RALPH WALDO EMERSON AND THE DIAL:
A STUDY IN LITERARY CRITICISM

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PREFACE

Despite warnings in my preliminary reading that Emerson was a man full of contradictions and devoid of any workable critical theory, I was intrigued by the prospect of analyzing the literary views of a man whose unquestioned influence on American literature has generally been implied rather than stated in terms of stylistic innovation and critical authority. The plan I evolved, the examination of Emerson as literary critic for The Dial, seemed to provide both the resources and the limitations for such an analysis.

Because most contributions to The Dial were unsigned, I am indebted to the late George Willis Cooke, whose scholarship provided the necessary information on authorship. Although every piece attributed by Cooke to Emerson was examined in this study, the occasional notes that defy conclusive proof of authorship were awarded less weight than Emerson's indisputable works.

I am indebted to Professor Richard L. Roahen, first, for stimulating my interest in Emerson in the course, Emerson and the Concord Group, then, for encouraging me to pursue this study of the Concord Sage and, finally, for reading my paper with such care and interest.

To Dr. Green D. Wyrick I owe my gratitude for his patience, perspective, and wisdom in advising me throughout

this endeavor, from the first planning stages to the last reading.

Finally, I wish to thank Dr. Charles E. Walton, whose devotion to the highest standards of scholarship, and whose concern for the students he guides through the graduate program, made this effort worthwhile.

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CHAPTER I

AN INTRODUCTION TO THE DIAL

In the Boston area of the mid-nineteenth century, a remarkable group of people dedicated themselves to the coming of age of American thought and letters. The man acknowledged as their chief spokesman was Ralph Waldo Emerson, who is today studied as a poet, essayist, and philosopher, but rarely as a literary critic. As a leader in the movement to establish a uniquely American literature, free from European restraints, Emerson offered expression of the standards for this new literature that should be of interest to students. Emerson's theory of literary criticism and his application of this theory in practice, as a critic and as an artist, can be found, side by side, in The Dial, a publication with which Emerson was closely associated throughout its four years of existence.

When The Dial first appeared, in 1840, Emerson was in the productive middle period of his writing career. He had published "Nature" in 1836, and had secured his reputation as a lecturer with "The American Scholar" in 1837, and his "Divinity School Address" in 1838. By the year 1842, Emerson had resolved the question of his vocation, and within the decade, he had established his eminent position in American literature.[1]

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[1]Bliss Perry, Emerson Today, p. 41; Henry Nash Smith, "Emerson's Problem of Vocation," New Engl Q, XII (1939), 66.

During his years with The Dial, Emerson published his best known work, Essays, First Series, in 1841, following it with Essays, Second Series, in 1844. Much of Emerson's poetry appeared for the first time in The Dial. Most of Emerson's prose work after 1844, with the exception of the European lectures, later published as Representative Men, was restatement and clarification of his earlier writing.

In The Dial, Emerson stated his views on literary criticism at the height of his creative powers. He wrote reviews on current publications and contributed poems and essays to every number of the little journal. Although Emerson's opinions on literary theory and on writers can be found in his journals and lectures, only The Dial yields his concentrated attention to these matters. Because of the discipline demanded by his role as working journalist and editor, Emerson provided, in The Dial, an ideal source for an analysis of Emerson as a literary critic.

Emerson's era, later known as the American Renaissance, had the characteristics of a time devoted to the rebirth of national purpose.[2] Young Americans, in particular, were receptive to Emerson's message of hope and self-reliance.[3] Americans were aware of an exciting new national spirit and

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[2]F. O. Matthiessen, American Renaissance, p. vii.

[3]Van Wyck Brooks, The Flowering of New England, pp. 215-216.

were eager to assert this spirit in all realms, including literature, to demonstrate their freedom from colonial attitudes.

In literature, there was nothing as yet that Americans could claim as wholly their own. The young country could boast of masterpieces of utilitarian prose in its documents of government; yet, these pieces owed their principles to the influences of thought evolved through years of European history.

The first distinguished American men of letters, William Cullen Bryant, James Fenimore Cooper, and Washington Irving, had made strides by using American subjects and by adapting English literary forms to fit these new subjects, but the English influence was unmistakable. The chief praise awarded them was that it seemed incredible that men who wrote so well were not English.

The desire to see American culture achieve its equal and independent position in the world was one of the mutual concerns that a group of citizens of the Boston area gathered to discuss. This group, known as the Transcendentalist Club, was not a true organization, and had no formal membership, but those regularly in attendance were Emerson, Margaret Fuller, George Ripley, Jones Very, Theodore Parker, Dr. Frederick Hedge, Orestes Brownson, James Freeman Clark, Elizabeth Peabody, John Dwight, Dr. Convers Francis, William

Channing, and Bronson Alcott.[4] Although many members of the group were indeed transcendentalists, the members themselves referred to the gatherings as The Symposium or Hedge's Club, because meetings were usually scheduled to allow Hedge to attend.[5]

American transcendentalism has generally been considered an offshoot of the German philosophy, introduced to New England through English writers, primarily Coleridge; yet, there is evidence that American transcendentalists looked to their German and English counterparts for confirmation of an indigenous spirit discovered in their own heritage.[6] American transcendentalism offered a spirituality that was lacking in the intellectual Unitarianism that, a few generations before, had emerged in protest to New England Puritanism. Emerson, considered a leader of the transcendental movement, referred to himself as an Idealist, rather than as a Transcendentalist.[7]

There was no systematic school of transcendentalist philosophy in New England, and no club, in the usual sense of

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[4] Ibid., p. 277; George Willis Cooke, An Historical and Biographical Introduction to Accompany "The Dial," I, 53.

