

**Toward a More Perfect Engine: Natural Science and Optimism in the American
Renaissance**

by

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Abstract

This dissertation examines the discourse regarding the perfectibility of American society among four figures associated with the American Renaissance: Ralph Waldo Emerson, Henry David Thoreau, Margaret Fuller, and Nathaniel Hawthorne. Emerson in *English Traits, Nature*, and many of his other works suggests that America, because of both its racial and cultural constitution, will reach the endpoint of human knowledge. To a large degree, Emerson bases his beliefs upon the biological concepts of race during his time. His protégé Thoreau, however, consistently argues against the belief in human progress espoused by his mentor. Thoreau's works from three different genres are explored: journalism, lectures, and non-fiction. Margaret Fuller, in both her journalism and *Woman in the Nineteenth Century*, argues that by granting equal rights to woman American society will become a utopia. Fuller believes, based on her own experiences with the esoteric practice of mesmerism and her understanding of the theories of the Christian mystic Immanuel Swedenborg, that women have a superior access to divine revelation and, consequently, altruism. Hence, when women are given their due freedom, the world will fulfill the expectations of her Christian millennialism. Nathaniel Hawthorne, on the other hand, is suspicious of the practice of mesmerism and the ability of technology to correct the flaws of human society. Ultimately, this dissertation explores the particular scientific and philosophical influences that fueled Emerson's and Fuller's optimism as well as the impetus for Thoreau's and Hawthorne's guarded cynicism.

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Introduction

In 1833, John Adolphus Etzler, an ambitious German immigrant published a work that made some extraordinary claims. In his full-length utopian manifesto, *The Paradise Within the Reach of All Men, Without Labor, by Powers of Nature and Machinery: an Address to All Intelligent Men, in Two Parts*, Etzler was not only theorizing about utopia; he was recruiting. Etzler promised in the text to “show the means of creating a paradise within ten years, where everything desirable for human life may be had by every man in superabundance, without labor, and without pay; where the whole face of nature shall be changed into the most beautiful forms” (1). Etzler never remade human society, but he did, over the years, successfully peddle his version of paradise in Germany, the US, and England, and he attempted at various times to establish his New Eden in several unlikely locations, first in Ohio, then in Texas, and finally in Venezuela.

Etzler’s faith in the possibility of utopia was profoundly secular, based firmly in the belief that human knowledge and power, focused upon making use of the forces readily available in nature, would provide the means to establish his New Eden. This is understandable considering Etzler’s background. His winding road to failure, which in many ways mirrors the trajectory of utopianism in the United States, began in Germany, where he attended the German equivalent of secondary school with a number of talented engineers, including Johann August Robling, who eventually designed the Brooklyn Bridge (Stoll 24). Robling and Etzler would later coordinate the immigration of a group of Germans to the US in hopes of creating a better, if

not perfect, society.¹ It was also during Etzler's youth that the Rhine was made navigable and the river's erratic flooding pattern was tamed. This was no small accomplishment. The Rhine was at the heart of Germany's economic and agricultural production, and controlling the flooding of the Rhine meant that the rich floodplains could be perpetually cultivated. Etzler had witnessed firsthand man's conquest of one of the most emblematic aspects of nature: the changing of the seasons.

Etzler believed that the conquest of the Rhine was the harbinger of greater advancements. And so, buoyed by his profound faith in technology, Etzler devoted a tremendous amount of his energy, intellect, and other people's money, to developing the first of his many anticipated breakthroughs: the "Satellite." The Satellite was a mechanism that could, at least theoretically, use wind-power to turn a turbine and apply that energy to any variety of agricultural tasks. Named the Satellite because it would turn wind-power to gravity, in order to cultivate perfect spheres of land, the contraption was in many ways an early version of today's versatile small tractor, being essentially an engine on wheels that could be fitted with any number of implements. The Satellite was what Steven Stoll labels a "philosophical machine"² because it was the synergy of the philosophical optimism of the Enlightenment and the promise of material abundance offered by new technology.³ Etzler planned for the Satellite to be followed by many other history-altering inventions that could harvest the earth's vast reservoir of forces; Etzler attempts to quantify the power of the forces down to the horsepower in *The Paradise Within*

¹ The group that they led would later split. The majority of the immigrants followed Robling's more modest leadership, but a few did follow Etzler to Ohio and eventually Venezuela.

² Stoll, Steven. *The Great Delusion: A Mad Inventor, Death in the Tropics, and the Utopian Origins of Economic Growth*. New York: Hill and Wang, 2008.

³ Stoll argues that the influence of Enlightenment thinkers such as Francis Bacon, Rene Descartes, and Baruch Spinoza led to the belief that material progress and the understanding of the natural world were now the answer to humanity's plight.

Reach.⁴ After the Satellite would follow ships of an enormous scale powered by the undulations of ocean waves, and immense floating islands that could be cultivated as farmland to increase the tillable surface of the earth.

The floating continents and the wave-powered ships were never built and, ultimately, Etzler's charisma defined him more so than his mechanical genius—the Satellite never functioned. He eventually led his followers to the tropics, a location that offered an abundance of natural resources, and, Etzler believed, enough unadulterated natural resources, surely, for a New Eden to finally be realized. His hopes for utopia, and most of his followers, died in Venezuela. Those who had survived poor nutrition, malaria, and dysentery attempted to return to the US, but their ship was lost in the journey. By the measure of his influence, Etzler is hardly important, but he, his ill-fated Satellite, and his seemingly inexplicable influence upon his followers are indicative of something much more important.

Etzler's belief that human knowledge and power were sufficient to remake society into a perfect whole was predicated upon a trust in technology, both material and social. Etzler believed, as did many during an age saturated with utopian aspirations, that humanity had the material ability to create a perfect society. He is one of many figures who embody the synergy of the mechanical and social engineer. While there are in place today hard and fast distinctions between these two roles, the boundaries were much more permeable, if even visible, in Etzler's time. Etzler's vision of a perfect society involved not only the Satellite and floating islands, but rigid systems of organization, which are as much technological innovations as engines or farming implements; he eventually would determine that a school needed to be developed that

⁴ He claims that wind-power alone could generate 80,000 times the power of all humanity, without the significant depletion of any resources (Etzler 13).

would require students to remain silent until they had been exposed to his ideas for a long enough time to accept them, which he figured was an entire decade. Without hard and fast distinctions between fields, and in a time without institutional categories of expertise predetermined, Etzler sought to reform society not only by applying innovative technology, but by applying innovative social theory. The two methods were barely discernable in antebellum America, as they were integrated into a totalizing approach to knowledge and progress indicative of the period.

The criteria used to evaluate thinkers such as Etzler at this time was often not the precision of their claims, but the ability of those claims to explain as many phenomena as possible. Either Etzler's understanding of humanity, science, and all the rest was compelling, or it was lacking. Etzler is defined by the breadth of his claims and the assumed range of his knowledge, by the affinities between his expertise on mechanism and his expertise on humanity. The integration and synthesis of various fields, rather than parsing and differentiation of disciplines, was the norm during Etzler's time. The trend was to calibrate a statement broadly, rather than precisely, to avoid contradiction.

Ralph Waldo Emerson, a thinker himself impressed by Etzler's *The Paradise Within Reach*, explains early in the essay *Nature* that he believes mankind is on the cusp of a revolutionary and totalizing theory: "[w]henver a true theory appears, it will be its own evidence. Its test is, that it will explain all phenomena" (7). Emerson's claim is epistemological; the measure of the truthfulness of an utterance is not coherence with other utterances, but sameness with an underlying utterance that is universally applicable. Whether Emerson's notions of the unity of truth, and consequently of specific utterances, finds its source in Platonism or Buddhism is somewhat beside the point, because he is in a distilled and salient manner

expressing a pervasive notion during his time that truth, both scientific and otherwise (a distinction between the two would be somewhat anachronistic) is pre-determined.⁵ If what constitutes knowledge is variable throughout history, as Michel Foucault and various others have since argued, then it is conceivable that there is also a preferred calibration regarding the scope of an argument. If our age is defined by an intrinsic distrust of metanarratives, Emerson and Etzler's is in part defined by the tendency to reject anything but a comprehensive commentary as insufficient. To limit the scope and implications of a statement was to limit its credibility, or at least its respectability. These were not the days of small ideas.

Etzler provides just such a theory, offering a totalizing and perhaps reductive materialism to explain humanity, arguing that with "a system of association that opens the way to all benefits to be derived from the new means for the poor and the rich, no violence or opposition can ensue; but all men will simultaneously enjoy the benefits, wherever they are introduced" (108). For this to occur, Etzler explains that "[m]an must first be satisfied with his physical wants, and be liberated from the slavery of work, before his mind can be accessible to superior culture. After you have done away with the physical wants, then you may gradually shed the mild beams of better information onto the mind, and render it more adapted to enjoy a superior life of a refined society" (108). There can be no lack except of a physical nature in Etzler's estimation, and all other problems stem from this material lack, and will consequently be resolved when the dearth of resources is redressed, which he believes is possible for the first time with a reliance upon human invention and rigid, technocratic organization.

Etzler owes, if not his defining materialism, at least his notions of Associationism to Charles Fourier, who is certainly a more historically significant utopian thinker and activist.

⁵ In the chapter focused upon Emerson, I will explore this concept in more detail.

Fourier was perhaps even more sanguine in his view of technology than Etzler. Etzler also would have found sources of funding less readily if were it not for the interest in utopian communities inspired by Fourier's followers in the United States. Fourier's influence upon America was profound both in terms of the status of his followers and in terms of the sheer number of people who were informed of and compelled by his ideas. Fourierism began in earnest in the U.S. during the early 1840's when Albert Brisbane returned from a trip to Europe where he met and became inspired by Fourier. Aided by the talented and influential Horace Greeley, then editor of the *New York Tribune*, Brisbane became a tireless propagandist of a refined version of Fourier's philosophy. While the influential strain of Fourierism in the United States scarcely lasted more than a decade, it caught on quickly and led to a number of Fourier inspired Phalanxes⁶ and publications, and it had a particularly acute effect upon Northern reformers in general and the Transcendentalists in particular.

Fourier, much like Etzler, supported his rigorously detailed and expansive plans for communal societies upon a totalizing paradigm. To a large degree, Etzler's non-mechanical ideas were developed upon Fourier's, although even Etzler's ideas fail to approach the wildly eccentric notions that Fourier developed, which included his perhaps too detailed account of planetary copulation and his predictions that humans would grow useful tails if they were allowed freedom from conventional notions of morality. In one of his central works, Fourier claims to be no less than "the possessor of the book of Destiny to banish political and moral darkness and to erect the theory of universal harmony upon the ruins of the uncertain sciences" (*The Theory of the Four Movements* vii). Fourier even more brashly claims in the same work that his theories will rewrite

⁶ Phalanx is the term that Fourier used to describe an individual community, which would be composed of 1600 people representing an exact sampling of the distribution of various personality types Fourier believed he had discovered and painstakingly categorized.

the current notions of science: "If your sciences dictated by wisdom have served only to perpetuate poverty and strife, give us rather sciences dictated by folly, provided that they quiet furies and relieve the miseries of peoples" (*The Theory of the Four Movements* vi). Hence, Fourier believes that, according to measures of any consequence, his theory is the most universal, because its application, in passing the test of efficacy, will lead to universal "harmony." To his credit, Fourier was, perhaps, one of the first thinkers to seriously consider applying "scientific" scrutiny to the social sphere,⁷ but it is his criteria for testing the validity of his ideas that is particularly interesting. If an authentic version of Fourierism were to be implicitly followed, then the result would be a ubiquitous state of paradise. His triumph over the "uncertain sciences" would satisfy the demands of Emerson's test of a "true theory."

While a modern reaction to theories such as Fourier's and Etzler's might be derisive, and would certainly question theories that involve a mixture of social, religious, spiritual, and technological postulates, the criteria involved in determining the merit of these sprawling commentaries is important. It seems that for many of the Transcendentalists, as well as others, the test of a paradigm was not how many details it explained perfectly, but how little it failed to explain. The explanatory reach of a theory need not be dictated by the breadth of the details it explains, but it needed to offer an absolute paradigm of apparent heuristic value. Taken from comprehensive theories such as Etzler's, Fourier's, and others, technological advancements often either suggested an incipient utopian future, or in some fashion a final degree of human understanding. A final truth existed and was within reach. This was not just the opinion of those on the fringes such as Etzler and Fourier, but for a number of writers during their time, and, for

⁷ Garreth Stedman Jones makes this point in the Introduction to Fourier's *The Theory of the Four Passions*.

these thinkers, technology and scientific understanding were the breadcrumbs leading to an effable, ultimate, and comprehensive truth. Humanity would have it all figured out soon enough.

Antebellum interest in utopias should be seen as symptomatic of this belief in an incipient, or newly arrived, ultimate knowledge. If human knowledge could control the flooding of the Rhine, and connect the nation through railroads, could it not then arrange humanity in such a way that they could live in perpetual peace and unprecedented efficiency? What is rarely explored is that in the early nineteenth century the ideas of Fourier and others were considered by many to be “scientific.” Albert Brisbane, who is chiefly responsible for transporting Fourierism from France to the United States, wrote in *The Social Destiny of Man*, his extensive work in which he explains Fourierism, that “Charles Fourier, the genius to whom is due the discovery of Association, based on Series of Groups and Attractive Industry...is to be ranked among those bold and original geniuses like Columbus, Copernicus and Newton, who open new paths to human science” (*The Social Destiny of Man iv*). It was after spending 1799 in Paris studying natural sciences at the *Bibliothèque Nationale* that Fourier claims to have discovered the all-encompassing theory of “attractions” (Jones xiv). He then went on to develop a theory that rejected the basic concepts of religious morality, competitive capitalism, and cosmology.

Equally striking is the fact that Fourier’s followers in the United States were not the *hoi polloi*; they were the educated elite of their day. George Ripley, the founder of the most well known of the Fourierist communities in the United States, was educated at Harvard and, even among the erudite Transcendentalists, was considered to have an exceptional mind and education. After the failure of Brook Farm, Ripley went on to work for the *New York Tribune*, where he continued to be an important national voice on issues of literary and cultural criticism.

Nathaniel Hawthorne, although he had his doubts, was a shareholder in Brook Farm for some time. Margaret Fuller visited the community on several instances and was profoundly interested in how Fourier's ideas applied to gender questions and class conflict. Emerson was supportive, although he never joined the community. The educational reformer Bronson Alcott and his daughter Louisa May⁸ lived in a utopian community called the Fruitlands. The community, founded by the Alcotts and another family, lasted only seven months because of their many impractical ascetic values,⁹ and the Alcotts had to move into a house purchased for them by Emerson. Of the recorded members of the four Fourierist communities with dependable records, only five of the 479 members were classified as unskilled workers (Guarneri 415, Table 11). What is obvious about these communities is that they were not established by the poor and hungry, but by a group of reformers both highly educated and financially stable.

Scholars have tended to downplay Fourier's comments upon topics that are now the subject of the "hard" sciences and have instead focused upon his commentaries upon social issues and in particular his critique of conventional religion and capitalism. There are a number of reasons for this, all of them reasonable. Obviously, part of the goal in studying Fourier is to understand him in terms of how he is the forerunner to more influential social theorists such as Marx and Freud. Also, it may seem counterintuitive to spend any reasonable amount of time upon works that describe interplanetary copulation. There has been, however, in the past decade, a greater degree of attention paid to Fourier's influence in the United States. Carl J. Guarneri's *The Utopian Alternative: Fourierism in Nineteenth-Century America*, published in 1991, provides a comprehensive catalogue of Fourierist societies, communities, and publications. More

⁸ Louisa May Alcott recorded her reflections upon her time at Fruitlands in *Transcendental Wild Oats*.

⁹ The members of Fruitlands were strictly vegan, consumed no stimulants, and, as much as possible, attempted to refrain from using animals in agriculture to any degree.

than any other work, Guarneri's comes the closest to writing the book that F. O. Matthiessen had called for in *The American Renaissance*, published in 1941, on "The Age of Fourier." The book that Matthiessen calls for is an explanation of the influence of Fourier upon the figures of the American Renaissance. Perhaps an equally compelling question, however, is why Fourier had such an influence. Perhaps Fourier's influence upon the intelligentsia in the United States was possible because they were possessed with something of the same optimism and the same tendency towards a comprehensive theory; we might more accurately describe the relationship between Fourier, Emerson, and Fuller as affinity rather than influence. In other words, they were inclined to listen to Fourier because they were much more like him than we have usually stated, or wanted to think. The Transcendentalists had, much like Etzler, seen the Rhine conquered by technology; Emerson and Fuller had seen technological and scientific advances that had been unimaginable just decades before. Even more importantly, they believed that humanistic advances correlated to these discoveries. To Emerson, and other reformers, the trajectory of scientific and technological progress followed the same arc as human progress, and they were not so much influenced by Fourier as they were compelled by his ideas because of the common ground they already shared.

Among writers associated with the Transcendentalists, however, there were dissenters. Henry David Thoreau, contrary to the influence of his mentor Emerson, and profoundly aware of the scientific and technological advances occurring around him, was incredulous that those advances portended a more humane or artistic society. Similarly, Nathaniel Hawthorne, although he was a stockholder in Brook Farm and lived there for some time, recurrently argues through his writing that technology, and perhaps many of the social reforms of the time as well, had a detrimental effect upon society. These countervailing perspectives presented by Hawthorne and

Thoreau also inherently questioned the notion that humanity would ever develop the terminal knowledge that Emerson and Fuller foresaw. Each of the writers mentioned addresses the debate over science, ultimate knowledge, and human progress in a distinct way, and so I devote a chapter to each, beginning with Emerson.

Emerson's attempt to develop a "true theory" capable of explaining all phenomena is part of his goal in *Nature*, and numerous of his other essays are either guidelines for intellectuals seeking such a true theory or Emerson's own movement toward an ultimate knowledge. Emerson himself had in some ways contributed to the creation of a theoretical vacuum by rejecting the overarching notion that the Bible and institutionalized religious authorities could serve as the heuristic through which all of life could be viewed; it was contention over this issue that led Emerson to break with the Unitarian denomination. Emerson was divested of the totalizing force of fundamentalist Christianity, but that is not to say he rejected the notion of an absolute knowledge. There seems to be the assumption that transcendentalists such as Emerson and George Ripley were rejecting the notion that an all-encompassing religious knowledge existed in favor of more humanistic paradigms, which is true to some degree. It is also, however, reasonable to suggest that they had not yet dissociated science from religious thought, that when Emerson speaks of the "Oversoul" or of the completely effable bifurcation of the "self" and "nature," he is attempting to provide a synergy of science and religion to form a final and complete understanding that merges these two lines of inquiry in order to fill that vacuum. To Emerson, the scientific and the spiritual were still inextricable, and a theory that did not address both simultaneously was a failure. It is a given that scholarship on Emerson has addressed his interest in spiritual inquiry, but recent scholarship on Emerson has appreciated his interest in the sciences of his time and has attempted to grapple with the scientific elements in Emerson's own

writings. Laura Dassow Walls' *Emerson's Life in Science*, published in 2003, explores the influence of the science of the time upon Emerson, noting that it was after visiting the Paris *Museum d'Histoire Naturelle* that Emerson announced "I will be a naturalist," and decided to deliver public lectures; his first four lectures were all on scientific topics. Shortly after initiating his lecture career, he wrote his defining work, *Nature*. Walls explores the influence of Charles Darwin, William Paley, Michael Faraday, and others upon Emerson. Eric Wilson, in *Emerson's Profound Science*, published in 2001, addresses the role of science within Emerson's works specifically. He also expands that enterprise in *Romantic Turbulence: Chaos, Ecology, and American Space*, published in 2000, in which he argues that there is a "scientific and poetic embrace of turbulence," that in the writings of Emerson and others manifests itself as an understanding that the material and spiritual are "not separate and hierarchical but rather interdependent and polarized" (119).

Walls' and Wilson's work is part of a valuable and compelling line of inquiry, but Emerson is not merely one figure representing eventual progress to a time in which scientific and religious inquiry should be completely dissociated; he is one of the last of a group of progressive thinkers for whom a satisfactory synergy of these two diverging discourses exists. Emerson's interest in and his notions of "self-reliance" should be seen as primarily a more effective means to an end, as a better way to strip away the pretense that has encased the truth: an ultimate, universal, and perhaps singular truth. When Emerson states in "The American Scholar," in 1837, that he hopes America will "look from under its iron lids and fill the postponed expectation of the world with something better than the exertions of mechanical skill," he is suggesting that the inventions of the United States presage something much more important than material progress. When in the opening to *Nature* Emerson pronounces that "[u]ndoubtedly we have no questions

to ask which are unanswerable” (73), he is in earnest, and it is to the leading intellectual figures of the day, who could possibly provide answers, that he dedicates his work.

A close associate of Emerson, and a major figure among the Transcendentalists, Margaret Fuller believed that sexual equality would, for both scientific and spiritual reasons, lead to the realization of a Christian millennium and the end to poverty, misogyny, and slavery. Notions of scientific and spiritual revelation are interwoven throughout Fuller’s *Woman in the Nineteenth Century*, published in 1845, in which Fuller claims that “the highest ideal man can form of his own powers, is that which he is destined to attain” (7). The reason that humanity has failed to reach perfection, Fuller argues, is that “we cannot expect to see any one sample of completed being, when the mass of men still lie engaged in sod” (8-9). The “mass” to which Fuller is referring are the oppressed, which for Fuller includes not only women but those in the bondages of slavery and abject poverty. Fuller’s faith in the ability of a universally free and humane society to reach perfection was built upon the notion that women served as better conduits for spiritual revelation, which to her was closely associated with the greater ability of women to conduct electricity, as she and others at the time believed. Fuller based her notions about the increased affinity of the female upon what she had experienced and learned about mesmerism, an esoteric procedure much akin to hypnotism that was widely practiced in the nineteenth century. Mesmerism was in Fuller’s time as reputable to many as any other medical procedure or line of scientific inquiry. Early in our nation’s history, an assembly of the finest minds in the country, including Benjamin Franklin, had been commissioned to determine whether or not mesmerism was legitimate. Many speculated that the ability to conduct electricity and the susceptibility to mesmeric influences were connected. Fuller speculated from this that since women were more easily mesmerized that they were more amenable to spiritual revelation. The added influence of

these energies, when allowed to influence society, would lead to the perfection of humanity. Hence, for Fuller, scientific understanding, divine revelation, and social progress were inextricably linked.

While Emerson and Fuller perceived the end of human knowledge, other figures opposed expansive commentary and the notion that technology necessarily meant harmony or liberation. Thoreau repeatedly argues in his work that technological progress and human progress are at best independent variables and at worst inversely correlative. Hawthorne was profoundly suspicious of technology as well as other practices such as mesmerism that, while now considered pseudo-science at best, were considered by many to be legitimate science in Hawthorne's time. Thoreau himself reviewed Etzler's *Paradise Within Reach*, which had been passed along to him by Emerson, and found fault with Etzler's materialistic approach, and the very notion that humanity is at the center of nature and that all other creatures and elements exist merely for humanity's benefit. Most importantly, however, Thoreau is skeptical that human history is a story of progress. Where Etzler witnessed the navigation of the Rhine and saw possibility, Thoreau saw the harvesting of the ice from Walden Pond and its consequent distribution as evidence that the aggregation of technological power in the hands of humanity would not necessarily lead to a more humane or altruistic society. Thoreau's review of Etzler's work serves as an early and lucid precursor to his work in *Walden*, published in 1854, *Cape Cod*, published in 1865, and a number of other works. The role of this review, among Thoreau's first published writings, in forming his understanding of the relationship between humanity and nature, and more specifically between technology, progress, and human perfectibility, is the subject of my chapter on Thoreau.

Much like Thoreau, Hawthorne was skeptical of human progress, and, despite his investment and involvement with George Ripley's utopian experiment at Brook Farm, he doubted that the experiment would serve as an alternative to society in general. He also, in a number of his short works as well as in *The Blithedale Romance*, published in 1852. In "The Celestial Railroad," Hawthorne, in a nineteenth-century version of *Pilgrim's Progress*, moralizes upon the torpor and credulity that technology can create; divested of the struggle of the journey, Pilgrim has temporarily mitigated his suffering, but has lost his individual prerogative and soul in the process. Similarly, in "The Birthmark," first published in 1843 in *The Pioneer*, Hawthorne provides a morality tale suggesting that the search for human perfection through the application of scientific understanding undoubtedly ends in failure. *The Blithedale Romance* also questions the notion that humanity can progress, when individuals are destined to fail. The utopian community parodied in the work cannot overcome their own desires and neuroses much less solve the problems of humanity at large.

It is easy to overlook the importance of technology to the writers of this period, but the fact is that the emerging natural sciences and the development of the steam engine were to Emerson and Thoreau on the cutting edge, more along the lines of how we might regard particle physics or epigenetic research today. We must also remember that while these thinkers and Emerson and Fuller had rejected the established religious institutions of their time, they had not abandoned the attempt to comprehensively answer the most expansive questions. They lived in a time rich in both scientific and spiritual speculation, and a time in which the boundaries between the two were sometimes permeable. What I wish to offer, here, is not a study of the effect of technology upon the conceptual landscape of American fiction and culture, something Leo Marx has done elegantly already in *The Machine in the Garden*, published in 1864. I am also not

attempting to explicate comprehensively the instances and implications of any of these thinkers' writings concerning technology, a number of those books exist already, several of which I have already referenced. Here, I hope to begin to give some small indication of how these antebellum writers, unmoored from religious specifics and enflamed by the promise of human ingenuity and human potential, saw synergy in precisely the same places where we see divergence.¹⁰

Some of the United States's most compelling commentaries from various genres have addressed the subject of technology, but when century Henry Adams, in *The Education of Henry Adams*, published in 1907, speculates that technology would serve as the silent source and epitome of power in the coming age as the Virgin had served for the previous, he is implicitly proclaiming the divergence of two lines of inquiry; the barrier has been erected between a unifying theory of the spiritual and the material. Human knowledge will not reach a final conclusion; there will be no "true theory," and, despite the ability to split the atom, clone sheep, and splice genes, the roofs in New England are still in the same state of disrepair, as Thoreau suggested in his review of Etzler's work, that they always would be. Perhaps, in studying figures of a time so dissimilar from our own, and given to such optimism, we have not enough considered, as Thoreau suggests we should, that "the theories and speculations of men concern us more than their puny accomplishment" ("Paradise (to Be) Regained" 11).

¹⁰ The tendency of the writers of the American Renaissance to be broad in terms of subject and style has been addressed by a number of previous scholars, who have come to various conclusions. In *The Esoteric Origins of the American Renaissance*, published in 2001, Arthur Versluis argues that the broad scope of the Transcendentalists and their close associates comes from Western Esoteric antecedents. Hence, it is the, as he terms it, "transdisciplinary" nature of these writers that has led to them being under-studied in the academy; the same thing goes for esoteric writers, subjects, and genres. Versluis explains that, "One major reason that Western esoteric traditions did not receive much academic attention until the end of the twentieth century, and the beginning of the twenty-first, is that these traditions are inherently transdisciplinary [...] This transdisciplinarity makes Western esotericism difficult to place in an academic environment concerned primarily with disciplinary turf" (5). Versluis is right, and much of this dissertation, especially the chapter on Fuller, focuses upon exploring the subjects that our discipline often finds difficult.

Chapter One: Emerson's Master Race

It may seem unremarkable that F. O. Matthiessen's *American Renaissance* is based, both conceptually and structurally, around the affinities between the five figures of the period that he wished to examine. In exploring, however, "the types of interrelations that have seemed the most productive to understanding the literature itself," Matthiessen argues that the seminal commonality between his subjects is "their devotion to the possibilities of democracy" (ix-xii), a claim which deserves some scrutiny. To a certain degree Matthiessen means quite literally "democracy" as he understands the term, but he also means "America" euphemistically when he refers to this notion of democracy, i.e. nationalism. This becomes apparent as Matthiessen explains that he is exploring the aesthetics of these writers who "all wrote for democracy in a double sense. They felt that it was incumbent upon their generation to give fulfillment to the potentialities freed by the Revolution, to provide a culture commensurate with America's political opportunity" (xv). Matthiessen, perhaps before his time, is aware of the promise and problems these writers present when he describes them: "Their tones were sometimes optimistic, sometimes blatantly, even dangerously expansive, sometimes disillusioned, even despairing, but what emerges from the total pattern of their achievement—if we will take the effort to repossess it—is literature for our democracy" (xv). Matthiessen's implication is that a system/nation of promise and ability will necessarily produce art that is aesthetically commensurate with its greatness, and these writers present to future generations what Matthiessen describes as "the challenge of our still undiminished resources" (xv). In his least humble moment, Matthiessen, aspiring to the ideal Ralph Waldo Emerson sets forth in "The American Scholar," pegs the success of his endeavor to measuring up to a standard he believes these writers established, and claims of his book that "[t]he ensuing volume has only to the extent that it comes anywhere near

measuring up to them” (xvi). Emerson is central to Matthiessen’s, and many subsequent studies of the period.

For Matthiessen, and for most critics and historians, Emerson is a persistently difficult figure. Matthiessen begins his discussion of Emerson by explaining that the “problem that confronts us in dealing with Emerson is the hardest we shall have to meet, because of his inveterate habit of stating things in opposites” (1). Matthiessen seeks to resolve the “paradox” that has “overtaken” Emerson’s body of work by explaining the seemingly contrary spiritual and empirical dimensions of his work in terms of Kant’s distinction between “reason and understanding” (1). I would not purport to resolve the paradoxes and difficulties inherent in Emerson’s work—such a task is impossible for a number of reasons, not the least of which is that Emerson’s thoughts, like any other thinker, evolved over time. My argument is that Emerson was very well aware of these contradictions and paradoxes and that he believed his writing was in anticipation, immediate anticipation, of a stage of human knowledge in which scientific and spiritual knowledge would converge and reconcile the apparent contradictions, what Emerson describes in *Nature* as a “true theory,” that “will be its own evidence,” because it will “explain all phenomena” (*Nature* 74).

Hence, the enigmas and paradoxes that in many ways define Emerson’s writing should be seen as a grasping for this knowledge, a knowledge that Emerson believed could only be attained through the synthesis of the two realms of thought, between what Matthiessen views from the Kantian lens as “understanding” and “reason,”¹ but has been explained in various forms by any number of critics. It is undeniable that much of what Emerson attempted to do was champion the

¹ One of the more detailed explorations of this comes in David Van Leer’s work, *Emerson’s Epistemology: The Argument of the Essays*, published in 2009, where he examines Emerson’s philosophy as philosophy, particularly as philosophical idealism along the lines of Leibniz, Kant, and Swedenborg.

role of intuition,² but that truism need not preclude the possibility that Emerson, ever searching for affinities, not only valued empiricism, discursive knowledge, or whatever we care to label it, but saw the division between these two types of knowledge as temporary. Modern readers and critics can see in our own times, even in the starkest of terms and on an architectural level, the separation between various disciplines. Thus, it is difficult for us to consider that Emerson understood that the fissures separating realms of thought were not expanding, but disappearing.

Emerson's anticipation of an ultimate knowledge is grounded in the nationalism that Matthiessen accurately describes, but Emerson's nationalism³ is more troubling than Matthiessen's, and more troubling than Matthiessen admits, because it is based not only in his faith in democracy, but in his belief that the United States is racially as well as culturally in a position to achieve what no other nation has. Emerson's optimism comes from what he sees as the racial, technological, and cultural progress of Western civilization that has led to the United States' exceptional position. Hence, my argument is that Emerson believes that the "American Scholar" is in a position to discover his "true theory" because of the unique and privileged position he or she occupies racially and culturally. Emerson stands at a point in American

² Perhaps the most recent in a long line of works exploring the importance of intuitive reason in Emerson's work is Patrick Keane's recent book *Emerson, Romanticism, and Intuitive Reason: The Transatlantic "Light of All Our Day,"* published in 2005. Keane provides a thorough and compelling explanation of the connections, already widely acknowledged, between German Romanticism, English Romanticism, and Emerson. He focuses most specifically upon the influence of William Wordsworth and Samuel Taylor Coleridge upon Emerson, but argues that even Milton's depiction of the angel Raphael served as an expression of the value of intuitive reason.

³ I realize this is in opposition to what many scholars of Emerson have suggested, particularly Lawrence Buell in his volume, *Emerson*, published in 2004. Buell argues that Emerson should "be thought of as anticipating a "postnational" form of consciousness." Buell further claims that "Emerson had surprisingly little patience for nationalism as such" (3). There is something to Buell's analysis, but the fact remains that Emerson did have a particular type of nationalism, albeit a nationalism that valued the United States for its potential more than for its past. The nation's promise was more important to Emerson than the nation's history. His belief that America was exceptional, for reasons I will elaborate upon, is far too prevalent to be disregarded, however distasteful Emerson's suppositions regarding race and culture may be.

history, at least prior to the Civil War, where he envisions a progress that would not much later seem impossibly sanguine.

