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The radical reconfiguration over the last three decades of critical studies and what constitutes 'knowledge', whereby 'theory' and writing, literature and the 'social', poetics and politics have crossed each other's path, has led to an irreversible interrogation of previous autonomies. It would be simple to reduce this trajectory to a superficial social history that commences around 1968 and develops, above all, through the writings, both theoretical and literary, of new historical subjects distinguished by gender, ethnicity and minority status. However, these are also symptoms of an altogether deeper current that, to use the unfashionable concept of egemonia, *draws our attention to the limits and crisis, both intellectual and institutional, of a particular historical-cultural formation and its subsequent arrangement of disciplines in the western academy. The confident nineteenth-century positivism and/or idealism that cultivated and established the present day divisions and distinctions of the social sciences and humanities (and the critical and historical sense of such terms are themselves to be investigated) is exhausted. Confronted by nervous retrenchment into orthodox backwaters or else the continual adjustment of the inherited discipline in order to continue to converse with change, the initial* dispositif *is now clearly in crisis.*

Yet crisis is, of course, the very basis of criticism. This is to suggest a theoretical modality that is neither conservative nor merely accommodating. But if positivism and idealism are no longer able to mirror the world in their languages, if the confidence of a subjective objectivity orbiting around the universal I/eye (humanism) is justly afflicted by doubt, then critical work, whether in literature or anthropology, becomes an altogether more exposed, more vulnerable, undertaking. Whatever the response to such a situation, which, of course, requires recognition as a critical situation and not something to be brushed under the carpet, it becomes clear that a local response, for example restricted to the field of 'English literature', cannot be divorced from a wider comprehension of the crisis-criticism of the humanities and its particular tutelage of 'knowledge'. It is in this direction that the new series of Anglistica *proposes to travel, drawing critical strength, above all, from an interdisciplinary approach that has historically developed within the vicinity of English literary studies, that of cultural studies. But, precisely because it is interdisciplinary, existing between and beyond existing disciplines, neither cultural studies nor the critical perspective proposed for this journal can claim the authority of an intellectual orthodoxy nor the institutional recognition of a disciplinary regime. Being vulnerable is an uncomfortable, but necessary, position to occupy; the only comfort it provides is the perpetual aperture, the opening, through which an intellectual challenge can continue on its way.*

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Vol. 6 (2002), n. 1, *Intersecting Discourses in the "American Renaissance" (and beyond)*
(editors for this issue: Mario Corona, Donatella Izzo)

EDITORIAL

The whole notion of an "American Renaissance" – the title of F. O. Matthiessen's foundational 1941 study and a time-honored rubric for countless books, journals, classroom texts, university courses and syllabi – has enjoyed a somewhat contradictory reputation over the last fifteen years or so. A significant index to this ambivalent status may be provided by Volume two of the *Cambridge History of American Literature* edited by Sacvan Bercovitch, covering the years 1820-1865 and published in 1995. Only once does the phrase "American renaissance" appear in the final index, with reference to Michael Davitt Bell's treatment not of the age as a whole but specifically of Matthiessen's book (curiously enough, since the entry is not italicized). Again, only once is the familiar label mentioned in Bercovitch's introduction to the volume, and then in the plural and between scare quotes, as "several distinct 'American renaissances'" that radically undermine, in their manifold patterns, functions, and aesthetic standards, the formerly undisputed uniqueness of the literary achievement canonized by Matthiessen.[1] On the other hand, despite the critics' undeniably uneasy handling of the expression, the jacket presentation of the Cambridge volume declares it right away to be "a comprehensive new account of the American Renaissance", thus bearing witness to the lasting authority and appeal of the definition — if nothing else, as a commercial catchword evidently more capable of pointing out for the reader the scope and relevance of the volume than the more historically neutral definitions currently favored by critics, "Jacksonian era" or "ante-bellum literature".

In its unstable reference – both to a historical age and to a literary practice, both to a work of criticism and to a critical operation – "American Renaissance" has laid itself open to multiple and contradictory criticisms and appropriations. It has been both contested

[1] *The Cambridge History of American Literature*, Volume 2: 1820-1865, general editor Sacvan Bercovitch, associate editor Cyrus R. K. Patell (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 6.

and reinscribed by being repeatedly adopted in such ethnically inflected forms as "Native American Renaissance" or "Asian American Renaissance"; but simultaneously (and sadly, in view of Matthiessen's own personal and political positions) the first result of an internet search for the key terms "American+Renaissance" is, nowadays, a white supremacist political group.

These contradictions are themselves inherent in the critical history of the expression. The definition, actually coined by Samuel Knapp in 1829, revived during the nineteenth century, and later adopted (not without hesitation, as David Leverenz reminds us in this issue) by Matthiessen for his pioneering book, has long been a byword to refer to "the age of Emerson and Whitman", as the book's subtitle specifies.[2] For generations of scholars and students both inside and outside the US, it has been synonymous with the triumphant achievement of both US literature – as endowed with an aesthetic value, original direction, and distinctive voice of its own and therefore equal to more ancient and established traditions – and US literary studies – as an intellectual pursuit capable of producing its own categories and standards, and therefore as a legitimate academic enterprise worthy of an institutional status comparable to that of English (i.e., British) literature.

Italy may be an exemplary instance of the widespread influence and authority of Matthiessen's work outside the US. *American Renaissance* (*Rinascimento americano. Arte ed espressione nell'età di Emerson e di Whitman*) was translated in 1954 by Franco Lucentini, a versatile and sophisticated translator as well as being a writer in his own right, and published by Einaudi – one of the most prominent publishing houses in the country, which in the post-war years was committed to renewing Italian culture after Fascism by opening it to the stimuli offered by

[2] F. O. Matthiessen, *American Renaissance. Art and Expression in the Age of Emerson and Whitman* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1941). On the history of the title of Matthiessen's book, see note 1 in David Leverenz's contribution to the "American Renaissance" forum, in this issue. For a documented reconstruction of the history of the whole discourse of an "American renaissance" and a critique of its implications, see Charlene Avallone, "What American Renaissance? The Gendered Genealogy of a Critical Discourse", *PMLA* 112:5 (October 1997), 1102-1120. Giles Gunn ascribes the first use of the expression to Knapp in "The Kingdoms of Theory and the New Historicism in America", *Yale Review* 77:2 (1988), 207-236.

foreign philosophical, political, and literary critical thought. Cesare Pavese, then one of the leading writers and intellectuals in Italy, as well as translator of *Moby-Dick*, recommended Matthiessen's book to Einaudi for publication; the important essay he devoted to it, "Maturità americana", was reprinted as a preface to *Rinascimento americano* after Pavese's death. The book — obviously in tune with some vital political and literary currents in Italian democratic culture past and present, as shown by Matthiessen's own reference to Francesco De Sanctis and Benedetto Croce — was reviewed by several important critics and proved extremely influential both on Italian culture at large and on Italian studies of American literature.[3] Through the work of the first Americanist scholars, and especially of such a leading figure of American studies in Italy as Agostino Lombardo (in Matthiessen's tradition, simultaneously a committed intellectual, a militant critic, and a university professor), *American Renaissance* has been for several generations of Italian students and scholars the classical critical text *par excellence*, decisive to their understanding of American literature. This helps explain the enduring critical fortune in Italy of the authors canonized by Matthiessen (with the partial exception of Emerson, which Giorgio Mariani explores in this issue), with important studies published on Hawthorne, Whitman, Thoreau, and especially Melville, by each successive generation of scholars — a critical output possibly equalled in magnitude and continuity only by studies on Henry James.[4]

It is by virtue of his very success that both Matthiessen's selection of great authors and his way of conceptualizing greatness – in other words, both his canon and his standards – have come under attack and

[3] See Agostino Lombardo, "Rinascimento americano", in *Il diavolo nel manoscritto. Saggi sulla tradizione letteraria americana* (Milan: Rizzoli, 1974).

[4] It may be of some interest (particularly for non-Italian readers) to note that, due to the strong influence of a well established historicist, materialist, and Marxist critical tradition alongside an idealistic one, Italian criticism would seem to have been less open to the idealizing, transcendentally aesthetic implications of Matthiessen's discourse, as lamented by Matthiessen's "dissensus" critics in the US. All in all, despite the considerable success of structuralism and semiotics with Italian literary scholars in the 1970s and early 1980s, the historical and political dimension of literary texts seems to have been constantly present to the minds of Italian Americanists. This is also shown by their early attention to issues of class, race, and gender difference, as witness a sizable number of studies starting from the late 1960s and early 1970s.

become primary targets for criticism once the "canon wars" have begun and a "period of 'dissensus'", in Sacvan Bercovitch's effective and fortunate phrase, has set in.[5] Both "American" and "Renaissance" have been made problematic by the critical and theoretical work of the last two decades, questioning both the notion of canonicity as unequalled and undisputable literary excellence and the idea of "America" as coextensive with the United States and expressing a single, unique, and homogeneous national and cultural identity. Inevitably, the once unquestionable achievement of the "American Renaissance" as the culmination of the national identity and artistic experience of the US (predicated, as Cecelia Tichi has noted, on a "*from-to* model based on the notion of aesthetic incipience leading to fulfillment") has come to signify a white, male, bourgeois, New England-based canon; a parochial exceptionalism and "a kind of cisatlantic hermeticism", as Lawrence Buell has termed it, binding US literature, in Eric Cheyfitz's words, "to a certain self-inclosed or nationalizing interpretation, which is linked to a fetishizing of the authority of the author"; and indeed, the very operation of selection, exclusion, and canonization itself, with all its false universality and ideological arbitrariness.[6]

Significantly, what has since come to be known as the work of the "New Americanists" (from Frederick Crews's polemical appellation in his 1988 review essay) first came into being as a series of individual but coherent confrontations with that most canonical of literary ages, the inescapable benchmark and testing ground of new critical methods and assumptions.[7] In his well-known essay on "The

[5] Sacvan Bercovitch, "The Problem of Ideology in American Literary History", *Critical Inquiry* 12 (Summer 1986), 633.

[6] Cecelia Tichi, "American Literary Studies to the Civil War", in Stephen Greenblatt and Giles Gunn, eds., *Redrawing the Boundaries: The Transformation of English and American Literary Studies* (New York: Modern Language Association of America, 1992), 209; Lawrence Buell, "American Literary Emergence as a Postcolonial Phenomenon", *American Literary History* 4 (1992), 411-442, 413; Eric Cheyfitz, "The Irresistibleness of Great Literature: Reconstructing Hawthorne's Politics", *American Literary History* 6 (1994), 539-558, 544. Cheyfitz has extensively argued his critique in "Matthiessen's *American Renaissance*: Circumscribing the Revolution", *American Quarterly* 41 (1989), 341-361. See also Avallone.

[7] Frederick Crews, "Whose American Renaissance?", *The New York Review of Books*, October 27, 1988, 68-81.

Problem of Ideology in American Literary History", Sacvan Bercovitch provided possibly the most authoritative and comprehensive expression of the common theoretical rationale underlying the work of the "New Americanists": a revisionary claim for a new literary historiography committed to diversity and dissensus (the multivolume *Cambridge History of American Literature*, then at its inception) and for a self-aware ideological approach to America as "a rhetorical battleground" and to the American Renaissance not as transcending history but as performing ideological work in its very antagonistic stance.[8] Starting from the 1980s (the 1982-3 sessions on the "American Renaissance" at the English Institute might be taken as a convenient starting point),[9] the former emphasis on unitary and transcendent aesthetic paradigms and on the unique, totalizing, and self-evident meaning of "American" has been replaced by a meticulous work of recontextualization and historicization. Following in the wake of Nina Baym and Jane Tompkins, critics have recovered an execrated tradition of "scribbling women", argued for the crucial cultural work they performed, reclaimed their literary function, and exposed the rationale whereby they had been systematically expunged from the canon.[10] Houston Baker has foregrounded the "boundaries of ethnic exclusion" acting as "prescriptive structures" in American

[8] Bercovitch, "The Problem of Ideology", 636.

[9] The sessions were titled "The American Renaissance Reconsidered" and "The Other American Renaissance" and aimed respectively at historicizing the period celebrated by Matthiessen and enlarging the canon it proposed; hence, by extension, they meant to relativize, question, and revise the principles for literary analysis and the criteria for greatness prevalent from Matthiessen's time throughout the 1960s and most of the 1970s. The papers were first collected as *Selected Papers from the English Institute*, 1982-3, n.9, and later republished in a ground-breaking volume: Walter Benn Michaels and Donald E. Pease, eds., *The American Renaissance Reconsidered* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1985).

[10] Nina Baym, *Woman's Fiction: A Guide to Novels by and about Women in America 1820-70* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1978); "Melodramas of Beset Manhood: How Theories of American Fiction Exclude Women Authors", *American Quarterly* 33 (1981), 123-139; *Novels, Readers, and Reviewers: Responses to Fiction in Antebellum America* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1984); Jane Tompkins, *Sensational Designs: The Cultural Work of American Fiction, 1790-1860* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985). Nina Baym has continued to open new paths of research in the nineteenth century, as witness her latest study of *American Women of Letters and Nineteenth-Century Sciences*, published in 2002 and reviewed in this issue.

literary history and constructing it according to "an ideology that classified European man as the acme of being", paving the way to a radically renewed consideration of the transatlantic slave trade as a central axis of US culture and of slave narratives as a central tradition in US literary discourse (a tradition vigorously reinstated, to mention just a few examples, by Baker's own work; by Henry Louis Gates's work both on literary theory and on the recovery of forgotten texts; by Jean Fagan Yellin's edition of Harriet Jacobs's *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*; by Hazel Carby's work on African American women novelists).[11] David Reynolds's *Beneath the American Renaissance*, while concentrating on the canonical authors, unearthed a wealth of formerly ignored products of contemporary popular culture to which they were indebted.[12] The works of Philip Fisher, Michael Gilmore, David Leverenz, Carolyn Porter have highlighted a number of as yet unexplored historical, social, psychological, and economic issues related to representations and roles of class and gender, to the new market economy and the resulting pressures, adding new dimensions, tensions, and nuances to our perception of individual texts and authors as well as of the literary age.[13] The race question and the Civil War – virtually obliterated as cogent issues by Matthiessen in his quest for unity and integration – have been reinstated to their central

[11] Houston A. Baker, jr., "Figurations for a New American Literary History", in Sacvan Bercovitch and Myra Jehlen, eds., *Ideology and Classic American Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 148, 147, 150; Id., *Blues, Ideology, and Afro-American Literature: A Vernacular Theory* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984); Henry Louis Gates, ed., *Race, Writing, and Difference* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986); *The Signifying Monkey: A Theory of Afro-American Literary Criticism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988); Harriet Jacobs, *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl: Written by Herself*, ed. Jean Fagan Yellin (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1987); Hazel V. Carby, *Reconstructing Womanhood: The Emergence of the Afro-American Woman Novelist* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989).

[12] David S. Reynolds, *Beneath the American Renaissance: The Subversive Imagination in the Age of Emerson and Melville* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1988).

[13] Philip Fisher, *Hard Facts: Form and Setting in the American Novel* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985); Michael T. Gilmore, *American Romanticism and the Marketplace* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985); David Leverenz, *Manhood and the American Renaissance* (Ithaca, Cornell University Press, 1989); Carolyn Porter, *Seeing and Being: The Plight of the Participant Observer in Emerson, James, Adams, and Faulkner* (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 1981).

position in mid-nineteenth-century culture by the works of Donald Pease and Eric Sundquist.[14] Both in their original English Institute papers and in their subsequent essays and volumes, they undertook a radical re-historicization of the American Renaissance not just in terms of general principles and values (the "devotion to the possibilities of democracy" that Matthiessen singled out as the "one common denominator" of his five writers)[15] but of actual policies, national politics, current cultural debate, and social and historical contingencies, seeking to relocate this "*locus classicus* for America's literary history" from the "sacred time" of rebirth and transcendence to the secular time of factual national history.[16] Finally, this work of recontextualization and rehistoricization of the American Renaissance has involved not only the antebellum age, but Matthiessen's own act of canon formation. In the frame of the World War II and Popular Front politics, we are in a better position to understand both Matthiessen's masterful achievement and his limits and exclusions, both his uncompromising stand for the superior value of democracy and of the "common man" and his quest for unity, wholeness, and

[14] Donald E. Pease, *Visionary Compacts: American Renaissance Writings in Cultural Context* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1987); Eric J. Sundquist, *To Wake the Nations: Race in the Making of American Literature* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1993). See also their contributions to *The American Renaissance Reconsidered*, as well as Sundquist's essay on "*Benito Cereno* and New World Slavery" (in Sacvan Bercovitch, ed., *Reconstructing American Literary* History [Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1986]) and his chapter on "The Literature of Expansion and Race" in the already cited Volume two of *The Cambridge History of American Literature*; and Pease's introductions to Amy Kaplan and Donald E. Pease, eds., *Cultures of United States Imperialism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1993) and to the two 1994 volumes he has edited for the "New Americanists" series of Duke University Press, which he directs: *National Identities and Post-Americanist Narratives* and *Revisionary Interventions into the Americanist Canon*.

[15] Matthiessen, *American Renaissance*, ix.

[16] Pease, "Introduction", in Michaels and Pease, eds., *The American Renaissance Reconsidered*, vii.

[17] See in particular Jonathan Arac, "F. O. Matthiessen: Authorizing an American Renaissance", in Michaels and Pease, eds., *The American Renaissance Reconsidered*; Pease, *Visionary Compacts*; Myra Jehlen, "Introduction: Beyond Transcendence", in Bercovitch and Jehlen, eds., *Ideology and Classic American Literature*.

aesthetic transcendence, as well as the subsequent re-canonization of his work in the Cold War era.[17]

The whole of this critical work – and the many other studies that have accompanied it and followed in its wake – amounts to a sweeping revision and, in retrospect, to a paradigm shift of staggering magnitude. It has heightened our awareness of conflict and diversity, of the manifold relations between texts and history, individual imagination and society; it has changed our perception not only of the American Renaissance but of American literature and of American literary studies as a whole, as witness the publication of such an innovative and controversial textbook as *The Heath Anthology of American Literature*, edited by Paul Lauter and published in 1990.[18] As Michael P. Kramer writes in his recent, thoughtful reassessment of the polemics over "New Americanist" studies, what seemed and was revolutionary then is now part of our basic outlook: "Many of their assertions are our assumptions … Our contexts and canons have been revised … it is arguably (to use Sacvan Bercovitch's phrase) a 'time of dissensus.' Or, to underscore the irony in Bercovitch's coinage, the dissensus has become the consensus".[19]

Of such a ground-breaking collective work of critical revision and renewal, the six scholars who participate in our forum on "'American Renaissance': Past, present, and future" have been outstanding protagonists. What they offer here is not just an inside view and an exceptionally documented account of the whole process, but, so to speak, an in-progress extension of the process itself. In reconstructing the biographical, academic, and institutional ambiance of their own early work and assessing its impact, sketching the outlines of their professional development, as well as evaluating the present trends of teaching and criticism, the intersecting (mostly convergent, occasionally divergent) voices of these critics present a remarkable instance of self-aware, historicizing critical work in its own right – another chapter in a critical story that, as Michael Gilmore astutely

[18] *The Heath Anthology of American Literature*, general editor Paul Lauter (Lexington, Mass., and Toronto: D. C. Heath, 1990).

[19] Michael P. Kramer, "Imagining Authorship in America: 'Whose American Renaissance?' Revisited", *American Literary History* 13 (Spring 2001), 108-125, here 108, 109.

remarks in his forum contribution, began in the Cold War but has now proceeded to a different stage, where criticism is confronted with the task of honing its tools to cope with the different anxieties and preoccupations of the age of global capitalism.

The "intersecting discourses in the American Renaissance" of our title, then, are the critical discourses that intersect in and on that field of US literary studies, but also, the manifold cultural discourses that intersect in US antebellum literature, as foregrounded by revisionary criticism. The critical essays collected in this issue all intentionally engage Matthiessen's canonical authors (Thoreau's being the only absence and Emily Dickinson the only understandable addition) from what would once have been called "extra-literary" – historical, philosophical, sociological – angles. Starting from the assumptions first created by the critical works of the 1980s, they take for granted what those works had to contend for, the continuity between the literary order and the philosophical, social, political, economic ones, and make it the ground for their textual analyses. Myra Jehlen – herself one of the leading figures in the process outlined above – analyzes the conflict between different versions of the relation between the ethical and the aesthetic principles in Hawthorne's *The House of the Seven Gables*, reading the much-debated ending of the novel as evidence of a divorce between the two. Mario Corona offers a perceptive reading of some high points of Whitman's poetry in terms of gender, showing the way they textually erase the barriers between private and public sphere, masculine and feminine, heterosexual and homosexual erotic drives, placing sexuality at the very center of poetic discourse. Gianna Fusco's essay carefully teases out the intersecting religious and psychological, personal and universal implications of a cluster of Emily Dickinson's poems, based on subtle variations and explorations of a number of food and drink metaphors that become emblematic of want and deprivation both in the material and in the spiritual sense. Two essays are devoted to Melville, both exploring his problematic attitude towards some current cultural concerns of his times: Giuseppe Nori locates "The Encantadas" in the twofold conceptual framework of romantic historicism and sentimental ethics and aesthetics, a move that enables him to tease out the different and contradictory implications of the notion of sympathy in Melville's representation of Hunilla, the half-breed Indian woman in the eighth sketch of the tale, a representative

both of romantic "vanquished humanity" and of the conquered races of the American continent. Sonia Di Loreto takes up again the question of sympathy with reference to *The Confidence-Man*, effectively connecting the novel to the contemporary discourse on charity and to the recently acquired market dimension of the charity business that gave a new turn to the whole question of interest, disinterestedness, and moral responsibility, engendering the ambiguities and paradoxes that Melville explores in his novel. Finally, a set of three essays on Emerson – the preliminary results of a work in progress by members of the "Emerson 2003" research project – bears witness to the renewed critical interest in this crucial and elusive writer and to the growing attention he is receiving in Italy. On behalf of the research group he directs with Igina Tattoni at Università di Roma "La Sapienza", Giorgio Mariani undertakes to provide the historical and cultural framework needed to situate the group's work. He carefully reconstructs the paradoxical ebbs and tides of Emerson's reputation in Italy from late nineteenth century through the 1930s-60s (the years when American literature began as a field of study and then became established as an academic discipline in Italy) to this day, and interprets such a varying interaction by highlighting the different ways in which the twofold historical dimension involved – of Emerson's work and of Italian culture – is played out at each turn. Anna Scannavini focuses on the question of language in Emerson and reads it through Stanley Cavell's radically new interpretation as a quest for "the ordinary" in language, tracing the complex and fascinating conceptual paths that, through Cavell, connect Emerson on the one hand to ordinary language philosophy, and on the other hand to modernist reflection on literary language. This in turn leads to Matthiessen's reading of language in Emerson and hence to the Italian perception of Emerson, filtered through the translators' interpretative decisions as regards the language both of Emerson and of his critics. Carlo Martinez engages Emerson by way of Henry James and addresses both writers from a new angle: the question of the role played in each by the notion of personality as an interface between the individual and the social dimension and as the ground for the construction of a public, social and cultural function for the critic – a "rhetoric of personality" first elaborated by Emerson that each writer adopts responding to the pressures of his own historical and cultural situation. Finally, the reviews by Anna De Biasio and Elena Spandri

address recent books that open new perspectives on American nineteenth-century culture by fruitfully playing on the intersections of yet another set of different discourses: Nina Baym's study of women of letters and their relation to scientific discourse, and Malini Johar Schueller's investigation of the discourse of orientalism in its specifically American ramifications.

Although these original and stimulating essays are evidence enough of the fruitfulness of "intersecting discourses", we are collecting here two more essays that, while engaging authors and texts outside the chronological scope of the "American Renaissance", focus on some of the concerns addressed by the essays in that section and display the same fecund critical intersection of different strains of discourse. Christina Lupton's article is a close reading of Franklin's "Letter on Literary Style", skilfully applying the tools of textual and rhetorical as well as cultural analysis to reveal the implications and paradoxes of Franklin's self-reflexive and self-constitutive argument on good writing. Pierre Walker, a welcome guest of the Istituto Orientale this past spring, kindly allowed us to publish a revised version of his extremely successful talk on the political dimensions of Henry James. Resorting to his unparalleled knowledge of James's letters and other lesser-known documents, Walker is able to draw on a wealth of biographical information to argue for James's sustained interest in the world of politics, and thus to create an interpretative framework supporting his close reading of *The Portrait of a Lady* as a novel teeming with political references and steeped in the current political debate, as well as centrally dealing with the issues of gender politics and the marriage market. Of all American writers, Henry James is possibly the one most closely connected by the critical tradition with the modernist dissociation of the artistic sphere from the social and political dimension. Walker's essay, then, seemed to us a particularly suitable way of closing this issue of *Anglistica*: a fine sample of a wealth of recent political readings of the novelist, it bespeaks the multiplicity of new paths that the revision of the literary and critical canon has opened not just in the "American Renaissance" but in all fields of American literary studies.

Donatella Izzo

ARTICLES

INTERSECTING DISCOURSES IN THE AMERICAN RENAISSANCE

Myra Jehlen

The Seditious Aesthetic of Hawthorne's *House of the Seven Gables*

The established literary order, whereby novels are inextricably moral and historical documents, is already challenged in the opening sentence of *The House of the Seven Gables*, which goes like this: "Halfway down a bystreet of one of our New England towns stands a rusty wooden house, with seven acutely peaked gables, facing towards various points of the compass, and a huge, clustered chimney in the midst".[1] Apparently, the primal fact, the first thing we need to know in order to make sense of what follows, is that the world we are entering contains a house. *The House of the Seven Gables* is not the only one of Hawthorne's novels to be in thrall to an object: *The Scarlet Letter* and *The Marble Faun* also revolve about the meaning of things. But neither letter nor statue achieves as much mastery as the house. Going by the first sentence, characters and events are less fundamental than the house; they are ancillary, it is primary.

Without the house and its excess of gables, there is no story. It is the house that first launched the plot, before the novel opens, and the house has survived almost unattended into the present. Indeed, the downfall of the Pyncheon family, whose head had the house built, began the day it was completed, for this first owner died as the guests gathered to celebrate his occupancy. Since then a grim fate has reduced the house's inmates to an aged spinster, Hepzibah, living on

[1] *The House of the Seven Gables*, in Nathaniel Hawthorne, *Collected Novels* (New York: The Library of America, 1983). All references are to this edition; page numbers will be included parenthetically in the text.

in two rooms of the dark mansion. The novel opens with the arrival of a young cousin in the female line, Phoebe, whom poverty has driven to Hepzibah's doorstep with offers of making herself useful. She proposes to take over a small shop Hepzibah has just opened in a corner of the house, hoping thereby to earn some little money with which to cheer the life of her brother who is that day to be released from prison where he has wasted many years accused of a crime he did not commit. Judge Pyncheon, the false accuser whose motive was, as a second cousin, to gain the inheritance of the house which otherwise was Clifford's, is the worthy descendant of the house's unscrupulous first owner but lives elsewhere. The house has one non-family occupant, Holgrave, a daguerreotypist who rents a room from Hepzibah. It will turn out that Holgrave is the descendant of the architect, Matthew Maule, who built the house for Colonel Pyncheon on land Pyncheon had acquired when, denounced by Pyncheon, Maule's father was hanged for a witch. Pyncheon, who possessed thousands of acres, had wanted to build his house on the one acre the elder Maule had been unwilling to sell him. Gaining that acre upon Maule's hanging, however, Pyncheon lost much of the rest of his land, for his deed to thousands of acres disappeared when he himself died the day the house of the seven gables was dedicated.

The plot in brief then: Phoebe arrives at the house, Hepzibah takes her in, Hepzibah's brother Clifford comes home, Holgrave is there in the house and falls in love with Phoebe. He eventually proposes marriage to her and their union is set to redeem the past by restoring the house of the seven gables to its rightful owners; while, in Phoebe, the Pyncheons are themselves restored to innocence. It is a happy ending, with the house purged of the sin at its base. Only, the house itself seems not to register this happy ending, this purging. It remains, at the end of the novel, exactly in the state in which the first sentence presents it. The last chapter is titled "The Departure" and describes the apparent abandonment of the house by all the characters who up to that moment were engaged in its redemption. They move out and the house is left as self-possessed as it was in the first sentence. It has not come under the aegis of the characters and plot; it is the characters and plot who quit the scene, leaving the stage to the house.

For an object to coopt a novel or a short story is odd, or worse. A fictive plot is constituted by change, by things happening; to the point

that when things do not happen in a plot, the absence of change appears as something happening. But an object has a basically static existence, and while things happen to an object, the happenings are secondary to its identity. Events are not essential to objects as they are to plots and characters, so that when objects take fiction over, they threaten it in its most basic being. Such take-overs are often sinister, as it threatens to be in Henry James's *The Spoils of Poynton*. Objects usurping the story is a near-thing in this work and only averted when James takes extreme measures and burns the house, "Poynton", to the ground. Nothing is left, not even Poynton's signature object, the Maltese Cross, which dematerializes with the house. This most powerful of objects goes up in the great inferno that releases the characters to their ongoing stories. But the house of too many gables spanning all the horizon does not go up in a fire. Just the opposite, this house stays, and it is the characters who disappear.

The last word of *The Scarlet Letter* goes to the letter via the chivalric inscription on Hester's tomb; and the last word of *The Marble Faun* is to the statue and the mystery of Donatello's resemblance to it. But in both instances, the objects dominate the scene on condition of serving the story's own needs. The letter has been transformed by Pearl into a tombstone bearing a testimonial to her mother, and the statue has been transformed into a living man. These objects have been subsumed to the process of the characters' and the plot's development. The letter and the statue have become instrumental. But *The House of the Seven Gables* undergoes no such instrumentalizing process. It is the same house in the last sentence as in the first, as autonomously significant, as self-referential.

Hawthorne may not have expected it to be so obdurate. In fact, early in the story, the house appears on the brink of a thorough transformation. For a few pages, it seems not just docile but willing. Chapter 5 describes Phoebe's awakening on her first morning in the ancestral manse, in a "waste, cheerless, and dusky chamber, which had been untenanted so long – except by spiders, and rats, and ghosts – that it was all overgrown with the desolation which watches to obliterate every trace of man's happier hours" (68-69). This is a very different way of describing the house from the way it is described in the first sentence. There, it was characterized by its material aspects: its rusty wood, its profusion of gables, its huge chimney. Here, as the

setting for Phoebe's dewy awakening, the house is defined spiritually, by the souls who have passed through it and now abandoned it.

The spiritual world being more malleable than the material, in just a few minutes Phoebe transfigures the drear room into "a maiden's bedchamber". Hawthorne is uncharacteristically blithe contemplating this transfiguration:

> What was precisely Phoebe's process we find it impossible to say. She appeared to have no preliminary design, but gave a touch here and another there; brought some articles of furniture to light and dragged others into the shadow; looped up or let down a window curtain; and in the course of a half an hour, had fully succeeded in throwing a kindly and hospitable smile over the apartment (69).

It is a little bit of a surprise to see such a fearsome pile melt into a rose-trimmed cottage, inasmuch as, up to Phoebe's advent, we had been led to believe that the house's countenance was permanently frozen in the scowling semblance of its first owner. Yet here the scowl turns out to have been only as permanent as the arrangement of the furniture. There is a hint that the transformation may not be quite this easy in the observation that "a large portion" of the roses Phoebe runs to the garden to pick from a bush that "looked as if it had been brought from Eden that very summer" have, on looking closer, "blight or mildew at their hearts". But when she picks "the most perfect" roses and brings them back to her room, their "fresh and sweet incense" blends imperceptibly with her "young breath" (68). Together, the white roses and the blooming girl are making the ancient chamber smell of heaven. Phoebe, moving an arm-chair here and plumping a pillow there, is redeeming as she renovates.

The scene of Phoebe's housewifely miracle is very satisfying, a little like the scene in which Disney's Snow White transforms the horribly messy house of the seven dwarves. Yet the active principle of the reader's pleasure is not sentimental. Hawthorne's rendering of Phoebe as the angel of the house is sentimental, but not his account of what she actually does and of its effect. That is, the active principle in Hawthorne's description of Phoebe at work is not sentimental, only its mode. When Phoebe rearranges her room or later when she washes inches of dust from Hepzibah's exquisite teacups, more basically than

the sentimental, the force at work is the aesthetic. The work Phoebe does in her room is aesthetic work: it has to do with the relations of shapes, textures and colors, with lines and symmetries. Good sentiments inspire her to do this work, but both the process and the result unfold in the realm of objects rather than of feelings.

Still, the crux of Phoebe's aesthetic genius is that it has feeling, good feeling. The transformed room is said to cast about it a kindly and hospitable smile. Hawthorne must have been a happy or at least a cheerful man writing the chapter in which Phoebe Pyncheon takes over the ugly and accursed house of her ancestors. It is a total take-over, an entire victory of the good beautiful over the bad ugly. Phoebe's room has known all of Pyncheon life and history: "the joy of bridal nights had throbbed itself away here; new immortals had first drawn earthly breath here; and here old people had died" (69). A reader does not have to be Pollyanna to end the chapter – in the course of which Phoebe also does over Hepzibah (who becomes almost sunny in her growing affection for her little bird of a cousin), and receives a first hint about the excellent young man whom she is destined to marry – feeling exceedingly optimistic. It will not be very long, it seems, before the ancient house is better than new because it is now good as well as beautiful. A latter-day reader readily imagines the advertisement in the Sunday newspaper: master-carpenter built house, owned by only one family, never renovated, original features intact, just needs tender loving care.

Phoebe's renovation magic even suggests a reason why Hawthorne would have opened his story not with a character or a plot line but with an object: it would be in order to show this object becoming subject to a transforming narrative. He would have wanted to show this happening both on the level of the story, where the house of the seven gables acquired a transforming history; and on the level of literary form, where the house's architectural aesthetic was transformed into a narrative aesthetic. This formal transformation would be an enormously hopeful development, proving that the world can be re-imagined more beautiful or in the image of a better beauty.

However, Phoebe as narrative artist (in contrast to Matthew Maule as an artist of the architectural), brings to the definition of the aesthetic not only historical capability but something more, an ethical capability. Phoebe's innocence is inextricable from her genius. As represented by

her work, art is moral: it is not just inherently allied to the good, it is inherently with moral. The principle here is that beauty has an ethical as well as an aesthetic value. The contrary of this principle would be that beauty has no necessary link to any moral value, not the good, not the bad, not the indifferent. This contrary principle holds the aesthetic apart from the ethical and renders it possible to practice one without the other, beauty without it being good, the good without it being beautiful. Not very long after Phoebe has so triumphantly demonstrated the principle of the ethical aesthetic, this second principle, of the amoral or non-moral aesthetic, emerges in *The House of the Seven Gables* in an oddly contradictory scene.

At the beginning of this scene, Clifford is showing the terrible wear of his long years of prison. He is capable of only the briefest bursts of life, after one of which "He appeared to become grosser – almost cloddish" (102). As this dimmed Clifford lies back in his chair, the narrator is finding it hard to believe that "aught of interest or beauty – even ruined beauty – had heretofore been visible in this man".

Then, suddenly, the clod is shocked to life by "the sharp and peevish tinkle of the shop bell" (102). Clifford is exaggeratedly appalled by the ugly sound: "'I have never heard such a hateful clamor!'" he cries to Hepzibah. "'Why do you permit it? In the name of all dissonance, what can it be?'" (102). The reader already knows what it is and is disposed to be tolerant of a dissonance brought on by self-abnegation and love. What Hepzibah and her little shop lack aesthetically, they more than make up in the realm of feeling. The narrator is unsympathetic to Clifford and short with him for making such a fuss over "this apparently trivial annoyance". He continues, however, and offers an explanation of Clifford's response that seems excessive. There was already sufficient explanation in the sentences preceding the sounding of the shop-bell: Clifford's nerves are shot, that seems reason enough.

But the narrator suggests that more is involved. "The secret", he tells us, "was that an individual of [Clifford's] temper can always be pricked more acutely through his sense of the beautiful and harmonious than through his heart". Indeed, "It is even possible – for similar cases have often happened – that if Clifford, in his foregoing life, had enjoyed the means of cultivating his taste to its utmost perfectibility, that subtile attribute [meaning his greater responsiveness to the aesthetic than to the

ethical] might, before this period, have completely eaten out or filed away his affections". By this time the narrator has worked himself into a state that threatens the coherence of his entire story: "Shall we venture to pronounce, therefore, that his long and black calamity may not have had a redeeming drop of mercy at the bottom?". The innocent victim, the fragile poetic wreck of a few pages past, has become, in one paragraph, a potential villain whom it was mercy to bury alive. There is no let-up in the whole rest of the scene: when Hepzibah explains that she has resorted to commerce only to ensure his subsistence, Clifford is not comforted, but "burst(s) into a woman's passion of tears" (103-104). A passionate effeminacy betokens not just weakness but perversity. Having started out embodying love, art, and intelligence against the Judge's commercial greed, his vulgarity and cunning, Clifford has come to represent something quite different.

It was Hepzibah and Phoebe, as his champions against the Judge, who cast Clifford as the fallen emblem of beauty and justice. But when Clifford speaks for himself, it turns out that his message is not quite beauty and justice. More precisely, it is just half that: beauty but not justice. And beauty without justice, the narrator tells us, is not half the cause, it betrays the whole. Is it not a higher justice, the narrator has just asked, to destroy beauty when it offers itself solo? for would it not then eventually do evil?

Indeed, Clifford championing himself against the Judge is no longer really his opposite, but more like his complement. The Judge has no heart because he craves property above all else; Clifford has no heart because he craves beauty above all else. Maybe it is better to crave beauty than property; but this can get confused when the property, say, is a house, and built on a beautiful tract of land; or when the pursuit of beauty is building a house for the man who caused your father to be hanged as a witch and building it brilliantly, to the highest pitch of your art. Looking back from the scene in which Clifford reveals himself a dangerous aesthete, all the way back to the first sentence and its hard focus on the physical house, one begins to see that little Phoebe's renovating is somewhat problematical. Renovation is no longer so clearly indicated nor so clearly a solution, after the scene of Clifford and the shop-bell, as it was after the scene of Phoebe and the bedchamber, if only because renovation – making the house beautiful again – means remaking it not only in Phoebe's image but in Clifford's.

In fact, the progress Phoebe makes in restoring the house of the seven gables, she dedicates to Clifford. It is for him, for the solace of his beauty-starved soul, that she sheds light, bestows flowers, rearranges the furniture, drapes fabrics. Meanwhile, the other artistic soul in the house, Holgrave, has also been realizing things about the pursuit of art, namely that it can work evil as surely as the pursuit of money. The Maules are victims to be sure, but not innocent ones; or, if innocent of the original crime with which they are charged, not innocent of other crimes, including the ultimate crime of using art to destroy a human soul. The story of "Alice's Posies", in which a Maule long ago hypnotized an innocent Pyncheon and blasted her young life, condemns Maule and Pyncheon equally, and perhaps Maule more than Pyncheon because Maule is stronger for wielding the greater power of art.

The power Phoebe exerts over her bedchamber is nothing like this. It is very great, in fact universal. For the brief period when her kind of art predominates in the story, all is well or, more importantly, will be well. An ethical aesthetic is a force for progress, the force that drives progress, though not the kind of progress Hester Prynne had once imagined, in which she led a revolution for women's rights; nor the kind that, before Phoebe works her influence on him, Holgrave imagines, which would mean a world in permanent revolution. Phoebe's kind of progress is a continual betterment of what is best in what already exists. It moves a bureau there, recovers a couch here, and the dear old world looks better and better.

But Phoebe's power and Phoebe's art are hard pressed by Clifford's and Holgrave's kind of art. Hawthorne, obviously, practices, or he imagines practicing, both kinds. But the narrator's denunciation of Clifford, so violent it ends up justifying his living entombment, measures the narrator's and Hawthorne's fear of what Clifford represents: an aesthetic that values the objects it creates – the beauty, the order, the knowledge – for themselves, to the point of taking pleasure or worse, deriving satisfaction, from their self-sufficiency.

This idea, that art is an entire activity in itself, emerges in *The House of the Seven Gables* as a defiance, a temptation, and possibly, simply and most frighteningly, a fact of life. The facts of life in *The House of the Seven Gables* suggest an artistic autonomy that nothing controls, neither morality nor politics nor economic power. Colonel Pyncheon causes the house to be built but it is a Maule who builds it according to

his own idea. The architect alone knows the house's interior life which secrets the heart's dream of the Pyncheons. The reason Phoebe cannot renovate the house is that the house cannot be renovated: it is not accessible to her moral-political-economic manipulations, but is impregnably its own thing. For Hawthorne this autonomy, this fullness of being, is irreconcilably a terror and a joy. On the evidence of *The House of the Seven Gables*, he could not bring himself to deny this sort of art: the house goes its way, and all the reconstructed ethic of the now purged and unified Pyncheon-Maules cannot reconstruct it. He completed the story of the Pyncheons and Maules, which works out perfectly well in its own terms. Phoebe and Holgrave marry and go to live on a country estate whose house is not even mentioned. Hepzibah and Clifford are there too, everyone is rich, some scrawny chickens that had been pecking around the house of the seven gables have come along to the country and grown plump. Their eggs are a marvel.

But back in Salem, the house holds unbroken sway, intact, unchanged, rusty and dark, just exactly the overwhelming object it was in the first sentence. A final scene shows Holgrave, dubbed "the artist", revealing the hiding place of the ancient land-deed in a cabinet hidden behind a portrait of Colonel Pyncheon. When Holgrave presses a secret spring, the painting moves aside and there is the deed, worthless, an object drained of all political and economic life; an object whose meaning lies wholly in itself, a historical document entirely coopted by art. The Pyncheons and their history pass out of the house, confounding the expectation, raised in Chapter 5 as well as generally by the design of the plot, that the novel would end in a redeeming restoration. Something like the opposite has happened: the house is now empty of Pyncheons and Maules alike. One half of *The House of the Seven Gables* ends with all the characters gone off happily at one with each other and with nature. The other half of the novel ends with the house of the seven gables standing all alone, emptied even of its ghosts. For this house is not a home, it has no necessary engagement with life and its concerns, and only an occasional coincidence with the realm of the ethical and the political. The house of the seven gables is Hawthorne's most troubled, and troubling, account of the work of art and of art.

Mario Corona

The Literary Representation of Sexuality in Mid-Nineteenth-Century America: The Example of Walt Whitman

To the purpose of making a foray into the shadowy territory of men, sexuality, and culture, I shall focus on a specific, circumscribed historical episode of "disorderly conduct" that could throw some light on the vast and still largely unexplored masculine landscapes[1] adjacent to the feminine domains so thoroughly investigated by Carroll Smith-Rosenberg in her book on gender in Victorian America.[2]

The episode I am going to evoke involves two of the foremost American men of letters of the last century, whom Harold Bloom places with good reason at the heart of the American canon: Ralph Waldo Emerson and Walt Whitman.[3] On a cold February morning in 1860, they could be spotted on the green of Boston Common – the heart of New England – walking back and forth for a good couple of hours, deep in an animated discussion that kept them warm enough. Emerson, philosopher, essayist and poet, was, at fifty-seven, the

[1] I borrow the expression from Byrne R. S. Fone's *Masculine Landscapes: Walt Whitman and the Homoerotic Text* (Carbondale and Edwardsville: Southern Illinois University Press, 1992). Fone, in turn, draws his title from *Song of Myself*, 646: "Landscapes projected masculine full-sized and golden".

[2] Carroll Smith-Rosenberg, *Disorderly Conduct: Visions of Gender in Victorian America* (New York: Knopf, 1985).

[3] Harold Bloom, "Emerson: The American Religion", in *Agon: Towards a Theory of Revisionism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982), 145-178; "Walt Whitman as Center of the American Canon", in *The Western Canon: The Books and School of the Ages* (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1994), 247-271.

leading and most respected American intellectual of his day. Walt Whitman, aged forty-one, was then a poet of dubious reputation, whom Emerson had five years earlier boldly "greeted at the beginning of a great career" in an enthusiastic letter he would later feel sorry about.[4] Whitman had come from New York to Boston to see the third edition of *Leaves of Grass* through the press, and Emerson joined him there from Concord, the historic town[5] some twenty miles from Boston which was (or had for some time been) the home of that visionary company of men and women writers known as the Transcendentalists that, among others, included the Emersons, the Alcotts, the Hawthornes, Henry David Thoreau, and Margaret Fuller.

What were the two gentlemen doing out there in the cold? What matter were they discussing so intensely? For one thing, both were inveterate walkers and lovers of the outdoors. Besides, the leading ladies of Concord (Lidian Emerson, the philosopher's wife; Mrs. John Thoreau, Henry David's sister-in-law; and Abigail Alcott, wife of Bronson and mother of Louisa May), had "all objected to having that scandalous man (Whitman) in their houses" in Concord.[6] Finally, as Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick would easily surmise,[7] the two men had a hot subject on their agenda, and the open space of Boston Common provided perfect privacy.

Whitman had made himself infamous not just with the Concord ladies for dealing too openly with the theme of sex in his poems. Upon reading the first edition of *Leaves of Grass* in 1855, Emerson had been so taken by the power and the originality of this then unknown poet as to write him the enthusiastic letter mentioned above, calling his *Leaves* "the most extraordinary piece of wit and wisdom that America has yet contributed.... [In it] I find incomparable things said incomparably well". When Whitman, in his unconscionable

[4] R. W. Emerson, Letter to Walt Whitman, 21 July, 1855. In Walt Whitman, *Complete Poetry and Collected Prose* (New York: The Library of America, 1982), 1326.

[5] As is well known, the first shot of the American Revolution ("the shot heard round the world", as Emerson called it) was fired there, on April 19, 1775.

[6] Gay Wilson Allen, *Waldo Emerson* (New York: Viking Press, 1981; Penguin Books, 1982), 666.

[7] Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985).

cheek, made this letter widely public, first by printing it in the *Tribune* (October 1855) and later by reproducing it on the cover of the second edition of his poems (1856), Emerson was put in an awkward position. He could not, and would not, recant his praise, nor was he willing to make a public issue of his reservations about the sexual passages in Whitman's poems. Privately, he would admit that those were the passages "where I hold my nose as I read", even though "one must not be too squeamish when a chemist brings him to a mass of filth and says, 'See, the great laws are at work here also'".[8]

Some of the early readers and reviewers had been similarly shocked. They worried that the book might be seen by women, who were to be protected from anything so "disgustingly coarse" (Charles Eliot Norton). Even Thoreau, though largely sympathetic, objected to some poems where "it is as if the beasts spoke".[9] Emily Dickinson is said to have refused to see the book, having heard it was "disgraceful".[10] Rufus W. Griswold, editor of the popular anthology *The Poets and Poetry of America* (1842) and of the equally popular *Graham's Magazine,* and Poe's literary executor, called *Leaves of Grass* "a mass of stupid filth", "a gathering of muck" characterized by "a degrading, beastly sensuality", and an exhibition of "festering sores".[11]

In 1860, Emerson knew that the poet he had so innocently sponsored was ready to give a new enlarged edition of his *Leaves* to a Boston publisher, and he had reasons for alarm. Whitman had already issued, in his very first poem, such radical watchwords as

> Unscrew the locks from the doors!
> Unscrew the doors themselves from their jambs!
>
> *Song of Myself*, 502-503 (1855)

[8] Allen, 580, quotes from Moncure Daniel Conway, *Autobiography, Memories and Experiences,* 2 vols. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1904), I, 216-217.

[9] Henry David Thoreau, Letter to H. G. O. Blake, 19 November 1856, in Walter Harding and Carl Bode, eds., *The Correspondence* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1974).

[10] Justin Kaplan, *Walt Whitman: A Life* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1980), 26.

[11] See Hindus Milton, ed., *Walt Whitman: The Critical Heritage* (London: Routledge, 1971).

Now he was readier than ever to deliver. In this new edition, the theme of sex would not just be occasionally touched upon as before, but would become the centerpiece of the whole book. Two of its sections were in fact to be entirely devoted to the theme of sex: fifteen new poems gathered under the title "Enfans (*sic)* d'Adam" (later "Children of Adam") would celebrate what Whitman, with a term borrowed from phrenology, called "amativeness", the love between male and female; and the forty-five poems of "Calamus" would be about "adhesiveness", or love between males. Something had to be done. Of course Emerson was no simple-minded prude. He feared that Whitman would get into trouble, and he was proved right. Five years later, the Secretary of the Department of Interior in Washington, James Harlan, fired the clerk Whitman for being a scandalous poet. Still, apart from these matters of expediency, we must register that even an open, liberal, radiant mind like Emerson's, nurtured on the spiritualistic sources of Transcendentalism, was apt to think of sex as "a mass of filth", though ultimately redeemed by "the great laws", the "higher laws", as Thoreau called the spiritual rules that permeate the whole universe.[12] Both Whitman's firing and Emerson's qualms can be taken as significant indicators of the cultural climate of the time and of the crucial role that the discourse on sexuality (or rather the absence of such discourse) had in those years, in America as well as in Europe. We might just as well remind ourselves, *en passant*, that in 1857 Baudelaire and Flaubert had been taken to court on charges of immorality on account of *Les Fleurs du Mal* and *Madame Bovary.*

It is noteworthy that Emerson left no account of the Boston Common conversation with which we began. Strange and interesting silence! We do have Whitman's account, though, which tells us a lot about a man who feels the urgency of breaking down at least some of the huge barriers that held the discourse on sexuality within the boundaries of strait-laced convention, to the detriment – Whitman thought – of both sexes and of the whole society.

Over twenty years after that meeting with Emerson, in October of 1881, Whitman returned to Boston. At the age of sixty-two, his health was far from that perfection he cherished. He had been an invalid for

[12] In chapter eleven of *Walden*, "Higher Laws".

eight years, since the paralytic stroke of 1873. In 1879 illness had kept him indoors for several months. But now the poet was in better shape, and could move about. A wonderful passage in *Specimen Days* brings us the mellow, reminiscent mood of those days and nights, and the memory of that debate up and down the Boston Common:

> I spend a good deal of time on the Common, these delicious days and nights – every mid-day from 11.30 to about 1 – and almost every sunset another hour. I know all the big trees, especially the old elms along Tremont and Beacon streets, and have come to a sociable-silent understanding with most of them, in the sunlit air, (yet crispy-cool enough,) as I saunter along the wide unpaved walks. Up and down this breadth by Beacon street, between these same old elms, I walk'd for two hours, of a bright sharp February mid-day twenty-one years ago, with Emerson, then in his prime, keen, physically and morally magnetic, arm'd at every point, and when he chose, wielding the emotional just as well as the intellectual. During those two hours he was the talker and I the listener. It was an argument-statement, reconnoitring, review, attack, and pressing home, (like an army corps in order, artillery, cavalry, infantry,) of all that could be said against that part (and a main part) in the construction of my poems, "Children of Adam." More precious than gold to me that dissertation – it afforded me, ever after, this strange and paradoxical lesson; each point of E.'s statement was unanswerable, no judge's charge ever more complete or convincing, I could never hear the points better put – and then I felt down in my soul the clear and unmistakable conviction to disobey all, and pursue my own way. "What have you to say then to such things?" said E., pausing in conclusion. "Only that while I can't answer them at all, I feel more settled than ever to adhere to my own theory, and exemplify it," was my candid answer. Whereupon we went and had a good dinner at the American House. And thenceforward I never waver'd or was touch'd with qualms, (as I confess I had been two or three times before).[13]

[13] Walt Whitman, "Boston Common — More of Emerson" (October 10-13, 1881), *Specimen Days,* in *Complete Poems and Collected Prose,* 914-915.

Significantly, Emerson was then trying to convince Whitman to excise the section devoted to heterosexual love, not "Calamus", since the latter, according to the behavioral and emotional codes of the age, could pass as a celebration of male friendship, free of sexual connotations. "Children of Adam", on the other hand, was perceived as scandalous because, however awkwardly and although from a decidedly phallic perspective, it portrayed women as sexed human beings rather than pure spirit, though their physicality is almost invariably linked to their being impregnated and bearing children.

Whitman's refusal to heed Emerson's advice clearly shows that by 1860 he had become aware that, however much torrid writing he had produced so far – and, as we shall see, there had been a good deal of it, and very bold indeed – sexuality was such a basic and thwarted aspect of private *and* public life that it had to be urgently rescued and restored to the very center of poetic discourse:

> Sex contains all, bodies, souls,
> Meanings, proofs, purities, delicacies, results, promulgations,
> Songs, commands, health, pride, and maternal mystery, the seminal milk,
> All hopes, benefactions, bestowals, all the passions, loves, beauties, delights of the earth,
> All the governments, judges, gods, follow'd persons of the earth,
> These are contain'd in sex as parts of itself and justifications of itself.
>
> *A Woman Waits for Me*, 3-8 (1860)

This is not great poetry, perhaps, but its programmatic purpose could not be stated more clearly. Twenty-seven years later, in the 1887 preface "A Backward Glance O'er Travel'd Roads", Whitman restated his purpose, further specifying that sexuality "does not stand by itself. The vitality of it is altogether in its relations, bearings, significance – like the clef of a symphony".[14] This intuition places Whitman at the forefront of a century-long cultural struggle for personal freedom and political sanity, as John Addington Symonds, Edward Carpenter, Oscar Wilde, Federico Garcia Lorca, Allen

[14] Walt Whitman, "A Backward Glance O'er Travel'd Roads" (1887), ibid., 669.

Ginsberg, and so many other poets and writers have since witnessed.

But even more interesting to us is the way in which this white, working-class bachelor of forty, with hardly any formal education (a few years in public grammar schools on Long Island), chose to represent sexuality in his poems. It is well known that since the 1830s and 1840s America had been flooded with "a plethora of pamphlets, tracts, lectures, newspaper articles, conduct books and manuals which demonized all forms of nonconjugal, nonprocreative sexual desires and behaviors".[15] In stark opposition to the dominant cultural trend, Whitman represents – to use one of his favorite words – a "flowing" variety of sexual feelings. So large and unusual is this variety that one might speculate whether, in the invigorating ocean breezes of Long Island as well as in the crowded, erotically charged streets of Manhattan, he had scented the necessary advent of Nietzsche, de Beauvoir, Marcuse, Foucault, Deleuze, and many more.

It is only one of Whitman's several contradictions that he would provide his most striking representations of sex in such early poems as *Song of Myself* and *The Sleepers,* written in the initial phase of his career, when he did not yet clearly know what he was doing; and that, as his awareness ripened, he would tend to "promulgate" the importance of sex rather than represent it. However, let us now turn to the texts, and see the poet at work.

To begin from the Beginning, Whitman sheds the time-honored convention of using "man" or "Man" as the inclusive term for both men and women. Suffice it to think, for example, of Alexander Pope's *Essay on Man*, and of the untroubled ways even revolutionary poets like Blake or the early Wordsworth accepted it. From his very first poems (1855) Whitman chooses to specify (italics mine):

> I do not think seventy years is the time of a man *or woman*,
> Nor that seventy millions of years is the time of a man *or woman,*
> Nor that years will ever stop the existence of me or any one else.
>
> *Who Learns My Lesson Complete?*, 16-18

[15] Michael Moon, "Disseminating Whitman", in R. R. Butters, J. M. Clum and M. Moon, eds., *Displacing Homophobia: Gay Male Perspectives in Literature and Culture* (Durham & London: Duke University Press, 1989), 241.

Has anyone supposed it lucky to be born?
I hasten to inform him *or her* it is just as lucky to die, and I know it.
Song, 122-123

What is known I strip away.... I launch all men *and* women forward with me into the unknown.
Song, 1134

Whitman's sensitivity to the fact that mankind is made of women as well as of men derives in part from a democratic stance that dismantles all traditional divisions, including those based on sex:

I am the poet of the woman the same as the man,
And I say it is as great to be a woman as to be a man,

(I will discreetly leave in the shade the third line of this stanza: "And I say there is nothing greater than the mother of men.")
Song of Myself, 1855, lines 425-426

The wife — and she is not one jot less than the husband,
The daughter — and she is just as good as the son,
The mother — and she is every bit as much as the father.
A Song for Occupations, 36-38

Whitman proceeds further in this direction, so far as to undermine what we have come to call the principle of binary opposition:

I am not the poet of goodness only.... I do not decline to be the poet of wickedness also.
.....
What blurts is it about virtue and about vice?
Evil propels me, and reform of evil propels me.... I stand indifferent,
My gait is no faultfinder's or rejecter's gait,
I moisten the roots of all that has grown.
Song, 467-472

Of course the Romantic Poet is by statute universal and supreme, and therefore contains all. This philosophical cover helps Whitman's

poetic *persona* to quietly drop any assigned gender definition, to the end of expressing the author's polymorphous view of sexuality. A result that ordinary democratic faith alone does not usually attain:

If you are a workman or workwoman I stand as nigh as the nighest that works in the same shop,
.....
If your lover or husband or wife is welcome by day or night, I must be personally as welcome;
.....
If you meet some stranger in the street and love him or her, do I not often meet strangers in
the street and love them?
A Song for Occupations, 16-22

What sex does (or do) the "you" that meets (or meet) strangers in the street belong to? To Whitman, it does not really seem to matter:

I resist anything better than my own diversity,
And breathe the air and leave plenty after me,
And am not stuck up, and am in my place.
Song, 347-349

In fact the poetic *persona*, though predominantly male, can easily, and explicitly, shift back and forth between a male and a female role:

I am the free companion.... I bivouac by invading watchfires.

