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George Panichas

Russell Kirk as Man of Letters

It was Thomas Carlyle (1795-1881), the Scots essayist and historian whose guiding genius, Emerson said, was his moral sense, who gave emphatic praise to "The Hero as Man of Letters," one of the lectures later included in his book *Heroes, Hero-Worship and the Heroic in History* (1841). The man of letters, he declared, is "our most important modern person," an "heroic seeker" of the light who belongs to "that Priesthood of the Writers of Books" containing "the Thought of man; the true thaumaturgic value." A man of letters like Samuel Johnson taught "a Moral Prudence" and "stood by the old formulas," Carlyle thus maintained. "Formulas fashion themselves as Paths do, as beaten Highways, leading men towards some sacred or high object." Indeed, Carlyle himself was to exemplify his own conception of men of letters who "plant themselves in the everlasting truth of things" and proclaim that "life must be pitched on a higher plane." For him the eighteenth century, in particular, embodied "a Sceptical world" stamped by "spiritual paralysis" and "the disorganized condition of society"—a world in which scepticism contributed both intellectually and morally to "a chronic atrophy and disease of the whole soul." At the very center of this world in crisis, Carlyle insisted, "the battle of Belief against Unbelief is the never-ending battle."

No less heroically than his Scots forefather in his time, Russell Amos Kirk (1918-

1994), the American essayist and historian of politics, honored the office of man of letters in our time. To him this office was his calling, and he devoted himself to it with all of his strength—selflessly, reverently, honestly. His life, his writing, his teaching illustrated, both in their union and in their unity, those special qualities that unmistakably identify a man of letters and set him apart from the literati and intelligentsia of his generation. Some aspirants to the office of man of letters may have the critical intelligence and sensitivity that a literary scholar must have to succeed. These assets, by themselves, are not enough, however. Kirk, as even a quick glance at the range of his interests and writings will confirm, did own these particular assets, but he also went far beyond them, enriched and enlarged them, deepened them. He invested them, that is, with character—with a moral and spiritual character—precisely that added element that is so often elusive and that cannot be readily obtained since it has an intrinsic worth that is beyond price. In the end this is a quality that, to possess, gives distinctions denied to others. To Russell Kirk it was given in the form of a divine spark, so to speak, so that his calling ascended to a higher calling. For what we

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finally see in the fullness of his achievement is the way in which a man of letters bears witness.

To say that the man of letters bears witness is to say also that he seeks "to point the way to first principles"—those universal values, traditions, virtues, and standards that create both order of the soul and order of the commonwealth. In Kirk the man of letters attains his substantive definition, character, worth: Intellect and spirit join forces, with a common concern and a common front. Function and responsibility are anchored in the moral imperative. The mission of the man of letters thus revolves around basic beliefs: that principles of order abide, that justice is more than human, that art is the servant of enduring standards. The man of letters, as such, is both conservative and conservator, "a guardian of old truths and old rights" who defends the discipline of continuity and the idea of permanence against the lures of progression, experimentation, innovation, in which he discerns the makings of a twin disorder—"disorder in private existence, and disorder in social existence." For Kirk, Edmund Burke's declaration that we are all subject to "the contract of eternal society" informs the faith of a man of letters in the modern world who is simultaneously a man of vision, or as Kirk writes:

From revelation, from custom and common sense, and from intuitive powers of men possessed by genius, we know that there exists law for man and law for thing. Normality is the goal of human striving; abnormality is the descent toward a condition less than human, surrender to vice.

In Kirk we view the man of letters allegiant, above all, to his moral obligations and to his belief that "humane letters give to the imagination and the reason a moral bent." To be sure, a man of letters has a generalist orientation, is concerned with

the human condition, with human destiny, with the totality of problems that relate to the process of civilization. But that orientation, and that concern, have a higher focus, ethical and moral in nature, mirrored in what Kirk terms "normative truths": John Henry Newman pinpoints its essential impulse when he speaks of the constant need to push things up to their first principles. Hence, the man of letters has the task of teaching others that there are abiding standards by which we measure our ambitions and attainments but from which we also too often fall away. Kirk never failed to alert us to this falling away from the center, and for him as a man of letters this was a fundamental requirement, a "sacred function." What finally distinguishes the man of letters from "the eager little knot of intellectuals hot after novelties" is precisely a willingness to judge matters in terms of authority, tradition, and the illative sense. In this tradition resides the "moral bent" that Kirk affirms and that he sees as missing in the modern consciousness. Above all, the man of letters is guardian of the Word, and his "normative duty" is to maintain the law of continuity and to save the permanent things from totalist ideology. How to give heart, then, to the forces of "the Great Tradition" in human life and morality, is a question that Kirk sought to answer in his long career as a man of letters:

The prophets of Israel, the words of Christ and His Disciples, the writings of the fathers of the Church, the treatises of the Schoolmen, the discourses of the great divines of Reformation and Counter-Reformation—these are the springs of American metaphysics and American morality, as they are of European metaphysics and morality.