The most important recent addition to scholarship upon Emerson, and the broader Romantic movements that occurred on both sides of the Atlantic, has been the reconsideration of the relationship between Romanticism and science.⁴ In her recent work, *Emerson's Life in Science: The Culture of Truth*, published in 2003, Laura Dassow Walls attempts to replace the image of Emerson as “the whimsical and fuzzy minded idealist,” with the image of Emerson as “the tough minded survivor, dedicated to facing down tragedy and evil with the keen-edged weapon of scientific truth” (Walls 2). Walls argues that the conventional wisdom regarding Emerson that has existed for nearly 200 years is partly responsible for our inability to conceive of Emerson as firmly grounded in the science of his day and that his very proficiency with the science of his time is to blame as well: “Emerson, like most intellectuals of his day, was perfectly at ease folding scientific truth into moral truth, reading literature and science together as part of a common intellectual culture” (Walls 3). Walls’ work is indicative of a trend that seeks to eliminate the anachronistic barriers to understanding the scientific discourses of the Romantic period as inextricable from other, broader conversations⁵ regarding religion, ethics, culture, etc.

Wall’s aptly identifies “synthesis” as one of the key aspects of Emerson’s understanding of science and importantly explains that John Herschel’s extension of Francis Bacon’s work,

⁴ Jennifer J. Baker’s essay “Natural Science and the Romanticisms” provides an excellent overview of recent works, and there are quite a few, that explore scientific thought of Romanticism in both the United States and Britain. Baker focuses especially upon understanding Romanticism in terms of its “organicism,” which, while still scientific, is in opposition to many of the conventions and methodologies of the physical sciences.

⁵ Other works specifically pertaining to American Transcendentalism that take up this issue are Walls’s work on Thoreau, *Seeing New Worlds: Henry David Thoreau and Nineteenth-Century Natural Science*, and Eric Wilson’s *Emerson’s Sublime Science*.

which Emerson found compelling, suggests that all natural phenomena could be explained by a few principles, perhaps even a single principle (Walls 9). In many ways, this notion of synthesis is central to Emerson's technological and cultural optimism and is the basis of his nationalism as well as his belief in the attainment of a final human understanding. Because Emerson's nationalism, optimism, and racial/cultural historiography are predicated upon this notion of synthesis, I will briefly give an indication of these elements of Emerson's thoughts early in his career, particularly by exploring his comparison between the American and British intellectual as presented in "The American Scholar" and *English Traits*, before exploring his technological/cultural optimism in "The Young American" and his description of a "true theory" in *Nature*.⁶

When Ralph Waldo Emerson gave his oration, "The American Scholar," to the Phi Beta Kappa society at Cambridge in the fall of 1837, he was formulating the image of a distinctively American scholar in direct opposition to what he encountered in Britain during his first trip across the Atlantic in 1833. He had been pleasantly surprised with Britain as a whole, but underwhelmed by many of the inveterate literary figures he had been excited to meet, including William Wordsworth and Samuel Taylor Coleridge. Coleridge had been bombastic and cantankerous, and "so readily did fall into certain commonplaces," that Emerson had trouble remembering exactly the subject of much of his conversation with Coleridge, who engaged too fervently for Emerson in the well-worn religious debates; a particularly long harangue attacking Unitarianism seems to have not set well with Emerson (*English Traits* 6-7).⁷ In his final dismissal of Coleridge, Emerson says, "As I might have foreseen, the visit was rather a spectacle

⁶ I have chosen to focus upon these works, supplemented with heavy use of Emerson's journals and correspondence, both because they represent the high point of Emerson's optimism, but also because it would take a much larger examination of the entirety of Emerson's work in any detail, even with regard to such a specific topic.

⁷ Emerson recounts this conversation with Coleridge in some detail: "On this, he burst into a declamation of the folly and ignorance of Unitarianism,--its high unreasonableness" (*English Traits* 5).

than a conversation, of no use beyond the satisfaction of curiosity. He was old and preoccupied, and could not bend to a new companion and think with him” (*English Traits* 7).

Although his meeting with Wordsworth was more satisfying than his encounter with Coleridge, Emerson dismissed Wordsworth because he found him nothing more than a poet: “Off his own beat, his opinions were of no value. It is not very rare to find persons loving sympathy and ease, who expiate their departure from the common, in one direction, by the conformity in every other” (*English Traits* 12). In something of a backhanded compliment, Emerson shrugs off his disappointment with Wordsworth when the poet recites his recent compositions: “This recitation was so unlooked for and surprising,--he, the old Wordsworth, standing apart, and reciting to me in a garden-walk, like a schoolboy declaiming,--that I at first was near to laugh; but recollecting myself, that I had come thus far to see a poet, and he was chanting poems to me, I saw that he was right and I was wrong” (*English Traits* 11). Why would Emerson, an aspiring poet himself, who even speculates that “poetry will lead in a new age,” nearly laugh at Wordsworth reciting his work (“The American Scholar” 52)? The reason is that Emerson sought intellectual mentors to help him develop his own identity, but neither of the literary patriarchs he met offered Emerson the breadth of knowledge, interest, or influence to satisfy him. Emerson, continually in search of unity and affinity, found the narrowness of a poet, even an admittedly great poet, disappointing.

The one figure with which Emerson was not disappointed was Thomas Carlyle, whom, after some searching, he was able to track down and meet at his home in rural Craigenputtock. Carlyle impressed Emerson because he was willing, at least at this point in life, to entertain Emerson’s penchant for exploring religious and social topics that many, including Coleridge and

Wordsworth, were unwilling to discuss.⁸ Emerson hoped to encounter in Wordsworth and Coleridge what he had encountered in Carlyle, not an author or a poet merely, but a thinker for whom few boundaries existed. Carlyle was willing to take on, in the most fundamental of terms, many of the philosophical, religious, and cultural assumptions of Western culture and, as Emerson believed, to search for a point of convergence in intellectual inquiry. This was a relationship, Emerson decided, worth careful cultivation. Upon their initial meeting, Emerson claimed that Carlyle was “a man from his youth, an author who did not need to hide from his readers, and as absolute a man of the world...tall and gaunt, with a cliff-like brow, self-possessed, and holding his extraordinary powers of conversation in easy command” (*English Traits* 7). Emerson’s visit with Carlyle in 1833 was during the peak of Carlyle’s powers, the very year he began publishing *Sartor Resartus*. From the time of their initial meeting, and though their relationship would have its share of strains, obsequiousness, and animosity, they would continue to correspond frequently for the remainder of their lives.⁹ Carlyle had done what Emerson now aspired to do, write about everything at once, take on philosophical and religious convention, and attempt to address not a specific question, but the assumptions that underlie the important questions of the age.¹⁰ Carlyle did not appear to suffer under the two great evils against which Emerson contends in “The American Scholar” and *English Traits*, the oppression of tradition, and the division of human inquiry into discontinuous fragments.

⁸ Although Emerson wished Carlyle was even more expansive in his commentary than he found him, he praises the range of topics, even the esoteric, upon which Carlyle was willing to comment: “we sat down, and talked about the immortality of the soul. It was not Carlyle’s fault that we talked on that topic, for he had the natural disinclination of every nimble spirit to bruise itself against walls, and did not like to place himself where no step can be taken. But he was honest and true, and cognizant of the subtle links that bind ages together, and saw how every event affects all the future” (*English Traits* 9).

⁹ The correspondence between Emerson and Carlyle is one of the more famous correspondences of the nineteenth century. Emerson first sent Carlyle a letter in 1834, and the last extant letter was exchanged in 1873.

¹⁰ In a letter to Carlyle sent several months after Emerson’s visit, he tells Carlyle that “[y]ou are dispensing that which is rarest, namely, the simplest truths—truths which lie next to Consciousness and which only the Platos and Goethes perceive” (*The Correspondence of Emerson and Carlyle* 99).

Emerson's initial visit to Britain had not only piqued his curiosity with English culture and history, successes and failures alike, but had led him to contemplate what the work of an American thinker should be. In Emerson's estimation, Britain held the past, and after scanning British history, he could then trace forward and see the trajectory of America's future. This is precisely what Emerson does roughly three years after his visit to Britain when he gives his speech on "The American Scholar." The notion of America serving as the intellectual extension of Britain occupied Emerson to the point that he took the opportunity to visit Britain again in 1847, this time as a celebrity on a tour organized around speaking engagements. After years of contemplating his wide reading and the experience gained from his two visits, Emerson published *English Traits* in 1856, a full-length work upon English society and history. When the work finally reached the public, the inchoate and implicit critiques found in "The American Scholar" had solidified into an extensive treatise upon the nature of Britain's zenith¹¹ and, as Emerson assumed, approaching decline. The decline in Britain's intellectual output was due inevitably to their staid success, and Emerson notes both the prolific nature of English industriousness and the increasingly visible fissures he sensed were expanding:

As we neared the land, its genius was felt. This was inevitably the British side. In every man's thought arises now a new system, English sentiments, English loves and fears, English history and social modes. Yesterday, every passenger had measured the speed of the ship by watching the bubbles over the ship's bulwarks. To-day, instead of bubbles, we measure by Kinsale, Cork, Waterford, and Ardmore. There lay the green shore of Ireland, like some coast of plenty. We

¹¹ Emerson explains that "if we will visit London, the present time is the best time, as some signs portend that it has reached its highest point. It is observed that the English interest us a little less within a few years; and hence the impression that the British power has culminated, is in solstice, or already declining" (*English Traits* 20).

could see towns, towers, churches, harvests; but the curse of eight hundred years we could not discern. (*English Traits* 17)

The “curse” to which Emerson refers is the inertia developed from a nation’s history, the pressing weight of institutions and modes of thought developed centuries earlier that have lost their savor, that enervate instead of inspire.

Mired within this tradition, Britain lacks the freedom that Emerson believes is one of the defining assets of the United States. Bowing under the pressure of the “curse,” the recent history of the British intellectual troubled Emerson. He explains that the British thinker, “On the other part, instead of being its own seer, let it receive from another mind its truth, though it were in torrents of light, without periods of solitude, inquest, and self-recovery, and a fatal disservice is done. Genius is always sufficiently the enemy of genius by over influence...The English...have Shakspearized now for two hundred years” (“The American Scholar” 57). Emerson believes that when the scholar is unable to overcome the past, he is “[i]n the degenerate state, when the victim of society, he tends to become a mere thinker, or still worse the parrot of other men’s thinking” (53). Emerson here warns not only of the oppression of tradition, but of a specific legacy that tends to divide intellectual labor, that cloisters away the thinker, relegating him to an ineffectual role. He argues that “[i]n this distribution of functions the scholar is the delegated intellect” (53). It is then that Emerson fears the separating out of tasks and authority, resulting in a myopic bookworm, society’s discerning head disembodied from its mechanical trunk.

Emerson goes on to identify exactly which institutions have lost their essence later in his chapters on the “University” and “Religion.” The thread running through Emerson’s analyses in these chapters is that England is too aristocratic, too materialistic, and too interested in its own

survival, which stifles the ability of the individual to move forward. Emerson explains that religious and academic institutions in general, and the British forms of them in particular, are flawed, saying, “Universities are, of course, hostile to geniuses, which seeing and using ways of their own, discredit the routine: as churches and monasteries persecute youthful saints” (*English Traits* 119). The advantage of the intellectual in the United States, for Emerson, is that he or she is divested of the weight of previous success, and, divested of the compulsion of history, is compelled by truth, free from the “curse” of Englishness.

Emerson’s aversion to an overly influential tradition is well documented, and his contemplation of the British intellectual, in *English Traits* and otherwise, is a manifestation of this. Part of Emerson’s rejection of tradition is a rejection of the tendency to parse out discreet realms of knowledge, to limit inquiry, and consequently limit the influence of an individual’s thoughts and abilities. The trajectory of British intellectual/spiritual history, Emerson argues, tends toward arbitrary institutional boundaries. Emerson, to what degree of hyperbole is difficult to tell, traces the mythical origin of this division of labor back to the Viking mythology: “When Thor and his companions arrive at Utgard, he is told that ‘nobody is permitted to remain here, unless he understand some art, and excel in it all other men.’” Emerson believes that England in his day is “[a] nation of laborers, every man is trained to some one art or detail, and aims at perfection in that; not content unless he has something in which he thinks he surpasses all other men. He would rather not do any thing at all, than not do it well” (*English Traits* 49). In regards to the division of intellectual labor, Emerson suggested, with some sincerity, that Carlyle cross the Atlantic to establish a new institution without existing institutional boundaries. In a letter to Carlyle not long after Emerson’s first visit to England, written in 1834, Emerson urges Carlyle to

“[c]ome and found a new Academy that shall be church and school and Parnassus, as a true Poet’s house should be” (*The Correspondence of Emerson and Carlyle* 110).

The “true Poet” had not appeared in British history. Emerson sketches the restraining pragmatism of British culture that even in poetry is evident, in his chapter “Literature” in *English Traits*. Emerson explains his ambivalent response to the impressive yet disappointing history of British Literature:

For the Englishman has accurate perceptions; takes hold of things by the right end,¹² and there is no slipperiness in his grasp. He loves the axe, the spade, the oar, the gun, the steampipe: he has built the engine he uses. He is materialist, economical, mercantile... When he is intellectual, and a poet or a philosopher, he carries the same hard truth and the same keen machinery into the mental sphere. His mind must stand on fact. (*English Traits* 131-132)

Emerson cites the usual suspects of British literature, Shakespeare, Milton, Bunyan, Swift, etc., and argues that they all bear out this tendency toward “keeping the truth at once to the senses, and to the intellect” (*English Traits* 132). This is, of course, in opposition to the value that Emerson places upon intuition, and, once again, what appears on the most basic level to be a statement complimentary of the British, that they have produced Shakespeare and steam power, is in fact an expression of their limitations.

Emerson’s analysis of the British literary tradition takes a troubling turn when he attempts to explain in racial/cultural terms the reasons for Britain’s production of so much

¹² This is the same analogy that Emerson uses in “The American Scholar” of the nature of inquiry: “And, finally, is not the true scholar the only true master? But the oracle said, “All things have two handles: beware the wrong one” (“The American Scholar” 5).

compelling literature. Emerson essentially argues for a cultural dimension to an argument that he makes in racial terms earlier in *English Traits*. Emerson initially contemplates how much importance should be placed on race, and whether race is even a meaningful concept. He addresses this question early in the chapter:

But whilst race works immortally to keep its own, it is resisted by other forces. Civilization is a re-agent, and eats away the old traits...It is easy to add to the counteracting forces of race...These limitations of the formidable doctrine of race suggest others which threaten to undermine it, as not sufficiently based. The fixity or inconvertibleness of races as we see them, is a weak argument for the eternity of these frail boundaries. (*English Traits* 26-27)

After these qualifications, however, Emerson comes to the conclusion that it is something of a hybrid vigor¹³ that makes Britain so great. He claims that “[t]he English composite character betrays a mixed origin. Every thing English is a fusion of distant and antagonistic elements. The language is mixed; the names of men are of different nations,--three languages, three or four nations;--the currents of thought are counter...Neither does these people appear to be of one stem; but collectively a better race than any from which they are derived” (*English Traits* 28). Emerson believes that he has identified three major categories of English races, the Celt, the Saxon, and the Norman, and that it is the synergy of these three that leads to the constitutive

¹³ As a genetic concept, this is the notion that breeding outside of one’s close relatives reduces the chance for deleterious recessive traits that often lead to a less hearty individual. Hence, a larger gene pool often leads to a healthier population.

English traits. The Norman vigor, in its pure form being too drawn to violence,¹⁴ for example, Emerson believes, is mitigated by the domestic and agrarian nature of the Saxon.¹⁵

The analog to the racial synergy described in *English Traits* appears in “The American Scholar,” although in a nascent form. Early in his address, Emerson cites an “old fable...that there is One Man...and that you must take the whole society to find the whole man.” He explains that “[m]an is not a farmer, or professor, or an engineer, but he is all...In the *divided* social state, these functions are parceled out to individuals, each of whom aims to do his stint of the joint work...in this distribution of functions, the scholar is the delegated intellect. In the right state, he is *Man Thinking*” (“The American Scholar” 53). With integration and synthesis, with a mixture of racial and cultural types, the American scholar will fulfill the “postponed expectation” of the world.

What is obviously problematic about Emerson’s valorizing of racial hybridization is that it only includes three races. This is to the exclusion of other races, which, to Emerson, offer very little to praise. In explaining the persistence of racial traits he says, “Race is a controlling influence in the Jews, who, for two millenniums, under every climate, has preserved the same character and employments. Race in the negro is of appalling importance” (*English Traits* 26). Along the same lines, Emerson later depicts the Irish as devolving because their gene pool contains merely Irish and because they, isolated from other cultures, are nearly incapable of supporting themselves.

¹⁴ He explains this in his section on the Norsemen: “These Norsemen are excellent persons in the main, with good sense, steadiness, wise speech, and prompt action. But they have a singular turn for homicide; their chief end of man is to murder or to be murdered” (*English Traits* 32).

¹⁵ He explains the nature of the Celts, which is drawn into relief by his later, more detailed, description of the Norman: “They planted Britain, and gave to the seas and mountains names which are poems, and imitate the pure voices of nature. They are favorably remembered in the oldest records of Europe. They had no violent feudal tenure, but the husbandman owned the land” (*English Traits* 30).

Similar to this racial notion of synthesis, Emerson locates the English literary genius in a mixture of cultures. In explaining this literary proclivity, Emerson claims, “The Saxon materialism and narrowness, exalted into the sphere of intellect, makes the very genius of Shakespeare and Milton. When it reaches the pure element, it treads the clouds as securely as the adamant. Even in its elevations materialistic, its poetry is common sense inspired; or iron raised to white heat” (*English Traits* 132). Extending this notion further, and suggesting that the concept of racial/cultural synthesis lead to greatness, Emerson attempts to explain English speech and language: “The marriage of the two qualities is in their speech. It is a tacit rule of the language to make the frame or skeleton, of Saxon words, and, when elevation or ornament is sought, to interweave Roman; but sparingly; nor is a sentence made of Roman words alone, without a loss of strength” (*English Traits* 132). Emerson also locates the perfection of this synthesis within a loosely defined middle-class, making the argument that both the laborers and the nobles occupy the Latinate and Germanic poles of this linguistic and cultural spectrum, while those between benefit from the admixture of the two: “[t]he children and laborers use the Saxon unmixed. The Latin unmixed is abandoned to the colleges and Parliament. Mixture is a secret of the English island; and, in their dialect, the male principle is the Saxon; the female, the Latin; and they are combined in every discourse” (*English Traits* 132).

The darker side of Emerson’s racial synthesis is clear when he describes what he believes to be devolution among the Irish not strengthened by the mixture of other races. He argues that “[i]n Irish districts, men deteriorated in size and shape, the nose sunk, the gums were exposed, with diminished brain and brutal form” (*English Traits* 170). Emerson reinforces this with his description of Scotland as well, where he once again comments upon the racial, linguistic, and cultural failings of the province: “In Scotland, there is a rapid loss of all grandeur of mien and

manners; a provincial eagerness and acuteness appear; the poverty of the country makes itself remarked, and a coarseness of manners; and, among the intellectual, is the insanity of dialects” (*English Traits* 29). Emerson, ever the Naturalist, seeks to use exact methods in his assay into the races of Britain, and he explains that his classification of racial types is much like the work of Linnaean classification.¹⁶ Admitting that his conclusions are not exact and final, he argues that the “kitchen clock is more convenient than sidereal time” (*English Traits* 29). Emerson compares racial fitness in like environments to a yacht race: “if the boats are anywhere nearly matched, it is the man that wins. Put the best sailing man into either boat, and he will win” (*English Traits* 29). Racial and cultural solidarity lead to cultural and biological depravity in Emerson’s configuration. The cure for all that ails England is synthesis, a mixture of cosmopolitanism and access to nature.

Emerson argues that British success has its genesis in both race and culture, but the common thread between Emerson’s valuations of these two realms is this concept of synthesis. The unique racial/cultural hybridity of England has accounted for the nation’s success, but its limitations come from the weight of its institutions and traditions. What if Carlyle were to be transplanted to America as Emerson suggests? What if the perfect storm of racial qualities Emerson sees in the English could break free from the chains of tradition and institutional boundaries? This is the promise Emerson sees when he writes “The American Scholar,” and forecasts that “[p]erhaps the time is already come when it ought to be, and will be, something else; when the sluggard intellect of this continent will look from under its iron lids and fill the postponed expectation of the world with something better than mechanical skill” (52).

¹⁶ His exact words are: “We must use the popular category, as we do by the Linnaean classification, for convenience, and not as exact and final. Otherwise, we are presently confounded, when the best settled traits of one race are claimed by some new ethnologist as precisely the characteristic of the rival tribe” (*English Traits* 29).

Ironically, it is this “exertion of mechanical skill” that so impressed Emerson and in many ways fueled his optimism. In support of his assertion that “if there be one successful country in the universe for the last millennium, that country is England,” Emerson describes the technological and technocratic abilities of the English (*English Traits* 18). Emerson describes England as a land that has been nearly fully developed by its industrious people:

England is a garden. Under an ash-colored sky, the fields have been combed and rolled till they appear to have been finished with a pencil instead of a plough. The solidity of the structures that compose the towns speaks the industry of ages. Nothing is left as it was made. Rivers, hills, valleys, the sea itself feel the hand of a master. The long habitation of a powerful and ingenious race has turned every rood of land to its best use, has found all the capabilities, the arable soil, the quarriable rock, the highways, the byways, the fords, the navigable waters; and the new arts of intercourse meet you every where; so that England is a huge phalanstery where all that man wants is provided within the precinct. Cushioned and comforted in every manner, the traveler rides as on a cannon-ball, high and low, over rivers and towns, through mountains, in tunnels of three or four miles, at near twice the speed of our trains; and reads quietly the Times newspaper, which by its immense correspondence and reporting, seems to have machinized the rest of the world for his occasion. (*English Traits* 18)

Emerson sees England as the best that the exertions of mechanical skill can achieve, and his description of the nation is remarkably similar to utopian John A. Etzler’s description of the America he envisions in his work, *The Paradise Within Reach of All Men*. Etzler’s plan promises, “the whole face of nature...changed into the most beautiful form of which it be

capable; where man may live in most magnificent palaces, in all imaginable refinements of luxury, in the most delightful gardens...with roads for transporting heavy loads many thousand tons and for travelling 1000 miles in 24 hours” (Etzler 1).

Emerson even describes England as a phalanstery, the term Joseph Fourier¹⁷ uses to describe his utopian communities. Because utopian communities in antebellum America were in many ways influenced by the Fourierist elements of the movement, the vocabulary of Fourier, particularly the term “phalanstery” was commonly used.¹⁸ Emerson was most closely tied to the Brook Farm community that fellow transcendentalist and former Unitarian minister George Ripley founded in 1841; the community was completely closed in 1847.¹⁹ This is, of course, during, or shortly before the time that Emerson was writing *English Traits*—finally published in 1856. This connection is important, because Emerson himself found the utopian communities that arose in the United States distasteful for precisely the same reasons that he felt England had become insipid. In a journal entry dated September, 26, 1840, Emerson muses upon the Brook Farm community and decides, unsurprisingly, that it is not for him: “Perhaps it is folly, this scheming to bring the good and like-minded together into families, into a colony. Better that they should disperse and so leaven the whole lump of society” (*Journals of Ralph Waldo Emerson* V, 465). On first reading this, it may appear that Emerson is arguing against the notion of synthesis, but that could hardly be less true. Emerson’s reason for disliking the Brook Farm community is that it matches like with like and fails to distribute that particular element throughout society—here we might envision Emerson picturing devolution similar to what he describes in the Irish

¹⁷ Refer to my introductory chapter for more information of Fourier.

¹⁸ When the members of Brook Farm decided to label their community a Fourierist community, they planned to build a new building they labeled a “phalanestery.” For one example of this usage, refer to a letter from Marianne Dwight to Anna Parsons, which can be found most readily as letter no. 56 in *Brook Farm Autobiography*.

¹⁹ Stephen Delano’s *Brook Farm: The Dark Side of Utopia*, published in 2004, provides a detailed narrative of the Brook Farm community from its origins to its dissolution.

neighborhoods, except with the effect being an increasing effeteness rather than intellectual decline. Dispersal will “leaven the whole lump,” hence, similar individuals need not aggregate together. By applying the cultural hybridization discussed theoretically in *English Traits* Emerson determines that the dissemination of the best type of people, who not incidentally are quite similar to Emerson in both cultural and racial terms, would be better than their aggregation.

Emerson considers quite seriously the offer Bronson Alcott, Margaret Fuller and George Ripley make regarding what he labels their “social plans,”²⁰ musing that “[y]esterday George and Sophia Ripley, Margaret Fuller and Alcott discussed here the Social Plans. I wished to be convinced, to be thawed, to be made nobly mad by the kindlings before my eye of a new dawn of human piety” (*Journals of Ralph Waldo Emerson V*, 473-474). He even later comes closer to following the associationist route after hearing Albert Brisbane speak, explaining in a letter to his wife, Lidian Emerson,

Mr. Brisbane indoctrinated me in the high mysteries of “Attractive Industry” ...in a conversation which I wish you all might have heard... What palaces! What concerts! What pictures lectures poetry and flowers...and when the Earth is planted and gardened and templed all over with “Groups” and “Communities” each of 2000 men and 6000 acres...we poets and Miscellaneous transcendental persons who are too great for your Concords and New Yorks will gravitate to that

²⁰ While Emerson never says that he is referring to Associationism specifically, it can be assumed that this is the most substantial part of their argument. Fuller spent some time at Brook Farm, and was in support of the endeavor. Bronson Alcott also founded another transcendentalist utopian community called the Fruitlands, so it is quite clear that their plans for these communities figured significantly into the discussion to which Emerson is referring. He explains his reaction to the solicitations of his companions: “But this scheme was arithmetic and comfort: this was a hint borrowed from the Tremont House and United States Hotel, a rage in our poverty and politics to live rich and gentlemanlike, and anchor to leeward against a change of weather; a prudent forecast against the probable issue of the great questions of Pauperism and Poverty...I do not wish to remove from my present prison to a prison a little larger” (*Journals of Ralph Waldo Emerson V*, 473-474).

point for music and architecture and society such as wit cannot paint nowadays.
(*The Letters of Ralph Waldo Emerson* III, 20-21).

The opinion of the associationist communities that Emerson is forming during his exposure to Brisbane's articulation of Fourier's doctrines finally foments, and he decides that Fourierism and associationism in general are the precursors of some great social order and not that order themselves. Believing that American and English cities, for the moment, function as a phalanx, Emerson muses that "London, New York, Boston, are phalanxes ready-made, where you shall find concerts, books, balls, medical lectures, prayers, or Punch and Judy, according to your fancy, on any night or day" (*Journals of Ralph Waldo Emerson* VI, 314). Therefore, the American and English cultural centers can become the institution that Emerson called upon Carlyle to found in America, the "church and school and Parnassus" in one, but only the American, as opposed to the Englishman, will lead the way.

America, Emerson believed, had demonstrated the same technological aptitude as the British. The result of these technologies in the United States, however, would be to increase integration and synthesis, to create one massive cosmopolitan society.²¹ In his address, "The Young American," given in 1844, Emerson explains how he believes technology will lead to a unified society:

²¹ The statement that the author of *Nature* is cosmopolitan may sound counterintuitive, but aside from his comparison of the cities being phalanxes that I mention, he also faults Thoreau for his denigration of the urban in favor of the rural. One passage in particular in Emerson's journal is illuminating: "H.D.T. sends me a paper with the old fault of unlimited contradiction...With the constant inclination to dispraise cities and civilization, he yet can find no way to honour woods and woodmen except by paralleling them with towns and townsmen" (*The Journals of Ralph Waldo Emerson* U, 9). He also believes that America is the opposite of Britain in that the greater persons dwell in the countryside in Britain but in the cities in American.

This rage for road building is beneficent for America, where vast distance is so main a consideration in our domestic politics and trade, inasmuch as the great political promise of the invention is to hold the Union staunch, whose days seemed already numbered by the mere inconvenience of transporting representatives, judges, and officers, across such tedious distances of land and water. Not only is distance annihilated, but when, as now the locomotive and the steamboat, like enormous shuttles, shoot every day across the thousand various threads of national descent and employment, and bind them fast in one web, an hourly assimilation goes forward, and there is no danger that local peculiarities and hostilities should be preserved. (“The Young American” 224)

Emerson sees the ingenuity of the American of English descent developing the same infrastructure in America as across the Atlantic. The railroad in the United States will allow for integration, an integration that, according to Emerson’s explanation here, will eliminate “local peculiarities,” which should remind us of his discussion of the “provincial” localities of Ireland and Scotland he describes in *English Traits*.

Emerson sensationalizes the railroad to the point that he believes it improves the lives of the Irish workers responsible for its construction.²² Emerson seems to argue in favor of the reform of the working conditions of the Irish immigrants who are responsible for the hard labor required to build the railroad: “Poor fellows! Hear their stories of their exodus from the old country, and their landing in the new, and their fortunes appear as little under their own control

²² Emerson was certainly not alone in subscribing to the notion that Americans regarded technology as an important support of their democratic ideals, and in opposition to European feudal systems or urban industrialism is part of David Nye’s argument in *America as Second Creation*, published in 2004, in which he argues that Americans typically thought of technologies as enhancing equality and Republicanism. Specifically he addresses the axe, the factory, the steam engine, and the canal, and irrigation systems.

as the leaves of the forest around them” (“The Young American” 225). This sentiments are undercut, however, when Emerson later argues that the intense physical labor mitigates the irascibility of the Irish: “Perhaps they may thank these dull shovels as safe vents for peccant humors; and this grim day’s work of fifteen or sixteen hours, though deplored by all the humanity of the neighborhood, is a better police than the sheriff and his deputies” (“The Young American” 225). It is the invention of the Englishman that Emerson credits with bettering the life of the Irish: “The new power is hardly less noticeable in its relation to the immigrant population, chiefly to the people of Ireland, as having given employment to hundreds of thousands of the natives of that country, who are continually arriving in every vessel from Great Britain” (“The Young American” 224). What we see is a depiction of a the Irish building a rail system that will allow the transporting of “representatives, judges, and officers,” who, we might assume, will be of the same Saxon/Norman stock that have already disseminated throughout the rest of the world to form the British empire. The devious aspects of technology that Emerson seems to relish serve to eliminate difference, and eliminate the barriers of time and distance from the overclass he eventually describes in “The Young American.”

Importantly, Emerson organizes the majority of “The Young American” around three topics that he believes are important in “creating an American sentiment” (225). He begins by describing the abundance of land that characterizes America, and the opportunity that technology, including but not exclusive to the railroad, provides for perfecting the land. Emerson explains that “[t]he railroad is but one arrow in our quiver, though it has great value as a sort of yard-stick...the arts of engineering and of architecture are studied; scientific agriculture is an object of growing attention; the mineral riches are explored; limestone, coal, slate, and iron; and the value of timber-lands is enhanced” (226). Emerson correlates the technological and moral

progress of American society when he explains that a “habit of living in the presence of these invitations of natural wealth is not inoperative; and this habit, combined with the moral sentiment which, in the recent years, has interrogated every institution, and usage, and law” (227). Land does much more than provide wealth, and morality; it is an impetus for a perpetual progressivism: “I think we must regard the *land* as a commanding and increasing power on the American citizen, the sanative and Americanizing influence, which promises to disclose new virtues for ages to come” (229).

After establishing that the United States’ abundance of natural resources provides the foundation for an exceptional future, Emerson argues that “the uprising and culmination of the new anti-feudal power of Commerce, is the political fact of most significance to the American at this hour” (229). Emerson, even while discussing trade, links the success of the United States to the “heterogeneous population crowding on all ships from all corners of the world (230). Because such a diverse mix of peoples will “quickly contribute their private thought to the public opinion, their toll to the treasury, and their vote to the election,” Emerson claims that “it cannot be doubted that the legislation of this country should become more catholic and cosmopolitan than that of any other” (230). Hopeful, or perhaps delusional, Emerson pronounces, “Only what is inevitable interests us, and it turns out that love and good are inevitable, and in the course of things” (230). The natural progression of history, Emerson argues, necessitates a system, itself temporary, to overthrow the European feudal system. The material reality of America’s natural abundance and the superior culture produced by racial diversity will, in Emerson’s estimation, lead to a perfect America.

Emerson identifies, in making his third point, “the signs of that which is the sequel of trade” (234). “The time is full of good signs,” Emerson declares, and “some of them shall ripen

to fruit (235). He refers to various forms of social progressivism as “this beneficent socialism,” and a “friendly omen.” Emerson sees promise in “the new movements in the civilized world, the Communism of France, Germany, and Switzerland; the Trades’ Unions” (235). In particular, Emerson lauds the “three Communities which have within a short time sprung up within this Commonwealth” (235). The present belongs to commerce, but the future belongs to this version of “Communism.” The science exists, Emerson believes, to “turn a sandbank into corn,” and yet, “the farmer [is] not only eager for the information, but with bad crops and in debt and bankruptcy” (235). The “Communists” provide the answer, and Emerson looks to theorists such as Fourier and Etzler for the solution: “Here are the Etzlers and countless mechanical projectors, who, with the Fourierists, undoubtingly affirm that the smallest union would make every man rich;--and, on the other side, is this multitude of poor men and women seeking work, and who cannot find enough to pay their board. The science is confident, and surely the poverty is real. If any means could be found to bring these two together!” (235).