I turn the bridegroom out of bed and stay with the bride myself,
And tighten her all night to my thighs and lips.

My voice is the wife's voice, the screech by the rail of the stairs,
They fetch my man's body up dripping and drowned.
Song, 813-817

I am of old and young, of the foolish as much as the wise,
Regardless of others, ever regardful of others,
Maternal as well as paternal, a child as well as a man,

Stuffed with the stuff that is coarse, and stuffed with the stuff
that is fine

Song, 326-329

I am the actor and the actress....
.....
I am she who adorned herself and folded her hair expectantly,
My truant lover has come and it is dark.

Double yourself and receive me darkness,
Receive me and my lover too.... he will not let me go without him.

The Sleepers, 42-49

So much for general principles.[16] The passages I have quoted are mostly declarative and didactic. It is now time to turn to some of the passages in which Whitman really plunges into the actual representation of sexual emotions or acts. Unfortunately, Whitman's long and intricately woven poems do not lend themselves to brief quotation. Yet quote we must, and we do not have room for more than four excerpts, all from *Song of Myself* and *The Sleepers*, both of which are in the 1855 edition. This means that, had Whitman decided to comply with Emerson's advice about not including *Enfans d'Adam* in the third edition, his reputation as a scandalous poet would not have been significantly different, except that his later, more philosophical stance would not have been so directly challenging.

The first two passages are among the most elliptical and elusive Whitman ever wrote, and the representation of sex we find here is simultaneously autoerotic, homoerotic, and orgiastic, so that we would be hard pressed to explain exactly what is going on. In the following lines we witness the strange assault on the speaker's other senses by the villainous, aggressive, uncontrollable sense of touch, which finally brings the compliant and complicitous speaker to orgasm:

Is this then a touch?... quivering me to a new identity,

[16] A larger documentation would have to include, beside many more passages and poems, prose works like *Democratic Vistas* (1867-8) and *A Memorandum at a Venture* (1882).

Flames and ether making a rush for my veins,
Treacherous tip of me reaching and crowding to help them,
My flesh and blood playing out lighting, to strike what is hardly
different from myself,
On all sides prurient provokers stiffening my limbs,
Straining the udder of my heart for its withheld drip,
Behaving licentious toward me, taking no denial,
Depriving me of my best as for a purpose,
Unbuttoning my clothes and holding me by the bare waist,
Deluding my confusion with the calm of the sunlight and
pasture fields,
Immodestly sliding my fellow senses away,
They bribed to swap off with touch, and go and graze at the edges of me,
No consideration, no regard for my draining strength or my anger,
Fetching the rest of the herd around to enjoy them awhile,
Then all uniting to stand on a headland and worry me.

The sentries desert every other part of me,
They have left me helpless to a red marauder,
They all come to the headland to witness and assist against me.
I am given up by traitors;
I talk wildly.... I have lost my wits.... I and nobody else am the
greatest traitor,
I went myself first to the headland.... my own hands carried me there.

You villain touch! what are you doing?... my breath is tight in its
throat;
Unclench your floodgates! you are too much for me.

Song of Myself, 618-640

In the second, long passage, taken from *The Sleepers*, the speaker again symbolizes the Poet's universal soul but at the same time acts like a very physical erotic nomad, indifferently male or female, until any individual identity seems to vanish, and the sexual scene itself takes over the whole stage:

I go from bedside to bedside.... I sleep close with the other sleepers,
each in turn;

I dream in my dream all the dreams of the other dreamers,
And I become the other dreamers.

I am a dance.... Play up there! the fit is whirling me fast.

I am the everlaughing....it is new moon and twilight,
I see the hiding of douceurs.... I see nimble ghosts whichever way I look,
Cache and cache again deep in the ground and sea, and where it is
neither ground or sea.

Well do they do their jobs, those journeymen divine,
Only from me can they hide nothing and would not if they could;
I reckon I am their boss, and they make me a pet besides,
And surround me, and lead me and run ahead when I walk,
And lift their cunning covers and signify me with stretched arms, and
resume the way;
Onward we move, a gay gang of blackguards with mirthshouting
music and wildflapping pennants of joy.

I am the actor and the actress.... the voter..the politician,
The emigrant and the exile..the criminal that stood in the box,
He who has been famous, and he who shall be famous after today,
The stammerer.... the wellformed person..the wasted or feeble person.

I am she who adorned herself and folded her hair expectantly,
My truant lover has come and it is dark.

Double yourself and receive me darkness,
Receive me and my lover too.... he will not let me go without him.

I roll myself upon you as upon a bed.... I resign myself to the dusk.

He whom I call answers me and takes the place of my lover,
He rises with me silently from the bed.

Darkness you are gentler than my lover.... his flesh was sweaty and
panting,
I feel the hot moisture yet that he left me.

My hands are spread forth..I pass them in all directions,
I would sound up the shadowy shore to which you are journeying.

Be careful, darkness.... already, what was it touched me?
I thought my lover had gone.... else darkness and he are one,
I hear the heart-beat.... I follow..I fade away.

O hotcheeked and blushing! O foolish hectic!
O for pity's sake, no one must see me now! ... my clothes were stolen
while I was abed,
Now I am thrust forth, where shall I run?

Pier that I saw dimly last night when I looked from the windows,
Pier out from the main, let me catch myself with you and stay....
I will not chafe you;
I feel ashamed to go naked about the world,
And am curious to know where my feet stand....and what is this
flooding me, childhood or manhood....and the hunger that crosses
the bridge between.

The cloth laps a first sweet eating and drinking,
Laps life-swelling yolks.... laps ears of rose-corn, milky and just ripened:
The white teeth stay, and the boss-tooth advances in darkness,
And liquor is spilled on lips and bosoms by touching glasses, and the
best liquor afterward.

The Sleepers, 29-70

After this, it comes as a surprise that the next two episodes share a perfectly focused vision, and a narrative clarity that poses no problem of immediate intelligibility. The former, again from *The Sleepers*, shows a woman – the narrator's mother – reminiscing about a beautiful young squaw she saw one day as a young girl, fell in love with, and never saw again.

Now I tell what my mother told me today as we sat at dinner together,
Of when she was a nearly grown girl living home with her parents on
the old homestead.

A red squaw came one breakfastime to the old homestead,
On her back she carried a bundle of rushes for rushbottoming chairs;
Her hair straight shiny coarse black and profuse halfenveloped her face,
Her step was free and elastic.... her voice sounded exquisitely as she spoke.

My mother looked in delight and amazement at the stranger,
She looked at the beauty of her tallborne face and full and pliant limbs,
The more she looked upon her she loved her,
Never before had she seen such wonderful beauty and purity;
She made her sit on a bench by the jamb of the fireplace....she cooked food for her,
She had no work to give her but she gave her remembrance and fondness.

The red squaw staid all the forenoon, and toward the middle of the afternoon she went away;
O my mother was loth to have her go away,
All the week she thought of her.... she watched for her many a month,
She remembered her many a winter and many a summer,
But the red squaw never came nor was heard of there again.

The Sleepers, 110-126

Not very sexy, maybe; perhaps not even sexual, but haunting and puzzling enough. The last episode is the more famous, and enacts a scene based on an intriguingly double perspective: that of a male who observes and controls a female who watches, unseen by them, a group of naked men frolicking in the water. Here Whitman outlines two separate worlds, men's and women's, and the flimsy contact precariously established between them by conflicting and concurring streams of desire, that in *The Sleepers* he had called "the hunger that crosses the bridge between":

Twenty-eight young men bathe by the shore,
Twenty-eight young men, and all so friendly,
Twenty-eight years of womanly life, and all so lonesome.
She owns the fine house by the rise of the bank,

She hides handsome and richly drest aft the blinds of the window.

Which of the young men does she like the best?
Ah the homeliest of them is beautiful to her.

Where are you off to, lady? for I see you,
You splash in the water there, yet stay stock still in your room.

Dancing and laughing along the beach came the twenty-ninth bather,
The rest did not see her, but she saw them and loved them.

The beards of the young men glistened with wet, it ran from their long hair,
Little streams passed all over their bodies.

An unseen hand also passed over their bodies,
It descended tremblingly from their temples and ribs.

The young men float on their backs, their white bellies swell to the sun....they do not ask who seizes fast to them,
They do not know who puffs and declines with pendant and bending arch,
They do not think whom they souse with spray.

Song of Myself, 193-210

In passages like this, most of the continuities which, in Judith Butler's words,[17] are assumed to exist among sex, gender, and desire, do indeed begin to disintegrate.

Whitman thought that it would take a long time, maybe a century, before his poems could be fully understood, and that ultimately women might "seize" them better than men.[18] It has certainly taken

[17] Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York-London: Routledge, 1990), ix.

[18] Quoted by Edward Carpenter, *Days with Walt Whitman* (London: Allen, 1906), 43: "What lies behind *Leaves of Grass* is something that few, very few, only one here and there, perhaps oftenest women, are at all in a position to seize. It lies behind almost every line; but concealed, studiedly concealed; some passages left purposedly obscure".

the rise of gay, gender, and queer studies to remove the layers of whitewashing which conventional academic criticism has accumulated on Whitman's poetry for decades and decades.[19]

At the close of the long cognitive journey that is *Song of Myself*, the "I" seems to have reached its fullest realization. A confused individual has become an all-knowing poet. At exactly that point, a new departure is announced, another nomadic rendezvous is promised, and the final full stop is dropped:[20]

> I depart as air....I shake my white locks at the runaway sun,
> I effuse my flesh in eddies and drift it in lacy jags.
> .....
> Failing to fetch me at first keep encouraged,
> Missing me one place search another,
> I stop some where waiting for you

"You". Singular? Plural? Male(s)? Female(s)? Everybody? Somewhere, somehow, someone will feel entitled to sign up for the party.

[19] Among the pioneering gay studies, I will mention Robert K. Martin, *The Homosexual Tradition in American Poetry* (Austin & London: University of Texas Press, 1979); among the more recent ones, Charley Shively, *Calamus Lovers: Walt Whitman's Working Class Camerados* (San Francisco: Gay Sunshine Press, 1987); Shively, ed., *Drum Beats: Walt Whitman's Civil War Boy Lovers* (San Francisco: Gay Sunshine Press, 1989); Michael Moon, *Disseminating Whitman: Revision and Corporeality in 'Leaves of Grass'* (Cambridge, Mass., and London: Harvard University Press, 1991); Byrne R. S. Fone, *Masculine Landscapes*; Franco Buffoni, "Il libro bianco di Walt Whitman", in *Foglie d'erba*, translated by Enzo Giachino (Turin: Einaudi, 1993). Among the examples of academic conformity are all the works of James E. Miller, Jr., whose *A Critical Guide to 'Leaves of Grass'* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1957) has been a standard for a long time; Edwin Haviland Miller, *Walt Whitman's Poetry: A Psychological Journey* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1968); Stephen A. Black, *Whitman's Journey into Chaos: A Psychoanalytic Study of the Poetic Process* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1975).

[20] "Nomadism ... is not fluidity without borders but rather an acute awareness of the nonfixity of boundaries. It is the intense desire to go on trespassing, transgressing", as Rosi Braidotti writes in *Nomadic Subjects: Embodiment and Sexual Difference in Contemporary Feminist Theory* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), 36.

Gianna Fusco

"My business is Circumference": Encircling the Experience of Deprivation

> Success is counted sweetest
> By those who ne'er succeed.
> To comprehend a nectar
> Requires sorest need.
> (J 67)[1]

Upon a first reading, these verses seem clear and unequivocal: the sense of things is revealed by their dearth, by the experience of deprivation. But reading more closely we may discover nuances of meaning that change our perception of the poetic message. If it is true that it is the vanquished who attach the highest value to success, how do we know that their evaluation is right and not over-laden with the burden of their failure? And what does the "comprehension" of the nectar, immensely enlarged by need, reveal, if not the extent of our own need, rather than the sweetness of the nectar itself? On the theme of knowledge and awareness gained through the experience of deprivation, Emily Dickinson wrote many poems that are often rich in images and metaphors drawn from the semantic field of nutrition. This is a favorite vocabulary for the poet, who uses it throughout her work in all its nuances, from the alienation of starvation to the ecstasy of drunkenness, as part of a verbal strategy through which she tries to catch and immortalize in her art the truth of human experience. In her verses,

[1] All quotations from the poems are from *The Poems of Emily Dickinson*, edited by Thomas H. Johnson (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1968).

often described as ethereal, we find the practicality of bread and wine, of liquors and banquets, but also the pain of starving men and beggars. Much has been written about the psychological and psychoanalytic relevance of what Cody has called "oral images",[2] also as an insight into the poet's biography. Though acknowledging the great importance of these studies, which have often drawn attention to relatively obscure poems, I would suggest that this use of food and liquor metaphors is better understood in connection with the Puritan culture that surrounded Dickinson in conservative nineteenth-century Amherst. Domestic imagery was in fact characteristic of emblem poems and was used by Puritan poets to trace the presence of God even in humble objects and actions. But the very same kind of metaphor is also typical of metaphysical poems, which Emily Dickinson read and appreciated. Moreover, domestic life and domestic work were part of that encircled, physically limited life that she chose to live in her father's house, where she daily baked bread and often offered her produce to friends and neighbors, along with flowers or poems.

In her poetry Emily Dickinson considers every aspect of the human relation with food and with the idea of fulfilment that it symbolizes; however, I will only analyze those poems where images of food are related to the idea of deprivation. Focus on these images reveals the wide range of meanings that Emily Dickinson builds up from words belonging to the same semantic field. We are confronted, not with a mere sequence of poems linked by the recurrence of a number of key words, but with what Eberwein has defined "an interpretive context built out of other associations from Dickinson's writing".[3] Tracing such a context highlights the complexity of Dickinson's discourse on deprivation, far from a conventional and superficial acceptance of the renunciation-reward paradigm.

Through the lexicon of nutrition, Emily Dickinson explores different dimensions and moments of deprivation; these poems constitute a cluster that seems to circumscribe its subject in order to analyze each of its stages and trace its psychological progression. I would like to use the

[2] John Cody, *After Great Pain: The Inner Life of Emily Dickinson* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1971), 40.

[3] Jane Donahue Eberwein, *Dickinson: Strategies of Limitation* (Amherst: The University of Massachusetts Press, 1985), 152.

image of the circle – one of Dickinson's favorite and most complex symbols – as an interpretative tool for my subsequent discussion. I will read these verses not as a linear sequence but rather as points in a circumference – each poem a different point of observation that redefines and investigates the knotty subject of sacrifice and renunciation. Dickinson's well known and enigmatic declaration to Higginson, "My Business is Circumference —" (L 268),[4] has always received much attention from the critics, who often disagree on the exact meaning of this abstract symbol for poetic investigation. For Anderson, the circumference suggests "an extension outward to include something larger than can be found at a particular static point",[5] while for Gelpi it "represented the furthest boundary of human experience, where two modes of being touched, where that which was circle pressed that which was beyond".[6] The notion of limit is also stressed by Gribbin, who defines the circumference as "the borderline of symbolic and linguistic order … the source and terminus of poetic discourse, marking the perimeter beyond which language, thought, and 'awe' cannot penetrate".[7] Eberwein, on the other hand, while reading Dickinson's circumference image as a boundary between human experience and immortality, argues that "[p]artaking of immortality — however briefly and tantalizingly — within her circuit world, she pushed against circumference for satisfaction of unquenchable longings".[8] Finally, Sharon Cameron draws attention to another connection for this image, quoting the lines "Tell all the Truth but tell it slant — / Success in Circuit lies":

[4] All quotations from the letters are from *The Letters of Emily Dickinson*, edited by Thomas H. Johnson and Theodora Ward (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1958).

[5] Charles Anderson, *Emily Dickinson's Poetry: Stairway of Surprise* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1960), 55.

[6] Albert J. Gelpi, *Emily Dickinson: The Mind of the Poet* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1966), 122.

[7] Laura Gribbin, "Emily Dickinson's Circumference: Figuring a Blind Spot in the Romantic Tradition", *The Emily Dickinson Journal* 2:1 (1993), URL: www.colorado.edu/EDIS/journal/articles/II.1.Gribbin.html

[8] Eberwein, 263.

> The illogical overlap between obliquity and circuity is a direct consequence of Dickinson's preoccupation with ineffable centerings. For however close the lens of a given poem comes to the subject of attention, to a center, its speaker perceives that subject shift out of the line of direct vision. To see from a perspective is to see at a slant....[9]

The circumference combines the slant vision with the idea of limit, of a border and boundary of experience that nevertheless enables a rare intensity, because all the energies of the poet converge in this limited compass. Furthermore, the circumscribed area can be extended to include an increasingly wide experiential reality; through the continuous pressure of all its points against what is outside, it can incessantly enlarge the horizon of poetic experience. Therefore, circumference is a threefold metaphor, one which combines the notion of limit and that of extension, and allows the poet to move inwards, working on depth, or to project her persona beyond the limit, exploring the unknown that is outside, or else to walk along its perimeter, investigating the border of her knowledge.

Renunciation and sacrifice as necessary and painful ways to gain a high ethical dimension and a knowledge that transcends materiality were hardly new notions in the cultural and religious context of Emily Dickinson's life; it is quite natural, therefore, that these themes enter her production. However, as may be expected, she handles these notions in strikingly original ways, interrogating and investigating them in terms of her own quest. When she writes "Water is taught by thirst" (J 135), Dickinson is taking for granted that everything in human experience is known by subtraction, by want:

> Water, is taught by thirst.
> Land — by the Oceans passed.
> Transport — by throe —
> Peace — by it's battles told —
> Love, by Memorial Mold —
> Birds, by the snow.
> (135)

[9] Sharon Cameron, *Lyric Time: Dickinson and the Limits of Genre* (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1979), 4.

The concise, impersonal form, the absence of the verb after the first line, the short and peremptory diction, all give these verses the strength of a truth asserted in its cold certitude. Indeed, the first line would suffice to convey the sense of the poem with the power of a proverbial expression: the extreme need of the thirsty, so easy to understand and so readily communicated, and water, so common but fundamental to life itself. Everything that follows is just a variation on this theme, re-proposing through a quick sequence of different images the truth that had been declared from the beginning. Rather than revealing the intrinsic value of the thing coveted but removed from enjoyment, the experience of want discloses to us the nature and intensity of our own need and the importance we attach to what is denied us. This awareness is actually unattainable without the test of loss, which forces us to look inside ourselves; indeed, the meaning of our painful experience lies exactly in this urge to pause and reconsider the significance we attach to each event of our life.

The same subject is re-examined in "To learn the Transport by the Pain —" (J 167), where in the first three stanzas Dickinson runs through the experience of deprivation again, using the very same images of "Water is taught by thirst" (J 135), yet rendering the sense of pain for the unsatisfied desire even more vividly and explicitly:

> To learn the Transport by the Pain —
> As Blind Men learn the sun!
> To die of thirst — suspecting
> That Brooks in Meadows run!
>
> To stay the homesick — homesick feet
> Upon a foreign shore —
> Haunted by native lands, the while —
> And blue — beloved air!
>
> This is the Sovereign Anguish!
> This — the signal wo!
> These are the patient "Laureates"
> Whose voices — trained — below —
>
> Ascend in ceaseless Carol —

Inaudible, indeed,
To us — the duller scholars
Of the Mysterious Bard!
(J 167)

The dichotomies used to convey the experience of the persona are precisely the same as in "Water is taught by thirst". In both poems, thirst is a figure of suffering and water the denied relief; the transport that is learnt by pain in one poem is taught by throe in the other; the foreign shore of "To learn the Transport by the Pain" recalls the oceans passed of "Water is taught by thirst" and both tell of a far and beloved native land. Yet the profusion of interjections, the accumulation of images of torment that succeed one another until they explode into a "Sovereign Anguish!" at the beginning of the third stanza, all clearly reveal that the speaker, though appearing in the text only through a shy "us" in the last stanza, is painfully rethinking "her" own deprivation. Emily Dickinson changes her point of observation just perceptibly, as if moving along a line with which she encircles her subject. Her new perspective discloses the condition of a persona who would accept the lesson of "Water is taught by thirst" and let her own voice too "Ascend in ceaseless Carol —" turning pain into a reward, but has to confess that she is still among the "duller scholars" who struggle to understand. "To learn the Transport by the Pain —" seems almost a response to the didactic, proverbial attitude of "Water is taught by thirst". It expands the short verses of the latter poem (the verse "Land – by Oceans passed" [J 135] becomes a whole quatrain in J 167), adding the vivid details and the hurt tone of actual experience.

As is often the case in Emily Dickinson's poetry, the moment when she passes to the grammatical first person is a very important one: what is elsewhere expressed in general terms applicable to everyone's life, becomes a testimony of personal experience. In achieving this shift in this cluster of poems, Dickinson runs along another arc of the ideal circumference that encloses her theme. This circularity enables her to go back to each theme at a later moment or in a different state of mind, because even the slightest movement along this orbit creates a fundamental difference that re-defines the contours of the observed object. Thus, in "I should have been too

glad, I see —" (J 313) the theme of self-knowledge through deprivation is expressed in yet a different way, focusing on the burning moment of piercing renunciation:

I should have been too glad, I see —
Too lifted — for the scant degree
Of Life's penurious Round —
My little Circuit would have shamed
This new Circumference — have blamed —

I should have been too saved — I see —
Too rescued — Fear too dim to me
That I could spell the Prayer
I knew so perfect — yesterday —
That Scalding One — Sabacthini —
Recited fluent — here—

Earth would have been too much — I see —
And Heaven — not enough for me —
I should have had the Joy
Without the Fear — to justify —
The Palm — without the Calvary —
So Savior — Crucify —

Defeat — whets Victory — they say —
The Reefs — in old Gethsemane —
Endear the Coast — beyond!
'Tis Beggars — Banquets — can define —
'Tis Parching — vitalizes Wine —
"Faith" bleats — to understand!
(J 313)

Stanza after stanza, line after line, the speaker tries to understand and explain to herself the tormenting anguish she feels, seeking a justification in its inevitability. The tone is definitely hurt and irritated, even sarcastic, marked by a sequence of "too" that qualifies worthy experiences as unacceptable excesses: too glad, too lifted, too rescued, too dim, too much! The lexicon and images are those of

Christ's Passion, which the speaker lives moment after moment but backward, beginning with the dying Christ that cries His last prayer from the cross ("That Scalding One – Sabacthini –") in the second stanza, then passing through the Calvary resulting in the Crucifixion ("So Savior – Crucify –") in the third stanza, to end with the prayer in Gethsemane evoked in the last stanza ("The Reefs – in old Gethsemane"), in an increasing inability to understand and accept the pain of loss. In fact, while it is almost instinctive to turn to the one by whom we feel forsaken (man, God, or anyone else) with the desperate words of the crucified, crucifying Christ, it is more difficult to accept that there cannot be victory without Calvary, that suffering is inescapable. And it is even more arduous to face and overcome the "reef" of Gethsemane, that is, to repeat the prayer of Christ at the most anguished moment of His earthly life, when He denied himself to do His Father's will: "Father, if thou be willing, remove this cup from me: nevertheless, not my will, but thine be done" (Luke, 22:42). Emily Dickinson's feeling for the deep sense of these words and her integrity, which prevented her from luke-warmly joining the First Congregational Church of Amherst, are confirmed by the conclusion of "I have a King, who does not speak" (J 103):

...
And I omit to pray
"Father, thy will be done" today
For my will goes the other way,
And it were perjury!
(J 103)

That painful renunciation makes subsequent victory more glorious is no longer a truth shared by the speaker, but something other people say, almost a commonplace, something alien to us: "Defeat — whets Victory — they say —". The speaker, overwhelmed with the pain of abandonment, cannot help revising the familiar discourse of knowledge through denial through her new perception of how hard it is to understand what in other circumstances she would undoubtedly have affirmed to be true. In his analysis of the last stanza of this poem, Anderson remarks that "Pain and loss, sharpened by a momentary vision of ecstasy, constitute the human condition she has been trying to adjust herself to throughout. For all her attempt to

verbalize this, in the end she can only cry as a sheep".[10] The use of the word "bleats" actually strengthens the unity of the poem providing a last indirect reference to the Gospel, where Jesus is at the same time the Good Shepherd and the Lamb of God.

Dickinson's predilection for the linguistic resources of the Bible is confirmed by the imagery of "Talk with prudence to a Beggar" (J 119), where she finds herself in the condition of the beggars, the hungry, and the prisoners, whose need is so desperate that simply to realize that what they are so cruelly deprived of is available elsewhere is enough to kill them.

Talk with prudence to a Beggar
Of "Potosi", and the mines!
Reverently, to the Hungry
Of your viands, and your wines!

Cautious, hint any Captive
You have passed enfranchized feet!
Anecdotes of air in Dungeons
Have sometimes proved deadly sweet!
(J 119)

"The beggar", "the hungry", "the captive" as symbolic figures of suffering are very familiar to any reader of the Bible and particularly of the Gospels: Dickinson is here making use of a language whose subtleties as well as commonplaces she knew and shared with many of her readers (though nearly unpublished during her life, Dickinson sent several of her poems to various friends and acquaintances in her letters). Through well known religious archetypes of need and deprivation, Dickinson universalizes her expression of pain, while claiming her own participation in such afflictions through her personae. In "Talk with prudence to a Beggar", her anxious appeals, her fear of an irreparable tragedy, her concerned exhortations not to sharpen the pain through narration of an impossible satisfaction, all reveal a deep identification gained at the cost of the same sufferings.

[10] Anderson, 196.

Each opportunity of catching a glimpse of an impossible happiness renews the pain and recalls the condemnation, as Emily Dickinson explains in "To One denied to drink" (J 490):

To One denied to drink
To tell what Water is
Would be acuter, would it not
Than letting Him surmise?

To lead Him to the Well
And let Him hear it drip
Remind Him, would it not, somewhat
Of His condemned lip?
(J 490)

Words like "denied" and "condemned" underline the powerlessness of the deprived subject of these verses. The verb "surmise" suggests that he has never experienced water, i.e. fulfilment or at least relief from pain, but nevertheless he knows his deprivation. "To lead", finally, reinforces the idea of dependence and vulnerability that pervades the poem. Through the sadistic game of water shown but not granted to the thirsty, the poem investigates the cruelty of a pain that the sufferer is unable to overcome. Because of its simplicity, the image of water/thirst is a perfect vehicle to express unnamed but strongly felt needs.

The next step along the hypothetical circumference that encircles a wounded self is to accept deprivation, interiorize it, and turn it into self-induced denial, that is, into a personal, conscious choice. Thus, in "To put this World down, like a Bundle —" (J 527) the discourse, though referring again to Calvary, remains impersonal: from a position of relative detachment, Dickinson tries to understand the ultimate price of renunciation – to get rid of the world as if it were a burden.

To put this World down, like a Bundle —
And walk steady, away,
Requires Energy — possibly Agony —
'Tis the Scarlet way

Trodden with straight renunciation

By the Son of God —
(J 527)

The difficulty, the insidious regret, the agony lie exactly in this idea that the world one renounces is "like" a bundle, but not really and completely such. The anguished prayer of Jesus in the Garden of Olives is again implicitly evoked: "Father, if thou be willing, remove this cup from me". Even the Son of God suffered in giving up this world and, metonymically, all that is peculiar to human experience. In the metaphoric battle that is life, the defeat, the pain of unrelieved need, the inextinguishable thirst, prepare one for the joy of ultimate victory. In Dickinson's words, "Who never lost, are unprepared /A Coronet to find!" (J 73). Eventually, the scar of the injury suffered in an arduous enterprise finds its reward; indeed, it is exactly the price to pay in order to receive the recompense at last.

How many *Bullets* bearest?
Hast Thou the Royal scar?
Angels! Write "Promoted"
On this Soldier's brow!
(J 73)

Yet, while painfully waiting for this ultimate satisfaction, two perturbing factors can intervene and change our perception of indigence. The first is the temptation to run away from one's suffering and change one's condition:

I play at Riches — to appease
The clamoring for Gold —
It kept me from a Thief, I think,
For often, overbold

With Want, and Opportunity —
I could have done a Sin
And been Myself that teasy Thing
An independent Man —

But often as my lot displays

Too hungry to be borne
I deem Myself what I would be —
And novel Comforting

My Poverty and I derive —
We question if the Man —
Who own — Esteem the Opulence —
As We — Who never Can —

Should ever these exploring Hands
Chance Sovereign on a Mine —
Or in the long — uneven term
To win, become their turn —

How fitter they will be — for Want —
Enlightening so well —
I know not which, Desire or Grant —
Be wholly beautiful —
(J 801)

Only the self-deception of pretended wealth allows the persona of this poem to overcome the crisis, at least apparently, and go on her hard way towards an end so coveted. But a second disturbing element, one that opens completely new perspectives, occurs at the conclusion of the same poem: the insinuation into the self of a "pleasure" of waiting, a taste for desire itself more than its fulfillment. Mossberg reads this poem as one among many instances of Dickinson's poetics of the dependent-rebellious daughter, and identifies the "Riches" with poetry:

> The act of writing poetry confers the autonomy and satisfaction that otherwise can only be achieved in her culture by the independent man. But poetry is not only compensation, a substitute for "Riches" to quell the childish "clamoring" for all she feels she lacks as a dependant woman; it is a means by which the daughter can achieve these "Riches".[11]

[11] Barbara Mossberg, *Emily Dickinson: When A Writer is A Daughter* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1983), 142.

The identification of "Riches" or "gold" with poetry is supported by the well known letter about the "gold thread" that the young Emily Dickinson wrote to her friend Jane Humphrey, a declaration of her decision to be a poet.

> I have dared to do strange things — bold things, and have asked no advice from any — … it's all wrong unless it has one gold thread in it, a long, big shining fibre which hides the others — and which will fade away into Heaven while you hold it, and from there come back to me. (L 35)

Significantly, Dickinson ends this poem on a suspended judgement about "which, Desire or Grant — / Be wholly beautiful —". She does not refer to happiness or joy, but beauty, which is an equivalent of truth, as she explains in another poem ("I died for Beauty — but was scarce", J 449), and a chief concern for her as a poet. A condition of perpetual want becomes necessary to the poet, who knows it enlightens "so well" and prevents her from being like the "independent Man" who owns gold but cannot esteem "Opulence" as she can. In the fourth stanza Dickinson personifies want and speaks of it as of a companion, to the point of using the pronoun "We" to refer to herself and her Poverty. Therefore, this poem makes clear the shift from an aspiration to satisfaction to the desire of never being fulfilled, since "'Heaven' — is what I cannot reach!"(J 239). As emphasized by Burbik, "The activity of not-having can ... gain such importance that it begins to rival consumption. Each denial builds the prize to such proportions that actual possession pales in relation to the struggle to acquire".[12]

This new possibility is explored in the inner dialogue to which Emily Dickinson gives voice in "Had I not This or This, I said" (J 904):

Had I not This or This, I said,
Appealing to Myself,
In moment of prosperity —
Inadequate — were Life —

[12] Joan Burbik, "Emily Dickinson and the Economics of Desire", *American Literature* 58:3 (October 1986), 369.

"Thou hast not Me, or Me" — it said,
In moment of Reverse —
"And yet Thou art industrious —
No need — hadst Thou — of us"?

My need — was all I had — I said —
The need did not reduce —
Because the food — exterminate —
The hunger — does not cease —

But diligence — is sharper —
Proportioned to the Chance —
To feed upon the Retrograde —
Enfeebles — the Advance —
(J 904)

By embodying the voice of her own desiring and unsatisfied self, Dickinson succeeds in making her own situation clearer to herself and in stating, consciously and directly at last, that it is not possession that gives her joy but need and desire that never end, in richness as well as in poverty. As she wrote to O.P. Lord late in her life: "The withdrawal of the Fuel of Rapture does not withdraw Rapture itself. Like Powder in a Drawer, we pass it with a Prayer, it's Thunders only dormant" (L 842). The powder in the drawer, the dormant thunders recall other images in Dickinson's writings such as the gun, or the volcano, metaphors of power and explosiveness whose energy long stored and finally released is so similar to that of her poetry. Desire, provided that it remains unfulfilled, becomes the fundamental element of these poems: as Helen McNeil argues, "For the living self whom Dickinson brings into her poems as her instruments, desiring is continual and innate, a state of being that defines being itself".[13]

[13] Helen McNeil, *Emily Dickinson* (London: Virago, 1986), 172. The dynamics traced by Dickinson's poetry here and the nexus between food and renunciation as a choice and as a means of keeping desire indefinitely open recall the well-known case of the butcher's wife analyzed by Freud and re-read by Lacan: by refusing to have her craving for caviar fulfilled by her loving husband, the butcher's wife ensured her own survival as desiring self. See Sigmund Freud, *The Interpretation of Dreams*, in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, translated and edited by James Strachey, volume V (London: The Hogarth Press and The Institute of Psycho-analysis, 1953), 148; Jacques Lacan, "Direction of Treatment and Principles of its Power," in *Ecrits: A Selection* (New York: Norton, 1977), 261. For an analysis of literary representations of desire and fantasy in this key, see Francette Pacteau, *The Symptom of Beauty* (London: Reaktion, 1994), 172 ff.

We are by now on a place along the circumference that is opposite the starting point. "Who never *lost*, are unprepared / A Coronet to find!" becomes

Who never *wanted* — maddest Joy
Remains to him unknown —
The Banquet of Abstemiousness
Surpasses that of Wine —
(J1430)

The banquet of abstemiousness surpasses that of wine because only need discloses the greatest joy. The perfect end of desire is hope still unrealized: proximity to the object of desire shows reality as it is, no longer veiled by that projection of happiness we lay upon it to make it more attractive than it actually is. The risk is that one may become disenchanted, as the poet says in "Undue significance a starving man attaches" (J 439), where just approaching the table steals the relish from the banquet.

At this point nothing remains but to close the circuit, and Emily Dickinson does so with "None can experience stint" (J 771):

None can experience stint
Who Bounty — have not known —
The fact of Famine — could not be —
Except for Fact of Corn —

Want — is a meagre Art
Acquired by Reverse —
The Poverty that was not Wealth —
Cannot be Indigence
(J 771)

After repeatedly emphasizing the central importance of deprivation and need as ways to self-knowledge and approaches to reality, Emily Dickinson seems to stress the equally important experience of abundance as a necessary touchstone for our "poverty". The poem is full of synonyms, antonyms, parallelisms and inversions of meanings. What is important here are nuances that, though apparently minor, are substantial for Dickinson. As noted by Gerlach, this poem "contrasts five synonyms of lack – stint, famine, want, poverty and indigence – with three of abundance – bounty, corn, and wealth – to develop the mutual relation of lack and abundance. We can only understand lack when we have known abundance".[14]

Indeed, for the 1828 Webster's Dictionary, "poverty", "want", and "indigence" are synonyms, and "want" is also a synonym of "famine". Yet, none of these words appear in the definition of "stint" whose meaning is "limit; bound; restraint", and also "quantity assigned; proportion allotted". It is exactly on this idea of the limit that Dickinson grounds her subtle distinctions between the synonyms made prominent in the poem by their alternation with words from the opposite semantic field of richness. To have known satisfaction is what throws us into a condition of more piercing need because it adds to our previous poverty the pain of loss, as emphasized by Eberwein in commenting on "It would never be Common — more — I said —" (J 430), another poem whose theme is deprivation and fulfillment: "The beggary and helplessness to which she is reduced hurt more than her earlier pain, precisely because she now has a standard (however modest) by which to measure joy".[15]

The key moment of these verses is the opening of the second stanza, where Emily Dickinson drops the lexical and syntactic structure of negation she uses extensively throughout the poem to give her own definition of want: "Want — is a meagre Art / Acquired by Reverse". In the unbroken game of parallelisms, inversions and oppositions, want becomes an art, though a meager one, something we can acquire, almost a desirable quality: "The final synonym, 'indigence', glows as if

[14] John Gerlach, "Reading Dickinson: Bolts, Hounds, the Variourum and Fascicle 39", *The Emily Dickinson Journal* 3:2 (1996), URL: www.colorado.edu/EDIS/journal/articles/III.2.Gerlach.html

[15] Eberwein, 64.

indigence were a goal worth of our striving; the use of the negative 'cannot be' suggests that indigence is something worth attaining; you can not have it without certain preconditions".[16]

Emily Dickinson makes use in all these poems of concepts like richness, poverty, hunger, thirst, famine, abundance, as rhetorical strategies that help her give strength and drama to her discourse on deprivation, pain, and loss. The nutritional metaphor binds up the experience of deprivation with the corporeal dimension, making it extremely concrete as well as generalizing it to all human beings. The communication of pain to the reader is always direct, effective, and powerful, whatever the experience that causes it. Tangible and highly symbolic at the same time, the language of nutrition (along with the related vocabulary of richness/poverty) grounds its power in the primordial psychological import of nurture and gains intensity from the indissoluble link it establishes between the two opposite dimensions of fulfillment and want. Incessantly shifting her perspective between these two extremes, Emily Dickinson leads a poetic investigation that moves from the observation that it is always in terms of denial that we succeed in appraising actual experience (too vivid in the contingent situation for us to know how to evaluate it), and, passing through the tormenting expression of a recently suffered loss, makes it possible not only to accept pain, but even to conceive of its desirableness as an experience that allows an expansion and growth of the circumference of our own conscience. Yet, though affirming in a late letter that "An enlarged ability for missing is perhaps a part of our better growth" (L 951), Dickinson never achieves a permanent ethic (and aesthetic) of renunciation in her poetry, as a reading of many poems on the same subject might suggest. Exactly because of her fragmentary rendering of the experience of deprivation in several short lyrics, we should read these as the poet's effort to express each step of this path with psychological accuracy and acute understanding, rather than as an achieved standpoint or an affirmative stance (albeit in negative form).

This paradoxical need for want that Emily Dickinson evokes in so many poems, gains even more importance when related to her poetic

[16] Gerlach.

activity. As I have argued, the water/thirst image is especially compelling because of its immediacy, which allows a ready comprehension of deep pain and dispenses with the need to provide a referent for the metaphor. Nevertheless, Emily Dickinson provides a key for this image at least once, in "We thirst at first, — 'tis nature's act" (J 726), where again she generalizes the experience of want through the use of the pronoun "We", and defines our need for water as a figure, an intimation, of a "finer want", that is immortality. Since thirst is a figure of our longing for eternity, and at the same time a suitable vehicle to generalize the experience of pain, every deprivation we suffer during our mortal life engenders a condition of need that always reminds us of this "finer want". Immortality being her "Flood subject" (L 319), a condition of perpetual deprivation and need is necessary to Dickinson's identity as a poet who envisages herself (or, to use her own words, her "supposed person" [L 268]) poised on the boundary of the circumference between earthly life and immortality, a "Speck upon a Ball" (J 378), embodying in her poetry ecstatic "Bulletins from immortality" (J 827) as well as the hurting and utterly human experience of pain. It is exactly from this continuous fluctuation between desire and renunciation, ecstasy and deprivation that her poetry derives its energy and life, and for this reason the poet never makes an ultimate choice between human life and ascetic growth, but remains on the border, giving life and voice to the material reality of human life as well as to her visions of immortality.

Giuseppe Nori

The Trials of Humanity at the Margins of History: On Herman Melville's Enchanted Isles

Within a few weeks of *Moby Dick*'s publication, Melville began work on what was to become the seventh (and fateful) book of his career – *Pierre; or, The Ambiguities*. Attacked from all sides and charged with faults of all sorts, the new ponderous novel was repudiated at home and abroad, sold very poorly, and left its bewildering author financially prostrate. As the ideal of the monumental work of art broke down, *Pierre* gave way to what may be viewed as a cluster of literary remains – unfinished or rejected projects, anonymous magazine pieces, serialized or uncanonical novels. This fragmentary production of the middle period (1853-57) has usually been approached through a critical reassessment of Melville's technique of characterization. "From being heroic" or "larger than life", the protagonist of Melville's fiction, we have long been told, "becomes suddenly the most insignificant of beings, most humble, most undistinguished, most forgotten".[1] This view has been reiterated time and again in Melville criticism. To its credit, it must be acknowledged that Melville's heroes and heroines, in the aftermath of *Pierre*, are all examples of "luckless humanity"[2] – wretched women and hopeless girls, the poor and the sick in the abodes of misery, the victims of social inequality or the vanquished of history.

[1] Elizabeth Foster, "Introduction" to Herman Melville, *The Confidence-Man: His Masquerade* (New York: Hendricks House, 1954), lxxxix-xc.

[2] Herman Melville, *Israel Potter: His Fifty Years of Exile*, ed. Harrison Hayford, Hershel Parker, G. Thomas Tanselle (Evanston and Chicago: Northwestern University Press and The Newberry Library, 1982), 160.

The character who is usually invoked as the first, representative type in this lowly world of defeated figures is, symptomatically, a "poor forsaken wife" – Agatha Hatch Robertson, a deserted woman wronged by a bigamous husband. Melville learned about her moving case in July 1852 from John H. Clifford, a New Bedford lawyer, and then sketched her tale in the so-called "Agatha letters" to Nathaniel Hawthorne (August-December 1852), assuming his friend "should be sufficiently interested, to engage upon a regular story". Later, as the whole project was urged back to him, Melville was apparently unable "to do justice to so interesting a story of reality". If he indeed wrote it and finished it as a longer work of fiction (entitled, as it has been argued, *The Isle of the Cross*), the tale never saw the light of day.[3]

Between the completion of *Pierre* (February 1852) and the composition of "Bartleby" (spring and summer 1853), this projected story bespeaks a major critical impasse in Melville's literary evolution and marketplace reputation. It is a sorry though crucial reminder of the failure of sympathy in both life and art, affecting not only the mediation and transmission of lived experience (*Erlebnis*), but also the process of artistic creation and of aesthetic experience at large (*Erlebniskunst*). The "story of Agatha" calls into question the subject, the process, and the object of sympathy – namely, the authorial stance of a supposedly compassionate chronicler, his committed endeavor to transmute life into art, and finally, and most important, the character of the woman sympathized with. Agatha remains one of the vanquished of humanity, at the margins of history, ultimately left unrescued – midway through her anonymity as a "wife" and her unachieved apotheosis as "a heroine"[4] – by the legal and fictional discourses of her male champions.

Melville's impasse points forward to his subsequent production where he not only employed but also challenged the forms and the

[3] On Melville's exchanges with Clifford and Hawthorne, see *Correspondence*, ed. Lynn Horth (Evanston and Chicago: Northwestern University Press and The Newberry Library, 1993), 231-42, 621-25. On Melville's *The Isle of the Cross*, see Hershel Parker, "Herman Melville's *The Isle of the Cross*: A Survey and a Chronology", *American Literature* 62 (1990), 1-16, and Basem L. Ra'ad, "'The Encantadas' and 'The Isle of the Cross': Melvillean Dubieties, 1853-54", *American Literature* 63 (1991), 316-323.

[4] Melville, *Correspondence*, 624.

conventions of sentimental representation. In the wake of "the story of Agatha" and the theme of forsaken humanity it inaugurates, a number of skeptical scholars have in fact often doubted Melville's use of pathos and emotions. Their critical views, though, are limited by what I take to be a partial and unproblematic understanding of the sympathetic outlook that Melville allegedly employed and/or subverted in his fiction of the 1850s. However briefly, a different approach to the concept of sympathy, in its wider intellectual context, needs to be suggested here. Such a context can in fact provide a different framework for an understanding of Melville's use and abuse of the strategies of feeling in the wake of *Pierre* and the "story of Agatha", strategies that may be seen powerfully as well as problematically at work in "The Encantadas, or Enchanted Isles" (1854), perhaps the most anomalous and complex tale of Melville's short fiction of the middle years.

Sympathy and the problematics of history

The concept of sympathetic identification emerged as a fully structured principle in the late eighteenth century. But this happened not exclusively in connection with the rise of the sentimental novel or with the flourishing of the poetry of sensibility. In particular, it originated from the empirical theories of moral philosophy and the practices of aesthetic criticism, while almost simultaneously becoming a central tenet of anti-rationalistic historical approaches, in reaction to the Enlightenment and its normative ideals. As a method in its own right, it was to shape those views of the past that we have come to associate, for better or for worse, with the growth and predominance of romantic historicism (*Historismus*) over the course of the nineteenth century.

For the romantic chronicler, history was both "science and art".[5] It was a critical investigation of original sources and documents (carried out through a new method of archival research), as much as a poetic

[5] Leopold von Ranke, *The Theory and Practice of History*, ed. Georg G. Iggers and Konrad von Moltke (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1973), 34.

reconstruction of the past (carried out through fellow-feeling and lived experience), whereby "the collected fragments" of bygone times and life, as Humboldt argued, could be first apprehended and comprehended in their own terms, and then re-shaped "into a whole" by the "imagination".[6] For Michelet, the "catacombs of manuscripts" in the "galleries" of the archives of France were also the catacombs of humanity. Thus to "revive" the dead and hear them speak through those papers "so long deserted" became one of the moving tasks of the romantic historian. He could narrate "all the loves and all the sorrows of humanity" because he could "feel all humanity" as his "blood" and "family". The past, as Niebuhr put it, was brought "closer to the sympathy and feeling of the historian, the greater the events he had experienced with a torn or with a joyful heart".[7]

On the one hand, the romantic chronicler inaugurated a psychological and aesthetic experience of history. On the other, he aspired to unprejudiced historical knowledge. The historian had to live through the paradox of involvement and detachment – first becoming one with the individualities of history, then disengaging himself, like the Rankean "deity", "surveying all of historic mankind in its totality and finding it everywhere of equal value".[8] In such a paradox, we can recognize both the affective and scientific strivings of the historicist spokesman – from his resurrection and sanctification of the dead to his godly attempts at impartial cognition and objective representation; from his ethical belief in the extensive work of the moral powers to his humanist faith in the survival and preservation of the past, whether objectified in the external world or sheltered within the human soul. Through the method of sympathy, in fact, the historicist chronicler theoretically claimed to be able to recover any object or segment of the past, even the most insignificant events or the most obscure and forsaken people. He assumed that everything could and should be

[6] Wilhelm von Humboldt, "On the Historian's Task", in Ranke, *The Theory and Practice of History*, 5-6.

[7] Jules Michelet, "Prefatory Note" to *History of France*, 2 vols. (New York: Appleton, 1845), vol. I, 3-4; Michelet, *Ma jeunesse* (Paris: Lévy, 1884), xvi; Barthold Georg Niebuhr, see his 1826 "Vorrede" to the second edition of his *Römische Geschichte*, 3 vols. (Berlin: Calvary & Co., 1873), vol. I, xxxi-xxxii.

[8] Ranke, *The Theory and Practice of History*, 42.

virtually known and represented because after all nothing was worthless, and nothing – human obliviousness, brutality, and devastation notwithstanding – could really vanish for historical life.

This paradox, though, could hardly be reconciled. If it is true that *all* the past had a claim on the chronicler's attention (as Ranke, Carlyle, and others believed), then it is also true that his attention (as Thierry, Sismondi, and other antagonistic writers taught) was more likely to be solicited by what had usually been neglected or obliterated by the dominant views of history. And it is in fact in the light of this impartial *and* partial impulse that Thierry, for instance, could speak of his historical sympathy as a "plebeian sympathy" – as both "an irresistible attraction" and a compassionate "duty of filial piety" for the races, peoples, and classes that had either been forgotten or erased in the annals of the rulers.[9] The "plebeian sympathy" of the historian was destined to qualify itself, quite naturally, as sympathy for the oppressed against the oppressors. There was a redemptive tendency within romantic historicism that never gave way to the eulogy of heroes or the great men of universal history, never revered the great powers.[10]

This tendency was to be particularly problematic in the United States, a new nation that was the outcome of a popular assertion of freedom as political independence (a "new plebeian democracy", as Bancroft put it),[11] as well as the fruit of a modern and complex process of settlement and colonization that had inevitably caused new racial antipathies and new victims. What was extolled as "the common asylum" of oppressed humanity – a "country in which meet together all human races ... and where men entertain for their fellow-men", as Thierry maintained, "none but sentiments of fraternity and affection"[12] – had in fact been established on an occupied soil, no

[9] Augustin Thierry, *The Historical Essays* (Philadelphia: Carey and Hart, 1845), xviii.

[10] I am alluding to Ranke's "The Great Powers" (1833), in *The Theory and Practice of History*, 65-101, and Thomas Carlyle's *On Heroes, Hero-Worship and the Heroic in History* (London: Chapman and Hall, 1841), two classic texts that may be taken as largely representative of the dominant view of history in the first half of the nineteenth century.

[11] George Bancroft, *History of the United States*, 10 vols. (Boston: Little, Brown, 1834-74), vol. IV, 13.

[12] Thierry, *Essays*, 90.

matter how "low"[13] the immigrating race was or was made to appear by the romantic keepers of the national genealogy. That immigration was in fact an invasion, a modern conquest in its own right that had established inimical distinctions between conquerors and conquered, "civilizers" and "civilizees" (as Melville put it a few years later, denouncing, in a larger context, what he starkly called the "philosophy [of] the winner"), thus turning the new subdued races into privileged candidates for the historian's cheapest forms of sentimentality – a sigh and a tear. "The picture of the unequal contest inspires a compassion that is honorable to humanity", says Bancroft. "The weak demand sympathy", he continues. "If a melancholy interest attaches to the fall of a hero, who is overpowered by superior force, shall we not drop a tear at the fate of nations, whose defeat foreboded the exile, if it did not indeed shadow forth the decline and ultimate extinction, of a race?"[14] The historicist "compassion" of the victors' spokesman here sounds just as a residual form of fellow-feeling for "the weak" and the downtrodden on a conquered soil – an expression of doom irrevocably pronounced upon the vanishing races.

Melville's use and abuse of the sympathetic outlook in the works of his middle period must be understood against the background of this national and international context – at the intersection of sentimentality and historicism. His focus on little men and abandoned women was therefore functional. It was part of an authorial design that wanted to depart from the Titanic torments of Ahab and Pierre as well as to move beyond the considerate attention or philanthropic reverence that romantic consciousness bestowed, in Bancroft's terms, on "lowly humanity".[15] Melville re-wrote the annals of compassion by investing the miseries of his downtrodden with the problematics of history. By so doing, he re-oriented the question of history itself against the course of its own romantic historicist development, whether that development had been urged by pietas and cultural

[13] Bancroft, *History*, vol. II, 452.

[14] Melville, "The South Seas", in *The Piazza Tales and Other Prose Pieces: 1839-1860*, ed. Harrison Hayford, Alma A. MacDougall, G. Thomas Tanselle, et al. (Evanston and Chicago: Northwestern University Press and The Newberry Library, 1987), 420; Bancroft, *History*, III, 236.

[15] Bancroft, *Literary and Historical Miscellanies* (New York: Harper, 1855), 425.

relativism on one side, or dictated by historical vengeance and aversive political praxis on the other.

In "Bartleby", Melville may be said to have created his first great sentimental character, at once dramatizing and manipulating the theme of oppressed humanity introduced by the projected "story of Agatha". In the subsequent tales he sketched a number of heroes and heroines who, to a certain extent, are all variations of the "poor forsaken wife" and the "forlornest" scrivener.[16] One of the most problematic figures among Melville's heroines is the protagonist of the eighth sketch of "The Encantadas", a "half-breed Indian woman of Payta in Peru", who may be said to stand as a representative of wretched humanity at large as well as an emblematic example of the subdued races of the American continent.[17] The plain evidence of Hunilla's misery, set over against her "stern" resistance to show the turmoil of her inner life, creates a demanding task for the sailor-narrator who tells us her story of "anxiety and pain".[18] A witness of the woman's condition at the moment of her rescue at the Galapagos, as well as a member of the audience who listen reverently to her tragic and moving account, he is called not only to file facts but also to interpret and reconstruct them through sympathy and psychological identification. The case of the "dark-damasked Chola widow" thus turns into a "little story" of "vanquished" humanity,[19] that may be seen as problematically positioned at one of the typical crossroads of the American renaissance – one where the intersecting discourses of the sentimental ethics and aesthetics of fellow-feeling, on one side, and of the redemptive impulse of romantic historicism, on the other, may be said to pass and mystify one another.

[16] Melville, *Correspondence*, 623; Melville, "Bartleby, the Scrivener: A Story of Wall Street", in *The Piazza Tales*, 30.

[17] Melville, "The Encantadas, or Enchanted Isles: By Salvator R. Tarnmoor", in *The Piazza Tales*, 152.

[18] Ibid., 161, 155.

[19] Ibid., 152, 151, 157.

Physis and humanity

The reader steps into the textual world of "The Encantadas" through the threshold of disparate aesthetic expectations – from the spell of exoticism suggested by the Spanish title, through the prospect of picturesque landscapes intimated by the author's pseudonym ("Salvator R.[osa] Tarnmoor"), to the dreary maze of allegorical reversals evoked by the introductory quotations from Spenser. In the opening paragraph of the tale, though, the picture of "The Isles at Large", comes into focus through a strikingly different process of imaginative projection:

> Take five-and-twenty heaps of cinders dumped here and there in an outside city lot; imagine some of them magnified into mountains, and the vacant lot the sea; and you will have a fit idea of the general aspect of the Encantadas, or Enchanted Isles. A group rather of extinct volcanoes than of isles; looking much as the world at large might, after a penal conflagration.[20]

The narrator highlights the residual nature as well as the marginal position of the universe he is conjuring up for the reader through a defamiliarized image of familiar elements. The "heaps of cinders" he hands out to us ("Take"), so as to give a "fit idea of the general aspect of the Encantadas", are in fact debris, mainly remains of the glowing embers of the fireplace. As such, they call forth images of domesticity and family gatherings, though they evoke them in estranged terms. Like "the lees of fire" of their exotic counterpart, they tell of exhaustion of life and drain of energy, burned-out existence, pulverized and discarded – "once living things" (as the narrator himself will shortly suggest in his comparison with the "Apples of Sodom") "crumbled" into "ashes".[21] Taken out of sight, they are relegated to the outer areas that the town arranges for the disposal of its wastes.

The "outside city lot" may then be said to mark the borders of civilized association in a double sense. On the one hand, by being located in the outskirts, it is set over against the dwelling place par

[20] Ibid., 126.
[21] Ibid., 126, 128.

excellence of aggregated humanity. On the other, by storing the dregs of the fireside, it stands out as the outer shell of society's inner core – a bleak, "outside" version and inversion, so to speak, of the hearth inside, at the very center of the family and the homestead.

Thus on the dumping ground of society, out of depleted material deprived of life and utility, and through the centrifugal force of an imaginative act of discharge and reaggregation, the narrator paradoxically builds the atypical universe of his archipelago. The geographical counterpart of the "outside city lot" emerges out of a blow-up of the setting (as both an enlargement and an explosion) on a cosmic level. The "heaps of cinders" are "magnified into mountains"; "the vacant lot" turns into "the sea"; and the exotic equivalent of urban desolation comes to be suddenly transformed into the universal stage of a post-apocalyptic drama – "looking much as the world at large might, after a penal conflagration".

As the narrator carries the reader from a world of residues at the margins of society to the residues of a broken world at the ends of the earth, he in fact sets up the ground for a complex narrative function. His purpose, apparently, is to describe the abnormal course of nature, at once reminding us of the nonpresence of humanity on the Galapagos and implicitly acknowledging the concomitant lack of historical life. His ultimate purpose, though, is to use his expunction of humanity and history to reinstate their exceptional, and therefore more emblematic, presence against the fixity of an empty land. In short, Melville's narrator may be said to foreground a static realm of physis so as to turn it into a foil for the dynamics of experience. Thus the residual world of inhospitable nature becomes the privileged setting for the residual world of humanity at the margins of history.