To save American civilization from falling into a slough was a lifelong concern of Kirk as a man of letters. The grim fate of Soviet Russia since 1917 never disappeared from

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his mind and warnings. Indeed, his various social-political writings and views emerged from his perception of the sins enacted by Marxism-Leninism during his own lifetime. His responses to the negations that he associated with ideology, it needs to be said, were not so much those of a political thinker or theorist but of a man of letters who viewed the *conditio humana* at all levels and who saw unending interconnections and interrelationships between literature, politics, economics, philosophy, and, especially, religion. With Eric Voegelin, whom Kirk much admired, he insisted that "politics, like science, like art, arises out of belief in a transcendent religion; and when that faith decays, politics degenerates." This process of degeneration he portrays with utmost critical acuteness and severity in his work and pinpoints in its irreligious tendencies and opinions. The religious side of Kirk's achievement comes from his deep understanding of the disorder of soul that he finds mirroring the disorder of society itself. Kirk never failed to see the

world as an organic whole. Put simply but emphatically, Kirk is not a political but a transcendental man of letters, one who, even as he is an active witness to the crisis of modernity, rises above it, refusing to be consumed by its corruptions and catastrophisms, but at the same time always and utterly aware of their effects on the life of the soul and the life of society.

Both as a dedicated man of letters and as a firm upholder of humane letters, Kirk sought to steer clear of "the errors of ideology." He chose to defend "prudential politics as opposed to ideological politics," which he connected with fanaticism, with utopian schemes, and with revolutionary tactics that

strive to transform human society and human nature. Religion and metaphysics, he insisted, were the prime targets of ideology, which he defined as "the politics of unreason" and which he viewed as the major enemy of tradition, custom, convention, prescription, old constitutions, in short, the traditions of civility and our cultural patrimony. Kirk cites Marxist-Leninist ideology, in particular, as an example of what ultimately destroys the situations and



From left to right: Malcolm Muggeridge, Annette Kirk, Russell Kirk, Kitty Muggeridge at Piety Hill (1978). Kirk would later remark that this snapshot to him captured what T.S. Eliot called a "timeless moment."

themes that inspire humane letters. In ideology, Kirk perceived a dogmatic political theory, or doctrine, striving to substitute secular forms and doctrines for religious goals and doctrines, which ultimately creates "a series of terrestrial hells." In ideology, then, Kirk sees not only the death of the imagination, particularly the moral imagination, but also the ruin of all those living values which give birth to the man of letters and to which he swears his allegiance. Ideology signifies, as such, the triumph of what Burke calls "the antagonist world"—a world of disorder that inevitably erodes the study of humane letters and, in effect, the office of the man of letters itself. The true man of

letters, as Kirk so amply and aptly demonstrated in a career spanning four decades, has a latitudinarian, long-range view of the world in the sense that, as Confucius remarks, "the man who does not take far views will have near troubles." A man of letters, in short, stands at the opposite pole of the "terrible simplifiers": ideological reformers who seek, at any cost, to establish "the Terrestrial Paradise."

With the "keen-sighted few" who belong to the great tradition of English-speaking men of letters—Irvig Babbitt, Paul Elmer More, T. S. Eliot, Richard M. Weaver—and also of European men of letters like Eric Voegelin, Werner Jaeger, Josef Pieper, Max Picard, Kirk unfailingly sought to teach wisdom rather than illusory opinions and vain wishes. (Not surprisingly he was an admirer of Joseph Conrad's novels, especially *Under Western Eyes*, *The Secret Agent*, and *Nostromo*, which he saw as having absolutely no illusions about ideological schemes that lead to the dead-ends of anarchism, nihilism, liberalism, imperialism.) This intellectual tradition emphasized transcendent reality, the supreme leap in being, the discipline of continuity and of moral order, the "inner check" and principles of order that the Neo-Humanists affirmed, as distinguished from the lures and frills, the vagaries of the "open society," zealously espoused by the social scientists and social engineers, and by modern progressivists and utopians. The latter, whom Kirk classified as "philodoxers," lovers of opinion or arid doctrine, help to create precisely that spiritual disorder that brings on both individual and collective abnormality. Kirk knew that only with the acceptance of defined limits and of standards does the man of letters have anything of value and good influence to impart. In spite of the pressing demands of stringent criticism and the habits of critical diagnosis, Kirk was ever san-