The associationists have the ability to translate the science into use, the ability to organize the competitive energies of commerce into a harmonious system of cooperation.²³ For, Emerson explains, “the Community is only the continuation of the same movement which made the joint-stock companies for manufactures, mining, insurance, banking, and so forth”²⁴ (236). Emerson

²³ Emerson explains that “[t]hey proposed, as you know, that all men should take part in the manual toil, and proposed to amend the condition of men by substituting harmonious, for hostile industry” (“The Young American” 236).

²⁴ Emerson is more accurate here than we might assume, because several of the Associationist communities were actually joint stock companies. Emerson knows this first hand because George Ripley had attempted at various times to solicit funds from Emerson—one need not even be a member of the community to realize a 5% return on their investment. In a letter to Emerson written in 1841, Ripley explains the joint-stock system of Brook Farm: “Our shares are \$500 each; they are guaranteed five per cent interest, and may be withdrawn at the pleasure of the subscribers, on giving three months’ notice. I have no doubt that an investment would be equally safe, if not equally lucrative, as in any joint-stock company in the Commonwealth, besides essentially aiding the establishment of an institution, which is believed to contain the seeds of future good to men” (*The Autobiography of Brook Farm* 61).

claims, “This is the value of the Communities; not what they have done, but the revolution which they indicate as on the way” (237). The communities fail because “they exaggerate the importance of a favorite project of theirs, that of paying talent and labor at one rate” (236). This fails, for “not an instant would a dime remain a dime. In one hand it became an eagle as it fell, and in another hand a copper cent. For obviously, the whole value of the dime is in knowing what to do with it...All depends on the skill of the spender” (237). The communities will give way to a better system, which takes into account “[t]he actual differences in men,” which, Emerson argues, “must be acknowledged” (237). The marked difference between Emerson’s future and that envisioned by the associationists becomes clear. The future, Emerson believes, “asks for lords, true lords, *land*-lords, who understand the land and its uses... and whose government would be what it should, namely, mediation between want and supply” (237). “Could any means be contrived to appoint only these,” Emerson wonders, and concludes that, yes, “there really seems a progress towards such a state of things, in which this work shall be done by these natural workmen” (237).

Emerson calls initially upon “young men” to “be the nobility of this land.” He muses that “[i]n every age of the world, there has been a leading nation,” and then asks, “Which should be that nation but these States?” The limits of this new nobility that Emerson describes continually narrow, as he singles out not only America, but his region as well: “Which should lead that movement, if not New England?” Emerson finally suggests not only what region his “*land*-lords” should come from, but also their race: “Here are we, men of English blood, planted now for five, six, or seven generations on this immense tract in the temperate zone, and so planted at such a conjuncture of time and events...into a new and more excellent social state than history has recorded” (244). Emerson’s optimism regarding technology has both its beginning and ending in

race. The Saxon/Norman hybrid is responsible for technological and cultural revolution, but is also empowered by the fruits of those very advances.

That this feedback loop between race and technology would empower man enough to develop a “true theory” seems patently absurd. In fact, the main difficulty here may be that we struggle to take Emerson literally when he says that this “true theory” will explain all phenomena. Why? Not because we believe that science is incapable of completely explaining the physical world. There are many promising avenues today that could come pretty close to explaining all of our observations regarding both matter and energy. String theory and the impending observation of the Higgs Boson are two avenues of inquiry that will get us even closer—we are talking about beginning with a singularity and ending with a singularity; the narrative could be no more complete. No, the reason we have trouble taking Emerson seriously is that his theory would, by his admission, explain the spiritual as well, and bleed over into the tricky realm of metaphysics, beyond the purview of any discipline, or any institution. Our solution is to dismiss it as only a passing rhetorical flourish, one of Emerson’s bizarre metaphors, much like the nonsensical “transparent eyeball.”

Christopher Windolph’s recent study, *Emerson’s Nonlinear Nature*, published in 2007, might provide a useful example, and in some ways counter our anachronistic tendencies. Windolph argues that “many readers in the past century have been confronted with the problem of parsing the words of a man whose way of thinking about the world is almost entirely foreign to modern and postmodern sensibilities” (5). Windolph asks facetiously, “To speak of oneself as a transparent eyeball and to claim that ‘I see all. The currents of the Universal Being circulate through me’ one must surely be speaking in anything but literal terms, right?” (5). Arguing that in Emerson’s writing, “The apparent signs of indecision are best understood in this context as

indications of the prolific love of harmony” (5), Windolph compellingly explains how Emerson’s understanding of the eye and geometry were a mixture of the common understanding of the time and of Emerson’s own idiosyncratic beliefs. Windolph’s point is that Emerson wrote sincerely, regardless of however alien he might seem to us, and was not a precocious poststructuralist, modernist, or anything else. Let us then entertain the notion that two of Emerson’s most distasteful qualities, his jingoism and his optimism, converged, that he then believed that a coalescence of disciplines and knowledge might lead to an Etzler or Fourier or Swedenborg or Carlyle who could finally reconcile both material science and spiritualism, a reconciliation so far from our horizon that it seems implausible.

Better comprehensive analyses of *Nature* exist than I could develop, and such work is not my goal here. I intend, rather, to briefly present the case that Emerson, in one of his self-contained works,²⁵ and perhaps his most important, bears out my argument that he forecasts a teleological endgame because of the synthesis of human knowledge, an Omega Point. It is important that Emerson’s own vocation represents a rejection of institutional boundaries, as he eventually worked neither as a minister nor a naturalist, but both of these ambitions influenced him significantly. Perhaps Emerson longed to strike the balance between the two, or, even more likely, to do both simultaneously. Scholars have rightly focused upon two events in Emerson’s life that determined the trajectory of his vocation. The first is his resignation from his Unitarian pulpit in October of 1832. When explaining his resignation to his congregation, Emerson makes

²⁵ For, as David Van Leer has expressed, there is a danger in placing too much emphasis on any particular reading of Emerson’s journals and notebooks. Van Leer fears “that, whatever their epistemic status, the journals as sources for empirical evidence simply prove too much. Virtually anything can be found somewhere in those sixteen volumes. But the organization and argument essential to thought are excluded, by definition from any such ‘notebook’” (Van Leer xiii). Leer perhaps overstates his case, because Emerson’s aphoristic style lends itself to jotting down thoughts that would later be fused together into a whole with a perhaps intentional disregard for cogency.

clear that he left not because he has given up the search for “divine truth,” but because he thought the institution hindered him from reaching that goal. Importantly, Emerson claims to not be turning his back on the office of minister, but only the title:

Nor do I think less of the office of a Christian minister. I am pained at the situation in which I find myself, that compels me to make a difference of opinion of no greater importance, the occasion of surrendering so many and so valuable functions as belong to that office. I have the same respect for the great objects of the Christian ministry, and the same faith in their gradual accomplishment through human means, which, at first, led me to enter it. I should be unfaithful to myself, if any change of circumstances could diminish my devotion to the cause of divine truth. (*The Selected Letters of Ralph Waldo Emerson* 114)

While Emerson makes overtures of devotion to the individuals comprising his pastorate, it was not with his congregation *per se* that he was concerned, at least not as much as to the notion of “truth.” Frequently Emerson’s ambivalence toward actual people, at least those outside of his close circle, surfaces. One journal entry, which later was scoured of the most misanthropic elements before appearing in the essay “Nominalist and Realist,” expresses Emerson’s thoughts with respect to the valuation of truth and people:

I wish to speak with all respect of persons, but sometimes it needs much heedfulness to preserve the due decorum, they melt so fast into each other, that they are like grass, or trees, and it needs an effort to treat them as individuals. A metaphysician, a saint, a poet of God has nothing to do with them; he sees them as

a rack of clouds or as a fleet of ripples which the wind drives over the surface of water. (*Journals of Ralph Waldo Emerson* U, 6)

Emerson's true ambition was to search for divine truth within his own mind and nature, and not to bring in the proverbial sheaves. Emerson's focus upon the abstract skews his self-perception, and his perception of other figures, to the point that he understands a "saint" to have nothing to do with individuals, with people as we most readily find them—we can see already the precocious aspects of Emerson's later full-blown Whiggery.

A few months after Emerson resigned his pastorate, he took his first trip to Europe. It was there that he had an epiphany regarding his vocation. After visiting the Jardin des Plantes in Paris, he declared, "I will be a naturalist" (*The Journals of Ralph Waldo Emerson* IV, 200). Robert Richardson explains that the Jardin des Plantes served as more than the gardens of leisure we are familiar with today: "Botanical gardens during this time were major research centers... The great botanical gardens were the Dow Chemical companies of their time, funded by the government and engaged in pioneering work in pharmacology, food, development, and forestry as well as in pure science" (Richardson 139). Emerson saw science on the cutting edge in what was perhaps the most important cultural center of nineteenth century Europe. When Emerson returned to the United States, he began his lecture tour with five lectures upon the Natural Sciences. Emerson, though he never became a naturalist and left the clergy, merged these two vocations by using the oratory skills he developed while preaching and the knowledge of and passion for the Natural Sciences that he acquired in Europe. *Nature* provides the most apt and

obvious expression of this conflation, because Emerson originally planned two works, the first on *Nature*, and the subsequent volume to be titled “Spirit.”²⁶

Emerson believed that a “good mind infers from two or three facts, or from one, as readily as from legion.” This explains the success of the great scientists Emerson admired, and he remarked that “Kepler, Dalton, Newton, who are born with a taste for the manners of Nature, catch the whole tune from a few bars” (*Topical Notebooks of Ralph Waldo Emerson* 1, 29).

While Thoreau sought out specific facts and painstakingly recorded his observations, Emerson sought the principles underlying them. Emerson betrays his knowledge of Chemistry, Geology, and Botany in his journals, where he records many of the foundational claims of each of these fields,²⁷ but these are typically with a mind toward principles rather than toward observations of discreet facts. And so, when in *Nature* he claims that “[u]ndoubtedly we have no questions to ask which are unanswerable,” he is in earnest, because Emerson believes we need not observe all of the facts to extrapolate a unifying principle from them.²⁸

The search for this unifying principle held Emerson’s attention, and is what drew him to Fourier. He muses that Fourier, “carries a whole French revolution in his head, and much more...His ciphering goes where ciphering never went before, starts and atmospheres, and animals, and men, and women, and classes of every character. It is very entertaining...and will suggest vast and numerous possibilities of reform to the coldest and least sanguine.” The

²⁶ Emerson explains this in his correspondence (*The Letters of Ralph Waldo Emerson* II, 26).

²⁷ Within a few pages of his journal, Emerson copies down a definition of latent heat, various thinkers’ postulations on the nature of heat, light, matter, transmutation, and the correlation between the geological timeline and other intervals in nature that reflect in microcosm those periods.

²⁸ In a broader sense, the very approach to science that Emerson employed came to him through other Romantic writers. Walls suggests that, “This dynamic flow, which makes Many tributary to the One, characterizes Romanticism...this connective, dynamic principle place science at the heart of antebellum literature and culture” (Walls 6).

aphorism, “To Genius everything is permitted,” follows directly after Emerson’s thoughts on Fourier in his journal (*Journals of Ralph Waldo Emerson* U, 8). Emerson takes up this argument in *Nature*, attempting to dispel the notion that there are any details that cannot be explained through an abstract, systematic approach: “But to a sound judgement, the most abstract truth is the most practical. Whenever a true theory appears, it will be its own evidence. Its test is that it will explain all phenomena. Now many are thought not only unexplained but inexplicable; as language, sleep, madness, dreams, beasts, sex” (*Nature* 8). When the naturalists at the Jardin des Plantes and the Fourier’s of the world seek to explain every observation, they are cataloging, but Emerson realizes that this is impossible. His interest, however, lies in finding the thread that ties them together, which he believes possible, in what we might call, more precisely than synthesizing, *analogizing*.

Emerson’s goal in *Nature*, however, is not in analogizing, not in finding the sameness between observations, but in opening such a discussion. Emerson never indicates that he has developed a “true theory,” but he may believe himself to be a guide, a pastor of abstractors, leading a congregation of what he believes to be the perfect race in a perfect natural environment in the most sublime of pursuits. Upon sending *Nature* to Carlyle, Emerson explains, “I send you a little book I have just now published, as an entering wedge, I hope, for something more worthy and significant. This is only a naming of topics on which I would gladly speak and gladlier hear.” Emerson only mentions his recently published work in these lines during this letter, but he reveals what he is after in this pursuit claiming, “the great truths are always at hand, and all the tragedy of individual life is separated how thinly from that universal nature which obliterates all ranks, all evils, all individualities” (*The Correspondence of Emerson and Carlyle* 149).

In the initial section of *Nature*, Emerson juxtaposes the aims of science and religion, and then gives us a list of allegedly inexplicable details, and finally a list of chapters of topics upon which he does not feel himself to be an expert. The point here is that by synthesizing these two discourses, the harmony can be found. If one begins with a universalizing discourse, one can come to a universal theory, but with restrictions that end can never be realized. Emerson seeks to lay the foundation for the discourse that will encompass the school, church, and Parnassus, a discourse that will be taken up by the naturalist/spiritualist. Perhaps, Emerson even reinforces this stylistically when he addresses the lack in science with the lack in religion without any logical transition between the two points. The point being substantively exactly what the *non sequitur* is stylistically, that intellectual progress requires the two to become one, for the connection to be made. He suggests a connection after presenting this conceptual and aesthetic rift:

All science has one aim, namely, to find a theory of nature. We have theories of races and of functions, but scarcely yet a remote approach to an idea of creation. We are now so far from the road to truth, that religious teachers dispute and hate each other, and speculative men are esteemed unsound and frivolous. But to a sound judgment, the most abstract truth is the most practical. (*Nature* 8)

The synergy of two lines of inquiry, science and religion, of institutions, and of intellectual vocation will lead to the answer, which is what Emerson describes in neurotically positive terms at the end of *Nature*. The reason, Emerson argues, “why the world lacks unity, and lies broken and in heaps, is, because man is disunited with himself. He cannot be a naturalist, until he satisfies all the demands of the spirit.” “Indeed,” Emerson states, “neither can be perfect without the other.” One last time, Emerson locates humanity’s failures in this division of thought: “There

are innocent men who worship God after the tradition of their fathers, but their sense of duty has not yet extended to the use of all of their faculties. And there are patient naturalists, but they freeze their subject under the wintry light of the understanding” (*Nature* 43). Emerson explains the effects of what the coming synthesis will be, in a voice that can only remind us of a more spiritual Etzler: “A correspondent revolution in things will attend the influx of the spirit...The sordor and filths of nature, the sun shall dry up, and the wind exhale...it shall draw beautiful faces, and warm hearts, and wise discourse, and heroic acts, around its way, until evil is no more seen” (*Nature* 43). In his final lines, Emerson suggests that even our imagining of this utopia is inadequate because of the barriers between the material and spiritual realms of inquiry still exist: “The kingdom of man over nature, which cometh not with observation,--a dominion such as now is beyond his dream of God,--he shall enter without more wonder than the blind man feels who is gradually restored to perfect sight” (*Nature* 44-45). The combination of Norman and Saxon will lead to the synthesis of science and religion, in fact the synthesis of all knowledge, and America will soon enough have “the” answer, and a God-like power over nature.

Chapter Two: My Best Friend Is a Saxon: Reading Thoreau through Emerson

As I have argued in my first chapter, Emerson's understanding of race effectively determined what he thought about human culture and social progress. Because he understood races as discreet and unalterable, his thoughts on race effected his position on almost everything else, even his understanding of his protégé, Henry David Thoreau. Emerson's eulogy was to some degree the first posthumous review of Thoreau's work, and has been in many ways the most influential piece of criticism ever written on Thoreau, and for good reason. Emerson himself knew Thoreau as well as anyone, and certainly Thoreau respected Emerson's opinion in general, and, consequently, many of Thoreau's contemporaries inherently respected Emerson's opinion of Thoreau. Readers of the eulogy, however, disagree significantly on what exactly Emerson was trying to say, and the degree to which this eulogy possibly insults Thoreau. The eulogy could very well contain the passive aggressive jabs and back-handed compliments many have ascribed to it, or it could merely be Emerson's earnest attempt at explaining a figure who remained an enigma even to his closest associates. Eulogizing Thoreau was surely no easy task, even for the talented Emerson. Parsing Emerson's enigmatic eulogy is challenging as well. If we read the eulogy, however, as an analysis of Thoreau based upon Emerson's scientific understanding of race that I have outlined in the first chapter, we are left with a less mysterious, if more troubling, understanding of the eulogy, as well as the relationship between the two writers.

Emerson's eulogy shares a number of similarities to Robert Louis Stevenson's harsh review of Thoreau, and it is telling that Stevenson initially understood Emerson's eulogy to be tacitly critical of Thoreau. In his own criticism of Thoreau, written in 1880, Stevenson is more

directly critical of Thoreau than Emerson. In “Henry David Thoreau: His Character and Opinions,” Stevenson offers interpretations of the facts of Thoreau’s character provided in Emerson’s eulogy. Stevenson seems to have felt that Emerson merely recounted Thoreau as he knew him, merely analyzed without evaluating too much, out of respect for decorum—it was his eulogy after all, and a certain degree of deference was expected. Stevenson attempts to fill in the blanks left by Emerson’s deference. Thoreau’s looks, sexual moorings, dietary habits, and dress were all objects of ridicule. To Stevenson, every detail of the man evidenced his lack. Stevenson concludes that Thoreau was a priggish,¹ close-minded, neurotic, feminine misanthrope, perhaps even a little sub-human.

Stevenson begins his send-up of Thoreau with a physical description: “Thoreau’s thin, penetrating, big-nosed face, even in a bad wood-cut, conveys some hint of the limitations of his mind and character” (59). In other words, Stevenson has never met Thoreau, but with the combination of a poor likeness carved in wood of the top 12 inches of the man and an apparent aptitude for physiognomy, he can tell the exact character of this skulking Henry David Thoreau chap. Beyond understanding the man’s character, Stevenson sees enough to know his opinions, to peer into his very thoughts. It is important that Stevenson, after judging Thoreau on his homely features, says, “with his almost acid sharpness of insight, with his almost animal dexterity in the act, there went none of that large, unconscious geniality of the world’s heroes” (59). Thoreau is something worse than uncivilized; he is slightly bestial. While Stevenson cannot dismiss out of hand Thoreau’s “insight,” he brackets it within the realm of uncivilized nature, of

¹ What is interesting is that it is commonplace among critics to accept Stevenson’s criticisms of Thoreau as apt. Even in his excellent, recent book on Thoreau, David M. Robinson does this. Robinson finds Thoreau’s self-discipline problematic as well: “This self involved, internally conflicted, and somewhat priggish Thoreau is a disquieting figure” (20). It seems contradictory for Robinson to admonish Thoreau’s criticism of overconsumption and materialism and then criticize the, in his view, overly ascetic attitude that serves as the motivation for Thoreau’s rejection of consumerism and materialism.

a perception too caustic—perhaps because of its directness²—to live up to the urbanity of Stevenson’s “heroes,” or Stevenson’s brand of cosmopolitanism.

Among Thoreau’s “many negative superiorities [that] begin to smack a little of the prig,” Stevenson claims that Thoreau was “not easy, not ample, not urbane, not even kind...but was all improved and sharpened to a point” (59). Thoreau’s isolation, often exaggerated, is particularly disagreeable to Stevenson; he was “like a plant that he had watered and tended with womanish solicitude; for there is apt to be something unmanly, something almost dastardly, in a life that does not move with dash and freedom, and that fears the bracing contact with the world” (60). Stevenson wants a man of action, and Thoreau’s own attempts at self-sufficiency surely would not have touched anything deeply seated in Stevenson, who was only financially independent of his own family in his early thirties, several years after he published the review of Thoreau.³ The fact that Stevenson questions Thoreau’s manhood is important, and something that Emerson does in his eulogy as well. A real man, according to Stevenson, seasons his self-cultivation with a charming dose of vice, with an appetite substantial enough to overcome at times his discipline, a thirst strong enough to demand the occasional draft of sensual pleasure, intoxication or violence.

Thoreau, too priggish to be manly, may even, Steven goes so far as to suggest, not in a meaningful way be human because of his remarkable austerity: “And there was a great deal wanting in this born dissenter. He was almost shockingly devoid of weaknesses; he had not enough of them to be truly polar with humanity; whether you call him demi-god or demi-man, he

² The language that Stevenson uses here is strikingly similar to that used by Emerson in *English Traits* when he describes the less civilized elements of English culture as having a “tough, acrid animal nature, which centuries of churching and civilizing have not been able to sweeten” (34). It is important that both Emerson and Stevenson seem to believe that Thoreau is of a subaltern status, although they both believe this to be the case for slightly different reasons.

³ Stevenson published his review in 1880, and never really made writing pay until the serialized publication of *Treasure Island* in 1882.

was a least not altogether one of us, for he was not touched with a feeling for the world's infirmities" (60). "The World's heroes," Stevenson explains "have room for all positive qualities, even those which are disreputable, in the capacious theatre of their dispositions" (60). Thoreau suffers from being too much of himself, from being the unalloyed manifestation of the puritanical, provincial Yankee; Concord's country bumpkin. Good Lord man, Stevenson seems to be saying, do take a pinch of snuff or spot of tea. Stevenson wants a dashing cavalier, bold in action but subtle in speech, someone who, as Stevenson claims of Shakespeare, might "begin the day upon a quart of ale, and yet enjoy the sunrise to the full as much as Thoreau, and commemorate his enjoyment in vastly better verses" (61). Stevenson believes Thoreau's abstemious "state of artificial training" is simply misdirected moralizing and perhaps displaced misanthropy, and his writing mirrors the eccentricities of his life and the lack in his character that Stevenson tries to elucidate.

Stevenson describes a "progression—I cannot call it a progress," in which Thoreau's work [moves] toward a more and more strictly prosaic level, until at last he sinks into the bathos of the prosy" (74). Thoreau fails to grasp that accurate details does not art make, as Stevenson explains, that "it is not the right materialistic treatment which delights the world...but the romantic and philosophic interest of the fable" (74). As Thoreau's writing devolved, Stevenson explains that he "began to fall more and more into a detailed materialistic treatment" (74). Thoreau, at once too feminine and too provincial, the puritanical husbandman, fails as an artist, because he is unable, in Stevenson's estimation, to understand how description can communicate philosophical nuance and "romantic" interest.

Stevenson believes that philosophical complexity, poetic faculty, and creativity do not come alone; they are accompanied by some measure of vice. A man exists on a continuum

between the “prig” and the dissipated. The detailed observation, unwavering moralizing, and domestic predisposition of Thoreau correspond clearly to one end of this moral spectrum. It is important to keep in mind that Thoreau’s physical description corroborates this perception in Stevenson’s mind. Thoreau’s “character and opinions” consist not only of his views on nature, society, and human progress, but his physical makeup. The continuum of personalities implicit in Stevenson’s explanation of Thoreau cannot distinguish between physical and mental faculties. Thoreau’s corporeal limitations are the same as his intellectual, and perhaps spiritual, limitations. This is not merely a question of aptitude, but also a question of disposition. Thoreau is not a man of action because the proclivity toward heroic action simply does not lie within the nature of a man fitting his physical description.

Stevenson would later recant several of his criticisms of Thoreau in an essay published in 1886, but only because Thoreau turned out to be more a man of action than his works had initially suggested to Stevenson—he had something of the swashbuckler in him after all. Claiming he “was looking at the man through the books,” rather than “read[ing] the books through the man” (84), Stevenson apologizes for his poor evaluation of Thoreau. In light of this, the experiment at Walden, initially considered indulgent and disingenuous, is justifiable in the context of Thoreau’s role in the abolitionist movement: “if Thoreau were content to dwell by Walden Pond, it was not merely with designs of self-improvement, but to serve mankind in the highest sense...that adroit and philosophic solitary was an ardent worker, soul and body, in that so much more than honorable movement” (84-85). Stevenson, with further illumination from biographical details of Thoreau’s life, is able to forgive the American’s abstruse writings because he “was once fairly and manfully in love, and, with perhaps too much aping of the angel, relinquished the woman to his brother” (85), in Stevenson’s estimation. To Stevenson, Thoreau’s

pretensions to philosophy, art, and even coherence are understandable and perhaps even admirable because he actually was the type of red-blooded man Stevenson could respect. In condescension as insulting as the overt criticism of his initial review, Stevenson concludes that Thoreau was not simply priggishness rarified into detailed abstraction after all, but a man of action driven to seclusion and moralizing by personal tragedy—Thoreau’s writing is the result of emotional pathology, not innate lack.⁴ This explanation gives Stevenson an out. He can now explain Thoreau in biographical terms. In this formulation, tragedy begets withdrawal, and Thoreau’s homely features are the twisted remains of a man of action who has loved and lost, not a man who was born without sufficient libido to love in the first place.

Stevenson’s reading of “the books through the man” (84) in his recantation is crucial, because this reinforces Stevenson’s belief that a man’s physical and mental inclinations are inextricably connected, if the difference between the two is even discernable. He forgives Thoreau’s poetic failures because of his advocacy for abolition—proof of his capacity for action. Thoreau’s assiduity serves then this higher cause, Stevenson concludes. This action, however, represents Thoreau more than his writings, and Stevenson even claims that he has been “duped” by Thoreau, as Thoreau “was seeking to make a dupe of himself, wrestling philosophy to the needs of his own sorrow” (85). Thoreau the man can then be forgiven for producing what Stevenson labels as “nonsense” (84) because of his emotional trauma.⁵ Stevenson’s “capital point,” defending the “quality” of the man, is more important than the evaluation of his writing,

⁴ Stevenson, in recounting one of his own encounters with an editor, claims that much of Thoreau’s writing is displaced insecurity: “The most temperate of living critics once marked a passage of my own with a cross and the words, “This seems nonsense.” It not only seemed, it was so. It was a private bravado of my own, which I had so often repeated to keep up my spirits, that I had grown at last wholly to believe it, and had ended by setting it down as a contribution to the theory of life. So with the more icy parts of this philosophy of Thoreau’s” (85).

⁵ Stevenson explains that he has not, in fact, reconsidered his criticisms of Thoreau’s writings, but pities the man enough not to take him to task for them: “Thoreau’s theory, in short, was one thing and himself another: of the first, the reader will find what I believe to be a pretty faithful statement and a fairly just criticism in the study; of the second he will find but a contorted shadow” (86).

which is only of incidental importance. The key question, to Stevenson, remains what *type* of man is Thoreau.

Emerson begins his eulogy of Thoreau as Stevenson did his review, with a physical description of Thoreau, and it is important that both Stevenson and Emerson choose this as their starting point. Emerson, however, expresses in more specific and overtly racial terms⁶ what Stevenson seems to define in terms of broad cultural oppositions, although their analysis of Thoreau's "character" remains the same.⁷ While most critics have found Emerson's eulogy less damning than Stevenson's, Emerson finds fault with Thoreau for many of the same reasons as Stevenson. Both Emerson and Stevenson complain chiefly that Thoreau was too much a man of consciousness and not enough a man of action.

They also both locate this flaw in his lack of masculinity and unwillingness to allow himself a part in the small failures of his fellow man. Emerson begins his eulogy of Thoreau with a more subtle allusion to Thoreau's homely features than Stevenson, but his description of Thoreau is perhaps in many ways more disturbing than Stevenson's, and subtly provides many of the same criticisms of Thoreau's constitution. Emerson chooses to explain Thoreau in racial terms, explaining, "he was the last male of a French ancestor who came to this country from the Isle of Guernsey. His character exhibited occasional traits drawn from his blood, in singular combination with a very strong Saxon genius" (1). The Saxon features failed to excite Emerson,

⁶ This, of course, makes perfect sense, as much of Emerson's focus for the few years prior to Thoreau's death had been exploring the importance of race in English history. The eulogy was given in 1862, and Emerson's *English Traits* was published in 1856, allowing ample time for Emerson's racial/cultural theories to become a part of his understanding of Thoreau.

⁷ Emerson begins his chapter "Race" in *English Traits*, by citing an "ingenious anatomist," who "has written a book to prove that races are imperishable, but nations are plain political constructions" (24). Hence, in Emerson's mind, race is immutable, and while there may be a mixing of races or the manifestations of these races may be altered due to externalities, the constant and discernable element of civilization is race. Certain attributes, even though they may be blended with others, will always serve as the *a priori* cause for discernable traits. Hence, Emerson titles his book *English Traits*, and then explains the traits he identifies in racial terms.

especially in comparison with the beauty of the Norman, which Emerson describes in some detail in *English Traits*.⁸ While any number of his contemporaries remarked upon Thoreau's homely appearance, Emerson describes it here in quite precise racial terms, terms he spent some serious thought upon, especially during the 1850's and 1860's.

Emerson begins his eulogy by explaining his departed friend in racial terms familiar to readers of Emerson's *English Traits*;⁹ Thoreau's eulogy was given in 1862, six years after the publication of *English Traits*. It was completely consistent with Emerson's *modus operandi* to mold a mundane speaking engagement into a disquisition upon some other, more philosophical, issue; usually an issue he felt was central to American consciousness or culture. The "Divinity School Address," a graduation address, helped, as much as anything, to solidify Emerson's reputation, and many of the topics that would later become essays began as not only lyceum speeches, but often as occasional speeches that should have, ostensibly, charged a graduating class or, in the case of Emerson's eulogy, celebrated a departed friend. Emerson's goal in writing the eulogy was not only to memorialize Thoreau, but also to explain the virtues and limitations of the Saxon, a topic of much broader significance to Emerson.

Following the argument that I made in the first chapter, Emerson's racial beliefs were the teleological antecedent to his belief not only in American exceptionalism, but also to an omega

⁸ Emerson explains in *English Traits* while describing the Norman aspects of English society, as opposed to the Saxon, that "Scandinavian races are distinguished for beauty" (36). Emerson makes the point that a number of historical sources, from various cultures, have found Northern Europeans to be remarkably attractive: "The anecdote of the handsome captives which Saint Gregory found at Rome, A. D. 600, is matched by the testimony of the Norman chroniclers, five centuries later, who wondered at the beauty and long flowing hair of the young English captives. Meantime, the Heimskringla has frequent occasion to speak of the personal beauty of its heroes" (36). This is not at all anathema during Emerson's time, and scientific attempts to link physical features with cognitive or behavioral attributes not only was not taboo, but was the focus of many well respected thinkers of the day.

⁹ Perhaps the most important concept to keep in mind, here, is Emerson's notion of racial synthesis, which I have outlined in my first chapter. Emerson believed that it was the synthesis of the Norman and Saxon races that made England the empire of empires. Emerson describes this notion succinctly in *English Traits*: "I incline to the belief, that, as water, lime, and sand make mortar, so certain temperaments may marry well, and, by well managed contrarieties, develop as drastic a character as the English" (28).

point of human knowledge. Emerson's belief that the Norman/Saxon hybrid is nature's default ruler obviously precludes the fact that someone of Thoreau's "nature" could be ultimately successful or eventually become one of history's "Representative Men." Emerson analyzes Thoreau, personal assets and liabilities alike, through his extensive and rigid racial paradigm. Emerson's description of Thoreau as a "Saxon genius" may not be as laudatory as it seems. When read within the context of the entire eulogy, a "Saxon genius," does not merely refer to a specific kind of genius with its own idiosyncrasies. No, Emerson's sobriquet is at once compliment and ridicule. Compliment in the sense that Emerson claims Thoreau is the very best of a type, but it is also pejorative in the sense that it suggests Thoreau has been inherently limited by his blood. His genius could never be more than a "Saxon genius." From the unalloyed blood of a race of farmers, we can only expect so much.

Emerson's understanding of man does not allow for the compartmentalization of various aspects, except in racial terms; it is a darkly deterministic view of humanity. While Emerson's sketch offers more compliments than Stevenson's, it is all the more exhaustive in its treatment. Consistently, Thoreau's qualities coincide with Emerson's view of the Saxon. Emerson even explains Thoreau's religious and political views in racially deterministic terms, claiming that Thoreau "was a born protestant"¹⁰ (23). This comment may seem benign enough, but, in light of Emerson's own expression that "[e]ach religious sect has its physiognomy"¹¹ (*English Traits* 26), we must assume that Emerson's comment simply furthers his description of Thoreau's singularly

¹⁰ This is clearly where Stevenson finds material for his assertion that Thoreau's contrariness is evidence of some type of pathology. Stevenson, in his review, says that, "It was "much easier," says Emerson, acutely, much easier to Thoreau to say *no* than *yes*; and that is a characteristic which depicts the man" (60).

¹¹ It might be useful to keep in mind how important this statement of Emerson's is. There are plenty of discussions of Emerson and religion, and certainly discussions of Emerson and race, but Emerson's understanding of race clearly serves as the foundation for his understanding of religion in many ways. Emerson, often stereotyped as an airy and impetuous intellectual, seeks above all a systematic understanding of the world around him.