[5] Loc. cit.

[6] Réné Wellek, "Emerson and German Philosophy," New Engl Q, XVI (1943), 62.

[7] Ralph Waldo Emerson, "Lectures on the Times: The Transcendentalist," The Dial, III, 297.

the word. The two things shared by the people who attended the informal gatherings known as the Transcendentalist Club were their devotion to the encouragement of individuality and their desire to establish a journal that would provide opportunities to exchange the exciting ideas and opinions circulating in the New England area.[8]

In a letter dated September 26, 1839, to his brother William, Emerson mentioned the prospects for such a journal.[9] He reported that he had promised to contribute, but had refused to serve as editor. Emerson seemed doubtful that an editor could be found, but he hoped that the journal could be established for the sake of Thoreau and other unpublished friends.

Although no votes were cast, it was finally decided among those interested that the long-awaited journal would be called The Dial, a title borrowed from Bronson Alcott's diary, and that Margaret Fuller would be editor-in-chief with the assistance of Emerson.[10] Emerson's consent to serve on the editorial board with Margaret Fuller was granted reluctantly; however, out of loyalty to his co-worker and his desire to

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[8]Perry Miller (ed.), The American Transcendentalists: Their Prose and Poetry, p. 15; Cooke, op. cit., I, 59-60.

[9]Ralph Waldo Emerson, The Letters of Ralph Waldo Emerson, Edited by Ralph L. Rusk, II, 225.

[10]Cooke, op. cit., I, 59-60.

see the publication succeed for the benefit of the unknown young writers of the area, he took on what he believed to be a temporary commitment.[11]

At the end of the second year, Margaret Fuller, who had expended prodigious effort on The Dial, found that her failing health and financial need made it impossible for her to continue as editor.[12] In a letter to Carlyle, dated March 31, 1842, Emerson explained the decision her resignation forced on him:

> . . . my friend Margaret Fuller, who has edited our little Dial with such dubious approbation on the part of you and other men, has suddenly decided a few days ago that she will edit it no more. The second volume was just closing; shall it live for a third year? You should know that, if its interior and spiritual life has been ill fed, its outward and bibliopolic existence has been worse managed. Its publishers failed, its short list of subscribers became shorter, and it has never paid its laborious editor, who has been very generous of her time and labor, the smallest remuneration. Unhappily, to me alone could the question be put whether the little aspiring starveling should be reprieved for another year. I had not the cruelty to kill it, and so must answer with my own proper care and nursing for its new life.[13]

Emerson, who had always endeavored to avoid the responsibilities of editorship, explained his reservations in the next paragraph of the same letter.

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[11]Harry R. Warfel, "Margaret Fuller and Ralph Waldo Emerson," PMLA, L (1935), 589.

[12]Cooke, op. cit., I, 86.

[13]Thomas Carlyle and Ralph Waldo Emerson, The Correspondence of Thomas Carlyle and Ralph Waldo Emerson, I, 397.

> Perhaps it is a great folly in me who have little adroitness in turning off work to assume this sure vexation, but the Dial has certain charms to me as an opportunity, which I grudge to destroy. Lately at New York, I found it to be to a certain class of men and women, though few, an object of tenderness and religion.[14]

The Dial, reprieved again, continued with Emerson as editor, Elizabeth Peabody as the new publisher, and a subscription list of fewer than three hundred names.[15] When the publication passed from Miss Peabody to James Munroe and Company of Boston, at the end of the third year, Emerson again revealed mixed emotions at this new crisis to his correspondent, Carlyle:

> I heartily hoped I had done with it [The Dial], when our poor, good, . . . publishing Miss Peabody . . . wrote me that its subscription would not pay its expenses (we all writing for love). But certain friends are very unwilling it should die, and I a little unwilling, though very unwilling to be the life of it, as editor.[16]

The reluctant editor found a talented assistant in Henry David Thoreau, who aided Emerson for the remaining two years.[17] When Emerson was engaged in lecturing away from home, Thoreau carried out the editorial duties alone; he had sole responsibility for the last number of the third volume.[18] When

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[14] Loc. cit.

[15] Cooke, op. cit., I, 85; Brooks, op. cit., p. 279.

[16] Carlyle and Emerson, Correspondence, op. cit., II, 32.

[17] Brooks, op. cit., p. 300.

[18] Cooke, op. cit., I, 121.

publication of The Dial was terminated at the end of the fourth year, Emerson had lost several hundred dollars of his own money in meeting expenses.[19]

In his journals, Emerson noted attacks made on the magazine throughout its brief life, both by sympathetic observers and by hostile critics. Emerson found much fault in the pages himself, but the criticism seemed to him to be disproportionate to the pretensions and flaws of the little magazine.[20] The Dial was widely ridiculed, with the favorite target being the "Oracles" of Bronson Alcott.[21]

The reasons for the disenchantment of The Dial's supporters could be traced to its origin. Since the group of idealists who gave life to the magazine prized individualism above all else, The Dial could not possibly meet all intentions and please all tastes. Some dissatisfied allies proposed to make the journal an organ of social reform, while others complained of any effort that did not measure up to their very high standards.[22] Emerson believed that The Dial should encompass more than literature, but he hesitated to ". . . put it

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[19] Ibid., p. 170.

[20] Ralph Waldo Emerson, Journals of Ralph Waldo Emerson, 1820-1872, Edited by Edward Waldo Emerson and Waldo Emerson Forbes, V, 471; Carlyle and Emerson, Correspondence, op. cit., I, 324.

[21] Miller, op. cit., p. 86.