guine. Though he admitted that "The world belongs to the vulgar—including the vulgar intellectuals," he also found grounds for hope: "Yet here or there endures a wise man of the stamp of Pascal or Samuel Johnson, abiding in a tradition, still employing the power of the Word to scourge the follies of the time."

If Kirk possessed the historical sense, he also possessed the religious sense, which shapes and sharpens his critical judgments and discriminations. He was never to waver in his belief that "the Flight from God" destroys humane letters. This belief gave centrality to his writings, to their perspective and significance. Whatever Kirk wrote was centered in his awareness of the divine otherness that radiates through the whole of human existence. And this it was that separated his writings, his thought, his life, from a "sham otherness" and from the decadent productions we have come increasingly to associate with "the treason of the intellectuals" in the modern age. Kirk added manifestly, in his time and through his many and various writings, to "the literature of vision." He refused to accede to that spirit of the time requiring us to "be utterly demythologized, disenchanted, desacralized, and deconsecrated." He fought hard against the mentality of the "secular city." Humility was for Kirk, as it was for T. S. Eliot, one of the highest of the "permanent things"; without it the "moral imagination" could not survive. The "tragic sense of life," Kirk further stressed, deepens one's perception of life free of illusion, of sentiment, a quality that he singles out in the writings of Ralph Ellison and of George Orwell. No sentence, in fact, better captures Kirk's critical acuteness than this:

Orwell's was that radicalism which is angry with society because society has failed to provide men with the norms of simple life—family, decency, and continuity, the sort of radicalism which does not mean to disinte-

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Kirk asked *the* question that any dedicated modern man of letters should ask of his contemporaries: Can humane civilization survive in that modern wasteland which an Orwell and an Aldous Huxley prophetically portray? Throughout his life and career Kirk sought for answers to this "accursed question." The chaos and decadence he saw all around him reinforced his awareness of ascendant evil in society and culture. But he never despaired as he gave his witness in essay after essay, book after book; his was not so much a career as it was a moral mission to redeem the time. To the very end he insisted that "the purpose of literature is not simple amusement, but rather the guarding and advancement of the permanent things." No one fought harder or more nobly than Kirk for this purpose; and no one understood more fully the multi-dimensions of this purpose, literary and political, social and cultural. The clarity and coherence of Kirk's judgments are always evident; his powers of discernment are invariably strong and subtle. "Man thinking" comes alive in Kirk as a man of letters who knows how to evaluate things in their true meaning and importance, to rescue them from ideological claptrap. How Kirk rescues Woodrow Wilson from "revisionist liberals" and sees him as an essentially "prudent conservative reformer, desirous of keeping America what she has been," is a trenchant example of Kirk's critical acuteness:

...he may be recorded as the last of our literary statesmen, bringing to the presidential office the humane and juridical disciplines. He did not merely drift with events: he perceived some of the deeper issues of this century better than anyone else among successful politicians....He was the sort of leader who makes possible the existence of democratic republics.

To read Kirk on "Woodrow Wilson and the Antagonist World" is to be reminded of what a man of letters in the modern world should be and do, or as Allen Tate best describes both function and process: "He must do first what he has always done: he must recreate for his age the image of man, and he must propagate standards by which other men may test that image, and distinguish the false from the true." It is good to remember Tate's words when estimating Kirk's worth as a man of letters. In an age so blatantly contemptuous of standards, Kirk never flinched from searching for and applying them in the name of order itself. Thus in clarifying the nature of Wilson's "failure"—"His failure was the failure of the nation's political imagination in those years, a normative failure"—Kirk emphasizes the absence of the Burkean principles of prudence, prescription, prejudice. He never failed to make connections, to show interrelations, to gauge causes and effects, ends and means. Unfailingly, he accepted Irving Babbitt's dictum, uttered in the very first paragraph of *Democracy and Leadership* (1924)—for Kirk "one of the few truly important works of political thought to be written by an American in the twentieth century—or, for that matter, during the past two centuries":

When studied with any degree of thoroughness, the economic problem will be found to run into the political problem, the political problem in turn into the philosophical problem, and the philosophical problem itself to be almost indissolubly bound up at last with the religious problem.