Saxon nature.¹² Following this logic, the entirety of Thoreau's iconoclasm has its impetus in his Saxon blood. His staunch abolitionism, his controversial defense of John Brown, his refusal to support the Mexican War, and his distrust of the notion of collective social progress and autotelic justifications of technological innovation all have the same unalterable and predictable physical source.¹³ Emerson believed these proclivities could be read in the very lines of Thoreau's face.

Echoing Stevenson, Emerson complains that Thoreau's chief fault is the lack of certain qualities, not the presence of a vice.¹⁴ In the most important lines in the eulogy, Emerson offers his criticism of Thoreau and satire of *Walden*:¹⁵

Had his genius been only contemplative, he had been fitted to his life, but with his energy and practical ability he seemed born for great enterprise and command; and I so much regret the loss of his rare powers of action, that I cannot help counting it a fault in him that he had no ambition. Wanting this, instead of engineering for all of American, he was captain of a huckleberry party. Pounding beans is good to the end of pounding empires one of these days; but if, at the end of years, it is still only beans! (39)

The criticism that Thoreau too much remained in his own consciousness and lacked the ambition

¹² In outlining how physiognomy correlates to religion in *English Traits*, Emerson delineates that "all Celts are Catholics, and all Saxons are Protestants; that Celts love unity of power, and Saxons the representative principle" (26).

¹³ It is quite clear that Emerson explains these renunciations as part of Thoreau's "protestant" nature. In the eulogy, he says that Thoreau was "a protestant *a outrance*, and few lives contain so many renunciations. He was bred to no profession; he never married; he lived alone; he never went to church; he never voted; he refused to pay a tax to the state; he ate no flesh, he drank not wine, he never knew the use of tobacco..." (24). Emerson even subtly reinforces that Thoreau really had no choice in being as he was. He explains that Thoreau, "fell into his way of living without forecasting it much, but approved it with later wisdom" (24).

¹⁴ Once again, Stevenson's analysis of Thoreau echoes Emerson's implication that Thoreau is, if not too good to be true, too good to be useful in a truculent and demanding society.

¹⁵ In chapter seven of *Walden*, Thoreau provides his description of his bean field and aggrandizes the minutia of farming, figuratively describing his struggles with weeds as combat and his forcing the earth to yield beans as something of a colonizing.

of great men has the same racial connotations as the rest of Emerson's description. In a particularly ominous passage in *English Traits*, Emerson's description of the qualities of the Norman offer a prescription for the problems inherent in Thoreau's nature: "When it is considered what humanity, what resources of mental and moral power, the traits of the blond race betoken, --its accession to empire marks a new and finer epoch, wherein the old mineral force shall be at last subjugated by humanity, and shall plough in its furrow henceforward. It is not a final race, once a crab always a crab, but a race with a future" (36). The future of the "blond race," which supplies the will to power, lies in its imminent mixture with the Saxon, and the formation of a race perfectly suited to be not only powerful, but diligent and magnanimous.

Emerson means by "once a crab always a crab," not that a race can evolve in the sense it might be meant today in terms of the modern synthesis of genetics and evolution, nor does he mean it in the Darwinian understanding of Natural Selection that was beginning to take hold during the time of the writing of *English Traits*. While Emerson did believe that humanity was mutable, he did not believe that specific racial qualities could change. A race indigenous to an area, if unmixed with another race, would suffer little alteration. The race has a "future" because it can be blended with another race—although the activity of their discreet properties cannot be ultimately altered. The murderous ambition of the Norman could become an asset if mitigated by the domesticity of the Saxon. The assiduity, mental faculty, and love of freedom that define Thoreau blended with the ambition of the Viking would give rise to the race custom made for "pounding empires" as well as "pounding beans," a hybrid race possessing both the power to control the world and the prudence to justify that control.

Understanding Emerson's notion of racial identity and synthesis, especially with regard to Thoreau, is crucial to understanding the differing approaches Emerson and Thoreau take when

addressing the perfectibility of human society and the sensationalism of technology. Thoreau, unlike Emerson, tended to believe that humanity could change, but he recoiled from the notion that these changes signaled progress. That the strong survive and the weak die offered Thoreau little comfort. Neither was he sanguine on the increasing aggregation of power in human hands that bastardizations of Darwin's theories espousing progress would imply.¹⁶ Emerson's prophecy that "the old mineral force shall be at last subjugated by humanity" (36) runs directly counter to Thoreau's insistence upon a less anthropocentric, and more subjective, approach to nature. Thoreau's answer, instead, was the cultivation of the individual conscience. He respected both the hard-boiled observation of the naturalist and the sublimating moral power of nature proposed by the English Romantics.¹⁷

Emerson's understanding of biology and race was quite distinct from Thoreau's, but so directed his thought that we might well read into the works of Thoreau and Emerson, especially their differences, a racialized system. Thoreau's purely, in Emerson's mind, Saxon qualities, were flaws, but in many ways thinking about Thoreau as what Emerson describes as Saxon may help us understand the disparities between the two writers' views on technology and progress as well as many other issues. Emerson's description of Thoreau in many ways remains valid, although currently we would be more inclined to consider what Emerson labels flaws as virtues. I suggest we read Thoreau through Emerson's racial reading of Thoreau, but, in most cases,

¹⁶ Contrary to the point of Darwin's work is the idea that a more complicated or later developed organism is "higher" than one less complicated or occurring earlier in a phylogenetic history. The variation of environment is essentially random, and so an organism less complicated may be more suited to a specific environment. Anathema to this central point of natural selection is the notion that the existence of humanity is inevitable or suggests progress; rather, that development was arbitrary. The notion that human history represents an onward march, in a biological sense, toward a more humanitarian society, directly goes against Darwin's own arguments, of which Thoreau was intimately aware. A brief explanation of how careful Darwin was to not even imply that "progress" was a part of his work can be found in Louis Menand's *The Metaphysical Club*, where he analyzes how the intelligentsia of the nineteenth century reacted to *On the Origin of the Species*.

¹⁷ Patrick Keane provides perhaps the best in-depth exploration of the influence of European Romantics upon the American Transcendentalists, especially Emerson, in his work *Emerson, Romanticism, and Intuitive Reason: the Transatlantic "Light of All Our Day."*

reverse the value judgments.

Key to Emerson's understanding of Natural History was the thought of the most influential scientist in 19th century America, Louis Agassiz. Agassiz was a fixture in Boston intellectual circles. Charismatic, and brilliant, he was the dominant figure in the Saturday Club, a dinner club that Emerson attended shortly before the Civil War. The club included many figures that would become important in shaping American intellectual culture for some time, including, in addition to Agassiz and Emerson, Nathaniel Hawthorne, Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, James Russell Lowell, Charles Sumner, Oliver Wendell Holmes, and William James. The fact that the club was known for some time simply as "Agassiz's Club," should express how influential Agassiz was during this time, even amongst the very powerful. Emerson himself even remarks in one of his letters that of all of the members of the club, "Agassiz is my chief gain from it" (*The Selected Letters of Ralph Waldo Emerson* 395).

Understanding Agassiz's influence upon Emerson is key to understanding Emerson's racial theories. History remembers Agassiz mostly for his refusal to accept Darwin's theories of Natural Selection. One of Agassiz's mentors, Georges Cuvier, the man largely responsible for Agassiz entrance into the scientific community, heartily fought against any theory that implied a new species could evolve from an existing species. Cuvier, until his death in 1832, opposed the theories of Jean-Baptiste Lamarck, who claimed that through the combination of an alchemical process and the influence of an animal's environment the traits of animal could essentially be altered—this was the first widely disseminated theory of evolution. Both Cuvier and Lamarck performed their research in part at the *Jardin des Plantes* in Paris. When Emerson visited the

Jardin des Plantes in 1832,¹⁸ Agassiz was there working with Cuvier.

Before and during the debates over Lamarckian evolution, Cuvier, Agassiz, and many of the preeminent European scientists favored the theory of polygenesis, which overtly claims that the races as they exist are independent of one another and their traits are essentially immutable. In accounting for racial difference, Agassiz maintained that various races of individuals were created and then placed in different locations by God, according to the fitness of their innate abilities. Hence, Emerson seems to have derived from this postulate that, since races have deterministic qualities that do not change, the only way for them to be modified is to either alter the environment or blend at least two of the discreetly identified races. Adding to Emerson's own brand of millennialism is Agassiz's theory that there have been different periods in the Earth's history. The initial discoverer of the Ice Ages,¹⁹ Agassiz believed that different periods in natural history were characterized by different life-forms, the dinosaurs and large predators exemplify one, and humans another.

The understanding of Natural History as a procession of species created and distributed by the divine led Agassiz and Emerson to believe that humanity was the latest, and most advanced, creation—this is opposite of Darwin's insistence that natural selection was arbitrary and not "progress." Both Agassiz and Darwin saw the ever expanding taxonomies of their day and came to different conclusions. Darwin concluded that chance variation determined everything, and that even the concept of a "species" implied too much order and neatness. Change was constant and any identification of boundaries was simply an arbitrary construct man

¹⁸ Emerson's visit to the *Jardin des Plantes* has been the subject of a significant amount of recent scholarship. The work that most specifically focuses upon the event is Lee Rust Brown's *The Emerson Museum: Practical Romanticism and the Pursuit of the Whole*.

¹⁹ In 1840, Agassiz published *Etudes sur les Glaciers*, which extended the study of the Alpine glaciers made popular by Goethe and others. Agassiz not only tracked the movements of the glaciers, but proposed that much of Europe had been once covered by much more substantial sheets of ice.

had created to allow him to understand the world in which he found himself. Agassiz, on the other hand, specialized in defining boundaries. Agassiz's discovery of the Ice Ages was influenced by Cuvier's discovery of extinction. As commonplace as it may now seem, the idea that a type of animal could cease to exist simply was not circulated until around 1800, nor did the notion that the Earth's conditions could be radically different from one time to another. Cuvier, and later Agassiz, are largely to credit for this.

Being able to define boundaries and identify epochs, but not being able to accept that the organs of animals changed over time, led Agassiz and other scientists to rely upon the theory of polygenesis. Polygenesis posited that various ages of the Earth's history were designed, that each age had characteristic species, and that clean breaks occurred between one and the other. Agassiz himself claimed to know,

one hundred and four species of fossil fish from the Old Red, belonging to forty-four genera, comprised under seven families, between several of which there is but little analogy as to organization. It is therefore impossible to look upon them as coming from one primitive stock. The primitive diversity of these types is quite as remarkable as that of those belonging to later epochs. It is nevertheless true that, regarded as part of the general plan of creation, this fauna presents itself as an inferior type of the vertebrate series, connecting itself directly in the creative thought with the realization of the later forms, the last of which (and this seems to me to have been the general end of creation) was to place man at the head of organized beings as the key-stone and the term of the whole series, the final point in the premeditated intention of the primitive plan which has been carried out progressively in the course of time. I would even say that I believe the creation of

man has closed creation on this earth, and I draw this conclusion from the fact that the human genus is the first cosmopolite type in Nature. (288)

Difficult though it may be to understand the far-reaching influence that this epochal concept had upon other areas of thought, there are whispers of it in Emerson's work. Emerson applies Agassiz's²⁰ theories on Natural History to human history in *English Traits* when he compares the Normans to "saurians;" they were both the vanguard of their respective eras. Emerson explains, "the reader of the Norman history must steel himself by holding fast the remote compensations which result from animal vigor. As the old fossil world shows that the first steps of reducing the chaos were confided to saurians and other huge and horrible animals, so the foundations of the new civility were to be laid by the most savage men" (33). The point, here, is that some rapacity is necessary in the process of "civilizing." Western civilization, Emerson seems to say, needed the Vikings, with their "love of murder." The present, however, calls for a mitigation of this rapacity, which comes from not a cultural domestication and civilizing, but the racial admixture of the Norman and Saxon. When Emerson discusses paleontology, he is on the cutting edge of the science of his day. We live in a world of endangered species and technologies that become obsolete ever more rapidly, as so we can only speculate upon what influence the discovery of extinction had upon Emerson and other thinkers of the 19th century. Emerson, as an adult, learned that animals could exist and then not. How could this not shake his idea of natural and human history to its core? Natural Philosophy had discovered a materialist void that perhaps awaited humanity, a nothingness, a new facet of ontology not derived from religious

²⁰ It is important to note here that Cuvier did not agree with Agassiz's theories of polygenesis and successive periods of divine creation. Cuvier, the first proponent of the paleontological theory of catastrophism, held that species existed, but could become extinct over time.

eschatology, but from the bones of creatures that seemed unbelievable in their size and ferocity.²¹ There was, Emerson learned, no Noah's Ark between the Paleozoic and Cenozoic periods.

In much of Emerson's work, the notion of epochal transitions blends with his pervasive Idealism. In a series of three lectures given in 1841 at the Masonic Temple in Boston titled, broadly, "Lectures on the Times," Emerson attempts to explain his current epoch. The spiritual Idealism of the essays is, without a doubt, the main theme. Emerson begins by claiming, "The Times, as we say—or the present aspects of our social state, the Law, Divinity, Natural Science, Agriculture, Art, Trade, Letters, have their root in an invisible spiritual reality. To appear in these aspects, they must first exist, or have some necessary foundation" ("Introductory Lecture" 167). To some degree, Emerson's Platonism and Agassiz's polygenesis work quite well together, much better, in fact, than either Lamarckian or Darwinian evolution work with Platonism. An anatomy of a species in constant flux precludes the existence of a spiritual ideal underlying the material fact of a particular species. If there were, as Darwin argues and Lamarck suggests, no such thing as a static, identifiable species, then there can be no ideal, and the shadows in the cave disappear. Agassiz, as fate would have it, became the rearguard for Platonism. Emerson believed, as many other scholars have noted²² that natural philosophy reveals more profound truth, or, as Emerson states in his lecture, "Beside all these small reasons we assign, there is a great reason for the existence of every extant fact; a reason which lies grand and immovable, often unsuspected behind it in silence" ("Introductory Lecture" 167).

To those familiar with Emerson, the expression of Idealism in this lecture should come as no surprise, but he then goes on to apply this Idealism to the understanding of the

²¹ Richard Owen coined the term "dinosaur" in 1842, although how widespread this use was during Emerson's time is difficult to discern.

²² Perhaps the best work along these lines is Laura Dassow Walls's *Emerson's Life in Science: The Culture of Truth*.

“Conservative,” and the “Reformer.” The Conservative Emerson labels and identifies with the material, while he correlates the Reformer to the ideal, spiritual, scientific, and abstract. “Let this side be fairly stated,” Emerson says of the Conservative, “Meantime on the other part, arises Reform, and offers the sentiment of Love as an overmatch to this material might” (168).

Emerson, seemingly veering off into vagaries, grounds himself in the immediate and practical, claiming that “the subject of the Times is not an abstract question. We talk of the world, but we mean a few men and women” (168). “The reason,” Emerson argues, “for this extreme attraction which *persons* have for us [is] that they are the Age....They indicate,--these witty, suffering, blushing, intimidating figures of the only race in which there are individuals or changes, how far on the Fate has gone, and what it drives at” (168). What Emerson argues, here, echoes Agassiz’s belief that humanity as a race is the final and most noble of God’s creations, or as Agassiz puts it, “the first cosmopolite in nature” (288).

The Ideal, the rational, and the Reformer all tug humanity forward, while the material, the instinctual, and the Conservative hinder this progress. The Conservative element, Emerson explains, “relying not on the intellect but on instinct, blends itself with the brute forces of nature, is respectable only as nature is, but the individuals have no attraction for us” (“Introductory Lecture” 172). “The history of reform,” Emerson continues, “is always identical; it is the comparison of the idea with the fact” (“Introductory Lecture” 173). Emerson’s dualism divides material reality from imagination, and organizes the political spectrum accordingly. The divergence between reality and the Ideal provides the motivation for reform. Mundane tasks fail to satisfy and we begin to ask, “Is there a necessity that the works of man should be sordid” (“Introductory Lecture” 174)? Emerson believes that in the posing of this question an answer emerges: “Perhaps not.—Out of this fair idea in the mind springs forever the effort at the Perfect.

It is the testimony of the soul in man to the fairer possibility of life and manners, which agitates society every day with the offer of some new amendment” (“Introductory Lecture 174”).

Regarding this singular ideal truth, Emerson says, “If we would make more strict inquiry concerning its origin, we find ourselves rapidly approaching the inner boundaries of thought, that term where speech becomes silence, and science conscience. For the origin of all reform is in that mysterious fountain of the moral sentiment in man, which, amidst the natural ever contains the supernatural for men” (“Introductory Lecture 174”). “Here or nowhere,” Emerson says, “resides unbounded energy, unbounded power” (“Introductory Lecture” 174).

“Science,” in the present age will become “conscience,” or, in other words, the truth of nature will govern human institutions. Getting right the anatomy of an eel matters, as does, in Emerson’s mind, getting right the constitutions of human species, i.e. races. Emerson does concede that “we must pay for being too intellectual. . . . People are not as light-hearted for it” (“Introductory Lecture” 180). He complains that “men never loved life less” and questions “if care and doubt ever wrote their names so legibly on the faces of any population” (“Introductory Lecture” 180). The constitutions of the Saxon, and by opposition, the Norman, subtly underlie Emerson’s Idealist dialectic of the Conservative and the Reformer. “This *Ennui*,” Emerson explains, “for which the Saxons had no name, this word of France has got a terrific significance” (“Introductory Lecture” 180). The industrious Saxon, with his hand always at the plow, never looked forward to Reform, but was the very embodiment of the instinctual and material. Despite the ennui, Emerson admits that, he still, “Of the two. . . like[s] the speculators best” (“Introductory Lecture” 180). Emerson ends this essay with a bold claim, that “[n]o man can compare the ideas and aspirations of the innovators of the present day, with those of former periods, without feeling how great and high this criticism is” (“Introductory Lecture” 181). Emerson believes his

generation beyond comparison with previous ages because of the breadth and ambition of the reformers and because of the evidence of so much technological advancement. He asks, “Is there not something comprehensive in the grasp of a society which to great mechanical invention, and the best institutions of property, adds the most daring theories; which explores the subtlest and most universal problems?” (“Introductory Lecture” 181). The reason that Emerson believes “the Genius of this Age more philosophical than any other has been, righter in its aims, truer,” is because the “true scholar [looks to] the attraction of the aspects of nature, the departments of life, and the passages of his experience [as] simply the information they yield him of this supreme nature which lurks within all” (“Introductory Lecture” 182).

Emerson’s dialectic of the Conservative and the Reformer in his “Lectures on the Times,” delivered in 1841, mirrors closely the racial constitutions he would later describe quite clearly in *English Traits*. Perhaps equally important is his insistence upon the exceptional nature of this age, as if it represents the completion of something, finality. Emerson encourages innovation and reform in generic terms. “What is the scholar,” he asks, “what is the man *for*, but for hospitality to every new thought of his time?” (“Introductory Lecture” 183). In the second lecture in the series, “The Conservative,” Emerson offers a classical expression of what is essentially the Agassizian epochal belief, while explaining the difference between the Conservative and the Reformer. Emerson explains, “Such an irreconcilable antagonism, of course, must have a correspondent depth of seat in the human constitution. It is the opposition of Past and Future, of Memory and Hope, of the Understanding and the Reason. It is the primal antagonism, the appearance in trifles of the two poles of nature” (“The Conservative” 184). He offers “a fragment of old fable” to explain the conflict between the Conservative and Reformer.

Emerson chooses the story of Saturn and his creation of Jupiter, but Emerson is really

talking about anxiety over extinction:

Saturn grew weary of sitting alone, or with none but the great Uranus or Heaven beholding him, and he created an oyster. Then he would act again, but he made nothing more, but went on creating the race of oysters. The Uranus cried, “a new work, O Saturn! the old is not good again.”

Saturn replied. “I fear. There is not only the alternative of making and not making, but also of unmaking. Seest thou the great sea, how it ebbs and flows? So it is with me; my power ebbs; and if I put forth my hands, I shall not do, but undo. Therefore I do what I have done; I hold what I have got; and so I resist Night and Chaos.”

“O Saturn,” replied Uranus, “Thou canst not hold thine own, but by making more. Thy oysters are barnacles and cockles, and with the next flowing of the tide, they will be pebbles and sea foam.” (“The Conservative” 185)

Saturn continues, as the story goes, to make oysters for another thousand years, but then Uranus’s words return to him and he makes Jupiter. After making Jupiter, Emerson explains, “he feared again; and nature froze, the things that were made went backward, and to save the world, Jupiter slew his father Saturn.” Emerson, terrified by the concept of extinction, chooses to explain it through the myth of the first patricide.

Emerson depicts through this myth Agassiz’s belief in epochs of natural creation, and he is basing his vague political appeal upon this contemporary science. In explaining the meaning behind the Latin myth, Emerson depicts the archetypal Reformer assuring the Conservative that extinction remains a part of a divine plan: “That which is was made by God,” saith

Conservatism. “He is leaving that, he is entering this other;” rejoins Innovation” (“The Conservative” 185). Thinking of the concept of successive waves of divine creation explains, within a framework compatible with Emerson’s Idealism and theology, extinction. Extinction, from this perspective, indicates progress, not only of organisms toward complexity, and races toward admixture, but of man to divinity, which Emerson could not help but find compelling. The fear that Cuvier awoke with his discovery of extinction, at the very location where Emerson was inspired to become a lecturer and writer,²³ was resolved, Emerson believed, by Agassiz’s epochal theories. Emerson then, had less to fear of the future than the past.

Thoreau himself had some connections with Agassiz. He collected and sent samples to Agassiz, and several times requested meetings with the Professor; Agassiz never took the time to meet Thoreau. While Thoreau respected the scientist, he ultimately found Agassiz’s particular method too anesthetized, detached, and institutionalized. Thoreau never came close enough to the domineering Agassiz to be drawn into his orbit, which allowed Thoreau to cultivate his own perspective on nature and society, one quite different than either the inveterate Agassiz or his own prestigious mentor, Emerson. It is remarkable that Emerson had such close connections to so many powerful persons while Thoreau saw very little of them, despite the fact that he spent much of his time in the Emerson household. The fact is that Thoreau had relatively little interest in the elite compared to Emerson.

While Emerson was a successful transatlantic lecturer, touring in both the U.S. and in Britain, Thoreau was openly antagonistic toward the audience of his lectures. It is only against Thoreau’s own formidable pugnacity, as well, that he was successful as a lecturer during his own time. While Emerson inflamed the minds of a new generation, filling them with the hope of a

²³ The *Jardin des Plantes* in Paris.

new, great nation that would steer humanity in a new, more promising direction, casting off stale institutions, Thoreau infuriated the same circles citing the faults of not only the conservative, but the reformer as well. Thoreau's opposition to the technological and social optimism championed by Emerson pervades his work, and in many ways he is the tempering voice shouting down the optimism of the other Transcendentalists, reminding them of the atavistic and pervasive nature of humanity's collective failures, regardless of their individual accomplishments. Far from championing a "true theory," Thoreau chooses to "finish [his] education at a different school," and his radical emphasis on the authority of the individual should in part be read as a reaction against the very synergies that Emerson champions. Thoreau seems to be directly challenging Emerson's lectures and writings when he tells his audience in "Life without Principle" that "[s]ince you are my readers, and I have not been much of a traveler, I will not talk about people a thousand miles off, but come as near home as I can" (155). Thoreau's comment seems especially on the nose considering Emerson began his lecture career by sharing in the United States what he had learned of the Natural Sciences in Europe, and the culmination of his writing was his longest work, *English Traits*, in which he quite literally describes "people a thousand miles off" and why these remote people are significant to his audience. Thoreau openly scoffs at travel and news from abroad, claiming that he would not "run around the corner to see the world blow up," although he was by any standard well-informed ("Life without Principle" 170). Thoreau not only suffered from anxiety over Emerson's influence, but from anxiety over any influence besides the divine revealed to the individual through nature, his singular preoccupation.

While I wish to specifically trace Thoreau's opposition to the belief in collective human progress, and specifically the correlation between technological progress and moral progress, in doing so, however, it is inevitable that I trace the opposition between these two interconnected

figures. As with my study of Emerson, I must practically limit the scope of my analysis of Thoreau's works—he wrote well over two million words. Initially, I explore one of Thoreau's first published works, his review of Joseph Etzler's *Paradise within Reach*. The review not only outlines Thoreau's ideas on utopian communities and technological progress, but illustrates that Thoreau consciously takes a polemical stance directly opposed to Emerson; Emerson himself favorably suggested the book to Thoreau; Thoreau then excoriated it in his review. I also provide an argument regarding Thoreau's taking up these issues in *Walden*. These works taken together provide a sketch of Thoreau as the private intellectual disposed to question Emerson's belief that humanity, and specifically those of English descent in the United States, had reached new heights.

Before I address any of Thoreau's works in depth, I will take a little time to sketch out Thoreau's antagonistic relationship to what he perceives to be the neurosis of other reformers; naturally, Emerson must be implicated in Thoreau's indictment. His lecture, "Reform and the Reformers," is the most direct example of Thoreau's antipathy toward the mentality and methods of reformers, and is a foil in many ways to Emerson's "Lectures on the Times." Thoreau never published "Reform and the Reformers," and the text was assembled and published from the notes of the lecture after Thoreau's death. To the best of our knowledge, Thoreau wrote the essay between 1839 and 1845, and several of the sections from Thoreau's drafts for the lecture appear in *Walden* as well.²⁴ It is important that Thoreau wrote this work between 1839 and 1845, because Emerson was preparing and delivering his "Lectures on the Times" in 1841 and 1842. The common subject matter and the possible overlap in dates of compositions of the two lectures beg us to compare them.

²⁴ Wendell Glick explains the textual evidence to support this date in his "Textual Introduction" to the essay in the version of *Reform Papers* he edited (*Reform Papers* 380).

In the draft of his lecture, Thoreau begins, as does Emerson, by criticizing the intentionally ill-defined “Conservative,” who “belongs to a decaying family.” Thoreau describes the Conservative’s appearance and tendencies: “The heads of conservatives have a puny and deficient look, a certain callowness and concavity, as if they were prematurely exposed on one or both sides, or were made to lie pack together, as when several nuts are formed under the same burr where only one should have been....Such as these naturally herd together for protection.” Attacking collectivism as vice, Thoreau writes that the Conservative “say[s] We and Our, as if they had never been assured of an individual existence,” referring to, “Our Indian policy; our coast defences, our national character.” He assaults the misogynist in the Conservative, as well as their unflagging support of established institutions and behaviors, jibing that the “ladies of the land with equal bravery are weavers of toilet cushions and tidies not to betray too green an interest in their fates. Men now take snuff into their noses, but if they had been so advised in season, they would have put it into their ears and eyes.” Thoreau baits his audience by describing the imperfections and pathologies of the Conservative, inviting them to feel superior and imagine how they might go about wrenching power from the “tyrannical father” (“Reform and the Reformers” 181-182).

It is at this point in the lecture that Thoreau turns on his audience and attacks what he vaguely identifies as the “Reformer” in terms at least as harsh as those used to berate the Conservative. Thoreau mocks the self-importance of the Reformers who imagine themselves the solution to the world defended by the Conservative. He also attacks the Reformer’s squeamishness, saying that in “the midst of all this order and imperfection in human affairs which he would rather avoid to think of comes the Reformer, the impersonation of disorder and imperfection; to heal and reform them; seeking to discover the divine order and conform to it;

and earnestly asking the cooperation of men” (“Reform and the Reformers” 182). Thoreau’s Reformer seeks to cure society of the failures they have yet to master in themselves. Thoreau finds fault with the Reformer for the same reason he finds fault with the Conservative: because they place the locus of responsibility upon society rather than the individual and because they focus upon abstract dualisms.

Thoreau disdains both the Conservative and the Reformer because both ignore the discreet unit of reform or uprightness. He warns, “The Reformer who comes recommending any institution or system to the adoption of men, must not rely solely on logic and argument, or on eloquence and oratory for his success, but see that he represents one pretty perfect institution in himself, the center and circumference of all others, an erect man” (“Reform and the Reformers” 184). Thoreau, through the paradoxical spatial metaphor he uses—man as both the “center and circumference”—rejects any institution or form of action that supplants the prerogative or even ontological primacy of “an erect man.” Thoreau frequently expresses this concept in his Journal, especially with regard to lyceums and the ranks of reformers found there. In one passage, written in June of 1851, Thoreau explains why he declines invitations to speak upon temperance: “When I have been asked to speak at a temperance meeting, my answer has been, “I am too transcendental to serve you in your way. They would fain confine me to the rum-sellers and rum-drinkers, of whom I am not one, and whom I know little about” (“Life without Principle” 228). Thoreau will not condemn what he does not understand, even for the sake of scoring a political or moral victory. Thoreau reveals how his idiosyncratic version of Transcendentalism informs his views of the lyceum in particular, and reform in general. Because the individual alone serves as the receptacle for transcendental knowledge, and because he or she alone has intuition or spiritual insight, the individual must speak upon the subject they know best, themselves.

Emerson speaks of an American scholar; Thoreau speaks of a Thoreau scholar. For Thoreau, the individual is the discreet unit of insight and reform.

Thoreau echoes these same points about the failure of the lyceum in “Life without Principle”: “At a lyceum, not long since, I felt that the lecturer had chosen a theme too foreign to himself, and so failed to interest me as much as he might have done. He described things not in or near to his heart, but toward his extremities and superficialities. There was, in this sense, no truly central or centralizing thought in the lecture” (156). Although there is no indication that Thoreau used the passage from his journal in the lecture, he uses essentially the same circle metaphor. The individual is both the center and the circumference, providing the central and centralizing thought. Thoreau goes on further to say that the “greatest compliment that was ever paid me was when one asked me what I thought, and attended to my answer” (“Life without Principle” 156). Thoreau, integrating the Eastern notion of *chi*, or center, into his thinking, makes the point, familiar to Taoism, Confucianism and various other strains of Eastern thought, that if the individual is firm enough, then the world will bend around them—hence the focus of reform should be the reformer. Thoreau argues in “Reform and the Reformers” that “[t]he disease and disorder of society are wont to be referred to the false relations in which men live one to another, but strictly speaking there can be no such false relation; if the condition of things related is true. False relations grow out of false conditions” (183). It is clear then, to Thoreau, that social harmony begins with the individual understanding and bending themselves to the true “conditions.” Once this is accomplished, society will order itself—true relations are predicated upon true conditions.

In his belief that true relations come from true conditions, Thoreau is once again, and quite subtly, taking aim at the notion that abstract theories of relation and classification, such as

“reformer” and “conservative” in this case should determine the “condition” of something.

Thoreau seems to believe that the relation between two things is simply a result of the condition of the two things, which is, at its heart, a rejection of the concept that an *a priori* law of how two things relate is useful or even necessary. Relation is the *de facto* result of the conditions. Gravity is not something in and of itself, but simply the result of the masses of two objects. Once these are altered, gravity is altered. Stating the law of gravity is simply describing what is already present in the conditions of two objects—eliminate the “condition” of an object’s mass, and you eliminate gravity. Thoreau eliminates one side of the equation. Since a relation is completely determined by conditions, any focus upon relations is specious. Hence, since oppositions such as “reformer” and “conservative” are based upon oppositions and one another, they are not, to Thoreau, useful.

F. O. Matthiessen, in *The American Renaissance*, notes that Thoreau’s friend and fellow Transcendentalist William Ellery Channing remarked that “metaphysics was his aversion” (80). Channing, in explaining Thoreau, also claimed that “[s]peculations on the special faculties of the mind, or whether the Not-me comes out of the ‘I,’ or the All out of the infinite Nothing, he could not entertain” (80). Thoreau would not entertain these thoughts, not because he had an aversion to metaphysics alone, but because he believed that facts spoke for themselves, conjecture beyond the “conditions” of things was a distraction. In grasping at Thoreau’s discussion of “conditions” and “relations” it might be useful to consider the influence two thinkers, Darwin and Agassiz, may have had upon Thoreau in this context. While these two are generally known for their disagreement, they were, along with Alexander von Humboldt, among the most important intellectual influences upon Thoreau. He found the influences of the Naturalists more appealing than the speculations of the philosophers, especially later in his life. The trajectory of Thoreau

and Emerson's work run counter to each other in this sense. Emerson was inspired initially to begin his lecture career by recounting what he had observed of science in Paris, but he later came to focus upon expansive, abstract theories about not only what he termed "nature," but race, culture, and cognition in *English Traits* and *The Natural History of Intellect*. Thoreau, however, increasingly became focused upon describing details as well as he could, focused upon understanding the mundane in order to grasp the sublime, focused upon "conditions" rather than "relations."