[22] Emerson, Journals, op. cit., VI, 367; ibid., V, 471.

in the hands of the Humanity and Reform Men, because they trample on letters and poetry; nor in the hands of the Scholars, for they are dead and dry."[23]

Judged by sales or by general public opinion of the time, The Dial was a failure. Some issues, known to contain articles by the more famous contributors, such as Theodore Parker, sold well, but this advantage was diminished by the practice of leaving the selections unsigned.[24] People who did not read The Dial suspected it was Transcendentalist propaganda, and those who did were disappointed with the lack of a clearly stated creed.[25] Yet The Dial, that owed more to Emerson than to any other individual, accomplished part of its mission in the introduction of new writers and in the presentation of guidelines for a wider, freer basis in the examination of literature, making it a signpost for those who follow the adventures of American thought.[26]

Emerson's essays and poems in The Dial, almost without exception, have been published elsewhere since their initial appearance. Any volume of his poetry is bound to include

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[23] Ibid., VI, 164; ibid., V, 448.

[24] Brooks, op. cit., p. 279.

[25] Emerson, Journals, op. cit., VI, 164.

[26] Oliver Wendell Holmes, Ralph Waldo Emerson, p. 147; Miller, op. cit., p. 149.

poems first printed in The Dial, such as the well-known "Woodnotes I and II," "The Snowstorm," "The Sphinx," and "Forbearance," His reviews, to this time, have not been reprinted, except for the full length essays on Landor and Carlyle, but some of Emerson's opinions in reviews can be traced to his journals. Emerson's critical opinion in The Dial, then, does not differ appreciably from his views expressed elsewhere. The importance of Emerson's work in The Dial rests not on any essential difference between it and other sources, but on what Emerson intended The Dial to accomplish.

In his editorial introduction to The Dial, Emerson emphasized his intention to use criticism in a way that would encourage positive thought and action.[27] He saw The Dial as an opportunity to create an atmosphere receptive to budding literary efforts. Emerson believed that his purpose, as editor, critic, and contributor, was to develop taste in his readers and to influence young writers to trust their insight and to avoid imitation.[28]

Only in his association with The Dial did the opportunity and responsibility to deliver this message fall to Emerson as a working journalist. Later, he contributed to other magazines, notably The Atlantic Monthly, under the

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[27]Ralph Waldo Emerson, "The Editors to the Reader," The Dial, I, 3-4.

[28]Loc. cit.; Miller, op. cit., p. 148.

editorship of James Russell Lowell, but never again was he responsible for overseeing the scope of literary opinion for an entire publication.[29]

Of Emerson's contributions to The Dial, only the lectures bear his name. Some pieces he signed with the initial "E," and others he left unsigned. The sole authority consulted on authorship in this study was George Willis Cooke. In 1902, Cooke arrived at a list he considered accurate for all but four poems.[30] He had consulted lists of published works by the authors involved and had corresponded with or interviewed surviving members of The Transcendental Club.[31] Cooke also had access to the personal copies of the magazines belonging to Emerson, Thoreau, and others who had written names of various authors in marginalia.[32]

One brief book review attributed to Emerson by Cooke was disregarded in this study because it begins with the editor's statement that he had been requested to "insert" it.[33] The author of the book in question was not named, in any case, but Emerson's authorship of the notice seemed questionable.

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[29]Holmes, op. cit., p. 221; Miller, op. cit., p. 57.

[30]Cooke, op. cit., p. vi.

[31]Ibid., pp. v-vi.

[32]Ibid., p. vi.

[33]The review mentioned is "The Ideal Man," The Dial, II, 409.

Many names in allusions with no real comment were discarded before the final compilation. In several cases, the attempts to determine the identities of men mentioned only by commonplace surnames seemed to border on reckless speculation and were abandoned. In one case, a surname produced only a near-match with a known writer whose list of publications does not include the work attributed to the man Emerson mentioned.[34]

Emerson's writing in The Dial includes twenty-five poems, two full essays on specific writers, ten essays on literature in general, and eleven essays on essentially non-literary topics. In addition, there are twenty-one short reviews or notes on books, and eleven notes on areas unrelated to books and authors. This material provides the source for an examination of Emerson as a literary critic.

Margaret Fuller, generally considered The Dial's outstanding literary critic, later held the job of literary editor on Horace Greeley's Tribune with such success that one scholar has declared her unequalled as a literary critic of her time except for Poe.[35] Whether The Dial produced another perceptive critic in Emerson can best be determined by first sifting his contributions for a statement of his literary

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[34]Ralph Waldo Emerson, "Europe and European Books," The Dial, III, 519.

[35]Warfel, op. cit., p. 594.

theory, then, by reporting his opinions on books and authors, and, finally, by measuring his evaluations against his own theory.

CHAPTER II

EMERSON'S CRITICAL THEORY

In 1837, three years before The Dial came into existence, Emerson delivered an oration, "The American Scholar," before the Phi Beta Kappa Society of Harvard. The theme of his address, a call for American men of thought and literature to cast off European influence, seemed to his audience to be the "Declaration of America's Intellectual Independence," although many previous speakers at the annual event had used the same theme.[36]

Emerson's desire for the emergence of a new American literature was as intense three years later with the appearance of The Dial. In the first number of The Dial, July, 1840, in "The Editors to the Reader," Emerson declares the purpose of the magazine to be the reflection of the spirit of the age in New England, which he views as revolutionary in all areas including literature.[37]

The new trend of disregarding traditional and borrowed standards seems to Emerson to exist in literature ". . . not yet in new books so much as in the higher tone of criticism."[38]

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[36] Van Wyck Brooks, Life of Emerson, p. 75.

[37] Ralph Waldo Emerson, "The Editors to the Reader," The Dial, I, 3.

