

academic critics, such as Brander Matthews and it is these who still dominate the field of art and literary criticism. They are, with but a few exceptions, mere conventional commentators, timid, pedantic and sterile, and are fettered in the expression of their views by the unwritten laws which dominate all capitalistic American universities.

It is not likely that under such conditions America will produce a Lessing or a Sainte Beuve. Among the unprofessorial critics the late James Huneker undoubtedly occupied the leading place. The most fearless, forceful and destructive critic in the United States today is H. L. Mencken of Baltimore. His tone is extremely popular, and his opinions are so iconoclastic, his principles so free of the usual democratic cant, his logic for the most part so unassailable that he comes as a refreshing breeze into the stale and sickly atmosphere of American criticism. He lays about him both with sword and cudgel, a writer fortified in that rarest of all things among American critics, intellectual honesty, and by a biting satiric humor that gives a touch of the burlesque to all that he writes. His shortcomings lie in an imperfect response to the emotional and esthetic values, to lyric beauty and the ecstatic element.

It must not be assumed from what I have said that there is no interest in literature in the United States. Literature is, in fact, a great American industry. One need consider only the space devoted to book reviews in American papers, the thick literary supplements of the large dailies, the special reviews devoted to literature. What I have tried to show is the nature and the operation of those forces which work against the creation and the appreciation of a great or a true literature. The interest in books as means of entertainment and amusement is tremendous, especially among the women, for in America as we all know, it is the women who form the leisure class. It is for them that the author must write, the musician play, the painter paint. This naturally brings about the effeminization of art, the erection of feminine standards to which all American art must bow or go to economic ruin. It is the American woman who brings about the sensational successes of the "best sellers", as the popular novels with their enormous editions are called. So whilst American fiction abounds in tales of red blood, of adventure and heroic, square-jawed masculinity, these things are merely the sexual, sentimental reflection and precipitation of feminine America — of romantic hero-worship. The spiritually, the intellectually masculine note is lacking. The sisters of Culturine, of the Chatauquas and the Sunday schools rule — they and that greatest of all American idols, the American Girl.