Thoreau further mocks the over-reaching Reformers and provides an example of how poor conditions lead to poor relations: "...if he has failed in all his undertakings hitherto; if he has committed some heinous sin and partially repents, what does he do? He sets about reforming the world....The world is going to be reformed, formed once and for all. Presto—Change!" He goes on to describe the extroverted aspects of reform as a type of hypocritical neurosis, explaining, "There is no reformer on the globe... now engaged in any good work anywhere, sorely afflicted by the sight of misery around him, and animated by the desire to relieve it, who would not instantly and unconsciously sign off from these pure labors, and betake himself to purer" (182). The problem, for Thoreau, lies in the fact that the new cause of the Reformer inevitably supersedes not only the work underway, but existing relationships: "Let but the spring come to him, let the morning rise over his couch, and he will forsake his generous companions, without apology or explanation!" ("Reform and the Reformers" 182-183). Frenetically hopping, in Thoreau's metaphor, from the bed of one cause to another, the Reformer displaces his fight with the evils within himself to the evils outside, sublimating his lack of self-control into, at its worst, a desire to subjugate and control nature and other individuals. Thoreau's ultimate point in his lecture is the same as in nearly all of his other works: each person would do best to be about

reforming themselves rather than enlisting support to reform the world. Thoreau never published “Reform and the Reformers” as an essay, perhaps because of its caustic nature, and he was hard pressed to make a career of insulting and criticizing his audience and readership. Emerson may have been able to graft his notions of self-reliance and the divinity of man upon Thoreau, but his optimism and jingoism simply would not take. Thoreau distrusted Emerson’s, and many reformers’, sanguine regard for technology, and, more fundamentally, their belief in collective human progress.

Thoreau’s departure from the Emerson I sketched in the previous chapter appears in one of his first published works, a review of Joseph Adolphus Etzler’s *Paradise within Reach*. Thoreau received a copy of the book from Emerson, and his review appeared in the *United States Magazine and Democratic Review* in 1843, only two years before he would build his cabin at Walden Pond. Thoreau titled his review “Paradise (to be) Regained.” Thoreau implies with his title that Etzler and his ilk believe possible the creation of a new Eden, but their attempt to bring the power of nature under human control seems to Thoreau heretical to his views of the divinity of nature, hence his mocking of the messianic aspects of Etzler’s theories in his direct allusion to Milton’s sequel to *Paradise Lost*. Thoreau opposes Etzler’s detailed plans because, for Thoreau, the relationship between man and nature is one of cooperation, not domination, and, even more fundamentally, because Etzler’s focus is upon collective human progress rather than the refinement of the individual.

Thoreau, subtly sarcastic, begins his review by trying to give some indication of the popularity of Etzler’s work. He explains that the book, now 10 or 12 years old, will be republished in another English edition and distributed in Britain. Thoreau suggests that the revival of interest in Etzler’s work may be due to the “recent spread of Fourier’s doctrines” (54).

Thoreau has witnessed the spreading of Fourier's influence first-hand with the establishment of the Fruitlands community by Bronson Alcott and the Brook Farm community by his fellow Transcendentalist and lyceum lecturer George Ripley in 1841; Brook Farm eventually closed in 1847, but the Fruitlands failed much sooner, in December of 1843. This means that Thoreau wrote his review near the height of the Transcendentalists' involvement with Fourierist doctrines and utopian communities. While Ripley did not found Brook Farm upon Etzler's models, Thoreau criticizes broadly the notion that invention or organization will lead to progress, especially when focused collectively rather than upon the individual. While he did visit the Brook Farm community once, nothing indicates that Thoreau ever had interest in joining Ripley's experiment. Thoreau labels the proliferation of utopian communities, and the subsequent popularity of Etzler's work, "one of the signs of the times" (54). Because Thoreau preferred to "march to the beat of a different drummer" and often derided fashion, the fashionable aspect of the theories of Etzler, Fourier, and their various acolytes certainly did not make them any more appealing to Thoreau. Richard Francis even reads *Walden* as a utopian experiment similar to the Fruitlands and Brook Farm, arguing that Thoreau thought the path to a perfect society lies in a "community of one" (6). There is something to this, but Richards may not go far enough in reading Thoreau's experiment at Walden as a reaction to the utopian reformers with which he was closely associated.

The stark materialism of Etzler struck Thoreau as misguided, and he directly contrasts this with the essence of Transcendentalism. Thoreau sees Etzler once again as standing for broader trends in his materialism: "It would seem from this and various other indications that there is a transcendentalism in mechanics as well as in ethics" (20). Marking the delusional scope of Etzler's suggested reforms, Thoreau jibes that "the quacks even direct small doses for

children, larger for adults, and still larger for oxen and horses... Let us remember that we are to prescribe for the globe itself" (21). More prescient than he knows, Thoreau transposes the rambling image of the reformer described in "Reform and the Reformers" upon Etzler, criticizing the way would be utopians "are too inclined to go hence to a "better land," without lifting a finger, as our farmers are moving to the Ohio soil; but would it not be more heroic and faithful to till and redeem this New England soil of the world?" (21). Thoreau never suggests that he knows anything of Etzler's personal history. He never mentions Etzler's beginnings in Germany, how he died during his ignominious return from the tropics, or the various would-be Edens Etzler visited between, but he certainly seems to have understood the psyche of men like Etzler, at a time when such men were plentiful.

Thoreau likens the attempt to control nature through mechanical means to an unnatural desire to have power over uncertainty, a power to completely dictate the future and eliminate variability. Satirizing the tendency to privilege human comfort and existence over even the most powerful of natural forces, Thoreau writes,

How many things are now at loose ends! Who knows which way the wind will blow to-morrow? Let us not succumb to nature. We will marshal the clouds and restrain tempests; we will bottle up pestilent exhalations; we will probe for earthquakes, grub them up, and give vent to the dangerous gas; we will disembowel the volcano, and extract its poison, take its seed out. We will wash water, and warm fire, and cool ice, and underprop the earth. We will teach birds to fly, and fishes to swim, and ruminants to chew the cud. It is time we had looked into these things. ("Paradise (to be) Regained" 21)

Technological expansion, to Etzler, seeks to make nature work to man's ends, and this is where Thoreau demurs. Rather than changing nature to accommodate humanity, Thoreau suggests that if the reformer reformed themselves, they could then respect nature on its own terms.

In Thoreau's estimation, humanity is not superior enough to the natural world to warrant engineering such epic changes. He suggests that "the moralist, too, inquire what man might do to improve and beautify the system; what to make the stars shine more brightly, the sun more cheery and joyous, the moon more placid and content" (22). Thoreau becomes stylistically evasive as he offers a series of questions that satirizes the arrogance of reformers who seek to acquire the power of the gods: "Could he not heighten the tints of flowers and the melody of birds? Does he perform his duty to the inferior races? Should he not be a god to them? What is the part of magnanimity to the beaver? Should we not fear to exchange places with them for a day, lest by their behavior they should shame us?" (23). Thoreau concludes the moralist's work is yet unfinished, and that by comparing ourselves to the nature we wish to subdue to our judgments we "slander the hyena" as "man is the fiercest and cruelest animal" (23). Once again, Thoreau, mocking Etzler's hubris apes, "Ah! He is of little faith; even the erring comets and meteors would thank him and return his kindness in their kind" (23). Thoreau finds it hard to believe that nature will be the beneficiary of man's increasing power.

As Thoreau continues to offer his perspective side by side with Etzler's, he offers two visions of man's interaction with animals. He questions the way in which man deals with beast, and the examples he provides all suggest that as technology has increased, and so man's power over beast, man has become no less cruel. Using technology that may be in and of itself benign enough, the tendency has been to inflict cruelty. Thoreau cites two examples of this "grosser interference" (24). He recalls that the previous summer he saw, "on the side of a mountain, a dog

employed to churn for a farmer's family, traveling upon a horizontal wheel, and though he had sore eyes, an alarming cough, and withal a demure aspect, yet their bread did get buttered for all that" (24). Here the ingenuity of the farmer has resulted, predictably, in less labor for himself, but also in the abuse of an animal. This illustration is merely one example of Thoreau's vision of technological progress devoid of moral improvement. Thoreau says, "Undoubtedly, in the most brilliant successes, the first rank is always sacrificed" (24). Citing that the "useless travelling of horses" has recently been to the benefit of man, he warns that "horses work too exclusively for men, rarely men for horses; and the brute degenerates in man's society" (24). Something noble has been sacrificed, and the invention of the wheel and the cart have emancipated humanity from walking and churning butter, but have cost them something much more dear. The dog at the wheel becomes a microcosm of the propensity for brutality in humanity, and Thoreau warns that in the vision of Etzler, the "great globe itself [is] but a wheel" (24). Directly before he begins to analyze the details of Etzler's book, he warns, "It will be seen that we contemplate a time when man's will shall be law to the physical world, and he shall no longer be deterred by such abstractions as time and space, height and depth, weight and hardness, but shall indeed be the lord of creation" (25). Of course, we hear the echoes of Etzler in Thoreau's mentor Emerson, and, as Emerson himself says in *English Traits*, "the views of nature held by any people determine all their institutions" (27). Thoreau, perhaps, is fully aware of Emerson's view, and quite rightly demurs. His criticism of Etzler by proxy criticizes many of Emerson's own ideas.

After analyzing Etzler's calculations—Thoreau was known for his mathematical abilities—Thoreau questions not only whether Etzler's calculations and technical expertise are compelling, but whether man is morally capable of such endeavors. Through the implementation of Etzler's mechanical system and rigid social organization, Thoreau mocks, the "old and stern

decree at length [will be] reversed,” and “man shall no more earn his living by the sweat of his brow.” All labor shall be reduced to “a short turn of some crank” (39). Thoreau asks where the impetus to even turn this crank can be found, and he wonders if there “is a crank—oh, how hard to be turned! Could there not be a crank upon a crank,—an infinitely small crank?” (40). Some moral rationale must exist to animate life, to give industry some purpose. Thoreau, as he waxes Transcendental, says, “there is a certain divine energy in every man, but sparingly employed as yet, which may be called the crank within,—the crank after all,—the prime mover in all machinery,—quite indispensable to all work” (40). Thoreau makes the point that mechanics is easy, but inspiration is hard. Collective accomplishments only occur because of an individual spark, and Thoreau suggests that the focus should lie upon that spark, because without it nothing else happens. The comparison that Thoreau makes at the beginning of the review is here extended; the moral reformer seeks to leverage inspiration into empathy, and then action.

The moral reform, Thoreau reasons, must take place at some point. As he puts it, “You may begin by sawing the little sticks, or you may saw the great sticks first, but sooner or later you must saw them both” (41). If Etzler’s dream should be realized and the entirety of nature should be subdued, Thoreau asks, what then? “It would be,” Thoreau claims, “employment for our whole nature, and what we should do thereafter would be as vain a question as ask the bird what it will do when its nest is built and its brood reared” (41). In order for the degree of human cooperation required by the materialist utopians to be realized, Thoreau argues, “a moral reform must take place first, and then the necessity of the other will be superseded” (41). The goal of technological innovation and social complexity, in Thoreau’s mind, is moral reform, but the two do not necessarily have anything to do with one another, “Nor can any really important work,” Thoreau explains, “be made easier by co-operation or machinery” (“Paradise (to be) Regained”

40). Once a moral reform of the individual takes place, in Thoreau's mind, the need for more power over nature would dissolve.

Although *Walden* would not be published until 1854 by Ticknor and Fields, Thoreau's actual sojourn at the pond was from 1845-1847. Much of Thoreau's commentary upon human progress and technology in *Walden* was honed and rehearsed in "Reform and the Reformers" and "Paradise (to be) Regained." Much as he does with "Reform and the Reformers," Thoreau consciously sets himself against the neuroses of other reformers. Thoreau's enterprise at Walden intentionally draws into relief the eccentricities of his contemporaries. Apparently, he spent some time thinking about how others might regard his enterprise in moral terms. The second paragraph of the work addresses the questions and criticisms Thoreau received from his neighbors and acquaintances. Thoreau even cites these as reasons for writing *Walden*:

I should not obtrude my affairs so much on the notice of my readers if very particular inquiries had not been made by my townsmen concerning my mode of life, which some would call impertinent, though they do not appear to me at all impertinent, but, considering the circumstances, very natural and pertinent....Others have been curious to learn what portion of my income I devoted to charitable purposes; and some, who have large families, how many poor children I maintained. I will therefore ask those of my readers who feel no particular interest in me to pardon me if I undertake to answer some of the questions in this book. (3).

"The circumstances" to which Thoreau refers are the conditions of modern civilization. The greatness of contemporary society that Emerson champions, Thoreau derides, and the initial

pages of *Walden* excoriate the daily lives of Thoreau's contemporaries. Thoreau also explains that his other goal is to provide some guidance to reform through *Walden*, although the scope of his subject is deliberately and, perhaps ironically, small. Thoreau explains that he "would fain say something, not so much concerning the Chinese and Sandwich Islanders as you who read these pages, who are said to live in New England; something about your condition, especially your outward condition or circumstances in this world, in this town, what it is, whether it be necessary that it be as bad as it is, whether it cannot be improved as well as not" (4). Thoreau speaks to melioration in *Walden*, but his approach differs dramatically from his contemporaries.

Thoreau focuses upon the area around Concord and specifically his own affairs during a two-year period. Numerous explanations have been offered to explain Thoreau's precision, to explain why he chooses to focus upon the "I": egotism, Buddhism, Romanticism, etc., and a great deal of criticism, both from scholars and the general public, has been leveled at Thoreau for the alleged arrogance, egotism, or disingenuousness of his enterprise at *Walden*. The most common criticism of Thoreau, from academics and casual readers alike, is that Thoreau preaches independence while he relies upon the generosity of Emerson, belittles charity while taking advantage of benevolence himself, and criticizes modern technology while making use of it. James Russell Lowell's lampoon of Thoreau remains the most enduring:

Thoreau's experiment actually presupposed all that complicated civilization which it theoretically abjured. He squatted on another man's land; he borrows an axe; his boards, his nails, his bricks, his mortar, his books, his lamp, his fishhooks, his plough, his hoe, all turn state's evidence against him as an accomplice in the sin of that artificial civilization which rendered it possible that such a person as Henry David Thoreau should exist at all. (Lowell 48)

Lowell, however, misses the point. It is precisely because his existence has been prefigured by all of these “accomplice[s]” that Thoreau attempts to divest himself of them and their influence. He realizes the danger of his existence being rendered possible by a particular technology or by a particular social institution.

The reason Thoreau chose to focus upon the “I,” is firmly grounded in his time. Thoreau is reacting against the expansive claims and totalizing theories of his fellow reformers and their intellectual milieu. Emerson, as I have tried to demonstrate, sought a totalizing theory. At the same time, Agassiz dominated American science with his belief in a perfectly orchestrated, epochal, divine order of creation, with immutable species and traits. Many Transcendentalists and other educated Northerners heard the siren’s song of utopians like Etzler. Fourierist communities sprung up across the United States. The Fourierist system even included not only a rigid organization model, but a complete theory of human behavior, history, and religion. Darwin offered an account of natural history that seemed to account for the obvious randomness, change, and chaos in the world. Alexander Humboldt, Agassiz’s mentor and a strong influence upon Thoreau, spent his later life trying to support the Kantian belief in a unity of natural phenomenon with his massive *Kosmos*, a text intended to synthesize scientific knowledge. Emanuel Swedenborg, a strong influence upon Emerson and other Transcendentalists, believed the whole of creation could be explained through spiritual hermeneutics applied to the Bible; he wrote numerous volumes of exegesis following this pursuit. Hegel, Schelling, and other German idealists believed that human history was a gradual revealing, that a unified absolute truth would eventually be a reality. Even more remarkable is that during Thoreau’s time no one knew which

of the numerous theories would prove the most compelling. Swedenborg and Fourier were perhaps more influential²⁵ in antebellum America than Darwin or Lamarck.

When Thoreau focuses upon the “I” in *Walden*, it is, of course, in the Romantic tradition, but it is also in reaction to his present intellectual environment, one dominated by the attempt to explain it all. Thoreau is revolutionary and reactionary at the same time, and *Walden* should be read in part as a rebuttal to man’s faith in abstract manifestations of his own knowledge, and faith in the inevitability of collective, historical progress. Thoreau, fatigued and troubled by the presumption of other thinkers, writes of Concord rather than the Sandwich Islands and of himself rather than a conceptual man. Thoreau fears the fictional, abstract idea of “man,” and focuses upon what he sees actually before him, an individual to whom expansive theories may not apply, grounded in a particular physical location, in a natural world that always seems to defy the most expansive and ambitious enterprises of the great minds. Thoreau explains that,

In most books, the *I*, or first person is omitted; in this it will be retained; that in respect to egotism, is the main difference. We commonly do not remember that it is, after all, always the first person that is speaking. I should not talk so much about myself if there were anybody else whom I knew as well. Unfortunately, I am confined to this theme by the narrowness of my experience. (4)

Thoreau, here, is mocking the broad claims of other writers, and does not consider it

“unfortunate” that he knows nothing better than himself. He makes many of the same criticisms

²⁵ This is certainly true for Emerson and Thoreau. F. O. Matthiessen explained that the two most important books that could be written about the American Renaissance would be *The Age of Swedenborg* and *The Age of Fourier*. Matthiessen explains that, “Emerson said in 1854, “The age is Swedenborg’s,” by which he meant that it had embraced the subjective philosophy that “the soul makes its own world.” That extreme development of idealism was what Emerson had found adumbrated in Channing’s “one sublime idea”: the potential divinity of man” (viii). Matthiessen understood that both Fourierism and Swedenborgism held in common the “inalienable worth of the individual,” which lead him to conclude that the most remarkable writers of the time all had a “devotion to the possibilities of democracy” (ix).

that he makes in “Reform and the Reformers” and “Paradise (to be) Regained.” Reform begins with the moral reform of the individual. In the initial pages of *Walden*, Thoreau explains why this book differs so much from others, fully conscious of how much it deviates from the writings of reformers like Emerson, Alcott, and Ripley, Fourier, or Etzler.

Thoreau’s voice has the same harsh, antagonistic, tone in *Walden* as in “Reform and the Reformers.” He seems to goad his readers and intentionally dress them down. Thoreau tells his audience directly that “[i]t is evident what mean and sneaking lives many of you live” (7). In his most famous lines he claims that the “mass of men lead lives of quiet desperation. . . . But it is characteristic of wisdom not to do desperate things” (8). In Thoreau’s “thirty years on this planet,” he claims he has “yet to hear the first syllable of valuable or even earnest advice from [his] seniors” (10). Thoreau does not deny the need for improvement in civilization, and he admits both the material and moral shortcomings in his fellow men. His answer, however, lies in focusing upon himself rather than the advancement of a prescriptive system of belief.

While not focusing on a collective social enterprise, the early pages of *Walden* focus upon “Economy,” which reflects the same preoccupation with labor and humanity providing for their material means that inspired Etzler to write *Paradise within Reach*. Etzler planned to create a world where “everything desirable for human life may be had by every man in superabundance, without labor, and without pay” (*Paradise within Reach* 19). Thoreau, in “Paradise (to be) Regained” questions whether focusing upon improving production through increased social complexity and technology is feasible, and instead argues for moral reform. *Walden* offers nearly an identical argument, albeit in a more expansive form.

In “Economy,” Thoreau invokes the image of the “Bramins [sic] sitting exposed to four fires and looking in the face of the sun; or hanging suspended, with their heads downward, over flames” (4), to contrast the willing suffering in pursuit of moral and spiritual enlightenment of the “Bramins [sic]” to the wanton suffering of his neighbors who suffer for a subsistence without the benefit of moral quickening. Thoreau notices that while the technology and means of modern farming were intended to enhance productivity and, thus, leave time for moral improvement, they seem to have the opposite effect. He laments what a “misfortune it is to have inherited farms, houses, barns, cattle, and farming tools; for these are more easily acquired than got rid of” (5). “How many a poor immortal soul,” Thoreau asks, “have I met well-nigh crushed and smothered under its load, creeping down the road of life, pushing before it a barn seventy-five feet by forty, its Augean stables never cleanse, and one hundred acres of land, tillage, mowing, pasture, and wood-lot!” (5). Man’s dominion over nature, the goal of Emerson and Etzler, is impossible; man has his hands full trying to maintain control of himself. Even, Thoreau notes, “The portionless, who struggle with no such unnecessary inherited encumbrances, find it labor enough to subdue and cultivate a few cubic feet of flesh” (5-6). Thoreau seems to be saying, once again, that laying hands upon that “infinitesimal crank” is the most difficult and most important task. Humanity progresses, Thoreau explains, by needing less, not by producing more.

Walden is the striking opposite of *Paradise within Reach*. Etzler plans to bring all of the Earth’s energy under man’s control, and he even tries to calculate how much lies waiting. Thoreau spends much of his review, “Paradise (to be) Regained,” analyzing Etzler’s numerous mathematical calculations of the energy he plans to extract from various natural sources, and often offers practical criticism of these figures. It is not that much of a stretch to believe that Thoreau, when he calculates how little he can live on in *Walden*, mocks Etzler’s detailed

calculations of how much power humanity can acquire through the use of technology and organization. In his review of *Paradise within Reach*, Thoreau offers the example of Etzler's calculations regarding tidal power:

However, the application of the tide being by establishments fixed on the ground, it is natural to begin with them near the shores in shallow water, and upon sands, which may be extended gradually further into the sea. The shores of the continent, islands, and sands, being generally surrounded by shallow water, not exceeding from 50 to 100 fathoms in depth, for 20, 50, or 100 miles and upward. The coasts of North America, with their extensive sand-banks, islands, and rocks, may easily afford, for this purpose, a round about 3,000 miles long, and, on an average, 100 miles broad, or 300,000 square miles, which, with a power of 240,000 men per square mile, as stated, at 10 feet tide, will be equal to 72,000 millions of men, or for every mile of coast, a power of 24,000,000 men. (*Reform Papers* 28)

Etzler's calculations imply the insignificance of the power of an individual. One man's work can be accomplished by a few cubic feet of seawater. A few miles of coast could outwork every living man, woman, and child on the planet. With power alone as the goal, the individual's work, and volition, becomes insignificant. Because a person's labor becomes mathematically insignificant, they have little power to leverage their usefulness into freedom. Humanity may direct the wind and the tides, but lose its soul in the process.

Perhaps in mockery of Etzler, Thoreau calculates how small a portion of the earth must be subdued to get subsistence. Thoreau lived for one year with only \$61.99²⁶ in gross expenses.

²⁶ In giving these amounts, I have left off the fractions of cents for convenience.

He spent \$28.12 on the house, \$14.72 on the farm, \$8.74 on food, \$8.40 on clothing, \$2.00 on oil etc. His net expenses, after subtracting the money he earned, were \$25.21 for the year (66-67). In “finding out what are life’s grossest groceries,” Thoreau tabulates even the fraction of a penny of each of his costs. The focus upon the minutia, upon the smallest expenditures not only draws attention to the moral consequences of consumption, but by implication, upon the obvious problems of a society that requires the power of billions of men. A civilization that *needs* such power, Thoreau seems to suggest, would not have the moral restraint to wield such power responsibly. If man were to subdue the Earth, neither party would benefit.

Thoreau suggests that technological advancement or increasingly expansive or complicated social institutions provide evidence not of moral success but, if anything, of moral failure. Thoreau offers us a version of history in which the great emblems of a successful economy come to be understood often as symbols of oppression. “While civilization has been improving our houses,” he explains, “it has not equally improved the men who are to inhabit them” (37). The question for Thoreau is not what heights the most powerful and advantaged can reach in society, but “how...the poor minority fare?” (37). Thoreau fears that “it will be found that just in proportion as some have been placed in outward circumstances above the savage, others have been degraded below him” (37-38). “The luxury of one class,” he explains, “is counterbalanced by the indigence of another. On the one side is the palace, on the other are the almshouse of the ‘silent poor’” (38). The most striking monuments of human history often stand not for collective accomplishment, but for slavery and abuse. Making the compelling case that “[t]he myriads who built the pyramids to be the tombs of the Pharaohs were fed on garlic, and it may be were not decently buried themselves,” Thoreau argues that the “mason who finishes the cornice of the palace returns at night perchance to a hut not so good as a wigwam” (38). The

pyramid's legacy contradict Emerson's claim that there is "something comprehensive in the grasp of a society which to great mechanical invention, and the best institutions of property, adds the most daring theories; which explores the subtlest and most universal problems" ("Introductory Lecture 182"). Thoreau argues, "It is a mistake to suppose that, in a country where the usual evidences of civilization exist, the condition of a very large body of the inhabitants may not be as degraded as that of the savages" (*Walden* 38). The legacy of technology and organization, Thoreau points out, has more often been an elaborate tomb to honor a dead tyrant than a society of equality and empathy.

Thoreau offers the most immediate example, a technology perhaps within his earshot and vision while he penciled the drafts of *Walden* in his journal. To see that technology and social organization have nothing to do with the *progress* of humanity, Thoreau suggest that we,

should not need to look farther than to the shanties which everywhere border our railroads, that last improvement in civilization; where I see in my daily walks human beings living in sties, and all winter with an open door, for the sake of light, without any visible, often imaginable, wood-pile, and the forms of both old and young are permanently contracted by the long habit of shrinking from cold and misery, and the development of all their limbs and faculties is checked. (38)

Hunched in their caves, Thoreau evokes the image of the savage when describing the impoverished families who live within a stone's throw of the great invention of the age.

Technology has advanced, but the poor are not even able to grow into healthy adulthood. The growth of society may seem apparent, but it has come at the cost of many individuals. The train is evidence of human ingenuity, but when such power has not lead to even help those in its

immediate vicinity, it also indicts modern civilization's failures. "Though the birds of the air have their nests, and the foxes their holes, and the savages their wigwams," Thoreau says, "in modern civilized society not more than half the families own a shelter" (33). All of this, Thoreau argues, "points to an important distinction between the civilized man and the savage; and, no doubt, they have designs on us for our benefit, in making the life of a civilized people an *institution*, in which the life of the individual is to a great extent absorbed, in order to preserve and perfect that of the race" (35).

Thoreau, focuses on the "I" in *Walden*, and encourages an inspection of individuals in society, not an abstract concept such as race, despite his preoccupation with such concepts.²⁷ In an actual physical location, real people suffer, despite proximity to technological advancement. What good are the discoveries of Agassiz, Cuvier, Darwin, and Humboldt, and what good are Etzler's floating islands and wind power if people live hunched in hovels, their underdeveloped frames evidence of their deprived souls? The good of the race, or species, must be measured by different criteria than technological and institution sophistication, and Thoreau fears that a measure of the "average" man will lead to the deprivation of many men. After all, Thoreau stands at a time when the very concept of what species and race mean are being fundamentally challenged, and the trajectory of Thoreau's own career mirrored the transition. The assumptions that informed the taxonomy of Linnaeus came under suspicion during the beginning and middle of the nineteenth century. Linnaeus's taxonomy echoed quite clearly philosophical idealism, which was no accident. Each individual organism was an avatar for the ideal, and deviations

²⁷ Thoreau's interest in ecology and even phylogeny are well documented. In *A Wider View of the Universe: Henry Thoreau's Study of Nature*, Robert Kuhn offers a study of Thoreau's development as an ecologist. He explains that Thoreau's works "included a wider ranging of study of forest succession, a consideration of the behavior of wild fruits, and an investigation into the role of wind, weather, and animals in the dispersion of wild seeds...In effect, Thoreau was attempting in these studies to discover the interrelationships among species, the mutual dependencies that made nature work" (4). Kuhn is one in a long line of critics who claim that if Thoreau's works on nature were ever completed, they "would be currently recognized as pioneering works in the field of ecology" (4).

from this were considered imperfections, the unfortunate reality in a *post-lapsarian* nature. Agassiz, and his mentor Cuvier, as I have previously explained, held to these suppositions. Lamarck first challenged these notions in 1809 with his work *Zoological Philosophy*. Clearly, with the title, Lamarck challenged more than simply the notion that species' traits remained static over time. Separating Natural Philosophy from Platonism, if not Lamarck's full intent,²⁸ was one of the effects of his work, and laid the foundation for Darwin's later work.

Human systems of understanding nature often do violence to the understanding of nature itself, and Lamarck understood this. *Zoological Philosophy* offers the full-length published explanation of an evolutionary theory, but also warns against too much trust in the systems that humans must use in order to make sense of the world. Lamarck begins his work arguing that naturalists must remain careful to not confuse the "artistic parts" of the Natural Sciences with the actual "laws and acts of nature herself" (1). Human taxonomy itself, Lamarck describes as the "artistic parts" of the field. "In the natural sciences," Lamarck explains, "the artistic parts are as follows:

1. the systematic distributions, whether general or particular;
2. the classes;
3. the orders;
4. the families;

²⁸ One of the most important influences upon Lamarck was Pierre Jean George Cabanis, the eighteenth century natural philosopher who enthusiastically argued for a materialist understanding of consciousness. In his seminal work, published in 1802, *On the Relations Between the Physical and Moral Aspects of Man*, he argues that consciousness is derived from the central nervous system rather than an immortal soul. The "moral" (non-physical) aspects of humanity were essentially to Cabanis, to use our current verbiage to express his idea, emergent biological properties.

5. the genera;
6. the nomenclature, whether of the various sections or of particular things” (1)

The “artistic parts,” then, are human systems that try to make sense of the reality of the natural world. The truth of nature is not expressed within the signifiers of scientific discourse. Lamarck realizes that signification is tenuous precisely because he has such a strong hand in determining these categories—he cannot deny the mediation for which he is responsible. Lamarck is aware of this, and, to his credit, offers the caveat that,

these six sorts of groups generally used in the natural sciences are uniquely products of the art we must use to arrange and divide and to prepare ourselves to study, compare, recognize, and refer to the different natural things we see. Nature has never made anything like this, and instead of doing ourselves an injustice and confusing our works with hers, we must recognize that in this business the classes, orders, families, genera, and nomenclatures are inventions of ours, which we are not capable of doing without but which we must use with care, subjecting them to acceptable principles, so as to avoid arbitrary changes which destroy all the advantages of such a system. (1)

The belief that our systems of classification ever hit exactly their mark troubles Lamarck. In certain respects, Lamarck’s version of evolution suggests individual agency has a role in the variability of individuals more than what has come to be known as “Darwinian” evolution.²⁹

²⁹ It’s important to note that the belief in acquired characteristics that has come to be known as “Lamarckian” evolution has little reason to be associated so exclusively with Lamarck. Lamarck was not unique or even unusual in his belief in acquired characteristics. Richard W. Burkhardt Jr. explains that it was only in the 1880’s when August Weismann questioned acquired traits that the notion was significantly challenged. Burkhardt explains that it “was then that the inheritance of acquired characteristics came to be commonly identified as the “Lamarckian,” or neo-Lamarckian” mechanism of organic change, in contrast to the “Darwinian” or “neo-Darwinian” view that evolution

Within Darwinian evolution, change occurs over a long period of time and between generations. Death and the void lie between the impetus for biological change and the results of that change. The fit organism's seed is sown, and only to posterity do the results matter. Randomness determines who receives the advantages and who fails. According to Lamarck's version, the environment and behavior of an organism lead to evolutionary change. In the most common and oversimplified example of Lamarck's theory, the giraffe reaches upwards for her food and so the neck becomes increasingly elongated of successive generations. Of course, the modern synthesis of evolution and genetics makes this seem absurd, but recent research into epigenetics and the significant role played by various agents other than DNA in the transcription and translation process makes it clear that what an individual organism does during their life can affect the expression of genes. Though not in the way he meant it, Lamarck's intuition was in some limited ways correct. The point is that how an individual behaves during their life affects their offspring. Behaviors lead to traits directly. In Lamarck's *Natural Philosophy*, what we leave to posterity is a function of what we do, not our resemblance of a perfect ideal or a random pairing of traits.

There was little consensus among naturalists, even those who worked at the same institution as did Lamarck and Agassiz. Involvement of more metaphysical elements within the approach of these thinkers meant that taking a position on taxonomy meant taking a position on human agency and, to some degree, the finer points of ontology. Emerson understood people to be species first and individuals second—he makes the mistake that Lamarck warns against in *Zoological Philosophy*, the categories of classification have become his reality, and the natural fact of the unique individual has become submerged. Saxon, Norman, Celt, all have their

proceeds through the natural selection of small, fortuitous variations. Charles Darwin himself, as his contemporaries were well aware, believed that the effects of habit could become hereditary, and he had granted such inheritance an important role in organic change" (2). Thoreau lived during a time when the platonic models of Linnaeus were being undercut by Lamarck, Darwin and others, but he died before what has come to be called "Darwinian" evolution existed. In some ways, it was the apex of individual agency within *Natural Philosophy*.

limitations and proclivities, even to the point that Emerson describes one of the most independent and idiosyncratic men he knew in terms of his race while he eulogizes him.