[38] Loc. cit.

For Emerson, this new criticism holds as its only criterion, fidelity to life, as evidenced by comparison with nature. The new critic looks for truth observable in life, and for form that is both necessary and beautiful, like all things in nature, instead of simply comparing a book with other books. To predetermine the direction of literary criticism in The Dial would be to imitate existing faults in the old systems being rejected, Emerson feels, for:

> All criticism should be poetic; unpredictable; superseding, as every new thought does, all foregone thoughts, and making a new light on the whole world. Its brow is not wrinkled with circumspection, but serene, cheerful, adoring. It has all things to say and no less than all the world for its final audience.[39]

The desire of the editors to achieve a broad, free concept of criticism is further indicated by the piece following this introduction, an "Essay on Critics," by the editor-in-chief, Margaret Fuller.

In the next number of The Dial, October, 1840, Emerson repeats his conviction that literature of lasting value reveals what is real and true in life at that moment, and adds:

> The highest class of books are those which express the moral element; the next, works of imagination; and the next, works of science;--all dealing in realities,--what ought to be, what is, and what appears.[40]

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[39] Loc. cit.

[40] Ralph Waldo Emerson, "Thoughts on Modern Literature," The Dial, I, 137.

Emerson's emphasis on the moral element stems from the transcendental view that since all true works of art proceed ". . . from absolute mind, whose nature is goodness as much as truth, they are always atuned to moral nature."[41] The person who first beholds and then reports a portion of this truth, accessible to all in the Oversoul, assumes the role of prophet recording scripture.[42] If the writer is priest or prophet, and his message is divine revelation, then literary form and technique would seem of small importance beside the religious truth manifest through them.[43]

If the message is not an inspired one, the vehicles of that message are of no importance, for:

> Literary accomplishments, skill in grammar, and rhetoric, knowledge of books, can never atone for the want of things which demand voice. Literature is a poor trick when it busies itself to make words pass for things.[44]

Without inspiration, no man, however skillful with language, can produce a literary work of universal appeal, according to Emerson:

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[41]Ralph Waldo Emerson, "Thoughts on Art," The Dial, I, 374.

[42]Ralph Waldo Emerson, "Thoughts on Modern Literature," The Dial, I, 139.

[43]Charles Howell Foster, "Emerson as American Scripture," New Engl Q, XVI (1943), 95.

[44]Ralph Waldo Emerson, "Thoughts on Modern Literature," The Dial, I, 139.

> The universal soul is the alone creator of the useful and the beautiful; therefore to make anything useful or beautiful, the individual must be submitted to the universal mind.[45]

Emerson is disparaging of literary accomplishments as such, for he feels that the best expression of thought is guided by the same intuitive power that inspired the thought itself:

> In poetry where every word is free, every word is necessary. Good poetry could not have been otherwise written than it is. . . . They [all great poets] found the verse, not made it. The muse brought it to them.[46]

If the thought and the word used to express that thought are inseparable, Emerson's theory of art and his standard for the criticism of art can best be described as organic in principle.[47] Beauty in organic expression would arise from the subject itself and not from the ornamentation of the subject with consciously applied literary devices. Emerson perceives that ". . . whatever is beautiful rests on the foundation of the necessary."[48] Just as everything in nature is beautiful as well as necessary and useful, so should all art reveal beauty through necessity:

> We feel, in seeing a noble building, which rhymes well, as we do in hearing a perfect song, that it is spiritually

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[45]Ralph Waldo Emerson, "Thoughts on Art," The Dial, I, 368.

[46]Ibid., p. 374.

[47]Norman Foerster, "Emerson on the Organic Principle in Art," PMLA, XLI (1926), 196.

[48]Ralph Waldo Emerson, "Thoughts on Art," The Dial, I, 375.

> organic, that is, had a necessity in nature, for being, was one of the possible forms in the Divine mind, and is now only discovered and executed by the artist, not arbitrarily composed by him.[49]

Although Divine mind provides both content and form, the artist must struggle with the earthly tools of creation until his skills reveal the divine intention. Emerson does not minimize the difficulties in the realization of the ideal, even with spiritual guidance, for ". . . the creating intellect is crippled in some degree by the stuff on which it works."[50] In literature, the material basis or "stuff" is ". . . not new created by the poet for his own ends, . . ." but is the same everyday language used by man in his more mundane pursuits.[51]

This struggle of man with his limited means to embody his vision of infinite truth constitutes art, since the truth did not originate with the artist, and the materials he must use have been provided for him, whether they be stone or language. Emerson echoes Aristotle's definition of art when he states that: "The art resides in the model, in the plan, for it is on that the genius is expended, not on the statue, or the temple [the completed work of art]."[52] The same

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[49] Loc. cit.

[50] Ibid., p. 370.

[51] Loc. cit.

[52] Ibid., p. 371.

literary skills Emerson often seems to disdain would seem a necessary part of the execution of the plan that he calls art.

Emerson's distinction between talent and genius provides the explanation to this seeming contradiction:

> Talent amuses; wisdom instructs. Talent shows me what another man can do; genius acquaints me with the spacious circuits of the common nature. One is carpentry; the other is growth.[53]

Talent, then, is the effective use of language; genius is the inspired use of language. A man of talent may write things of temporary popularity, but only a man of genius can produce a work of lasting importance.

The man of talent is one who displays his facility with language as an intricate exercise to command admiration. The genius is one who makes of himself the "organ through which the universal mind acts."[54] Talent is greatly admired, Emerson admits, and yet,

> . . . the failures of genius [are] better than the victories of talent; and we are sure that some crude manuscript poems have yielded us a more sustaining and a more stimulating diet, than many elaborated and classic productions.[55]

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[53]Ralph Waldo Emerson, "The Senses and the Soul," The Dial, II, 377.