Though such a reversal becomes fully clear only midway through the narrative, it is in fact the outcome of a strategy that the narrator sets in motion from the start, by repeatedly highlighting the absence of mankind in the first place. A native population is in fact unknown to the islands; humanity at large is altogether disassociated from them, banished from a cursed land where the life of the spirit has not objectified itself:

> It is to be doubted whether any spot of earth can, in desolateness, furnish a parallel to this group. Abandoned cemeteries of long ago,

> old cities by piecemeal tumbling to their ruin, these are melancholy enough; but, like all else which has but once been associated with humanity they still awaken in us some thoughts of sympathy, however sad. Hence, even the Dead Sea, along with whatever other emotions it may at times inspire, does not fail to touch in the pilgrim some of his less unpleasurable feelings.[22]

Since the Encantadas have never been "associated with humanity" – not even "once" – then their landscape, though ruined and ruinous to the point that "ruin itself can work little more upon them", cannot "touch" the soul of the beholder.[23] The narrator emphasizes the difference between natural ruins and the ruins of history or civilization. As the latter belong to the realms of the soul, they can be accessible through transmissions of feelings, affective resonances, and reflections. The islands, on the contrary, do not inspire "emotions", "thoughts of sympathy", or "feelings", whether "melancholy", "sad", or "unpleasurable". In short, they elicit no sentimental response. Their "desolateness" stands for a lack of sentimentality, denying the occurrence of any psychological correspondence between the self and the objective world.

On the islands humanity can be felt, so to speak, only residually – whether in the broken pieces of "wrecks" that tell of far-off devastations, or through the reminders of mortality symbolized by their most complex animals, the "tortoises". As a world "exploded into sight", this enchanted group is unique. Characterized by "desolateness", "solitariness", and "uninhabitableness", the archipelago remains unparalleled on the face of the earth. As nature is deflected from its cyclical course ("rain never falls" and there is no "change of seasons"), then its benevolent function is also distorted.[24] Potential sublimity turns into permanent aberration. And it is exactly from this perspective that nature seems to be the only field of interest for the narrator. Together with some meteorological factors such as "winds" and "currents", in fact, only animals, plants, and rocks – the

[22] Ibid., 126.
[23] Ibid.
[24] Ibid., 127, 129, 169, 126.

objects, that is, of the traditional branches of natural history – are the phenomena that fall under his observation, in a closed world that is basically revealed to the reader as the world of "the strangest anomal[ies] of outlandish nature". The Encantadas, in fact, harbor the endemic oddities of zoology; foster the unnamed and unnamable curiosities of botany; display the unworldly specimens of mineralogy and geology. Through his descriptions and pseudo-classifications, his empirical inspections and fanciful generalizations – from iguanas and tortoises to "unearthly birds" and "strange" fish, from the "ungrateful" vegetation to the "rock-bound" and "clinker-bound" coast – the narrator's discourse becomes a history in its own right, a representation strictly focussed on the anomalous life and offsprings of nature alone.[25]

Humanity, then, seems indeed to remain absent from the islands, except in its fleeting role of passer-by. In the first sketch, for example, even the Buccaneers are briefly and vaguely mentioned only as "visitors" – as visitors are, after all, the "large fleets of whalemen" that cruise among them "for Spermaceti", or the warships of "the American navy". The human race surrounds the cluster. It does not belong in its penal ground. And even when from the top of Rock Rodondo the narrator traces the geographical coordinates of the archipelago and describes its larger morphology, establishing its "relative place on the sea" and summarizing the story of its discovery – even then, humanity comes to be associated with the enchanted group only in an external way. History enters his narrative with data (numbers, dates, and voyages); it sails through and around the isles; it names them with the names of the powerful, "noblemen", "kings", and "famous Admirals" – it touches them, but merely from the outside. His description of some of the major islands seems to confirm their desolateness. The first figure to appear on his statistical table of "the population of Albemarle" ironically reads: "Men, ... none". And all the other isles he mentions or lists are "for the most part an archipelago of aridities, without inhabitant, history, or hope of either in all time to come".[26]

[25] Ibid., 127, 136, 127.
[26] Ibid., 128, 143, 139, 141, 142.

The starkness of this assertion seems to sanction, once and for all, the absence of humanity from the charmed group. In fact, it paves the way to an antithesis that paradoxically (re)introduces what the narrator had first omitted from the world of the Encantadas. "But not far from these", he immediately adds, "are rather notable isles – Barrington, Charles's, Norfolk, and Hood's". These are in fact worthy of attention, and their "notability" rests – as the logic of the contrast inevitably suggests ("But") – on the fact that they have harbored human tenants; that events have been recorded in writing, or set down in memory; and that their "history", accordingly, can be somehow presented to the reader.[27] And when the reader, in the last sketch, finally learns that "signs of vanishing humanity" are in fact to be found not only upon these "rather notable" islands, but also on those that are emphatically grouped as "an archipelago of aridities, without inhabitant, history, or hope of either in all time to come", then the incongruity brings the strategy of reversal to a climax. "Nor does the stranger, wandering among other of the Enchanted Isles", the narrator points out at the beginning of the tenth and final sketch, "fail to stumble upon still other solitary abodes, long abandoned to the tortoise and the lizard". "[S]olitary abodes", "relics of hermitages", "stone basins", "post-offices" consisting of "a bottle" and "a stake", "grave-stones" and "grave-boards" – all of them stand side by side with the Buccaneers' "ruins of seats" on Barrington Isle, as well as with the "lava-palace" and its "walls of clinkers" on Charles's; with Hunilla's "solitary dwelling" on Norfolk, and the "relics of the hut of Oberlus" on Hood's.[28]

Like the ruins in sentimental representation, these are traces that "testify to the human inability to prevail".[29] Happening to emerge out of a paralyzed physis – a fixed world where humanity and history are not endemic and have apparently been denied existence – these ruins are so emblematic as to counter-represent, as it were, the great history of humanity as a whole. Though they bear the names of the powerful of the earth, the isles the narrator chooses as privileged examples for his stories, as well as the others he only mentions in passing, are

[27] Ibid., 142.

[28] Ibid., 172, 170, 172, 145, 148, 147, 159, 170.

[29] Philip Fisher, *Hard Facts: Setting and Form in the American Novel* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), 120.

places that have become significant because they harbored the outcasts of the race. Thus the archipelago may be viewed as a terminal point, a sort of deflated, inverted telos not only for drifting natural "relics", but also for human "wrecks", the debris of a devastated or perverted mankind that also happened to travel all their way "from Paradise to Tartarus".[30]

Sentimentality and the history of the vanquished

For the Buccaneers, the Dog-King, and Oberlus, all male characters who belong to the past, the narrator relies on sources he openly acknowledges or quotes in the text. Only for Hunilla does he resort to first-hand experience. The woman is in fact a real presence on the islands, the only one who tells her own story of sorrow, directly eliciting the sympathy of her rescuers. And it is here, in particular, that the narrator's strategy of reversal reaches its highest effect – shifting his discourse from the "strangest anomal[ies] of outlandish nature" to "the strongest trials of humanity".

If in the first sketch the narrator emphasizes the "desolateness" of an archipelago that evoked no "feelings", no "emotions", no "thoughts of sympathy", then the opening of the eighth is its direct inversion:

> Far to the Northeast of Charles' Isle, sequestered from the rest, lies Norfolk Isle; and, however insignificant to most voyagers, to me, through sympathy, that lone island has become a spot made sacred by the strongest trials of humanity.[31]

Norfolk Isle is taken off the center of the archipelago (where it actually belongs) and removed to its margins. This deliberate displacement serves a double purpose. On the one hand, it sets up the appropriate place that befits Hunilla: "sequestered" and "lone", Norfolk is the geographical counterpart of the physical marginality

[30] Melville, "The Encantadas", 127.

[31] Ibid., 151. On the textual inconsistency of the double form "Charles's" and "Charles'" in "The Encantadas", see the "Editorial Appendix" to *The Piazza Tales*, 611-612.

and spiritual solitude of the "lonely widow", first separated from her dear ones by death, and then left unrescued for years. On the other it sets the island aside for veneration. Norfolk is in fact set apart as a "spot" consecrated for worship, changed into holy ground ("made sacred"), in the face of nature's "fallen" world, by the severest hardships of the human race. "Humanity, thou strong thing", the narrator exclaims midway through the sketch, "I worship thee, not in the laurelled victor, but in this vanquished one". Through sympathy, "the oppressed Hunilla" becomes not only an object of pity but also one of glorification.[32]

As the unsympathetic description of physis turns into a touching account of a case of wretched humanity, sympathy plays a double narrative function. In its original meaning of compassion in relation to suffering, it indeed proves itself "the central moral category of sentimental narrative".[33] Hunilla's misfortunes speak to the species, to the human race as a whole. At the same time, as a tool for a peculiar version of hero-worship (the reverence for a lost one), sympathy is also a vehicle for the historical redemption of the downtrodden, in keeping with many an antagonistic project of romantic historicism. Thus "Norfolk Isle and the Chola Widow" may be read as both the sentimental tale of an abandoned woman ("Hunilla was herself the heroine of her tale", says the narrator)[34] and a striking as well as problematic example of the history of the vanquished.

The Indian woman had left the continent three years earlier and arrived on the Encantadas "with her young new-wedded husband Felipe, of pure Castilian blood" (the blood of the conquerors of Peru) "and her one only Indian brother, Truxill". The captain of the French whaler who had landed them there had also promised "to take them off upon returning from a four months' cruise". After a few weeks of busy permanence, "calamity" strikes. Hunilla watches her loved ones drown, half a mile off the coast, on what had started as a joyful "fishing trip". As the French whaler does not come back to pick her

[32] Ibid., 155, 127, 157, 155.
[33] Fisher, *Hard Facts*, 95.
[34] Melville, "The Encantadas", 155.

up, she suffers years of solitude and is the victim of "events" (only intimated by the narrator) perpetrated by sailors from passing ships.[35]

Hunilla's is a story of loss and suffering caused by death and "unnamed" crimes, as well as one of rescue, if not one of spiritual deliverance. What she herself tells the captain, in Spanish, surrounded by "a voiceless circle" of sailors, is the retrospective account of what took place on the island.[36] She relates her story through a minimal sequence of events. As a skeleton of bare facts, her chronicle is first filtered by the captain (who understands her language and supposedly translates it to his sailors), and is then complemented by the narrator's remarks and insights, urged by his deep emotional participation in the present. In being the first to report and file these occurrences, he in fact creates his "little story" through an act of imaginative "re-experiencing" (*Nacherleben*) – what Dilthey called the "awareness of a psychic state", energized by sympathy, and based on life and experience (*Erlebnis*) – while at the same time subjecting it to discursive expansion and textual organization.[37]

One of the most striking examples of the narrator's strategies of representation is provided by his reconstruction of the scene in which Hunilla watches her dear ones die. The scene presents all the essential elements of sentimental narrative – the irrational oppressor, victims and witness, and an obsessive time frame that inescapably ties the latter to the devastations of the past.

The oppressor is here elemental nature, paradoxically personified, in all its inhuman indifference, by the "broad-chested swells" that dash Felipe and Truxill between the "broken logs" of their "ill-made catamaran" and the "sharp teeth of the reef". Both victims and witness constitute a family. A husband and a brother, the unfortunate ones who undergo physical destruction are tied to Hunilla by primary bonds of love and kinship. Calamity blasts life at the moment of its highest exertion and "joyfulness". We are told of "the Cholos' busy

[35] Ibid., 152-53, 154, 158.
[36] Ibid., 158, 159.
[37] Wilhelm Dilthey, *Der Aufbau der geschichtlichen Welt in den Geisteswissenschaften*, in *Gesammelte Schriften*, 12 vols., ed. Bernhard Groethuysen (Leipzig: Teubner, 1921-36), vol. VII, 136.

mind" and "toilsome matter", their "persevering labor" and "hard work" – all suddenly wiped out by a "swift doom":

> No more they sought to gaze with feverish fear, or still more feverish hope, beyond the present horizon's line; but into the furthest future their own silent spirits sailed.[38]

As life contracts and is abruptly extinguished by unexpected death, the anxieties and anticipations of those who are no more (Felipe and Truxill) give way to the travail of memory of the one who remains (Hunilla). Their projection into future prospects (their gaze "beyond the present horizon's line") is thus replaced by what will become the obsessive fixity of a woman's backward glance. Even as "their own silent spirits" embark with death and sail "into the furthest future", husband and brother remain inalienable parts of Hunilla's past – vanishing points in time within her reversed perspective in life. They become the haunting characters, so to speak, of her retrospective story of woe, anchored to a bygone moment of time that comes to be irreversibly riveted in the structure of her existence as one of separation and permanent loss.

On a "lofty cliff", "looking upon the sea at large ... from among the branches as from the lattice of á high balcony", Hunilla's eyes meet a scene of destruction. She is in the typical position of the observer in sentimental representation. She is called to witness death without being able to act, contemplating such an unforeseen and distant spectacle as to seem almost unreal, "some sham tragedy on the stage":

> So instant was the scene, so trance-like its mild pictorial effect, so distant from her blasted bower and her common sense of things, that Hunilla gazed and gazed, nor raised a finger or a wail. But as good to sit thus dumb, in stupor staring on that dumb show, for all that otherwise might be done. With half a mile of sea between, how could her two enchanted arms aid those four fated ones? The distance long, the time one sand.[39]

[38] Melville, "The Encantadas", 153, 154.
[39] Ibid., 154.

Melville creates what may be called a sentimental imbalance between the spatio-temporal units of "the scene", ruthlessly denying the witness not only any possibility of action (as usual, in sentimental narrative), but also (and quite unusually) any generous extension of feeling towards the victims. He in fact widens the space between Hunilla and her loved ones while keeping the time structure of the "tragedy on the stage" to a minimum. The spatio-temporal imbalance ("The distance long, the time one sand") crystallizes in the woman's glance – a glance that can cross from cliff to reef in no time, even as she has indeed no time to move from her station, come forward, or cry out for the two wretched ones. The "half a mile of sea between" thus turns into an unbridgeable gulf – a kind of objective correlative for the woman's stupefied impotence. Paralyzed is the hand that cannot be stretched out to provide help, as unbroken by any spontaneous expression of grief is the silence that surrounds her. There is no immediate, emotional response here, as there is no active involvement.

As time passes, Hunilla is indeed left alone with herself and her memory. The tragic event irreversibly sinks behind, turning into the one crucial fact around which her life will have to revolve in retrospect forever. The witness of bodily destruction, as is often the case in sentimental narrative, becomes the victim of mental suffering. As she tells her story, however, "the lonely widow" tends to pass over the distressing consequences of the event. The ensuing "nameless misery" that transforms her from a detached witness into an involved victim remains basically untold, though it is deeply and visibly felt by her audience. "But not thus did she defraud us of our tears", notices the narrator. "All hearts bled that grief could be so brave".[40] In fact, if her reticence moves her rescuers and increases their veneration, then it also invites the narrator to probe into the compass of the woman's hidden emotions. This creates a problematic narrative situation. As the speaker tries to pry into her lone soul, he is also somehow reverently forced to withdraw from it.

Although the sailors' response is appropriate to a sentimental audience, disinterestedly extending their sympathy to a fellow-creature who needs an enormous restitution of humanity, the core of

[40] Ibid., 155.

Hunilla's personality remains, at bottom, unreachable. Shut is the casket of her soul, readable only from the outside and on the surface: "She but showed us her soul's lid, and the strange ciphers thereon engraved", muses the narrator; "all within, with pride's timidity, was withheld".[41]

"Only soul can discover soul" (Herder); "so wondrous the communion of soul with soul" (Carlyle); "Like can only be known by like" (Emerson); "soul blends with soul" (Droysen); "life grasps life" (Dilthey). All these statements describe concentric processes of sentimental "communion" and cognitive "rediscovery", expanding from the self, through the other person, to cultural systems, and universal history. Thus in an exemplary passage that at once synthesizes and brings to a climax the romantic historicist view, Dilthey could assert that "Understanding is a rediscovery of the I in the Thou".[42]

In his short fiction of the 1850s, Melville usually denies such affective and cognitive correspondences. As the lawyer in "Bartleby" could not reach the soul of the scrivener ("it was his soul that suffered, and his soul I could not reach"), so the narrator of "The Encantadas" is unable to force his way into the widow's inmost being, even when he thinks he sees "one exception".[43] There is something about the woman that deeply touches her audience, yet cannot be touched – something that invites the extension of sympathy, indeed gratifies the affective and ethical restitution of humanity, yet challenges the cognitive and, to a certain extent, even the conative power of fellow-feeling. Though it is honorable to feel and shed tears for the woman, as it is morally imperative to succor her, there is something "within" that is out of reach and must remain so.

[41] Ibid.

[42] Johann Gottfried Herder, *Vom Erkennen und Empfinden der menschlichen Seele: Bemerkungen und Träume*, in *Sämtliche Werke*, 33 vols., ed. Bernhard Suphan, (Berlin: Weidmann, 1877-1913), vol. VIII, 327; Carlyle, "Characteristics", in *Scottish and Other Critical Miscellanies* (London: Dent, 1915), 194; Ralph Waldo Emerson, *Representative Men*, in *Essays and Lectures*, ed. Joel Porte (New York: The Library of America, 1983), 619; Johann Gustav Droysen, *Outline of the Principles of History* (New York: Fertig, 1967), 14; Dilthey, *Der Aufbau der geschichtlichen Welt*, 136, 191.

[43] Melville, "Bartleby", 29; Melville, "The Encantadas", 155.

This becomes clear as we discover that Hunilla has been a victim not only of mental suffering, but also of physical violence. As she keeps waiting for the French whaler after the tragedy, the survivor gets "lost" in the "labyrinth" of time. She would "tear" from her the "past length of weary weeks", give them all "freely" away to "buy the certainty" of the present. A "piece of hollow cane" on which the widow has "scored the days" is her only record of the flow of time on the island. But the "notches" that make up the "panel of the days" stop forever at the moment of severest suffering – the pain caused by the greatest crimes of humanity against humanity. "'There were more days', said our Captain; 'many, many more; why did you not go on and notch them too, Hunilla?'" What has come to pass against her will and against her heart belongs to a time structure that remains unmarked by the victim as well as unrecorded by the chronicler:

> Then when our Captain asked whether any whale-boats had —
>
> But no, I will not file this thing complete for scoffing souls to quote, and call it firm proof upon their side. The half shall here remain untold. Those two unnamed events which befell Hunilla on this isle, let them abide between her and her God. In nature, as in law, it may be libellous to speak some truths.[44]

By not naming those two crimes, the narrator is hardly concealing the dark side of life about Hunilla, the race of woman, or humanity at large. "Those two unnamed events" are quite clear from the context. Ships had passed on without rescuing her; while sailors, sent ashore on whale-boats, first abused the widow and then deserted her. Melville does not allow his narrator to name the crimes of abandonment and rape, it seems, for another reason. A true, antagonistic history of the vanquished cannot be filed "complete". The past cannot be reappropriated through a narrative dialectic that is supposed to reconstitute the linearity of time and rearrange the chain of events along a formal continuity of cause and effect (the historicist "causal nexus"),[45] thus also including what was forced on the victim

[44] Ibid., 157-158.

[45] Ranke, *The Theory and Practice of History*, 40.

and de-humanized her. That would mean to reconstruct the three years that spanned the woman's permanence on the island from the point of view of the oppressor. It would mean to disregard the perspective of "the oppressed Hunilla", historicizing the "vanquished one" in a chronicle that is not her own. She chose not to mark all her days, as she now implores not to be asked certain things by the captain ("'Señor, ask me not'....'Ask me not, Señor'"), whether leaving his questions unanswered or answering them indirectly ("'Nay, Señor; – but —'....'Señor, be it as you say'").[46] For the vanquished, in fact, not all time is worth remembering, not all events are worth recording, as not all words are worth speaking, because not all the past is worth redeeming – not those segments of the past, at least, whose resurrection would call the downtrodden to bear testimony to the brutality of the oppressor.

For Melville, then, the question here is not so much the false pity or insincere sympathy of the narrator. It is not even the "cat-like" strategy of "pause" and resumption he uses to enhance the participation of his sentimental audience ("sporting with the heart of him who reads; for if he feel not, he reads in vain").[47] The issue at stake is the limited scope of fellow-feeling in relation both to a psychological insight into the inner life of the vanquished, and to the representation of *her* history – *qua* history of the vanquished – outside the dominant designs that usually celebrate the deeds of the "laurelled victor". To understand and truly redeem the "vanquished one", sympathy must stop at the "soul's lid", at the threshold of the psyche's shrine, paradoxically leaving the victim unknown as well as unredeemed.

Many romantic writers and historians limited the importance of psychological interpretation (namely, the necessity of a full revelation of personality) in order to emphasize the significance of what they viewed as the larger, ethical forces or "moral energies" in history.[48] Bancroft, for instance, claimed that the "universality" of the "moral powers" allowed the historian theoretically to receive *any* member of the human race (even the "Comanche warrior" or the "dark-skinned

[46] Melville, "The Encantadas", 157.

[47] Ibid., 156.

[48] Ranke, *The Theory and Practice of History*, 100.

Caffre", as he put it) "within the pale of equality". "In these potencies", says Droysen, "all have part, each in his place. Through them, mediately, even the meanest and poorest participates in the life of History". In his "little story" of the vanquished, instead, Melville undermined the power of psychological interpretation not to magnify the "moral powers" and make room, through them, even for "the meanest and poorest" of mankind in the historical process (a forward march "attended", as Bancroft put it, "by its glorious company of martyrs"), but to deny the lower orders of society or the so-called lower races of mankind any incorporation whatsoever in the "*ensemble* of this restless progress upward [which] is the moral world" (the only one to which, according to Droysen, "does the expression 'History' find its full application").[49] What place could Hunilla take (a widowed woman and a "dark-damasked" Indian, oppressed and vanquished, raped and abandoned) in any historicist project, whether dominant or countercultural, that was supposed to celebrate – as Ranke and Carlyle put it, or as Bancroft and Prescott, and others believed – the victory of genuine moral energy or the process of the infinite perfectibility of mankind?

"Personality as such", says Droysen, "does not find in History the tests of its value, in what it undertakes, does or suffers there". To personality, he claims, "is reserved a circle of its own, wherein, however poor or rich in gifts it may be, significant or insignificant in respect to effects or results, it has to do with itself and its God, a circle of its own, wherein is the truest source of its willing and existence".[50] It is to such "circle of its own" that Melville has Hunilla reserve her "anxiety and pain". And it is the privacy of this circle of her own that the writer has his narrator respect, as he does not allow him to name the two "events" that befell her on Norfolk Isle, thus letting "them abide between her and her God". Melville creates a "vanquished one" who passively forces her audience as well as the chronicler of her "little story" to venerate her by accepting and adopting her reticences through a restrained form of sympathy. The

[49] Bancroft, *Miscellanies*, 428, 413-414; Droysen, *Outline*, 30; Bancroft, *Miscellanies*, 510; Droysen, *Outline*, 10.

[50] Droysen, *Outline*, 29.

structural hiatus, the silence of the "untold", the a-social sanctuary of personality – these characterize what Melville may have envisioned as his peculiar, anti-redemptive version of history of the vanquished.

In such a version, in fact, Melville ruthlessly uses Hunilla's physical rescue to emphasize her spiritual irretrievability. Though she has been saved from utter misery and solitude, and shown such a "silent reverence of respect" as was never received by "any wife of the most famous admiral", the "heavy-hearted" widow remains a self-enclosed and solitary being, a "lone, shipwrecked soul", reluctant to expose herself to external scrutiny as well as ultimately irrecoverable to social and humanitarian interactions.[51] During the "long passage" back from the Galapagos to Tombez in Peru, Hunilla is the "silent passenger". Once ashore, she is also unaware of the last act of generosity and sympathy of her rescuers, the woman not being told that a "contribution from all hands" has been added to the "silver" received for the sale of her "tortoise oil". The use of "hands" for sailors is here suggestive of confederate humanity, the hands that join together to bestow, *contribuere*, to bring together and share in giving to another fellow-being. Whereas her unawareness leaves such a generous act of fellowship in its purest disinterestedness, it leaves her also alone and apart, unreached as well as cognitively untouched by the sympathy of her benefactors. She is still a solitary soul ("lone Hunilla", as she passes "into Payta town, riding upon a small gray ass"), a sort of drained counterpart of that absent Christ that, in "her Romish faith", she had long addressed in vain during the most trying moments of her martyrdom on the island.[52]

Lonely and unredeemed, Hunilla is and remains a victim. Though her body has been saved and her trials have been apparently glorified, she is inexorably returned – all passion spent – to her ultimate destiny of pain and isolation. An emblematic figure, she may be said to stand for all the lost ones that Melville portrays in his fiction of the 1850s – forlorn and hopeless human beings who command attention and elicit deep emotional responses, yet ultimately resist the beholders' cognitive approaches or frustrate their power of action. These are the

[51] Melville, "The Encantadas", 159, 155, 157.

[52] Ibid., 162, 155, 161.

wretched ones whose real danger, for Melville, is not so much that of being lost in the catacombs of humanity, as that of being exhumed from the tombs of oblivion and nonexistence just to be anonymously reincorporated, "each in his place", within the irresistible "progress of the race" founded on the "development" of "the moral powers" (Bancroft) or the "upward and onward motion" of "the moral potencies" (Droysen).[53] They therefore need protection and must be sheltered from the inadequacy or complicity of sympathy as well as from the misleading claims of cultural relativism, cognitive impartiality, or narrative objectivity. As Melville was in no position to articulate his adversarial vision into a countertraditional project in its own right, his only effective way to safeguard his humble characters was to leave them all as they were. Little men caught in the storms of antagonisms and conflicts, miserable women relegated to their destiny of suffering and abandonment, they are all resigned to the calamities to which mortality exposes mankind, yet all of them also 'authorized', so to speak, to be inflexibly as well as insensibly recalcitrant to any sympathetic attempt at cultural reintegration or historical redemption.

[53] Bancroft, *Miscellanies*, 428; Droysen, *Outline*, 9-10, 30.

Sonia Di Loreto

Retail Philanthropy: Trust and Responsibility in Melville's *The Confidence-Man*

> "Apocrypha?"…
>
> "The word itself, I have heard from the pulpit, implies something of uncertain credit".

Herman Melville's *The Confidence-Man* opens "at sunrise, on a First of April",[1] and starts off with the entrance of one passenger aboard of the steamer *Fidèle*, which is traveling from St. Louis to New Orleans, and where the story takes place. Immediately in the first chapter, in what seems a mobile epigraph to the novel, two different kinds of inscriptions are juxtaposed. As soon as he gets aboard, the stranger begins to write on a small slate a series of epigrams about charity, quoting from the Bible, and holding it up so that the crowd can read it: "Charity thinketh no evil", "Charity endureth all things", "Charity believeth all things", "Charity never faileth".[2] In stark contrast with the words of the stranger, the barber hangs over his door a sign with the phrase "No trust" (*CM* 8-10) on it. The words of the Bible are meant to be prescriptive, of course, but at the same time they show a progressive pace. In fact "the word charity, as originally traced, remained throughout uneffaced" (*CM* 9), while the predicate changes, disclosing different aspects and further attributes of the notion of

[1] Herman Melville, *The Confidence-Man: His Masquerade* (1857) (New York: Penguin Books, 1990), 7 (hereafter cited as *CM*).

[2] All the mottoes come from I Corinthians I:13.

charity. This sequence written by the stranger evokes the possible transformative quality of charity operating on somebody willing to practise it, and it is opposed to the business-like tone and the directness of the barber's sign. The juxtaposition of the two inscriptions sets off a dialogue between the concepts of charity and trust, playing out a variety of implications and uses of the two ideas. The significance of what it means to exercise charity and trust, how they relate to one another, and how they might lead to different results from the ones expected, are some of the objects of my analysis. *The Confidence-Man*, in fact, does not only show a vast gallery of the transformations of the title character, who seeks to carry out advantageous transactions, but it also addresses the issue of the trasformative quality of benevolence, and the import of the act of granting trust, hinting at the consequences that these actions produce.

As Karen Halttunen points out, at mid-century people are left with a "vacuum of prescriptive guidance on how to interact safely with others",[3] since relations and interactions have become unstable due to the social and economic changes of the early nineteenth century. While before "confidence might be offered or denied to another on the basis of long term mutual knowledge",[4] in the altered social context, where even personal knowledge can be called into question – the mobility of people and the mutability of character could change even somebody once well known – relations and interactions are more and more based on momentary associations. In these circumstances, trust and confidence cannot find their own *raison d'être* in mutual knowledge, but have to be established on some other ground. Therefore, all the feelings and impressions generated during a casual encounter become the crucial test on which to found the future possibilities of that interaction. Sentiments are important not only in the parlor and in daily interactions but even more in business transactions, especially when other epistemological tools lack, or fail to help.[5]

[3] Karen Halttunen, *Confidence Men and Painted Women: A Study of Middle-Class Culture in America, 1830-1870* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1982), 193.

[4] Ibid.

[5] Recent studies have recognized "sentimentality not just as a literary genre or a rhetorical mode, but as a practical consciousness … that traverses many cultural forms, including begging letters, temperance testimonials, portraits and photographs, philanthropy, and advice manuals". Mary Chapman and Glen Hendler, Introduction to *Sentimental Men: Masculinity and the Poetics of Affect in American Culture* (Berkeley: Universty of California Press, 1999), 9. See also Ann Fabian, "Unseemly Sentiments: The Cultural Problem of Gambling", in Shirley Samuels, ed., *The Culture of Sentiment: Race, Gender, and Sentimentality in Nineteenth-Century America* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), 143-156.

A steamer on the Mississippi is of course the ideal example of a mobile context where momentary acquaintances take form, dissolve, and reshape in another form, and where – more to the point – the restless impulse to conclude business is constantly brought to the fore in these casual associations. In every single exchange occurring on the *Fidèle* confidence and trust are exercised, discussed, dissected, requested, granted or refused. As the barber's sign demonstrates, confidence and trust, in fact, pertain very much to the business world, and call into question the very nature of knowledge: how can one know enough of another person in order to bestow or refuse trust? How is it possible, during a casual encounter, to understand and feel enough about another person, to be able to practice charity or negotiate a business transaction? In following some of the interactions of the confidence-man, it is my aim to investigate how both the recently acquired market dimension of the "charity-business" and the sentimental appeal in the business world have made it difficult to distinguish the benevolent from the entrepreneurial spirit, questioning from time to time the most profound personal impulses, usually considered spontaneous and altruistic. One of the crucial issues addressed in this complex landscape of emotions is, in fact, the trajectory of personal moral responsibility, both in charitable and in business interactions.

Melville's novel, deemed baffling by many reviewers of the time,[6] is constituted by a series of scenes in which different avatars of the

[6] "It is not till a lengthened perusal … has familiarized us with the quaintness of the style, and until long domestication with the incomprehensible interlocutors has infected us with something of their own eccentricity, that our faculties, like the eyes of prisoners accustomed to the dark, become sufficiently acute to discern the golden grains which the author has made it his business to hide away from us". *The Literary Gazette, and Journal of Archaeology, Science, and Art,* London, April 11, 1857, reprinted in Herman Melville, *The Confidence Man*, ed. Hershel Parker (New York: Norton and Co., 1971), 272.

title character encounter other passengers of the steamer. During one of these conversations, one of the personifications of the confidence-man, the "man in gray", suggests to his interlocutor the extravagant idea of a World's Charity – a project that, given the context of the time, might not have seemed completely bizarre, after all:

> The World's Charity is to be a society whose members shall comprise deputies from every charity and mission extant; the one object of the society to be the methodization of the world's benevolence; to which end the present system of voluntary and promiscuous contribution to be done away, and the Society to be empowered by the various governments to levy, annually, one grand benevolence tax upon mankind (*CM* 50).

The formal and legal tone of the proposition aims at emphasizing and somehow satirizing an already existing tendency. By the time Melville's *The Confidence-Man* was published, in fact, the idea of systematizing and controlling the various dispersed projects had been put into practice in many "miscellaneous popular charities",[7] as even R. W. Emerson pointed out in "Self Reliance", and it was actually reasonable to refer to an already existing "charity business" (*CM* 49). By exaggerating the business character of charity, the World's Charity project unveils some paradoxical tendencies, and serves as a critique of benevolence's self-complacency. One of the striking aspects of the confidence-man's project lies in the imposition of a regulatory system on the sentiment and attitude of benevolence: "the methodization of the world's benevolence" undermines the spontaneous and natural essence commonly attributed to this inclination. In fact benevolence, as a moral predisposition, is considered a very specific trait of the period's sensibility, but it is also a distinctive marker of enlightened individuals, who, precisely through their private and public conduct – and their demonstration of benevolence – would assert themselves to be virtuous citizens. As Susan M. Ryan argues, "white benevolence … would produce *better* white people" (Ryan 706) and it would not

[7] Ralph Waldo Emerson, "Self-Reliance", in *Essays and Poems* (New York: Library of America, 1996), 262.

only help destitute and needy classes. On the contrary, a thorough methodization would obscure the spontaneous moral character, shifting the focus on the final result – "not a pauper or heathen could remain the world round over" (*CM* 50) – thus excluding the transformative quality of the act itself on the donor.

Connected to this change, the confidence-man's bold theory also implies a total lack of voluntarism, that is, of personal choice: to do away with "the present system of voluntary and promiscuous contribution" means to empty the charitable acts of the personal choices made by individuals, trusting all the benevolence into the hands of a centralized institution. What before was a donation – unsolicited, originating from a benevolent disposition – now becomes a legal superimposition, "one grand benevolent tax upon mankind". According to this project, on the one hand people would be totally disempowered of their unmediated contribution – their direct exercise of benevolence – and on the other hand there would be an extreme rationalization and bureaucratization of a sphere that was still believed to pertain to the realm of emotions, sentiments, and morals. The satirical vein underlying the World's Charity business is especially evident in the attack on the gradualist and constant practice of benevolence. The confidence-man, in fact, is "for doing good to the world once for all and having done with it" (*CM* 52), excluding any possible idea of progressive reform: the worldwide change is almost to occur overnight, not taking into account any idea of constant commitment, moral example, and sentimental influence. An aggressive, impetuous, and impersonal entrepreneurial spirit seems to be destined to devour the personal, sentimental, constant involvement of an old-fashioned charity.

In this critique of the self-complacent quality of benevolence, the confidence-man heightens the easy discharge of personal responsibility to a potentially enlarged charity business: if on the one hand a benefactor or benefactress uses benevolence to construct his or her own virtue, as well as doing good to society, it is also true that the individual's direct intervention would always entail personal commitment and responsibility. By taking charity away from its sentimental system of reference, the World's Charity project reveals the risk of a total delegation of responsibility. If the direct interaction between the philanthropist and the needy person is removed,

substituted by bureaucracy, where can personal responsibility and freedom of choice be located? On a smaller scale, this question is present in every charitable interaction involving the confidence-man. If one follows Scott A. Sandage's suggestion that "business relations … depended on strong bonds of mutual obligation", thus implying that "sentiment was not out of place in the competitive sphere of market capitalism",[8] it is very interesting to focus on what lies at the heart of the interactions on the *Fidèle*, since those relations cannot rely on previous knowledge or former affection, but are absolute in their *hic et nunc* reality.

The context chosen by Melville, that of a scene in constant motion, is the microcosm of a world where both business and charity have very little security. As the "man in gray" with his World's Charity illustrates, benevolent institutions, shaped as profitable business, intervene to manage an ever increasing range of social problems, widening the gap between the charitable person and the object of his or her benevolence, thus providing room for a number of "mysterious impostor[s]" (*CM* 7) to maneuver for their own ends. It is precisely in that enlarged interpersonal breach – where confidence, charity, and moral responsibility get negotiated – that Melville's confidence-man operates. Since the confidence-man moves in a suspension of stable identities, social roles, business transactions, and in an atmosphere of epistemological insecurity, he is able to unveil the ambiguities inherent in the paradoxical interactions that oscillate between charity and business.

As the exchange between the confidence-man and the barber illustrates, confidence and trust are very much interconnected. When looking at the sign, the cosmopolitan, one of the guises of the confidence-man, protests with the barber: "'No trust? No trust means distrust; distrust means no confidence'" (CM 266), proceeding then to prove the barber's distrust with one of his tricks: "'suppose I say to you, "Barber, … I have no small change with me tonight, but shave me, and depend upon your money tomorrow"—suppose I should say that now, you would put trust in me, wouldn't you? You would have

[8] Scott A. Sandage, "Failed Men and the Sentimental Marketplace, 1873-1893," in Chapman and Hendler, eds., *Sentimental Men,* 182.

confidence?'" (*CM* 267). When it becomes inevitable to grant confidence, *trust* is the currency for every possible transaction, both as a way to delegate benevolence, and as a way to reaffirm the sentimental nature of every negotiation. To trust somebody implies to recognize value to that person, and also to transfer something – responsibility, feelings, and money – to that same person. In *The Confidence-Man* trust turns into the symbol of the renunciation of a belief in validation, both in the realm of charity and in the business sphere. To trust somebody or something means to believe without evidence, to willingly want to believe.

As shown in more than one encounter, the confidence-man tries to locate trust in unreachable places. Trust, in one case, is the projection into the unknown past, into the memory of a stranger, as when the man with the weed exhorts the country merchant to have "trust in the faithfulness of [my memory]" (*CM* 26). In another case, trust is to be founded upon the unforeseeable future, as when the herb-doctor tells the sick man "that little you ask, I think, can be granted. But remember, not in a day, nor a week, nor perhaps a month, but sooner or later … then may you calmly look for some eventual result of good" (*CM* 100). In any case, trust can never be grounded in validation: it becomes "apocryphal", "something of uncertain credit" (*CM* 287). In fact trust, in the confidence-man's operations, is "not warranted" (*CM* 287), it gets located exactly in that intermediary space described by the old man in the last scene of the novel: "look, sir, all this to the right is certain truth, and all this to the left is certain truth, but all I hold in my hand here is apocrypha" (*CM* 287). As staged by the novel, trust can never find confirmation elsewhere, but it is always granted as a tautological belief: one bestows trust because he or she believes in trust. But, once again, the confidence-man demonstrates that even when there is validation – and again a validation based on faith – the proximity of "apocrypha" can be baffling: "when is all bound up together, it's sometimes confusing" (*CM* 288). The confusion increases even more when one considers that along with trust, it becomes problematic to locate responsibility. In fact, if personal responsibility gets transferred along with trust, it is not clear how to define a totally responsible person with his or her own integrity.

What is inherent in every charitable transaction is the notion of benevolence. The very idea of benevolence implies a willing personal

exertion, a projection of sympathy that from one person would reach another who is in need and distress. The existing gap – social, financial, emotional – between the two people, no matter how wide, is believed to be filled by sentiment, which functions as a bridging gesture from one person to the other. Some kind of mindful recognition and sentimental sympathy are the first steps that would induce every benevolent person to partake in the great work of reform: the initial stage of charity occurs in the mind and heart of the charitable person, who will then act accordingly.

In many cases the inward and sentimental movement, and the inner awareness of somebody else's condition and problems, are even more important than the actual helpful action, as Harriet Beecher Stowe reminds her readers: "There is one thing that every individual can do – they can see to it that *they feel right*.... The man or woman who feels strongly, healthily and justly, on the great interest of humanity, is a constant benefactor of the human race."[9] Beecher Stowe's sentimental construction of her public of readers presupposes both individual responsibility for inner transformation – through which a society formed by single individuals can undergo reform – and also an "emotional transparency",[10] a common transferability of affect, which can be easily recognized and shared, and which might serve as an overarching moral uplifting. Moreover, she invokes constancy in benevolence: feeling right is not a unique experience, but a continuous endeavor in order to become a "constant benefactor". In fact, through these aspects of sentimental experience, Beecher Stowe and other cultural agents propound a general moral reformation.

By focusing on the use of sentimental modes, it might be useful to examine how Melville's novel establishes a critique of the benevolent scope of sentimentality, denying its potential for reform. One very telling example of sentimentality gone awry is the cripple's lack of sympathy toward Black Guinea. In one of the first scenes, "a grotesque negro cripple", called Black Guinea, puts on a pitch-penny game: "shuffling among the crowd, now and then he would pause,

[9] Harriet Beecher Stowe, *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (New York: W. W. Norton and Co., 1994), 385.

[10] Glenn Hendler, "The Structure of Sentimental Experience", *The Yale Journal of Criticism* 12:1 (1999), 146.

throwing back his head and opening his mouth like an elephant for tossed apples at a menagerie" (*CM* 16). From the crowd a "limping ... sour-faced person—it may be some discharged custom-house officer" (*CM* 17) starts to doubt the black man's invalidity, proclaiming his deformity to be a sham, and him to be "some white operator, betwisted and painted up for a decoy" (*CM* 19). To reinforce the absence of a supposedly natural attitude – sympathy towards the invalid – the narrator carefully stresses how the missed opportunity for a sympathetic situation goes completely unnoticed by the crowd: "That cripples, above all men, should be companionable, or, at least, refrain from picking a fellow-limper to pieces, in short should have a little sympathy in common misfortune, seemed not to occur to the company" (*CM* 17). Not even the extreme case of a shared physical misfortune can be envisioned as a typical example of sympathy, since Black Guinea's doubtful racial identity and the underlying threat of his cheating, along with the custom-house officer's acrimonious treatment of the black man, confound any possibility for direct benevolence and charity.

Of course, as Susan M. Ryan notices, racial identities are at stake here, causing "white panic in the face of unstable benevolent hierarchies".[11] In this case a possible benevolent encounter is nullified, since the custom-house officer has no benign and compassionate disposition: by claiming that "charity is one thing, and truth is another" (*CM* 20) the man is not willing to grant unwarranted trust, but he is expressing his belief in a truth grounded on empirical evidence. After he gives vent to his suspicion, in fact, the crowd starts to ask Black Guinea "documentary proof, any plain paper ... attesting that his case was not a spurious one" (*CM* 18). The custom-house officer denies the transformative quality usually attributed to charity, thus shifting the focus from the charitable person and the generosity of the act to the receiver, opposing scrutiny to benevolence. On the other hand, the transparency and translatability of Black Guinea's suffering are not easily transferred onto his audience of donors and potential sympathetic benefactors. The resistance to sentimental

[11] Susan M. Ryan, "Misgivings: Melville, Race, and the Ambiguities of Benevolence", *American Literary History* 12:4 (2000), 704.

communication is overcome only by the trust granted by the country merchant. But the merchant's "proof of [his] trust" (*CM* 23) is not a simple, single, one-way donation. When he gets his purse from his pocket, the country merchant accidentally drops his business card, which will be used later by the confidence-man. The country merchant, therefore, performs a double offer: the willing donation of money and the accidental gift of his business card. In this case, benevolence is revealed to be not only a matter of sentimental piety and charitable effort. Through the duplicitous presentation – even if one is involuntary, and in fact exactly because of its casual nature – trust's double character is unveiled: it is charitable and business-oriented, responsible and fortuitous, isolated and consequential.

This transaction between the country merchant and Black Guinea posits crucial questions regarding the nature and consequences of benevolent actions, as well as the scope of personal moral responsibility. Wai-chee Dimock, in her chapter on *The Confidence-Man*, discusses issues of individual accountability, or, more precisely, "personified accounting".[12] Differently from her analysis, I would like to focus on the idea of responsibility in its wider connotation, as a concept which maintains both the principle of accountability, and the notion of keeping control and authority over one's own actions. I would argue, in fact, that the novel stages some of the characters not always and not only as "greedy, gullible, moronic … what we might call 'deserving victims'",[13] but as somewhat trapped between their desire of being morally and benevolently accountable – they want to grant trust – and their preoccupation of keeping control over their own transactions – they wish to retain the trust, even when it is bestowed. In fact, if the country merchant is the only character charitable and responsive to Black Guinea, he can also be deemed somewhat responsible for the chain of events occurring later in the story. It is precisely because of his good intention – to give Black Guinea money – that he drops his business card, losing control and authority over his own identity, thus starting the confidence-man's

[12] Wai-chee Dimock, *Empire for Liberty: Melville and the Poetics of Individualism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989),179.

[13] Ibid., 185.

series of frauds and eventually becoming a victim of his own open disposition. The correspondence between emotional trusting and financial trust is literally enacted in the transaction between the two men. The passage of the business card from one person to the other foreshadows subsequent transactions between the merchant and two different personifications of the confidence-man, once again the first being charitable and the second business oriented.

In both cases a sort of transfer takes place: in the first instance, the merchant is moved by the sad story of the gentleman with the weed and gives him money, while in the second case he buys stocks from another avatar of the confidence-man, the transfer agent. In the latter case the "good merchant" hands down to the agent not only his money but also the story of the old miser, who "had no trust in anything, not even in his parchment bonds, which … he had packed down and sealed up, like brandy peaches, in a tin case of spirits" (*CM* 70) and who will become another victim of the confidence-man. As in the previous, involuntary transmission, once again the merchant is responsible for incautiously delegating his knowledge to somebody who is in fact a 'transfer agent' by definition, functioning as the exemplary mediator between willing transaction and unconscious revelation. A transfer agent is somebody who has agency, but at the same time he is able to use this very agency only when entrusted by the company and the investors. He is never completely and independently in control, so that he cannot be held totally responsible if the deal is not an advantageous one. The "transfer agent", like the "cosmopolitan", is a perfect embodiment of the extreme mobility and shiftingness of responsibility typified by the transactions. After asking, and very often receiving confidence, these operators never keep it long enough to transform it into a stable tenet; they immediately transfer trust into some other business and personification. On the one hand, this pattern negates emotional transparency – Emerson's "transparent eyeball" becomes Mark Winsome's "purely and coldly radiant … prism" (*CM* 227); on the other, it strongly affirms an extreme and immediate transferability: even the responsibility of narrating stories is delegated to a previous story-teller and never given as a form of first-hand knowledge.

The absence of transparency, combined with extreme transferability, heightens the necessity of *willingly* granting trust.

Since Black Guinea is not transparent as a sentimental character, one has to want to believe he is one. Even more so, since the combination of these two features in the confidence-man's transactions results in an ability to deflect all sorts of inquiry and control, which are, as Sandage points out, the signal not only of a culture of sentiment, but also of "a culture of surveillance … when people who failed found themselves under increasing scrutiny by charity, reform, and even credit-reporting agencies".[14] But even surveillance does not work on the *Fidèle*, not only because the boat is full of "confidential passages … and out-of-the-way retreats like secret drawers of an escritoire" (*CM* 13), but also because the confidence-man is able to wear the "air of a necromancer", conjuring up little episodes of "fictitious estrangement" (*CM* 215).

If responsibility and trust can easily be discarded and passed on to somebody else, their vicariousness is not unproblematic, as the figure of the "gentleman with gold-sleeve buttons" renders evident. Moral integrity and transmission of responsibility are the focus of the episode. The confidence-man is lured by the exceptional goodness of the gentleman, by his "winning aspect" (*CM* 45), by his "expression of so prevalent [goodness]" (*CM* 45). As in the charitable lady's case, the quality of being good is so transparent that it can be worn on one's countenance, and is easily recognizable, a sort of social trait. Because of the paradoxical nature of such a quality, goodness is the more evident the more profoundly and intimately it is rooted in one's self, showing a perfect transparency between internal and external features, just like the gentleman's "inner side of his coat skirts" made of "white satin", which confirms that "what seemed so good about him was not all outside" (*CM* 46). Of course, if goodness can be worn as an "involuntary emblem" (*CM* 46), it is an emblem nonetheless, and a very visible one. Therefore, it seems that precisely because the gentleman is naturally and involuntarily good, he does not have any personal merit for being so; in fact, as the narrator stresses, he is "one whose very good luck it was to be a very good man" (*CM* 46). But the gentleman, in order to retain the integral perfection of his goodness, cannot spare it and, most importantly, cannot transfer it: quite the

[14] Sandage, "Failed Men", 185.

opposite, indeed. He is good, and his hands are clean, because his black body servant, "a certain negro body-servant, whose hands nature had dyed black", does the *dirty* work for him, thus allowing the gentleman to remain pure: "this negro servant's hands did most of his master's handling for him; having to do with dirt on his account, but not to his prejudices" (*CM* 46). The question here is twofold and it concerns the issue of sentimental benevolence: if goodness is natural and immanently grounded in one's inner self, how would it be possible to transmit it through the operations of somebody else, while also retaining the integral moral responsibility, that is, full control over it? Moreover, if moral sentiments are a social construction, that is, enacted in the social sphere, in order to substantiate goodness and transform it into benevolent work it is indispensable to delegate a part of the actual benevolent work, thus risking to delegate also the chance of not doing good. The mere hint of this possibility is startling: "but if, with the same undefiledness of consequences to himself, a gentleman could also sin by deputy, how shocking would that be!" (*CM* 46). Sinning or doing good almost always require a deputy, and in a market society this would probably imply opening a series of chains of consequences, those very consequences the gentleman with gold sleeve-buttons would keep himself undefiled by.

It is not an accident, of course, that the World Charity's project is revealed exactly to the gentleman with gold-sleeve buttons. Only to such an icon of goodness – pure, integral, but also isolated – could the plan of exercising charity by proxy be disclosed, since it would seem so proper for him to completely delegate direct, moral responsibility. Precisely because he is all goodness, by delegating benevolent work he never risks losing any of it. The gentleman needs the body-servant just as he might welcome the centralized institution of the World's Charity, in order to be able "to keep his hands clean" (*CM* 46) and his money "unspotted from the world" (*CM* 48). In this case trust is pure proxy, with very little emotional exertion, completely different from the trust bestowed by the country merchant on the man with the weed, which was of a sentimental nature, since the confidence-man sees the merchant "not entirely unmoved" (*CM* 29) by his story, as a "friend in whom [he] may confide" (*CM* 28).

These two figures, the gentleman with gold-sleeve buttons and the good merchant, are described as "good", but they embody different

kinds of goodness. The former is the emblem of integral benevolence, pure but not transmissible through sentimental operation. He is the one who would support the market dimension of the charity business; in fact, he can delegate moral responsibility precisely because he keeps control over his goodness. He never requires validation for his trust, but effortlessly gives money to the man in gray, without even asking, as others do, to be recorded as a donor, thus keeping himself completely outside of the charity system. For him "charity was in one sense, not an effort, but a luxury" (*CM* 48), showing how charity is completely detached from any personal labor, or intentional compromising. As "a luxury", charity is already a byproduct of the market, a surplus for him, and something he can discard or retain at his leisure, because it is outside of the realm of necessity.

The good merchant is more open to sentimental appeal, and he is probably a significant instance of the sentimental man in the business world. He is the one who is able to experience "that confidential sort of sympathetic silence" with the transfer agent, since "friendliness, like true religion, [is] a sort independent of works" (*CM* 70). In both cases, the gentleman's and the merchant's trust are gratuitously granted: the gentleman listens to the World's Charity project, eventually offering money, and the good merchant never requires validation for his trust. He believes the transfer book to be the "true book", just because of its ontological quality; his knowledge about the book and what it implies resides exclusively in his trust, "for how, by examining the book, should I think I knew any more than I now think I do; since, if it be the true book, I think it so already" (*CM* 69). While the gentleman with gold-sleeve buttons knows how to avoid responsibility by delegating it along with his trust – he is compared to Pontius Pilate, who did not want to be held directly responsible for Christ, thus giving up also his control over the events that followed his decision – the country merchant puts all his responsibility, both as moral accountability and as control over his actions, in his trust. When the transfer agent asks him "But you have not examined my book", the merchant placidly replies, professing his belief: "What need to, if already I believe that it is what is lettered to be?" (*CM* 69).

Despite the complete absence of a reliable and authenticated system of reference – from the beginning to the end there are no papers to attest Black Guinea's identity and his deformity – trust is the

only principle that can be granted. In the last scene, even the doubtful confidence-man, who has built all his operations and his whole identity on trust, has his trust shaken by the looming presence of distrust in the Bible, another "true book". He is not able to recognize and distinguish warranted and unwarranted truth, thus having to put his own trust into the old man's final explanation: "think no more of it, for it's apocrypha" (*CM* 287).

Giorgio Mariani

The (Mis)Fortune of Emerson in Italy

In the afterthought of his recent *Liquid Modernity*, Zygmunt Bauman – one of the profoundest analysts of what has come to be called the postmodern condition – tries to capture the sensation experienced by those contemporary "fragile individuals" who, "doomed to conduct their lives in a 'porous reality', feel like skating on thin ice". In order to capture this experience, he exhausts his metaphor with a quotation from Ralph Waldo Emerson's essay "Prudence": "In skating on thin ice – Emerson writes – our safety is in our speed".[1] Yet, as Bauman goes on to note, speed is seldom conducive to thinking, and certainly "not to thinking far ahead, to long-term thinking at any rate". Thus what might be taken as a strategy for survival on the one hand, may lead to the drowning of our intellectual, critical abilities on the other. The question that Bauman leaves unanswered – and I say this not to criticize him, since that is obviously unimportant to the larger scope of his argument – is the question of where Emerson stands in the midst of all this: is he an early diagnostician of liquid modernity, and if he is, what course is he recommending we take vis-a-vis the sense of uprootedness it disseminates? Is he promoting speed as one of the key virtues of prudence, or is he decrying it as an example of that "base prudence … which is a devotion to matter, as if we possessed no other faculties than the palate, the nose, the touch, the eye and ear"

[1] Ralph Waldo Emerson, *Essays and Poems*, ed. Joel Porte, Harold Bloom, and Paul Kane (New York: Library of America, 1996), 364; Zygmunt Bauman, *Liquid Modernity* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2000), 209.

(358)? Or is Bauman resorting to the Emerson quotation simply because it allows him to round off his trope?

Regardless of how we wish to answer these questions, Bauman's use of Emerson is a marker – small, yet to my mind significant – of that renewed interest in Emerson's writings that can be noticed well beyond the confines of professional American literary criticism, where at any rate studies of Emerson have over the last three decades grown to such an extent that their output now appears to threaten even the leviathanic proportions of the so-called Melville industry.[2] From the early seventies onwards thinkers as diverse as Stanley Cavell and George Kateb, Cornel West and Richard Poirier, Harold Bloom and Barbara Packer – just to mention a few of the most notable names – have paid considerable attention to Emerson: a sure sign that, whatever we may finally decide to do with him, this writer-philosopher continues to engage us because many of the issues he raised are issues we are still, often both desperately and passionately, trying to come to grips with.[3]

[2] For two important review essays on recent Emerson studies, see Lawrence Buell, "The Emerson Industry in the 1980's: A Survey of Trends and Achievements", *ESQ: A Journal of the American Renaissance* 30 (1984), 117-136, and Richard Grusin, "Revisionism and the Structure of Emersonian Action", *American Literary History* 1 (Summer 1989), 404-431.

[3] Stanley Cavell, *The Sense of Walden: An Expanded Edition* (San Francisco: North Point Press, 1981); *In Quest of the Ordinary* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988); *This New Yet Unapproachable America: Lectures after Emerson after Wittgenstein* (Albuquerque, N. Mex.: Living Batch Press, 1989); *Conditions Handsome and Unhandsome: The Constitution of Emersonian Perfectionism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990); *Philosophical Passages: Wittgenstein, Emerson, Austin, Derrida* (Cambridge: Blackwell, 1995). George Kateb, *The Inner Ocean: Individualism and Democratic Culture* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1992); *Emerson and Self-Reliance* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 1995). Cornel West, *The American Evasion of Philosophy: A Genealogy of Pragmatism* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1989). Richard Poirier, *The Renewal of Literature: Emersonian Reflections* (New York: Random House, 1987); *Poetry and Pragmatism* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1992). Harold Bloom's essays on Emerson include: "Emerson and Influence", ch. 9 in *A Map of Misreading* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1975), 160-176; "Emerson and Whitman: The American Sublime", ch. 9 in *Poetry and Repression: Revisionism from Blake to Stevens* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1976), 235-266; "Emerson: The American Religion", ch. 6 in *Agon: Towards a Theory of Revisionism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982), 145-178; "Emerson: Power at the Crossing", in Lawrence Buell, ed., *Ralph Waldo Emerson: A Collection of Critical Essays* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1993), 148-158. Barbara Packer, *Emerson's Fall: A New Interpretation of the Major Essays* (New York: Continuum, 1982).

To some Emerson now appears a Nietzschean thinker whose reflections on power anticipate Foucault's work.[4] To others he is a "titan of deconstruction" whose definition of all language as "vehicular" anticipates both Nietzsche and Derrida.[5] To others still he deserves to be seen as the fountainhead of American pragmatism, to which he bequeathed, in Poirier's words, an understanding of language as "the instrument of a saving uncertainty and vagueness".[6]

Whether we accept any of these readings of Emerson or not, what seems unquestionable is that no serious engagement with the literary and cultural tradition of the United States can afford to ignore Emerson, a writer described some years ago in the *New York Review of Books* as being no less than "Mr. America". In a piece thus entitled, Harold Bloom, after dismissing the notion that Emerson could be reduced to a transcendental philosopher, went on to declare that "Emerson is the mind of our climate; he is the principal source of difference in poetry and criticism and in pragmatic postphilosophy … the inescapable theorist of all subsequent American writing. From his moment to ours, American authors either are in his tradition, or else in a countertradition originating in opposition to him".[7] While Bloom has highlighted Emerson's centrality within the American literary canon, others have insisted on his relevance to American political culture. For example, Charles E. Mitchell has argued that all commentary on Emerson "[is] ultimately based on some understanding of his treatment of individualism" and that "Emerson confronted in his own work the issues that were and remain at the core of American democracy".[8] If this is true, then we may wish to conclude that Emerson's texts could prove to be extremely useful in charting our navigation across the waters of liquid modernity. This is

[4] On the Nietzsche-Emerson connection see George J. Stack, *Nietzsche and Emerson: An Elective Affinity* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 1992), and *Emerson/Nietzsche*, ed. Michael Lopez, a special issue of *ESQ: A Journal of the American Renaissance* 43 (1997).