Though Thoreau's criticisms in *Walden* are harsh, he fights against the dehumanizing loss of the privilege of the individual in the wake of the progress of *humanity*. Thoreau not only asks his audience that they take him as they find him, but he displays such empathy in *Walden*. For all his criticism of men, Thoreau shows respect, reverence, and kindness to the individuals he encounters. The clearest example of this is Thoreau's depiction of the "Homeric or Paphlagonian man...a Canadian, a woodchopper, a postmaker" (159). Though his acquaintance is functionally illiterate and only an interim worker, Thoreau treats him as a peer with respect and even reverence. The man interested Thoreau because "he was so quiet and solitary and so happy withal" (162). Thoreau explains that "[a] well of good humor and contentment...overflowed at his eyes. His mirth was without alloy" (164). The woodchopper has nothing to do with the "advancements" of civilization, with the schemes of the Etzler's and Fourier's of the world, and Thoreau demonstrates through his description of the man that, though he has none of the trappings of society's collective progress, he, as an individual, can be accepted and respected on his own terms. Through his description of the woodchopper, Thoreau shows the man who has no need of reform, in defiance of Thoreau's intellectual contemporaries:

I heard that a distinguished wise man and reformer asked him if he did not want the world to be changed; but he answered with a chuckle of surprise in his Canadian accent, not knowing that the question had ever been entertained before, "No I like it well enough." It would have suggested many things to a philosopher to have dealings with him. To a stranger he appeared to know nothing of things in general; yet sometimes I saw in him a man whom I had not seen before, and I did

not know whether he was as wise as Shakespeare or as simply ignorant as a child, whether to suspect him of a fine poetic consciousness or of stupidity....I loved to sound him on the various reforms of the day, and he never failed to look at them in the most simple and practical light. (164)

Thoreau even poses to the woodchopper the question of how to classify man: “At another time, hearing Plato’s definition of a man,—a biped without feathers,—and that one exhibited a cock plucked and called it Plato’s man, he thought it important that the knees bent the wrong way” (165). Despite showing an aptitude for observation, that Thoreau certainly appreciated, what the “simple” woodchopper in *Walden* is able to see, the sophisticated Emerson is not. The woodchopper intuitively denies that a classification of men as species is necessary; without seeing it, he steps over the snare that caught and held Emerson. He could solve the problem of telling what is human without the taxonomy of Linnaeus and without the Platonism of Emerson. The taxonomy itself poses its own internal limitations, and reliance upon the “art” of the naturalist, as Lamarck puts it, can lead to a dangerous misunderstanding of what it means to be human. The concepts of race and species are only useful instrumentally, not philosophically, and they should only be used in so far as they are useful themselves. Thoreau asks his readers to take his work on the same terms: “As for the rest of my readers, they will accept such portions as apply to them. I trust that none will stretch the seams in putting on the coat, for it may do good service to him whom it fits” (4). This is the epistemology—valuing the reality of the individual over the imposition of systemic racial or cultural classification—that Thoreau means to express in *Walden*, which is, after all, not bad for a Saxon.

Chapter Three: “Demonology and Mythology”: Margaret Fuller’s Millennialism

Emerson’s willingness to freely criticize his departed friends is obvious not only in his eulogy of Thoreau, but also in his contribution to the *Memoirs of Margaret Fuller Ossoli*. As when he eulogized Thoreau, Emerson offers an unflattering picture of Fuller’s physical features in his contribution to the *Memoirs of Margaret Fuller Ossoli*.¹ Emerson writes that, “Her extreme plainness, --a trick of incessantly opening and shutting her eyelids,--the nasal tone of her voice,--all repelled” (202). While most critics may be right in crying foul at the derogatory elements of Emerson’s portrayal of Fuller, even his criticism draws a fascinating, if problematic, portrait of her. Emerson spends some time upon the mystical nature of Fuller’s interests and beliefs, something many biographers have tended to downplay, dismiss as figurative hyperbole, or neglect almost entirely. Taking the same ambivalent approach that he does to Thoreau, Emerson offers a compliment of Fuller followed by a thinly veiled criticism: “She was familiar with all the field of elegant criticism in literature. Among the problems of the day, these two attracted her chiefly, Mythology and Demonology” (218). Emerson, in the same breath, is quick to add a few other interests of Fuller’s—those that have been more privileged by Fuller scholarship: “French Socialism, especially as it concerned woman; the whole prolific family of reforms, and, of course, the genius and career of each remarkable person” (218). Yes, it turns out, Fuller was interested in social reform, which is certainly a more cited reason for her fame today than her commitment to Demonology, Mythology, and French Socialism, i.e. Fourierism. The fact remains, however, that Fuller’s interest in reform cannot be untangled from her interest

¹ The *Memoirs of Margaret Fuller Ossoli* was published in 1852. James Freeman Clark, William Henry Channing, and Emerson edited and contributed to the volume, which alternates between primary documents from Fuller’s own hand, letters, journal entries, etc, and their own recollections of Fuller. They were not historians, and their goal was to draw a sketch of Fuller from what they knew. Many Fuller biographies, as Charles Capper notes, have not been very concerned with accuracy either (Capper 9).

in demonology, mythology, or the eccentric utopianism of Charles Fourier. The bright future Fuller imagines comes to her in shining visions through the esoteric mediums of her day—actual daemons as she saw it. Complicating our understanding of Fuller is the fact that, for her, mysticism, science, and reform were inextricably linked. Human knowledge, Fuller believed, was progressing, both through innovation and divine revelation. Fuller looked at human history and placed her hope in an increase of actual spiritual contact, not in spiritualism's gradual retreat, and, as the teleological end-point to human knowledge approached, woman, because of her superior ability to serve as a conduit for the divine, would lead the way.

Emerson, however off the mark he may seem relative to the foci offered in Fuller scholarship, and however spiteful his contribution to the *Memoirs* may at times appear, seems to be spot on with regards to Fuller's own writings, and, perhaps, he even had several particulars in mind as he rattled off the first three interests of Fuller, Mythology, Demonology, and French Socialism. In her most well known work, *Woman in the Nineteenth Century*, published in 1845, Fuller explains she has “attempted to select a few...Among the throng of symptoms which denote the present tendency to a crisis in the life of woman, which resembles the change from girlhood with its beautiful instincts, but unharmonized thoughts, its blind pupilage and restless seeking, to self-possessed, wise, and graceful womanhood” (109). Fuller notes that “One [of these “symptoms”] of prominent interest is the unison of three male minds, upon the subject, which, for width, culture, power of self-concentration and dignity of aim, take rank as the prophets of the coming age” (109).

The first figure that Fuller mentions happens to be the demonologist *par excellence*, and perhaps the most influential philosopher upon the Transcendentalists, Emanuel Swedenborg. The second man she mentions is the only French socialist widely known throughout the United States

during the first half of the nineteenth century, Charles Fourier. The final was Goethe, the poet laureate for Romanticism and the most influential literary figure in Fuller's reading. While not addressing Fuller directly, F. O. Matthiessen's 1941 claim that the "American Renaissance" could as easily be called the age of Fourier or the age of Swedenborg, (Matthiessen viii), seems to apply as much to Fuller as any other thinker of the period, yet her connections to these figures has not been taken as seriously as one might assume. While it is common to find Goethe listed as a key influence upon Fuller, which is entirely reasonable,² it is rare to see Swedenborg's influence even mentioned in more than passing comments,³ despite the fact that Fuller continually references him and relies heavily upon even the most mystical elements of his philosophy. Fourier's influence is cited only slightly more frequently than Swedenborg's, despite the fact that she was quite sympathetic to the Fourierist communities in the United States, and championed them in her foreign correspondence.⁴ Ignoring or downplaying the role that these esoteric figures play in Fuller's philosophy, or dismissing Fuller's more mystical beliefs as merely metaphors or symbols gives us a Margaret Fuller more palatable to our sensibilities. However, as Melville puts it, "man is heir to complex moods" (*Clarel* 17), and, I might add, ever in search of their reconciliation--Fuller is no exception. With this in mind we should not take Fuller in slices, but as a whole, to try to do justice to the complicated, living, breathing, and

² It is in fact Fuller who was among the first Americans to popularize Goethe's works. Her essay "Goethe" written while she was editor for *The Dial* was among the first examinations of Goethe in the United States.

³ In Margaret Vanderhaar Allen's *The Achievement of Margaret Fuller*, for instance Swedenborg is not even mentioned once; Fourier is never cited as an influence upon Fuller, although Allen references her "socialism" at times. There is, on the other hand, an entire chapter upon Goethe's influence. Joan von Mehren in *Minerva and the Muse* only mentions Swedenborg once. Swedenborg's name does not appear even once in Meg McGavran Murray's *Margaret Fuller, Wandering Pilgrim*. In the first volume of Charles Capper's definitive biography of Fuller, *Margaret Fuller: An American Romantic Life*, Swedenborg is mentioned once in passing. He does, in the second volume *The Public Years*, however, in cataloging what Fuller wrote, list Swedenborg's presence in those works several times. The dearth of exploration of this influence, or even acknowledgement of its presence, that I have mentioned in these examples, holds for the majority of the biographical work on Fuller.

⁴ Fuller spent some time at the Brook Farm community established by fellow Transcendentalist George Ripley.

fascinating Fuller who stood toe to toe, unflinching, with the greatest minds and questions of her day.

While Emerson placed his faith in a superior racial and cultural hybridity, Fuller believed that the liberation of the female sex would lead, naturally, to a benevolent and peaceful future because woman, much more than man, has access to divine inspiration, and, consequently, altruism. While Fuller's understanding is overtly spiritual, it was to her as much scientific as it was mystical—and she believed the two discourses were converging. In the coming age, Fuller believed that the two types of knowledge would soon coalesce and reinforce one another, leading to a synthesis of natural science and religious devotion.

It is important to keep in mind that Fuller's most significant work, *Woman in the Nineteenth Century*, is saturated with Swedenborg's understanding of matter and spirit. While she directly references him several times, her underlying understanding of the unity of matter and spirit, consciousness and nature, derives quite clearly from his philosophies, which influenced many of her close contemporaries, Emerson especially. Perhaps Swedenborg's most enthusiastic and articulate American supporter was Emerson's close friend Henry James Sr., father of Henry and William James, also a respected friend of Fuller. James Sr. interprets Swedenborg as the antithesis of both Emmanuel Kant and what James Sr. describes as a flagging, general skepticism. James believed that Kant, and his advocates, represent not only an unfair skepticism of spiritualism, but a faulty skepticism of the capacity for science to firmly establish empirical fact as well—to James, Kant represented philosophical doubt, period. The conflict between Swedenborg and Kant was to James key to Transcendentalism, and the future of both scientific and religious belief. James understood the choice to be between abstruse

skepticism versus esoteric spiritualism, German Romantic mysticism versus Enlightenment French materialism, deism versus a verifiable spiritual presence.

In his full-length work on Swedenborg, *The Secret of Swedenborg*, James establishes these dichotomies. He claims that society must choose one of these alternatives. James argues that the “fundamental problem of Philosophy” (2), is to reconcile the creation by God of an “other;” i.e., how can there be a something added to an already infinite being. James could have more accurately labeled this the “fundamental problem of New England Transcendentalism.” James, in *The Secret of Swedenborg*, published in 1869, begs off solving this problem--“I cannot now at all events, afford the time to treat it more exhaustively” (iii), but he assures the reader that he has “outlined it in so conscientious a manner as that any one interested may easily work out the necessary details for himself” (iii). Hence, James is confident that with common sense and the breadcrumbs he has left, the reader will arrive at the answer.

James predicts that Kant and his deism will fade into memory, but his hopes, interestingly, rest not on a Jeremiad or religious institution of any fashion but on the advancement of biological science: “While deism as an intellectual tradition continues doubtless to survive, it seems at the same time to be losing all hold upon the living thought of men, being trampled under foot by the advance of a scientific naturalism” (iii). James does not believe deism offers an acceptable alternative to a competing scientific atheism. James predicts that Kant’s theology, at least in the United States, will become an abandoned middle country in a future struggle between scientific atheism and Christianity, or, more precisely in James’s mind, between a totalizing materialism and a liberating Transcendentalism.⁵

⁵ James claims that “Paganism and science are indeed plainly incompatible terms. The conception of a private or unemployed divine force in the world—the conception of a deity unimplicated in the nature, the progress, and the destiny of man—is utterly repugnant to human thought; and if such a conception were the true logical alternative of atheism, science would erelong everywhere, as she is now doing in Germany, confess herself atheistic...the rational

James claims there is a trend toward giving, “revelation itself a strictly rational aspect,” which will “bring it within the legitimate domain of science” (iv). Kant, he argues, represents “a new pusillanimity on the part of philosophy,” because his idealism avoids making a decision. More importantly it defines limits upon, on the one hand, human knowledge, and, upon the other, an active and involved deity, what James calls a “work day”⁶ God (ii). He attacks Kant’s “*noumenal* world,” arguing instead for a world purely consisting of *phenomenon*, the knowable and observable. It is important to realize here that James is criticizing Kant’s notion of *noumenon*, which is as James and Kant label it “things-in-themselves.” He is not criticizing the Greek concept often associated with the term, and to which Kant is not referring, of a higher knowledge that goes beyond empiricism and is unverifiable (a form of truth that is not *veritas*—i.e. subject to scientific rigor). Once again, while we presume James’s spiritualism to be based upon intuition, it is not. James does not want a muse, but a powerful, active, experimentally verifiable God. James is interested in revelation and not in inspiration. The subject/object problem for James, and Swedenborg, becomes a subject/Subject problem; ontology becomes theology. “Instinct is not intelligence,” James tell us, “and sophistry can be combated only by intelligence” (4). “Now to my mind,” he continues, “nothing so effectually arms the intellect against error, whether it be the error of the sceptic or the error of the fanatic, whether it reflect our prevalent religious cant, or our almost equally prevalent scientific cant, as a due acquaintance and familiarity with the ontological principles of Emanuel Swedenborg” (4). Hence, James

alternative of atheism is not deism, but Christianity, and science accordingly would be atheistic at a very cheap if not wholly gratuitous rate, should it become so only to avoid the deistic hypothesis of creation. The deistic hypothesis then is effectively dead and buried for scientific purposes” (iii-iv).

⁶ James claims this is the key impetus for the work: “But I am free to confess that have long outgrown this loutish conception of deity. I can no longer bring myself to adore a characteristic activity in the God of my worship, which falls below the secular average of human character. . . . In fact, what I crave with all my heart and understanding – what my very flesh and bones cry out for—is no longer a Sunday but a week-day divinity, a working God, grimy with the dust of sweat of our most carnal appetites and passions” (vii).

claims, in Swedenborg's philosophy objective truth does justice to both empirical science and spiritualism.

James also explains the wisdom of rejecting Hegel, and the historiographic implications of his work, in favor of Swedenborg. Hegel, in James's estimation, places too much importance upon the abstract nature of "thought." James finds the notion that "thought"—as something immaterial--can actually act upon an object absurd:

Now doubtless our faculty of abstract thought is chief among our intellectual faculties; but when it is seriously proposed to build the universe of existence upon a logical abstraction, one must needs draw a very long breath. For thought by itself affords a most inadequate basis even to our own conscious activity; and when, therefore, our unconscious being is in question, it confesses itself a simply ludicrous hypothesis. (5)

James's Swedenborgian understanding of consciousness deviates significantly from both Kant and Hegel. Spirit, to James something scientifically verifiable, is the animating force, not thought or consciousness⁷ as Hegel argues. Hence, the Hegelian version of the Enlightenment subject acting upon the object through consciousness fails to apply to the Transcendental system. There necessarily must be a real, verifiable force animating matter—hence the unity of subject/object, or self/nature as Emerson puts it.

Swedenborg was perhaps the first anatomist to recognize that psychological functions mostly reside in the pre-frontal cortex of the brain, which he concluded through his typically rigorous clinical observation (Toksvig 2). This seems to have led to his belief that consciousness

⁷ To be clear, I am taking James to believe Hegel to mean "mind" when he uses the term *Geist*, especially in *The Phenomenology of Spirit*. This is an important clarification, because the alternate translation is "spirit," which, in English, carries certain other connotations that could cause confusion, especially when the difference between consciousness and spirit is exactly what James attempts to elucidate.

had a biochemical basis. The soul, according to Swedenborg, was force (electromagnetic), which in its corporeal form was matter. Hence there is only one type of “thing” out there. He did not, however, agree with Hegel’s model for collective and individual progress. The model was, perhaps ironically, too immaterial for the mystical Swedenborg, because of its focus upon the non-thingness of consciousness. James articulates the difference of the two theories with regard to the (im)material nature of consciousness as such: “if being turns out to be identical with nothing, with the absence of mere *thing*, then I must say, in the first place, that I do not see why any sane person should covet its acquaintance” (6). “I need not deny,” James continues, “that I hold thing and thought to be by any means identical; but I am free to maintain nevertheless that if you actually abstract things from thought, you simply render thought itself exanimate” (6). Thought or consciousness is not subject to empirical evaluation if it is not material/spiritual, and so James rejects Hegel for the same reason he rejects Kant, because their philosophies lead to conclusions beyond the realm of experimental observation and, consequently, verifiable truth.

Consequently, the Hegelian notion that self-evolving consciousness was a positive feedback loop inching ever closer to a perfect consciousness (i.e. the infinite or God) makes no sense to Swedenborg or James because they do not believe the enlightenment mind, consciousness, to be a viable medium of material--or spiritual as they are the same--change. Consciousness as Hegel describes it is not a part of Swedenborg’s world. As James bluntly puts it: “In a word, our knowledge of it is no way intuitive, but exclusively empirical” (7). To Swedenborg, James, and to a large degree, Fuller, submerged beneath what we often see lies not another world, but the rest of the world, the vastly undiscovered material/spiritual reality that the coming age of science and revelation will reveal. It was this world that whispered to Fuller in the dark watches of the night.

Because Swedenborg, and James, necessarily turn a starkly different direction than Western philosophy after Kant, misunderstanding them, and consequently other Transcendentalists such as Fuller, is quite common. The concern in Swedenborg, and many iterations of Transcendentalism, is not with subject/object, but with matter/spirit. The tension from this dualism is what drives Fuller's understanding of both the esoteric and the scientific.

At the beginning of *Woman in the Nineteenth Century*, Fuller explains that while man⁸ “not fully installed in his powers” has “given much earnest of his claims” (5). “That claim,” she explains,

is for no partial sway, no exclusive possession. He cannot be satisfied with any one gift of life, any one department of knowledge or telescopic peep at the heavens. He feels himself called to understand and aid nature, that she may, through his intelligence, be raised and interpreted; to be a student of, and servant to, the universe-spirit; and king of his planet, that as an angelic minister, he may bring it into conscious harmony with the law of that spirit. (6)

The material world we experience, Fuller suggests, must be made to correspond to the spiritual underlying it, and it is by access to this truth that progress is made. Man has, Fuller argues, at times done this, but not fully enough. The “[s]ages and lawgivers,” she explains, “have bent their whole nature to the search for truth, and thought themselves happy if they could buy, with the sacrifice of all temporal ease and pleasure, one seed for the future Eden” (6). Fuller sees her time in history as opening the opportunity for not only the continuation of this search, but perhaps even its fulfillment. In beginning to discuss what she understands to be the modern manifestations of the ancient prophets Fuller asks, “Shall we not name with as deep a benediction those who, if not so immediately, or so consciously, in connection with the eternal

⁸ Fuller here by “man” means male precisely, and not humanity as a whole.

truth, yet, led and fashioned by a divine instinct, serve no less to develop and interpret the open secret of love passing into life, energy creating for the purpose of happiness” (7). Fuller’s verbiage here, “Love passing into life,” and “energy creating,” describes these precocious prophets, but is more than metaphor. Fuller is here describing in her own terms a physical process she believes is responsible for altruism and revelation and hinting that knowledge comes from Swedenborg’s submerged spiritual realm.

Fuller then describes various intimations of this revelation that have occurred throughout history:

the artist whose hand, drawn by a pre-existent harmony to a certain medium, moulds it to forms of life more highly and completely organized than are seen elsewhere, and, by carrying out the intention of nature, reveals her meaning to those who are not yet wise enough to divine it; the philosopher who listens steadily for laws and causes, and from those obvious, infers those yet unknown; the historian who, in faith that all events have their reason and their aim, records them, and thus fills archives from which the youth of prophets may be fed. The man of science dissects the statements, tests the facts, and demonstrates order, even where he cannot its purpose. (7)

In all of these examples, Fuller alludes to the same thing, an order or truth not always perceivable, but always present. Fuller, in an age of optimists, was among the most sanguine. While she admits that “man is still a stranger to his inheritance, still a pleader, still a pilgrim” (8), she believes that, “his happiness is secure in the end” (8). Fuller, in a style reminiscent of the sermons of her day writes that, “And now, no more a glimmering consciousness, but assurance begins to be felt and spoken, that the highest ideal man can form of his own powers, is that

which he is destined to attain” (9). “Whatever the soul knows how to seek,” she continues, “it cannot fail to obtain” (9). “This,” Fuller claims, “is the law and the prophets. Knock and it shall be opened, seek and ye shall find. It is demonstrated; it is a maxim” (9). Of course, until the last line, Fuller references the New Testament, but the last line references a quite different type of knowledge: empirical, verifiable evidence.

The obvious question is what exactly will be opened when Fuller knocks on the door, and what she will receive once she asks. “However disputed by many, however ignorantly used, or falsified by those who do receive it,” Fuller writes, “the fact of an unceasing revelation has been too clearly stated in words to be lost in sight or in thought, and sermons preached from the text, “Be ye perfect,” are the only sermons of a pervasive and deep-searching influence” (9). Fuller sees nothing short of the perfection of humanity as the result of this “universal, unceasing revelation” (9).

Fuller attempts to navigate a course through the troubling wake that always seems to follow revelations, whether scientific or spiritual. “Among those who meditate upon this text,” Fuller explains, “there is a great difference of view, as to the way in which perfection shall be sought” (9). Fuller then lists three suggested avenues to perfection, “the intellect,” “the life,” or, what she labels the “true way,” through which, “destiny would be accomplished in a purer and more natural order” (9). Fuller in a flurry of somewhat obscure, erudite prose dominated by frequent Biblical references, explains that the “true way,” is to, “In quietness yield thy soul to the causal soul” (10). “Be still,” she continues, “seek not, but wait in obedience. Thy commission will be given” (10). Building upon her earlier claim that the soul cannot help but find what it seeks, Fuller explains that, “could we indeed say what we want, could we give a description of the child that is lost, he would be found” (10). The proof that the perfection of man approaches,

lies in the fact that people believe possible that perfection and seek after it. “When,” Fuller explains, “the Jewish prophet described the Lamb, as the expression of what was required by the coming era, the time drew nigh” (10). Since to Fuller truth, both scientific and spiritual, comes from revelation rather than invention or discovery, the deciphering of prophecy signals the imminence of the prophetic message. Fuller expresses a Christian Millennialism fairly common during her time⁹ and argues that, “no doubt, a new manifestation is at hand, a new hour in the day of man” (10).

Fuller’s Millennialism is distinct from others of her time because of the particular role she believes woman have in experiencing revelation, which she explains fully only later in the work. Although a “new manifestation is at hand,” Fuller argues, “We cannot expect to see any one sample of completed being, when the mass of men still lie engaged in sod, or use the freedom of their limbs only with wolfish energy” (10). “The tree,” she continues, “cannot come to flower till its root be free from the cankering worm, and its whole growth open to air and light. While any one is base, none can be entirely free and noble” (10). Because Fuller believes that, “hearts crave, [even if] minds do not know how to ask,” she predicts that, “something new shall presently be shown in the life of man” (10). The perfection of man is linked in Fuller’s mind to equality, but in a very particular way. The very desire for equality itself, to Fuller, comes from divine inspiration—it is not invented or discovered--and signals the imminence of that equality, and the concurrent perfection of humanity.

Fuller claims that, though she is a dreamer, she is not the only one. “Meanwhile,” she writes, “not a few believe, and men themselves have expressed the opinion, that the time...the

⁹ The entire passage from *Woman in the Nineteenth Century*: “those who call for a more triumphant expression of love, a love that cannot be crucified, show not a perfect sense of what has already been given. Love has already been expressed, that made all things new, that gave the worm its place and ministry as well as the eagle; a love to which it was alike to descend into the depths of hell, or to sit at the right hand of the Father” (10).

other chamber of the heart of life, needs now to take her turn in full pulsation, and that improvement in the daughters will best aid in the reformation of the sons of this age” (13). In granting woman their rightful place, America is fulfilling what Fuller sees as its exceptional role in history. She claims that, “this country is...surely destined to elucidate a great moral law” (15). It is important to keep in mind that Fuller acknowledges that America has yet to grant freedom to men, even in the letter of the law. She explains that,

Though the national independence be blurred by the servility of individuals, though freedom and equality have been proclaimed only to leave room for a monstrous display of slave-dealing and slave-keeping; though the free American so often feels himself free, like the Roman, only to pamper his appetites and his indolence through the misery of his fellow beings, still it is not in vain, that the verbal statement has been made, “All men are born free and equal.” (15)

Fuller sees in the cause of abolition an example of how the discernment of women can lead to the liberation of men. Fuller claims that, “Of all its [the case for the equality of women] banners, none has been more steadily upheld, and under none have more valor and willingness for real sacrifices been shown, than that of the champions of the enslaved African” (18). “And this band it is,” Fuller explains, “which, partly from a natural following out of principles, partly because many women have been prominent in that cause, makes, just now, the warmest appeal in behalf of woman” (18).

Fuller sees evidence around her of what we might label change of consciousness, but what she believes is the diffuse evidence of a prophecy come to fruition. Fuller, disparaging the use of the phrase “women and children” and all the fealty it implies, argues that, “every arbitrary

barrier [be] thrown down [and] every path laid open to woman as freely as to man” (26). If this were done Fuller believes that, “ the divine energy would pervade nature to a degree unknown in the history of former ages, and that no discordant collision, but a ravishing harmony of the spheres would ensue” (26).¹⁰ “Yet,” Fuller tells us “mankind will be ripe for this, when inward and outward freedom for woman as much as for man shall be acknowledged as right, not yielded as a concession” (26). In considering, “what obstructions impede this good era, and what signs give reason to hope that it draws near,” Fuller offers the example of a woman, Miranda, who, “might speak without heat and bitterness of the position of her sex” (27). Miranda serves as a proxy for Fuller and, consequently, has the same background. Miranda’s father, Fuller explains, saw his daughter as the “temple of immortal intellect” (27). “Thus,” Fuller continues, “this child was early led to feel herself a child of the spirit. She took her place easily, not only in the world of organized being, but in the world of mind” (27). The connection Fuller makes here, between the “child of the spirit” and finding a place in the “world of the mind” reiterate the epistemological point that, to her, intellectual and spiritual truth are two parts of the same thing.

Fuller also describes in Miranda an opposition of qualities that she believes is central to the appreciation and equality of woman. Miranda, Fuller explains, “was fortunate in a total absence of those charms which might have drawn to her bewildering flatteries, and in a strong electric nature, which repelled those who did not belong to her, and attracted those who did” (28). Fuller here explains that the outward homeliness that Emerson and others initially found as a barrier to Fuller¹¹ has served to protect her from misplacing her goals and from devaluing the

¹⁰ Explain here how this is reminiscent of both Fourier and Thoreau’s criticism of Etzler.

¹¹ In a quite famous description of Fuller in his contribution to *The Memoirs of Margaret Fuller Ossoli*, Emerson explains that Fuller’s “extreme plainness,—a trick of incessantly opening and shutting her eyelids,—the nasal tone of her voice,—all repelled; and I said to myself, we shall never get far” (202). Emerson claims that this first-impression of Fuller was quite common: “It is to be said, that Margaret made a disagreeable first impression on most persons, including those who became afterwards her best friends, to such an extreme that they did not wish to be in the same room with her” (202).

more important part of her identity, her “strong electric nature.” Fuller seems to, in this case, merge what she has learned of the science of the day with some aspects of the esoteric theories of Fourier’s. In many ways it makes sense that she would respect much of Fourier’s work. He was, after all, perhaps the first to coin the term *feminisme*, and argued in his 1837 work, *The Theory of the Four Movements*, that furthering the rights of women was among the key goals of social progress and the liberation of the not only humanity, but nature as well (Goldstein 92).

While it is difficult to tell to what degree Fuller’s ideas regarding woman were influenced by Fourier, clearly, she has some reverence for the Frenchman. Fourier explained that the deficiencies of humanity and nature alike were due to the improper matching of people with their mate and of people with their profession. He theorized that there were 810 different types of individuals, and that they were best matched with another of their type. Consulting Fourier’s doctrine, one would ascertain their identity, and then engage in a relationship in which they would not be forced to control their passions, but would be free to express them. This, Fourier concluded, would lead, somehow, to a sea made of lemonade and the development of useful tails. The universe was well ordered, and so the natural world followed the same rules, it must be let to seek its own happiness. In offering one of the most creative solutions to Olber’s Paradox, Fourier believed that the universe expanded, quite literally, through planetary procreation.

The important part of Fourier’s claims about a sea of lemonade, developments in human biology, and a healthy sexual relationship between the planets, is that he argues, throughout thousands of pages, that a connection exists between human social enlightenment and the vitality of the natural world. Humanity can literally make the sun shine brighter if they are well organized and allowed to follow their passions. Fuller also connects the behavior of man with an improvement of the earth. Although, with this subject, it is difficult to determine exactly what

influences were the strongest in Fuller's mind. Fuller seemed to be hearing in the secular Fourier something that echoed the sermons of her youth. The unusual theories of the eccentric Frenchman and the Biblical prophecies Fuller knew by heart seemed to align. In eschatological terms Fuller sees Fourier and "Revelation" as barking up the same tree. Fourier sees, in the social and material realms, the whispers of the Second Coming Fuller had been told to anticipate, when creation would be perfected.¹²

The fact that Miranda's "strong electrical nature" repelled some and attracted others is similar to Fourier's beliefs that certain personalities exist and they can be improperly matched with another. Certain individuals were meant to be together. Those who failed to see past Miranda's "total absence of those charms which might have drawn to her bewildering flatteries" (28) were simply not meant to be her companions. This determinism in relationships matches a determinism in self-reliance in Miranda. The obvious connections have been made between this self-reliance and that of her friend Emerson, but, in addition to this connection, Fuller associates independence in women with inspiration. Miranda explains that, "It is true that I have had less outward aid, in after years, than most women, but that is of little consequence. Religion was early awakened in my soul, a sense that what the soul is capable to ask it must attain, and that, though I might be aided and instructed by others, I must depend on myself as the only constant friend" (29). Miranda claims that men have not been able to restrain her as successfully as other

¹² Fuller seems to indicate this particular eschatological belief several times in *Woman in the Nineteenth Century*. She suggests that the coming Millennial period will correct a creation damaged by the fall. The lapse, in terms of nature, would be reconciled: "Yet, by men in this country, as by the Jews, when Moses was leading them to the promised land, every thing has been done that inherited depravity could do, to hinder the promise of heaven from its fulfillment. The cross here as elsewhere, has been planted only to be blasphemed by cruelty and fraud. The name of the Prince of Peace has been profaned by all kinds of injustice toward the Gentile whom he said he came to save. But I need not speak of what has been done toward the red an, the black man. Those deeds are the scoff of the world; and they have been accompanied by such pious words that the gentlest would not dare to intercede with "Father, forgive he, for they know not what they do." Here as elsewhere, the gain of creation consists always in the growth of individual minds, which live and aspire, as flowers bloom and birds sing, in the midst of morasses" (14-15).

women because, “the position I early was enabled to take was one of self-reliance” (29). “And were all women,” Miranda explains, “as sure of their wants as I was, the result would be the same” (29).

With self-reliance, drawn from spiritual insight, Miranda believes that, “the feminine side, the side of love, of beauty, of holiness, was now to have its full chance, and that, if either were better, it was better now to be a woman, for even the slightest achievement of good was furthering an especial work of our time” (30). Man’s faults, Miranda suggests, are somewhat beyond his control, “No! man is not willingly ungenerous. He wants faith and love, because he is not yet himself an elevated being. He cries with sneering skepticism, Give us a sign. But if the sign appears, his eyes glisten, and he offers not merely approval, but homage” (35). A “sign” then is what will elevate man, making him capable of giving woman her deserved freedom and respect. Of course, that sign will first be seen and exposted by woman.

“If larger intellectual resources begin to be deemed needful to woman,” Fuller argues, “still more is a spiritual dignity in her, or even the mere assumption of it, looked upon with respect” (89). This, to some degree, Fuller claims, is already the case. She explains that, “Joan Soutcote and Mother Anne Lee are sure of a band of disciples; Ecstatica, Dolorosa, of enraptured believes who will visit them in their lowly huts, and wait for days to revere them in their trances” (89). Fuller claims that even the “foreign noble traverses land and sea to hear a few words from the lips of the lowly peasant girl, whom he believes especially visited by the Most High. Very beautiful, in this way, was the influence of the invalid of St. Petersburg, as described by De Maistre” (89-90). Fuller argues that even the most powerful and influential of men revere the ability of woman, even those at the bottom of society, to serve as a conduit for the divine. “Mysticism,” Fuller continues, “which may be defined as the brooding soul of the world, cannot

fail of its oracular promise as to woman” (90). “The mothers”—“The mother of all things,” Fuller explains, “are expressions of thought which lead the mind towards this side of universal growth” (90). “Whenever a mystical whisper was heard,” Fuller writes, “sprang up the thought, that, if it be true, as the legend says, that humanity withers through a fault committed by and a curse laid upon woman, through her pure child, or influence, shall the new Adam, the redemption arise. Innocence is to be replaced by virtue, dependence by a willing submission, in the heart of the Virgin Mother of the new race” (90). Fuller’s belief in the redemption of humanity, and eventual perfection, through a Second Coming, is, once again, not an uncommon belief, but she believes the scales will be balanced further, with woman serving as the voice in the wilderness for the coming age and “the new race” (90).

