>17</sup> In his "The English Romantics: The Grounds of Knowledge" *Studies in Romanticism*, 4 (1964), 17-34.

est of romanticism for the literary mind. Like realism, it has proved that it cannot be suppressed. Still, the response of western literature and criticism in the 20 century to romanticism has been overwhelmingly negative. It must be recognized that modernism can in no way be regarded as a continuation of romanticism. Raising openly the banner of anti-realism, modernism, in fact, has been equally anti-romantic. The scholarly defense of romanticism even when performed most capably and most influentially by someone like René Wellek is *still* only the beginning. As a world-wide literary trend that spans many different epochs, romanticism covers a much wider area than can be measured by the delineation only of a specific west European literary movement of specific historical limits however crucial that movement may have been. Therefore, the task of a comprehensive defense of romanticism still lies ahead.

We should, however, point out here that an important part of this defense seems to depend on two points. The first is that romanticism is not an antithesis to, but a preparation for, realism, which, particularly in the works of its greatest practitioners, never negates the achievements of romanticism but, on the contrary, it absorbs them and lifts them to a whole new stage. The imaginative outlook consolidated by the romantics did not fade away in the works of the great realists. It simply took a new form through the use of the literary imagination for the creation of the various social types. These literary figures, we must remember, are always idealized and “futuristic” in that they help to create new social types *as well as* reflecting actually existing ones. This, I think, is what Gorky meant when he said that in the works of the great novelists realism and romanticism were always mixed. Thus while realism is responsible for the depiction of actual conditions, romanticism is the necessary element that enables us to envision how those conditions change.

In fact, the recognition of this deep and intimate relationship between realism and romanticism brings us to the second point in the defense of romanticism which is that these two literary movements once fully understood in their dialectical connection with each other cannot but be regarded as permanent features of the literary process. They are, in other words, *literary* tendencies, styles and outlooks that can be found in the oldest mythic literature as well as the most advanced works of contemporary literature. This, of course, is not to be confused with the anti-romantic attack that reduced it to an abstract psychological impulse or to a recurring, usually morbid, state of mind, in the manner of the psychological critics we have discussed earlier. Nor is it opposed to the scholarly endeavor to describe accurately a specific romantic movement and to delineate its historical and social setting. It is simply an awareness of the enormous importance of romanticism, and of realism, as literary *techniques* for the whole of world literature and, consequently, their enduring usefulness in the fields of comparative literature and literary theory.

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