[5] Bloom, *A Map of Misreading*, 174-175; quoted in Michael Lopez, "Emerson and Nietzsche: An Introduction", in *Emerson/Nietzsche*, 17.

[6] Poirier, *Poetry and Pragmatism*, 3-4.

[7] Bloom, "Mr. America", *New York Times Book Review*, 22 November 1984, 19.

[8] Charles E. Mitchell, *Individualism and Its Discontents: Appropriations of Emerson, 1880-1950* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1997), 3.

not to say, of course, that Emerson is the Sage to whom we may confidently turn in order to find the answers to the seemingly intractable intellectual and social problems of today. What I am saying is that, if we agree with Bauman that the task of critical thinking is that of "separating destiny and fate, to emancipate destiny from fate, to make destiny free to confront fate and challenge it", then we must surely enlist Emerson amongst one of the possible inspirational sources of such thinking, no matter how contradictory Emerson may often sound. After all, in the very essay Bauman quotes from, after noting that "in skating over thin ice, our safety is in our speed", Emerson goes on to invoke the learning of "a prudence of a higher strain" – a prudence that "does not consist in evasion, or in flight, but in courage. He who wishes to walk in the most peaceful parts of life with any serenity must screw himself up to resolution" (365).

This Emerson sounds remarkably unlike the detached transcendentalist dreamer a certain critical tradition has consigned to us. Unfortunately, it is largely through this tradition that Emerson has been received by Italian culture and this fact alone may go a long way in explaining Emerson's Italian reputation, or lack thereof. At the beginning of the new millennium, Italian Americanists can point with some pride to a fair amount of significant Italian books on Melville, Hawthorne, Dickinson, Whitman, Thoreau, Twain, and Henry James – just to mention some well-known nineteenth-century American authors whose works have been closely studied in Italy – but to no major volume on Emerson even remotely comparable to, say, Eduard Baumgarten's or Maurice Gonnaud's important books.[9] This essay is nothing but a preliminary attempt to sketch out the reasons behind the relative lack of interest in Emerson not only on the part of Italian culture at large, but of Italian specialists of American literature as

[9] Eduard Baumgarten, *Der Pragmatismus: R. W. Emerson, W. James, J. Dewey* (Frankfurt: Vittorio Klostermann, 1938); Maurice Gonnaud, *Individu et société dans l'oeuvre de Ralph Waldo Emerson* (Paris: Didier, 1964), English translation by Lawrence Rosenwald as *An Uneasy Solitude: Individual and Society in the Work of Ralph Waldo Emerson* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987).

[10] The twin goal of re-reading Italian materials on Emerson and inquiring into the causes of his neglect in our country is currently being pursued by the "Emerson 2003" research group that includes Sonia Di Loreto (Rutgers University), Carlo Martinez (University of Chieti at Pescara), Anna Scannavini (University of L'Aquila), Igina Tattoni (University of Rome 1, "La Sapienza"), and myself. This same group is also the steering committee of the Emerson 2003 Conference, to be held in Rome on October 16-18, 2003. In what follows I take full advantage of the group's collective work and discussions, even though the responsibility for the ideas expressed in this piece is exclusively mine.

well.[10] Given space limitations I will narrow my focus to two issues. First, I would like to briefly recall a few facts concerning Emerson's Italian reputation from the early twentieth century onwards. Secondly, I will take a closer look at representative samples of academic criticism on Emerson published in Italy since the 1950s in order to formulate some tentative explanations as to why, even after American literature became a subject taught in all major Italian universities, Emerson failed to achieve the major status accorded by Italian critics to other American writers.

I

Most readers of this journal will scarcely need to be reminded that most major, and often also minor United States authors have fared extremely well on Italian shores. From the Risorgimento onwards, many Italian intellectuals as well as a significant share of the Italian reading public have turned to American writers with enthusiasm and in some cases even devotion. Yet no one can deny that the story of Ralph Waldo Emerson's reputation in Italy is to a large extent a surprisingly sad one. We have of course Italian translations of some of his writings as well as interesting assessments of his work, but once we take a closer look at the Italian critical bibliography on Emerson we soon discover that a large part of what has been written on him deals mostly with what are reputed to be his "ideas" and touches on his texts only in a cursory manner. Emerson the thinker, in other words, seems to have largely overshadowed Emerson the writer, and it seems to me that if the former was never taken seriously it is also because the latter was too quickly dismissed, in most cases, as lacking both real artistry and originality.

Italian translations of Emerson's work and Italian writing on Emerson from the mid-nineteenth century to the late fifties and early sixties, are listed and discussed in two fine articles by Rolando Anzilotti

and Maria Teresa de Majo, to which anyone who wants to learn more about the early reception of Emerson's work in Italy should turn.[11] Here, rather than repeat what can be found in these two essays, I will focus only on what strike me as some of the peculiarities of Emerson's early Italian reputation. Though some of Emerson's work began to appear in translation after Leon Alberto Perussia's 1886 edition of *Essays, First Series* (entitled in Italian *Il carattere e la vita umana*), it was only after the Emerson centennial that his work became the object of sustained critical and editorial interest.[12] While Perussia believed that, in the midst of Italy's "moral and political chaos", only a few refined readers would most likely appreciate Emerson, whom he described in his introduction as a "solitary giant … heedless of the multitudinous herd", turn-of-the-century responses paid homage to Emerson as an exemplary figure of American democracy, playing an important role in shaping the culture of a young nation – a theme of obvious importance in a post-Risorgimento Italian culture very much in search of itself.[13] But what is especially worth noting about this early phase of Emerson's Italian reception is that amongst the first translators and critics of Emerson's work we find three women who had all enthusiastically admired him. Though perhaps it would be an exaggeration to claim that in these women's writings there is a "feminist" or gendered perspective on Emerson, in their different ways, all three writers seem to have been fascinated by what one might describe as Emerson's democratic transcendence of man-as-male in favor of man-as-human being.

For example, in the preface to her translation of *Representative Men*, after praising Emerson for being "anti-dogmatic, non-conformist and anti-clerical", Maria Pastore-Mucchi goes on to stress

[11] Rolando Anzilotti, "Emerson in Italia", *Rivista di letterature moderne e comparate* 9 (Marzo 1958), 69-80; Maria Teresa de Majo, "La fortuna di Ralph Waldo Emerson in Italia (1847-1963)", *Studi Americani* 12 (1966), 45-87.

[12] Ralph Waldo Emerson, *Il carattere e la vita umana*, ed. and trans. Leon Alberto Perussia (Milano: Quadrio, 1886). To the twelve essays of *Essays. First Series*, Perussia added "Greatness", from *Letters and Social Aims*. On the early reception of Emerson in Italy see the insightful comments by Anna De Biasio, "Appunti sui primi studi americanistici in Italia: Gustavo Strafforello e il suo manuale di Letteratura Americana (1884)", *Annali di Ca' Foscari*, XXXIX, 1-2 (2000), 113-133, especially 128-133.

his championing of the moral rights of the soul as being even more important than the political declaration of man's rights: "All men are equal vis-a-vis the human soul…. Man is deeper than man…. The true man is actually not what he appears to be from his social conditions, but what he is in his own heart".[14] Manhood as a social, cultural, and biological fact is here overcome by what Mucchi takes to be the Emersonian preference for moral greatness over worldly power. Similarly, Maria Pezzé Pascolato – a Venetian writer who collaborated with journals such as *Roma letteraria*, *Vita Femminile*, and *Il Rinnovamento* – in an essay in the latter publication largely devoted to "The American Scholar", praises Emerson for basing "all his hopes for the salvation of the world … on the interior and independent qualities of the individual…. The interior regeneration of the individual was the actual hub of his teaching".[15] Finally, and more explicitly, Fanny Zampini Salazar, in the first book-length study ever published in Italy, makes of Emerson a representative of all the best moral and civic qualities of his country. At the time a well-known journalist and writer of both prose and fiction, Salazar believed that Emerson's thinking is "so modern that he appears to be our contemporary", a shining example of that "sovereign respect for individual freedom" that is of immense help to "both those men and women who, in the United States, are about to take on any intellectual or commercial enterprise". Again, while one should not put too much emphasis on Salazar's "both those men and women", neither should one ignore how also for this woman writer the most attractive feature of Emerson's thinking seems to be his faith in the freedom of the individual, a faith that is necessary if we wish to honor "the human being (*l'essere umano*)". Along these lines one must notice that later

[13] Leon Alberto Perussia, "Introduzione", *Il carattere e la vita umana*, xvii, xiv. Here and elsewhere, unless otherwise indicated, all translations from Italian criticism of Emerson are mine.

[14] Maria Pastore Mucchi, "Prefazione", in R. W. Emerson, *Uomini Rappresentativi* (Torino: Fratelli Bocca, 1929), xiv, xv.

[15] Maria Pezzé Pascolato, "R. W. Emerson e l'"American Scholar"", *Il Rinnovamento* 1:2 (Febbraio 1907), 149. Pascolato's piece remains to this day one of the very few Italian writings on Emerson that takes the trouble to discuss one of his essays as a whole, by paying close attention to both its content, and the structure and style of the argument.

in her book, rejecting the stereotypical image of Emerson as "a solitary dreamer", Salazar constructs a sort of feminine Emerson, an Emerson who "cared immensely for the youth and was one of the first Americans to sustain female progress".[16]

In a few years, however, such passionate praise of Emerson as the poet and philosopher of Democracy as one can find in Salazar's book was to a large extent shelved in favor of an approach that, while continuing to emphasize his faith in the spiritual and creative energies of the individual, was more in tune with the official rhetoric of the times. Unsurprisingly, after the rise of Fascism interest in Emerson tended to focus on his work on the uses of Great Men. Rolando Anzilotti has even gone as far as suggesting that perhaps the only time when Emerson was on the brink of becoming really popular in Italy – though for the wrong reasons – was during the Fascist era. Mussolini himself publicly declared at least twice to be an admirer of Emerson (and William James), though it is hard to tell whether the Duce actually ever read their work. In any case Mussolini's endorsement may in part help to explain why Emerson's name ended up in the list of those foreign authors whose study was recommended by the Italian Ministry of Education, so that at least three editions of his work for high-school use were published between 1931 and 1936.[17] One might be tempted to conclude that Mussolini's ideologues tried to appropriate Emerson in a way that immediately brings to mind the

[16] Fanny Zampini Salazar, *Ralph Waldo Emerson nella vita e nelle opere* (Milano: Pallestrini, 1905), 5, 2-3, 1, 40. Salazar (56-57) also mentions Emerson's letter to Van Buren to protest the Cherokee removal (although she refers to the removal as a "violent and illegal expulsion" with no mention of who the targets of this illegal act were) and his anti-slavery stance as examples of the balance Emerson was able to maintain, in her view, between his theory, on the one hand, and his practice, on the other. Salazar's interest in women's issues and other progressive causes is evident also in many of her other publications, which include works such as *Uno sguardo all'avvenire della donna in Italia* (1886), *La donna italiana nell'ora presente* (1903), *La liberazione degli schiavi d'Africa* (n.d.). She also directed for several years the *Rivista degli interessi femminili*.

[17] We read that Emerson was "amongst the authors recommended in the official curricula" in the preface to one of these high-school editions of Emerson's work entitled *La presenza di Dio* (Firenze: Le Monnier, 1931), edited with a preface and an introduction by Mario Favilli. It must be noted, however, that along with a sort of Fascist-inspired interest in Emerson as the apologist of a Great-Men theory of history, in the early decades of the twentieth-century there was also a good deal of interest in the educational aspects of

Nazis' appropriation of Nietzsche – a somewhat intriguing overlap given Nietzsche's well-known sympathetic comments on Emerson. But of course the two cases are vastly different. Nietsche was an icon of German culture capable of granting the Nazi regime a significant share of cultural capital; Emerson was to Italians a largely unknown writer and philosopher belonging to a country towards which the Fascist regime became over the years increasingly hostile. On the other hand it should be kept in mind that, both in Nazi Germany and in Fascist Italy, certain American writers were tolerated, and at times even admired and promoted as examples of a kind of American anti-Americanism. We know, for example, that during the 1930s in Nazi Germany several twentieth-century American writers such as Theodore Dreiser, Sherwood Anderson, Sinclair Lewis, and Edith Wharton, were highly respected, and a classic writer like Herman Melville was studied closely even by militant Nazi critics.[18] The same was true of the Italian nineteen-thirties. As Cesare Pavese noted in an article written shortly after the end of World War II, "[a]round 1930, when Fascism was beginning to be 'the hope of the world', some young Italians happened to discover in their books America.... For several years these young people read, translated, and wrote, with a joy of discovery and of revolt that infuriated the official culture; but the success was so great that it constrained the regime to tolerate it, in order to save face".[19] Yet the desire to save face may not have been the only reason why the regime tolerated (to some extent, of course)

Emerson's philosophy. Giuseppe Lombardo Radice's *Pedagogia di apostoli e operai* (Bari: Laterza, 1936), a book-length study of "Emerson as a prophet of human education", is the most notable example of such interest in Emerson. Lombardo Radice worked at the Italian Ministry of Education from 1923 to 1924, directing the Elementary School division of the Ministry. He also collaborated with Giovanni Gentile in redesigning the Elementary School curriculum. He abandoned his position after Matteotti's assassination. An anti-fascist, Lombardo-Radice later criticized some aspects of the reforms which he himself had contributed to, but he always argued that they were not fascist reforms.

[18] See Lawrence Masden Price, *The Reception of US Literature in Germany* (Chapel Hill: North Carolina University Press, 1966); Charlotte Weiss Mangold, "Herman Melville in German Criticism from 1950 to 1955", Ph. D. Dissertation, University of Maryland, 1959.

[19] Cesare Pavese, "Ieri e oggi", *L'Unità*, 3 Agosto 1947, reprinted in *La letteratura americana e altri saggi* (Torino: Einaudi, 1953), English translation by Edwin Fussell as *American Literature: Essays and Opinions* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1970), 196.

the dissemination of American culture within Italy. As Umberto Eco reminded us a few years ago, some high-ranking Fascists themselves were deeply attracted by both American literature and film, and until the United States entered the war the favorite target of Fascist hatred was England rather than the U.S.[20]

It is therefore not surprising to see that, rather than simply dismissing an author like Emerson, the Italian culture of the time filtered him through the political and ideological agenda of the day. A case in point is Angiolo Biancotti's Introduction to his 1934 translation of *Representative Men*, characteristically entitled "Emerson, o della superanima". There Biancotti depicts Emerson as a believer in the virtues of the *aristia*, the natural aristocracy comprising those representative men who are "the 'supermen' of themselves". According to Biancotti, for Emerson "aristocracy has been the flag of every human community able to distinguish itself ... [and] the abolition of the *aristia* could lead to fatal subversions.... Masses need action; thinking is not indispensable to them. Thereby the need arises for the One who can think for all, show the way to wavering wills, simplify the Chaos that is within us, by reducing it to a few definitive lines.... It is a gross error of surviving democracies to think that there is in any being a thinking faculty that would allow it to make decisions for himself. Masses think through the thoughts of the highest, the strongest, the greatest".[21] When one sees Emerson being praised in these terms it is hard not to think of F. O . Matthiessen's observation that the effect "of Emerson's green wine on

[20] Eco mentions, for example, that the Duce's own son, Vittorio, was a great admirer of the American film industry. Another episode mentioned by Eco is worth recalling here. Giuseppe Bottai – one of the most controversial and contradictory figures of the Fascist regime, "a liberal Fascist and an anti-Semite, a lover of English culture seen with suspicion by the German allies" – sponsored a reform of the Italian Education system that he claimed was partly inspired by John Dewey. Bottai's interest in Dewey, along with Mussolini's own words on William James and Emerson, shows that some sectors of the Fascist intelligentzia were indeed drawn to (what they took to be) American pragmatism – a "philosophy" they believed encouraged a liberating and invigorating approach to everyday life. See Umberto Eco, "Il mito americano di tre generazioni antiamericane", *Comunicazione di massa* 3 (1980), recently reprinted in Umberto Eco, *Sulla letteratura* (Milano: Bompiani, 2002), 274-291.

[21] Angiolo Biancotti, "Introduzione: Emerson o della superanima", in Ralph Waldo Emerson, *Gli uomini rappresentativi*, ed. Angiolo Biancotti (Torino: UTET, 1934), 31, 32.

natures less temperate than its maker's" could be traced in the movement from Emerson's Saadi to Nietzsche's Zarathustra, whereby "the ideal man of self-reliant energy was transformed into the hard-willed Ubermensch, whose image was again to be altered and degraded into the brutal man of Fascism".[22] The Emersonian "Great Man" of Biancotti's is obviously not a direct incarnation of "the brutal man of Fascism", but it is unquestionable that this Emerson is miles apart from the champion of democracy discussed thirty years earlier by Salazar, Mucchi, and Pezzolato. Indeed, Biancotti never employs the word "democracy" once in reference to Emerson, whom he insists on presenting to the reader as a member of the "fierce aristocracy [of] the kingdom of thought".[23]

II

As the ties between Fascist Italy and Nazi Germany grew stronger, and the war was imminent, the Fascist regime extended its attack on "demoplutocratic nations" and their culture to those Italian intellectuals who studied American literature, which was in those days considered unworthy. It is therefore no accident that, from an incomparably superior cultural level, two anti-fascist intellectuals like Cesare Pavese and Elio Vittorini, commonly considered as the ur-Americanists of modern Italy, worked very hard precisely to promote the literature of the United States as a great democratic alternative to the deadly Fascist culture of the day. Yet, ironically enough, Pavese's and Vittorini's efforts to piece together a great democratic American literary tradition found very little room in it for the man who is

[22] F. O. Matthiessen, *American Renaissance: Art and Expression in the Age of Emerson and Whitman* (London: Oxford University Press, 1941), 367-368.

[23] In fact the only time the word "democracy" occurs in Biancotti's introduction is in the rather ominous phrase on "surviving democracies" quoted above. Though often recycled within an ideological perspective that is opposite to Biancotti's, the tendency to make Emerson's thinking the precursor of some of the most anti-democratic and ruthless traits of American culture remains alive and kicking to this day. For example, in an otherwise very readable study of American culture just off the press, rich with stimulating information and insights, Francesco Dragosei traces the origins of Rambo (!) back to Emerson's idea of self-reliance. See *Lo squalo e il grattacielo. Miti e fantasmi dell'immaginario americano* (Bologna: Mulino, 2002), 215-216.

usually considered the greatest nineteenth-century American philosopher of democratic individualism. In his ground-breaking and influential anthology, *Americana*, Vittorini failed to include a single line of Emerson's work, and in the prefatory notes to the "Classici" section, after praising both Emerson and Thoreau for their contribution to the advancement of human consciousness, he qualified such praises by concluding that these two writers "enriched human consciousness only in so far as the intellect was concerned, not the blood: they enriched it with abstract furors".[24] Finally, with a move that was destined to become a sort of cliché amongst Italian students of American literature, Vittorini juxtaposed Emerson's and Thoreau's "abstractions" to the "really concrete words" (42) uttered by Poe, Melville, and Hawthorne. According to Vittorini, while the latter acknowledged "suffering and evil", the former simply excluded evil from their universe: "Slaves themselves to prejudices, conventions, inhibitions, they could only … teach passive defense, and separation, abstraction, individual solitude" (43).

If Vittorini was quite direct in expressing his lukewarm feelings about Emerson, Pavese simply showed no special interest in him. In his important essays on American literature, written over a twenty-year span and eventually collected in book-form in *La letteratura*

[24] Elio Vittorini, ed., *Americana: Raccolta di narratori*, with annotations by Claudio Gorlier and Giuseppe Zaccaria, and an appendix with the 1942 introduction by Emilio Cecchi (Milano: Bompiani, 1984), 42. Cecchi's introduction was written in order to replace Vittorini's introductions to the various sections of the anthology, which were deemed unpublishable by the Fascist censors. Of course one may argue that as the volume he was editing was an "antologia di narratori", Vittorini was justified in excluding Emerson simply on the grounds that Emerson did not write fiction. However, the fact that Emerson is hard to place (he did not write novels; he was a weak poet; he was not a "real" philosopher) often seems a good excuse to avoid giving his texts the attention they deserve. On a different plane, it is interesting to note that the phrase "astratti furori" (in reference to the bloodless abstractions of Thoreau's and Emerson's), had already been used by Vittorini in the opening lines of his *Conversazione in Sicilia*, to describe the mindset of Silvestro, the novel's protagonist-narrator: "Io ero, quell'inverno, in preda ad astratti furori. Non dirò quali, non di questo mi sono messo a raccontare. Ma bisogna dica ch'erano astratti, non eroici, non vivi; furori, in qualche modo, per il genere umano perduto". *Le opere narrative*, ed. Maria Corti (Milano: Mondadori, 1974), 571. The juxtaposition of immature, "abstract" furors to a healthy "heroic" attitude was evidently a staple of Vittorini's criticism. Too bad he missed the non-abstract, "heroic" dimension of both Thoreau and Emerson!

americana e altri saggi, Pavese mentions Emerson only a few times, and always in passing. In fact, most of Pavese's references to Emerson appear in his 1946 review of F. O. Matthiessen's *American Renaissance*, where he gives every indication of sharing Matthiessen's belief that "Emerson never decisively confronted the real".[25] Yet the historical importance of Pavese's piece lies not so much in his nod of agreement with Matthiessen's judgement on Emerson, as in his assessment of *American Renaissance* as *the* definitive treatment of nineteenth-century American literature. By promoting Matthiessen's study, Pavese could not help but sponsor the kind of Emerson emerging from the pages of *American Renaissance*.

It is necessary at this point to remind especially my Italian readers that a certain hostility towards Emerson's work is certainly not unique to Italian students of American literature. Quite the opposite: until fairly recently Emerson's reputation has been a controversial one even in the United States. Emerson has of course always been a canonical figure and yet, until the recent blooming of Emerson and Emersonian studies, his canonical status has been by and large the somewhat paradoxical product of what Michael Lopez has called "the anti-Emerson tradition": "it is not too much to say that Emerson's canonization has been a curse as well as a blessing and not an exaggeration to characterize the dominant tradition of Emerson criticism as also an anti-Emersonian tradition".[26] Emerson's crucial importance in the culture of nineteenth-century America has never been much contested, but the recognition of his significance has always gone hand-in-hand with his dismissal as a thinker incapable of becoming either a full-blown artist or a 'serious' philosopher. Emerson the Transcendentalist, the Idealist, the seeker of cosmic truths, the man incapable of accounting for and confronting the evil that is in the world, mystical and naive – this has been the Emerson who – until the recent attempts at "de-transcendentalizing" him – has dominated American literary studies. No wonder, then, that, as Richard Poirier has put it, Emerson "is both everywhere in American

[25] Pavese, 186.

[26] Michael Lopez, *Emerson and Power: Creative Antagonism in the Nineteenth Century* (De Kalb, Illinois: Northern Illinois University Press, 1996), 24.

culture and nowhere, conspicuous as platitude and otherwise unrecognized".[27] Similarly, Stanley Cavell has complained that both Thoreau and Emerson are "unknown to the culture whose thinking they worked to found … in a way it would not be thinkable for Kant and Schiller to be unknown to the culture of Germany, or Descartes and Rousseau to France, or Locke and Hume and John Stuart Mill to England".[28] The reasons for this neglect of Emerson's work have been studied by both Lopez and others, and it seems only fair to say that, until at least the mid-twentieth century, the substantially negative judgments on Emerson uttered by thinkers like George Santayana, Henry James, and T. S. Eliot proved to be much more influential than the favorable reception accorded to Emerson by John Jay Chapman, William James, and John Dewey. Thus, when Matthiessen published his *American Renaissance* in 1941, the anti-Emerson tradition was already firmly in place.

Even though Matthiessen did not found the tradition, he did more than simply adhere to it. In his enormously influential study – whose overall intelligence and significance I wish in no way to call into question – Matthiessen assigned to Emerson and Emersonianism a key role in the shaping of an American literary tradition. After all, the subtitle of *American Renaissance* is no other than *Art and Expression in the Age of Emerson and Whitman* and the book opens with an epigraph from *Representative Men*. Moreover, in the prefatory pages of "Method and Scope", Matthiessen notes that "Emerson's theory of expression was that on which Thoreau built, to which Whitman gave extension, and to which Hawthorne and Melville were indebted by being forced to react against its philosophical assumptions. The nature of Emerson's achievement has caused me to range more widely in my treatment of him than in that of the others" (xii). This quotation is typical of the way in which Matthiessen both acknowledged Emerson's central position and yet criticized him as a failed organicist – as a thinker who, incapable of finally realizing his dream of reconciling the word and the world, embraced an idealism which, as

[27] Richard Poirier, *Trying it Out in America: Literary and Other Performances* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1999), 175.

[28] Stanley Cavell, *In Quest of the Ordinary* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1988), 27-28.

Matthiessen writes later in his book, "encouraged [Emerson] to ignore experience whenever it was in harsh or ugly conflict with his optimism" (52). Though Matthiessen has plenty of subtle and interesting things to say on Emerson, he often mechanically juxtaposes Emerson's "optimism" to Hawthorne's and Melville's more complex and dark vision, and unfortunately this formula – coming, as it did, from the critic credited with inventing the "Great Tradition" of American literature – was destined to have an enduring negative effect on the Italian perception of Emerson.

Vittorini's words on Emerson sound almost like an echo of Matthiessen's formulations, but in fact when Vittorini made his selections and penned his notes for *Americana*, Matthiessen's book had not been published even in the United States. However, as I noted above, in 1946 Pavese enthusiastically praised *American Renaissance*, expressing the hope that the book would soon be translated into Italian. The translation finally came out eight years later, and it was favorably reviewed by two prominent Americanists like Agostino Lombardo and Claudio Gorlier, as well as by another influential literary critic, Renato Poggioli. Moreover, it is worth adding that the way to the translation of *American Renaissance* had been paved not only by Pavese's article, but by sympathetic assessments of Matthiessen's achievement published by influential students of English and American literature such as Giorgio Baldini, Emilio Cecchi, Vittorio Gabrieli, and Salvatore Rosati as well as by the dean of Italian literary criticism, Benedetto Croce, who, in a 1951 essay appearing in *Quaderni della critica*, had expressed his hope that *American Renaissance* would be soon translated into Italian.[29] In brief, given both the high esteem in which Matthiessen's critical abilities were held and the fact that *American Renaissance* was for a rather long time the only extensive American treatment of Emerson

[29] The bibliographical information on the Italian reception of Matthiessen's work comes from a footnote in Agostino Lombardo's excellent "Rinascimento americano", in *Il diavolo nel manoscritto. Saggi sulla tradizione letteraria americana* (Milano: Rizzoli, 1974), 56-65. The footnote in question is on page 399. It is worth noting that Matthiessen himself, in his preface to *American Renaissance*, had quoted approvingly Croce's favorable assessment of Francesco De Sanctis' *History of Italian Literature*, which in a way he took as an inspiration for his own work.

available in Italian, it is hardly surprising that the establishment of American literature as an academic discipline in the post-war period went hand-in-hand with a very specific notion of what the nature of Emerson's work was. His texts were of course read more closely and placed in a more accurate and better-known linguistic, aesthetic and historical context as the largely impressionistic and amateurish approach to Emerson of the pre-World War II phase gave way to more objective and professional assessments. Yet I think it is no exaggeration to say that most Italian academic evaluations of Emerson to appear in the fifties and sixties – on which I will focus in the remainder of this article – have tended to replicate or elaborate on Matthiessen's understanding of Emerson as a thinker who, even though he "was not unconscious that evil existed" (181), had essentially no use for the tragic sense of life.

III

One of the main tasks of Italian Americanists in the early post-war period was the writing of manuals of American literature for university students. Since some of these manuals, originally written in the fifties, continued to be used at Italian universities at least well into the eighties, they can tell us quite a bit about the kind of Emerson Italian students of American literature were exposed to. Luigi Berti's *Storia della letteratura americana* was the first history of American literature to be published in Italy after the war. The author had an in-depth knowledge of his subject, which he treated in some detail over two volumes running to a total of nearly nine hundred pages. Today, however, Berti's diction and style appear quite dated, and I suspect that even his contemporary readers found his *Storia* somewhat difficult to get through. Berti devotes to Emerson a section over twenty pages in length, featuring a generous amount of quotations from both Emerson's poetry and his essays.[30] Uncharacteristically, Berti not only finds Emerson's poetry worth reading, but he believes that, though at times weakened by its "conventional diction", the best

[30] Luigi Berti, *Storia della letteratura americana*, 2 vols. (Milano: Istituto Editoriale Italiano, 1950), 179-205.

of Emerson's lines, with their "delirious imaginative genius" are unequalled by those of any other American poet. Berti is also unlike other critics of the time in that, though he duly takes notice of the prevailing view concerning Emerson's indifference or insensitivity to the problems of human suffering, sin, and punishment, he doesn't see that stance as a flaw in Emerson's art. Those who insist on this aspect of Emerson seem to Berti incapable of grasping the real music of Emerson's poetic and philosophical voice – a voice whose "Dionysian lyricism" and "pure religious pathos" Berti compares to the enthusiasm of Nietzsche's Zarathustra. Berti sees Emerson's art reach its apex in the essays – not only in the most famous ones like "Self-reliance", but also in an essay like "Power", where Berti finds, and seems to admire, a definition of heroism as "the soul's military attitude" (199).

Berti's approach to Emerson appears to be largely free of Vittorini's, Matthiessen's or Pavese's strictures. Yet his viewpoint was not destined to exert much influence on later Italian writings on Emerson and my guess is that, because of its length as well as its style, his *Storia* as a whole was never very popular in Italian universities.[31] Three much shorter manuals (running to a little over two hundred pages) were published between 1956 and 1957 by Giovanni Savelli, Salvatore Rosati, and Rolando Anzilotti.[32] Savelli, however, dismisses Emerson in less than two pages by subsuming his views under the general rubric of Transcendentalism. Rosati and Anzilotti also treat Emerson mainly as a Transcendentalist, but their few pages do more justice to Emerson than Savelli's three or four

[31] His against-the-grain treatment of Emerson also seems to have gone largely unnoticed in subsequent criticism. For example, in his fine study of American poetry, Glauco Cambon makes no mention of Berti's discussion of Emerson, despite the fact that it was the only substantial treatment of Emerson's poetry available in Italian. See Glauco Cambon, *Tematica e sviluppo della poesia americana* (Roma: Edizioni di Storia e Letteratura, 1956).

[32] Giovanni Savelli, *Letteratura americana* (Roma: Edizioni del Centro di Comparazione e Sintesi, 1956); Salvatore Rosati, *Storia della letteratura americana* (Torino: Edizioni Radio Italiana, 1956); Rolando Anzilotti, *Storia della letteratura americana* (Milano: Vallardi, 1957). Anzilotti's volume (running to a little over one hundred pages) was conceived as part of the *Storia delle letterature moderne d'Europa e d'America*, ed. Carlo Pellegrini, and was republished in 1958 in Volume III of that work.

paragraphs. Anzilotti describes Emerson as "the spokesman for the intellectual revolution that took place in America in the middle of the nineteenth-century" (34). Similarly, Rosati considers Emerson the "most important representative" of American Transcendentalism and *Nature* the best formulation of its central tenets. Yet both critics see flaws in Emerson's thinking and style. Anzilotti observes that "often his arguments lack an explicit logic; he [Emerson] proceeds by fits and starts and antitheses"; Rosati believes that Emerson often relies on aphorisms thereby "leaving the impression of a loose consistency in the logical grain of his arguments" (97). While Anzilotti finds that even his best poetry is too abstract and dry he also adds that "the vigor and originality of his [Emerson's] thought ... endow his speculative works with a superior unity". Rosati, on his part, customarily finds that his "optimism" is not balanced by an equally developed concept of evil. Rosati does praise Emerson because his "faulty conception of evil" was after all instrumental in overcoming the burden of the Puritan heritage, but by insisting that Emerson, like the other Transcendentalists, lacked "the tragic sense of life", the critic sets the scene for a familiar juxtaposition of the "complex" art of Hawthorne and Melville to Emerson's too-easy transcendence of evil. Rosati concludes his brief analysis of Emerson by stressing his crucial contribution to the development of the "doctrine of the free and creative individual". Given the overall frame of Rosati's reasoning, however, one is led to conclude that also Emerson's construction of the "free individual" is vitiated by his turning a deaf ear to "injustice, sickness, and death" (99).

Carlo Izzo's *Storia della letteratura nord-americana* was first published in 1957 and it was successful enough to be reprinted in 1967 as part of the "Letterature del mondo" series issued by the publisher Sansoni in order to meet the demands of the increasing number of university courses in foreign literatures – a series that included such prestigious volumes as Mario Praz's history of English literature, Giovanni Macchia's history of French literature, Carmelo Samonà's history of Spanish literature, and so forth.[33] Izzo's five-

[33] Carlo Izzo, *Storia della letteratura nord-americana* (Milano: Nuova Accademia Editrice, 1957; Firenze: Sansoni, 1967).

hundred-page volume was, along with the Italian translation of Marcus Cunliffe's *History of American Literature* (published in 1958), the manual whose reading was most often recommended to students of American literature at Italian universities for nearly thirty years.[34] Both Cunliffe and Izzo are convinced of Emerson's importance in any understanding of nineteenth-century American culture, but at the same time they both seem to have trouble describing the exact nature of his achievement given that they find Emerson's writing aesthetically wanting and his "philosophy" contradictory, incoherent, often confusing. "Ralph Waldo Emerson – Izzo writes – belongs to that category of men that one cannot help but label great. Make no mistake: such men are not great poets or writers or artists or philosophers or scientists or statesmen; they are only, and simply, 'great men'". Emerson wrote occasionally beautiful lines, but his poetry was lacking "that concrete feeling of language without which there is no real poetry" (263). Cunliffe's views are similar to Izzo's. He too considers Emerson's poetry at times interesting but overall finds his lines "brittle and unmusical, or excessively didactic" (96).[35] According to Cunliffe, however, Emerson's flaws are not simply the flaws of a failed poet. His "want of form" is symptomatic of a larger deficiency of thought. Hence the many passages in his writing that Cunliffe finds "exasperating or disconcerting" (98) and the criticism often leveled at Emerson (with which Cunliffe agrees) that he turned contradiction into a system.

Both Izzo and Cunliffe acknowledge Emerson's sincerity and the honesty with which he tried to remain faithful to the premises of his individual vision, and both contribute interesting insights on Emerson. Izzo, for example, notes that some passages in *Nature* seem to anticipate the philosophy of American pragmatism. Cunliffe, on his

[34] Marcus Cunliffe, *Storia della letteratura americana* (Torino: Einaudi, 1958). A revised edition of Cunliffe's book came out in 1970. The original English-language volume had been published in 1954 by Penguin.

[35] Parenthetical page numbers refer to the revised 1970 Italian edition. Here I quote Cunliffe's words as they appear in the original 1954 Penguin edition. In all other quotations, however, translations are mine as I have not been able to find a copy of the revised English edition used as a basis for the Italian text. The original Penguin edition's section on Emerson is nearly two pages shorter than the one appearing in the last printed Italian version.

part, stresses that Emerson's gaiety is always matched by his acknowledgement of the world's iniquity, so that if his views seem to lack tragic depth they are never merely superficial. All in all, however, both critics ultimately see Emerson's significance as lying paradoxically outside his own personal achievement. In Izzo's words, "Even though he left abundant marks of himself in the world of letters and thought, thus becoming one of the obligatory reference points in any discussion on the formation and evolution of American culture, [Emerson] appears today rather like a profile with undefined contours" (263). Izzo's conclusion is rather harsh: though Emerson wrote volume after volume "striving to reach the limits of his mind ... we continue to think ... that in the fourteen lines of his *Infinito* Giacomo Leopardi said more, and in a way that is more memorable, limpid, free of redundancy and definitive" (264). On a somewhat similar note, Cunliffe finds traces of Emerson almost everywhere in American culture, and insists in his concluding remarks that "one cannot understand nineteenth-century America without coming to terms with Emerson" (101). Yet to Cunliffe Emerson appears "a modest man with unlimited ambition" (100) and a writer who, as Henry James put it, was never able to develop his own style.

While the fifties saw the publication of no less than five Italian histories of American literature, it was only in the early nineties that, rather than reprinting Izzo's volume, the publisher Sansoni finally put out a new *Storia della letteratura americana*.[36] Unfortunately, whatever the merits of the volume as a whole, Emerson is very poorly served by the new textbook, where he is dismissed in less than three pages packed with hasty definitions that would have been commonplace even decades ago. In fact, while the conclusions – that Emerson is more a scholar and an inspirer of other people's writings than a writer himself, that he is inordinately ambitious and yet aware of his inevitable failures – are remarkably similar to the ones found in Izzo's book, at least the latter reached them through some kind of argumentation. In the new *Storia*, instead, they are offered as so many slogans or self-evident truths.

[36] Guido Fink, Mario Maffi, Franco Minganti, Bianca Tarozzi, *Storia della letteratura americana* (Milano: Sansoni, 1991). Emerson is discussed on pages 72-75.

Also, as we have seen above, Izzo's views were in many ways shared by American and English students of United States literature such as Matthiessen and Cunliffe. What is disconcerting about the new *Storia* published by Sansoni is that the few pages on Emerson could have been written fifty years ago, as they take no advantage whatsoever of the voluminous output by Emerson scholars during the Sixties, Seventies, and Eighties. Moreover, while Izzo insisted on Emerson's centrality, despite his flaws, the new volume makes no mention of Emerson's importance and indeed, given the way he is treated, no reader can guess why one should even bother remembering such a figure, let alone read any of his works. That Emerson can be dismissed in such a way in what is probably the currently most read history of American literature is indicative of a larger problem: despite important efforts to do justice to Emerson's significance, he remains at the margins of most Italian constructions of American literature and culture. What remains to be seen is whether, in the very terms through which some of the "founding fathers" of Italian American Studies tried to make a case for Emerson's significance, one can find at least a partial explanation as to why, rather than growing along with the overall development of American studies in Italy, interest in Emerson seems to have become increasingly weaker.

IV

Agostino Lombardo is certainly one of the most important Italian Americanists of the last half century, a scholar who has worked very hard to promote American literature both within and beyond the university. A prolific critic and translator, he has also directed the journal *Studi Americani* for twenty-five years as well as contributed numerous articles to newspapers and magazines. Lombardo seems to have always believed in Emerson's importance: in a series he directed Vito Amoruso published his important translation of a selection of Emerson's journals in 1963. Yet in many ways Lombardo's approach to Emerson is in line with the Matthiessen tradition. In his essay "Emerson e l'arte americana" Lombardo declares at the outset that, no matter how rich and complex the various strains of Emerson's thought, he cannot be considered an original philosopher, which

wasn't even what Emerson aspired to be anyway.[37] What Emerson "even desperately wanted to be was an artist, a poet" (77), and in Lombardo's view he did succeed in becoming an artist to the extent that his eloquence, his language, and the beauty of many passages from his essays and his journals are all witness to his unquestionable aesthetic qualities. However, despite his rich imagination, Emerson failed to be a "creator". "He is not capable of creating that autonomous and self-enclosed image of life which comprises a work of art. Perhaps he was too abstract, too detached from reality to be able to transfigure it and create it anew" (78). Moreover, Lombardo restates a familiar charge: "Emerson … had no sense of evil.... His world lacks drama, it's a way too harmonious world, never reached by the anxiety of modern man that we can find instead in *Moby Dick*, in *The Scarlet Letter*, in the poetry of Emily Dickinson" (78-79). In short, Emerson's works fail to provide a complete picture of the human condition.

Yet Lombardo believes that Emerson's importance within American literature can hardly be exaggerated because, if on the one hand Emerson functioned as a link between the culture of Europe and that of the United States, on the other his doctrine of self-reliance laid the foundation for a new and original American culture. The critic goes even as far as to call Emerson "America becoming conscious of itself: the American man finding his interpreter, his voice, his advocate", even though Lombardo ends his essay by quoting approvingly Matthiessen's opinion that while Emerson's theory of language was shared by the other great writers of the American Renaissance, Emerson never managed to translate his principles into poetic facts. In Lombardo's view he is the cornerstone of both American art and an American philosophical tradition that begins with Emerson and runs through pragmatism all the way to John Dewey. Yet Emerson was neither a great artist nor a great thinker: he was an important and energetic source of inspiration, but he apparently left it to others to reap the artistic and philosophical fruits he had planted.

[37] Originally published in *La ricerca del vero* (Roma: Edizioni di Storia e Letteratura, 1961), 111-124, the essay can now be found in *Il diavolo nel manoscritto*, 75-85.

Also Claudio Gorlier and Elemire Zolla, two other key figures in making American literature a well-respected academic subject in Italy, shared Lombardo's belief in Emerson's importance, and both treated him at some length in their discussions on Transcendentalism. Gorlier focuses on Emerson in the first chapter of his book *L'universo domestico*, and he states at the outset that Emerson was not the naive optimist he is often made out to be. After all, the background of both Emerson's and Thoreau's thinking was that of Puritan doctrine, and what they did must be understood as an attempt to undermine the New England heritage from within. Emerson's belief in individualism is born from his dissatisfaction with the Puritan notion of self – his self-reliance "could be achieved only in opposition to the Puritan 'angry god' or, better, in spite of him" (57). Gorlier believes that Emerson was in many ways responding to the social and cultural needs of a new historical phase: unlike Thoreau, Emerson appears to believe in the goodness of commerce and technological advancements, and while he is by no means blind to the drawbacks of a fast-developing capitalist society, he seems to believe that all problems could eventually be overcome. Idealism and pragmatism are wedded together in Emerson's concept of the American Scholar, and his call for a national literature worthy of the new country stands out as one of the key moments in America's efforts to define itself.

However, just as Lombardo ended his essay on a rather critical note by quoting Matthiessen, Gorlier draws his argument to a close by invoking the authority of another very influential American student of the American Renaissance: Charles Feidelson, Jr., whose views on Emerson's theory of language basically coincide with Matthiessen's. "Emerson, according to the apt definition given by Feidelson, was the theorist and advocate of a new language, Melville was the one who put the theory into practice" (69). While Gorlier spends several pages illustrating Emerson's theory of symbolism, his position is that Emerson's writings survive not so much for their "speculative value" as in the guise of "literary monuments". Gorlier seems therefore to share Lombardo's views on Emerson being an important inspirer of literary theories who failed, however, to live up to their practical realization. Also, Gorlier and Lombardo agree on one unstated premise that is however central to their qualified appreciation of Emerson. Emerson, as he himself recognized, was not capable of writing great poetry. On the

other hand he wrote neither novels nor plays – his art form was that of the essay but, curiously enough, he is seldom discussed as an essayist by Italian critics, who prefer to compare him to contemporary novelists such as Hawthorne and Melville, or contemporary poets, such as Dickinson and Whitman. To put it in a somewhat crude way, my impression is that behind much Emerson criticism there is the deep-seated belief that great art can come only in the form of drama, fiction, or poetry, whereas the essay as a genre belongs less to the province of literature than to those of philosophy or politics.

Even though Zolla's critical interests are different from those of Lombardo and Gorlier, his treatment of Emerson in his *Le origini del trascendentalismo* shares with his two colleagues the idea that Emerson is both an important and yet a seriously flawed literary figure. Zolla writes that "any 'classic' American author [is] naturally Emersonian" (126) but it is not easy to understand how he wants the reader to take that remark. On the one hand Zolla seems to admire Emerson's genius, his "mental independence", and especially his ability to distance himself from "collective feelings" and his ability to see society as "the fountainhead of what is quotidian, banal, crass" (132). On the other hand, Zolla clearly condemns Emerson for finally giving in to the pressures of the society he seemed to criticize, and compares his naiveté on this score to that of an Horatio Greenough: both "are confident that the dominant mercantile reason of bourgeois society is inimical to the birth of art and yet eventually they will both convert into defenders of the immediate artistic nature of the products of that society.... They will both not only endorse the aesthetic impoverishment of the industrial century – they will even camouflage it as the beginning of a new glorious era in life, if not in art" (225, 226). In brief, Zolla appears to agree with Lombardo and Gorlier that while we cannot afford to do away with Emerson, one is not sure what to do with him.

While all three critics I have been discussing managed to give Italian students a better understanding of Emerson's significance, his milieu, and his influence on American literature, they never took upon themselves the task of presenting a well-rounded, exhaustive portrait of Emerson. Their contributions came in the form of the short essay (Lombardo), or in the course of larger discussions of early American literature (Gorlier) or American Transcendentalism (Zolla). Not one of them, in fact, chose to discuss in depth a single essay of Emerson's,

such that the lack of consistency in Emerson's thinking, or the faults of his artistry are often taken for granted and supported with brief quotations, rather than argued in some detail. Nevertheless such contributions were influential enough to attract interest in Emerson on the part of mainstream publishers. In fact, if we take together Lombardo's, Gorlier's and Zolla's writings on Emerson, along with the Italian translation in one volume of Emerson's *Essays. First Series* and *Essays. Second Series*, the appearance of an *Antologia degli scritti politici di Ralph Waldo Emerson* (both published in 1962), and, perhaps most importantly, the appearance of Vito Amoruso's selection from Emerson's Journals (*Diario*, published in 1963), we can very well say that the early Sixties were the high-water mark of Emerson studies in Italy. Since then, interest in Emerson has been sporadic; only recently have we had some signs that the trend may be changing.

Yet Amoruso's introduction to Emerson's *Diario* had struggled to indicate a promising new direction for Emerson studies. Right from the start he took issue with the "optimistic Emerson and Whitman versus the pessimistic Hawthorne and Melville" approach of so much criticism – an approach that he considered one-sided, too narrow, cliché. Emerson's thinking is for Amoruso "less rigid and abstract … more unsystematic, unforeseeable and free" than is often thought. "[H]is thinking is actually that of the true essayist, contradictory and varied, made richer by personal feelings, resentment, and contradictions, rather than by a strong logic and conceptual base".[38] In fact Amoruso locates the great achievement of Emerson's journals precisely in their uncompromising display of "the insurgent, even anarchic creativity of his [Emerson's] interior life" (xii). What in his essays Emerson had to keep to some extent under control, is in the journals allowed to run wild: "Emerson moves on unshackled and vivacious, jotting down his thoughts as they occur in his mind ... the lack of rhythm in the flow [of his thinking] was only the typical pace of a rhapsodic meditation, intent on grasping the ceaseless, ever-changing flow of the real" (xi). The very traits of Emerson's writing often judged by critics as troublesome and indicative of the confusion

[38] Vito Amoruso, "Introduzione", in Ralph Waldo Emerson, *Diario (1820-1876)* (Venezia: Neri-Pozza, 1963), x.

in his mind are turned by Amoruso into an emblem of not only intellectual but rhetorical brilliancy. Amoruso is in fact one of the first Italian critics to pay a close and sympathetic attention to Emerson's style: he notes, for example, how persistent the image of water and water-flowing in his writings is, and how such an image is one and the same with Emerson's conception of a ceaselessly flowing universe. More generally, Amoruso points to "the reckless and varied use of metaphor" (xii) typical of Emerson, who resorts to all kinds of idioms and moves easily from technical and scientific language to political and religious rhetoric, appropriating the whole American landscape and making use of both its rural and industrial civilization.

Even though Amoruso comments on the well-known, optimistic side of Emerson's personality, and acknowledges the involvement of his rhetoric in the "yankee spirit" of the times – which, as we have seen above, was stigmatized by both Gorlier and especially Zolla – he also defends Emerson from the charge of being a believer in "the thaumaturgic power of the dollar" (xiii). Overall, Amoruso sees Emerson growing over time wiser and more radical concerning the political reality of his country, and openly admires the stance taken by Emerson on the slavery issue. Yet, though he praises Emerson's democratic spirit and the role he played in the shaping of an original American culture, Amoruso considers the aesthetic element of Emerson's writing as being the most significant. "The feeling of beauty" is one of the key ingredients of his journals: a feeling that Amoruso considers all the more significant as it takes full account of the "in-built frailty" of life (xx-xxi). Emerson is not so much after the form of things – which he sees as being intrinsically unstable – as after their "rhythm": hence the proverbial fragmentary and contradictory nature of his thinking "which is not a flaw, but on the contrary a positive trait, a way of being" (xxiii). Amoruso concludes that a tension between the voice of wisdom and the chaos of history is at the heart of Emerson's imagination and that such tension can best be seen precisely in his journals, which he considers an "authentic work of literature" (xxiv). Even though Amoruso does not explicitly challenge the readings of Emerson offered by other Italian critics, it would be hard to miss the polemical aspect of his insistence on the beauty, the complexity, the wisdom of Emerson's writings, which he boldly labels as literature in their own right, and not merely as tool

boxes or sources of inspiration for better, sounder artists capable of following his leads, as was the critical custom of the day.

Given the promising critical stance taken by Amoruso in the Introduction to his edition of Emerson's journals, one might have expected that Emerson's moment had finally come also in Italy. Unfortunately that has not been the case. While one must be grateful to Americanists like Lina Unali and Tommaso Pisanti for their efforts at keeping some interest in Emerson alive after the "mini boom" of the early Sixties, I think it is fair to say that only over the last few years have there been some substantial signs not only that Emerson still matters to Italian students of American literature, but also that the latter are beginning to take notice of the new approaches to Emerson that have marked United States scholarship of the last thirty or so years.[39] Leo Marchetti's *Il sepolcro dei padri* (1996), for example, is the first book-length study of Emerson to appear in Italy since Zampini-Salazar's 1905 booklet and, as a glance at his footnotes will reveal, Marchetti tries to situate his discussion of Emerson within current American critical debates.[40] The same is even truer of Giuseppe Nori's recent essays on Emerson, in which attention to historical detail goes hand-in-hand with an acute awareness of the philosophical and theoretical dimension of Emerson's writings.[41] Also worthy of notice is a book like Nadia Urbinati's *Individualismo*

[39] See Lina Unali, "Sulla 'Divinity School Address' di Ralph Waldo Emerson e sull'uso della parola *Soul*", *Annali delle Facoltà di Lettere-Filosofia e Magistero dell'Università di Cagliari*, XXXVI (1973), 3-21, e "Notes on Harvard and Emerson", *Annali della Facoltà di Magistero dell'Università di Cagliari*, Quaderno n. 5 (1978), 189-202; Tommaso Pisanti, *La 'veste di Dio': la natura da Emerson a Frost* (Salerno: Edisud, 1990). It is worth noting that while Italian critics writing on Emerson in the early Sixties kept referring to Matthiessen's views, they never so much as mentioned Stephen Whicher's path-breaking study *Freedom and Fate: An Inner Life of Ralph Waldo Emerson* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1953). To my knowledge, only Amoruso lists Whicher's book in the critical bibliography at the end of his introduction; however, the only critics explicitly quoted in the introduction are Matthiessen, Lombardo, and E. R. Curtius.

[40] Leo Marchetti, *Ralph Waldo Emerson. Il sepolcro dei padri* (Pescara: Tracce, 1996).

[41] Giuseppe Nori, "Gli usi e gli abusi dei grandi uomini: Emerson e la dottrina della rappresentatività", *Trame di letteratura comparata*, II:2 (I semestre 2001), 185-212; "Ai piedi della Torre: Emerson e il reportage trascendentalista", in *Camminare scrivendo. Il reportage narrativo e dintorni*, ed. Nicola Bottiglieri (Cassino: Edizioni dell'Università degli Studi di Cassino, 2001), 79-106.

democratico, a work in which Emerson's contribution to American political culture is appropriately underscored and which will hopefully bring attention to the originality of Emerson's thinking beyond the relatively small circle of Italian Americanists.[42] Urbinati's book may be important in strengthening the interest shown in recent times by Italian philosophers in both Richard Rorty's work and American pragmatism, and thus help in creating an intellectual climate more favorable to the reception of Emerson's work.

The notion of democracy as a never-ending project at the center of Urbinati's discussion of American individualism helps her to project an image of Emerson as a philosopher of democracy whose roots are unquestionably in the nineteenth century, but whose theoretical dimension remains as important today as it was two centuries ago. In this sense it is probably no coincidence that, in the same afterthought to which I referred in my opening remarks, Zygmunt Bauman describes the intellectual challenges of liquid modernity in a way that seems to me to be – unconsciously, no doubt – profoundly Emersonian. After quoting Cornelius Castoriadis's definition of a truly democratic society as "a society which questions everything that is pre-given and by the same token *liberates the creation of new meanings*", Bauman goes on to argue that "the absence of guaranteed meanings – of absolute truths, of preordained norms of conduct, of pre-drawn borderlines between right and wrong, no longer needing attention, of guaranteed rules of successful action – is the *conditio sine qua non* of, simultaneously, a truly autonomous society and truly free individuals" (212-213). The would-be autonomous individual must therefore face up to the challenges of liquid modernity without any nostalgia for the absolutes of an older solid modernity. Similarly, in "Circles" Emerson writes that "the coming only is sacred. Nothing is secure but life, transition, the energizing spirit. No love can be bound by oath or covenant to secure it against a higher love. No truth so sublime but it may be trivial tomorrow in the light of new thoughts. People wish to be settled; only as far as they are unsettled is there any hope for them". As Emerson reminds us here, the liberation of new meanings requires the abandonment of old ones – it

[42] Nadia Urbinati, *Individualismo democratico. Emerson, Dewey e la cultura politica americana* (Roma: Donzelli, 1997).

requires what he calls an "active soul" capable of engaging the world around her. This is obviously only one aspect of Emerson's thought, but while I admit that there may be less appealing traits in his philosophy, it is this "unsettling" Emersonian legacy that much recent American criticism has been intent on re-discovering. One would hope that, with the Emerson bicentennial around the corner, a substantial number of Italian students of American literature and culture will stop hurrying over the thin ice of worn-out truths, no matter how "sublime", and find ways to give us a more usable and lively picture of "Mr. America". Only if Italian Americanists are willing to be unsettled is there any hope for Emerson on our shores.

Anna Scannavini

Of the Ordinary and Other Matters: Cavell, Eliot, Matthiessen, and Emerson

A usable present

I

If we look at the Emerson scholarship of the last thirty years, we find that critical attention has shifted from the transcendental to the social drive of his thinking.[1] The new approach has certainly been fostered by the investigation of Emerson in connection with pragmatism on the one hand, and the ordinary language philosophers on the other. Interestingly enough, both lines of research have at their center the relationship between language and action.[2] The burden is placed on Emerson of creating a social ethics by calling for a new methodology

[1] Important book length studies in this sense are Sacvan Bercovitch, "Emerson, Individualism, and Liberal Dissent", in *The Rites of Assent* (New York: Routledge, 1993); Eduardo Cadava, *Emerson and the Climates of History* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997); Stanley Cavell, *Conditions Handsome and Unhandsome: The Constitution of Emersonian Perfectionism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990); Michael Colacurcio, *Doctrine and Difference* (New York: Routledge, 1997); George Kateb, *The Inner Ocean: Individualism and Democratic Culture* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1992); *Emerson and Self-Reliance* (Thousands Oaks CA: Sage, 1995); Michael Lopez, *Emerson and Power: Creative Antagonism in the Nineteenth Century* (De Kalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 1996).