Fuller appreciates that it is necessary for women to have all of the opportunities for mental development afforded men, but she believes that this, in itself, is not enough: “The spiritual tendency is towards the elevation of woman, but the intellectual by itself is not so” (90). Fuller argues that Plato, “sometimes seems penetrated by the high idea of love, which considers man and woman as the two-fold expression of one thought” (90). Finding Plato insufficient, Fuller says that, “Plato, the man of intellect, treats woman in the Republic as property, and, in the Timaeus, says that man, if he misuse the privileges of one life, shall be degraded into the form of woman, and then, if he do not redeem himself, into that of a bird” (90). Despite the compliments he sometimes pays women, Plato’s thought as a whole, “express most happily how anti-poetical is this state of mind” (90). Plato had a glimpse of the truth, but fell far short. Fuller then explains that in order to understand adequately the nature of both man and woman, Plato, a thinker fixated too intently upon the intellect, should be enhanced by the sage of the time, Swedenborg. “This,” Fuller explains, referring to the Plato’s claim that “man and woman [are] the two-fold expression

of the same thought,” the angel of Swedenborg, the angel of the coming age, cannot surpass, but only explain more fully” (90).

Fuller contrasts Plato, as representative of the intellect, with Swedenborg, who, to Fuller, represents the emotional and spiritual. Sounding strikingly similar to Henry James Sr., Fuller contrasts the ethereal muse of Plato with the much more tangible contact with the spiritual of Swedenborg: “For the poet, contemplating the world of things, selects various birds as the symbols of his most gracious and ethereal thoughts, just as he calls upon his genius as muse, rather than as God” (90). Intellect and intuition, God and muse, are in tension, and these are the two expressions of the same thought. The reference to Swedenborg, at this point, seems vague, but as Fuller continues to explore the balance between intellect and intuition, God and muse, she seems to be alluding to what was, for the time, a very scientific understanding of the difference between the corporeal and the spiritual: the difference between energy and matter.

Fuller, expressing perhaps her greatest reason for optimism that the future for women will be better than the past, claims that, “The electrical, the magnetic element in woman has not been fairly brought out at any period. Everything might be expected from it; she has far more of it than man” (90). Fuller understands that she deals with an abstract topic, and tries to explain, through a common example, the “electric” tendency in women:

This is commonly expressed by saying that her intuitions are more rapid and more correct. You will often see men of high intellect absolutely stupid in regard to the atmospheric changes, the fine invisible links which connect the forms of life around them, while common women, if pure and modest, so that vulgar self do not overshadow the mental eye, will seize and delineate these with unerring discrimination. (91)

Here Fuller offers what essentially could serve as a falsifiable test—the ability to predict the weather--albeit limited in scope, of the presence of not a preternatural power *per se*, but an actual sense, possessed in a greater degree by women. The atmospheric changes are an actual phenomenon of the real world, and even the least educated of women can sense their changes more effectively than the most educated of men. The electrical, magnetic attribute is an innate physiological attribute, and is uniquely powerful in woman.

Fuller realizes that if men were to concede that woman has such a unique and powerful gift, they might even use this to further infantilize women. Understanding this danger, she reiterates that precisely because women are especially apt to inspiration and intuition, a balance must be sought between the intellect and inspiration. “Woman,” she explains, “who combine this organization with creative genius, are very commonly unhappy at present. They see too much to act in conformity with those around them, and their quick impulses seem folly to those who do not discern the motives” (91). “This,” Fuller claims, “is an unusual effect of the apparition of genius...because harmony, an obvious order and self-restraining decorum, is most expected from her” (91). These women, “who seem overladen with electricity, frighten those around them,” especially, Fuller claims, a “woman, whose depth of eye and powerful motion announced the conductor of the mysterious fluid” (91-92). Fuller explains that if these women are linked to an overbearing, restrictive man, “It is the cruelest of errors” (92). “Yet,” she claims, “allow room enough, and the electric fluid will be found to invigorate and embellish, not destroy life” (92).

“Sickness,” Fuller argues, “is the frequent result of this overcharged existence” (92). “To this region,” she suggests, “however, misunderstood or interpreted with presumptuous carelessness, belong the phenomena of magnetism, or mesmerism, as it is now often called,

where the trance of the Ecstatica purports to be produced by the agency of one human being on another, instead of, as in her case, direct from the spirit” (92). Fuller addresses here a controversial topic of special interest to her: mesmerism. Much is at stake for Fuller with mesmerism, or, as it was alternately labeled, animal magnetism. She herself frequently took mesmeric treatments, and claims that they helped treat the symptoms of both severe headaches and a spinal curvature from which she suffered, perhaps due to a bout of typhoid fever as a child. Deborah Manson claims that Fuller most likely acquired her initial knowledge of mesmerism from Joseph Deleuze’s *Practical Instruction in Animal Magnetism*, which was extremely popular, at least in certain circles, in both Providence, RI, where she was teaching in the late 1830’s and in Boston (Manson 305). Manson recounts that Fuller had an enduring fascination with mesmerism, which she used for both physical relief and spiritual transcendence. Fuller had access to several noteworthy figures in the area.¹³

Many of Fuller’s peers seemed to think that mesmerism was nothing more than psychological manipulation. Credulous women as they saw it, placing themselves under the power of unscrupulous men. Others thought that a more sinister force was at work. Nathaniel Hawthorne, Edgar Allan Poe, Orestes Brownson, and many other less influential writers found in mesmerism compelling and timely material for their fiction.¹⁴ Various other works were published on mesmerism including the provocative *Confessions of a Mesmer*. The work, the

¹³ Fuller initially witnessed a well-known medium, Loraina Brackett, first-hand while she was in Providence. Manson also notes that Fuller, while revising the article that would become in its full-length version *Woman in the Nineteenth Century*, received treatments from Dr. Theodore Ledger, a Frenchman, and author of *Animal Magnetism; or, Psycodunamy* (308).

¹⁴ In both *The Blithedale Romance* and *The House of Seven Gables* Hawthorne deals extensively with mesmerism, and in both of the works Hawthorne suggests that mesmerism is something, if not supernaturally evil, and least morally repugnant. Poe’s 1844 short story “Mesmeric Revelation,” tells the story of a mesmerist actually held a conversation with a patient who had died—the point being that mesmerism and death are so close as to be indistinguishable. Orestes Brownson, in his 1854 book *The Spirit-Rapper*, a not-quite-fiction indictment of many of the spiritualist practices of nineteenth century New England, argues that demonic forces are behind mesmerism and the spirit-rapping of the time.

author of which is unknown, depicts deliberate manipulation by a skilled Mesmerist. While, as Todd Aldridge notes, the “author’s confession is tame by modern standards of decency” (14), he did use his knowledge of mesmerism to persuade his wife to marry him and cure the fickleness of his associate’s fiancé.

Fuller once tried to convince Emerson to join her in viewing the clairvoyant Anna Q. T. Parsons, but Emerson politely declined, deferentially referencing his skepticism of the practice.¹⁵ Fuller’s close friend Sophia Peabody, fiancé and eventual wife of Nathaniel Hawthorne, often took part in mesmeric activities with Fuller, of which Sophia’s husband was derisive.¹⁶ The main concern regarding mesmerism was, understandably, the fear that women would be under the control, whether preternatural or psychological, of either a spirit twisting and turning through the ether or a less than honorable man. Fuller, however, argues that this is decidedly not the case with mesmerism. Manson makes the argument that Fuller’s interest in mesmerism led her to influences beyond Emerson’s dominating presence and, consequently, allowed for her future intellectual development. Manson argues that: “mesmerism significantly influenced Fuller’s life and work, and a consideration of her involvement in the popular nineteenth century science is instructive in understanding her formulation of a provocative feminist ideology” (299).

Fuller’s use of mesmerism was extensive, even to the point that she would induce trances upon herself for both pain relief and to partake in communication with spirits. Numerous of her writings address mesmerism and altered spiritual states, but, despite the fact that Fuller communicates these experiences quite explicitly, it is common to describe them as myths or

¹⁵ Manson provides this anecdote and explains that Emerson, never wanting to offend his friends while alive, sent not only a letter apologizing to Fuller but also a letter apologizing to Ms. Parson’s as well. He says that, “Certainly [his] taste would not lead [him] to seek preternatural facts...[and that] he see[s] no hope for [his] proficiency in neurology” (Emerson qtd. in Manson 298).

¹⁶ I will address this dynamic in more detail in the next chapter, where Hawthorne and Fuller’s dispute of mesmerism serves to draw into relief their views on the meaning behind social and technological progress.

myth development.¹⁷ Among the scholars, such as Manson, who do acknowledge the depth and sincerity of Fuller's participation in mesmerism, they seem to have not made a connection that once mentioned seems quite obvious. Fuller's frequent encounters with daemons and spirits should sound strikingly familiar to the experiences of another mystic, Swedenborg.

In the *Memoirs of Margaret Fuller Osolli*, William Henry Channing explains a particular passage of Fuller's writings in which she recalls a particular period that, in Channing's words was, "ever after, to her, an earnest that she was of the Elect" (99). Fuller explains her experience:

I was in a state of celestial happiness, which lasted a great while. For months I was all radiant with faith, and love, and life. I began to be myself. Night and day were equally beautiful, and the lowest and highest equally holy. Before, it had seemed as if the Divine only gleamed on me; but then it poured into and through me a tide of light. I have passed down from the rosy mountain now; but I do not forget its pure air, nor how the storms looked as they rolled beneath my feet. I have received my assurance, and if the shadows should lie upon me for a century, they could never make me forgetful of the true hour. (98-99)

¹⁷ Several examples of this exist, including the work of Bruce Mills, who argues that Fuller and Poe, through their writings on mesmerism were exploring the nature of authorship. This is to a large degree accurate, but it is ancillary to Fuller's main goal, which was to explain what she believed was the truth of her mesmeric visions. Another example of this is the work of Jeffrey Steele, who interprets Fuller's recollections of her mesmeric experiences as a conscious mythmaking. Steele argues that, "[c]onstructing images of an instinctive force that she intuited within...she evokes a female creative energy that had been consigned to a political "unconscious" outside of masculine domination" ("Introduction" xviii). Fuller's texts, in this vein, *a la* Frederic Jameson, represent not the work of an autonomous individual *per se*, but the smallest discreetly observable utterance pragmatically available to our hermeneutic capacities as a field upon several concentric levels of analysis, all of them focusing upon the symbolic--in terms of both semiotics and ideology--value of the text. This praxis may allow, perhaps even aid, our understanding of Fuller's place in a "history now conceived in its vastest sense of the sequence of modes of production and the succession and destiny of the various human social formations, from prehistoric life to whatever far future history has in store for us" (Jameson 56). It does not, however, do justice to the individual behind the text, who suffered from intense pain and alienation, and found a way to transcend those limitations. The danger of the approach of Steele is that Fuller becomes primarily, a historical pit-stop on the road to our current era—we value Fuller because we see the ancestor of our current thought. Our understanding of Fuller may necessarily be diachronic to a certain degree, but we still have a long way to go in terms of coming to grips with even the details of Fuller's life and works, which should be our initial goal, and one fully worthy and demanding of our efforts. Placing her in the chronicles of the "history of today" should come second.

“This last passage,” Channing explains, “describes a peculiar illumination, to which Margaret often referred as the period when her earthly being culminated, and when in the noon-tide of loving enthusiasm, she felt wholly at one with God, with Man, and the Universe” (99). Once again, it might be easy, considering the effusive and allusive nature of Fuller’s prose, to claim she speaks exclusively in metaphors here, but it is particularly after this period, and this experience specifically, that Fuller began to delve ever more deeply into mesmerism and her self-induced trances. The belief that after a certain spiritual transcendence or salvific experience a new spiritual sense is awakened is not unique to Swedenborgism, but Fuller’s particular description, and the trajectory her religious expression followed afterward are remarkably similar to Swedenborg’s.

While Swedenborg was in his 40’s, in the early 1740’s, he had an ecstatic visionary experience that confirmed to him that he should leave off his scientific work and dedicate the rest of his life to the exploration and understanding of the spiritual realm, which remained his purpose into his 80’s (Jonsson 122-123). After this period Swedenborg claimed to have conversed quite regularly and amicably with various denizens of the spiritual realm, including those from non-Christian mythology. Swedenborg kept a matter-of-fact record of his interactions with the spiritual realm. He used his understanding of anatomy learned from his earlier anatomical work done at the Hague¹⁸ to offer a remarkably detailed physiological explanation of the workings of his visions. He believed that thought was a kind of inner speech, which then led to actual physiological alterations in the brain. These physiological changes in the brain then directly effect what he calls the “spiritual fluid” (Jonsson 139). Swedenborg’s explanation relied

¹⁸ Among his various contributions during this time, Swedenborg theorized that various organs had smaller units that were dedicated to the same function as their aggregate versions, i.e. muscles fibers for muscles, neurons for the nervous tissue. His last project before he left science behind was to explain these correspondences mathematically (Jonsson 90).

on the presence of a spiritual fluid, which served as the medium between the thoughts of individuals on a, currently, imperceptible level. Swedenborg, along with everyone else at the time, had no way to understand the nature of sound, but his theory involving a universally present fluid corresponds quite well to our current understanding of how humans transmit sound. Much as verbal speech causes distortions in the fluid of the air, sending forth waves that cause perceptible vibrations, communication on a spiritual level occurs through the medium of this spiritual fluid. This spiritual ether, in Swedenborg's estimation, functions like an alternate, spiritual atmosphere.

Fuller's explanations of mesmerism and the particular genius of women also imply a certain affinity, to say the least, with Swedenborg. Fuller wrote reviews of works on Swedenborg and mesmerism while serving as an editor of the *New York Daily Tribune* from 1844-1846. In both reviews, Fuller seems to be defending her own experiences as much as she is mesmerism or Swedenborg. On February 17, 1845, Fuller published a review of Stanley J. Grimes's¹⁹ *Etherology; or the Philosophy of Mesmerism and Phrenology*.²⁰ Fuller opens her review not by questioning mesmerism but by accepting as a fact that the controversial practice is more than humbug. Fuller begins by saying that, "Man is always trying to get charts and directions for the super-sensual element in which he finds himself involuntarily moving" (*NYDT* Feb, 17, 1845). Fuller explains that there is a democratization of science, which marks the spirit of her time. "We believe" Fuller writes, "that it is pure democracy to rejoice that, in this department as in others, it is no longer some one great genius that concentrates within himself the vital energy of his time"

¹⁹ Grimes's dubious credentials are listed in the *Tribune* as such: "Stanley J. Grimes, Consellor at Law, formerly President of the Western Phrenological Society, Professor of Medical Jurisprudence in the Castleton Medical College, and author of *A New System of Phrenology*."

²⁰ The full, and certainly comprehensive, title of Grimes's book is *Etherology; or The Philosophy of Mesmerism and Phrenology: Including a New Philosophy of Sleeping and Consciousness, with a Review of the Pretensions of Neurology and Phreno-Magnetism*.

(*NYDT* Feb, 17, 1845). “We see,” she continues, “a movement corresponding with this in the region of exact science, and we have no doubt that in the course of fifty years a new circulation will be comprehended as clearly as the circulation of the blood is now” (*NYDT* Feb, 17, 1845). Fuller believes, as did Henry James Sr., that there will be empirical verification of the spiritual realm upon which she places the hopes of women and society. All lines of inquiry, Fuller believes, lead to an explanation of the spirit/matter question. “In metaphysics, in phrenology, in animal magnetism, in electricity, in chemistry,” Fuller argues, “the tendency is the same, even when conclusions seem most dissonant” (*NYDT* Feb, 17, 1845). “The mind,” Fuller continues, “presses nearer home to the seat of consciousness the more intimate law and rule of life, and old limits become fluid beneath the fire of thought. We are learning much, and it will be a grand music, that shall be played on this organ of many pipes” (*NYDT* Feb, 17, 1845). As Fuller makes clear here, and in *Woman in the Nineteenth Century*, truth, both scientific and spiritual, if a difference exists, will lead to the freedom, equality, and ultimately, harmony.

Fuller’s review of Grimes seems to echo her own experiences, as described by Fuller and Channing in her *Memoirs*. A period of physical pain is followed by tranquility and assurance, and, then, a heightened awareness of the spiritual realm. She, in defending and explaining Grimes, seems to be as much defending herself: “Sometimes, indeed, for long periods, a life of continual activity in supplying bodily wants or warding off bodily dangers will make him inattentive to the circumstances of this other life.” “Then,” Fuller continues, “in an interval of leisure, he will start to find himself pervaded by the power of this more subtle and searching energy, and will turn his thoughts, with new force, to scrutinize its nature and its promises” (*NYDT* Feb, 17, 1846).

As the editor of arguably the most influential newspaper in the United States Fuller had the opportunity to defend both mesmerism and Swedenborg on the front page, and defend herself against her critics, of which there were many; she makes good use of the space. She offers her own personal experience in support of the legitimacy of mesmerism. Fuller, in her review of Grimes, tells the story of her visit to a young, blind girl who, while in a trance, both diagnosed and cured her of a severe headache. Fuller saw the girl again, several years later, in an asylum for the blind. The girl failed to recognize Fuller. Fuller relates, however, that the girl, though “no longer a somnambulist,” was still “through a nervous disease very susceptible to magnetic influences” (*NYDT* Feb, 17, 1846). The girl gave a brief note to Fuller as she departed, which read: “The ills that Heaven decrees / The brave with courage bear” (*NYDT* Feb, 17, 1846). Fuller offers her interpretation:

Others may explain this as they will, to me it was a token that the same affinity that had acted before, gave the same knowledge; for the writer was at the time ill in the same way as before. It also seemed to indicate that the somnambulic trance was only a form of the higher development, the sensibility to more subtle influences, in terms of Mr. Grimes, a susceptibility to Etherium. (*NYDT* Feb, 17, 1845)

Hence, while the blind girl is more susceptible to a “nervous disease,” her ability to operate on the spiritual level was heightened. What is important, however, is that this girl operated without the aid of a male mesmerist, and that her abilities in “Etherium” lead her to once again comfort Fuller. The heightened female ability to function in this other medium leads, in Fuller’s mind, to empathy and kindness.

When Fuller makes the argument in her review of Grimes that the “democratization” of knowledge resulting from both scientific advancement and mesmerism will lead to equality, she seems to be thinking particularly of women. If we consider Transcendentalism as, Perry Miller argues, a form “religious expression” (ix), we might call Fuller’s own iteration of that expression mystical hyper-Protestantism. Until the time that science can prove that women have a valuable, even superior, understanding of the spiritual realm, Fuller defends that insight, through her defense of mesmerism and Swedenborg’s mysticism, as it provides an authority beyond the reach of both a positivism and religious structure inherently biased against the authority of women. Her pleas, upon the front page of the *New York Daily Tribune* and in *Woman in the Nineteenth Century* are for the survival of that authority.

Chapter Four: “New Science or Old Humbug”: Technology and Devilry in Hawthorne’s Fiction

Critics and historians since Perry Miller’s *The New England Mind: From Colony to Province* have accepted the truism that much of Hawthorne’s fiction serves as a national, or at least regional,¹ allegory for a larger American transition away from Puritanism and a reckoning with the accompanying legacy.² Hawthorne’s struggle with intergenerational guilt has become foundational to the study of not only Hawthorne, but also many other American writers.

Hawthorne, while serving as the American expression of intergenerational guilt and creative catharsis, also often bears the label of reactionary because of his, ambivalent at best, stance on the reform movements of his day that have since become elements of mainstream agreement.³

Nearly every critical work on Hawthorne necessarily has to deal with his complaint that “America is now wholly given over to a damned mob of scribbling women” (1855; 17:304).

Hawthorne’s remark has been interpreted as outright misogyny, veiled jealousy,⁴ or a rash slip

¹ Michael Davitt Bell, in *Hawthorne and the Historical Romance of New England*, published in 1941, one of the first works to focus on history in Hawthorne’s works, argues that among the most effective ways of understanding Hawthorne’s fiction is comparing it to the “Matter of New England” (4). Essentially, Hawthorne’s fiction serves as the literary chronicle of the trajectory of New England history.

² The consummate example of this cited by critics is Hawthorne’s discussion of the Salem witchcraft trials in the opening to *The Scarlet Letter*, “The Custom House.” This also is much of the meaning behind Hawthorne’s allegorical “Young Goodman Brown,” according to, among others, James R. Mellow in *Hawthorne in His Times*, published in 1980 (60). Philip McFarland also claims that guilt regarding his ancestors’ involvement in the Salem Witch Trials led Hawthorne to change the spelling of his name (18). Hugo McPherson goes so far as to analyze Hawthorne’s fiction as “a myth for the New World” (ix).

³ Particularly, here, I mean Hawthorne’s derision of abolitionists and what some critics argue is a resistance to equal rights for women. In one of his letters to one of his abolitionist friends, Hawthorne says, “like every other Abolitionist, you look at matters with an awful squint, which distorts everything within your line of vision; and its queer, though natural, that you think everybody squints except yourselves” (1857; 18:89). His take on the women question I deal with in more detail as the chapter continues.

⁴ This is essentially the position taken by Melinda M. Ponder and John L. Idol Jr. in the Introduction of the volume they edited, *Hawthorne and Women: Engendering and Expanding the Hawthorne Tradition*, published in 1999. They speculate that “dismissing women writers as ‘scribblers’ no doubt owes more to his jealousy of the financial success of certain women authors than to his regret that they were not artistically accomplished” (2).

from an author who was, for his time, atypically supportive of women writers and intellectuals.⁵ Often the fixation upon one controversial line from one of Hawthorne's letters has not led us to understand his works, his times, or ourselves that much better.

These two main lines of inquiry, understanding Hawthorne as national guilt/catharsis and debating his perspective on the women's rights issues of the time, are both subsumed within Hawthorne's perspective upon historical progress in general, and perhaps understanding his perspective on that broader issue would help us understand the more focused issues as well. Of course, during his time, that would necessarily include the questions of women's rights and the Puritan legacy that have been the focus of Hawthorne criticism. Hawthorne's commentary, however, upon progress as represented by science, technology, and human understanding in general has remained to a large degree unexplored, even while various insightful works have been published exploring these elements in the work of Emerson, Thoreau, Fuller, Poe and others.

Perhaps this is because the examples of scientific advances and technology as they appear in Hawthorne's works rarely resemble the technology or science of today. While mesmerism⁶ was considered, along with phrenology, to be a burgeoning science by much of the American population, it fades into the Romantic and Gothic backdrops of *The House of Seven Gables* and *The Blithedale Romance* precisely because Hawthorne is able to depict it in such a mystical and ominous fashion. He conveys his fear of the demonic aspects of mesmerism adroitly enough that we feel them. A daguerreotypist, such as Holgrave Maude in *The House of Seven Gables*,

⁵ John T. Frederick makes this argument in his article "Hawthorne's Scribbling Women." Frederick makes the point that in other letters to Ticknor, Hawthorne offered a good deal of praise for several women writers when asked the question of who the best writers of the time were (231-233).

⁶ To be fair, there is a fair deal of scholarship that addresses mesmerism in Hawthorne's work, but they do not see it often as indicative of his perspective on technology in the same sense that I do in this chapter. Notable recent books on this subject include Samuel Coale's *Mesmerism and Hawthorne: Mediums of American Romance*. Coale focuses upon how mesmerism serves as a conceptual and aesthetic device in Hawthorne's fiction. In essence, he mesmerizes his characters, audience, etc.

sounds quaintly out of date, a curio, but the chemistry behind the daguerreotype was, for the 1850's, quite advanced.⁷ The symbol of the railroad in Hawthorne's short story, "The Celestial Railroad," seems to be overshadowed by the heavy allegory, even to the point that the quite obvious commentary upon technology often goes unmentioned—despite the fact that the train had been around a shorter time for Hawthorne than stealth bombers and nuclear submarines have been as of today. Hawthorne's story, "The Birthmark," relies upon anxiety regarding the pursuit of technological perfection, but once again the obvious Gothic and Romantic elements of the story seem to lead us away from that fact—in an age well aware of the ubiquity of cosmetic orthodontics, plastic surgery, and tanning beds, how does "The Birthmark" not ring true?

Some writers have addressed this issue to some degree, and the most well known exploration of Hawthorne's views on technological advance is Leo Marx's *The Machine in The Garden*. In order to introduce the key trope of his book, Marx relates that Hawthorne, as he sought peace and solitude at a secluded area in the woods labeled "Sleepy Hallow," was shaken out of his repose by a train whistle. Hawthorne, in the midst of using nature metaphorically to describe human experience, encounters the sounds of the train. Marx explains, "What begins as a conventional tribute to the pleasures of withdrawal from the world—a simple pleasure fantasy—is transformed by the interruption of the machine into a far more complex state of mind" (15). Marx's use of Hawthorne's recollection of the Sleepy Hallow episode, the first and foremost in his book, further establishes Hawthorne's place as the prototypical American fiction writer—this time with regard to the American pastoral. With the publication of *The Machine in the Garden*, Hawthorne becomes even more of a national allegory for canonical American fiction.

⁷ The patent for the daguerreotype was obtained in France in 1839, and so photographed images had only existed for 11 years, anywhere in the world, when Hawthorne wrote *The House of Seven Gables*. The chemistry is necessarily technical, and it was only after accidentally spilling mercury that Daguerre realized that an image could be captured. The original process involved careful use of copper plates, iodized silver, mercury and special salts.

The point that Marx makes about Hawthorne, and American literature in general, is striking, although not unpredictable, in how materialist it is. Marx claims that “the interruption of the machine” essentially leads to a greater understanding, or, in his words, “a far more complex state of mind” (15). Technological innovation, or in a more fundamental sense an advancement in the means of production, have lead to a heightened understanding, a more sophisticated writer and person, and, symbolically, nation. Material advancement has lead to conflict, and the American pastoral defined by the “machine in the garden” metaphor is a the reactionary antithesis of this—once again Hawthorne allegorically serves as the American psyche struggling to accept inevitable progress. Intellectual advancement, in both Hawthorne and American culture, is the ultimate result, according to Marx. This technological determinism is the foundation of Marx’s argument in *The Machine in the Garden*. Hawthorne, as the allegorical American, must reconcile this, without retreating into what Marx labels a “naïve” pastoralism he blames for a laundry list of diverse cultural bugaboos.⁸

To be fair, Marx only invokes Hawthorne to make a point that he could have made with many other authors, and his is not in any way a detailed study of Hawthorne’s fiction or time. The question, however, is whether there is any good reason, beyond Hawthorne’s inveterate reputation, that he serves this allegorical function. There may not be an easy answer, especially considering the complexity and ambiguity of Hawthorne’s fiction. There is, however, one strain

⁸ Marx is quite expansive in what he blames on this “naïve” pastoralism. Without an argument as to the mechanism, this metaphor, in its simple form, has taken on the chimerical form of many things, both cultural and political, that Marx despises: “An obvious example is the current ‘flight from the city.’ An inchoate longing for a more ‘natural’ environment enters into the contemptuous attitude that many Americans adopt toward urban life (with the result that we neglect our cities and desert them for the suburbs)... We see it in our politics, in the ‘localism’ invoked to oppose an adequate national system of education, in the power of the farm bloc in Congress, in the special economic favor shown to farming’ through government subsidies, and in state electoral systems that allow the rural population to retain a share of power grossly out of proportion to its size. It manifests itself in our leisure-time activities, in the piety toward the out-of-doors express in the wilderness cult and in our devotion to camping, hunting, fishing, picnicking, gardening, and so on” (5).

of thought, regarding history, progress and technology that has remained unexplored in Hawthorne's fiction and may be idiosyncratically, albeit not exclusively, American.

In the most basic sense, what we see in Hawthorne's fiction can be described as the conflation of two sources of, in a sense, extra-natural power: spiritualism and technology.⁹ In nearly all of Hawthorne's works where pseudo-science or technology appear, they take on the Gothic form, and what we fear is the unseen power. Hawthorne displays the affinities between the mesmerist's hands caressing the air in close proximity to his medium, the smoke coming from the unfathomed reaction of the chemicals in the test-tube, and the train propelled by a motive power unseen.¹⁰

The conflation of the spiritual and technological has appeared time and again in American culture. In a more complicated manner, the role of these two forces in history is something that Henry Adams addresses in *The Education of Henry Adams*, published in 1907, when he compares the dynamo and the Virgin. What Adams does, however, is explain that humanity finds its impetus in either spiritual awe, or in awe of technology—human ingenuity replaces belief. This point has become a cliché now, but Adam's understanding of history is not as applicable to Hawthorne as to other writers, and may not even be as useful in understanding United States' history as it is in understanding European history. Hawthorne's distrust of technology, spiritualism, and, to some degree, reform, is a distrust of the perfectibility of human knowledge and power. Emerson and Fuller hoped that a unified understanding of the scientific and the spiritual would lead to a brighter future, but in an age when Emerson, Fuller, Fourier,

⁹ Hawthorne's fiction has been explained as a hybrid of genres before, and there is certainly something to this line of thought. Perhaps most influential has been Richard Chase's oft cited claim that Hawthorne's blending of elements of realism and romance is an important formal technique of American fiction (Chase 67-70).

¹⁰ These are the menaces depicted in *The House of Seven Gables*, "The Birthmark," and "The Celestial Railroad" respectively.

Etzler, and others thought that humanity would soon have the answers, Hawthorne had his doubts.

Hawthorne's intentional conflation of the spiritual and scientific expresses the affinities between their respective functions in society, and informs his perspective on the reform movements of his time. Hawthorne's short stories rely heavily upon allegory, although deciphering those allegories or arriving at a comprehensive understanding of those stories proves difficult. Included in the collection *Mosses from an Old Manse*, published in 1846, are two stories of particular interest: "Young Goodman Brown," and "The Celestial Railroad." Both were published prior to their inclusion in the short story collection,¹¹ and they provide a particular insight into how Hawthorne depicts both technology and the supernatural.

"Young Goodman Brown," is the story of a Puritan resident of Salem who takes an allegorical journey one night through the woods surrounding the town. He encounters an avatar of himself holding a black staff carved to resemble the head of a serpent. He also meets another woman of the town, who complains of the trouble of having to walk so far from one place to the next. Brown's dark doppelganger then gives her the magical staff, which immediately whisks her away to her destination. As Brown continues through the forest he encounters various members of his Salem community, and thinks he may have encountered his wife, Faith. Eventually, emotionally and physically fatigued from the journey and his suspicions of his neighbors, he uses the staff crafted for him by his dubious other, which takes him to a dark witches' Sabbath in the woods where he encounters not only all of the members of his community, but Faith as well. He eventually "escapes" from the witches' Sabbath when he yells to his Faith, "Look up to Heaven, and resist the Wicked One!" ("Young Goodman Brown" 88). Brown never is able to determine

¹¹ "Young Goodman Brown" was originally published in 1835 in *New England Magazine*, and "The Celestial Railroad" was originally published the *United States Magazine and Democratic Review* in 1843.

whether or not the experience was a dream, and so he spends the rest of his life dogged by paranoia of his neighbors, wife, and doubting the destination of his immortal soul.

A relatively large body of scholarship has been focused on “Young Goodman Brown,” but relatively little on another allegory from the same collection, “The Celestial Railroad.” There seem to be two main reasons for this. The first is that “Young Goodman Brown” is a much more complicated and ambiguous text, and, despite its allegorical nature, invites sophisticated readings. While some scholars believe it to be an indictment of Calvinism and Salem, others believe it to be a subtle defense of the Salem witch trials.¹² “The Celestial Railroad,” is, on the other hand, much less opaque, and does not fit in well with the typical critical paradigm that explains Hawthorne as the historically allegorical neo-Puritan iconoclast. In fact, as Ryan Cordell has noted,¹³ “The Celestial Railroad” had an extensive publication history among Evangelical denominational literature during the 19th century because it was read as a straightforward Jeremiad—even being transposed into tract form and distributed. The phenomenon here is particularly interesting. Two stories by the same writer, from the same collection, have served to bolster his image in the academy as the representative of the American transition away from traditional religious authority, and, among denominational publications, as the voice cajoling America back to that ole timey religion.

“The Celestial Railroad” is what we might label 19th century fan fiction, and is John Bunyan’s *Pilgrim’s Progress* set in antebellum America. In Hawthorne’s retelling, the narrator meets Mr. Smooth-it-away, a railroad executive, who promises to take him on a newly built

¹² James Mellow argues that Hawthorne includes two plaintiffs at the Salem Witch Trials in this story and depicts them as actual witnesses in order to vindicate the role of his family in the trials (Mellow 60). Philip McFarland, among others, makes the argument that the story is allegorically critical of Calvinist theology (McFarland 24).