[54]Ralph Waldo Emerson, "Thoughts on Art," The Dial, I, 373.

[55]Ralph Waldo Emerson, "Thoughts on Modern Literature," The Dial, I, 222.

The Aristotelian concept that art imitates nature is Emerson's chief guide for evaluating literature. He examines a man's writing to determine ". . . whether it leads us to nature, or to the person of the writer. The great always introduce us to facts; small men introduce us always to themselves."[56]

The doctrine of self-reliance, of knowing and trusting oneself, would seem to support the subjective approach to writing, but to Emerson, self-reliance meant reliance on that spark of the Divine that all men share, not a self-centered concentration on the individual's own thought and abilities.[57] Emerson cautions writers that ". . . your method and your subject are foreordained in all your nature, in all nature, . . . or it [your writing] has no worth."[58]

The stock-writers who ". . . vastly outnumber the thinking men," and who ". . . have voluminously ministered to the popular tastes were men of talents, who had some feat which each could do with words, but who have not added to wisdom or virtue."[59] Usually these writers specialize in:

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[56]Ralph Waldo Emerson, "Thoughts on Modern Literature," The Dial, I, 147.

[57]Ibid., pp. 146-147.

[58]Ibid., p. 138.

[59]Ralph Waldo Emerson, "The Senses and the Soul," The Dial, II, 377.

> . . . books about books; and then perhaps the book criticized was itself a compilation or digest of others; so that the page we read is at third or fourth hand from the event or sentiment which it describes.[60]

Most of this writing is devoted to "superficial fact," which ". . . shuns any reference to a thought or law which the fact indicated."[61]

Defects in style that Emerson points to include the use of "a swollen and vicious diction," with thoughts expressed in ". . . the most clumsily compounded and terminated words for want of time to find the right one."[62]

Emerson praises non-professional writers who prefer natural expression to perfect metre, for he says, ". . . the halting rhymes had a worth beyond that of a high finish; for they testified that the writer was more man than artist, more earnest than vain. . . ."[63] He suspects that

> . . . the faults and vices of our literature and philosophy, their too great fineness, effeminacy, and melancholy, are attributable to the enervated and sickly habits of the literary class.[64]

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[60] Ibid., p. 376.

[61] Loc. cit.

[62] Ralph Waldo Emerson, "English Reformers," The Dial, III, 227.

[63] Ralph Waldo Emerson, "New Poetry," The Dial, I, 221.

[64] Ralph Waldo Emerson, "Man the Reformer," The Dial, I, 531.

The man of genius is less likely to fall prey to these faults, Emerson feels, because he will speak with eloquence, the gift that occurs ". . . when consciously he makes himself the mere tongue of the occasion and the hour, and says what cannot but be said."[65] Although men of talent, then, may produce more mechanically polished products, the man who writes not for critics, but for his own joy, will express himself with more originality.

Emerson lauds the daring use of unconventional imagery in the work of poets who shun the time-worn metaphor and trust their own perception.[66] Imagery is as important to the poet as the thought it clothes:

> The poet must not only converse with pure thought, but he must demonstrate it almost to the senses. His words must be pictures, his verses must be spheres and cubes, to be seen, and smelled and handled. His fable must be a good story and its meaning must hold as pure truth.[67]

Truth in fable is possible, but Emerson does not hold fiction, in general, in high regard. He seems to regard the novel as a literary form appreciated primarily by the servant-girl variety of reader, although he says he is advised that it is ". . . supposed to be the natural fruit and expression of

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[65]Ralph Waldo Emerson, "Thoughts on Art," The Dial, I, 373.

[66]Ralph Waldo Emerson, "New Poetry," The Dial, I, 223.

[67]Ralph Waldo Emerson, "Europe and European Books," The Dial, III, 515.

the age."[68] He categorizes these romances into the "novels of costume" or "circumstance" and the "novels of character."[69]

He views the novel of costume as a formula production that follows the course of romantic love to marriage with very few original touches to distinguish one book from the other. The novel of character he considers more worthwhile, because it attempts to trace the growth and change in the nature of one or more of the characters. Emerson seems persuaded that a work of fiction is inferior to an essay or poem as a vehicle for truth.

One of the most persistent criticisms of Emerson, in his own time and since, has been that he lacks a sense of the tragic.[70] Although he insists that the moral element is a necessity in great literature, Emerson appears never to recognize the existence of evil, which would seem an elemental part of any system of morality.

Emerson gives his fullest treatment of the question of tragedy in "The Tragic," in the last number of The Dial. He begins the essay with a sentence he wrote twelve years earlier

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[68] Ibid., p. 519.

[69] Ibid., pp. 519-520.

[70] Stephen E. Whicher, "Emerson's Tragic Sense," reprinted in Emerson; A Collection of Critical Essays, Edited by Milton R. Konvitz and Stephen E. Whicher, p. 40; Newton Arvin, "The House of Pain," Hudson R, XII (1959), 38.

in a letter to his aunt, during a period of frail health, financial distress, and bereavement.[71] He surely was no stranger to deep sorrow when he said: "He has seen but half the universe who never has been shown the House of Pain."[72] The passage continues with a description of the misery and melancholy that are part of the human condition. He admits that ". . . no theory of life can have any right which leaves out of account the values of vice, pain, disease, poverty, insecurity, disunion, fear, and death."[73]

The foundation of most tragedy is "the belief in a brute Fate or Destiny," that destroys any man who goes against the "whim" of the gods.[74] The belief in such a force, Emerson dismisses as primitive superstition. The evils of the world that men see and name are not so much the "proper tragic element" as ". . . Terror . . . which does not respect definite evils, but indefinite. . . ."[75] This fear of the unknown, perhaps of the unreal, suggests that ". . . tragedy seems to consist in temperament, not in events."[76]

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[71] Arvin, op. cit., p. 42.