[2] Through action, as a matter of fact, tragedy can be reinstated as a literary genre, and to the reading of Emerson. Connections between tragedy and language in action are found in Cavell, *The Claim of Reason: Wittgenstein, Skepticism, Morality, and Tragedy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1979).

of writing and reading. Such a demand reframes interpretation as a linguistic pragmatics of sorts, and involves what has been termed the ordinary, in clear reference to ordinary language.[3] Linguistic pragmatics involves the ordinary because it draws attention to the formation of meaning (use of words) in the micro-situations that make up the social context. The ordinary, in turn, must sooner or later return to the foundations of society, raising the problem of how such everyday intercourse intersects the making of society and history. Where is it, in other words, that ordinary life (say, synchronicity) becomes relevant to social memory, and by way of what connections? When applied to Emerson, the question bears directly on the preeminence of the present action over the past, of "speaking" over "quoting". Such preeminence, it should be noticed, does not necessarily imply the abandoning of history, since attention is focused not on a space beyond human experience, but on the very simple ("humble") exchanges that make such experience possible. A nice case in this sense is made by Stanley Cavell, when he wonders about the connection between our place in history (say, synchronicity) and the possibility of transformation (utopia?): "How do you know what names are used in a new world?" This question he answers, a bit roguishly, by quoting Marx and Emerson. Both Marx and Emerson, Cavell seems to maintain, place the stress on synchronicity, as they call for philosophy to produce a new class of philosophers:

> Marx's idea – voiced the same year Emerson was composing "Experience," in the Introduction to *The Critique of Hegel's Theory of Right* – that the working class is the inheritor of German philosophy means, let us say, that a certain group of human beings are now, given the conditions of the present developed over the stages of world history, in a position at last to put the ideals of philosophy into

[3] An attempt to bring pragmatics into literature was that of Mary L. Pratt, *Toward a Speech Act Theory of Literary Discourse* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1977). The attempt was generous, but not successful, according to our Umberto Eco. A discussion of the contribution of ordinary language philosophy to the ethnography of speaking has recently been offered by Alessandro Duranti, *Linguistic Anthropology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 214-244.

> practice, and human history will at last begin. For Emerson, in the American nineteenth century, which represents, or should, a break in human history, the conditions of a philosophical practice are set before *us*, the group of human beings who find themselves here. (Here – under *this* constitution. Which? Is Emerson writing a new one, or ratifying the old?).[4]

Different approaches are driven here to merge into the same terms. In both cases what is found at the center of the present is not a privileged class of individuals, but the class of those who "find themselves" at that juncture. Their familiarity with each other, and with their place, is what can be called the ordinary: "The everyday is ordinary because, after all, it is our habit, or habitat".[5] This is the point of departure of a search for what it is that we must understand as our place – the "where do we find ourselves?" that Cavell reads in "Experience". The reflection of the ordinary in language comes to the front as the final issue of philosophy, and of all behavioral sciences. As a consequence, the ordinary radically questions not only the place of history, but also the thinking of Emerson and, in the same vein, of Cavell himself.

Hereafter, I will maintain that Cavell can perform whatever dramatic act he performs on the Emersonian scene, because he reads the ordinary in the light of the philosophy of language – more specifically of the work of ordinary language philosophers, Ludwig Wittgenstein and J. L. Austin in the first place.[6] There is an edge to this investigation that cuts through any supposed unity of language, restoring it to its human and social foundations: "words" in the plural come to be substituted for "the word". Such a reading involves a methodological revision that goes as far back as T. S. Eliot, crossing

[4] Stanley Cavell, *This New Yet Unapproachable America* (Albuquerque: Living Batch Press, 1989), 94-95, hereafter, TN; page numbers will be included parenthetically in the text. The difference is, of course, that in Marx such determination is historical, whereas in Emerson it is emphatically geographical.

[5] Cavell, *In Quest of the Ordinary* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1988), 9.

[6] Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, trans. G. E. M. Anscombe (Englewood Cliffs NJ: Prentice Hall, 1958 [1953]); J. L. Austin, *How to Do Things with Words* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1962).

the work of that other important Emersonian scholar, Richard Poirier.[7] Although Cavell and Poirier differ in important ways, I will argue, they represent the questions that are usefully asked of Emerson today. In this sense, there is much common ground that can be taken for granted. Both Poirier and Cavell hold democracy to be a deeply structuring principle in Emerson (although they frame their claim differently in relation to pragmatism and to secularization). Both treat problems of the ordinary in the light of what pragmatics has to say on the flow of human activity. Both offer a self-sustained theory of reading, of which they acknowledge the pedagogical implications. Both, finally, claim that Emerson cannot be dealt with, if all of the above is not confronted in some way.

This marks the terrain on which the breaking away from previous scholarship can be traced. On such terrain it is necessary to enter, I will contend, as a preliminary step in the investigation of the Italian reception of Emerson. In what follows, I will test some of the terms and connections that map it. Eventually, this might make my essay look like an essay of words on words. This is not completely un-Emersonian, I will contend. Many of the terms have to do with language, as they open language not only to the influx of the ordinary, but also to reflections on its origin in the ordinary, and on the origin of meaning. This brings us back to the critical theories we have inherited from modernism, most specifically from T. S. Eliot. By way of Eliot, the work of F. O. Matthiessen must also be engaged – not a secondary task since, as Giorgio Mariani points out, Matthiessen still looms large in the Italian appreciation of Emerson. As it is pointedly based on language, moreover, such work should turn out to be particularly useful in questioning translations, both old and recent. From there, an interpretive grid of sorts should be deduced, which might provide a good starting point in the ensuing investigation of the influences that surface, or could/should have surfaced in Emerson in our country.

[7] Mutual acknowledgements are not overwhelming. Cavell refers to the work of Richard Poirier in *This New Yet Unapproachable America*, 121. Poirier refers to Cavell in *Robert Frost: The Work of Knowing* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997), 27; and in *Poetry and Pragmatism* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1992), 10.

II

First, there must come a cleavage in style. As has been widely pointed out, Emerson repeatedly endorses the importance of the ordinary (the common).[8] Claims to the ordinary find their way into his writings on the two levels of the vernacular and of the understanding, a closeness that is most aptly underlined by Matthiessen when he quotes Emerson as saying that his "anecdotes of the intellect" are a "sort of Farmer's almanac of mental moods".[9] The common, however, does not seem to produce clarity of speech. On the contrary, readers have long felt that in Emerson intellectualism and fragmentation thwart a higher organizing principle that is forever struggling to emerge, and never quite succeeds in doing so. Under the load of the struggle, his style inevitably yields to conflict and fogginess, a lamentable lack of control over subject matter. These and similar charges are what Poirier has taken upon himself to counter in his critical work.[10] Against them, he maintains that extravagance (extra-vagance, dislocation, "sudden turns of discourse")[11] is necessary to the invention of new space, and that the immanence of philosophy in speech is the source of Emerson's most compelling inheritance, his liberating "skepticism about language". The struggle with language is all the more striking in Emerson, Poirier points out, because it surfaces in the very making of his writing, as he "lets his language reveal the pathos of discovering in his own sentences how his words resist his efforts". A similar pathos is not found in the work of all pragmatists – say, in the more objective way of writing of William

[8] An Italian reading that investigates the role of the common in representativeness is that of Giuseppe Nori, "Gli usi e gli abusi dei grandi uomini: Emerson e la dottrina della rappresentatività", *Trame* 2:2 (2001), 185-212.

[9] F. O. Matthiessen, *American Renaissance: Art and Expression in the Age of Emerson and Whitman* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1968 [1941]), 3; hereafter the references will be in the text (RA). In Kant the "understanding" is the place of practical knowledge, and of the categories that organize perception.

[10] Paramount for a new evaluation of Emerson's turns and displacements of discourse has been Barbara Packer, *Emerson's Fall: A New Interpretation of the Major Essays* (New York: Continuum, 1982).

[11] "Extravagance" is so defined in Poirier, *Robert Frost*, 87-88.

James – although they all share the same kind of skepticism about words.[12]

In this mood, "multiplicity", and the two related terms "fragmentation" and "repetition", can be regarded as central, because they are the embodiment of Emerson's struggle to overcome, to re-form, language. They are closely connected to "transitionality", one of the most recurring concepts used in current Emersonian scholarship. Here goes a first set of terms. They convey notions of change, passage, being fluid, more or less in the same way as Bauman conveys them in his analysis of postmodernity.[13] The whole import of the term, however, is not fully appreciated if a more complex reading is not taken advantage of. This kind of reading brings us to Poirier, and from there to William James, and, once more, to social intercourse, and to action. Poirier argues that there is a relation between the idea of "superfluity" (an idea he strongly links to Emerson) and the images of flow found in James (flow; fluxional in Emerson): "The implication is that the stability of words is achieved only in their fluid relations to other words, and that these are set in motion by the person using the words" (PP, 137). The argument is used as a defense of sound against the fixity of "substantives", and it is instrumental in creating commonalities between pragmatism and modernism.[14] However, the idea that there might be words and sounds designed to keep language in motion ("Large tracts of human speech are nothing but signs of direction in thought", James says) readily finds a counterpart in the existence, in common speech, of a large number of markers that do not exactly fit into any sentence (extravagant?), but that are designed to keep communication open. A similar notion, in fact, seems to be endorsed by Poirier himself, when

[12] Poirier, *Poetry and Pragmatism*, 27, 28; hereafter the references will be in the text (PP). Poirier makes similar claims on the struggle against language in *A World Elsewhere* (Madison: The Univ. of Wisconsin Press, 1985), 69. Useful notes on Poirier, pragmatism, and the uses of language are in Eric Wilson, "From Metaphysical Poverty to Practical Power: Emerson's Embrace of the Physical World", *ESQ* 45 (1998), 295-322, 308-10. Nori touches usefully on dislocations of meaning in relation to the common in "Gli usi e gli abusi dei grandi uomini".

[13] Zygmunt Bauman, *Liquid Modernity* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2000); quoted by Giorgio Mariani, "The (Mis)fortune of Emerson in Italy" in this same issue.

[14] As if an "effort to refloat the world", PP, 40.

he observes that "Emersonian pragmatists go beyond [deconstructive readings about the instabilities of language] to show how words may be kept in motion by human agency" (PP, 137). The vague is thus reinstated, I would suggest, not only to its place in the mental (James) and in poetry (Poirier), but also to a contextual determination of sorts. This is a key note Poirier strikes again when he compares the fundamentals of Emerson to those of T. S. Eliot:

> Those who read Eliot too simply ... fail to understand how sadly his potential Emersonianism gives way to the urgency of his personal need for semblances of order and, ultimately, for the God of Anglo-Catholicism, both of which Emerson would happily have left behind. For Emerson, says Dewey, "all truth lies on the highway." He finds it, that is, in all manner of life – and not exclusively in literature – in movements, in transits, in the abandonments of order including any "simultaneous order" (PP, 21-22).[15]

Investigations in language

I

Being so strongly overshadowed by facts of the ordinary, Dewey's "abandonment of order" is not only contiguous to transitionality in its more social version, but also partakes of the meaning of "aversion", a favorite term with Cavell. According to Cavell, "aversion" is used by Emerson to mean the turning away of the self from what is received in society, the language that is familar, and shared with one's neighbors: "conformity" or "dictation". Since "aversion" is thus generated inside received language, its explanation is inherently bound to be found in society, in terms once again of "dictation" – a

[15] Also see, on Paul de Man, the contention that literature is mediated, but so are other social linguistic usages. Interestingly enough, the quoted instance is a kind of "signifying"; the reference work on signifying is that of Claudia Mitchell-Kernan, "Signifying and Marking: Two Afro-American Speech Acts", in J. J. Gumperz and D. Hymes, eds., *Directions in Sociolingustics: The Ethnography of Communication* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1972), 161-179.

creative process very much like that of "circles", and also kindred to the much dicussed idea of "moral perfectionism".[16] The whole set of terms involves one more question. When so engrained in the acceptance of received language, both "transition" and "aversion" demand that fluidity be hindered in some way by its own material. There must, in other words, be a mutual definition between fixed meanings ("fixtures") and the search for what it is that relates such fixtures to the world: a double process of negotiation, of the self with its own meaning, and of the self with others. This can be taken, I would suggest, as part of what Cavell says when he quotes Wittgenstein to counter images of "skating" with images of walking. Wittgenstein writes: "We have got on to slippery ice where there is no friction and so in a certain sense the conditions are ideal, but also, just because of that, we are unable to walk. We want to walk: so we need *friction*. Back to the rough ground!"[17] Speaking about "closeness and distance", Cavell adds, walking can be considered with Kierkegaard "the gait of finitude". It is then all the more significant that walking itself be taken as an act of will: "But suppose walking", so Cavell, "is specifically a human achievement, a task in philosophy. I change [Wittgenstein's] connective: 'We want to walk; *then* we need friction.' I would like this to suggest that our wanting to walk is as conditional ... as our need for friction: If we want to walk ... we will see our need for *friction*". The need for friction, in other words, will result from a willingness to break away, and the act of breaking away will produce a demand for friction (TN, 55, emphasis added). Let us transfer the notion of friction to the ways in which words define their reference. That "words" and "things" are key terms in Emerson is common understanding. Their relationship, however, is radically revised if attention is focused not on their struggle for some kind of metaphysical unity, but on the ways in which they rub against the

[16] A fine discussion of the problems connected with aversion is in James M. Albrecht, "'Living Property': Emerson's Ethics", *ESQ* 41 (1994), 177-217; on Cavell and moral perfectionism a useful article is that by Russell B. Goodman, "Moral Perfectionism and Democracy: Emerson, Nietzsche, Cavell", *ESQ* 45 (1998), 159-180. Cavell writes about aversion and perfectionism most specifically in *Conditions Handsome and Unhandsome*, 1-63.

[17] Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, 460.

"rough ground" of the everyday. That is not only something sobering, but also something empowering. The struggle to pin down the "thing" in itself cannot but yield to impossibility, and tragical orthodoxy. "Friction", on the contrary, involves a creative acceptance of "finitude", and thence of possibility. The notion is best summarized by Gordon Bearn, when he claims that for Cavell "all explanations come to an end somewhere (or other)". This is the main source, I would contend, of Cavell's exhilaration over Emerson.[18]

When so "happily" reshaped as possibility, the breaking up of meaning radically recontextualizes the all too well known theme of "fragmentation". In the passage quoted above, Poirier seems to depict Eliot as if he were in front of a choice. If there ever was such a time, of course, it was when *The Waste Land* was written. And, sure enough, the poem is about loss and fragmentation. If we now look at it from the point of view of the ordinary, we will find that the possibility of the ordinary has a much deeper impact there than it simply appears in the use of the vernacular against educated language – of lower vs. higher class. Especially significant is the signal title of Section Two ("A Game of Chess"). The connection immediately occurs with Cavell's philosophers of language. Chess is used as a context in which to discuss criteria in Wittgenstein's *Investigations*. The game is also used to explain constitutive rules by John Searle, a scholar who has done much work in the same current of thought.[19] When so connected, the title becomes a clue to the reading of the whole poem. Fragmentation comes to name not a historical crisis but the inherent impossibility of constructing human language as a cohesive system of sorts. That is the obstacle that Eliot side-stepped when he embraced not God, really, but orthodoxy and fixture. The same obstacle was directly engaged by Wittgenstein.

[18] See Gordon C. F. Bearn, "Sounding Serious: Cavell and Derrida", *Representations* 63 (Summer 1998), 65-92. The quotation is on page 68.

[19] Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, 197, 199, 205; J. R. Searle, *Speech Acts* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969), 34; the connection between the *Investigations* and Searle's constitutive rules is discussed in Amedeo G. Conte, "Paradigmi d'analisi della regola in Wittgenstein", in Aldo Gargani et al., eds., *Wittgenstein. Momenti di una critica del sapere* (Napoli: Guida, 1983).

II

Somehow, the coincidence seems to be rooted historically. The year of publication of *The Waste Land* followed on a couple of decades in which the Cambridge analytical philosophers, a group with whose work Eliot was acquainted, had investigated the possibilities of completely clarifying language.[20] Their effort was, so to speak, to literally "abstract" from natural languages their logical foundations and, consequently, the logical foundations of meaning. The enterprise seemed attuned to the work of the mathematician. In the same year that *The Waste Land* was published, the project seemed to find a nice systematization in Wittgenstein's *Tractatus Logicus-Philosophicus*, the work he would later abandon with the publication of *Philosophical Investigations*. The *Tractatus* and the *Waste Land*, in other words, come to stand as turning points not only in the life of their authors, but in a wider context. From then on, Eliot would withdraw from his own perception that language is composite and (in Emerson's terms) transitional, as if unable to surmount "the craving to speak, in Wittgenstein's phrase, 'outside language games'", a craving that creates "fixed perspectives, decontextualized meanings, from within which language seems a prison, or wastelands", as Cavell has it.[21] Not so with Wittgenstein. After the publication of the *Tractatus*, he started a revision of his work that would eventually lead him to study meaning as a systematic multiplicity of uses, what in the *Investigations* he called "language games". Against the mistakes of traditional philosophy, he claimed the therapeutic importance of such an insight. The approach would in time be tagged as ordinary language philosophy: "A loosely structured philosophical movement, holding that the significance of concepts ... is fixed by linguistic practice. Philosophers, then, must be attuned to the actual *uses* of words"; to define "truth", for instance, they have "to ask how the

[20] A reference to Bertrand Russell is in "The Perfect Critic"; Eliot also plays on denomination and the use of names in the opening poem of *Old Possum's Book of Practical Cats*.

[21] Cavell, *In Quest of the Ordinary*, 48,147; hereafter the references will be in the text (QO). Cavell quotes *Endgame* as an instance of "perception of 'the extraordinary of the ordinary'", a way of seeing fissures, the limit (QO, 9).

word 'truth' *functions* in everyday non-philosophical settings".[22] It must be mentioned here that the movement includes Austin, besides Wittgenstein, and that its focus of interest – the problem Wittgenstein felt he had not solved in the *Tractatus* – is the problem of how the relationship between word and reality works, the problem of meaning.

Wittgenstein's research breaks away from traditional logic, and from the attempt of the *Tractatus*, in that it rejects the idea that words or sentences have so many corresponding objects or states of affairs in the world. What is questioned is the assumption that all the sentences of a language can be reduced to propositions having a truth value. Could this be expressed in exclusively grammatical terms (but it cannot), we would say that not all language is a series of declarative sentences (a contention developed in the work of Austin on promising). When so devoid of truth value, the rules that govern games cannot in general be denied, or discussed as if they expressed some kind of knowledge; rather, they must produce a social expectation of sorts. This is the starting point for understanding the term "criteria".

And sure enough – Cavell maintains – the acceptance of criteria amounts, when thus stated, to "nothing less" than an acceptance of the basic conditions of communication: separateness from the others and a common ground with them, what in Emerson is defined as the "common". When so embedded – Cavell goes on – separateness from the other implies letting the other be, acknowledging that the world has a life of its own, unattainable, but not completely unaccountable by the "self". This is the basis of "intelligibility" – a negotiation of social understanding.[23] In accordance with other recent analyses, the boundaries of Emerson's ethics are redrawn in terms of sociality. That language creates the ground of intelligibility implies a specific methodology of reading, and also a trust in the ability of other speakers to read. This is where the capacity of "hearing" language is involved, in the very simple sense of understanding the import of

[22] *The Cambridge Dictionary of Philosophy*, general editor Robert Audi, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995).

[23] John Searle, *The Construction of Social Reality* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1995).

language in the words of others.[24] If at this point one tackles again the question of Poirier's "skepticism about language", Wittgenstein's eventual answer to it was that it is the mistake of philosophy to follow such an impulse to repudiate ordinary language, at the cost of turning away from our only form of philosophical (and human) knowledge: common words as they are found in all possible configurations of everyday speech, and under all possible criteria. This is an invitation, if any, to start all over again from fragments.

III

Where does Cavell's Emerson stand under this respect? Cavell's ascription to Emerson of a deep insight into the ordinary organizes a number of other claims. Of these, two are of special interest here. The first is that the line that runs from transcendentalism to pragmatism and to the philosophers of the ordinary includes Cavell too, so that his work comes to be a prolongation of Emerson's – for instance, in that Cavell crosses the boundaries between the discourse of philosophy and creative discourse. He writes: "this communication between philosophy and literature, or the refusal of communication, is something that causes romanticism, *causes at any rate my present experiments with romantic texts*, experiments caused by the discovery of these texts among the effects of *The Claim of Reason*" (QO, 27, emphasis added).[25] The second, and more important, claim is that the philosophical foundations of Emerson are not to be looked for in religion, but rather in Kant's "immense work of secularization", so that Emerson must be read in the frame of skepticism, keeping Kant in the background.[26] This claim clearly divests transcendentalism of a center, does away with the over-soul, and consequently displaces *Nature* as a canonical text. Since, moreover, Cavell considers Wittgenstein a Kantian philosopher, this is one more reason to keep

[24] Hearing is Cavell's word. On the capacity to hear, see his discussion of Heidegger's deafness to the new in language, his "annihilation of human speech" (QO, p. 159).

[25] Eventually founding Cavell's own way of writing, his own "presentation". See also Wilson, "From Metaphysical Poverty to Practical Power", 302, 304.

[26] It might be noticed here that a cognate term of transition is "transitivity", the property of including a direct object under the verb.

not only Kant in the background, but also Wittgenstein. Even better, Wittgenstein and the ordinary language philosophers should be understood as being anticipated ("underwritten") in authors such as Emerson or Thoreau (with reflections in Poe or Hawthorne).

This "mutual relation to Kant" (QO, 170), a specific mode of skepticism, means that they all recognize – in some way or other – that we can only know the world through a set of "human conditions of knowledge" – Kant's *a priori* conditions of knowledge. In Wittgenstein's practice, however, the search for these conditions – "transcendental deduction" – is not one for human concepts, as in Kant, but for language. "Every word in our ordinary language requires deduction"; it must be studied in how it applies to, and in, the world. What Wittgenstein calls "grammar", Cavell contends, "is in some sense to be understood as [a different kind of] a priori conditions" (QO, 170).[27] In other words, human language is all we have, and the all-important metaphysical drive to "repudiate" it must be understood as something that is inside language itself, a twist in it that must be dealt with. The mutuality of the relation between Emerson and the ordinary language philosophers thus comes to be based on the fact that they seek not "to deny skepticism's power (on the contrary) but to diagnose the source (or say the possibility) of that power – to ask, as I put it a while ago, what it is about human language that allows us, even invites us, in its own name, to repudiate its everyday functioning, to find it wanting" (QO, 170).

This is where a discontinuity between Cavell and Poirier surfaces. They both conceive of language as a contextualized process of discovery. If I understand Poirier correctly, however, he holds that skepticism belongs outside of language (it is *about* language, not *in*

[27] Does the contention imply the existence of universal structures? It implies a system; Cavell says of Wittgenstein that "our uses of language are pervasively, almost unimaginably, systematic. (Though since Wittgenstein wrote, the science of linguistics, especially Chomskian transformational grammar, seems to have gone a long way toward imagining it, indeed laying it out ...)". Although transformational grammar does not replace Wittgenstein, this looks very much like an admission of the possibility of some kind of universal basis for the development of language. *The Claim of Reason: Wittgenstein, Skepticism, Morality, and Tragedy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1979), 29-30.

language), and returns to language in the shape of troping. Cavell's assumption is that skepticism is inherent in language, all language at all moments, and that we must accept skepticism if we want to communicate. It is inherent in the very functioning of words. Consequently, for instance, whereas Poirier finds that poetry and ordinary discourse are closest when they share in the use of troping, Cavell "finds" that philosophy and the ordinary are at their closest in the very use of speech.[28] If I understand it correctly, the difference implies that Poirier differs from Cavell because he does not give the same amount of attention to the contribution that the study of language can give to the understanding of ontology. His writers not only "share in a liberating and creative suspicion as to the dependability of words and syntax", but also feel that language is not dependable especially when it comes "to matters of belief" (PP, 5). Hence the difference between Cavell's ascription to Emerson of the ontological question ("what is it about human language that invites us to repudiate its everyday functioning?") and Poirier's interrogation of why "even then [at a time of foundation] it was not possible [for poets] to escape from language" (PP, 134-135).

"Skepticisms are not gratuitous"

To summarize, Emerson can be read in a twofold fashion. He acknowledges the existence of a community of speakers from which the self must break away ("aversion"), but from which it also receives language ("conformity"), its only inheritance and condition of knowledge. Hence the idea that the self is active in so far as it is "transitional". The contention is especially developed in the reading of "Self-Reliance", the place, as a matter of fact, where Cavell forges

[28] Does his stance imply that there is no use whatsoever for a distinct explanation of common usage as opposed to its fictional imitation (what Austin defines parasitic usages)? It seems to me that the question deserves more study. On the one hand there is a need in the analyses of actual speech to distinguish what is fictional (theatrical) from what is not. Given the thrust to repudiate it, on the other hand, the return of language on itself cannot but involve a pervasive process of reflection. For Austin on the parasitic, see *How to Do Things with Words*, 21-22.

the firmest link with language, by maintaining that Emerson answers the question "what I am" with the claim that "I am a being who to exist must say 'I exist'". The claim is doubly rooted in language. First, because it features what Wittgenstein would term a grammatical answer, in that it looks into language for an ontological explanation. Second, because, since the act of speech so performed is inherently public, it makes the self subject to being read, to "allow[ing itself] to be known", to becoming "intelligible" (QO, 119).[29] Once it is so interpreted, the self-assigned Emersonian task of bringing the truth of the obvious to the surface becomes more clearly rooted not in "quoting", but in "speaking" ("sounding"; words in use). If we now refer to "criteria", they should provide an answer "both to the ordinary question 'how do you know?' and to the philosophical question 'what is knowledge?'"[30] How is it possible to keep the two questions in balance? One way could be that of looking at words from several perspectives, without ever forgetting the fissures that separate them: taking words up repeatedly in different contexts. The return of language to itself thus comes to be figured for practical purposes as the play between decontextualization and recontextualization of words, a movement that it is not difficult to label as "work" in the Emersonian sense. This is as close as I can come to giving meaning to the terms "count", "recount", and "account" that Cavell presents as the foundation of "intelligibility". This would contribute to the idea that some kind of system is necessary, implying that there is a need in language for segmentation: of sounds, words, syntax, uses.[31]

"Counting" thus becomes the keyword that describes how knowledge is found not in the mind as such, but in all and each word of received language. How does Wittgenstein go about the task of

[29] Cavell claims that there is a time and mode (mood?) for reading. This is very true of Emerson, but also of Cavell. Both require listening, reading aloud. They also require silence, in the sense of giving time to thoughts. In oral speech timing is given by repetition, of course, but the whole idea voiced here – of "timing" as individual "timing" both of the speaker and of the listener – goes in many ways contrary to what is generally held to be common to oral discourse.

[30] Cavell, *The Claim of Reason*, 16.

[31] The whole set of terms is defined in the reading of "The Imp of the Perverse", QO, 123-126.

expressing "counting"? Say, by the working of the "literary". By creating a series of small narratives, of contexts in which to bring language to life. Then it will be the work of the philosopher to dig up all possible implications. One of the first remarks in the *Investigations* contains the pretty famous scene of the two builders working together and exchanging objects and (rudimentary) words. This seems to be an approach based on the "imagine that", "let's make believe". Is Emerson's strategy the same? Obviously not; not if we look for narratives of sorts. However, Cavell is right in saying that Emerson *does* have a way of looking at words differently. This is openly figured whenever the eye is written in connection with glass. Nice correspondences are created in such cases, between the *a priori* organization of perception, and studies in optics. There is a passage in "Experience" in which a comparison is made between man and Labradorite: "There is no adaptation or universal applicability in men, but each has his special talent". And: "A man is like a bit of Labrador spar, which has no lustre as you turn it in your hand, until you come to a particular angle; then it shows deep and beautiful colors".[32] What Wittgenstein and Cavell teach, it seems to me, is exactly that same gesture. An act of turning, as if of a crystal, to find the right angle from which to look at thoughts: "The same or almost the same points were always – Wittgenstein says – being approached afresh from different directions, and new sketches made".[33] Such is also the work Emerson performs with words: pick one, single out its conditions of understanding as a "strong" word, turn the word over, look at its meanings from all possible angles. In order to bring out whatever there is in it that can be brought out, whatever "use" or "uses" that word "subserves" to man. Words put to work, as one is supposed to do in language games.

These are the "uses" of the sudden turns and displacements of meaning – the feeling of dislocation – that are so often found in Emerson's writing. In this sense, the many one-word titles take on their exact meaning. They all mark the ground of an exegesis that is done not on a book, of course, but on the world, better yet on secular

[32] Ralph Waldo Emerson, *Ralph Waldo Emerson*, ed. Richard Poirier (Oxford: Oxford University Press , 1990), 221.

[33] Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, v.

usage. As such, Emerson's works stand as a catalogue of keywords, and a presentation of his times. Here there is one more affinity with Cavell's appreciation of Wittgenstein. In both cases, the listener, or reader, would be given a picture of the age, although a sketchy one, an album of drawings "made in the course of these long and involved journeyings", as Wittgenstein says. Would Emerson accept a fixed portfolio of ideas? Of course not. Words must be put in motion, as if they were a prism through which to look at landscape. The titles name each prism and become clues or instructions as to how the listener (seer?) should move across the terrain. Not that the journeying can be unawares or hurried. It is as characteristic of Emerson as of Wittgenstein (and Cavell) that each stretch of discourse requires reflection, re-reading, return to the previous parts, in a word: repetition. The title helps the reader to hold on to its center. This makes it possible to mark the distance, pin down the passages, count the tract of written space behind. Far from denying the possibilities of language, repetition restores it to its only way of functioning, the contextual. It so happens, for instance, that the word "experience" first appears with the evanescent coat of retrospection, to be immediately challenged in that meaning. At that point, a number of attempts at pairing the word with other terms follow each other, as if poking the vocabulary: experience and grief (in a couple of paragraphs, that Cavell unravels as a denunciation of the illusory attempt to grasp a supposedly graspable world once and for all: the "unhandsome" of clutching, "illusion" for Emerson); experience and temperament; and change (succession); and practice; and surface (steps, and/vs skating); and surprise; and reality (limits, form); and subjectiveness.[34] Until the intended picture emerges of experience as actuality, as the "vast-flowing vigor" of "Being". There, the well known contention is found that "we have arrived as far as we can go", although the limit does not mark an end, but the opening of "interminable oceans".[35] The limit, nevertheless, seems to mark the end of words. It certainly marks the end of *this* catalogue of words,

[34] Poirier points out that the list of the Lords of life in the last section of the essay is not the same as the list in the opening poem; hence the second list can be taken as a table of content of the sections of the essay. PP, 69-70.

[35] Emerson, *Ralph Waldo Emerson*, 229.

although the possibilities of language still stand as an open matter. Interestingly enough, Emerson's idea of his work seems rather close to Wittgenstein's: "Illusion, Temperament, Succession, Surface, Surprise, Reality, Subjectiveness – these are the threads of the loom of time, these are the lords of life. I dare not assume to give their order, but *I name them as I find them in my way*. I know better than to claim any completeness for my picture. I am a fragment, and this is a fragment of me ... I am too young yet by some ages to compile a code" (emphasis added).[36]

So far, so good, and the reading of Cavell seems quite useful. The connections are impressive. There still is, however, a question to dispose of. Against similarities, it is undeniable that the textual constructions of Emerson and Wittgenstein are completely different. Their ways of writing, moreover, seem to follow divergent directions. They are both slow and painful reading, difficult reading. Wittgenstein, however, always seems to be painstakingly looking for complete simplicity. Since the very beginning, I know that he will not spend more words than are strictly required. Everything will be clear, and if it is not, it will be my fault, the lack on my part of important stretches of implied, but very simple, information. In other words, I am sure that what Wittgenstein does (in spite of all extravagance) is take out all the words that are not necessary. Not so with Emerson. And I know why. Obviously enough, this is because my encyclopedia, my way of inference, is different. Just to name one difference, Wittgenstein (Cavell) cannot but work under conditions set – for better or worse – by analytical philosophy. Emerson synthesizes a different kind of shared knowledge. The notions that he brings into play within the term "skepticisms" are the notions he finds in his own context, not mine.

One can think of the uses of natural sciences, from phrenology to geology, from *Nature* to "Fate". We should assume that Emerson operated along the fissure of modernity marked by the disengagement of the natural sciences from philosophy. No wonder that both cultural layers (philosophy and the technologizing of scientific fields) operate in his writings, at times openly countering secularized readings. Let me just mention the idea that all words have developed out of metaphors –

[36] Ibid., 233.

that they are "signs of natural facts".[37] It is easy to see how this claim tends to assume a notion of meaning opposed to the one posited by Cavell. Thus stated, the relation between word and object seems to look for some kind of natural correspondence, an elevation of meaning, from Earth to an essential reality. "Language" in this sense does not question the thrust to repudiate words completely; rather, it provides evidence of it. Cavell would object that *Nature* cannot be taken into the canon, that Emerson does in fact depart from it in the essays that follow. *Nature*, Cavell argues, is "apt to grant Emerson a relation to philosophy by characterizing his philosophy as essentially (though doubtless not wholly) neo-Platonic", since the issue of skepticism is still taken as "solvable or controllable whereas thereafter he takes its unsolvability to the heart of his thinking" (TN, 79).

It is a fact, nevertheless, that the opening is there, at the core of one of the most widely read essays of Emerson, and this takes us over to Matthiessen's claim that Nature contains "in embryo nearly all [of Emerson's] cardinal assumptions" (12).

Moods

> Emerson makes himself sometimes amazingly hard to read ... If you want to get to know him, you must stay as close as possible to the movements of his language, moment by moment, for at every moment there is movement with no place to rest.[38]

There is an edge to the way in which *American Renaissance* has yielded to closure that is quite odd. In spite of the book's obvious quest for finiteness, Matthiessen's analysis of Emerson is in fact far from being easily exhausted. His bulk of quotations is too vast to honestly allow for only one interpretation, and "Book One" of *American Renaissance* reads at times as a curious instance of a double-voiced text, in which Emerson and Matthiessen are speaking in altercation against each other. The author, in other words, has not silenced the voice of

[37] Ibid., 13.
[38] Poirier, PP, 31.

Emerson, even while he was silencing the patent contradictions between his claims to integrity and Emerson's wavering and "not-after-all-so-centered" language. As if Matthiessen were willing to leave a space open to hesitancy – an Emersonian act, if ever there was one. As made clear in the title of Section Four in the First Chapter ("The Word One with the Thing"), the altercation is carried out along lines of language, and of meaning. A sustained argumentation is developed there to show that Emerson's transcendentalism finds expression in "the dozen pages on 'Language' in his book *Nature*". Matthiessen, it will be remembered, makes his point by closely following the three "propositions" that in *Nature* trace "words" into "the symbol of spirit". The propositions describe words as a medium in the quest for a spiritual center, so that "language was symbol, the bridge that enabled man to pass from concrete appearance to spiritual reality" (AR, 32). The claim clearly authorizes the centrality of symbols and symbolic images in the subsequent analysis. As a consequence, *Nature* becomes an important link in the chain that connects the renaissance authors to each other, and to Emerson. And, sure enough, *Nature* is the essay that Matthiessen most substantially engages in the book. This is not to say that in his work there are no openings to the possibility of different interpretations. In "A Few Herbs and Apples", for instance, the focus admittedly shifts from the metaphysical to the cleavage between human thought and reality, "the discrepancy between the world of fact and the world that man thinks" (AR, 57). The poem, as a consequence, can be read as an expression of a quiet skepticism that seems far from the uses of language in *Nature*. It is the possibility of such a split in reception, I would maintain, that Cavell warns against, when he invites readers to be careful about taking *Nature* as the fountainhead of all Emersonian thought.

Contradiction is a tightrope, however, that Matthiessen walks to Emerson's advantage, and the Emerson of *Renaissance* is wonderful reading. As the balance between voices is often the result of a delicate balance of words, on the other hand, problems can arise in translation. The Italian edition is a very well translated, very accurate book, that conveys the meaning nicely.[39] It may happen, nevertheless, that

[39] F. O. Matthiessen, *Rinascimento americano. Arte ed espressione nell'età di Emerson e di Whitman*, trans. Franco Lucentini, with an introduction by Cesare Pavese (Milano: Mondadori, 1961).

Matthiessen's implications surface at times a bit too forcefully. Then, a very small gap opens, one that shows quite visibly under the strain of recent interpretations. I will quote only two instances. The first has to do with the relationship between word and reference, the Emersonian "word" and "thing". If I understand Cavell correctly, repudiation of language should not go so far as to authorize the inversion of word and thing. Words *are* energy; they are not the vehicle of a pre-existing spiritual something that breaks through them. That is the limit (the ocean) where Emerson stops. If we now take the quote: "word one with the thing" it will be seen that it can be interpreted quite easily in both ways. It so happens, then, that in *Rinascimento americano* the translation of the title "The Word One with the Thing" follows the exact order of the words: "La Parola una con la Cosa". The unwarranted capitalization of "Parola" ("word") and "Cosa" ("thing"), however, seems to add a metaphysical clue that is not necessarily implied in the English usage.[40] It is my opinion that in doing so the translators are interpreting the expression according to Matthiessen's directions. They are, in other words, subtly countering the ambiguity of the phrase. The same words occur in almost the same order in the Introduction. There, however, Matthiessen breaks the phrase by inserting a modal: "the stimulus that lay in the transcendental conviction that the word must be one with the thing" (xiv). Interestingly enough, the Italian translation reads: "Lo stimolo costituito dalla credenza trascendentalista che il mondo debba divenire uno con la parola" (35). The inversion here is quite meaningful, and so is the replacement of "thing" with "mondo", as if the "world" should descend into the "word". Once again, this is not to say that the translators are mistaken. On the contrary, they are quite correct in applying the reading authorized by *Nature* and, through *Nature*, by Matthiessen.

A similar objection can be raised in the second example. The problem here is in a sense more superficial, and the gap is really small. The translation, however, makes for a nice case in favor of recent interpretations as a possible key to one of Emerson's dubious

[40] Capital letters are not very common in Italian except for proper and honorific nouns; they can be used for philosophical terms; they are certainly not used in titles.

statements. At the beginning of Section Five, the recurrent image of the sea-shell with its "fragile yet intricate form" is mentioned, together with a quotation from Emerson: "Thence I learned that composition was more important than the beauty of individual forms to effect. On the shore they lay wet and social by the sea and under the sky" (AR, 45). This entire passage revolves around Matthiessen's reading of how the poem "Each and All" figures the poetic dilemma of Emerson. In the poem, the shells lose brilliancy when removed from their context, just as, Matthiessen says, "the rhythmical wholeness of the experience [slips] away from him" when Emerson comes "to set it down on paper" (AR, 45). What is interesting here is the way in which the translation deals with the above quotation from Emerson: "Da ciò appresi che la composizione, il contesto, è più importante della bellezza delle forme individuali. Sulla riva, esse giacciono in lucente solidarietà col cielo e col mare" (92). A couple of observations are in order. In the first place, there is the insertion of "contesto" ("context") beside "composizione" ("composition") in the first part of the passage. The insertion is rather significant, of course, as "context" seems a fitter term in present readings than it was in the original text. On the other hand, the "wet and social" of the second part is simply ruled out, to be replaced by "in solidarietà col cielo e col mare" (something like: "in solid unity with sky and sea"). The connection strikes me as arbitrary, unless we let considerations of Nature enter the text. Emerson, however, openly speaks of society, of being social, and the explanation presents itself that the sea-shells can be "wet and social by the sea", in analogy with the "fragile" human associations (sexual associations?) of which recent analyses speak.

What is the relevance of such small gaps in interpretation? It must be underlined, of course, that Franco Lucentini is not translating Emerson, but Matthiessen, so that his Emersonian text is far more cohesive, in a sense, than the real text is. Lucentini cannot ignore, in other words, Matthiessen's interpretation. On the other hand, I would argue that such an exercise shows how Emersonian scholarship can be brought to bear on the investigation of the Italian reception and translations of Emerson. In that mood, one thing should be clear so far: the question of the Emerson canon will be a benchmark in our future readings, and *Nature* will have to be a point in question.

Carlo Martinez

"The Aroma of Personality": The Sage of Concord and the Master*

Surprisingly enough, although the relationship between Ralph Waldo Emerson and Henry James has been repeatedly asserted as a central 'stream' in American literary culture, it has seldom been investigated in detail.[1] While it is generally assumed that Emerson's *Essays* and James's fiction are in the same line, very little exists on the influence that Emerson exerted on the elaboration of James's famous critical

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[1] On the relationship between Emerson and James's family, Frank Lentricchia, for example, writes: "The Emerson/James connection may constitute the most influential enhancement of intellectual force in American literary history…. The connection, moreover, seems to have derived its power from its mediation in the great interbiography of American literary culture. I refer not only to the interrelations of Henry Jr., William, Alice ... but also to the larger cultural family composed of Emerson and the Jameses, with particular emphasis on Emerson's relations to the novelist, the philosopher, and to Henry Sr. – relations which at different times, both in his lifetime and after, cast Emerson in roles ranging from older brother, teacher, culture hero, and father, to godfather, priest, and deity": *Modernist Quartet* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 26-27. Quentin Anderson is among the few who have paid extensive attention to the relationship between Emerson and James. His line of analysis, though, runs contrary to the one I will try to suggest here as regards the relationship with society and culture at large: "My thesis ... is that the American flight from culture, from the institutions and emotional dispositions of associated life, took on form in the work of Emerson, Whitman, and Henry James": *The Imperial Self: An Essay in American Literary and Cultural History* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1971), 3. See also Earl Rovit, "James and Emerson: The Lesson of The Master", *American Scholar* 33 (1964), 434-440; and Annette T. Rubinstein, "Henry James, American Novelist or: Isabel Archer, Emerson's Grand-Daughter", in Norman Rudich, ed., *Weapons of Criticism: Marxism in America and the Literary Tradition* (Palo Alto: Ramparts Press, 1976), 311-326.

tenets. Likewise, while the debt of James's fiction to a sound and deep-rooted American tradition is now a commonplace, the 'American side' of his criticism has been subjected to far less scrutiny. This article explores some of the ways in which Emerson might have represented an intellectual and formal model that Henry James had to confront in writing his critical works, especially the *Prefaces* to the New York Edition.

What I'd like to suggest is not so much that Emerson's influence on James's criticism is a direct and explicit one, for the two differ remarkably on a number of points: take for example James's rebuke that Emerson's essays lack form: "Emerson had his message, but he was a good while looking for his form – the form which, as he himself would have said, he never completely found".[2] Yet, I believe that Emerson represented a crucial model for James, not only for his critical writings, but also for the role he bestowed on the critic in the social and cultural field.

Historically speaking, Emerson and James found themselves in the unusually similar position of having to legitimize something: Emerson, an autonomous status for the American scholar and American culture at large; James, the novel's artistic value and its critical and social scope. As 'acknowledged legislators' of their fields, they had to grapple with what James's father called "the aroma of personality":

> I tried assiduously during the early years of our intimacy to solve intellectually the mystery of [Emerson's] immense fascination.... But what the magic actually was, I could not at all divine, save that it was intensely personal.... For it was utterly impossible to listen to Mr. Emerson's lectures without being perpetually haunted as to your intellect by the subtlest and most searching aroma of personality.[3]

[2] Henry James, Jr., "Ralph Waldo Emerson", now in *Henry James Literary Criticism I: Essays on Literature, American Writers, English Writers*, ed. Leon Edel (New York: The Library of America, 1984), 253.

[3] Henry James, Sr., "Emerson", written in 1868, and published by William James with a long introductory note in *The Atlantic Monthly* 94 (July-December 1904), 740-745, here 740.

Two pages later, James Sr. asks himself: "Now why do I thus linger upon these personal traits of Mr. Emerson? It is because they at least indicate ... the solution I shall venture to give you of the problem of his rare genius", and he finds his answer again in the centrality of the idea of personality as a cultural and social product: "the influence exerted by Mr. Emerson over the minds of his contemporaries is not in the least of a dogmatic or intellectual, but of a purely personal quality. And personality – character – as it seems to me, is the distinctive badge of Mr. Emerson's genius".[4]

Henry James Jr. also refers to Emerson's personality as a cultural and symbolic icon of the age: "he was the man of genius of the moment", he recalls in *Hawthorne*.[5] His reference here is to Hawthorne's age, but his remark was still – and perhaps even more – true for James's own. According to Randall Fuller, it was during the Gilded Age that Emerson's figure rose to its apex as a cultural symbol of the nation: "what makes the period immediately following his death especially interesting is the unprecedented cultural authority suddenly, almost spontaneously, attributed to him.... Emerson during the last decades of the nineteenth century was a *national* symbol".[6] This can read as the fulfilment of a strategic design pursued by Emerson himself throughout his long career as public figure – "character is higher than intellect" (62), he says in "The American Scholar". Much as James recalls that "there were faulty parts in the Emersonian philosophy; but the general tone was magnificent", his keenest interest lies in the personality of his father's friend.[7] So in the *Autobiography* he defines Emerson as "the wonder of Boston", and in

[4] Ibid., 742.

[5] Henry James, Jr., "Hawthorne", now in *Henry James Literary Criticism I*, 382. In the first volume of the *Autobiography*, James writes: "among the impressions of the next early years I easily distinguish that of the great and urbane Emerson's occasional presence in Fourteenth Street", *A Small Boy and Others*, now in *Henry James Autobiography*, ed. Frederick W. Dupee (London: W. H. Allen, 1956), 7.

[6] Randall Fuller, "Emerson in the Gilded Age", *ESQ: A Journal of the American Renaissance* 45 (1999), 97-129, here 97. See also Joel Porte, *Ralph Waldo Emerson in His Time* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1979) and Charles E. Mitchell, *Individualism and Its Discontents: Appropriations of Emerson, 1880-1950* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1997).

[7] James, "Hawthorne", 383.

his study on Hawthorne he "envies the privilege" of those who could hear "the finest of Emerson's orations poured forth in their early newness". His lectures "had a music and a magic, and when one remembers the remarkable charm of the speaker, the beautiful modulation of his utterance, one regrets in especial that one might not have been present on a certain occasion which made a sensation, an era – the delivery of an address to the Divinity School of Harvard University".[8] James's remark that Emerson was endowed with the gift of "the genius to see character as a real and supreme thing" renders character and personality central, to the point that the historical figure of Emerson becomes suspiciously similar to a character in a novel.[9]

The issue of personality was a crucial one for James at that time. When he began to write his autobiography, James had already partly accomplished the process of self-monumentalization begun in *The American Scene* and, most eminently, in the New York Edition of his work. *The Prefaces* especially point towards the establishment of an aura for the critic, constitutive of the cultural and critical agenda that James pursues. James as a subtly and deftly self-conscious critic authorizes and advertises the figure of James the Master. This, to my mind, is where Emerson becomes an overarching presence.

Both Emerson and James came to be public figures who, as such, invested much labor in the creation of what might be called an ideology of personality. The "Sage of Concord" and the "Master of Fiction" are not simply two sobriquets; rather, they are complex cultural artifacts, real brand names. All the more so, if one considers that for a long time they were both singled out as examples of intellectual detachment from social, historical, and political commitment. Emerson's contemporaries regarded personality and works as two disengaged elements, and referred to the former as something "natural", whereas it is now clear that personality represented a powerful and emblematic vehicle that Emerson carefully moulded to spread, even to "enforce", his writings as the normative American ones. Along with his ideology of liberal individualism, Emerson began to methodize a specific American

[8] James, *Notes of a Son and Brother*, *Autobiography*, 359; "Hawthorne", 383-384.
[9] James, "Emerson", 254.

ideology of personality that had a pervasive influence on James's cult as the Master. If it is true, as David McWhirter has fittingly argued about the Jamesian "construction of authorship" in the New York Edition, that "the self is less a structure of autonomous, self-same identity than an ever changing network of differences and relations; that authorship is less a matter of monological, originating intentions than a process of infinite adaptability and responsibility", so that we must always be wary of "confusing literary authority with subjectivity itself", it is also true that such confusion belongs to a critical *credo* as much as to an ideological agenda. The cult of the Master, far from being only a literary and aesthetic cliché, consists in what might be called a complex politics of mastery in the literary and cultural field. This is why, as McWhirter notes, James's authorial narrative in the New York Edition is one based on "a capacity for establishing multiple, often contradictory lines of connection, relation, and responsiveness to the many Henry Jameses who inhabit this extraordinary text".[10]

The deconstruction and questioning of James's *Prefaces* and of the New York Edition in general as a "master-narrative of identity" that has variously been carried out from several viewpoints, is concurrent with the recent interest in the social, dialogic, and historical dimensions of Emerson's writings which commonly goes under the rubric of "detranscendentalization of the Emerson Image".[11] Michael Lopez observes that starting with the 1980s "a diverse array of fresh approaches was rehumanizing, recontextualizing, rehistoricizing an amberembalmed literary icon". According to Lopez, Emerson has been caught in a sort of critical double bind since the very beginning of his reception: "it is not too much to say that Emerson's canonization has been a curse as well as a blessing and not an exaggeration to characterize the dominant tradition of Emerson criticism as also an anti-Emersonian tradition".[12]

[10] David McWhirter, ed., *Henry James's New York Edition: The Construction of Authorship* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995), 15.
[11] Michael Lopez, "De-Transcendentalizing Emerson", *ESQ: A Journal of the American Renaissance* 34 (1988), 77-123.
[12] Michael Lopez, *Emerson and Power: Creative Antagonism in the Nineteenth Century* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 1996), 165, 24.

If this is, or was, the situation, then we must acknowledge that James's criticism of Emerson is to some extent responsible for the establishment of this double perspective. According to James, on the one hand Emerson had "a high and noble conception of good, without having, as it would appear, a definite conception of the evil" and he had "no great sense of wrong – a strangely limited one, indeed, for a moralist – no sense of the dark, the foul, the base"; on the other hand, he was "the first, and the one really rare, American spirit in letters".[13] This is why the notion of personality comes to the foreground of analysis. Working as an interface between subjectivity and authorship, it allows us to avoid the "confusion" between the two and, at the same time, to reconsider the monumentalization of the two authors not only in terms of critical misreadings, but as the result of a precise ideological as well as critical performance that they themselves first launched. This is not to deny the magnitude of notions of authorship and identity, but to reframe them in a different perspective. Only along the way opened by new directions in criticism in these past years does it become possible to argue that Emerson and James share a similar goal as far as the construction of personality is concerned. The notion of personality always already implies an external visibility, a social dimension, an unstable identity, pointing toward what Richard Poirier has named a "performing self". If it is imperial, then it is an imperial personality, rather than an imperial self that Emerson and James are concerned with.

In a way, they transformed their individual figures into *personae*, infused with a strong symbolic capital. As Kenneth Dauber and

[13] James, *Literary Criticism I*, 243, 269. See for example these two apparently contradictory statements: "he was the Transcendentalist *par excellence*" and "he liked to explain the transcendentalists but did not care at all to be explained by them". "He", James adds a little later, "was never the man any one took him for, for the simple reason that no one could possible take him for the elusive, irreducible, merely gustatory spirit for which he took himself". In concluding his review of Cabot's biography of Emerson, James remarks: "I have arrived at the end without even pointing to the grounds on which Emerson justifies the honours of biography, discussion and illustration. I have assumed his importance and continuance, and shall probably not be gainsaid by those who read him.... Such a revision of Emerson has no relegating consequences. *The result of it is once more the impression that he serves and will not wear out, and that indeed we cannot afford to drop him*" (*Literary Criticism I*, 382, 265-266, 270; my italics).

Giuseppe Nori have pointedly remarked, throughout his career Emerson put great energy into the formulation of a doctrine of representativeness, and he carved out for himself the role of *exemplum*.[14] He offered his historical self as the embodiment of a wider, far-reaching, multifaceted, representative self. As the opening paragraphs of "Nature" illustrate, the narrator who "goes into solitude" has previously been turned into a self representative of an entire generation, and, even more, of every future generation having to tackle the same questions and look for new answers. To set in motion that incredible process of empowerment that will lead the self to become the celebrated "transparent eyeball", "a man needs to retire as much from his chamber as from society". The first stage of this process is a temporary and voluntary desocialization, a 'willing suspension' of the social self, as it were, and a plunge into a natural dimension whereby the individual reactivates some contact with the most vital and authentic aspects of himself:

> Crossing a bare common, in snow puddles, at twilight, under a cloudy sky, without having in my thoughts any occurrence of special good fortune, I have enjoyed a perfect exilaration. I am glad to the brink of fear. In the woods, too a man casts off his years as the snake his slough, and at what period soever of life is always a child. In the woods is perpetual youth.[15]

Yet, this recovery of a natural dimension in the form of "perpetual youth" does not point toward an anti-social or pre-social fusion with nature, nor does it imply the attainment of a level of common humanity with the rest of mankind in a peculiarly romantic fashion. In this process, nature is not so much played out against society nor against individuality, nor does it stand in opposition to individual and

[14] Kenneth Dauber, "On Not Being Able to Read Emerson, or 'Representative Men'", *Boundary 2* 21: 2 (1994), 220-242; Giuseppe Nori, "Gli usi e gli abusi dei grandi uomini: Emerson e la dottrina della rappresentatività", *Trame* 2:2 (I semestre 2001), 185-212. See also Leo Marchetti, *Ralph Waldo Emerson. Il sepolcro dei padri* (Pescara: Tracce, 1996).

[15] Ralph Waldo Emerson, "Nature", now in *Ralph Waldo Emerson: Essays and Lectures* (New York: The Library of America, 1983), 10. The quotations that follow are from this edition; page numbers will be included in brackets in the text.

collective history. The Emersonian nature serves as the site where individuality and personality are not erased or dissolved, but strengthened and developed. Nature features as the stage on which the empirical historicized self becomes a representative personality. Curiously enough, this self can develop into a socialized, and therefore representative, self only by way of naturalization, which means on the one hand a temporary and self-conscious withdrawal from social relations, both public and private, and on the other the adoption of a self-validating rhetoric of authenticity. The Emersonian individual who retreats into nature thus turns experience into a peculiar moment of intimacy, whereby the process of de-socialization of the self is counterbalanced by a rhetoric of natural authentication which intensifies subjectivity and endows it with an aura, or 'aroma,' of personality. At this point "the name of the nearest friend sounds then foreign and accidental: to be brothers, to be acquaintances, master or servant, is then a trifle and a disturbance"(10). Such a disquieting and supercilious remark is not the manifestation of an asocial or narcissistic ego, nor is it a sheer statement of fact, but something that can be accounted for only if we take it as the expression of a personality that, as Richard Sennett argues, is "immanent with appearances". According to the sociologist, personality becomes a crucial site of modern life as a consequence of a further form of "confusion": that "between public and intimate life.... This confusion might appear to be a peculiarly American problem. The value American society places on individual experience might seem to lead its citizens to measure all social life in terms of personal feeling".[16] From this standpoint, Emerson gives a momentous turn to the relationship between public and private:

> The only thing grief has taught me is to know how shallow it is. That, like all the rest, plays about the surface, and never introduces me into the reality, for contact with which we would even pay the costly price of sons and lovers.... Grief too will make us idealists. In the death of my son, now more than two years ago, I seem to have lost a beautiful

[16] Richard Sennett, *The Fall of the Public Man* (London: Faber and Faber, 1993; first published, Knopf 1977), 153, 5.

> estate, – no more. I cannot get it nearer to me ... I grieve that grief can teach me nothing, nor carry me one step into real nature (472-473).

What interests me here is the use of this intimate, strictly private event in relation to a general point Emerson wants to make. Yet, after all, can we really call it intimate? In what sense is it personal, we might ask, when it is employed in such a context, and when the author himself says that the experience of grief did not touch his personality, or *persona*? By turning this truly intimate, although apparently meaningless, "shallow", and almost inexpressible experience into a public and shared one, Emerson translates it into an expression, no matter how paradoxical, of his personality. Along similar lines, another example can be drawn from "History":

> If the whole of history is in one man it is all to be explained from individual experience.... Of the universal mind each individual man is one more incarnation. All its properties consist in him. Each new fact in his private experience flashes a light on what great bodies of men have done, and the crises of his life refer to national crisis. Every revolution was first a thought in one man's mind, and when the same thought occurs to another man, it is the key to that era. Every reform was once a private opinion, and when it shall be a private opinion again it shall solve the problem of the age (237-238).

What comes to the forefront is the representativeness of a 'private' experience that is de-privatized and developed into a historical, social entity. The value and role of privacy and individuality are here eminently social ones. Privacy materializes as the sphere where history is experienced through a process of capitalization and socialized sharing of personal experience. Then, Emerson poses biography as the mark of history: "We are always coming up with the emphatic facts of history in our private experience and verifying them here. All history becomes subjective; in other words there is properly no history, only biography" (240). Biography as the figure of historical discourse constructs history as representative personality, which does not position itself above or outside individual history, but resonates with the multiplicity, variety, and topicality of history through individual experience. In this way, Emerson functionalizes

the private sphere of personality to the creation of a public, authoritative and representative figure of the American scholar who should "read history actively and not passively; to esteem his own life the text, and books the commentary" (239). If biography is the mark of history, then what Sennett suggests when he talks of "personality as social category" makes perfect sense.[17]

Doesn't Henry James, one wants to ask at this point, confront the same issue when, at the close of his career, he revises his *corpus* for the New York Edition? The "Sage of Concord" stands in the background and seems to offer a model out of which James can cut and shape his own image of the novelist, as well as that of the critic. James the Master duplicates the Emersonian double gesture of representing himself at once as a historically grounded individual and as an emblematic public *persona*. In the preface to *Roderick Hudson*, which opens the collection, James writes:

> This is why, as one looks back, the private history of any sincere work ... looms with its own completeness in the rich, ambiguous aesthetic air, and seems at once to borrow a dignity and to mark, so to say, a station. This is why, reading over, for revision, correction and republication, the volumes here in hand, I find myself, all attentively, in presence of some such recording scroll or engraved commemorative table – from which the "private" character, moreover, quite insists on dropping out.[18]

In this respect, James moves much further than Emerson into the exploration, or one might say, the exploitation, of his private side, to the extent that in the *Prefaces* he formulates a model of the critical act shaped on a rhetoric of intimacy, whereby the reader is offered the spectacle of the intimate, and therefore critically subtle, relations that the author establishes anew with his past and now alienated work. Pushing Emerson's lesson to an extreme, James conceives of the

[17] Ibid., 126.