The critical problems, the defining concerns and responsibilities, of which Babbitt speaks in this arresting sentence are precisely those that occupied Kirk in his body of writings. Clearly he was to extend the frontiers of criticism in ways that purely literary and academic critics have been unable to do. And clearly Kirk was possessed

by the larger problem and the larger concern, even as he was speaking to the larger audience, to man at large. His thought reached beyond an institutional complex, beyond a specified area of endeavor, beyond immediate issues. The world as an organic whole was his constant concern, and he sought to guard the organic character of life from the incontinences and reductionisms that modernity has created with a vengeance. With Burke he believed that "Good order is the foundation of good things." The man of letters as a guardian of our "entailed inheritance" attains in Kirk a primacy of importance. He had learned well the lessons Burke articulated: "A spirit of innovation is generally the result of a selfish temper and confined views. People will not look forward to posterity, who never look backward to their ancestors." The conflict between the forces of integration and those of disintegration signified for Kirk our crisis of modernity. In his scrutiny of this conflict he brought to bear "the two principles of conservation and correction" that Burke affirms. These two principles are requisite to Kirk in his function as a man of letters.

The man of letters attains a preeminent stature, both literary and moral, in Kirk. His writings, in their full variety and meaning, magnify the very term "man of letters." Indeed, this term achieves, with Kirk, far more significance and authority than the secondary status to which T. S. Eliot, albeit respectfully, assigns men of letters (as distinguished from men of genius) whose main function it is to preserve the continuity of a great tradition of literature. To be sure, Kirk served this particular cause faithfully. But, as any examination of his writings finally shows, Kirk propels the man of letters to a much higher level, the lasting importance of his work being commensurate with that of writers of genius who embody the moral imagination. In this respect, Kirk opposes

the nominalism that neoteric critics and teachers, especially behaviorists, social scientists, and Marxists, embrace. He insists that "only by a return to the true sources of wisdom—which in part are the visions of genius—can the critic of society find standards by which to measure our present discontents and to propose remedies." Invariably he exposes the dissipations that accompany "vulgarized pragmatism." Religion and prescriptive morality are primary aspects of his commentaries on a civil social order that culminates in a Benthamite-technologico society. To repeat, as a man of letters Kirk addresses himself to the total human situation; literary, historical, and political texts, hence, are only parts of the whole. A man of letters, Kirk makes clear, must have perspective, but he must also have vision, which, according to Swift, is "the art of seeing things invisible."

What gives Kirk's work its special, revelatory powers is his genius for understanding things visible and invisible, in direct relation to the permanent things; in his writings all these things attain transcendent reconciliation. The metaphysical quality that illuminates Kirk's achievement makes it possible for us to fathom what Gabriel Marcel calls the "mystery of being." No other modern man of letters helps us more than Kirk to experience both communication and transcendence as meaning and possibility; the outer life and the inner life, in short, are not profanely divided in Kirk's writing. In reckoning their connections and also their confluence, Kirk avoided the vagaries of the relative and the abstract. Anyone who studies the elements of style in Kirk's writings will quickly recognize a concrete, stable temper and tone—solidity, balance, composure, robustness. He is, undeniably, a master of English language and style, as these paragraphs on "John Randolph of Roanoke" (1773-1833), American statesman and orator, vividly

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Randolph of Roanoke died in a Philadelphia inn, strange and wonderful to the last. There is no statue in his memory. The fierce lover of permanence was buried in the woods of Roanoke. But in 1879, his body was exhumed and taken to Hollywood Cemetery, in Richmond. The roots of a great tree, penetrating through his coffin, had twined through the dead man's long black hair and filled his skull. So, doubtless, he would have wished to lie forever. Yet modern America, ill at ease in the presence of things immutable, will not permit even the bones of genius to rest secure.

Against the lust for change, Randolph had fought with all his talents. And though he lost, he fell with a brilliancy that was almost consolation for disaster.

His style, it can be said, is guided unceasingly by the principle of prudence, "the soul's stern sacristan," as one poet expresses it. Not surprisingly prudence is a heart-word in Kirk's lexicon.