[72] Ralph Waldo Emerson, "The Tragic," The Dial, IV, 515.

[73] Loc. cit.

[74] Loc. cit.

[75] Ibid., p. 517.

[76] Loc. cit.

Emerson concludes that:

> . . . all sorrow dwells in a low region. It is superficial; for the most part fantastic, or in the appearance and not in things. Tragedy is in the eye of the observer, and not in the heart of the sufferer.[77]

Emerson believed that the man who is spiritually atuned to the Higher Reason will maintain his serenity in the face of any adversity.[78] No burden of trial or grief comes to one incapable of enduring it. Emerson intimates that tragedy is not a fit province for man or his literature. Man must rise through reason and goodness to a realm where tragedy may not follow.

Although Emerson would regard attempts to assign literature into divisions of the comic and the tragic as arbitrary, his rejection of tragedy lends added importance to his views on comedy. In support of his rejection of tragedy, Emerson contends in his essay, "The Comic," that in all nature, only man has a sense of humor: "And as the lower nature does not jest, neither does the highest."[79] Only man laughs; and he laughs at himself.[80]

Man is the source of humor, as well as the observer, because:

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[77] Loc. cit.

[78] Loc. cit.

[79] Ralph Waldo Emerson, "The Comic," The Dial, IV, 247.

[80] Ibid., p. 248.

> The essence of all jokes, of all comedy, seems to be halfness; a non-performance of what is pretended to be performed, at the same time that one is giving loud pledges of performance. The baulking of the intellect, the frustrated expectation, the break of continuity in the intellect, is what we call comedy; and it announces itself physically in the pleasant spasms we call Laughter.[81]

Man is the only creature who does not act always in accord with nature's design, and so is the only creature capable of halfness or frustration. Since man has access to the vision of perfection, he is aware of the discrepancy between the actual and the ideal, and ". . . the comedy is in the intellect's perception of discrepancy."[82]

Emerson believes that a sense of humor is an essential part of the creative mind; that ". . . a perception of the comic seems to be a balance-wheel in our metaphysical structure."[83] A man without an awareness of the ludicrous in life is lost:

> . . . a perception of the comic is a tie of sympathy with other men, is a pledge of sanity, and is a protection from those perverse tendencies and gloomy insanities into which fine intellects sometimes lose themselves.[84]

Emerson considers the jest "a legitimate weapon of the philosopher," for:

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[81] Loc. cit.

[82] Ibid., p. 249.

[83] Ibid., p. 250.

[84] Loc. cit.

> Wit makes its own welcome, and levels all distinctions. No dignity, no learning, no force of character can make any stand against good wit.[85]

Even man's most serious endeavors are suitable targets for satire, which has a proper place in literature:

> We must learn by laughter, as well as by tears and terrors; explore the whole of nature,--the farce and buffoonery in the yard below, as well as the lessons of poets and philosophers upstairs, in the hall,--and get the rest and refreshment of the shaking of the sides.[86]

Despite his stated intention in the first piece in The Dial to disregard the old standards of criticism, Emerson establishes guide-lines for literary evaluation that are not so different, after all. He does insist that "All just criticism will not only behold in literature the action of necessary laws, but must oversee literature itself."[87] The impression of the total work and not the analysis of each of its parts is the deciding factor: "If I analyze the sentences, it eludes me, but is the genius and suggestion of the whole. Over every true poem lingers a certain wild beauty. . . ."[88]

The good critic must read a book with

> . . . a wisdom which transcends the instructions of any book and treats the whole extant product of the human

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[85] Ibid., p. 251.

[86] Ibid., p. 256.

[87] Ralph Waldo Emerson, "Thoughts on Modern Literature," The Dial, I, 140.

[88] Ibid., p. 141.

intellect as only one age revisable and reversible by him.[89]

If the poet-critic Emerson hopes for can fill these requirements, he will certainly meet the goal expressed by the editors of The Dial--to attain in criticism, ". . . that spirit which . . . reconciles the practical with the speculative powers."[90]

In summary, Emerson's theory of literary criticism can not be considered apart from his transcendental mysticism. Emerson enlarges on Aristotle's mirror to nature and on Plato's doctrine of inspiration for his basic philosophy. He believes that a critic should read a book with no preconceived expectations or demands, but with a desire to see what the book can tell him of life. The critic evaluates the ideas he reads by examining them in the light of experiences that all men share and not by comparison with the philosophies of other books.

The critic's consideration of the form and style of the book should be directed by a search for organic wholeness. The form should be inseparable from the thought, and every part should be necessary and beautiful. Diction should resemble the everyday language of men with emphasis on the few right words rather than the many pretentious ones. Ornate and over-blown rhetoric should be shunned. Rhetoric should

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[89] Ibid., p. 140.

[90] Ralph Waldo Emerson, "The Editors to the Reader," The Dial, I, 4.

flow from the manly straight-forward expression of earnest thought, which, in its economy, will possess its own simple beauty.

The critic should judge a work in its entirety, and not by one attribute alone. If the book is an inspired one, the critic will recognize a singing spontaneity and the essence of moral wisdom throughout. A perfect work of art will startle the observer into recognition of universal truth and beauty. Even at first encounter, the perfect work will seem familiar and right.