[18] Henry James, *Prefaces to the New York Edition*, now in *Henry James Literary Criticism II: French Writers, Other European Writers*, ed. Leon Edel (New York: The Library of America, 1984), 1039. The quotations that follow are from this edition and will be included in brackets in the text.

critical gesture as an "intimate history" of his work, written from the standpoint of the present. The retracing of the multilayered "intimate history of the business" (1072), of the relations the author-figure entwines with their original "germ", with the characters, and with the recollections of the act of writing, enables James to weave together critical discourse, fictional language and autobiographical experience.[19] Yet, similarly to Emerson, James makes it very clear that his carefully constructed intimate relation to his work and the cunningly calculated disclosure of personality enacted throughout the *Prefaces* do not bear a "private" and merely psychological mark, but point toward a public and rhetorical function. Both Emerson and James structure their paradigm of representativeness on the basis of an unyielding rhetoric of personality that provides it with a dialogic thrust, making it operate as a relational catalyst for a wide array of social functions – be it The Sage or The Master.[20] In as much as it is the site where different orders of discourse interact and hybridize, rhetoric becomes the cognitive-linguistic category which naturally aligns with the notion of personality in Emersonian and Jamesian terms. This is why Emerson must be read by way of a slant approach, for to disengage philosophy from literature in his language is hardly possible and takes you nowhere. Likewise, James's *Prefaces* can hardly be taken at their face value, as their relationship with philosophical and theoretical categories is deeply elusive, non-systematic and often more rhetorical than conceptual. Through the influence exerted by the author's personality, the reading of both the *Essays* and the *Prefaces* approximates a living experience more than an intellectual exercise. Like the *Prefaces*, the *Essays* aim at seducing

[19] On this point, see Carlo Martinez, *L'arte della critica. Ideologia estetica e forma narrativa nelle Prefazioni di Henry James* (Roma: Bulzoni, 2001).

[20] Most of the recent work on the *Prefaces* has cast new light on a number of textual strategies whereby the traditional monologic fabric of this work bespeaks a more complex and multivocal nature. See for example: Sharon Cameron, *Thinking in Henry James* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1989); Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, "Shame and Performativity: Henry James's New York Edition Prefaces", in David McWhirter, ed., *Henry James's New York Edition: The Construction of Authorship* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995); John H. Pearson, *The Prefaces of Henry James: Framing the Modern Reader* (University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1997).

the reader: as Snyder argues, their style "is neither cognitive nor expressive, but seductive". In an early entry of the *Journal*, the Sage reports that "Not so much matter *what*, as *how* men do and speak.... Style not matter gives immortality". "Emersonian essaysm", Snyder adds, "is textualism as such: precise semantic content is minimal".[21]

"Circles" is a fine example of the way in which any consideration about form directly involves the conceptual level as well: "The life of a man is a self-evolving circle, which, from a ring imperceptibly small, rushes on all sides outwards to new and larger circles. The extent to which this generation of circles, wheel without wheel, will go, depends on the force or truth of the individual soul" (404). Such a narrative of the workings of consciousness seems to provide an important model not only for William James's notion of individual consciousness, as has often been remarked, but also for his brother's conception of it. Again, rather than a direct impact of Emerson on James, what emerges here is the possibility of establishing a link between the two on a rhetorical and discursive level. What I'm suggesting is the existence of a genealogical relation between the use and the function that Emerson and James assign to consciousness in their cultural agenda. They seem to agree on the radically relational, functional, and mobile nature of consciousness, which appears to work more as a vehicle than as a tenor. "There are no fixtures in nature", we read in "Circles"; "The universe is fluid and volatile. Permanence is but a word of degrees". And two pages later Emerson adds: "There are no fixtures to men, if we appeal to consciousness" (404). Such an unstable and versatile model for consciousness seems to preside also over the Jamesian type:

> The centre of interest throughout "Roderick" is in Rowland Mallet's consciousness, and the drama is the drama of that consciousness.... It had, naturally, Rowland's consciousness, not to be *too* acute – which would have disconnected it and made it superhuman: the beautiful little problem was to keep it connected, connected intimately, with the general human exposure....This making of his relation to everything

[21] John Snyder, *Prospects of Power: Tragedy, Satire, the Essay and the Theory of Genre* (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 1991), 192-195.

> involved a sufficiently limited, a sufficiently pathetic, tragic, comic, ironic, personal state to be thoroughly natural, and yet at the same time a sufficiently clear medium to represent a whole (1050).

Consciousness sanctions the transformation of individual experience into something representative, trans-individual, and, eventually, into the wider circle of historical understanding. It is the medium that turns personal experience into shares of cultural capital.[22] An early version of Jamesian consciousness is provided by the image of the "world's eye" that for Emerson typifies the American scholar. The highest achievement of the Emersonian scholar lies in his working as a social mediator that activates the experiential process: "He is one who raises himself from private considerations and breathes and lives on public and illustrious thoughts" (63).[23] Similarly, when James decides to tackle his past work from a critical stance, the representative authorial self is what allows for the transitivity from personal memories and reflections to a "comprehensive manual" of the art of fiction.[24] In addition, when Emerson says that "there is never a beginning, there is never an end, to the inexplicable continuity of this web of God, but always a circular power returning into itself" (55), and that all this forms a "spectacle" which most "engages" the scholar, he seems to anticipate the celebrated passage from the *Prefaces* that reads: "Really, universally, relations stop nowhere, and the exquisite problem of the artist is eternally but to draw, by a geometry of his own, the circle within which they shall happily appear to do so" (1041).

At this point, I would like to suggest that Emerson may have affected James on a more structural level, by providing an

[22] James clearly identifies this function of consciousness in Emerson when he says that "The doctrine of the supremacy of the individual to himself, of his originality and, as regards his own character, *unique* quality, must have had a great charm for people living in a society in which introspection, thanks to the want of other entertainment, played almost the part of a social resource". *Literary Criticism I*, 383.

[23] A few paragraphs later, talking about the scholar, Emerson states : "the deeper he dives into his privatest, secretest presentiment, to his wonder he finds this is the most acceptable, most public and universally true", 64.

[24] *Henry James: A Life in Letters*, ed. Philip Horne (London: Viking, 1999), 463.

epistemological model for his criticism. "Nature" best exemplifies Emerson's idea that the natural world has a textual character, with a referential function, that it is intrinsically linguistic and semiotic. Since "the axis of vision is not coincident with the axis of things", so that "they appear not transparent but opaque" (47), nature awaits an interpretation which turns out to be somehow paradoxical, when the observer discovers what he already knows because it's part of himself. Yet, being alienated from nature now, the self can no longer hope to match with it again: hence the need for an interpretation, which is new and provisional every time. In a way, one may contend that, according to Emerson, nature as a vehicle realizes nature as a tenor, but it is an unknown and never fully knowable tenor. This move is surprisingly similar to the one James performs as he begins to formulate an interpretative method for his past work in the *Prefaces*. He looks at his writings as alienated things, completely severed from the self that is now working on them: "The thing done and dismissed has ever, at the best, for the ambitious workman, a trick of looking dead, if not buried" (1120). In a way, the work of the past confronts the critic as nature does the Emersonian scholar. They both face an external object that is at once alien but also deeply connected to them. How is it possible to establish anew a relation with this not-me which is also a part of me? Like Emersonian nature, for the author reborn as critic, the work of the past is a network of possible relations, a world of analogies weaving together the self and his writings, in an endless game of reversals where the self and the work are connected by a fluid transitivity.

As Carl Strauch has argued, sympathy is the most significant medium employed by Emerson to establish a relation with external reality in general and with nature in particular. It is through sympathy that the self becomes a "transparent eyeball", capable "to see all" and to set in motion the interpretative process.[25] At this point, nature becomes "an object of the intellect". I do not wish to get into the Emersonian version of the doctrine of sympathy. What I am trying to offer here is a tentative sketch of how the working of sympathy in

[25] Carl F. Strauch, "Emerson and the Doctrine of Sympathy", *Studies in Romanticism* 6:3 (Spring 1967), 152-174.

Emerson could have endowed James with a suitable blueprint for establishing his own interpretative method. When James talks of his past work in terms of old pictures that he, like a painter, puts on the easel again, to evaluate the effects of time, he says that if the work proves to be a good one, then "creative intimacy is reaffirmed, and appreciation, critical apprehension, insists on becoming as active as it can". The means to recover the creative intimacy is feeling. In an earlier essay, "The Science of Criticism", James writes that in order to accomplish his task the critic has "to lend himself, to project himself and steep himself, to feel and feel till he understands".[26] The way that leads to critical understanding is thus opened by an act of feeling rather than by theoretical reasoning. A complex, multivocal and pervasive rhetoric of intimacy underpins the *Prefaces*, joining together the critical and the creative gesture, thus turning the authoritative but romantically oriented Emersonian doctrine of sympathy into a powerful tool for modern critical analysis.

Finally, in discussing retrospectively the sense of what he has been doing throughout his career as a writer, James finds that this sense can only be that of keeping in touch as much as possible with "the conditions of life": "I have found revision intensify my impulse intimately to answer to those conditions" (1340). These conditions of life are, precisely, conditions. Not a metaphysical or fixed entity, but an ever-changing reality.

> The whole conduct of life consists of things done, which do other things in their turn ... We recognize betimes that to "put" things is very exactly and responsibly and interminably to do them. Our expression of them, and the terms on which we understand that, belongs as nearly to our conduct and our life as every other feature of our freedom (1340).

Thus, James ends his critical investigation by facing the question of "the conduct of life". Maybe it's not entirely coincidental that Emerson, too, had ended his own career investigating the implications that "the conduct of life" entails. J. Hillis Miller points out that these

[26] Henry James, Jr., "The Science of Criticism", now in *Literary Criticism I*, 99.

last pages from the *Prefaces* show a "mixture of the colloquial and oratorical, which belongs to a peculiarly American tradition of moral reflection, the tradition, for example, of Emerson". Certainly, the issue at stake here engages the question of the responsibility of the authorial voice with reference to a larger, social context and function. To "put things" in words, as Miller argues after James, is "to do them"; so that to use words equals doing things in a very matter-of-fact way, things we must take and claim responsibility for.[27] It's exactly this responsibility that Emerson fully takes on, when he writes his essays as the result of an act of reading. To read, that is to say to interpret, is to set things in motion which, to use James's words, "do other things in turn", in an endless chain.

One could read Emerson's *Essays* as a unique and unrelenting effort to keep his discourse, at all times, within the "conditions of life", regardless of the consequences: looseness, fluidity, overdetermination, unstable vehicles and tenors, contradiction. Emerson's *Essays* do not tell how and what things mean; he knows he cannot make the axis of things entirely coincide with the axis of vision or with the axis of language. Yet, he also knows that to use words is to do things one is asked to stand for, as James is well aware that to interpret is to make things happen, to give the handing down of experience another turn of the screw.

[27] J. Hillis Miller, *The Ethics of Reading: Kant, de Man, Eliot, Trollope, James, and Benjamin* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1987), 107.

... AND BEYOND

Christina Lupton

Making the Rules That Are Already Clear: Franklin's Letter on Literary Style [1]

When, in 1733, Benjamin Franklin published his letter "On Literary Style" in the *Pennsylvania Gazette*, he addressed a topic of potential controversy for the colonial reader.[2] Literary style, understood as it was in the metropolitan circles of the 1730s in connection with ideas of taste, disinterest, and gentlemanly exchange, posed important problems of identity for writers – and printers – who appealed to an equally cosmopolitan audience in the towns of British America. As an editor, Franklin was intimately acquainted with the need to strike a balance between practical information, local controversy and erudite editorial comment in the material he published. In 1729, when he and Hugh Meredith took over ownership of the *Pennsylvania Gazette*, the paper lacked a sufficient body of advertisers and subscribers, and Franklin set out to remedy this deficit in making the publication "as agreeable and useful an Entertainment as the Nature of the Thing [would] allow".[3] Yet, far from moving in a literary direction under his control, Franklin's *Gazette* was much more focused on news than it had been under its previous editor, Samuel Keimer. Franklin had been closely involved with the problems of his brother James's *New-England Courant* less

[1] I would like to thank Myra Jehlen and Joseph Chaves for their careful readings of this piece: no readers could have shown better the importance of style. All errors in this respect and others remain, of course, my own.

[2] I am using the version of "On Literary Style" published in Labree et al., eds., *The Papers of Benjamin Franklin* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1959), vol. 1, 328-331.

[3] Labree et al., *Franklin's Works*, vol. 1, 159. During these first ten years as printer of the paper, Franklin also heavily increased the amount of advertising in the *Gazette.*

than a decade earlier in Boston, had seen the *Gazette* flounder under Keimer, and was therefore well aware that style mattered to his potential readers: the derivatively British style of editorial debate, controversy and wit of these earlier papers had failed to find an easy resonance with their local communities.[4]

During the decades when Franklin established his own style as a writer and editor, literary style therefore presented special problems in colonial America. It was implicated in the attempt to find a language for a republican body of people – a challenge which underscored the important impersonal, representational quality of print that was so important to Franklin.[5] At the same time, however, printed discourse continued to overlap powerfully with the still developing oral culture of colonial America. In the 1740s the flamboyant itinerant ministers of the Great Awakenings relied, for instance, on both the dissemination of sermons in print and on a style of speech and forms of oral accountability which would remain characteristic of a national language.[6] While writers like Franklin, his brother James, or his friend James Ralph, willingly drew their models of literary accomplishment from across the Atlantic, literary figures of the Revolutionary period sought terms of address that were characteristically American. Intersecting with both printed and oral forms of language were a utilitarian resistance to the excesses of rhetoric and a Puritan tradition of allegorical reading, both of which

[4] For a full account of the history and development of the *Pennsylvania Gazette* under Keimer, Franklin and Hall, see Charles E. Clark and Charles Wetherell, "The Measure of Maturity: The Pennsylvania Gazette, 1728-1765", *William and Mary Quarterly*, third series, 46: 2 (April 1989), 279-303. This article suggests – and I would like to stress – that the particular problem of finding what Clark and Wetherell refer to as a "local vision" for the Pennsylvania paper by no means prevented its editors from maintaining a strong focus on Britain and Europe. Clark and Wetherell's historical article does not address questions of tone and style as such, but one way to think about the way in which Franklin localized the paper is through this attention to style rather than content, which was largely guided by foreign interests and models even under his editorship.

[5] Michael Warner, *The Letters of the Republic: Publication and the Public Sphere in Eighteenth-Century America* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1990).

[6] For a full discussion of the oral culture of eighteenth-century America, see Sandra Gustafson, *Eloquence Is Power: Oratory and Performance in Early America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000). Gustafson contends here with arguments such as Michael Warner's stressing the importance of printed letters in colonial America.

continued to underpin a style such as Franklin's in making early American literary language something which resisted the idea of language as entertaining or aesthetically pleasing.[7]

Written with these areas of controversy in mind, Franklin's "On Literary Style" nevertheless works hard to present literary style as something self-evident. The short piece, submitted anonymously to "the Printer", not only claims that every author should be able to stand back from his work while aspiring "to write *clearly*", but also assumes a reader who will be able to judge this writing style intuitively. Franklin's characteristic emphasis on the advantages of anonymity suggests, moreover, that this act of judgment is facilitated by a reader's ignorance of the author or context of a piece.[8] Despite the fact that a stylistic ideal was far from settled as an object of agreement among the current or potential readers of the *Pennsylvania Gazette*, the tautology at work in this claim takes as its cause an ideally transparent language; it assumes literary style as the perfect object of unbiased judgment. Franklin's way of making this argument is, moreover, a case in point, suggestive of his wider ability to handle the argumentative terrain in which something he ostensibly refers to – the reader; the object of literary style – is explicitly made even in the process of its being assumed. His *Autobiography*, for instance, famously links the language of faithful description with what most critics now recognize as a highly self-aware process of self invention.[9]

[7] See, for instance, Bernard Bailyn's discussion of the simple nature of most American pamphlets compared to their British counterparts in *The Ideological Origins of the American Revolution* (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1967), 12.

[8] It is interesting that in 1745, Franklin extended his praise of reader as a judge of anonymous writing to the entire American readership as particularly endowed with the quality of impartiality. Franklin wrote to William Strahan: "Your Authors know but little of the Fame they have on this Side of the Ocean. We are a kind of Posterity in respect to them. We read their Works with perfect Impartiality, being at too great a Distance to be bypassed by the Fashions, Parties and Prejudices that prevail among you. We know nothing of their personal Failings; the Blemishes in their character never reach us, and therefore the bright and amiable Part strikes us with full force". Labree et al., *Franklin's Works*, vol. 3, 13.

[9] The two best studies to take account of the rhetorical nature of the *Autobiography* as a text which stands in for any more authentic idea of Franklin's self are Mitchell Breitwieser, *Cotton Mather and Benjamin Franklin: The Price of Representative Personality* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984) and Michael Warner, *Letters*.

The focus of this article is the structure of assertion that allows Franklin to manage the potential contradiction involved in claiming something as true while, at the time, acknowledging that it is a truth being made. Although the discussion which follows is quite local in its attention to the case of "On Literary Style", the wider implications of this argument suggest that the colonial discourse of common sense was more generally adept at making and describing things in the same rhetorical move than its British counterpart. A now classic example of this argument is Jay Fliegelman's reading of the *Declaration of Independence*, which suggests that the freedom being declared by Jefferson as a necessity and a fact of nature – "We … solemnly publish and declare that these united colonies are and of right ought to be free" – is conspicuously performed by the *Declaration* as a truth that must be won. For Fliegelman, this is not a contradiction or ambiguity, but a sign of dialectical productivity:

> the tension in the Declaration between the description of independence as the necessary consequence of George's action and the document's own status as a performative utterance carried…the dynamic between willful determination and determinism, efficacy and necessitarianism … into proto-Hegelian meditation.[10]

Whether or not we accept the full force of Fliegelman's claim to see the roots of the dialectic of self-consciousness in Jefferson's rhetorical performance, his claim can be contrasted with a general body of reflections on British eighteenth-century discourse. Throughout the last decades of the twentieth century it has become something of a commonplace to point out that what eighteenth-century writers claim to be objectively describing – whether this is the nature of racial difference, the availability of the natural world to human discovery and development, or the characteristics of gender – are in fact products of the highly proactive ideology which the language of reason conceals. For instance, recent critics of the period have focused on the way that taste and sentiment work for early

[10] Jay Fliegelman, *Declaring Independence: Jefferson, Natural Language and the Culture of Performance* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1993), 151.

eighteenth-century authors. Of course, so the argument goes, Shaftesbury, Addison, Hutcheson, or Hume imagine themselves describing the innate preference of their readers for certain forms of aesthetic experience over others – but in reality these authors conceal the fact that to encounter the world naturally in these terms is actually to occupy a very specific, materially and sexually privileged subject position which is inscribed by the Enlightenment at the center of the reasonable world view.[11]

On this front, what is different about Fliegelman's claim for Jefferson is that it suggests that the axioms of reason which are asserted in the *Declaration* are, at an important level, aware that they are not natural. These are terms of liberty that appear as if they were common sense, but which consistently display the fact that they have still to become so. If we turn this argument in the direction of Franklin, it appears possible that the language of simplicity and clarity – this object of commonsensical agreement – which he offers to his reader as a literary style evidently superior to others, also advertises the fact that it is not automatically so. The process of subject-formation, the formation of a self-aware reading public, and the obfuscation of the embodied author, which stand to be revealed as operations hidden in the concept of taste favored in British publications like the *Spectator*, appear in this light to be relatively open in Franklin's account of what it means to write well.

Most simply described, Franklin's "On Literary Style" consists of a set of instructions for how prose should be written and delivered. All of these invectives comfortably echo the "simplicity, precision, order and trenchant pointedness" which critics have long associated with Franklin's own literary practice.[12] According to Franklin, the author should try to remain anonymous, his prose should be simple

[11] Important examples of such analysis include Terry Eagleton, *The Ideology of the Aesthetic* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1990), John Barrell's work on eighteenth-century painting, and Ronald Paulson, *Breaking and Remaking: Aesthetic Practice in England, 1700-1820* (New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1989). Paulson, for instance, argues that "the Shaftesburian man of good taste … is rendered capable of having taste by the ownership of property that, by precluding the need for labor, confers on him disinterestedness" (5).

[12] These adjectives are used to describe Franklin's prose by Chester Jorgensen, "Sidelights on Benjamin Franklin's Rhetoric", *Revue Anglo-Americaine* 11 (1933), 108.

and self-evident to all who read it, and writing in general should aim at the improvement of either the reader's knowledge or his virtue. The view of good writing that Franklin expresses here participates in the widely shared eighteenth-century belief that plain style was the new and appropriate language of communication for an expanding trans-Atlantic network of readers in scientific and literary communities. Echoing the neo-classical ideals of Swift, Addison, Johnson and Hume, Franklin supports the ideals of order, precision and correctness which were more generally present in the eighteenth-century attempt to standardize English as a modern literary language. His terms also support the contravention of Renaissance rhetoric which can be associated with the Enlightenment more generally, and with the tradition of plain style specifically, in setting up "a mode of discourse conceived as neutral, nonpositional, and transparent" in place of an ornate language of communication between known individuals.[13] The attack on rhetoric which Franklin carries through when he argues that "Phrases, like learned Words, are seldom used without Affection" and that "If a Man would that his Writings have an Effect on the Generality of Readers, he had better imitate that Gentleman, who would have no Word in his Works that was not well understood by his Cook-maid" can be connected to the language of modern science which, in the works of Bacon, Galileo, and Descartes, replaced the language of positionality and social hierarchy with a form of expression allowing readers and writers to imagine themselves as equal and interchangeable participants in a language of observation. "The Author of a Gazette", wrote Franklin as he took over from Keimer as printer of the *Gazette*, "ought to be qualified with an extensive Acquaintance with Languages, a great Easiness and Command of Writing and relating Things cleanly and intelligibly, and in few Words".[14]

If this language of dualistic thought provides, on the one hand, the world as an object to be cleanly communicated, it appeals, on the

[13] John Bender and David E. Wellberry, "Rhetoricality: On the Modernist Return of Rhetoric", in John Bender and David E. Wellbery, eds., *The Ends of Rhetoric: History, Theory, Practice* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1990), 7-8. This article provides an excellent account of the demise of rhetoric in the eighteenth century more generally.

[14] Labree et al., *Franklin's Works*, vol. 1, 158.

other, to the subject as an observer of this world. As Franklin suggests, the ideal literary style speaks to – and depends for its definition of success upon – the comprehension of a new kind of reader. This new reader is not only part of the wider and more anonymous audience made possible by print, but also situated as an individual whose felt response matters to the kudos and identity of a text. Modern men of letters, such as Franklin's correspondent and admirer David Hume, looked to the public rather than to a patron for support of their texts, as well as to a reader for whom judgments of taste would arise from an intuitive (rather than cognitive) experience of approval.[15] With its emphasis on the affective response of the reader, and open appeal to the criteria of common sense, Hume's work, like Franklin's, was at the center of what Siskin describes as "the locus of stylistic efforts to engage a growing reading public through then innovative gestures of sympathetic identification".[16] These two poles of experience – the objectified world, and the affective subject – are both rendered transparent by the version of literary style which Franklin advocates.

Described in this way, it becomes clear that Franklin qualifies as a representative of the Enlightenment from the point of view of its best known twentieth-century critics. Max Horkheimer, Theodor Adorno and Michel Foucault have, in their respective ways, challenged the dualism of subject and object which Franklin's language of transparency promotes. Yet what marks Franklin's description of literary style as so specific in the landscape of enlightenment discourse is that "On Literary Style" makes its general assertions in the turbulent context of an argument which must simultaneously demonstrate the kind of prose it advocates. Evidence for the stylistic logic which Franklin promotes is not located in texts to which Franklin refers his reader – apart from a fleeting reference to Tilloston, canonical examples of good prose are conspicuously absent

[15] Hume, for instance, begins his *Treatise* in 1739, with the claim that "The approbation of the public I consider as the greatest reward of my labors; but am determined to regard its judgment, whatever it may be, as my best instruction". *A Treatise of Human Nature* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978), i.

[16] Clifford Siskin, *The Work of Writing: Literature and Social Change in Britain, 1700-1830* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998), 97.

from his argument – but is constructed in a language determined to serve as its own referent. This doubling of language as medium and object complicates the straightforward rationalism which we might otherwise associate with Franklin's view of language.

The first paragraph of his letter suggests that, unlike other polite accomplishments, writing is often overlooked because precisely at the high point of its execution, it dwindles into a less visible accomplishment than the other requirements of polite society. For Franklin, the aim of language is to protect the "native Force and Beauty" of proper sentiments and just reasoning rather than to produce such experiences as a novelty within language.[17] In keeping with this insight, Franklin introduces his own commentary on style via the trope of scientific observation: he deliberately assumes the position of the scientist whose duty is to record what he sees and claims that in addressing the topic of writing well he will "frankly communicate the Observations I have made or collected on this Subject, and request those of others in return". Rather than claiming any authority as an author who practices what he advocates, and whose observations must consist of a mode of self-reflection, Franklin asks that we imagine style as a natural object which he keeps in view even as he picks up his pen to describe it.

Yet this is also the first sign in Franklin's letter of how wryly askew Franklin as a stylist is going to wear the cap of the scientist. While his ideal of transparency remains meaningful because of the independence of the object to which it seems to refer, Franklin's use of this ideal in the context of language itself openly undermines the stability of the distinction between the thing being viewed and the transparency of the medium which makes it visible. The next sentence suggests that Franklin is well aware of his bind as a scientist of style: "I have thought in general, that whoever would write so as not to displease good Judges, should have particular Regard to these three Things, viz. That his Performance be smooth, clear, and short".

[17] John Lynen, "Benjamin Franklin and the Choice of a Single Point of View", in Sacvan Bercovitch, *The American Puritan Imagination: Essays in Revaluation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1974), points out that it is one of the greatest paradoxes of Franklin's life that he practiced the art of seeing from a transcendental point of view so successfully, that he is commonly judged "no artist at all" (192-193).

Reverting to the provisional "I have thought", Franklin cannot help but defer to the judges for whom he writes; if there is an experiment taking place it is not one he merely observes but one he is bound to enact, and which explicitly calls upon his reader to act too. From now on, clarity, length and smoothness are introduced as categories through which to understand the experiment we are involved in; their status as abstract terms linked to the reader, whose own discrimination must now work through them. Thus when the essay considers the effect of omitting vowels from words like "judged" or "disturbed" in favor of "judg'd" or "disturb'd", it does so almost without comment, leaving to logical inference the superiority of the former.

Franklin's argument comes closest to relying upon the axiomatic in addressing the good judge of plain style; implying the self whose presence as reader of the essay is repeatedly invoked as proof of the argument being enacted. Does this not please you, Franklin seems to ask of the "true Judges" for whom "the simplest Style is the most beautiful"? It is this self, "his Dear Reader", to whom he seems so confidently to turn at the end of the piece in handing over the reigns of judgment and admitting his apprehension "lest I should be guilty of every Fault I condemn and deficient in every Thing I commend". This is the self whose common sense, authenticity and rationality had been situated at the center of a metropolitan practice of *belles lettres* by the writers upon whom Franklin modeled his own practice – Shaftesbury, Swift, Addison and Steele – and whose presence as reader would continue to serve the standard of taste and sensibility around which so many of the great projects of the eighteenth century circled.

The claim to an innate taste for the rational, which Franklin celebrates in the reader of the *Pennsylvania Gazette,* of course reflects his wish that such a reader could be found. Franklin favored a staunchly anti-partisan, aloof and reasonable subject position and maintained this ideal throughout the colonial and Revolutionary periods. This vision of broad appeal and transcendent understanding was readily mapped onto the imagined body of American people in terms pre-emptive, rather than reflective, of national self-understanding. Observing the particular brand of authority proper to republican print discourse, Michael Warner has stressed that this involves "the pretense that representative democracy derives its

legitimacy from the people and their law, when in fact it performs what it claims to describe. A way of representing the people constructs the same people".[18]

In effect, Franklin's letter willfully assumes that a temperate and rational reader already exists in the Philadelphia community. Many of his pieces published in the *Pennsylvania Gazette* during the first years of the 1730s appeal to the reader's approval of simplicity and frankness.[19] Yet, in "On Literary Style", Franklin also admits that the reader who becomes so pivotal in confirming the self-evidence of the simplicity being practiced, and whose preference for "judged" over "judg'd" is assumed, is in the process of being tutored into being as the letter unfolds. Franklin calls on "Men of Capacity for making any considerable Figure in Life" to improve their style of writing, leaving open the sense that his "Dear Reader" emerges as a result of correct choices rather than as a matter of course. In the world of polite letters, where the idea of taste seems to repel the ideology of educating readers, Franklin flaunts the fact that subject as cause and subject as effect of his logic overlap. Although the reader is credited with innate powers of discrimination, "On Literary Style" stands out less for the way in which it conceals its ideological work of educating readers than for the way in which it reveals the possibility that this reader will come into existence as he or she takes the lessons of the letter to heart. For Franklin, preference and style refuse to pretend to a chronology of separation, rejecting the artifice of a rhetorical practice in which subject and object exist as prior to the moment in which they flash up in representation.

"On Literary Style" confounds this sequential logic because it shows that two temporalities, one the permanence of print, the other the immediacy of the readerly performance, insistently overlap. Franklin's close relationship to print has been well documented, most notably by Michael Warner. As a printer, and as a writer for whom the medium of print was able to embody a transcendent and representative perspective, Franklin was well aware that print could embody the virtues of an ideally impersonal stance. It is no surprise,

[18] Warner, *Letters*, xiv.

[19] Anthony Afterwit, for example, complains of his wife's extravagant tastes and circumvents them with the assumption that he shares virtues of frugality with his reader. Labree et al, *Franklin's Works*, vol. 1, 237-240.

then, that the printedness of Franklin's argument appears as a condition of its logic: it is because "in some Degree it concerns the Credit of the Province, that such Things as are printed be performed tolerably well" that "mutual Improvement seems to be the Duty of all Lovers of Writing". Printing is made responsible in these terms for the fact that the writer can take stock of his own position as something which he approaches judiciously with an eye to "mutual Improvement". The externalization of the writer's thoughts as print provides the form of self-relation that underpins this meditation on his own presentation. Style, as Franklin wants us to understand it, is available to scrutiny as an object precisely because words get "bound down upon Paper and subjected to the calm, leisurely Examination of nice Judgment", and it is precisely this distinction between the Sermon or Speech (for which Franklin's letter dictates quite other rules) and print that Franklin relies on when he claims that style has an objective existence he merely observes. The complex way in which he undoes this claim to objectivity, by acting out his imbrication in the rules he has prescribed, remains beholden to the printed form of the letter as a rhetorical unit in which Franklin's characteristic self-effacement as author nevertheless leaves a material and objective trace behind.

At the same time, the letter remains consciously linked to the idea of performance which is not "bound down" to print. Its longest paragraph is devoted to a discussion of the liberty which may be allowed to the speaker, particularly when it comes to his or her right to speak at greater length than the writer: "Let them have the Liberty of repeating the same Sentence in other Words; let them put an Adjective to every Substantive, and double every Substantive with a Synomia; for this is more agreeable than hauking, spitting, taking Snuff, or any other means of concealing Hesitation". As the paragraph unfolds, it becomes clear that Franklin can take delight in disobeying his own instructions; in three successive sentences he repeats the idea that repetition, which ought not to be performed on paper, can be an attribute of speech. This strain of alliteration suggests a version of entertainment which would come from the letter being read aloud, and it seems clear here, as with the demonstration of judged being naturally preferable to "judg'd", that Franklin imagines this performative life as a significant circumstance of the letter's publication. His acute sense of what will offend "the Ear"

and "the Patience" in a written piece suggests a forum in which reading depends, at least for its model of pleasure, on the possibility of the text being heard.

These references connect the printed version of "On Literary Style" to what was in all likelihood its first appearance, as a piece read aloud to Franklin's private society, the Junto. Founded in 1727, the Junto was a group of Philadelphian citizens who met regularly to discuss matters of public interest in the city. The format of their meetings consisted largely of queries posed and responded to by members, and "On Literary Style" began life as a response to a query posed by the society.[20] The fact that the piece was performed, or at least intended to be performed, suggests the strong culture of oral dissemination in which even Franklin, the colony's strongest advocate of print, participated. And this material double life of the text as speech and newspaper piece also suggests that Franklin took real interest in the relationship between the immediacy of his own oral performance and the printed object's permanence and impersonality. His critique of "judg'd" invites the intuitive compliance of an auditor not a reader: it is because it increases the offense of "Hissing" that it can quickly be deemed inappropriate. Yet at the level of print the character of "judg'd" as a word awkwardly spoken would hardly stand out from the litany of contractions that Franklin uses as a composer of the piece. "Design'd", "ill-natur'd", and "allow'd" appear within "On Literary Style" as legitimate to the printed form of English which Franklin used and promoted. The frequency of these printed contractions within the piece – greater than even Franklin would normally have used – suggests that Franklin took great care with the typographic arrangement as it was printed, distinguishing the text deliberately from the oral presentation which remains alive within its printed form.[21]

In focusing simultaneously on these printed and oral incarnations of his own text, Franklin provides the two registers between which his

[20] See Sparks, *Works*, vol. 11, 553, where Franklin's rough draft is published. "On Literary Style" has been identified as Franklin's work because of this rough draft which, although not demonstrating conclusively that it was performed for the Junto, also shows that it was prepared as an inquiry for the club.

[21] I am grateful to Christopher Looby for pointing out this specificity of "On Literary Style" in his reading of this article.

own logic moves. On the one hand, his sense is that style can be objectively observed, "bound down on Paper" and made available, even – perhaps most importantly – to its own author, as a product which has passed over into the realm of objects for which he or she is no longer responsible. On the other hand, Franklin is aware of the occasion which keeps print in dialogue with the contingencies and validations of subjective reception. This sense of event knits the general terms of announcements disowned by their author to the here and now of each single performance, in which the political affectivity of words relies upon the immediate experience of a reader who must participate in the drama of illumination by making it his or her own. Rather than simply staging a contest between print and orality, Franklin pegs standards for both the 'ear' and 'eye' of the reader. Thus, while the conventions of printed language should, Franklin suggests, be subject to an objective standard, the effect of "judg'd" remains contingent upon how it is heard. If style is to be treated as something to be observed as 'out there' in the world, then Franklin's "Dear Reader" must be willing to treat his or her own reading of the letter as an act of recognition linking the general principles involved to the time of his or her own experience. In this sense the piece acts as an experiment in which the procedure set up to take place is really only activated by it being read.

Here it is important to remember that at the height of the American Enlightenment, where objective language was used to claim the greatest degrees of autonomy for writers, and often literally appeared in the guise of anonymous argument – Thomas Paine's *Common Sense* and Franklin's *Plain Truth* are examples of anonymously written texts asserting this kind of authority – the cultivation of the reader's felt response was a vital correlate to the ostensibly impersonal dictates of reason. Writing of Franklin's prose, Fliegelman has argued that "what energizes a great deal of the polemical prose of the period is the dialectical relation between the authority of the impersonality rooted in the discourse of descriptive science and the authority of sincerity rooted in affective experience".[22] Indeed, many

[22] Fliegelman, *Declaring Independence*, 128. Douglas Anderson, *The Radical Enlightenments of Benjamin Franklin* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997), also foregrounds the more complex embeddedness of Franklin's civic sensibility in

of Franklin's pieces can be described in this way, as exploiting an impersonal and aphoristic register, but at the same time engaging the specific and incidental co-ordinates which link a text to a dynamic of personal recognition. Franklin's almanac, for instance, closely positions its aphorisms in terms of the historical day on which they are to be read, often using this intersection to cast aspersions on their objective sense.[23] Thus when Franklin explains with a note of indifference to his sister that his texts are objects he no sooner writes than disowns – "written occasionally for transient Purposes, and having done their Business, they die and are forgotten. I could as easily make a Collection for you of all the past Parings of my Nails"[24] – this is not to be mistaken for a sign that he is indifferent about how they are to be read. On the contrary, the independent status which Franklin gives to his 'nail-parings' of text suggests that their value depends upon the way in which they are received.

The tension Franklin so masterfully does away with as he denies the property of an author over a text reappears as a possible realm of tension between the text and the reader, whose amusement, common sense, approval and understanding remain uncertain in the outcome of the experiment being performed. "On Literary Style" commits itself to moving in this way between the claim to objectivity and the performance of contingency: it enacts the greatest kind of transcendence from the thing it investigates, yet simultaneously reveals that this attempt at objectivity puts the reader in a self-conscious position from where it is obvious that style can never finally be bracketed out from the immediacy of experience.

In this sense "On Literary Style" confounds the idea of Franklin as an easy target for critiques of enlightenment rationality. This does not necessarily overturn the position of a critic like Mitchell Breitwieser, who has put Horkheimer and Adorno's description of the "abstract self" effectively to work in describing Franklin's masterfully disembodied rationality. Quoting Horkheimer and Adorno's *Dialectic*

those rhetorical traditions which are founded, via the "objectivity" of language, on a civil agreement between author and audience.

[23] Anderson, *Radical Enlightenments*, 115.

[24] Franklin, Letter to Jane Mecom, Dec 24th, 1767 in Leo Lemay, *Franklin's Writings* (New York: Library of America, 1987), 829.

of Enlightenment, Breitwieser refers to Franklin's compulsive desire to reduce everything to mathematical and conceptual units: "The abstract self, which justifies record-making and systemization, has nothing set over against it but the abstract material which possesses no other quality than to be a substrate of such possession".[25] Yet in the case of style, Franklin's abstraction from self also introduces that dialectical understanding of the self's involvement in making the natural world which Horkheimer and Adorno find pointedly lacking in the Enlightenment's self understanding. In showing so fully the way in which literary style as an object is caught up in a process where it is created by and creates subjects, Franklin not only forecasts but embodies many aspects of theories (including that German tradition of dialectical materialism) which reproach the language of objectivity for setting up truth as something accessible from outside experience.

Although "On Literary Style" in many ways supports the ideal of reason, Franklin's object of style also confounds Rupert Hall's description of a scientific revolution led by men who "believed in a real, ordered natural creation, independent of man but rationally knowable by man … and would have rejected as both irreligious and unphilosophical the notion that nature might be in a fundamental sense unknowable and indeterminate".[26] On the contrary, Franklin's "On Literary Style" is an explicitly dialectical abstraction, separated from human life only in a way that incorporates within itself recognition of its own provisionality. In using the language of empiricism to describe things as openly made as self and style, Franklin's most rational of performances willingly pushes the language of empiricism to extremes where its transparency as a medium is risked and its creative power revealed.

[25] Quoted in Breitwieser, *Mather and Franklin*, 230.

[26] Rupert Hall, *The Revolution in Science 1500-1750* (London: Longman, 1983), 360.

Pierre A. Walker

Henry James's *The Portrait of a Lady* as a Political Novel

Without question, the primary trend in scholarly study on James, at least in North America, during the last fifteen or so years has been to show the considerable extent to which James and his writing were materially and politically engaged. Virtually all the important books on James since at least the mid-1980's, and especially Michael Anesko's *"Friction with the Market"*, Ross Posnock's *The Trial of Curiosity* and John Carlos Rowe's *The Other Henry James*, have been central to this project.[1] These and other books were written against the view of James that predominated in Anglo-American scholarship

[1] Michael Anesko, *"Friction with the Market": Henry James and the Profession of Authorship* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986); Ross Posnock, *The Trial of Curiosity: Henry James, William James, and the Challenge of Modernity* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991); John Carlos Rowe, *The Other Henry James* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1998). Other recent scholarly work that has helped present James's career and writing in its political light include Sara Blair, *Henry James and the Writing of Race and Nation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996); Mona Ozouf, *La Muse démocratique: Henry James ou les pouvoirs du roman* (Paris: Calmann-Lévy, 1998); and Kenneth W. Warren, *Black and White Strangers: Race and American Literary Realism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993). My own modest contributions to this scholarly project consist of *Henry James on Culture: Collected Essays on Politics and the American Social Scene*, ed. Pierre A. Walker (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2001), and "'Adina': Henry James's Roman Allegory of Power and the Representation of the Foreign", *Henry James Review* 21 (2000), 14-26. The other prominent trend in James scholarship, beginning with Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's famous article, "The Beast in the Closet: Henry James and the Writing of Homosexual Panic", in Ruth Bernard Yeazell, ed., *Sex, Politics, and Science in the Nineteenth-Century Novel* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986), 161-186, and continuing

throughout the middle of the twentieth century. During that time, both the critics who liked James *and* those who did not had the same reason: that James's fiction seemed to transcend the ordinary world of politics and that James, therefore, could be transformed into an apostle of art. For his admirers, James became a quintessential example of a high Modernist belief in the transcendent value of art. As Posnock wrote in his survey of mid-twentieth-century evaluations of James's literary reputation, "James has often been enlisted as a canonical modernist upholding an idealist dichotomy that opposes art to life", which is why James's admirers, "F. Scott Fitzgerald, Edmund Wilson, and Richard Blackmur, among others, joined Pound and Eliot ... in declaring their veneration of the Master".[2] But to James's detractors, according to Posnock, this same "idealist dichotomy" was the reason for "reducing James to an artistically brilliant but shallow novelist essentially detached from social reality".[3] Thus, James was admired and maligned for the same reason: that his writing appeared to attempt to rise above the material world and the politics of human, social life.

The Modernist view of James presupposed that the world of art was independent of materialism and politics, that James himself cared little for the material, political world, and that his fiction reflects both these presuppositions. But the political readings of James that we have seen in the last fifteen or so years have made it increasingly difficult to hold these presuppositions about James. The high Modernist view that James and his writing were above politics fails if we look at the biographical evidence, if we look at his career as a writer, and if we look at a specific, fictional text, such as James's best-known novel, *The Portrait of a Lady*, which demonstrates that human life, and especially women's lives, independent of the politics of social life cannot be realized.

with the more recent publications of such work as Hugh Stevens's *Henry James and Sexuality* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), John Bradley's edited collection, *Henry James and Homo-Erotic Desire* (London: Macmillan, 1999), and Wendy Graham's *Henry James's Thwarted Love* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1999), has been the exploration of issues of gender and sexuality in James.

[2] Posnock, *Trial of Curiosity*, 55, 60.

[3] Ibid., 63.

The idea that James was above politics, in the sense of politics as national and international affairs, is certainly belied by the biographical evidence, as we can see – to give but just one, short example – from his relationship with his early editor and mentor and long-time friend, Charles Eliot Norton. Norton became editor of the *North American Review* in October 1863; in October 1864 and during 1865, this review published James's seven first known book reviews.[4] While James published no political commentary in the *North American Review*, he must have known that under Norton's editorship, the *Review* was highly committed to its political role, as Norton's biographer, James Turner, tells us. Norton talked of the *Review* "influencing public opinion"; he wanted it to "represent the best & most advanced thought of America on questions of politics & literature";[5] and "He meant the *North American* to weigh heavily not only in debates over wartime and postwar policy but also in scholarship, literature, and the arts".[6]

We can assume that James knew something of his editor's political aims for the *Review* from the fact that in James's considerable, surviving correspondence over the years with Norton, James engages Norton's interest in political events. In letter after letter to Norton, James solicits his friend's opinion on events. To give three early examples: in his 4, 5 February 1872 letter James wrote to Norton about reactions to a likely treaty between England and the United States over American Civil War reparations; three months later, in his 6 May [1872] letter to Norton, James discusses the likelihood of Horace Greeley's winning presidential votes away from Ulysses S. Grant; and in his 18 April [1869] letter to Norton's sister, Grace, James asks her what her brother thinks of two contemporary political events: the naming of a new American ambassador to England and the

[4] James Turner, *The Liberal Education of Charles Eliot Norton* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999), 187; Leon Edel and Dan H. Laurence, *A Bibliography of Henry James*, Third Edition (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1982), 291-292.

[5] Charles Eliot Norton, quoted in Turner, *Charles Eliot Norton*, 187-188.

[6] Turner, *The Liberal Education of Charles Eliot Norton*, 188.

continued lack of resolution between England and the United States over Civil War reparations.[7]

Not only did James write about political events in his private letters, but he also did so for publication. Amongst his non-fiction is a significant body of articles on contemporary political issues, especially two groups of published essays: four articles of political commentary that James wrote in 1878-1879 for the American magazines, *Lippincott's* and the *Nation*, and seven more articles written in 1915 on the beginning of World War I.[8]

One might want to argue that the 1878-79 political commentary articles were hack work written solely for money and that, therefore, they don't represent James's primary interests as a writer. It is no doubt at least partly true that James wrote these articles in order to be paid, but then he expected to be paid for everything he wrote, including *The Portrait of a Lady*, his great, canonical masterpiece, which, as Anesko and others have shown, James marketed as carefully as anything he ever wrote.[9] And even if James's primary

[7] Henry James, manuscript letter to Charles Eliot Norton, 4, 5 February 1872, Houghton Library, Harvard University, reprinted in Leon Edel, ed., *Henry James Letters* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1974), vol. 1, 272, and in Philip Horne, ed., *Henry James: A Life in Letters* (London: Allen Lane, 1999), 46; James, manuscript letter to Norton, 6 May [1872], Houghton Library, Harvard University, reprinted in Edel, ed., *Henry James Letters*, vol. 1, 277; James, unpublished manuscript letter to Grace Norton, 18 April [1869], Houghton Library, Harvard University.

[8] "The British Soldier", *Lippincott's Magazine* 22 (August 1878), 214-221; "The Afghan Difficulty", *Nation* 27, 14 November 1878, 298-299; "The Early Meeting of Parliament", *Nation* 27, 26 December 1878, 397-398; "The Reassembling of Parliament", *Nation* 28, 20 March 1879, 197-199; "The American Volunteer Motor-Ambulance Corps in France", in *The American Volunteer Motor-Ambulance Corps in France: A Letter to the Editor of an American Journal* (London: Macmillan, 1914); "France", in Winifred Stephens, ed., *The Book of France in Aid of the French Parliamentary Committee's Fund for the Relief of the Invaded Departments* (London: Macmillan, 1915), 1-8; "The Question of the Mind", in *England at War: An Essay* (London: Central Committee for National Patriotic Organisations, 1915), 3-12; "Allen D. Loney – In Memoriam", *New York Times*, 12 September 1915, 1:4; "Refugees in England", *New York Times*, 17 October 1915, 4:1-2; "The Long Wards", in Edith Wharton, ed., *The Book of the Homeless* (New York: Scribner's, 1916), 115-125; "Within the Rim", *Fortnightly Review* 102, 1 August 1917, 161-171; all reprinted in Walker, ed., *Henry James on Culture*, 3-18, 22-31, 131-137, 146-185.

[9] Anesko, *"Friction with the Market"*, 56, 188; Leon Edel, *Henry James: The Conquest of London, 1870-1883* (London: Rupert Hart-Davis, 1962), 405.

motive for writing the political articles was because he needed money, his need does not explain why he resorted to writing political commentary when he was already successful at marketing art criticism, literary biography, reviews of recent books, drama reviews, and travel essays, not to mention, of course, novels and short stories. And even if the 1878-79 articles are only hack pieces, it is next to impossible to argue that the World War I essays are, for James dropped virtually all his current writing projects, once the war began, and threw himself into volunteer activities in support of the Allied war effort, including writing about the war, with unquestioned zeal.

Just these few examples show why it is incorrect to doubt that James, both as a writer and as a private person (if one can separate them), was aware of, interested in, and engaged in politics, in the sense of current affairs. His fiction is deeply imbued with politics, but in the sense according to which Terry Eagleton, for instance, has defined "the political": "the way we organize our social life together, and the power-relations this involves".[10] In novel after novel and story after story, James portrays society as a world in which people struggle to attain and maintain position. These people engage, therefore, all the time in politics, in the sense of the "Conduct of private affairs; politic management, scheming, planning".[11] The struggle of the characters who people James's novels is political on two social levels: where characters struggle with society in general for social position, and where characters struggle with each other – sometimes within a family or a couple – for something the other has. By presenting people as living in a world full of such politics, James's fiction, and especially *The Portrait of a Lady*, critiques the very idea that life separate from politics.

As a way of introducing the point that social and interpersonal politics are all-pervasive, *The Portrait of a Lady* includes several reminders that its characters live in a world of politics in the sense of current government affairs. Lord Warburton, a major figure in the House of Lords, particularly serves this purpose. Early in their

[10] Terry Eagleton, *Literary Theory: An Introduction*, 2nd ed. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), 169.

[11] "Politic", Def. 3f, *The Oxford English Dictionary*, 2nd ed.

acquaintance, Lord Warburton shares his Liberal, political views with Isabel Archer, the novel's protagonist: "From all of which Isabel gathered that Lord Warburton was a nobleman of the newest pattern, a reformer, a radical, a contemner of ancient ways".[12] However, a few pages later, Isabel's uncle, Daniel Touchett, in an apparent reference to the 1869 disestablishment of the Protestant Church of Ireland, tells his niece of his own, far more Conservative politics: "You see they want to disestablish everything; but I'm a pretty big landowner here, and I don't want to be disestablished" (*PL* 71). Thus Isabel finds that the new friends she makes in England cover a range of contemporary political views, and the function of these varied expressions of political philosophy is to situate the novel in the context of the range of mainstream political views operative in England at the time the novel is set, the early 1870's.

The novel includes other reminders that its characters exist in a world of real, political issues. In the short part of the novel that is set in Paris, Isabel meets Mr. Luce, the husband of an expatriate American friend of her aunt, Lydia Touchett. Mr. Luce plays absolutely no plot role in the novel, and yet the text treats its readers to a lengthy description of his anti-Republican politics:

> Like many of his fellow colonists Mr. Luce was a high – or rather a deep – conservative, and gave no countenance to the government lately established in France. He had no faith in its duration and would assure you from year to year that its end was close at hand. "They want to be kept down, sir, to be kept down; nothing but the strong hand – the iron heel – will do for them," he would frequently say of the French people; and his ideal of a fine showy clever rule was that of the superseded Empire. "Paris is much less attractive than in the days of the Emperor; *he* knew how to make a city pleasant" (*PL* 184).

Because this extended passage is entirely irrelevant to the novel's plot, we have to conclude that it serves some other purpose in the text. Quite obviously it helps situate Isabel's story in a particular, historical

[12] Henry James, *The Portrait of a Lady*, ed. Robert D. Bamberg (New York: Norton, 1995), 68 (hereafter cited as *PL*).

and political moment: the aftermath of the fall of the French Second Empire and the early and shaky days of the Third Republic, when Monarchists, Legitimists, Bonapartists, Republicans, and Radicals vied for control of the nation's uncertain political future. This, in turn, helps make it clear that the novel is set in a political world.[13]

When the novel moves to Italy, the text again uses Warburton to remind readers of contemporary political issues, this time Italian ones. Pansy Osmond, Isabel's stepdaughter, the novel tells us, appreciated Warburton's talking to her about Italian current events: "Pansy ... was glad that Lord Warburton should talk to her, not about her partners and bouquets, but about the state of Italy, the condition of the peasantry, the famous grist-tax, the *pellagra*, his impressions of Roman society" (*PL* 349). The "famous grist-tax", introduced in 1868, and "the *pellagra*", a major problem in Italy at the time, resulting from poor nutrition, are both specific, local political references, and as with the other such references in the novel remind us that the novel takes place in a world where there are real, political issues.

The novel also uses irony to remind its readers that most of the characters are part of a privileged socio-economic class. When Ralph Touchett, Isabel's cousin, accompanies Isabel and her journalist friend, Henrietta Stackpole, to London in September, he apologizes to the two women because "there wasn't a creature in town". But Henrietta reminds Ralph of how his privileged position in life leads him to confuse the still-summering aristocracy with "everyone": "'There's no one here, of course, but three or four millions of people. What is it you call them – the lower-middle class? They're only the population of London, and that's of no consequence'" (*PL* 124). Here the novel allows Henrietta to voice the view that class and the social distinctions that result are inescapable.

The novel's title also helps to emphasize the same point. Most obviously it identifies the protagonist as a "lady", rather than as a

[13] Here I am arguing against Julie Wolkenstein's reading of the passage, which suggests that the motives of Mr. Luce's conservatism are rather aesthetic than political: "Or les motifs de ce conservatisme sont davantage d'ordre esthétique que politique". *La Scène européenne: Henry James et le romanesque en question* (Paris: Honoré Champion, 2000), 119-120.

woman. This word choice is significant; consider that in its Italian translation the novel is a "ritratto di signora", while in French it is a "portrait de femme", and *not* of a "dame". The original's emphasis on "lady" implies a number of things: propriety, refinement, and superiority in a number of respects, and certainly the novel tries to show Isabel Archer as having these qualities. The word "lady" shows more respect than "woman" does, too, and therefore James's title expresses a degree of respect for the novel's protagonist. But the "lady" of James's title also implies social standing and class distinctions: a "lady" in England is exclusively upper class; one only says "My Lady" to a woman of royal or noble birth. Therefore, the use of the word "lady" immediately signals that the novel takes place in a world of class hierarchies. So too does the title's other important word, "portrait", for in the days before photography, only wealthy people could afford formal portraits. Thus the title signals, through its two most significant words, that the novel is set in a world where class and wealth matter. And in a world where class and wealth matter, there are politics, for among the principal tasks of politics (in the sense of social scheming) are the establishment and maintenance of class and wealth.

These signs of class distinction in the novel reflect the fact that two of the novel's most important characters struggle hard to better their social class position: Serena Merle and Gilbert Osmond. Madame Merle uses her many social skills to maintain her precarious existence among her well-off friends, and she and Osmond connive to induce Isabel, once she has unexpectedly inherited a considerable fortune from her uncle, Mr. Touchett, into marrying Osmond. Then Osmond and Madame Merle intrigue in an attempt to marry Pansy Osmond, their daughter, to the fabulously wealthy Lord Warburton. Osmond's and Madame Merle's schemes are the most prominent example in the novel of the kind of politics where people struggle for social position.[14]

[14] In addition, Osmond and Madame Merle exemplify something of the complexity of class as James represents it in his fiction. It is a cliché to perceive James's novels as only about well-off, upper-class people, but not only did James write a long novel about working class people (*The Princess Casamassima*), but a number of his major characters lead precarious lives, financially speaking: Lambert Strether of *The Ambassadors*, Merton Densher of *The Wings of the Dove*, Fleda Vetch in *The Spoils of Poynton*, for instance. Furthermore, if we judge class primarily by its primary historical markers in European communities – wealth, kind of employment, and ancestry – the appropriate class position of many of James's characters is unclear. In *The Portrait of a Lady*, only Lord Warburton is unequivocally upper-class, for he is both a landed aristocrat and wealthy. Daniel Touchett is wealthy, but he is *nouveau riche*, for he made his fortune himself in international banking. He is a native of Rutland, Vermont (*PL* 43), and therefore unlikely to be from a wealthy, privileged background. Since he worked for his fortune, he would not qualify, strictly speaking, for the upper class. On the other hand, the other expatriate Americans in the novel (with the exception of Ralph Touchett and his mother) do not work and are therefore genteel but are apparently not well-off enough to be considered rich, and therefore do not qualify for the upper class either: Osmond, Madame Merle, and Ned Rosier. The Archers' social class is not clear either. Mr. Archer died leaving "very little money" but an ancestral house in Albany (35), and we never learn what he did in life nor the source of what money he did have. Isabel's two sisters are married to professionals: a lawyer and an engineer (*PL* 37), and thus are middle- or upper-middle class. At the beginning of the novel, Isabel's eldest sister lives on "Fifty-third Street" in New York (*PL* 37), not yet the smartest part of the city, but by the end of the novel, this sister's view of the world is "all bounded ... by Madison Avenue" (*PL* 405), meaning she cares little for New York's working- and lower-middle class neighborhoods. What all of this shows is that the class of James's characters, especially his Americans (and his writers and artists in other novels and stories), is not clear-cut (as Mr. Touchett tells Isabel, "the advantage of being an American" is that "you don't belong to any class" [*PL* 59]), and this is a significant way in which his fiction is about social politics, for it is a comment on the breaking down in the later-nineteenth century, especially in the United States, of clear class distinctions.