¹³ This is a point that Ryan Cordell has made. He has compiled a list of the reprinting of the story throughout the 19th century. He notes that the story appeared in various versions among various religious denominations and even in the literature of the Oenida perfectionist community. It was not uncommon for these publications to alter the text to more adequately fit their particular theological point.

railroad from Destruction, their current city, to the Celestial City. Along the way, they pass various boundaries that appeared in *Pilgrim's Progress*: the Slough of Despond, the Wicket Gate, the Interpreter's House, Hill Difficulty, the Valley of Humiliation, the Dark Valley, the Valley of the Shadow of Death, and Vanity Fair. In taking a shot at his sanguine contemporaries, Hawthorne has replaced the monsters Pope and Pagan with a new threat, "German by birth...called Giant Transcendentalist" ("The Celestial Railroad" 197). "But," the narrator explains, "as to his form, his features, his substance, and his nature generally, it is the chief peculiarity of this huge miscreant, that neither he for himself, nor anybody for him, has ever been able to describe them" ("The Celestial Railroad" 197). The various characters from Bunyan's work who helped Pilgrim along his way have all either been bought off or sent away through Mr. Smooth-it-away's skullduggery. The narrator eventually boards a steam-powered fairy, and, once it is too late, he realizes that he is not bound for the Celestial City and that Mr. Smooth-it-away is a fiend with all the traditional accoutrement: fiery nostrils, crooked smile, red eyes. At the end of the story, the narrator wakes and realizes that it was all a dream.

Several of the similarities between these stories are obvious, and quite common in Hawthorne's fiction, such as the use of allegory, and the dream as framing device. The key difference is that the fiend in "The Celestial Railroad" makes use of technological innovation, and the promise of a fast train to utopia. While Brown in "Young Goodman Brown" is whisked away by a magical staff, not to his desired location but to the witches Sabbath, the narrator in the "The Celestial Railroad" rides in comfort on the train and the steam-powered ferry not to his destination, but an evil alternative. Both the ominous staff and railroad serve the same purpose. The chimeras that haunt Hawthorne's dreams, regardless whether the subterfuge be based on technology or witchcraft, above all tempt humanity with the desire for ease and the denial of the

reality of human suffering, something Hawthorne believes they have in common with the utopians of his time.

Of course, Hawthorne lived amongst a flurry of utopian activity. The real life trajectory of Joseph Adolphus Etzler lines up quite well with Hawthorne's allegory. At best his followers lost their money, at worst they lost their lives. Those who believed Etzler's promise of a paradise, achievable within ten years through mechanical innovation, followed him to Venezuela and died either there or on the return journey.¹⁴ Hawthorne himself was a stockholder in the utopian community Brook Farm, founded by Transcendentalist and former Unitarian minister George Ripley.¹⁵ He lived there for a short time, and based his novel *The Blithedale Romance*, published in 1852, to some degree upon his time there.

Mesmerism plays a key role in *The Blithedale Romance*, and serves as the perfect example of the conflation of the spiritual and the scientific in Hawthorne's fiction. Mesmerism during Hawthorne's time occupied a liminal space, and existed somewhere in the haze of the unexplained. Anton Mesmer's own treatments often resembled what Hawthorne might have thought of as demon possession more than medical treatment. Mesmer was extremely popular, although many questioned the validity of both his theory of ubiquitous ether and the efficacy of his treatments. Because of demand for his services, Mesmer eventually had to magnetize people *en masse*, and did this by placing them all in a tub of water touching one another surrounded by bent iron rods. Many of the patients would go into violent convulsions. Wracked by paroxysms, they would scream, grunt, and gurgle as Mesmer caressed them one at a time (Winter 12-16). Such was the treatment prescribed by the patriarch of animal magnetism to cure maladies

¹⁴ Refer to my introduction for Etzler's more detailed story.

¹⁵ Sterling Delano's *The Dark Side of Utopia* offers the most complete account of the Brook Farm community, and *The Autobiography of Brook Farm*, edited by Henry W. Sams, is a collection of many of the most important primary documents associated with the community.

ranging from back pain to blindness. Howard Kerr makes the point that America's obsession with mesmerism occurred concurrently with a rash of spirit rapping¹⁶ (Kerr 6-8), and certainly Hawthorne witnessed the interest in both of these phenomena.

Hawthorne's wife, Sophia Peabody, dabbled in mesmerism with encouragement from her friend Margaret Fuller. In a letter written to Sophia in 1841, while he was staying at the Brook Farm community, Hawthorne urges his wife not to take part in trances:

[B]elovedest, my spirit is moved to talk with thee to-day about these magnetic miracles, and to beseech thee to take no part in them. I am unwilling that a power should be exercised on thee, of which we know neither the origin nor consequence, and the phenomena seem rather calculated to bewilder us, than to teach us any truths about the present or future state of being...I have no faith whatever that people are raised to the seventh heaven, or to any heaven at all, or, that they gain any insight into the mysteries of life beyond death; by means of this strange science. Without distrusting that the phenomena which thou taltest me of...have really occurred, I think that they are to be accounted for as the result of physical and material, not of a spiritual, influence...And what delusion can be more lamentable and mischievous, than to mistake the physical and material for the spiritual? What so miserable as to lose the soul's true, though hidden, knowledge and consciousness of heaven, in the mist of an earth-born vision? (*The Selected Letters of Nathaniel Hawthorne* 95-96)

¹⁶ Spirit-rapping was a phenomenon that caused quite a sensation beginning in the 1830's. Usually, young females would knock on a hard surface and have the knocks answered, allegedly by a spirit from the other side. The knocks would serve as a code to answer questions that supposedly could only be answered by the deceased. Herman Melville's short story, "The Apple-Tree Table," is a spoof of spirit-rapping. Orestes Brownson, in his book *The Spirit-Rapper: An Autobiography*, claims that demonic forces are behind the phenomenon.

Hawthorne is not only unconvinced of the validity of animal magnetism, but he wants to keep the spiritual and the physical realms separate. He dislikes mesmerism especially because it blends the two into what he labels the “strange science” and “miracle of mesmerism.”

Hawthorne rejects Margaret Fuller and Henry James Sr.’s belief, derived from Swedenborg, that the spiritual world was empirically verifiable, and would be explained as science advances.

Hawthorne, above all, wants to keep the other side on the other side.

While in his letter Hawthorne seems to lean toward explaining mesmerism as, to use an anachronistic term, psychological, the depiction of the practice in his fiction is more ambiguous and, once again, results in the conflation of the supernatural and the scientific. In the opening chapter of *The Blithedale Romance*, the narrator, Miles Coverdale, describes seeing the Veiled Lady. “[F]or the benefit of such of my readers,” Coverdale explains, “as are unacquainted with her now forgotten celebrity...she was a phenomenon in the mesmeric line; one of the earliest that had indicated the birth of a new science, or the revival of an old humbug” (5). Of course, Coverdale is not necessarily a proxy for Hawthorne, but his explanation of mesmerism, ambiguity included, seems to resemble the perspective Hawthorne presents in his letter to Sophia. Coverdale describes the development of the mesmeric milieu: “Now-a-days, in the management of his “subject,” “clairvoyant,” or “medium,” the exhibitor affects the simplicity and openness of scientific experiment; and even if he profess to tread a step or two across the boundaries of the spiritual world, yet carries with him the laws of our actual life, and extends them over his preternatural conquests” (5-6). Coverdale, impressed with the Veiled Lady, explains her purpose in his story about Blithedale: “Her pretensions, however, whether miraculous or otherwise, have little to do with the present narrative; except, indeed, that I had propounded, for the Veiled Lady’s prophetic solution, a query as to the success of our Blithedale

enterprise” (6). Coverdale reveals that her “response, by-the-by, was of the true Sibylline stamp, nonsensical in its first aspect, yet, on closer study, unfolding a variety of interpretations, one of which has certainly accorded with the event” (6). As we might expect, Hawthorne leaves some ambiguity with regards to the preternatural abilities of the Veiled Lady.

Certainly, Hawthorne means to associate, in *The Blithedale Romance*, the misguided credulity of the utopian reformers with the prophecy of the Veiled Lady. She, perhaps accurately, predicts the inevitable failure of the Blithedale community. Hawthorne connects the failure of the community, which the leader, Mr. Hollingsworth, wants to turn into a retreat to reform convicts, to mesmerism. He also associates the Veiled Lady’s methods with that of Zenobia, the woman’s rights advocate who is a part of the Blithedale community.¹⁷ “Zenobia,” Coverdale explains, “by-the-by, as I suppose you know, is merely her public name; a sort of mask in which she comes before the world, retaining all the privileges of privacy—a contrivance, in short, like the drapery of the Veiled Lady, only a little more transparent” (8). Zenobia, the women’s rights activist engages in similar parlor tricks and self-deception as those who take part in the mesmeric rites. The belief in the perfectibility of humanity, to Hawthorne, is as much a sham as animal magnetism.

Coverdale even becomes susceptible for a while to the pleasant delusion. It is interesting that Hawthorne describes his experience as something of a daydream, a less intense form of the allegorical dream stories “The Celestial Railroad” and “Young Goodman Brown.” As Coverdale compares the early days at Blithedale to a daydream, he does so in less harsh terms than he does

¹⁷ Many critics have argued that, to a large degree, Zenobia represents Margaret Fuller, and that Priscilla perhaps represents Sophia Hawthorne. A quite detailed and compelling exploration of this is Thomas R. Mitchell’s *Hawthorne’s Fuller Mystery*. While there are a number of striking similarities between Zenobia and Fuller, it is difficult to tell exactly how much Hawthorne meant to reveal by these associations. In the opening of the book he claims that the “characters...are entirely fictitious. It would be...a most grievous wrong to his former excellent associates, were the Author to allow it to be supposed that he has been sketching any of their likenesses” (2).

at other times in the novel. Upon his arrival at Blithedale, Coverdale recalls, “Around such chill mockery of a fire, some few of us might sit on the withered leaves, spreading out each palm towards the imaginary warmth, and talk over our exploded scheme for beginning the life of Paradise anew” (11). “Paradise, indeed!” he continues, [n]obody else in the world, I am bold to affirm—nobody, at least, in our bleak little world of New England—had dreamed of Paradise, that day, except as the pole suggests the tropic” (12). “Nor,” Coverdale explains, could “with such materials at hand...the most skillful architect have constructed better imitation of Eve’s bower, than might be seen in the snow-hut of the Esquimax. But we made a summer of it, in spite of the wild drifts” (12). In the drear of winter, the utopians warm their nights scheming up their perfect future. When there are no cows to be milked or ditches to be dug, Hawthorne seems to be saying, melioration seems especially possible.

Coverdale, however, has a pleasant nostalgia when he remembers the early time at Blithedale, and while he realizes the inevitability of the failure of such experiments, he understands their allure: “The better life! Possibly, it would hardly look so, now; it is enough if it looked so, then” (13). “Yet,” Coverdale says, “after all, let us acknowledge it wiser, if not more sagacious, to follow out one’s day-dream to its natural consummation, although, if the vision have been worth having, it is certain never to be consummated otherwise than by a failure” (13-14). Whether this represents Hawthorne’s perspective is difficult to tell, but it does reflect to some degree his own experience at Brook Farm, which he seems to have enjoyed even as he was realizing that the community’s lofty vision of the future would never materialize. Early in the life of Brook Farm Hawthorne doubted its success, but stayed on for some time even when he thought the failure of the community was inevitable. In a letter written in July of 1841, Hawthorne defends the community’s founder, George Ripley, and reveals a quite touching

loyalty to his friend. He defends Ripley even while acknowledging the precarious nature of the enterprise by arguing that “[o]ur constraint has been entirely that of circumstances which were as much beyond his control as our own; and there is no way of escaping this constraint except by leaving the farm at once” (*Autobiography of Brook Farm* 22-23). Hawthorne “confess[es] that of late [his] hopes are never very sanguine,” but emphasizes, once again defending Ripley, that he forms his judgment “not from anything that has passed within the precincts of Brook Farm, but from external circumstances—from the improbability that adequate funds will be raised or that any feasible plan can be suggested without a very considerable capital” (*Autobiography of Brook Farm* 23). Hawthorne describes Mr. Ripley as displaying the same well-intentioned delusion of Mr. Hollingsworth in *The Blithedale Romance*: “His zeal will not permit him to doubt of eventual success” (*Autobiography of Brook Farm* 23). “You will see,” Hawthorne continues, “that there was no pressing necessity for me, or my fellow laborers, to dishearten Mr. Ripley by expressing dissatisfaction with our present mode of life. It is our wish to give his experiment a full and fair trial; and if his hopes are to be frustrated we should be loath to give him reason to attribute the failure to lack of energy or perseverance” (23). Hawthorne, though he knows the community will fail—here think of the prophecy of the Veiled Lady—still remains at the Brook Farm community and endures the drudgery of the farm.

Much as Brook Farm eventually collapsed, the fictional Blithedale fails as well, but before its failure Coverdale meets the only truly sinister character in the novel: Professor Westervelt. Professor Westervelt is the handler and magnetizer for the Veiled Lady, who had been rescued from him by Mr. Hollingsworth and brought to the Blithedale community where she becomes Zenobia’s protégée and goes by the name of Priscilla. The dashing Professor

Westervelt intimates that he is not a spiritual person, and, in describing his clairvoyant, and meal ticket, he reveals this:

She is one of those delicate, nervous young creatures, not uncommon in New England, and whom I suppose to have become what we find them by the gradual refining away of the physical system among your women. Some philosophers choose to glorify this habit of body by terming it spiritual; but, in my opinion, it is rather the effect of unwholesome food, bad air, lack of out-door exercise, and neglect of bathing on the part of these damsels and their female progenitors. (106)

Even while Professor Westervelt markets Priscilla as a spiritual medium professionally, he derides the belief that physical frailty suggests spiritual fortitude. Criticizing the perspective of those like Fuller who claim that women, especially those suffering from nervous disorders, have unique gifts.

While *The Blithedale Romance* does not have the overt supernatural elements of many of Hawthorne's other works, the mesmerist is described very much as a demon. Westervelt first addressed Coverdale with the pretense of familiarity expected, calling him, though they are not acquainted, "friend." Westervelt, Coverdale explains, "had almost the effect of an apparition," and was "as handsome a man as [he] ever beheld" (104). "There was in his eyes," Coverdale describes, "the naked exposure of something that ought not to be left prominent" (104). Coverdale says that "[h]is hair, as well as his beard and moustache, was coal-black; his eyes, too, were black and sparkling, and his teeth remarkably brilliant....His shirt-bosom, which had a pin in it, set with a gem that glimmered....like a living tip of fire" (105). In striking similarity to the dark version of himself that Young Goodman Brown encounters in the short story, Professor Westervelt carried a stick with a wooden head, "carved in vivid imitation of that of a serpent"

(105). Coverdale recalls that Professor Westervelt's "black eyes sparkled at me, whether in fun or malice I knew not, but certainly as if the devil were peeping out of them" (106). As Professor Westervelt laughs at naïve goals of the Blithedale reformers, Coverdale describes him in much the same way that the narrator of "The Celestial Railroad" describes Mr. Smooth-it-away, as an expertly veiled fake of the worst kind:

[H]e opened his mouth wide, and disclosed a gold band around the upper part of his teeth; thereby making it apparent that every one of his brilliant grinders and incisors was a sham. This discovery affected me very oddly. I felt as if the whole man were a moral and physical humbug; his wonderful beauty of a face for aught I knew, might be removeable like a mask; and, tall and comely as his figure looked, he was perhaps but a wizened little elf, gray and decrepit, with nothing genuine about him, save the wicked expression of his grin. (106)

Hawthorne seems to say that whether mesmerism be applied psychology or practical spiritualism, it results in one individual having unnatural control over another. "Professor" Westervelt carries the same demonic talisman, the black staff shaped as a serpent's head, as we see in "Young Goodman Brown" because the results are the same, delusion and abandonment of the conscience of the individual.

As Priscilla eventually becomes free from the mesmerist's influence and falls in love with Mr. Hollingsworth, the community dissolves. In dramatic fashion, it turns out that Zenobia was in love with Mr. Hollingsworth and took part in the Blithedale community mostly to win his affections. Priscilla has exchanged the mesmerist for the philanthropist, and Zenobia, as she comes to the realization that her future with Mr. Hollingsworth was always impossible, describes her experience in Blithedale as being like a trance or a dream: "I am weary of this place, and sick

to death of playing at philanthropy and progress. Of all varieties of mock-life, we have surely blundered into the very emptiest mockery, in our effort to establish the one true system...It was, indeed, a foolish dream!" (227). At the dénouement of the novel, Zenobia is found drowned in a river, and, as Hollingsworth fishes her out of the river, he strikes her with a pole and, as a witness explains, "wound[s] the poor things breast....Close by her heart too!" (243). Coverdale dramatically explains, "so he had indeed, both before and after death" (243). Zenobia, wealthy, beautiful, and independent, fell under the spell of Hollingsworth's philanthropic charm, and as with mesmerism, loses her volition and eventually her life.

Zenobia dies because of the powerful charm of Hollingsworth's ideals, and, though there are intimations of the supernatural in *The Blithedale Romance*, the depiction of mesmerism in *The House of Seven Gables* is both more sinister and more ambiguously supernatural. In the Preface, Hawthorne claims that the moral of the work is that "the wrong-doing of one generation lives into the successive ones" (2). He is somewhat tongue in cheek though and admits further along in the preface that this novel will be as ambiguous and indirect as his other works: "In good faith, however, he [the author] is not sufficiently imaginative to flatter himself with the hope of this kind. When romances do really teach anything, or produce effective operation, it is usually through a far more subtle process than the ostensible one" (2-3). Hence, Hawthorne communicates the verities of the world through the ambiguities of his fiction, and the proclivities of the Maule family provide just such an opportunity.

The Maule's intergenerational animosity for the Pyncheon family begins when Matthew Maule is executed for witchcraft. There are rumors that Colonel Pyncheon, who had attempted to remove Maule from his land in order to erect a mansion, had perverted justice through his powerful position in the community. In the penultimate moment before his execution on the

scaffold, Matthew Maule singles out Colonel Pyncheon and prophecies that “God will give him blood to drink!” (8). Because Colonel Pyncheon built “his house over an unquiet grave,” it would “afford the ghost...a kind of privilege to haunt its new apartments” (9). Two generations later, Matthew Maule’s grandson, himself named Matthew Maule, was reputed to have the same disposition and abilities as his warlock ancestor. The town believed that he “had a strange power of getting into people’s dreams, and regulation matters there according to his own fancy, pretty much like the stage manager of a theatre” (189).

The younger Matthew Maule, who believes he is the rightful proprietor of the Pyncheon estate, is solicited by Colonel Pyncheon’s grandson, Gervayse Pyncheon, to find a deed that, as rumor had it, was held by Colonel Pyncheon. The ensuing interaction between the two represents quite effectively Hawthorne’s moral from the preface, that “the wrong-doing of one generation lives into the successive ones” (2), for it is the greed of Gervayse Pyncheon that leads him to allow Matthew Maule to mesmerize his daughter in order to find the lost deed, which, according to legend, would provide Gervayse Pyncheon with claim to nearly the entire state of Maine, allowing him to retire to England as the landed gentleman he aspires to become. The conflict between the two pits, allegorically, the power of witchcraft against the power of social status—two forces that Hawthorne seems to always depict as dubious in their application. This, of course, was the foundation of the original conflict between the elder Matthew Maule and Colonel Pyncheon, and is atavistically carried out by Gervayse and the younger Matthew Maule. In the initial encounter, Colonel Pyncheon succeeded in using his status to have Maule hung, but in third generation, Matthew Maule’s witchcraft proves the more powerful.

Mocking Gervayse Pyncheon’s hubris, Matthew Maule, in preparing to mesmerize Alice for the first time “remark[s] with the utmost deference, but yet a half-hidden sarcasm in his look

and tone, “[she] will no doubt feel herself quite safe in her father’s presence, and under his all-sufficient protection” (202). Placing her faith in her breeding, Alice replies to Maule: “I certainly shall entertain no manner of apprehension, with my father at hand. . . . Neither do I conceive that a lady, while true to herself, can have aught to fear from whomsoever, or in any circumstances!” (202). Alice succumbs to Maule’s power the narrator explains, because

[s]he was very proud. . . . Setting aside all advantages of rank, this fair girl deemed herself conscious of a power—combined of beauty, high, unsullied purity, and the preservative force of womanhood—that could make her sphere impenetrable, unless betrayed by treachery within. She instinctively knew, it may be, that some sinister or evil potency was now striving to pass her barriers; nor would she decline the contest. (203)

Believing that the wealth gained from the deed might allow his daughter to marry into European royalty, Gervyse Pyncheon “consented in his heart, that, if the devil’s power were needed to the accomplishment of this great object, Maule might evoke him!” (204). Maule seemingly has complete control over Alice Pyncheon from this point forward, and mesmerizes her so that Gervyse Pyncheon can use her as a medium to discourse with the departed spirits who may know the location of the deed. Alice’s interlocutions into the spirit realm are unsuccessful; she sees Colonel Pyncheon, but Maule’s two ancestors silence him before he can reveal the location of the deed.

Maule, for the rest of Alice’s life, retains a power over her. His very thoughts can dictate her actions and emotions. The narrator explains that “a power, that she little dreamed of had laid its grasp upon her maiden soul,” until, “all the dignity of life was lost [and] she felt herself too much abased, and longed to change natures with some worm!” (208-209). Maule’s final

debasement of Alice was to compel her to act as a servant to his low-born wife during their wedding. At the end of the ceremony Alice is seemingly released from the trance, but catches a cold and dies. Maule, filled with guilt, the narrator explains, “last in the [funeral] procession, came...gnashing his teeth, as if he would have bitten his own heart in twain; the darkest and wofullest man that ever walked behind a corpse” (210). He had meant “to humble Alice, not to kill her;--but he had taken a woman’s delicate soul into his rude grip, to play with;--and she was dead!” (210).

Maule’s supernatural mesmerism achieves the same result as the good-natured utopian delusions of Hollingsworth in *The Blithedale Romance*. As both play the role of possessor and savior of women, respectively, their dominance ends up leading to the most extreme of outcomes. The pattern of one will dominating another, whether it be Pyncheon over Maule or Maule over Pyncheon, ends with the next generation because Holgrave Maule chooses not to exercise his preternatural, or psychological, powers over the Pyncheon daughter who is his peer. In *The House of Seven Gables*, it is Holgrave Maule who tells the story of Alice Pyncheon, and now he has his own intergenerational guilt to contend with. As he finishes relating to Phoebe Pyncheon the story of Alice Pyncheon he

Observe[s] that a certain remarkable drowsiness...had been flung over the senses of his auditress. It was the effect, unquestionably, of the mystic gesticulations, by which he had sought to bring bodily before Phoebe’s perception the figure of the mesmerizing carpenter. With the lids drooping over her eyes...she leaned slightly towards him, and seemed almost to regulate her breath by his. Holgrave gazed at her...and recognized an incipient stage of that curious psychological condition, which, as he had

himself told Phoebe, he possessed more than an ordinary faculty of producing. A veil was beginning to be muffled about her, in which she could only behold him, and live only in his thoughts and emotions...there was consciousness of power, investing his hardly mature figure with a dignity that did not belong to its physical manifestation. (211-212)

Holgrave resists the temptation that had snared both Colonel Pyncheon and the younger Matthew Maule, exercising their power, social or psychological, to control the destiny of another. The narrator asks that we “concede to the Daguerreotypist the rare and high quality of reverence for another’s individuality. Let us allow him integrity, also, forever after to be confided in; since he forbade himself to twine that one link more, which might have rendered his spell over Phoebe indissoluble” (212).

Holgrave is able to put to rest the persistent conflict between the Pyncheon and Maule lines, and it is through Holgrave that Hawthorne also reveals perhaps his most direct expression of his understanding of the nature of human progress. In explaining the definitive aspects of Holgrave’s youthful perspective, the narrator explains that “as doubtless it has seemed to the hopeful of every century, since the epoch of Adam’s grandchildren—that in this age, more than ever before, the moss-grown and rotten Past is to be torn down, and lifeless institutions to be thrust out of the way, and their dead corpses buried, and everything to begin anew” (180). Certainly this criticism seems to strike directly at the anti-institutional Transcendentalists, and the narrator explains the error in Holgrave’s line of thought: “As to the main point—may we never live to doubt it!—as to the better centuries that are coming, the artist was surely right” (180). “His error lay,” the narrator continues, “in supposing that this age, more than any past or future one, is destined to see the tattered garments of Antiquity exchanged for a new suit, instead

of gradually renewing themselves by patchwork” (180). Holgrave’s mistake is one of perspective, or calibration: “in applying his own little life-span as the measure of an interminable achievement; and, more than all, in fancying that it mattered anything to the great end in view, whether he himself should contend for it or against it” (180).

Holgrave, after nearly mesmerizing Phoebe, goes into a harangue in which Hawthorne has him ape many of the anti-institutional sentiments of the time. Echoing the well-known and provocative essay published just a few years earlier by Orestes Brownson,¹⁸ Holgrave complains that if “a Dead Man...happen to have made a will, disposes of wealth no longer his own” (183). Echoing Emerson he attacks every institution he can think of, “We read in Dead Men’s books! We laugh at Dead Men’s jokes, and cry at Dead Men’s pathos! We are sick of Dead Men’s diseases, physical and moral....We worship the living Deity, according to Dead Men’s forms and creeds! Whatever we seek to do, of our own free motion, a Dead Man’s icy hand obstructs us!” (183). In her simplicity, Phoebe asks why such institutions should be disregarded, “so long as we can be comfortable in them?” (183). Phoebe exclaims to Holgrave, “How you hate everything old!” (184). She then explains that, “It makes [her] dizzy to think of such a shifting world!” (184). Holgrave, raging against the wrongs of the Pyncheon family, argues that “[h]uman blood, in order to keep its freshness, should run in hidden streams, as the water of an aqueduct is conveyed in subterranean pipes” (185). To Holgrave, who is both a historian as well as a daguerreotypist,¹⁹ the Pyncheon house stands as a symbol for the weight of the past. “Now this old Pyncheon-house!” he says, “Is it a wholesome place to live in...with its grime and

¹⁸ Brownson’s essay “The Laboring Classes,” published in 1840 caused quite a sensation. Some have even claimed that it affected the president election that cycle (Schlesinger 8-9). In the essay he argues that inheritance should be eliminated. Property rights, Brownson argues, should end with life, so that each generation will live by its own merit.

¹⁹ Once again it seems that Hawthorne depicts here a conflation of the traditional method of the historian, writing the stories that form history, and making a lasting visual depiction through a quite technical medium. The difference is only in technique, not in result.

sordidness, which are the crystallization on its walls of the human breath, that has been drawn and exhaled here, in discontent and anguish?” (184). He concludes that the “house ought to be purified with fire—purified till only its ashes remain” (184). Once again, Phoebe’s practical sagacity is the antidote for Holgrave’s mercurial nature, and she brings him back to the present reality. “You talk of the lunacy of the Pyncheons,” she chides, “[i]s it contagious?” (186). Realizing that his own rage against the injustice of the Pyncheon’s has almost led him into the same mistakes as his ancestors, Holgrave subsists.

At the end of *The House of Seven Gables*, Phoebe and Holgrave are married and move to a new home. Symbolically, the home is not newly constructed, but one already existing, and made of stone. Both *The Blithedale Romance* and *The House of Seven Gables* provide a depiction of the nature of mesmerism, which symbolizes the power of one individual over the other without their consent, and the erasure of individual will. The power of new technology or old devilry can be used to the same ends, and the distinction is only theoretical to Hawthorne. Holgrave realizes that there are no easy answers to historical injustice, tempting though revenge may be, and quite the opposite of Emerson, Fuller, and the other reformers, provides us a picture of gradual progress. There is no “true theory” in Hawthorne’s fiction, and no Millennium on the horizon. Hawthorne firmly reminds us that, if there is a Celestial City, it remains elusive.

Conclusion

The faith that Emerson and Fuller had in the perfection of human knowledge was never rewarded, and it seems that the Civil War seriously derailed, for a time, utopianism in the United States. Perhaps, as Louis Menand argues in *The Metaphysical Club*, the Civil War and the trajectory of science led to a distrust of the mandates, if not the presence, of totalizing systems and surety, setting the stage for the pragmatism of William James, Charles Sanders Peirce, and then John Dewey. Agassiz's epochal explanation of human history was replaced by Darwin's model of gradual change. Neither Millennialism nor the question of women's equality would end with Fuller, but it is safe to say that her singular approach to them would. The revolution, it seems, will not come from cataclysm.

Perhaps the pragmatism that followed the Transcendentalists could provide a useful hermeneutic for these thinkers. In many ways, Emerson was right in thinking that his generation would be the first to have an intellectual and artistic tradition independent from England, and perhaps pragmatism, formulated to address the specific nature of problems facing American democracy, might be applied to these thinkers. This may be the first generation of thinkers for whom this admittedly nominalist heuristic might work. While to some degree all literature is about the balance of power between individuals, narratives, and institutions, those concerns are central to Emerson, Thoreau, Fuller, and Hawthorne. While my study here has focused on the role that their understanding of the science played in their belief in a teleological end-point to human knowledge, it necessarily had to comment upon their epistemology in broader terms and their views on the nature of the individual in a specific society in a specific time. This is the value of pragmatism as a heuristic, because it focuses on explaining transitions, observing

patterns, commenting upon what did happen and not what could happen. History and literature, as much as we want them to, cannot tell us what will happen, only what has.

John Dewey, in his essay “Freedom and Culture,” argues that a final knowledge capable of ending the discussion is firmly out of reach. Dewey argues that transcendental revelations or Hegelian metaphysics are both unsatisfactory. Technology and science can help us answer the questions of how the mind works and what society needs, but they will never lead us to anything resembling final knowledge. He argues that the technological determinism of Marxism fails to take into account shifting social contingencies. It is a narrative useful for a certain time, a productive heuristic in some situations, but not in others. Of course, Dewey and William James, both psychologists as well as philosophers, traffic in the realm of the “mind,” which, even with MRI’s and other technologies, remains a persistent mystery—perhaps constantly evolving as well. Dewey, contemplating the development of fascism and repressive regimes in 1939, understandably fears final knowledge. There is, however, in Dewey, a balance of the philosophically conservative—change is gradual—and he fears that if science destroys our institutions but does not lead to new ones, we are the worst for it. Science is merely a part of something larger that Dewey calls “experience.”¹ Each generation should not be a new epoch, and should not burn down the houses of the past, as Holgrave Maule initially wants to in *The House of Seven Gables*. The generational purge is not autotelic, but contingent upon emerging conditions as much as anything else.

¹ This is something he expresses in the 1930 essay, “What I Believe.” In a number of ways, Dewey consciously builds upon Emerson and not only “Experience,” but much of his work. Dewey adamantly defended Emerson, and had as high praise for the Transcendentalist as anyone. His essay “Emerson—The Philosopher of Democracy” is the best example of this.

The difficulties we have in understanding Emerson and Fuller particularly are that they use lexicons quite challenging to us. Emerson attempts to develop a new philosophical language that combines poetry, philosophy, and religion—a universal language of thought. Fuller, enraptured by her mysticism goes places we simply cannot go. We should not, however, disregard the parts of Fuller’s works that rely on this lexicon, because there would be little left, and also because it would do an injustice to her beliefs. In an instrumental sense, however, Fuller’s millennialism was one of the most important beliefs in developing American feminism. It was an instance of what William James describes as “a meaningful life,” which he describes as “the same eternal thing—the marriage, namely, of some unhabitual idea, however special, with some fidelity, courage, and endurance; with some man’s or woman’s pains.—And whatever or wherever life may be, there will always be the chance for that marriage to take place” (164). It is after all “unhabitual” ideas that lead to change, but they necessarily require sacrifice to bring about. We see where James is going with this statement: belief is validated through action—surely this is above all what Fuller represents.

Dewey’s understanding of history, which I have only given a brief explanation of here, can help us explore the American Renaissance more effectively. I think that we see something of Hawthorne, here, who depicts, according to my argument, the instrumentalism of belief. That is not to say that he was divested necessarily of firm beliefs himself; the evidence is to the contrary. It is, however, to say that he, as later would William James and Dewey, questioned religious experience or positivism when they did not lead to ends justified outside their own internal systems, i.e. lived experience. Witchcraft, mesmerism, misplaced religious fervor, or an unexamined desire for reform can all be equally deplorable if they lead one person to deny the agency of another. “Truth” is a problem for Hawthorne only as often as it causes problems. As

he describes the legacy of Matthew Maule in *The House of Seven Gables*, he suggests as much: “But, on the other hand, had not a whole community believed Maule’s grandfather to be a wizard...Had he not bequeathed a legacy of hatred against the Pyncheons to his only grandson, who, as it appeared, was not about to exercise a subtle influence over the daughter of his enemy’s house? Might not this influence be the same that was called witchcraft” (203). It is irrelevant how an action relates to the ethereal when we must make hard and fast distinctions. “Spiritual” and “scientific” knowledge, according to their most common parlance, often do not provide Hawthorne with the answers to the most immediate questions.

Of course the legacy of the indirect conversation between Emerson and Thoreau should help remind us that our systems can get out of hand, and even our closest friends can come to seem lacking when we place a category before a person. There is, perhaps, something in pragmatism that helps resist the “pounding of empires” of which Emerson seems so fond. If there is a “true theory,” humanity is incapable of knowing it; we must work from there. We may be sure of scientific or religious truth—and we may be right—but it is not sufficient justification to compel someone else. Surely here we see Thoreau’s critique as well. An increase in human knowledge and power does not mean an increase in benevolence—“ignorance” is not to blame for humanity’s problems. Splitting atoms or splitting beans, we still face the same immediate moral challenges.

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