Emerson has ample opportunity in The Dial to exercise his approach to literary criticism by these standards. Already an acknowledged intellectual leader in America, Emerson as editor and critic for The Dial, applies his idealistic philosophy to the criticism of literature, with new and widening influence on the literary climate of his time.

CHAPTER III

EMERSON'S COMMENTS ON BOOKS AND AUTHORS IN THE DIAL

Although Emerson urged American writers to disregard literary tradition and to find models and inspiration in their own time and place, his observations in The Dial include extensive evaluation of the past and distant. Emerson introduced young American writers with encouragement in The Dial, but most of his comprehensive criticism involved the European writers, late and contemporary, who constituted America's borrowed cultural heritage. In his first piece in The Dial, Emerson stated his intention to appraise ". . . what state of life and growth is now arrived and arriving," in literature.[91] Emerson readily confessed that, for the time: "Our American literature and spiritual history are . . . in the optative mood."[92]

The imported books arriving with almost every ship, Emerson considered a mixed blessing, since he believed that Americans were so pleased and impressed with European books that they were neglecting their own literary development.[93]

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[91] Ralph Waldo Emerson, "The Editors to the Reader," The Dial, I, 4. All subsequent footnotes in this chapter refer to Emerson.

[92] "Lecture on the Times," The Dial, III, 303-304.

[93] "Senses and the Soul," The Dial, II, 376.

Beguiled by these foreign books, American writers wrote for an European audience that was not interested in pale imitations of their own artistic products, although Emerson noted that Europeans seemed genuinely interested in things uniquely American, such as the opening West.[94]

Emerson, in his role as editor and critic for The Dial, felt responsible for analyzing the current literary scene. The scope of the task was formidable:

> In order to complete any view of the literature of the present age, an inquiry should include what it quotes, what it writes, and what it wishes to write.[95]

The first two conditions demanded consideration of European literature, and the last was everywhere implied in his commentary.

Emerson's comments on books and authors in his contributions to The Dial range from mere allusion to criticism in depth. There are allusions to such men as St. Augustine and Shakespeare in his poems, his essays, and his reviews. Frequently Emerson comments on one author by comparing him with others, and occasionally he lists many writers with a blanket comment on a common trait. It is sometimes difficult to ascertain from Emerson's allusions whether he is referring to a man as a thinker or as a writer. He makes small

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[94] "Europe and European Books," The Dial, III, 511.

[95] "Thoughts on Modern Literature," The Dial, I, 141.

distinction between a man's thought and his books. This is consistent with his belief that the message supersedes the medium; but, as a rule, there is no certainty that references to such men as Newton and Kepler indicate a familiarity with their writing. It must be assumed that a single allusion, unaccompanied by significant comment, to a man not primarily considered a literary figure, does not justify the inclusion of the reference in a study of literary criticism. Repeated allusions to a man deserve further attention, and some writers outside of the realm of belles lettres are included.

Since Emerson reviewed books newly available in New England, his reviews consider old works in recent translation or in reprint, as well as contemporary publications. He wrote reviews on St. Augustine's Confessions as well as on Tennyson's poems and Carlyle's Past and Present. Emerson's reviews encompass many approaches to the introduction of a work. Some reviews consist of a few sentence of welcome, and others provide detailed analysis. Emerson frequently used quotations from the work in question, allowing the author to speak for himself. Quotations from other sources are occasionally employed. Reviews sometimes appear as full articles and other times as notes in editorial columns such as "New Books."

The best medium in The Dial for Emerson's literary opinions is the essay. "Thoughts on Modern Literature," "Thoughts on Art," "Europe and European Books," "The Young

American," and a series called "Lectures on the Times," all contain evaluations of books and authors. A specific review of an author's work does not always produce as much opinion as a mention of the author in an essay on literature in general.

The following section of Emerson's reactions to books and authors is arranged alphabetically. No attempt has been made to separate ancient writers from contemporary, foreign from domestic, or eminent from obscure. For the reasons discussed above, any of these methods of division would result in a fragmented presentation.

Aeschylus. Emerson called his tragedies "genuine works of art" that endure because of their basic fidelity to the eternal truths.[96] Aeschylus was named as one of the immortal writers who has contributed to the modern wealth of inherited wisdom.[97]

Alcott, Bronson A. Emerson introduced one of Alcott's contributions to The Dial, "Days from a Diary," with very general comments on the character-revealing qualities of such writing.[98] The selection is prefaced by a brief letter from Alcott, stating his dissatisfaction with The Dial and with the

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[96]"Thoughts on Art," The Dial, I, 376.

[97]"Walter Savage Landor," The Dial, II, 264.

[98]"Notes on 'Days from a Diary,'" The Dial, II, 409.

handling of material that he had submitted.[99] In "English Reformers," Emerson acknowledged Alcott's assistance in providing materials for the essay, and quoted Alcott's comment on a Mr. Wright, although he suggested that Alcott's opinion might be prejudiced.[100]

Aristotle. Aristotle's definition of art, used in one essay, was illustrated by his reference to the art of shipbuilding being ". . . all of the ship but the wood."[101] In his essay "The Comic," Emerson used Aristotle's definition of the ridiculous, ". . . what is out of time and place without danger," as a beginning for his discussion.[102]

Aubrey, John. Emerson referred to an "engaging account" in Aubrey's biography of Bacon.[103]

St. Augustine. Augustine is named as a man of God in Emerson's poem "The Problem."[104] To Emerson, Augustine's writing seemed full of ". . . the genial miraculous force we have known to proceed from a book."[105] When Augustine and

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[99] Loc. cit.

[100] "English Reformers," The Dial, III, 238.

[101] "Thoughts on Art," The Dial, I, 368.