The ways in which I have been trying, so far, to show that *The Portrait of a Lady* is a political novel are marginal; they only make clear that the novel takes place in a political world. The real question is: how is James's story – or portrait, rather – of a woman, or a lady, a political one? And the answer is that this novel is the story of how a young woman seeks to achieve agency and how inescapable social pressures function to prevent her from doing so. This is a profoundly political matter, for these pressures not only involve politics in the social sense but also gender politics, in the sense of what kind of life a woman can expect to lead. James has taken a young woman on the threshold of adult life (literally so, for we first encounter her in a doorway [*PL* 25]), given her all the positive qualities one could want, including charm, intelligence, sensitivity, wit, good looks, and – after a hundred and sixty pages – wealth, and thrown her into the midst of

human society. We readers sit back, along with Ralph Touchett, and watch to see if she can make for herself the kind of life she wants. If she cannot – and I think that she cannot – that says that this woman lives in a society in which even a woman who has all Isabel has going for her cannot control her own destiny, cannot be the agent of her own life's course. If she could, then that would also say something very important about what it means to be that kind of a woman at that time; it would say that in spite of everything, a woman can overcome obstacles and forge for herself the life she chooses. Either way, the novel tells us whether or not a woman armed with all the necessary equipment can shape her own destiny.[15]

Whether or not Isabel can achieve agency and control her own destiny is closely related to her view of her future, to her hopes and aspirations, which run up against what the world makes of her and turns her life into, especially Osmond's and Madame Merle's manipulation of her. Several important passages early in the novel express Isabel's hopeful and positive outlook on her future. For instance, Ralph thinks about her qualities and ponders her future:

> She was intelligent and generous; it was a fine free nature; but what was she going to do with herself? This question was irregular, for with most women one had no occasion to ask it. Most women did with themselves nothing at all; they waited, in attitudes more or less gracefully passive, for a man to come that way and furnish them with a destiny. Isabel's originality was that she gave one an impression of having intentions of her own (*PL* 64).

This passage raises several important points. For one, it summarizes a number of Isabel's qualities: she is "intelligent" and "generous"; she has "a fine free nature". For another, it shows that Ralph understands

[15] A citation of all the feminist readings of James, or even of just *The Portrait of a Lady*, would be extensive. Certainly the most provocative reading of women's issues, especially in *The Portrait of a Lady*, is Alfred Habegger's *Henry James and the "Woman Business"* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), esp. 126-181. Donatella Izzo has included an up-to-date and extremely useful synoptic history of feminist interpretations of James in *Portraying the Lady: Technologies of Gender in the Short Stories of Henry James* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2001), 6-17.

that women not only have few options in life other than marriage ("Most women did with themselves nothing at all"), but that their approach to their futures can only be "passive", that they cannot control their own destiny in a social system where marriage politics dominate women's careers. And as a result, it shows what an obstacle society creates to a woman's effort to achieve agency. Thirdly, the passage shows Ralph's understanding of Isabel's resistance to embarking in the only career normally open to a woman like her – marrying as best she can. And finally, the passage is one of several in the novel's early pages that give us the sense that Isabel wants to take control of her destiny: "Most women did with themselves nothing at all ... Isabel's originality was that she gave one an impression of having intentions of her own".

The passage is, of course, a summary of Ralph's view of Isabel, but the novel means us to see that his view is also Isabel's. After she rejects Warburton's offer of marriage, Isabel expresses thoughts similar to Ralph's:

> Who was she, what was she, that she should hold herself superior? What view of life, what design upon fate, what conception of happiness, had she that pretended to be larger than these large, these fabulous occasions? If she wouldn't do such a thing as that [marry Warburton] then she must do great things, she must do something greater (*PL* 102).

This passage indicates Isabel's reluctance to succumb to the common fate of most young, middle-class women ("hold herself superior"), which was to marry the most eligible candidate for her hand. It also indicates, through its references to her "design upon fate" and her "conception of happiness" that she could try to be the primary agent in fulfilling a normal desire for a happy life and to do so not necessarily through the expected, traditional path of marriage. As she tells Ralph at another point in the novel: "I don't want to begin life by marrying. There are other things a woman can do" (*PL* 133). And if learning about life is one of the "things a woman can do", she is clear that she does not need a man to help her learn; as she tells her persistent American suitor, Caspar Goodwood, "'I don't need the aid of a clever man to teach me how to live. I can find it out for myself'" (*PL* 140). In all of these passages, what is at stake is whether or not Isabel can pass beyond the apparent limits of a typical woman's career.

Isabel's hesitation about marrying is part of her "deeply romantic" (*PL* 96) outlook in the first half of the novel, an outlook characterized by her "fixed determination to regard the world as a place of brightness, of free expansion, of irresistible action" and by her naïve desire "that she might find herself some day in a difficult position, so that she should have the pleasure of being as heroic as the occasion demanded" (*PL* 54). The fact that Madame Merle turns out to be a false and deceitful friend and Isabel's disappointing marriage to Osmond combine to ruin her bright, early outlook (ironically, she gets her wish to find herself "in a difficult position" and finds the position not too pleasant). Her early, hopeful, optimistic outlook has its counterpart in the gestational pains of the French Third Republic in its early years, for both Isabel and the new Republic were fragile and yet bore the hope that things, for once, would turn out differently (James, in an 1876 article, had described the Third Republic as a "toddle[r]" whose likelihood of "tumbl[ing] over and crack[ing] its pate" was decreasing "every year" that "its legs are growing longer").[16] And the destruction of her illusions by the harsh reality of Madame Merle's and Osmond's taking advantage of her parallel Mr. Luce's desire to see the Third Republic swept away by a Bonapartist autocrat.

Her romantic aspirations are ruined and she is unable to break the limitations society imposed on a woman's career because Isabel finds no other suitable option than marrying; she finds she has no other power over her own life beyond accepting or rejecting, the two kinds of "'exercise of power'", as her aunt tells her, available to a woman (*PL* 176). This shows that, for all her will to lead a unique life and attain an individual destiny, there really is no option outside of the world of marriage. Furthermore, Isabel marries because she becomes the victim – regardless of whether we think it is through the fault of her own naiveté – of Osmond's and Madame Merle's Machiavellian social politics. This is an important respect in which *The Portrait of a Lady* is fundamentally political, for by making Isabel the victim of Merle's and Osmond's scheming social politics, the novel shows that, for all her ideals, Isabel cannot escape the impact of politics.

[16] Henry James, "Versailles As It Is", *New York Tribune*, 8 January 1876, 2.

In other words, Madame Merle and Osmond and their manipulative intrigue are the specific obstacles that prevent Isabel from breaking the limitations on women's careers that the passages about not beginning "life by marrying" and finding "out about life for myself" invoke. A number of passages in the novel make it clear that Osmond and Madame Merle personify society's power to make individuals conform. For instance, we learn from a conversation with Madame Merle that Osmond believes a wife should sacrifice her individuality to her husband:

> "... She [Isabel] has only one fault."
> "What's that?"
> "Too many ideas."
> "I warned you she was clever."
> "Fortunately they're very bad ones," said Osmond.
> "Why is that fortunate?"
> "*Dame*, if they must be sacrificed!" (*PL* 244)

Osmond's view here is that Isabel – and by extension any wife – must sacrifice those ideas of hers for which her future husband won't care, and this suggests something of the conventional view of a wife's relation to her husband: that she must put his wishes first. And this is not just Osmond's view; it is society's dominant view, which we can tell because of the serious effort Isabel makes, later in the novel, at her husband's insistence, to bring Pansy and Warburton together (*PL* 348-350) and because of how seriously she hesitates, when Osmond forbids her to make the journey, to go to England when she learns that Ralph is dying (*PL* 446-448).

Interestingly, Isabel's literary namesake, Newland Archer, of Edith Wharton's *The Age of Innocence*, also believes in a husband being a guide to his wife's thinking: "He did not in the least wish the future Mrs. Newland Archer to be a simpleton. He meant her (*thanks to his enlightening companionship*) to develop a social tact and readiness of wit ...".[17] Both literary Archers, then, present examples of a prevailing

[17] Edith Wharton, *Four Novels: The House of Mirth, Ethan Frome, The Custom of the Country, The Age of Innocence* (New York: Library of America, 1985), 844; emphasis added.

cultural stereotype of the day: that a husband is the autocrat of his wife's way of thinking, much as a Bonapartist emperor would be to Mr. Luce's Paris. By extension, a woman's function is to serve a man's pleasure (just as Paris's is to Mr. Luce). As Osmond, on another occasion, told Isabel, "'A woman's natural mission is to be where she's most appreciated'" (*PL* 226). When Osmond says this, he means it as a compliment – he is trying to persuade her to settle in Florence, where she has admirers. But the compliment implies that a woman's "natural mission" is not, say, to get the most out of her own life or to "find out about life" for herself, but to satisfy others, to be a passive object, to be appreciated, i. e. to serve one of the functions of a portrait.

For Osmond, the idea that a woman should be an object of appreciation is perfectly in keeping with his hobby for collecting art objects, for what seems to make Isabel attractive to him is that she would make a good addition to his collection: "he perceived a new attraction in the idea of taking to himself a young lady who had qualified herself to figure in his collection of choice objects" (*PL* 258). And, ominously, Ned Rosier, the suitor of whom Osmond *disapproves*, finds his daughter, Pansy, appealing for the same reason: "she was really a consummate piece. He thought of her in amorous meditation a good deal as he might have thought of a Dresden-china shepherdess" (*PL* 301). What these two suitor/collectors show is that Isabel exists in a world where men seek wives not for the sake of the women's happiness but in order to keep them as passive objects. No wonder, then, that Isabel didn't want to begin life by marrying!

I have been arguing that through their intrigues Madame Merle and Osmond personify the political pressure society exerts against the individual will of an independently-minded woman. But I have also been implying that two political issues that are highly central to the novel are also an important part of the obstacle that Isabel encounters: the central role of marriage politics and the limited range of career options open to women.

In many respects, *The Portrait of a Lady* is about marriage: about how and why one makes a marriage and, as in *The Golden Bowl*, what one does when a marriage goes wrong. Most of the novel's characters spend most of the novel talking about and thinking about who will marry whom and working to get someone married either to

themselves or to someone else, which in itself demonstrates the degree to which politics (working to further someone's marriage) and the social (marriage becomes the business of others) are inextricably related to the private (marriage as the union of two individuals and their private feelings for each other). As a result, various characters express their philosophies of marriage, which range from Mrs. Touchett's highly pragmatic and political view to Isabel's early, idealistic view. Mrs. Touchett, the text tells us, "took, it will be observed, not the sentimental, but the political, view of matrimony" (*PL* 234). As an example of this "political" view, when Isabel announces her engagement to Osmond to her aunt, Mrs. Touchett bluntly states what she values in a marriage: "People usually marry as they go into partnership – to set up a house. But in your partnership you'll bring everything.... He has no money; he has no name; he has no importance. I value such things and I have the courage to say it; I think they're very precious" (*PL* 282-83). Marriage, then, for Mrs. Touchett, is not about love and sentiment but about "money", "name", and "importance". Marriage is a social, an economic, and a practical matter, according to this view. And during the course of her own marriage, Isabel comes to understand marriage, at least to some extent, on a practical level: "Certain obligations were involved in the very fact of marriage, and were quite independent of the quantity of enjoyment extracted from it" (*PL* 481).

At the other extreme, Isabel once had a very high ideal of marriage: "caring only for truth and knowledge and believing that two intelligent people ought to look for them together and, whether they found them or not, find at least some happiness in the search" (*PL* 359). This is surely a wonderful ideal; it is unfortunate that Isabel chose so badly when she picked, or rather was manipulated into picking, a partner in this search for truth and knowledge. But, interestingly, Isabel *is* envisioning marriage as a partnership too, though not as the socio-economic partnership her aunt described but an intellectual partnership.

These passages on marriage show that the novel dramatizes competing views of the purpose of marriage, ranging from the highly idealistic to the politically pragmatic. However, what the novel leads us to conclude about these different views is that Isabel's idealized view of marriage cannot be realized because even marriage is

inescapably political (in terms of both social and interpersonal politics). Her own marriage turns out a failure, and the closest she comes to achieving her ideal is with Ralph on his deathbed: "nothing mattered now but the only knowledge that was not pure anguish – the knowledge that they were looking at the truth together" (*PL* 478). Thus her ideal, on the one hand, runs up against the hard reality of the mercenary marriage Osmond and Madame Merle successfully intrigue her into making, and on the other hand, the ideal can only be achieved momentarily, in a Platonic relationship (with Ralph), and on the threshold of death.

The fate of her ideal of marriage is just another way that the novel emphasizes how politics trump Isabel's early ideals and by extension how ideals in general run up against the reality of social and interpersonal politics. As a result, rather than suggesting that James preferred the ethereality of art to the politics of ordinary life, *The Portrait of a Lady* shows not that the ideal transcends politics but that politics destroy ideals.

The subject of marriage is so central to James's novel because it is the story of a woman. By definition, then, it has to be a novel about marriage and marriage politics for the very good reason that for middle- and upper-class women at the time, marriage was one of the few career options, if not the only one. In addition to presenting different philosophies of marriage, through its major female characters, the novel dramatizes different, possible approaches to women's relative lack of career options.

At first glance, one might be tempted to see Madame Merle, Mrs. Touchett, and Henrietta Stackpole as examples that in the world James's novel represents a woman can attain some kind of individuality and independence. Because each of these women is similar to Isabel in significant respects, we are meant to see them as foils to the protagonist; the text even calls Henrietta "a model" for Isabel (*PL* 55). Madame Merle bears the most comparison to Isabel, for we learn from a short, parenthetic passage about her own marriage that Madame Merle began adult life almost exactly as Isabel would nearly twenty years later. During their trip to Egypt together, Madame Merle tells Isabel something of her earlier life: "(... it concerned the late M. Merle, a positive adventurer ... who had taken advantage, years before, of her youth and of an inexperience in which doubtless

those who knew her only now would find it difficult to believe)" (*PL* 274). This passage implies that when she was young, she got caught into an unhappy marriage much as Isabel does. Just as Monsieur Merle was an "adventurer" who took "advantage" of Serena Merle's "youth and inexperience", so too will Osmond of Isabel's.

This similarity explains, among other things, why Isabel's first reaction to hearing Countess Gemini reveal Madame Merle's motherhood of Pansy and earlier relationship with Osmond is an expression of sympathy for Madame Merle: "'Ah, poor, poor woman!' cried Isabel" (*PL* 452). In spite of how deeply Madame Merle has wronged Isabel, the two women are enough alike for Isabel still to feel sympathy for her. But more importantly, what the circumstances of Madame Merle's earlier years suggest are that if she and Isabel began their adult lives in similar ways, Isabel's might turn out as Madame Merle's did. In other words, twenty years hence, will Isabel have become the same kind of woman Madame Merle had become, or can she avoid such a destiny? That is one of the novel's great unanswered questions, and it is a complex one. On the one hand, Madame Merle has become, at least ostensibly, a single woman (a widow, actually) living successfully on her own. In this respect she could be read as a positive foil to Isabel, an example that in the patriarchal, marriage-dominated society in which they live, a woman can create a life for herself, even when, as is the case with Madame Merle, she does not have extensive financial means. However, we have to notice the price Madame Merle has had to pay in order to create such a life. She spends much of her time as a houseguest "'at great houses'" (*PL* 169); she "had social ties in a dozen different countries" (*PL* 168-69) and, according to Mrs. Touchett, "'has her pick of places; she's not in want of a shelter'" (*PL* 169). The novel offers no specific clues, but there is no doubt that Madame Merle does something to maintain her relationships with her many hosts. Since she is unable to reciprocate in kind for the hospitality she receives, she has to provide her hosts with something else in order to make herself a desirable guest. She does not, like Lily Bart in Wharton's *The House of Mirth*, volunteer to take care of her hosts' correspondence, for apparently her hosts find her intrinsic qualities sufficient to warrant frequent invitations. As Mrs. Touchett states, "'It's a favour to me that she stays'" (*PL* 169). But it cannot just be

through her good luck and intrinsic qualities that Madame Merle continues to be so desirable a houseguest in rich households; she must also be a skilled social politician to nurture and maintain her social connections.

Madame Merle's similarities to Isabel, then, suggest that in order to be the independent woman Isabel had, earlier, dreamed of being, she would have to learn to succeed in the kind of politics at which the elder woman is apparently so adept. One of the reasons that may motivate Isabel's return to Rome at the end of the novel could be a desire to help Pansy. If this is the case, then it indicates that Isabel is about to enter a serious social and interpersonal political battle with her husband over her step-daughter's fate, which suggests that Isabel is embarking on a road that could lead to her becoming the kind of adept politician Madame Merle became. And if she does, she may not be immune from what proves to be Madame Merle's undoing, becoming a ruthless schemer.

As a foil to Isabel, then, Madame Merle suggests several possibilities: that a woman can become independent, but at a great price that consists of having to struggle every day just to attempt to maintain one's independent position, and that one may have to struggle unsuccessfully, risking the loss of one's closest friends (at the end of the novel, Mrs. Touchett, Isabel, and even Osmond have all abandoned her) and one's own integrity. Whether we read Madame Merle as a positive or negative foil to Isabel, we cannot escape the fact that Madame Merle exemplifies the same argument I have been making about Isabel herself: that being a woman in the world *The Portrait of a Lady* represents means implicitly engaging herself in the politics of the society in which she lives.

Mrs. Touchett is also an independent woman. In addition to living her life exactly as she pleases, she is also a woman of independent means. In these respects, then, she can also be understood as a foil to Isabel's own individualistic desire for independence. But like Madame Merle, Mrs. Touchett has paid a great price for her independence: she has gained it at the cost of any ideals and any true sympathy for others. We can see this in her utterly practical and unemotional approach to everything. The one time in the novel when she appears to show any emotion, when readers may be tempted to think that at last Mrs. Touchett shows she has a heart and soul, comes

immediately after Ralph's death. Isabel tries to say a consoling word to her, and her characteristically abrupt reply is: "'Go and thank God you've no child'" (*PL* 480). However, if we remember that Isabel *had* had a child, who had died "'six months after his birth'" (*PL* 305), we will realize that Mrs. Touchett's remark is rude and insensitive. Rather than saying, now I know how you must have felt when you lost your child, Mrs. Touchett tells Isabel, you can have no idea what a terrible thing it is to lose a child. Mrs. Touchett's example serves to show that a woman can be independent and live a life of her own making, but only by becoming completely self-centered. As Madame Merle at one point remarks to herself about Mrs. Touchett: "'you never did anything for another!'" (*PL* 180).

Unlike Madame Merle, whose apparently independent life is the fruit of her political scheming, and unlike Mrs. Touchett, whose independence results – at least in part – from her having her own, independent fortune (*PL* 35), Henrietta Stackpole holds a job in order to live her independent life. Her example would seem to represent, then, the possibility that a woman can support herself (and dependents, "an infirm and widowed sister" and her three children [*PL* 55]) through her own work. She would also seem to represent the possibility that an unmarried woman can be independent and frank in her opinions, without having Mrs. Touchett's financial fortune, can travel independently and un-chaperoned, and can work in a primarily male profession, journalism. While all this is true, we must wonder, nonetheless, at Henrietta's engagement to Ralph's English friend, Mr. Bantling. While the text provides no suggestion that Henrietta's and Bantling's marriage won't be anything but happy, there are hints that this marriage parallels Isabel's to Osmond, and furthermore, there is a clear sense that Henrietta has had to sacrifice her principles in order to accept Bantling. Throughout the novel, Henrietta had criticized Isabel for her involvement with not just foreigners but even with expatriate Americans. But when Henrietta becomes engaged to Bantling, she admits that she has gone a step beyond Isabel – "'I've gone further than you'", Henrietta tells Isabel (*PL* 469) – for while Isabel married an expatriate American and settled permanently in Europe, Henrietta is about to marry and settle in London with a European. Thus Henrietta herself suggests that her forthcoming marriage bears comparison to Isabel's and Osmond's. Henrietta justifies the complete

reversal of her principles by the conclusion that she has "'changed'" and that "'a woman has to change a good deal to marry'" (*PL* 470). Therefore, while through much of the novel we can read Henrietta as representing the possibility of a woman succeeding economically and living independently in a man's world, the announcement of her engagement at the end suggests that even as independently-minded a woman as she, ultimately, conforms to a typical marriage plot, and that in order to do so, she must make important concessions to social and gender expectations.

The role of these characters is to give parallel examples to Isabel's of what becomes of women in this novel. They serve as signs of what Isabel could, or cannot, or should, or should not become, and they show that a woman can only achieve a heavily qualified and at best temporary kind of independence, that a woman's attempt to attain agency is not likely to be successful. These women present different angles on the central questions that Isabel's own example raises: is there any way Isabel can avoid the compromises these women have made? Can she attain happiness on her own terms? Can any woman? Indeed can any person, but especially a woman in the kind of society in which these women live? These questions could be understood on a philosophical level, as questions about destiny and free will, but they also raise social questions, for the obstacles for Isabel, and apparently for all the other women in the novel, to forging the life one wants to forge for oneself are social pressures, which means, in the highly political society James represents, that they are political pressures. *The Portrait of a Lady* is not the kind of political novel that exposes an injustice and champions a particular social or government policy for reform. It is political by presenting human society as always involving social politics, through working with or against others to attain certain aims or through being compelled to conform to social expectations.

DIALOGUE/ DEBATE/DISSENT

FORUM ON THE "AMERICAN RENAISSANCE": PAST, PRESENT, AND FUTURE

Forum on the "American Renaissance": past, present, and future

The following questionnaire was circulated in January 2002 among twelve US scholars, whose innovative works have most contributed to questioning, widening, redefining, and reshaping the field of "American Renaissance" studies over the last two decades. The format proposed was simple and flexible: given the great potential complexity of the issues raised, each participant was left free to answer in as short or as ample a fashion as she or he deemed best. Informal answers and personal positions rather than formal discussions were encouraged. All answers, therefore, have been presented as originally provided by individual participants, reducing editorial interventions to a bare minimum: this accounts for some differences, which we have kept in order to respect the contributors' individual emphases and decisions. Although some of the critics we contacted were unable to participate because of personal or professional reasons, most of them expressed interest and encouragement, which we gratefully wish to acknowledge – first and foremost among these, Sacvan Bercovitch, without whose groundbreaking work, truly, a forum such as this would never have been thinkable in the first place. Needless to say, our main debt is to the critics who have taken time from their numerous scholarly and academic engagements to reconstruct the ambiance of their first steps within academia, rethink and reassess their past work, offer personal views and anecdotes, engage the present trends and future perspectives in the discipline. They have made this forum possible through their interest, dedication, and participation: to them go our warmest thanks.

1. Ever since Matthiessen's book, the "American Renaissance" age has been the most canonical field in American studies – the one where more authoritative and wide-ranging statements were produced, the one that provided more "cultural capital", in Bourdieu's terms, for the critics engaging it. What was your perception of that field of studies at the beginning of your career as a scholar, and what was your intended contribution to it?

2. What is your retrospective assessment of your contribution to studies on the "American Renaissance", and how would you describe its impact both in terms of your own development as a critic and in the light of the response it has evoked and the critical work that has followed?

3. How has your approach to the "American Renaissance" changed over the years in your teaching practice, particularly as regards your choice of syllabus and your use of, and criteria for, evaluative judgment?

4. The continuing use of the expression "American Renaissance" undoubtedly bears witness to the enduring power of Matthiessen's critical construction. Does the expression still retain its original meaning and relevance under different historical and intellectual circumstances? Has it been refunctionalized to meet different critical needs?

5. The last decade or so has witnessed a substantial redefinition of methods, theoretical frameworks, and objects of study in the field of American literature, and an increasing shift in the direction of cultural studies. What is your evaluation of this trend as regards the present situation and future perspectives of "American Renaissance" studies? What role, if any, can studies in the field continue to play in the context of such developments as theory, canon revision, cultural studies, etc.?

Nina Baym

1. As a graduate student I accepted most of the authoritative critical pronouncements I studied. I assumed that the American Renaissance was exactly as the important personages in the field described it: the originating moment of a truly American literature. At the same time, these personages tended to celebrate the Renaissance for conducting the theological values and approaches of New England Puritanism into a later, more secular, period by expressing them in literary forms. These forms were accordingly interpreted as sites of resistance to an emergent middle-class culture that was assumed to be market-driven, sentimental, and feminized. The book making this argument most persuasively was F. O. Matthiessen's *American Renaissance*, but equally important when I was a student were the magisterial studies of Puritan culture by Perry Miller. For both these Harvard University-based critics, the "Renaissance" writers represented a kind of moral severity and spiritual uprightness that they could only understand as masculine.

My career as a literary critic began in a very local way when, as a novice teacher, I found it impossible to accept *The Scarlet Letter* as a theological book about Arthur Dimmesdale. Leslie Fiedler's *Love and Death in the American Novel* provided a target here. My essay, "Passion and Authority in *The Scarlet Letter*", argued that Hester was the book's main, and sympathetic, character; this affiliation with an abandoned woman made the novel if anything anti-Puritan and very much a mid-nineteenth-century Romantic artifact. From asking the question what had Hawthorne to say about, or what did he show about, Hester, I went on to ask what he had to say about women throughout his oeuvre. On the basis of my interpretation of his novels and stories I launched the argument that a kind of pro-woman stance was central to his entire career. What that stance consisted in exactly has been the subject of a good deal of Hawthorne criticism since then.

At about this time I was swept up by the "second wave" of feminism. I lost interest in the anti-Puritan theological approach to Hawthorne and began to think more about the possibility that he was using the Puritans for other purposes, in particular as exemplary of patriarchy rather than any particular theology. Once one thought of the Puritans as Hawthorne's symbol for the masculine (not necessarily

the male), his work took on a particular shape, which was the organizing principle of my book on Hawthorne, *The Shape of Hawthorne's Career.* This reading saw the author as rejecting exactly those values that the critical establishment saw him as celebrating. In the development of "masculinity studies" in American literature, some of the ideas I worked with have been applied very productively to Hawthorne's depiction of anguished male characters.

The tradition of literary exegesis has always involved substituting one reading for another, so there was really nothing unusual in my method here; the innovation was putting women at the center of a canonical writer's work. Now, I became interested in Hawthorne's famous epistolary reference to the "d___d mob of scribbling women". Despite generalizations about mid-century feminized literary culture, few critics gave details, and those who did were stingingly contemptuous or satirical (as, for example, Matthiessen is in the introduction to *American Renaissance*). I investigated the scope and nature of the books produced by this "mob" and discerned a repeated plot formula that was not sentimental, at least not as that term had been used in the criticism. If these books were feminine or feminized, then the antebellum feminine was not quite what we had imagined it to be. After I published *Woman's Fiction,* I wrote an essay about the critical paradigms that allowed women authors and their work to be deleted from the historical record. This essay, "Melodramas of Beset Manhood", has probably been the most widely read piece I've published.

As I look back at this account I see that my method has tended to be formalist – in each of these three cases I was looking for a recurrent pattern internal to the texts at hand, whether the texts were by a single author, a group of similar authors, or a group of critics. It has also been synthetic in the sense of canvassing a large number of individual examples rather than working from one single text. (I continue to believe that one can't read off an entire culture from a single text, which puts me at odds with some initiatives in New Historicist and Cultural studies. Along the same lines, I think there's much work left to be done on how, and how importantly, literary texts intervene in the life of a culture.)

2. The most important things one has done vary according to when the question is asked. At this moment, I think the most important were

to a) call attention to the historical existence of a much larger number of literary texts than the critical scene at that time acknowledged; b) show how these texts might be taken seriously rather than mocked and dismissed; and c) help make it possible to write about women authors and women characters at the very moment when large numbers of women began to enter academia and become professors of literature. In my own research after *Woman's Fiction* I have continued the retrieval project, expanding my focus to other kinds of work published by women. Having discovered the huge numbers of women active in the production of novels, I could no longer say that the profession of authorship was off limits to them. The question now was whether and how their published work conformed to stereotypes of the feminine – whether these stereotypes were of the age when they worked, or subsequently imposed by our critical perspectives. In books on women's history-writing and women's science-writing I have surveyed and publicized a great deal of activity in what have been conventionally thought of as public matters beyond women's scope.

Some critics have objected to my work on the grounds that it deals only with white women; others have decried its namby-pamby liberalism; and still others have objected to its atheoretical empiricism. All of these criticisms have merit. Some critics – especially Marxist and new historicist – have returned to the idea of the sentimental bourgeois feminine literary sphere that my own work meant to displace. There is no telling how this will ultimately sort out. I see my contribution as ultimately (but who knows what is ultimate?) being a) the recovering of a set of women's literary practices which, whether of interest to other critics at the moment or not, are worth returning to the record and b) the publicizing of the concept of a much more expansive canon than that which I inherited.

3. As a teacher of undergraduate students I merge study of the traditional (Matthiessen-identified) authors with others less canonical, in effect trying to mime for the students a small-scale model of the larger literary scene that has preoccupied me as a scholar. The group of writers whom Matthiessen defined as key to antebellum literary culture remain, but in the antebellum part of my undergraduate survey, for example, I now teach Margaret Fuller as one of the trio of

Transcendentalists (Emerson and Thoreau being the other two) and I throw in Louisa May Alcott's "Transcendental Wild Oats" as a corrective to Transcendentalism. I pair Catharine Maria Sedgwick with Washington Irving as regional writers, Caroline Kirkland with James Fenimore Cooper as frontier writers. Harriet Beecher Stowe gets a place of her own, perhaps alongside of Herman Melville as author of an American prose epic. Frederick Douglass and Harriet Jacobs are also there; Emily Dickinson shares the spotlight with Walt Whitman. I don't try to impose my esthetic judgments on the students – I want to give them materials for making judgments of their own. Few students complain about the expansion of the canon beyond the canonical; to the contrary, many of them express appreciation of the wider view. Women especially, whether they "like" the women authors we read or not, are pleased to know of the existence of so many women writers in earlier periods.

In more specialized graduate seminars I do less with Matthiessen's canonical group, more with less well-known authors. (But I count on others in my department to do the canonical work.) Although I have taught many graduate courses on women writers, and although most of my published scholarship has been woman-specific, as a teacher I am interested in bringing together men and women, black and white, in some kind of simulacrum of the "real" literary scene and, for that matter, of the nation itself. The great good fortune of being asked to be the General Editor of the *Norton Anthology of American Literature* has provided me with a national platform for this kind of approach.

4. Yes, I think the expression "American Renaissance" does bear witness, if not to Matthiessen's critical construction, then to the enduring power of the writers whom he brought together within that construction. Undergraduate students who voluntarily take courses in pre-twentieth-century American literature want to read the writers they've heard about; want to admire or reject them (that is, want to interact with them); and want to decide whether these writers are or are not "American" in any sense they can accept. They find these writers convenient shorthand for learning about the past in ways they think they will remember. These desires exist in students of diverse ethnic backgrounds. Matthiessen's group, augmented by Emily Dickinson and Edgar Allan Poe, seems to have real staying power.

In the critical field, the expression is used more as a way to identify a group, or even to refer to Matthiessen's work, than it is to connote a historical fact about the development of American literature. I myself prefer the terms "antebellum" and "Jacksonian" to American Renaissance because to me American Renaissance means Matthiessen not a fact of American literature. But I accept that his constellation of writers is basic to the construction of the field.

5. From the standpoint of literary feminism, the idea of a cohesive entity "woman" that enabled my earliest work is entirely obsolete; when I write "woman" or "women" above I am not modifying it with particular attributes, but I am keenly aware that I mean a particular sub-set of women in the United States. I don't agree with those who claim that "woman" has no meaning at all. But, I realize that no statement about even a large number of women can apply to all women. This point, developed by feminist theory, has in many ways undone feminist literary scholarship and feminist literary criticism; I see no return to the earlier utopianism. The result of this, perhaps paradoxically, is that the old male canon acquires new life. It is not subject to, or has not been subjected to, this kind of deconstruction.

The powerful interest in minority voices, on the other hand, has done a great deal to destabilize the Matthiessen canon. At the same time, the existence of 50+ years of new writing since Matthiessen published, and the general obsession with contemporary popular culture that characterizes our own era, has moved interest away from the antebellum period. So I suppose that the antebellum era will become more and more the province of corrective pedagogy and historical (even antiquarian) scholarship. As for canon revision, so many writers have now been brought into view that the concept has lost some of its force. The so-called "canon wars" are over and people have moved on to other things. The large number of the "uncanonized" has dispersed their authority and increased competition for available slots. I write "available slots" because all canons demand selection and doing without canons is mentally impossible. Canons are an organizing feature of knowledge and cognition; they can be expanded to a certain point and revised infinitely, but they will always be with us. One may note how objections to the concept of the canon invoke the same small set of

theorists – a canon of appropriate references. Will the figures of the "American Renaissance" remain in any American canon? I think the answer is yes. I'll close with an anecdote. Two recent undergraduate students in my lecture survey course happened to find themselves in Boston: one had graduated the year before and moved there, the other was passing through en route to a European city. What did these two do? They went out to Concord to see Emerson's house, the Old Manse, and Walden Pond.

Michael T. Gilmore

I will focus my responses on the first three questions and briefly discuss how my book came to be written; its "contribution" and supersession by the New Historicism; and my own evolution as a teacher and critic.

Three factors were formative in producing *American Romanticism and the Marketplace*: my personal background; the changes in the discipline of literary studies; and the institutional setting, Brandeis University, where I worked out the argument. I come from a Jewish immigrant background, and my father, who was born near Kiev in the Pale of Settlement, was a lifelong sympathizer with the Left. He belonged to the Communist Party for a time and, though he became a successful businessman, he did not, like so many immigrants who "made" it in America, lose his skepticism about capitalism's claims to inevitability and righteousness. His sense of himself as an ideological outsider coexisted uneasily with his gratitude to his adopted country. I inherited his politics, but I could not help being aware that we were the beneficiaries of the economic system whose sins he used to detail at the dinner table. As an affluent leftist, I felt embarrassed at various times by my family's wealth and at other times by my passionately-held radicalism.

Of course, many people who attended college in the 1960s, as I did, experienced disaffection from the United States. This was the era of the Civil Rights Movement and of the protests against the war in Vietnam. One difference, perhaps, was that even at my most alienated, I was conscious of my complicity in the social order and always attuned to my own ambivalence. It was unexpectedly good

training for someone who became fascinated by the mixed response of the "American Renaissance" authors to the antebellum market revolution. My finding that Emerson, Thoreau, Hawthorne, and Melville were simultaneously drawn to and repelled by the commodification of culture and society could be seen, I suppose, as a simple case of projection, a foisting onto the past of my own uncertainties. But it is a nice question whether *any* critical understanding is altogether free of biography, and it may be that my experience gave me insights denied to other readers less conflicted about capitalist hegemony.

But that came later. When I attended graduate school, in the late sixties and early seventies, the ruling paradigms were still univocal. That is, the concept of internal contradictions or of indecision between positions took a back seat to the view that the writer was either a myth-and-symbol wielding voice of the culture – the "American Adam", the symbolist imagination, the champion of the demos, and so on – or an oppositional figure, crying out against the railroad's depredations on the landscape or protesting the emergence of classes, etc. (The equivocal ending of *The House of the Seven Gables*, in this view, was something of a scandal, and critics would wring their hands over Hawthorne's obtuseness in allowing Holgrave to marry Phoebe and so to reconstitute the class society that the novel, up to that point, seemed to deplore. That Hawthorne might be both for and against the class system was not entertained.) These arguments began to be swept away in the late seventies. The influx of literary theorizing from abroad, especially France – Barthes, Foucault, Derrida – and the enlargement of the field of study to include women, African Americans, and other previously marginalized agents, problematized the ideas both of representativeness and of coherence.

Obviously, I was influenced by these developments. (Not enough, some would say: I was criticized, rightly I now feel, for neglecting the role of women writers in the emergent literary market.) But my own favorite theorists were an odd assortment of thinkers: Georg Lukács from Hungary, Pierre Macherey from France, Raymond Williams from Great Britain, and an American, William Charvat, who unlike the other three was not explicitly a Marxist but did center his scholarship on the economics of authorship. I was powerfully affected by the concept of reification, which Lukács elaborated in *History and Class*

Consciousness (1923; English edition, 1971), and by Macherey's notion of the artwork as a distorted mirror evoking the contradictions of the age (from *A Theory of Literary Production* [1966; English edition, 1978]). Williams's understanding of the social as a dynamic and multifaceted formation, consisting of dominant, residual, and emergent stages, shaped my thinking about authorial placement within a modernizing economy (from *Marxism and Literature*, 1977). Charvat's work, more reticent theoretically, also inspired me, particularly his insistence on the inextricable bond between economic expansion and the flowering of American authorship. Elsewhere I have summarized Charvat's career and the originality of his perspective; while most critics followed Leo Marx, for example, in lamenting the railroad's shattering of the pastoral garden, Charvat pointed out how the new transport system underwrote the American Renaissance by making possible the national distribution of books.

My academic environment, Brandeis University, was as important as my reading. I was hired in 1976, fresh from graduate school, and I have taught there ever since. Brandeis had a history of welcoming maverick Americanists who tended to cast a wider net than the purely formal or aesthetic. Philip Rahv and Irving Howe were two of the English Department's earliest faculty members, and both brought a European-inflected outlook to the study of American culture. (Brandeis had been founded as a non-sectarian, "Jewish sponsored" university in 1948.) Another early hire was J. V. Cunningham, not an Americanist but a student, along with Hart Crane, of Yvor Winters, author of the highly eccentric *Maule's Curse: Seven Studies in the History of American Obscurantism* (1938). Sacvan Bercovitch, later the most influential Americanist of his generation, also taught at Brandeis for several years before my arrival. And at the time I made my own migration from Cambridge to Waltham, my contemporary Philip Fisher was teaching the Victorian novel, and the slightly older poet Allen Grossman was the Department's authority on modern poetry.

I single out Fisher and Grossman because both shifted away from their original specialties and made vital contributions to the reconfiguring of the American Renaissance. We were friends and rivals who regularly exchanged ideas and encouraged each other's work. All well and good, but I can still remember my slight panic attack when I realized that they were venturing into American

literature and beginning to rethink my field in ways at least as innovative as I was. The three of us began publishing on the American Renaissance in the early eighties, but the critical date was 1985: in that year Fisher brought out *Hard Facts*, Grossman's essay on "The Poetics of Union in Whitman and Lincoln" appeared in *The American Renaissance Reconsidered*, and Chicago University Press issued *American Romanticism and the Marketplace*. Only Fisher can be said to have moved beyond the usual suspects canonized by Matthiessen: the highlight of his study is a reading of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. But we were all contending for the continuity between the social or political or economic and the literary: the artwork was not a rarefied discourse apart, impeaching a debased reality or constructing a utopian elsewhere, but a register or accomplice of the existing order. In Grossman's formulation, poetry and policy were one and the same.

It will be evident, I trust, that my own take on the American Renaissance classics was – depending on one's perspective – either less boldly revisionary or more modulated and subtle than the cascade of new studies that very rapidly overtook the field between, say, 1985 and 1990. Bercovitch, Fisher, and Grossman, my ex-fellow Brandeisians, are extremely complex thinkers. I do not mean to suggest that my work is somehow more profound than theirs. (The supposition, by the way, that we are all Jews, and so outsiders by virtue of our shared ethnicity, is erroneous. Fisher was raised as a Catholic, which arguably makes him more of an alien in the current academy than the rest of us.) What I think is undeniable, however, is that they, along with other prominent American Renaissance revisionists – Jane Tompkins, Walter Benn Michaels, the New Historicists generally – were inclined to see the figures they wrote about as thoroughly and unambiguously integrated into the reigning state of affairs. According to this position, the major literary artists of the mid-nineteenth century internalized their culture; they could not do otherwise. They either recycled the jeremiad (Bercovitch); or lent their fiction to the project of clearing the wilderness (Fisher's account of Cooper); or, in the most extreme statement of the argument, recapitulated the capitalist worldview (Michaels in *The Gold Standard and the Logic of Naturalism* [1987]).

My book on the marketplace, with its more fractured reading of the relationship between literature and the polity, and with its

insistence that the author retains a margin of intellectual freedom to dissent, was almost immediately eclipsed by the ascendance of the New Historicism. (Bercovitch and Fisher would object to the designation, but I believe that their work has clear affinities with Foucault-influenced scholarship.) The consolidation of feminist and African-American studies also pushed aside my emphasis on the canonical foursome of white males. No one could reasonably deny that women writers like Stowe had quarrels with the dominant patriarchy, or that blacks like Douglass and Harriet Wilson could not be conflated with the market. These arraignments of antebellum culture from the peripheries were allowed to stand. But the mainstream authors, it was increasingly agreed, were another story. They and their writings could not be isolated – indeed, they could barely be differentiated – from the capitalist, racist, and sexist society of which they were a part. A new isomorphism had arisen to resurrect (while sophisticating) the univocal paradigm.

A cynic might have said that if Cold-War exceptionalism colonized American literary studies in the late forties and fifties, free-market naturalism was doing the same thing in the nineties. Critics within the university had difficulty imagining an "outside" to capitalist rule in the past because people in the present – just about everywhere on the planet, it seemed – found it almost impossible to conceive of viable alternatives to the American pattern. Not by accident did the New Historicist moment coincide with the disappearance of the Soviet Union and, apparently, of Marxism as well. As forms of resistance, however perverted, to the global dominance of capitalism withered, how could one seriously maintain that a handful of long-dead authors in the economic epicenter held out against the irresistible force of history?

Today, when I teach my survey course in nineteenth-century American literature, I still include Emerson, Thoreau, Hawthorne, and Melville. But I no longer have my students devote a week or more to *Walden* and to *Moby-Dick*. Instead we read "Civil Disobedience", "Bartleby the Scrivener", and "Benito Cereno", which leaves room for Margaret Fuller, the *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass*, and *Ruth Hall* or *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. (I cannot teach any poetry at all in the survey.) There is simply not enough time, in a thirteen- or fourteen-week semester, to cover everything, and the American

Renaissance authors Matthiessen celebrates no longer, in the twenty-first century, monopolize the curriculum as they once did.

For a while, in the nineties, I practically stopped discussing the literary marketplace altogether. The decade of free-market triumphalism was not hospitable to analyses of authorial misgivings about laissez faire. Students listened with ill-disguised boredom, and, being human, I started to softpedal the themes I had always concentrated on in the course. But with the recession that began several years ago, the drying up of dot-com opportunities for college graduates, and now the collapse of Enron, I am happy – the wrong word, perhaps, but you get the idea – happy to report an accelerating discomfort among undergraduates with the supposed wisdom and justice of the economic system. Suddenly Hawthorne's double attitude about displaying his "scarlet letter" in the marketplace makes sense again. And the return of ambivalence, I am happy to say – and here my happiness is unalloyed – may breathe fresh life into the argument I propounded seventeen years ago in *American Romanticism and the Marketplace*.

Paul Lauter

1. My intention when I began work on my dissertation was to write a three-part work, on Emerson, Thoreau, and Melville. My advisor in effect decided that I was finished when I had completed the 212 or so pages on Emerson's rhetoric. But I did continue work on Thoreau (producing a couple of articles, mainly one called "Thoreau's Prophetic Testimony"), and much later doing an edition of *Walden* and "Civil Disobedience". I saw Emerson and Thoreau, and Melville, too, though a bit differently, as men interested in shaping how people thought and acted, which is a somewhat different angle on them from that developed by Matthiessen. On the other hand, at the time, they seemed to me the critical writers with which to engage, not so much because they provided "cultural capital" (a concept I would have had no notion about at the time), but because they seemed to me so effective as shapers of thought and action.

I should add that I had already done my Master's thesis (a relatively long one) on Whitman – a kind of psychological study, a

big part of which was published in a psychological journal, *American Imago*, late in the fifties. It might have helped shift the ground slightly toward acknowledging Whitman's sexuality, though (embarrassingly) it argued, in the spirit of that time, against his actually practicing homosexual relations. But I approached Whitman in ways quite different from those that Matthiessen put forward (though one can read his work as one fostering gay writers).

2. I don't know that my work has been particularly influential, if that is what is being asked. Certainly lots of people have read what I wrote about the construction of Melville's reputation, and some took offence at it, but that involved a misreading, for it was really a piece about the 1920s, and much less so about Melville himself. I do know that some people found the kind of rhetorical analysis I did of Emerson useful, but I doubt that I added much in a theoretical way to what Kenneth Burke (by whom I was strongly influenced) had done. I know that some of what I did on Thoreau, particularly a late 1950s review of then-recent work on him, has been cited as calling the turn for a much more political reading of his work. I think that's accurate – I do think I called that turn and also helped bring it about.

As for my own work as a critic, a great deal of it has been devoted to winning space for others, writers who did not fit into Matthiessen's paradigm. So I didn't exactly build on what I had done.

3. Mainly, I've devoted a lot of time and energy to broadening the canon of early 19th-century American writing. The courses I do teach on Ante-bellum writing will generally include Emerson, Thoreau, Melville, and sometimes Whitman, but also Douglass, Jacobs, Fern, Fuller, etc. And, as the title of one such course, "Amistad and Other Rebellions", suggests, I tend to emphasize the political conflicts of the time. So I'm less involved with the aesthetic questions, more with the cultural and, as I say, political.

4. By and large, I think it continues to retain much of the definition that Matthiessen provided. Inflected, to be sure, by cultural studies and the like. But it seems to me to remain a kind of standard against which canon revision and other forms of resistant readings are deployed. Indeed, I think the power of the term to define the period

remains ... and will continue to be a force until someone develops an alternative paradigm that, at least in my view, re-envisions the writing of the time in terms of its responses to a set of social, economic and political crises that came to a head in the 1840s and 1850s. Only when such a thoroughgoing revisionary paradigm is worked through will a real alternative to the power of "American Renaissance" to define the field emerge.

5. I think I've actually responded to this already. From my point of view, the shift described enables us to read the full range of writing in the Ante-Bellum period NOT in terms of the work of the "American Renaissance" and those "beneath" them, but as varied intellectual and aesthetic responses to the times and the possibilities of and needs for authorship. So the broadening of the conceptual frameworks are at once necessitated by the changes in focus to a much larger number of texts and enabling of that widening of the lens.

David Leverenz

1. What was my perception of the field of "American Renaissance" studies at the beginning of my career, and what was my intended contribution to it? My short answers: 1. Loomingly Canonical; 2. almost none.

In the late 1960s, when I was finishing my Ph.D. at Berkeley, I wasn't thinking much about making a contribution to American Renaissance studies, though I'd bought Matthiessen's book and plowed through it twice. I was embarked on writing a 670 pp. dissertation modestly entitled "A Psychoanalysis of American Literature", from the Puritans through Mailer and Albee, all white male, with a chapter on *Moby Dick* tacked on at the end. After I discovered that my dissertation was unpublishable as well as grandiose, I settled down to working up the section on the Puritans into what became *The Language of Puritan Feeling*. I wrote and rewrote that book seven times, typed it seven times, kept changing the arguments too, before it was published in 1980 and sank without a trace. Only thereafter did I turn to the American Renaissance. Then, sparked by my relatively intense involvement in helping to raise four

children, I began to rethink the gendered aspects of various texts by Hawthorne and Emerson as well as Melville.

It was only much later, by the way, when I taught at the University of Southampton in the spring of 1985, that I realized the battle Matthiessen had been fighting, to get Emerson, Thoreau, Hawthorne, Melville, and Whitman taken seriously as great writers.[1] Many of the English powers that be still saw them as callow neo-colonial provincials, at best weird precursors to Henry James and T. S. Eliot. I discovered that implicit disdain slowly, in thinking about why I and a visiting Australian were brought in to teach American and Australian writers in part so that the department wouldn't have to hire someone to do it. Nor did this theoretically avant-garde Southampton department include classic American writers on their comprehensive examinations. I gained a new appreciation of why Matthiessen spends so much time affiliating Hawthorne with Spenser, or Melville with Thomas Browne. True, he has no Stowe or Poe. But his larger effort seems to me so heroically successful that now, as new generations of critics try to decanonize and democratize American literary texts, or to show how complicit Matthiessen is with Manifest Destiny imperialism, we take the canonicity of his Big Five for granted. For many years I reiterated his awe at the miraculous explosion of great American writing from 1850 to 1855, though I did try to include other texts in that explosion – not only *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, but also Susan Warner's *The Wide, Wide World*, Frederick Douglass's *My Bondage and My Freedom*, and Longfellow's poetry.

2. My major contribution to American Renaissance studies has been my 1989 book, *Manhood and the American Renaissance*. I

[1] Matthiessen also had to fight a battle just to get his now canonical book published. As Kermit Vanderbilt recounts in *American Literature and the Academy: The Roots, Growth, and Maturity of a Profession* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1986), 471-480, Matthiessen's 1941 book was rejected in 1939 by both W. W. Norton and Houghton Mifflin, and Oxford accepted it only if Matthiessen would pay for one third of the publication costs, about $1,000. Norton's letter soliciting the book a decade earlier noted that "American literature has become a stepchild of the English Literature Departments" (471). Note the small "l" for American and the capital "L" for English Literature. Harry Levin suggested the title (478).

worried about that title. As I said to my editor at Cornell University Press, Bernhard Kendler, "Nobody knows what the American Renaissance means". "That's all right", he responded. "Nobody knows what manhood means either".

This book caught the gender wave pretty well. Non-Emersonians liked my critique of Emerson's advocacy of manliness and my analysis of "Experience" as a depressive blaming of his wife and mother. They also relished my emphasis on the absence of girls from Emerson's celebrated line in "Self-Reliance", "the nonchalance of boys who are sure of a dinner". Emersonians tend to think I've reduced his fizzing intellectual energies to transiently fashionable sociological categories. My chapter on *The Scarlet Letter* as "Mrs. Hawthorne's Headache" was quite influential for a time, with several reprintings. Some Melvilleans balk a bit at the over-the-top chapter on Ahab as a man being beaten, though a few critics have run with it in several directions. Lee Clark Mitchell's book on Westerns has a terrific chapter on the wounded and recuperating movie cowboy, and Eric Haralson has an excellent essay on Christopher Newman as a man being beaten.[2] My chapter on Frederick Douglass got the most unstinting praise from reviewers, in part because my close reading comparing the 1845 and 1855 versions of his fight with the slave-breaker Covey opens up so many intertextual as well as gender issues.

Several prominent younger critics have told me that one line from my 1986 *PMLA* essay on Emerson spoke to them with exceptionally liberating power: "Instead of deconstructing his prose I want to reconstruct his politics".[3] The problem is, one never knows which line – if any – will speak.

My most fundamental argument, that manhood controls and counters fears of humiliation, has had a wary reception, perhaps because it doesn't invite cultural complications and specificities. Two other basic arguments have fared better. Beyond my specific readings

[2] Lee Clark Mitchell, *Westerns: Making the Man in Fiction and Film* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996); Eric Haralson, "James's *The American*: A (New)man is Being Beaten", *American Literature* 64 (September 1992), 475-495.

[3] David Leverenz, "The Politics of Emerson's Man-Making Words", *PMLA* 101 (January 1986), 38-56, quotation 43. I changed "its" to "his politics" in *Manhood and the American Renaissance* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1989), 51.

of various authors, I was keen to establish competing varieties of manliness in antebellum America. My schematic model – gentry patrician, artisan, and entrepreneurial manhoods – was taken up by Michael Kimmel in *Manhood in America*, and keeps getting cited.[4] Another argument, also used by Kimmel and others, asserts that male-male relations rather than male-female relations are the primary ground for constructing ideologies of manhood. Here I was resisting the then-ubiquitous feminist perspective that saw patriarchy and fear of women's bodies as the generative frame. A fourth argument, that antebellum writers use gender to manage class conflicts, hasn't gone much of anywhere that I can see, except to be briefly critiqued in Wai Chee Dimock's and Michael Gilmore's *Rethinking Class*.[5]

Initially at least, one paragraph early on in the book struck a good many readers as outrageously homophobic. I dramatized myself as a conventional straight reader recoiling from Whitman's offer of a one-night stand to jump-start my creativity.[6] I was aiming to show how Whitman genially incorporates such straight-laced readers into his ongoing dialogue of "I" and "you". In retrospect, I should have used the third person. But I did respond to parts of "Song of Myself" that way, so I let it stand. Big mistake. One Whitman book linked me to the Christian right. Robert K. Martin and Donald Pease wrote acerbically dismissive reviews. While some gay critics who knew me didn't react that way, cumulatively these charges hurt, and may well have cost me a job at Northwestern.

A more long-lasting criticism of the book has been that I presume male and female separate spheres. I was eager to show how antebellum male and female writers respond to manliness issues differently, particularly because at mid-point in the writing, a feminist reader for the press said I should be writing only about men. To refute that, I discussed Sarah Hale, Caroline Kirkland, Susan Warner, Harriet Beecher Stowe, and Elizabeth Stoddard as genteel, passionate, and/or

[4] Michael Kimmel, *Manhood in America: A Cultural History* (New York: The Free Press, 1996).

[5] Wai Chee Dimock and Michael T. Gilmore, *Rethinking Class: Literary Studies and Social Formations* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), esp. Michael T. Gilmore's essay on "Hawthorne and the Making of the Middle Class", 215-238.

[6] Leverenz, *Manhood and the American Renaissance*, 30.

ironic writers about manhood. Younger critics such as Lora Romero and Gillian Brown have challenged that dichotomy by showing how antebellum domesticity is steeped in men's language of individualism and empire.[7] Despite various collections to the contrary, especially the prizewinning *American Literature* issue entitled "No More Separate Spheres!", I persist in thinking that for most white ladies in the United States before 1960 as well as 1860, not being allowed and encouraged to work for pay does create a separate sphere, in behavior as well as rhetoric.[8] But that has become a minority view.

Beyond all that, I have two minor textual contributions to American Renaissance studies that I'm inordinately proud of. The *Scarlet Letter* article and chapter notes Hester Prynne's ultimately transgressive desire to be married to Dimmesdale in Hell, "for a joint futurity of endless retribution" (*Scarlet Letter*, ch. 5). To my knowledge no one had picked that up before, since the passage is usually read retrospectively from the tamer version at the end. Secondly, not in the book but in a later article on Hawthorne's short stories, I show at least to my satisfaction that the end of "My Kinsman, Major Molineux" plays with Dante's one dirty joke, the passage about farting at the end of Canto 21 of *The Inferno*. On the other hand, Lea Newman's recent assessment of Hawthorne's uses of Dante doesn't mention my argument, so perhaps it's more tenuous than I'd thought.[9]

More recently, I've published two rather lengthy articles on Poe, one arguing that his stories play with the code of Southern gentry

[7] Lora Romero, *Home Fronts: Domesticity and Its Critics in the Antebellum United States* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1997); Gillian Brown, *Domestic Individualism: Imagining Self in Nineteenth-Century America* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990).

[8] Cathy N. Davidson, ed., *No More Separate Spheres!*, *American Literature* 70 (September 1998), special issue. See also Monika M. Elbert, ed., *Separate Spheres No More: Gender Convergence in American Literature 1830-1930* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2000).

[9] David Leverenz, "Historicizing Hell in Hawthorne's Tales", in Millicent Bell, ed., *New Essays on Hawthorne's Major Tales* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 101-132, 107-109 on Dante; Lea Bertani Vozar Newman, "Sophia's Enduring Influence: Hawthorne's Creative Resurgence and the Genesis of *The Marble Faun*", *Nathaniel Hawthorne Review* 26 (Fall 2000), 1-12, esp. 7-9.

honor that his life tried to reflect, the other arguing that his stories turn from gentry satires to gender-based sensationalism.[10] But the verdict on both of those articles is still out.

Finally, you ask about the book's impact on my own development. It's parenting, not the book, that has developed me. That was the crucible for all of my rethinkings of American literature.

3. Charlene Avallone's *PMLA* essay attacking the label, "American Renaissance", has persuaded me to drop the name entirely.[11] I now use the more inclusive category of "antebellum American literature". So that's what I teach when I teach it, and I no longer highlight the allegedly explosive 1850-1855 period.