As a man of letters Kirk is also a teacher who strives mightily to train the intellect and also to shape the soul. The educational process for Kirk in effect involves a double discipline leading to "order in the soul of the person, the direction of will and appetite by reason...[and] order in the commonwealth, through the understanding of justice, freedom and the public good." The primary function of education is to rouse the moral imagination, to impart a moral heritage—"to teach that the virtues and the vices are real, and that the individual is not free to toy with the sins as he may choose." The "ideology of Democratism," Kirk further insisted, has dissolving effects on all levels of society and culture, which Edmund Burke had prophetically recognized back in the eighteenth century and whose words

Kirk never stopped pondering in his lifetime:

All the super-added ideas, furnished from the wardrobe of a moral imagination, which the heart owns, and the understanding ratifies, as necessary to cover the defects of our naked shivering nature, and to raise it to dignity in our own estimation, are to be exploded as a ridiculous, absurd, and antiquated fashion.

Kirk never surrendered his sacred texts, "those grand and decorous principles and manners," to recall Burke's phrase, that



Max Picard [left] with Russell Kirk [right] and Mrs. Henry Regnery in Switzerland (circa 1955).

build and define modern Western civilization. To the end he gave his loyalty to loyalty. "Only through prescription and tradition," Kirk wrote, "only by habitual acceptance of just and sound authority, only by conformity to norms, can men acquire knowledge of the permanent things."

Kirk never weakened in his resistance to the "adulterated metaphysics" (to quote Burke again) of modern times. His writings, though by no means having a particular system of thought or doctrine to convey, in their discrete parts and in their organic whole, can be viewed as essays of resistance to the profane spirit of the time—to the forces of nihilism that increasingly besiege humane letters and life. That resistance continued to the very end of his life's work; he

opposed the enemies of the permanent things at every step of the way, across a wide front, under fire—"And, through the heat of conflict, keeps the law," to recall here Wordsworth's "happy Warrior." In their "dogmas of negation" he perceived dangers that, not to be resisted, prove fatal. Kirk's example reminds us that the man of letters must also be a brave man of character who does not succumb to the blandishments of "sophisters, economists, and calculators." With patience and singleness of vision, he confronted the "antagonist world," diagnosing and judging it according to moral criteria. In the ideology of a "new morality," Kirk viewed the ultimate point of corruption, of human degradation and nothingness. It is with special and characteristic approbation that he chooses to quote these words of Gustave Thibon (b. 1903), the French religious philosopher: "The decline of moral habit produces, in its first stage, a rigid and exalted moralism; and in its second, an immoralism raised to the level of doctrine; sooner or later, it invariably gives birth to the lowest level of morality."

Kirk graced the office of the man of letters with dignity and with style, the ultimate morality of a mind, just and clear. In word and work, in his ministry, so to speak, he manifested above all the great gift of perception, which is essentially a diagnosis. But perhaps the greatest of all gifts apportioned to him was what Saint Paul speaks of as "the discerning of spirits." Kirk possessed the discriminating sense, the ability, that is, to make exact distinctions after careful observation and reflection. This ability is itself a sign of one who has thought and measured; and of one whose critiques emerge from an intrinsically heroic recognition that the "need for roots" and the "roots of order" are indissoluble. His censorial inspection of modern conditions and circumstances was always conducted in the spirit of affirma-

tion, in the firm belief that adversity "frequently opens the way for the impulse toward virtue." Even when Kirk is most caustic he is not, as Carlyle wrote of another great Scotsman, Robert Burns, "a mourning man"—"A large fund of Hope dwells in him." He is always guiding us out of the wasteland of modern existence to the way of affirmation—an "encourager unto all good labours," as well as "encourager of letters and the arts."

There are no entries for "man of letters" in the major encyclopedias. Rather perfunctorily, *Webster's Third New International Dictionary* defines the man of letters as "1. a learned man: scholar; 2. a literary man." Any future estimate of Russell Kirk's achievement should considerably expand our view of what it is the man of letters signifies. Those same marks of greatness that one finds in the poet, the novelist, the seer, as Kirk's example shows with abundance, can be equally present in the man of letters. He had the extraordinary ability to make us see things in ways we never did before. Thus, he helped change forever Americans' understanding of the conservative mind and of the moral imagination. Only an independent, creative man of thought can bring about this epochal happening, particularly in a time of history hateful of what Burke calls "the ancient permanent sense of mankind." To the office of the man of letters, then, Kirk brings a critical comprehensiveness anchored in wisdom and insight. But beyond this, he gave to his high calling an integrity that the man of vision must possess absolutely if his contribution is to have viability. It is, in fact, a transcendent visionary quality fusing the temporal order and the spiritual order that he depicts in his writings and thought.