I've also been giving less and less space to Emerson's essays, *Walden*, and *Moby Dick*, so that I can give enough close-reading attention to slave narratives (Equiano, Douglass, Jacobs) and popular women's fiction, especially Rowson's *Charlotte Temple* and Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. Most American students don't like *Moby Dick*, feel baffled by Emerson's essays, and get annoyed at *Walden*, in part because those texts induce a great deal of intellectual labor without settling down anywhere, and in part – especially with Thoreau – because these readers rightly sense an Olympian snippiness as well as an aggressive questioning of how they live. A few students, of course, go crazy with delight, as I did and do. On balance, given that I teach in a state university, I've taken to excerpting *Moby Dick* and *Walden*, and reducing their Emerson immersion to "Self-Reliance". Sometimes

[10] David Leverenz, "Poe and Gentry Virginia", in Shawn Rosenheim and Stephen Rachman, eds., *The American Face of Edgar Allan Poe* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995), 210-236, rev. and rpt. as "Poe and Gentry Virginia: Provincial Gentleman, Textual Aristocrat, Man of the Crowd", in Anne Goodwyn Jones and Susan V. Donaldson, eds., *Haunted Bodies: Gender and Southern Texts* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1997), 79-108; "Spanking the Master: Mind-Body Crossings in Poe's Sensationalism", in J. Gerald Kennedy, ed., *A Historical Guide to Edgar Allan Poe* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 95-127.

[11] Charlene Avallone, "What American Renaissance? The Gendered Genealogy of a Critical Discourse", *PMLA* 112 (October 1997), 1102-1120. To my mind at least, Avallone unfairly associates my book with a general male dismissal of antebellum women's writing as a "subculture" lacking in "vitality" (1110), though I do give short shrift to Margaret Fuller.

I teach only Melville's "Bartleby, the Scrivener" and *Benito Cereno*, jettisoning the whale entirely. But I'll try *Moby Dick* again this Fall and see what happens. Whitman and Dickinson remain relatively constant presences, though I tend to emphasize Whitman's short poems more and more. Long ago, teaching *The Scarlet Letter*, I had an angry epiphany that Dimmesdale gets away scot free from doing child care. But I never teach that romance any more, because it's the one antebellum text most students have read in high school. Besides, I love teaching Hawthorne's short stories.

I don't quite know what you're looking for in asking about my "evaluative judgments". Neal Tolchin, who wrote a dissertation with me that later became a fine book on Melville's mourning, said in his preface that I'm an Ishmael in conversation, an Ahab in response to writing.[12] Not bad, except that I try to be constructive in my attentiveness to issues of grammar and structure. I don't think I've changed a bit in that respect. I continue to be pretty good at seeing problems with focus and development in everyone's writing except my own.

4. For me at least, it's a great idea whose time has passed.

5. One of the scariest pronouncements in the criticism of the last two decades is Carolyn Porter's dictum, in her lengthy 1994 *ALH* essay on new historicism, that the center of American literary studies has to shift from Boston to Havana.[13] That was one of the first times that I wondered how long it would be until I retire.

In the last two decades there has been an accelerating critical shift from individual close readings to comparative analyses and textual juxtapositions. In retrospect, deconstruction was the last hurrah for close readings, a mode soon to be challenged by new historicism, which quickly yielded to cultural studies and now globalization studies. These movements have usefully prompted wider and wider

[12] Neal L. Tolchin, *Mourning, Gender, and Creativity in the Art of Herman Melville* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988), ix.

[13] Carolyn Porter, "What We Know That We Don't Know: Remapping American Literary Studies", *American Literary History* 6 (Fall 1994), 467-526, esp. 502-521.

contextings and intertextings, usually to further critiques of ethnicity/race, class, and gender issues, and also of imperialism. I feel like quite a fuddy duddy in my continuing classroom emphasis on close reading. While I weave in various recent perspectives, I keep getting excited with the delights of the text at hand, and even my graduate classes remain text-driven rather than theory-driven. Cultural studies approaches don't suppress the excitement of discovering textual bafflements and complexities, but they tend to deflect attention to social issues. Of course, that's what some reviewers said about my manhood book, too.

On canonicity, I don't think any American text except *The Scarlet Letter* has kept its canonical status relatively constant. Melville, Dickinson, and Stowe have careered down and up, and Longfellow has long since dropped from sight. Thanks to Jean Fagan Yellin, Harriet Jacobs's *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* just got admitted in the last two decades, while thanks to Jane Tompkins, Susan Warner's *The Wide, Wide World* had a mayfly canonical life in the late 1980s.[14] In my teaching, I don't talk much about the canon any more. For me it's more important to get students engaged with the texts, not to make hierarchical assessments of their literary value.

In my current project, on paternalism and daddy's girls during the early corporate era, I've been influenced more by studies of American business rhetorics and practices than by cultural studies criticism, which tends to highlight American imperialism, a related but not central topic for me. I'm trying to use corporate capitalist culture as a context for various close readings. I'm not sure that what I'm doing is

[14] A ground-breaking article by Yellin, "*Written By Herself*: Harriet Jacobs' Slave Narrative", *American Literature* 53 (November 1981), 478-486, exposed the autobiographical roots of Jacobs's slave narrative, and demolished the widespread (white) critical presumption that it was at least partly a fiction written by Lydia Maria Child. For an expanded version of her arguments, see Harriet Jacobs, *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl: Written by Herself*, ed. Jean Fagan Yellin (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1987), xiii-xxxiv. Spurred by that discovery, many critics have now explored Jacobs's textual and contextual complexities. In *Sensational Designs: The Cultural Work of American Fiction 1790-1860* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), Jane Tompkins resurrected Susan Warner's *The Wide, Wide World* for a temporarily wide audience. Warner's novel is now out of print again, as Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* was in 1948.

cultural studies, in part because my arguments aren't sufficiently on the left. One could call it a two-cheers-for-corporate capitalism approach. I see corporate capitalism as progressive as well as exploitative, in part because it undermines individual production, landed property, and traditional fatherhood as bases for middle-class manhood and male status. For me, that's a good thing. The left still tends to idealize proletarian or artisan labor, privilege production, and disparage consumerism as not manly enough. But that's another story.

I'll conclude with a personal note. By far my finest achievement has been that I've helped to raise four children who are happy with themselves. My art is short; may their lives be long.

Donald E. Pease

1. In 1987 I positioned *Visionary Compacts: American Renaissance Writings in Cultural Context* within the imaginary lineage of F. O. Matthiessen's *American Renaissance: Art and Expression in the Age of Emerson and Whitman* in order to disclose the pertinence of Matthiessen's project to our own time. Jonathan Arac has explained that Matthiessen deployed the term "American Renaissance" as a participant in the popular front's effort to cover over rents in the social fabric. I intended *Visionary Compacts* as a revisionist account of antebellum literary culture that would open up the conversation in which the Matthiessen canon was discussed. I aspired to remove American Renaissance writings from the sacred precincts of canonical literary history and relocate them within a highly conflicted antebellum public sphere so as to recover the debates – over expansionism and slavery and the extension of political rights to women and minorities – that Matthiessen had suppressed.

I thought that a previous generation of Americanists – Henry Nash Smith, R. W. B. Lewis, Quentin Anderson, Richard Chase – had invoked the Matthiessen canon polemically to ward off political and historical questions during the era of the cold war. *Visionary Compacts* criticized the aestheticizing assumptions that undergirded what I referred to as the field imaginary of American literary studies and introduced a socio-political supplement which interrogated the

complicity between their aesthetic ideology and the cold war mentality. By the field imaginary, I meant to designate a location for the disciplinary unconscious of American literary studies, the locus for the tacit assumptions and the key terms that Americanists shared.

Visionary Compacts placed post-structuralist theory, the new historicism, feminism, and critical race theory into the service of the wholesale revision of the field of American Studies as well as the contexts for the interpretation of Americanist texts. In place of the construal of American Renaissance writings as inhabiting an idealized realm of authority and literary prestige, *Visionary Compacts* insisted upon American literature's place within a public sphere where questions of citizenship, identity and polity were debated. The book explored the vexed relation between literary dissent and material social transformation and sought to destabilize the status and the symbolic capital Matthiessen's Renaissance writers had acquired.

2. I associated *Visionary Compacts* with the projects of the numerous Americanist scholars like John Carlos Rowe, Myra Jehlen, Jonathan Arac, Philip Fisher, Houston Baker, Richard Slotkin, and Kenneth Dauber (among others), who wished to move American literary studies away from reconsiderations of the canonical scene of its production and transmission and towards an expanded set of questions. These questions would link the masterworks of the American Renaissance to conflicts over sectionalism, slavery and the political status of women and minorities. The Americanists with which I was affiliated shared the conviction that it was the foreclosure of questions of race, gender, class, and sexuality that had produced for the transhistorical category of the "American Renaissance" the false semblance of universality and endowed it with its hypercanonical standing. Individually and collectively we criticized the "American Renaissance" as a category which threatened to subsume diverse and noncomparable imagined communities of American citizen-subjects inside (as well as outside) the territorial U.S. within the confines of a homogeneous literary culture.

In a benchmark essay entitled "Whose American Renaissance" which he published in the twenty-fifth anniversary issue of the *New York Review of Books*, Frederick Crews reviewed *Visionary Compacts* along with seven other recently published works by Americanist

scholars. In the review Crews referred to the scholars under review as the "New Americanists", and he stipulated that these scholars had already accomplished a major reorganization of the field of American literary Studies. Crews then carefully spelled out the terms and presuppositions separating what he called the "New Americanists" from their precursors:

> What gives the New Americanist critique a special emotional force, however, is its connection both to our historical national shames—slavery, "Indian removal," aggressive expansion, imperialism and so forth—and to current struggles for equal social opportunity. When a New Americanist shows, for example, that a canonical work such as *Huckleberry Finn* indulges in the stereotypical "objectifying" of blacks, Native Americans, women, or others, a double effect results. First, the canon begins to look less sacrosanct and is thus readied for expansion to include works by long-dead representatives of those same groups. Second, their contemporary descendants are offered a reason for entering into the academic dialogue that had previously slighted them. In short, the New Americanist program aims at altering the literary departments' social makeup as well as their dominant style of criticism (*The New York Review of Books* 35:16 [October 27, 1988], 68-69).

In the "Introduction" for a volume of essays entitled *Revisionary Interventions into the Americanist Canon*, I turned the term New Americanists into an honorific which described the collective project of a new generation of Americanist scholars. The volume launched the *New Americanist Series* published by Duke University Press for which I served as General Editor. Since the Series' inception in 1991, over seventy-five volumes have been published in the New Americanists Series. Individually and collectively the New Americanists have replaced the canonical history they repudiated with contemporary questions of identity and representation. In their refunctioning of the topos of the American Renaissance, they rendered that domain a highly self-contradictory realm, riven with residual and emergent categories. In so doing they have also transformed American literature's relationship to Matthiessen's American Renaissance writers as well as the stories that we tell about them.

New Americanist scholars like Priscilla Wald, Russ Castronovo, Cindy Weinstein, Timothy Powell, Paul Gilmore, Kirsten Gruesz, Shelley Streeby, Valerie Smith and Ronald Judy are preoccupied with the construction of alternative versions of the American Renaissance. They have preserved the topos of the "American Renaissance" as of the utmost importance to an understanding of the national identity, but they have also contested Matthiessen's term so as to intervene in debates concerning the future of American literary studies, specifically, whether it should be represented within nationalist or transamerican contexts.

3. Since the publication of *Visionary Compacts* in 1987, I have extended the temporal as well as the geographical coordinates of the American Renaissance. Whereas I formerly interpreted American Renaissance writings through the twin optics of the Civil War and Reconstruction, I now place these writings within the context of US imperial expansion throughout the hemisphere. This broad-gauged reconceptualization of the category has led me to add Frederick Douglass, Harriet Beecher Stowe, John Rollin Ridge, Lydia Child, Harriet Jacobs, William Wells Brown and Catherine Sedgwick to the syllabus of American Renaissance writers. I ask my students to read Melville, Poe and Emerson within the framework which Toni Morrison provided these Renaissance writers in *Playing in the Dark.* In that work, Morrison argued that Africanity constituted the Other to American Renaissance literary culture in the sense that it provided the unreflected backdrop against which these writers constructed the representations of their lifeworlds.

The revisionist interventions of José David Saldívar, Paul Gilroy, and Gloria Anzaldúa in particular have also led me to reconceptualize the American Renaissance as a literary formation whose historical framework is at once multicultural and transnational. Saldívar's and Anzaldúa's anxiety over New England's colonization of U.S. literary culture has encouraged them to represent events in the hemisphere as part of the global distribution of U.S. imperial power in which 1848 (rather than 1850) was the pivotal year. Without elevating it into a point of origin, Saldívar has suggested that 1848 be construed as an historical watershed. According to Saldívar, the so called Mexican-American War did not merely designate an episode in the violent

history of the borderlands of *Nuestra America* but disclosed the United States proto-imperial role in the Americas and in the rest of the world. Following Saldívar, Shelly Streeby has recently insisted upon the significance of the inter-American imperial encounters of 1848 and beyond for an understanding of class and race formations at work within American Renaissance writings. According to Saldívar and Streeby, U.S. imperialism consolidated the processes of expansion with forms of internal colonialism that encompassed the conflicts with indigenous peoples, the U.S.-Mexican War, imperial rivalries with Spain, Britain and other European powers in the Americas and filibustering expeditions to Cuba. As a consequence of these recontextualizations, I now tend to be less interested in the pre-existing archive than in the larger frame of transamerican and transatlantic cultural networks of publication, translation, circulation and the geographies of reception in which these transactions are conducted.

In downplaying my former emphasis on national literary traditions, I have turned toward more global patterns of migration, diaspora and exile so that a transamerican and multicultural history can become visible to my students. In teaching American Renaissance writings, I attempt to situate them within the transnational and regional perspectives of what Paul Gilroy calls the "Black Atlantic" (which extends from Georgia to Santo Domingo) and what Joseph Roach refers to as the circum-Atlantic (whose trajectory encompasses New Orleans, Antilles, West Africa and London).

4. Matthiessen intended the term "American Renaissance" to designate a canonical moment in the U.S. literary history when the nation's greatest authors produced literary works endowed with the originality and imaginative scope of the most gifted writers of the European renaissance. Matthiessen wanted to acquire the cultural capital of the European renaissance by americanizing it, and thereafter to promote pedagogical institutions that inculcated in the citizenry the capacity to appreciate this special form of literacy.

Since co-editing *Cultures of U.S. Imperialism* with Amy Kaplan in 1993, I have become increasingly sensitive to what Walter Mignolo has described as the "darker side of the renaissance": the correlation of this specialized literacy with the larger projects of imperial

expansion and internal colonization. New Americanists' explanations of post-1848 class and racial formations have emphasized the darker side of American Renaissance writings. These accounts have described the "American Renaissance" as shaped by inter-American contact, transnational diasporic communities and global transformation, and have rendered American Renaissance studies which isolate the nation-state as a unit of analysis all but obsolete.

When viewed from the borderlands, to name but one of these transamerican perspectives, the map and history of the American Renaissance look quite different. Gloria Anzaldúa's "*La Frontera*", José Limon's "*Greater Mexico*", José David Saldívar's notion of a "*transfrontera* contact zone" have supervised the movement of American Renaissance texts across the map of an enlarged America, and have demonstrated the ways in which what happened outside U.S. borders importantly affected its development as a nation.

5. In my remarks thus far, I have briefly outlined the institutions of pedagogy, canonization and official sanctification through which American Renaissance writings had formerly been immortalized. I have also correlated changes in the methods, theoretical frameworks, and objects of study in the field of American literature with transformations in the new Americanists' representation and interpretation of the American Renaissance. The fact that the category of the American Renaissance has played such a significant role in the formation as well as the reorganization of the field would tend to suggest that this topos will continue to preoccupy Americanist scholars into the future.

Eric Sundquist

1. Because I graduated from college in 1974 and graduate school in 1978, my perception of the field was very much determined by Matthiessen's book. Along with a few other books – Leo Marx's *The Machine in the Garden* and R. W. B. Lewis's *The American Adam*, for example – it was *American Renaissance* that continued at that time to define the major trends in critical thought. There were, of course, structuralist, psychoanalytic, feminist, and other approaches making a

mark on critical practice in the field by that time; but the major texts and writers had not been very much altered in most programs and for most scholars. At the time of writing my dissertation, my intended contribution to the field was, in effect, to reconsider, from a psychoanalytic (and to some degree deconstructive) theoretical point of view, major works by Cooper, Thoreau, Hawthorne, and Melville. The result was a book entitled *Home as Found: Authority and Genealogy in Nineteenth-Century American Literature*. The book was not as broad as its title implied, and, for whatever contribution it may have made to studies of those writers, it did not very much change the idea of the canonical figures or texts, nor was it meant to do so. In this respect, it was a book that continued to work within the tradition described by Matthiessen, Lewis, and others.

2. I went on to write on other topics before returning to the period of the American Renaissance. Specifically, I wrote a book on Faulkner (*Faulkner: The House Divided*) in which I began with an interest in genealogy and ended with a double interest in genealogy and race relations as expressed in Faulkner's major works. My continued interest in literary form, that is to say, became more entangled with an interest in the politics and ideology of race, and this led me to return to the period and authors of the American Renaissance with a new interest in racial issues both in canonical authors such as Melville and in authors who were at that time not so widely studied as they are today, such as Frederick Douglass. I wrote essays on Melville's "Benito Cereno", on slavery and the post-Revolutionary tradition, and on Mark Twain, and edited collections of essays on Douglass and on *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. This in turn led to two projects in which I re-examined the American Renaissance and its aftermath from a new, race-centered orientation. In *To Wake the Nations: Race in the Making of American Literature* I argued that Nat Turner's "Confession", Martin Delany's *Blake*, Douglass's *My Bondage and My Freedom*, Melville's "Benito Cereno", the stories and novels of Charles Chesnutt, Twain's *Pudd'nhead Wilson*, and Du Bois's *The Souls of Black Folk* constituted a kind of "counter-tradition" within and extending beyond the period of the American Renaissance that defined that important period of social conflict and literary flowering in a different and more inclusive way. In a second

project of this same period, my contribution to volume II of the *Cambridge History of American Literature* (ed. Sacvan Bercovitch), I wrote about the literature of the frontier and American Indians, exploration and continental expansion, and slavery and race. By definition, my contribution focused on non-canonical literature of the mid-nineteenth century, but was also a means to see the canonical writers covered in other parts of the volume within a new and more comprehensive context.

3. My teaching in the field has reflected the evolution of critical interests described above, although my recent interests have gravitated toward the twentieth century — an edited collection of documents on Ellison's *Invisible Man*; a published set of lectures on James Weldon Johnson, Zora Neale Hurston, and Arna Bontemps (*The Hammers of Creation*); and projects on African American and American Jewish writing of the post-World War II era. Although I have been a university administrator for the last five years, once I return to teaching and writing next year I hope to continue work in this area and take up more contemporary American fiction as a subject. I tend to see all of these projects as continuations, in some degree or another, of the reexamination of the period that I began with *To Wake the Nations*. In that sense, the period of the "American Renaissance", broadly understood as the period when the crisis over slavery and race took its constitutive modern form for the United States, is still the formative period for me.

4. Perhaps as a result of the power of the original statement, and perhaps as a result of the interest shown in Matthiessen himself as a subject of critical study, it seems that the phrase "American Renaissance" will continue to be powerful. Because one can now use the term to embrace a wide array of fascinating works, given the expansion of the canon, the concept of a period of intense, original literary work that is decidedly "American" in some new way – a period in which Douglass and Jacobs are as intriguing as Emerson and Hawthorne – should continue to engage our attention. And, as noted above, because it is in key ways the starting point for modern understandings of race in the United States, both the period and its major works remain vitally important, even as they clearly belong to a

much longer, and less easily segregated, tradition. In the long run we can expect to see a continued blurring of the historical divisions between centuries and eras within centuries.

5. As indicated above, I believe the American Renaissance will remain a focal point, perhaps a kind of pivot around which the study of American literature will turn, for some time to come. As the nineteenth century recedes and the works of the twentieth begin to readers to seem "old", then a new focal point may emerge. The most likely turning point in future studies may be World War II and the period that followed, culminating in the social revolutions (in areas of race and gender) of the 1960s. Arguably, in the same way that the civil rights movement of that period has been considered a "second Reconstruction", an attempt to correct the failed Reconstruction of the post-Civil War era, so too the literary and critical flourishing of the 1960s-1970s, in which race and gender issues came to the forefront of attention, may ultimately come to seem in literary history a new kind of "renaissance". It may, however, prove hard to identify and argue for a group of writers and texts as revolutionary and lasting as those that constitute the first (and perhaps only) American Renaissance. Time will tell.

REVIEWS

Nina Baym, *American Women of Letters and Nineteenth-Century Sciences: Styles of Affiliation* (New Brunswick, New Jersey, and London: Rutgers University Press, 2002), pp. 272.

Reviewed by Anna De Biasio

The historical record's severe verdict bespeaks the arduous intercourse between women and science. The astronomer Maria Mitchell, who discovered a comet in 1847, was the only woman to receive recognition for scientific achievement in antebellum America, and virtually the sole to enjoy the status of scientist for most of the nineteenth century. Does this exception imply that before the opening of higher education to women in 1870 "girls [didn't] do science" at all, according to a saying that still retains some actuality?

Nina Baym's masterly research demonstrates that rather the opposite is true. Not original scientists themselves yet immersed in an age of intense faith in technological innovation, nineteenth-century women appear to have actively served the scientific cause by occupying a wide range of nonprofessional or quasi-professional – which Baym terms "affiliative" – positions. The modes of involvement and advocacy included the teaching of sciences in women's schools, the writing of pedagogical texts, and the divulgation of scientific discoveries through books and popular journals. Baym insists upon the paramount role of print in making the sciences available to women, by women. On the one hand, access to print allowed women to participate in the public discourse of science as both producers and receivers, thus leading to the creation of a national market for the sciences. On the other, print offered them a vehicle for arguing for the importance of science in improving other women's lives.

The main work of popularization appears to have been carried out by a culturally homogeneous group of activists (upper-middle class, leisured, and northerners) between the 1830s and the 1870s. According to a common ideological agenda, Almira Phelps, Sarah Hale, Catherine Esther Beecher, Susan Fenimore Cooper, and Elisabeth Cary Agassiz variously operated to

foster awareness and mastery of the natural environment, a rational understanding of house management, and in general an appreciation of the benefits – especially when they relieved women from time-consuming and burdensome tasks – of magnificently progressive times. In no case, as Baym hastens to make clear, did their belief in the ideals of innovation and middle-class civility coincide with a real questioning of the intellectual position of woman within that class.

If partially deflated at the outset, the issue of science as a test-case for women's minds remains thorny throughout Baym's study. Treatises, educational writings, public speeches, and journal articles are interrogated in search of pronouncements on female intellectual emancipation, and the answer is almost invariably a position of moderate reformism. Often, especially with the advent of the Civil War, particularly enlightened stances grow more conservative over the years. After urging for a life-time scientific formation to discipline women's unruly and emotional nature, Almira Phelps became corresponding secretary of the Women's Anti-Suffrage Association. Sarah Hale, the influential editor of *Ladies' Magazine*, for forty years preaching the study of science for women and circulating scientific findings, theorized the organic difference of the female constitution (more "imponderable" and "ethereal") and women's need to practice scientific expertise "by the fireside, the bedside, in the 'inner chamber', where her true place is".

Even the few she-scientists of the era exhibit rather unformed views as to women's capacity for creative research. When Maria Mitchell declares that "until able women have given their lives to investigation, it is idle to discuss their capacity for original work", she voices a fatalistic opinion widespread in her time. Melancholic as this may sound to present-day readers, it would be rather anti-historical, Baym seems to suggest, to expect radically egalitarian claims from these gentility-oriented popularizers (only Emily Dickinson is discussed as a case of radical appropriation of the scientific discourse, but she actually confirms the rule by her dismissal of the public arena). In the context examined, advanced as it was, the reality of sexual difference remained undisputed, and, in Baym's words, "affiliation [the] way of negotiating this difference".

It is extremely engaging to follow the author as she explores the margins for gender assertion – or, in an opposite perspective, the traces of gender *impasse* – entailed by women's strategies of negotiation. The underlying message of science supporters seemed to be that given that women were not – or rather ought not to be – equal to men, they should valorize their spiritual

inclination by counterbalancing it with a certain amount of rationalism. In a time in which science and religion were not seen as conflicting instances, Baym's public women, be they journalists, fiction writers, physicians or leaders of spiritualistic movements, all agree that feminine, markedly moral resources were to be preserved and enhanced, not reduced, by scientific training.

The case for female difference, however, becomes more compelling as Baym discusses "style" as an interface between the scientific and the artistic discourse, the true ground where the limits of women's affiliation to science were tested. As Baym persuasively argues, the prose of early popularizers such as Elisa Cary Agassiz or Emma Willard already exhibited an aestheticist vein: a tendency to be narrative and descriptive rather than sheerly expository, subjective rather than impersonal, metaphorical and imaginative rather than referential. Throughout the second half of the century, women increasingly claimed aestheticism as a territory for themselves, in an ideal opposition to utilitarian, earth-bound, factual – in a word, masculine – science. In possibly the most brilliant and polemical chapter ("The Sciences in Women's Novels"), Baym exposes some crucial contradictions inherent to the late nineteenth-century cultural field, and, implicitly, to the evolution of women's professionalism.

As the roads of science and art began to diverge, and the province of professional science was firmly – as to some extent it still is – in men's hands, polite letters were gradually appropriated by women. As novelists and poets, women tended to turn the literary artifacts into the preserve of an aesthetic, subjective, emotional response to reality, developing a characteristically flamboyant rhetoric that conveyed notions about female higher sensibility. They thus imparted to literature a strongly gendered impulse which contrasted not only with the work of former women pedagogues, but also with the male realists' (as later with male modernists') simultaneous effort to reclaim literature as a manly and science-like business. The paradox implicit in this cultural dialectics is that the partially regressive phenomenon of female aestheticism coincided both with the rise of women's literary professionalism and with the opening to women of scientific professions.

For the time being, Baym's last word seems to be that through varying degrees of affiliation to science – up to the farthest remove from it – vindication of a spiritual superiority appeared to most nineteenth-century women of letters the most viable way of making up for an enormous cultural

disadvantage. Although sometimes, as we read in Elizabeth Stuart Phelps's *Story of Avis* (1877), the longed-for model was even more perfect:

> We have been told that it takes three generations to make a gentleman; we may believe that it will take as much, or more, to make A WOMAN. A creature forever more of nerve than of muscle, and therefore trained to the energy of the muscle and the repose of the nerve ... such a woman alone is fitted to acquire the drilled brain, the calmed imagination, and sustained aim, which constitute intellectual command ... in whom emotion intensifies reflection, and passion strengthens purpose, and self-poise is substituted for self-extravagance.

Malini Johar Schueller, *U.S. Orientalisms: Race, Nation and Gender in Literature, 1790-1890* (Ann Arbor, The University of Michigan Press: 2001), pp. 248.

Reviewed by Elena Spandri

U.S. Orientalisms is a brilliant exploration of the ways in which different kinds of orientalist discourse in the United States contributed to shape an imperial nationhood in the late eighteenth and nineteenth century. Drawing on the most recent cultural critique, which opposes notions of insularity and posits the centrality of imperial ideology in the process of nation-building, Shueller argues that since the Revolutionary War various and multifaceted "orientalisms" started to be at work in U.S. literary writing and political language, thus providing a repertoire of tropes and ideologies whereby the United States negotiated internal socio-political conflicts and carved out for themselves the role of an emergent empire, better yet, the latest empire bound to fulfill Columbus's original dream of joining West and East.

As the title suggests, the book is at once an explicit tribute to Said's intellectual legacy and a likewise unambiguous departure from the monolithic and disciplinary approach he adopts in *Orientalism*. Schueller's self-positioning "at the intersection of postcolonial and feminist analyses" allows her to confront Saidian theoretical formulations on a twofold ground. On the one hand, she contends that U.S. orientalist texts resist the perpetuation of repressive patriarchy by breaking down the traditional gendered dichotomies of mind and body invoked by Said. On the other hand, she highlights the "deformative" and creative powers of localities by

foregrounding three discrete geopolitical contexts, which are meant to replace the abstract, unlocalized category of the Saidian "Orient": the Barbary Coast, the Near East, and India.

Schueller locates the origin of American orientalism in the military and diplomatic crises that broke out between the United States and the North African nations in 1785, when an American schooner was captured by the Algerians in retaliation for the U.S. refusal to pay passage money for the ships trading in the region. Her insightful analyses of the literary texts that capitalize on this sequence of historical events (Susanna Rowson's *Slaves in Algiers*, Royall Tyler's *The Algerine Captive*, David Everett's *Slaves in Barbary*, James Ellison's *The American Captive*, Joseph Stevens Jones's *The Usurper*, Washington Irving's *Salmagundi*, Peter Markoe's *The Algerine Spy in Pennsylvania*) show the extent to which the enslavement of American sailors engendered a geographical imaginary in which the eventual victory of the United States read as the inevitable triumph of "a virtuous empire spreading the light of freedom in a dissipated Orient, the imperial body being constructed through an exclusion of both slavery and deviant Oriental sexuality" (14). The clear-cut demarcations between regeneration and depravity, freedom and slavery, masculine vigor and feminine lack of agency drawn by North African orientalism (yet, as Schueller skilfully illustrates, simultaneously trespassed) become sites of anxiety in Near Eastern orientalism, in which missionary rhetoric, narratives of colonial encounters, and preoccupations with cultural and racial hierarchies fuelled by the findings of Egyptology coalesce into an "important critique of the technologies of imperial knowledge" (100). The satiric bent and the "archaeological imperative" embodied in the Janus-like figure of the male adventurer-hermeneute who confronts the epistemological crisis of Western logic testify to the self-conscious element of Near Eastern orientalism in the nineteenth century. Schueller distinguishes two main currents of Near Eastern orientalist literature. The first includes the writers who respond to counterorientalist pressure by resorting to the all powerful resource of narrative closure (William Ware, Maria Susanna Cummins, Maturin Murrey Ballou, John DeForest). The second features Edgar Allan Poe, Harriet Prescott Spofford and Herman Melville, whose more "subversive orientalisms" undermine the trope of the Near East as the new frontier by rewriting the border in terms of racial-cultural hybridity, transgressive sexuality, and hermeneutical resistance.

Schueller's constant preoccupation throughout the book is to link the numerous textual and ideological tactics for handling colonialism and

imperialism enacted by U.S. orientalisms with the U.S. nineteenth-century discourses on slavery. Bearing on recent African Americanist scholarship, which locates racial alterity at the core of the construction of national identity, Schueller aptly cautions the reader against the risk of reading orientalist texts through a Manichean lens: either as naive attempts at repressing the hot issue of internal slavery through the cunning manipulation of the technologies of race, or as straightforward denunciations of an emergent imperialist ideology. Her subtle and critically informed readings of Emerson's and Whitman's Asian/Indic orientalism illuminate the extent to which the transcendentalist "language of political innocence", which maps out Asia as the West's spiritual Other by erasing history and power relations, becomes a politically charged, ambivalent discursive site. Emerson's fatalistic and spiritualized Asia, constructed in his *Essays* and *Journals*, and Whitman's alternatively maternal and eroticized Asia, evoked in his so called "international poems", serve the dual purpose of articulating an imperial rhetoric of a young expanding nation while simultaneously protecting the country from "contamination by Oriental passivity [which] arises from the very real fear that the United States lacks the will to create its own history free of slavery" (166). The association of Emersonian and Whitmanian uneasy sacralization of Asia with multiculturalism's present-day commodification of "native" cultures endows orientalist discourse with both a cultural tradition and a political and ideological currency that defy the insularity generally ascribed to eighteenth- and nineteenth-century U.S. culture, and enable the author to convincingly show that a self-conscious critique of imperial technologies of race and gender can coexist with male, hegemonic and raced constructions of the Orient.

Although Schueller addresses the relation of U.S. orientalism to British and, more generally, European orientalism only cursorily, she seems to imply that the question should not be approached exclusively through the category of competition. If U.S. orientalisms can be accounted for in terms of strategies of national self-recognition and compensatory rhetoric aimed at containing anxieties about racial difference and sexual normativity, to invoke the paradigm of literary and cultural competition with British orientalism would mean displacing the "indigenous" side of the phenomenon. Schueller is perfectly aware that some sort of competition between U.S. orientalism and British orientalism does in fact exist, and is to be ascribed to cultural and economic factors, yet she does not commit herself to such a consolidated and historically grounded vision of the relationship between post-revolutionary

and nineteenth-century U.S. culture, on the one hand, and British romantic and Victorian culture, on the other. Her resistance to such a sanctioned view, if anything, points towards a reversal of perspective. By foregrounding local differences, and by emphasizing the self-conscious and ironic traits of U.S. orientalisms, the author encourages the reader to dismiss the facile logic of the imitation of British literary fashions, thus paving the way toward a systematic and unprejudiced scrutiny of the dynamics of cross-fertilization at work in orientalist discourses in the United States and Europe.

In this respect, the book is a timely and intriguing acknowledgment of the relevance of postcolonial theory and critical methods in the study of American literature and culture, in that it eschews both passive conceptual alignment with Said's idea of orientalism as male, hegemonic, disciplinary discourse, and acritical adherence to radical feminist appropriation of it in terms of sheer counter-hegemonic discourse. Schueller's ability to systematically link local instances with general argument persuasively demonstrates that U.S. literary orientalism has substantially contributed to consolidate national identity by naturalizing ideas of empire and by securing new cultural foundations to U.S. transition from a pre-capitalist to a capitalist society. Concomitantly, Schueller's interest in the slippery, ironic, and deeply sophisticated rhetoric of nineteenth-century U.S. orientalism points toward a different perspective on the interaction between nationalism and cosmopolitanism on which imperial ideologies are grounded. On this matter, her argument approximates recent recuperations of the oriental tale in terms of "socioliterary shifter" (Srinivas Aravamudan) activating the twofold process of endocultural and exocultural referentialization, whereby the nation acquires a peculiar kind of "cosmopolitan currency", one which transcends the simplistically mimetic, "demiurgic" and sometimes "patronizing" thrust of fictional writing, and eventuates in a hermeneutically baffling, transgeneric, and satiric autoethnography.

Paolo Fabbri, *Elogio di Babele* (Roma: Meltemi, 2000), pp. 166.

Reviewed by Manuela Coppola

Paolo Fabbri, formerly the director of the Italian Cultural Institute in Paris (1992-1996), teaches the Semiotics of Art at the University of Bologna. His works include *Tactica de los Signos* (1996) and *La svolta semiotica* (1998)

published by Laterza. As the author himself affirms in his "*Post-scriptum et –dictum*", the nine essays collected under the sign of Babel in *Elogio di Babele* are different in origin and texture, oscillating between the agility of oral presentation and the meticulousness of academic writing.

As he explores the various strategies of communication involved in the status of translation, Fabbri argues that Babel is a metaphor for the translatability of languages. In his praise of Babel he maintains that not only does the destruction of the biblical Tower symbolize the sin of *hybris* and the tragedy of the loss of unity, but it also marks the birth of meta-language and the discovery of the beauty of diversity – previously flattened by Adamitic language. With Babel, humanity is able to experience language in its diversity for the first time and to enjoy the dissemination of languages, turning communication into a process of endless translation – a negotiation of meanings and reciprocal understanding. The correspondence of sense and meaning characterizing language before the construction of the Tower is thus powerfully replaced by a condition of linguistic transformation and metamorphosis that makes translation inevitable. Confuting the Wittgensteinean idea of the incommensurability – and thus untranslatability – of language games, Fabbri suggests that translation is the only way to question, through the mobility of languages, the inertia of language games.

Moving from the Red Brigades and the Moro affair (Chapter 1: "Truth in hostage: terrorism and communication") to various forms of New Talk (Chapter 2: "Newtalk: from standardization to pidgins"), or to strategies of secrecy, betrayal and duplicity as he explores the complexity hidden in the folds of appearance by focusing on the paradoxical figure of the double agent (Chapters 7 and 8: "The topic of the secret", "We are all double agents"), Fabbri analyses the way communicative strategies are constituted and operate through a variety of language modalities, showing the irreducible status of constant translation between languages of all kinds.

One of the most suggestive analyses proposed by the text is that of the untranslatability of religious faiths (Chapter 6: "Untranslatability from one faith to another"). Arguing that systems of beliefs are tendentiously closed systems, inclined to be self-affirming and resisting translation, Fabbri articulates the idea of different levels of 'opening' implied in their very structure. The author analyses the figure of the prophet as belonging to an 'oracular' – and thus extremely closed – system of belief, and yet capable of some sort of translation into another culture. The spectacular conversion to Islam of the seventeenth-century Jewish prophet, Shabbetaj Zevi, implies the

recognition, in the Jewish culture, of the figure of the apostate as "a necessary Messiah". The Messiah is recognized as such precisely because during his preaching he commits a series of transgressions according to the paradox of a 'rule of passage' in the shift from one closed system of definitions to another. Since Jewish culture is open and strong enough to contain within itself the signs of transgression, it strengthens its structure by enacting translation through conceptual breaches in the paradigmatic system of faith.

Translation is thus viewed once again as a reciprocal enrichment, a sort of 're-motivation' of the arbitrariness of language, which, according to Fabbri, is moving towards a "future, unattainable unity". In the vortex of new forms of communication, languages and differences, caught in a continual process of translation, "the city of Babel stands behind us, the Tower in front of us" (78), confirming the Derridean idea of the tower as a symbol of the impossibility to complete, totalise and finally build the unfinished architecture of languages.

Rosa Maria Bollettieri Bosinelli, Christine Heiss, Marcello Soffritti, Silvia Bernardini, eds., *La traduzione multimediale. Quale traduzione per quale testo?* (Forlì: Clueb, 2000), pp. 467.

Reviewed by Susanna Poole

Since its foundation in 1989, the Scuola Superiore di Lingue Moderne per Interpreti e Traduttori in Forlì has sponsored research, conferences and seminars on the topics of translation and the relations between language and culture, both in literary and multimedial contexts. Its publications cover four main areas: translation, translation and film, translation and linguistics, phonetics and communication.

The volumes devoted to translation and film present the proceedings of a series of conferences on multimedial translation and are part of an ongoing project of research, discussion and teaching practice. The series opened in 1993 with a conference on dubbing and its linguistic and cultural transpositions: *Il doppiaggio: trasposizioni linguistiche e culturali*, eds. R. Baccolini, R. M. Bollettieri Bosinelli and L. Gavioli (Forlì: Clueb, 1994), followed, in 1995, by a conference on multimedia translation for film, television and the stage, *Traduzione multimediale per il cinema, la televisione e la scena*, eds. Christine Heiss, Rosa Maria Bollettieri Bosinelli

(Forlì: Clueb, 1996). *La traduzione multimediale. Quale traduzione per quale testo?* (the proceedings of the 1998 conference) is the third of the series, continuing and developing the issues raised in the previous volume, in which translation theorists, professional film translators, and film critics look into the interaction between theory and practice in multimedial translation.

In her introduction to the second volume, Christine Heiss explores the concept of "multimedial translation", which scholars nowadays define in more or less broad terms according to how they understand the word "medium". Multimedial translation in Heiss's view is "the translation of texts in multimedial contexts", while medium is a *technical* means of communication, stimulating at least two perceptive channels, in general the auditive and the visual. In fact, oral communication could itself be defined as multimedial insofar as it involves both linguistic and non-linguistic codes and employs auditive and visual communication. The scientific definition of multimedial translation was one of the issues at stake in the conference, and there were considerable differences in the use of terminology among the participants. All however were convinced that translating a multimedial text means translating the whole product, not merely its linguistic units. Thus, for example, Mary Snell-Hornby, Claudia Lisa, Klaus Kaindl and Christina Hurt insist on the importance of involving professional translators of drama, opera surtitles and librettos in the creative process, alongside playwrights, composers and directors, since words in theatre are part of a multimedial performance where different codes interact in the production of meaning, while Irena Kovacic stresses that subtitlers should render the interpersonal signals and textual structure at work in dialogues, rather than privileging ideational content.

As well as sections on film dubbing and film subtitling and simultaneous translation, the volume includes essays on translating in the context of transpositions from literature to cinema or theatre, a round table discussion between professionals and scholars on the relationship between translation theory and professional practice, and, finally, an extremely useful international bibliography on multimedial translation.

While the 1995 conference devoted considerable space to theatre and opera, the third conference pays more attention to new communication technologies and formats, such as the Internet, hypertexts and global live television events. Including both theoretical contributions and case studies, the book is divided into five parts spanning from issues such as 'the (un)translatability of puns on screen' to the role of hypertexts for the study of translation processes.

The first part, "Dubbing – Beyond Untranslatability", includes three essays about coming to terms with humour, dialect, slang and accent when translating a film, while the fourth explores the influence the language of dubbed television programs may have on national products. The link with the previous volume in the Forlì conference series is particularly evident in this section. In the 1995 proceedings, Thomas Herbst had presented a theoretical introduction to the "impossibility" of dubbing, analysing the difficulties raised in dubbing British and American television series into German. Using Geoffrey Leech's distinction between seven types of meaning in *Semantics: The Study of Meaning*, he isolates elements of meaning such as regional and class identity, emotions and degrees of formality, which are expressed in the spoken language, but are among the aspects of meaning that are most problematic in translating dialogue. When translating from English into German, the only variety one can translate into is the formal standard language, thus limiting the potential of linguistic variation as a means of characterization. But choosing one or another regional variation would give incongruous local connotations to supposedly British or American characters.

In the 1998 proceedings the essays of the first section look into more specific aspects of film translation. Delia Chiaro Nocella analyses the difficulties of translating comedies based on puns, as opposed to those based on action. While commenting on recent examples of English to Italian film dubbing (and viceversa), Nocella shows how puns are either ignored, replaced (with a pun or idiomatic expression in the target language) or compensated (with the insertion of a different pun in another point of the film). Christine Heiss and Lisa Leporati compare two films by Pupi Avati with their German renditions. The films are rooted in regional culture and dialect, which explains the playful title of this essay: "We shouldn't be too choosy here, should we? Translators and dialogue writers coming to terms with regional dialect".

Both the previous essays and the following by Salmon Kovarski stress the importance of creativity for translators having to face texts which are culturally marked in a very strong way, as with the case of puns or local stereotypes, dialect and regional culture, or ethnic varieties of a language. Kovarski's "Translating ethnolect: how to dub Jewish accent in Italian" is a study of Jewish actor and director Moni Ovadia's rendition of Russian-Jewish "ethnolect" in both his theatre plays and his recent book on Jewish humour. Ovadia has succeeded in creating an artificial but very effective Italian-Jewish accent, whereas film translators tend either to substitute ethnolect with a

regional accent in the target language, thus giving rise to obvious incongruities in terms of cultural coherence, or to omit any specific linguistic connotation in the target text. Finally, in "The language of Italian television series between stereotypes and reality", Francesca Gatta shows how Italian soap operas such as "Un posto al sole" are linguistically modelled on North-American soaps and South-American telenovelas as dubbed into Italian. She thus introduces a linguistic perspective on the delicate balance between stereotypes and realism that is so peculiar to the aesthetics of the genre.

The second part of the volume, "Beyond Dubbing: Simultaneous Interpreting, Subtitles, Didactics", focuses on the efficiency and specificity of the different techniques when cinema and television products are transposed from one culture to another. Gabriele Mack refers to a recent media phenomenon that deserves the attention of translation theorists and professionals. Historic events, such as Princess Diana's funeral or Pope John Paul II's journey to Cuba, that become global television live programs broadcast all over the world in numerous languages, require much more than the usual expertise of conference interpreters and thus more research and professional collaboration.

The last two essays in this section, by Christopher Rundle and Christine Heiss (lecturers at the Forlì school), are dedicated to methods and instruments used in teaching film translation. Rundle describes a software he himself has designed to allow students to practice subtitling, while Heiss suggests that training in multimedia translation leads learners to understand the complexities of both the foreign language and the mother tongue, and improves their linguistic competence in different communicative and professional situations. The emphasis on teaching experience continues in the third section, "Translating Film: Professional Work and Education", which is a collection of five papers by students at SSLiMIT, introduced by Gianni G. Galassi, a professional dubber and lecturer at the Forlì school. The papers are part of the students' research work for Galassi's course on multimedial translation in 1996-97.

The fourth section, "Translation and Information Technology: Hypertexts, the Internet etc.", introduced by Marcello Soffritti, raises the question of redefining translation in the light of contemporary means of communication and new textual formats, such as CD-ROMs, web sites, chat rooms and mailing lists on the Internet. In these new communicative spaces the terms "original text" and "target text" lose their meaning, being inapplicable to a condition of constant mobility and transformation. In

"*Corpora*, translation, multimediality", Silvia Bernardini discusses the use of *corpora* in the practice of linguistic translation and research. She remarks how useful these electronic resources could be for multimedia translators, in that the creation of multimedia *corpora* offers access to a virtually infinite number of samples of original and translated multimedia products. Giovanni Nadiani and Federico Zanettin reflect on the new communicative models created by the development and diffusion of the Internet and the new terminologies imposed by technological innovations. Nadiani proposes the substitution of "target text" with "transit text" when defining the application of translation to the Internet, since readers are able to manipulate the received text as they please. Zanettin explores the practical and theoretical problems raised by hypertexts for both professional and trainee translators.

The last section in the volume, "Multimedia Translation: Theoretical Aspects", starts with an essay by Mirella Agorni discussing the recent history of multimedia translation theory. From the 1970s to the present there have been very few scientific publications. The reason for this delay seems to be the rather ambiguous status of multimedia translation, which challenges the traditional distinction between written and oral text typologies. Agorni suggests that recent developments in Multimedia translation theory make it easier to understand the complexity of multimedia translation. This optimistic stance seems to be shared, which deals with the increasing success of multimedia translation studies in the light of its crucial importance in deciphering the transcultural communication flows that enliven our world. Two areas of study appear to be very productive at the moment: film translation and computer-based *corpora* studies. Having reported on some of the main theoretical results already attained in these fields, Ulrych suggests the possibility of transforming multimedia translation theory into an integrated, multidisciplinary theory, including theoretical, descriptive and applied aspects of translation studies. In the last and most theoretical of the essays in the volume, "A semiotic approach to multimedia translation", Siri Nergaard tries to integrate elements from Umberto Eco's "interpretive semiotics", such as "narrative strategy" and "*intentio operis*", with the approach of the Paris School of Semiotics and the most recent trend in translation studies, emphasising the role of translation as intercultural communication.

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La traduzione di Amleto nella cultura europea, ed. Maria Del Sapio Garbero (Venezia: Marsilio, 2002), pp. 173.

Carla Sassi, *Imagined Scotlands. Saggi sulla letteratura scozzese* (Trieste: Edizioni Parnaso, 2002), pp. 144.

Spettri del potere: ideologia identità traduzione negli studi culturali, eds. Cinzia Bianchi, Cristina Demarca, Siri Nergaard (Roma: Meltemi, 2002), pp. 263.

Writing Mothers and Daughters: Renegotiating the Mother in Western European Narratives by Women, ed. Adalgisa Giorgio (New York and Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2002), pp. 258.

SUMMARIES

Myra Jehlen

The Seditious Aesthetic of Hawthorne's *House of the Seven Gables*

The essay investigates the aesthetic import of the house in the novel, where it stands as a central, autonomously significant presence from the very beginning. Different aesthetic principles emerge in the novel: while Phoebe's art is a force for progress (albeit of a limited kind), Clifford's and Holgrave's art is self-sufficient, autonomous, and complete in itself. As such, it emerges in the novel as both a temptation and a frightening possibility for Hawthorne, suggesting an artistic autonomy controlled by neither morality nor politics. This impregnable quality of art is conveyed by the house itself, and its treatment in the novel is evidence of Hawthorne's ambivalence.

Mario Corona

The Literary Representation of Sexuality in Mid-Nineteenth-Century America: The Example of Walt Whitman

This essay focuses on some loci of *Leaves of Grass*, highlighting Whitman's original and, to his contemporaries, scandalous treatment of sexuality. Besides dealing with sex and its central role in human life with unprecedented frankness, Whitman shockingly depicted women as sexed human beings; keenly aware of gender difference, he systematically refused the conventional inclusive use of "man" as subsuming woman. Whitman's polymorphous poetic *persona* – simultaneously taking up male and female, heterosexual and homosexual subject positions – undermines the notion of gender difference as a biologically given, binary opposition, opening up unheard-of paths to sexual desire and to its poetic expression.

Gianna Fusco

"My Business Is Circumference": Encircling the Experience of Deprivation

The lexicon of nutrition is one of Emily Dickinson's favorite linguistic resources, one which the poet uses extensively in her poems on deprivation. This essay offers a reading of this cluster of poems as an expression both of the Puritan cultural context that sorrounded the poet and of her effort to express the condition of the deprived subject in all its psychological nuances and stages: from ethical meditation on deprivation as a means to a better understanding of life, to a desire for deprivation as a condition that intensifies experience and enlarges consciousness. Making use of one of Dickinson's recurring and most enigmatic symbols, the essay proposes a "circumferential" ordering of the poems that, while laying stress on their connection to the same theme or centre, keeps the individuality of each, and preserves the perpetual fluctuation between longing and renunciation, ecstasy and lack that characterizes Dickinson's poetry.

Giuseppe Nori

The Trials of Humanity at the Margins of History: On Herman Melville's Enchanted Isles

On the grounds of a wider approach to the concept of sympathy, Nori provides a new framework for contextualizing Melville's use and abuse of the strategies of feeling, powerfully as well as problematically at work in "The Encantadas, or Enchanted Isles" (1854). The protagonist of the eighth sketch of the tale, a "half-breed Indian woman of Payta in Peru", may be said to stand as a representative of wretched humanity at large as well as an emblematic example of the subdued races of the American continent. Her case is thus read as problematically positioned at one of the typical crossroads of the American renaissance – one where the intersecting discourses of the sentimental ethics and aesthetics of fellow-feeling, on one side, and of the redemptive impulse of romantic historicism, on the other, may be said to pass and mystify one another.

Sonia Di Loreto

Retail Philanthropy: Trust and Responsibility in Melville's *The Confidence-Man*

This article explores the interconnection between personal responsibility, the activity of charity, and trust in Herman Melville's *The Confidence Man*. In following some of the interactions of the confidence-man, the essay investigates how the recently acquired market dimension of the charity business, on the one hand, and sentimental appeal in the business world, on the other, make it difficult to distinguish between benevolent and entrepreneurial spirits. In this context, the trajectory of the individual's moral responsibility takes unexpected turns, and trust can hardly be grounded on a reliable and authenticated system of reference.

Giorgio Mariani

The (Mis)Fortune of Emerson in Italy

The essay provides a preliminary sketch of Ralph Waldo Emerson's reputation in Italy. By focussing on the 1930s-1960s period, the author argues that, as Italian American Studies became more sophisticated and American literature began to be taught at most Italian universities, interest in Emerson waned. This was partly due to a too hasty acceptance on the part of Italian critics of F. O. Matthiessen's version of an American Renaissance in which Emerson was downplayed next to Melville and Hawthorne. The critical myth of Emerson as detached Transcendentalist thinker was accepted and emphasized, first, by both Elio Vittorini and Cesare Pavese and later by the authors of most histories of American literature written in the 1950s.

Anna Scannavini

Of the Ordinary and Other Matters: Cavell, Eliot, Matthiessen, and Emerson

Three decades after F. O. Matthiessen, the function of language in Emerson has again been brought to the center of attention by Stanley Cavell. The connection he draws between skepticism, Emerson, and the ordinary language philosophers not only brings language to the foreground as a socially constructed means to ontology, but also invites a new appreciation of Emerson's own ways to use words, where fragmentation, sketchiness, and "sudden turns of discourse" can be interpreted as tools in an ongoing process of research on the social uses of language and, eventually, on the ways in which words define the world. Such a study is also relevant to the study of Emerson's reputation; the comparison between previous and new interpretations of language sets the stage for an investigation of translations of Emerson, and the influences that surface in them.

Carlo Martinez

"The Aroma of Personality": The Sage of Concord and the Master

This article explores some of the ways in which Emerson might have represented an intellectual and formal model for Henry James in the writing of his critical works, especially the *Prefaces*. Despite several divergences, Emerson provided James with the model of a social and cultural role for the critic, based on an "ideology of personality", that is, on a careful construction and performance of the critic's public persona as an interface between subjectivity and authorship, the individual and the social dimension. Both Emerson and James structure their paradigm of representativeness on the basis of an unyielding rhetoric of personality that provides it with a dialogic thrust, making it operate as a relational catalyst for a wide array of social functions.

Christina Lupton

Making the Rules That Are Already Clear: Franklin's Letter on Literary Style

This article, a close reading of Benjamin Franklin's "Letter on Literary Style", makes the case for Franklin's view of language as a complicated, dialectical construction. Lupton argues that Franklin's view of literary style claims the self-evidence of good writing while, at the same time, revealing that this self-evident truth is in the process of being made. His "Letter on Literary Style" was written and circulated at a moment when Franklin was in the process of establishing for Colonial America the style which the piece advocates as already objectively available. Following Fliegelman, Lupton argues for the specificity of colonial discourse as self-reflexively constituted.

Pierre A. Walker

Henry James's *The Portrait of a Lady* as a Political Novel

As several recent political readings of James have shown, the high Modernist view of James as above politics is belied by both the biographical evidence and a close reading of his fictional texts. Drawing on a variety of epistolary and non-fictional writings, this essay shows that James was aware of and engaged in politics, both in the sense of contemporary issues and current affairs, and in the wider sense of social life and the power-relations it involves. By presenting a world full of such politics, James's fiction critiques the very idea that life separate from politics. This is especially true of *The Portrait of a Lady*, a work carefully situated in the context of the main political views and issues debated in Europe at the time the novel is set, and entirely devoted to the exploration of the general social pressures and of the specific gender politics that prevent a young woman from achieving agency.

NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

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Gianna Fusco graduated from I.U.O. with a thesis about Emily Dickinson's poetry and is now attending the Ph.D. program in Comparative Literature at I.U.O. She has published an article on *Othello* and is currently doing research on figures of masculinity in late nineteenth-century novels for her Ph.D. dissertation.

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David Leverenz has been a professor of English at the University of Florida since 1985. His major publications include *The Language of Puritan Feeling: an Exploration in Literature, Psychology, and Social History*, *Manhood and the American Renaissance*, and *Mindful Pleasures: Essays on Thomas Pynchon*, co-edited with George Levine. He also has many articles and essays on various aspects of American literature. At the University of Florida he has won four teaching awards.

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Giorgio Mariani teaches American literature at the Università di Roma 1, "La Sapienza" and is co-editor of the journal *Àcoma. Rivista internazionale di studi nord-americani*. The author of books on Stephen Crane, the politics of Melville's reputation, and the contemporary Native American novel, he has recently edited a collection of essays on the representation of war in the literature and culture of the United States, *Le parole e le armi*. His translation of a selection of Sherman Alexie's poems will be published this winter.

Carlo Martinez studied at Università di Roma "La Sapienza" and at SUNY-Buffalo, holds a Ph.D. in American Studies from Università di Roma Tre, and is currently an assistant professor of American Literature at Università "Gabriele d'Annunzio" of Chieti at Pescara. His publications include *L'arte della critica. Ideologia estetica e forma narrativa nelle Prefazioni di Henry James* and (edited with Annalisa Goldoni) *Le lettere rubate: forme, funzioni e ragioni della censura*.

Giuseppe Nori is an Associate Professor of English at the Università di Cassino, Italy. The author of two books on Melville, *La scrittura sconfitta* and *Il seme delle piramidi*, he has edited Melville's *Lettere a Hawthorne* and Carlyle's *Cartismo*. His articles have appeared in essay collections and international journals such as *Analecta Husserliana*, *Language and Style*, *Studies in Romanticism*, *The European Legacy*. He is currently completing a critical edition of George Bancroft's addresses and orations.

Donald E. Pease is the Avalon Foundation Chair of the Humanities at Dartmouth College.The author of *Visionary Compacts: American Renaissance Writing in Cultural Context* and the editor of eight volumes including: *The American Renaissance Reconsidered*, *Cultures of US Imperialism* (with Amy Kaplan), *Revisionist Interventions into the American Canon*, *Postnational Narratives* and the forthcoming *Futures of American Studies*, Pease is the General Editor for the New Americanists book series at Duke University Press, the Founding Director of a Summer Institute for American Studies at Dartmouth, and the head of Dartmouth's Liberal Studies Program.

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Pierre A. Walker is Associate Professor of English at Salem State College. He is the author of *Reading Henry James in French Cultural Contexts* and of articles on literary theory, African American literature, and Henry James; the editor of *Henry James on Culture: Collected Essays on Politics and the American Social Scene*; and co-general editor of the forthcoming *Complete Letters of Henry James*. He has held fellowships from the National Endowment for the Humanities and the Bibliographic Society of America.

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Examples:
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