As a man of letters Kirk was far more than one who possesses much learning and complete intellectual command. He was to ad-

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dress himself to the total human situation, and to "speak to the condition," to use the Quaker phrase, with a seriousness and sacredness of purpose found only in great visionary writers of prose and poetry, those who in the end belong to a great tradition and strive to preserve humankind from injury, violence, or infraction—for example, a Samuel Johnson, an Edmund Burke, a Walter Scott, a Nathaniel Hawthorne, a Joseph Conrad, a T. S. Eliot. In Kirk the modern American man of letters achieves the quintessence of his calling, his witness. To the office of the man of letters, above all, he gave the added sapiential dimension of one who, in the ancient Greek context, is both a *spoudaios*, a man of character, of excellence, of moral importance, and an *hierophylax*, a keeper of the holy things. It is no small achievement that, through his long and heroic labors, Russell Kirk raised the man of letters to true greatness in rank and dignity.

A Bibliographical Note: From a general perspective, I have composed this essay on the basis of my study of Russell Kirk's major writings as these have been published since the appearance of *The Conservative Mind* in 1953. My particular view here of Kirk as man of letters emerges from my frequentation of his many essays as these have been collected in separate volumes through the years. Of his various collections, *Enemies of the Permanent Things: Observations of Abnormality in Literature and Politics*, first published by Arlington House in 1969, and reissued in a revised edition by Sherwood Sugden and Company Publishers in 1984, best depicts Kirk as a man of letters and brings out, maximally, his representative ideas and criticism. For me *Enemies of the Permanent Things* remains the keystone of his books of essays insofar as it contains the central principles of his critical exposition and thought.

The Wise Men Know What Wicked Things Are Written on the Sky (1987), *The Politics of Prudence* (1993), and, though to a lesser extent, *America's British Culture* (1993) also figure prominently in my overall estimation. These books continue and develop the literary, social, and cultural lines of concern identi-

fied earlier in *Enemies of the Permanent Things*, clearly a book indispensable to a proper understanding of Kirk's contribution to the republic of letters. Not to go unnoticed is Kirk's *Eliot and His Age: T. S. Eliot's Moral Imagination in the Twentieth Century* (1972, 1984), which examines Eliot as the "greatest man of letters in his time." My own lengthy review of this book appeared in *The University Bookman*, xxvii (1987), 10-15, under the title "The Faith of Men of Letters."

Especially helpful to me have been three essays by T. S. Eliot: "The Classics and the Man of Letters" (1942), in his posthumous collection *To Criticize the Critic and Other Writings* (New York, 1965); "The Man of Letters and the Future of Europe," in the *Sewanee Review* (Summer 1945); and "Leadership and Letters," in the *Milton Bulletin*, Milton, Mass., XII. 1 (February 1949), originally given as the "War Memorial Address at Milton Academy, November 3, 1948."

I also want to mention Allen Tate's "The Man of Letters in the Modern World" ("The Phi Beta Kappa Address, University of Minnesota, May 1, 1952"), found in his *Essays of Four Decades* (Chicago, 1968). For a book-length study of men who shaped literary opinion in England during the Victorian, Edwardian, and contemporary eras, one should consult John Gross's *The Rise and Fall of the Man of Letters: A Study of the Idiosyncratic and the Humane in Modern Literature* (London, 1969).

Both the phrase and the subject of man of letters have long interested me; the final essay in my book *The Reverent Discipline: Essays in Literary Criticism and Culture* (1974), entitled "Austin Warren: Man of Letters," views Warren as being essentially a New England man of letters, in accordance with my belief that "great criticism demands a great humanity: a great critic must also be a great humanist." In addition to Thomas Carlyle's discussion of "The Hero as Man of Letters; Johnson, Rousseau, Burns," in *Heroes, Hero-Worship and the Heroic in History* (1841), I have also found of much value Ralph Waldo Emerson's "The Man of Letters," included in his *Lectures and Biographical Sketches* (1895). Here Emerson addresses those in pursuit of a career in letters; his words, as quoted in the following sentences, could easily serve as an epigraph to Russell Kirk's achievement: "I offer perpetual congratulation to the scholar; he has drawn the white lot in life. The very disadvantages of his condition point at his superiorities. He is too good for the world; he is in advance of his race; his function is prophetic."