[102] "The Comic," The Dial, IV, 247-248.

[103] "Young Americans," The Dial, IV, 490.

[104] "The Problem," The Dial, I, 122.

[105] "Thoughts on Modern Literature," The Dial, I, 140.

Plutarch speak, ". . . the air swarms with life; the front of heaven is full of fiery shapes; secrets of magnanimity and grandeur invite us on every hand; life is made up of them."[106] Emerson later quoted Augustine in the same piece.[107]

The essay "Prayers" ends with a lengthy quote introduced as a ". . . pearl of great price from that book of prayer, The Confessions of Saint Augustine."[108] Another quotation from Augustine was used by Emerson in a review of a piece by O. A. Brownson.[109]

When Elizabeth Peabody of Boston published a new printing of the Confessions, Emerson had an opportunity to ". . . heartily welcome this reprint from the recent London edition, which was a revision, by the Oxford divines, of an old English translation."[110] In a rare burst of superlatives, Emerson referred to Augustine as ". . . one of the truest, richest, subtlest, eloquentest of authors," whose Confessions rank as ". . . one of the honestest autobiographies ever

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[106] Ibid., pp. 140-141.

[107] Ibid., p. 154.

[108] "Prayers," The Dial, III, 80.

[109] "A Review of A Letter to Rev. Wm. E. Channing, D. D.," The Dial, III, 277.

[110] "A Review of Confessions of St. Augustine," The Dial, III, 414.

written."[111] The brief but enthusiastic review closed with a passage from the Confessions on the death of a friend.

Bacon, Francis. Although Emerson admired Bacon for going ". . . the circuit of human knowledge . . .," he felt that Bacon's stature had diminished with time.[112] Emerson quoted sections from Bacon's medical advice, which for the most part, was unobjectionable to the nineteenth century scientist, but still containing occasional statements based on ignorance and superstition.[113]

In another essay, Emerson again referred to Bacon as a fallen giant:

> The reputations that were great and inaccessible they change and tarnish. How great were once Lord Bacon's dimensions! he is become but a middle-sized man; and many another star has turned out to be a planet or an asteroid. . . .[114]

Yet Emerson spoke of literature's ". . . few specimens of magnificence" in style as including "Bacon and Milton [as] the moderns of the richest strains."[115] This suggests that Emerson's statements on Bacon's waning reputation referred to Baconian scientific theory, and not to the man's writing ability.

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[111] Loc. cit.

[112] "Thoughts on Modern Literature," The Dial, I, 145.

[113] Ibid., p. 143.

[114] "Lecture on the Times," The Dial, III, 5.

[115] "A Review of Past and Present," The Dial, IV, 101.

Emerson quoted Bacon on gardens in a later essay and mentioned his essays "On Buildings" and "On Gardens."[116] It is in this essay that Emerson mentioned Aubrey's biography of Bacon. Emerson stated that the best criticism on Bacon's Essays was to be found in Walter Savage Landor's "Dialogue Between Barrow and Newton."[117]

Bentham, Jeremy. Emerson praised Bentham as representative of the recent men of thought who used "the bold and systematic criticism" that was dispersing clouds of myth and ignorance.[118] Bentham seemed to Emerson to be one of the reformers who ". . . in their accusations of society, all respected something."[119]

The Bible. Since Emerson believed all great literature to be divinely inspired, his comments on the Bible are of particular interest. He called the Bible:

> . . . the most original book in the world . . . This old collection of the ejaculations of love and dread, of the supreme desires and contributions of men proceeding out of the region of the grand and eternal, by whatsoever different mouths spoken, and through a wide extent of times and countries, seems, especially if you add to our canon the kindred sacred writings of the Hindoos, Persians and Greeks, the alphabet of the nations. . . . .[120]

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[116] "Young Americans," The Dial, IV, 490.

[117] "Walter Savage Landor," The Dial, II, 297.

[118] "Thoughts on Modern Literature," The Dial, I, 145.

[119] "Man the Reformer," The Dial, I, 523.

[120] "Thoughts on Modern Literature," The Dial, I, 139.

Emerson stated that all subsequent literature suffered by comparison, both in thought and in expression, for:

> The elevation of this book may be measured by observing, how certainly all elevation of thought clothes itself in the words and forms of speech of that book, . . . Shakespeare . . . leans on the Bible; his poetry supposes it.[121]

The reason for the Bible's power and importance, Emerson explained, was sometimes misunderstood:

> People imagine that the place, which the Bible holds in the world, it owes to miracles. It owes it simply to the fact that it came out of a profounder depth of thought than any other book. . . .[122]

References to the Bible and to men of the Bible and their writing exist in Emerson's poems and essays.[123]

Borrow, George. Two of Borrow's books were reviewed by Emerson in The Dial. The Zincali: or an Account of the Gypsies of Spain; with an Original Collection of Their Songs and Poetry contained:

> . . . twenty or thirty pages in it of fascinating romantic attraction, and the whole book, though somewhat rudely and miscellaneously put together, is animated, and tells us what we wish to know.[124]

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[121] Loc. cit.

[122] Loc. cit.

[123] "The Problem," The Dial, I, 122; "Thoughts on Art," The Dial, I, 376.

[124] "Review of The Zincali," The Dial, III, 127.

Emerson predicted that this book would be well received by the "lovers of the wild and wonderful" in America.[125]

Borrow's acquaintance with the gypsies, as agent for the British and Foreign Bible Society, provided the material for sketches of their history and social structure. Gypsy poetry accompanied by a vocabulary completed the volume.

Although Emerson found the book entertaining, he was dismayed by Borrow's "dismal" picture of gypsy life. This culture would have disappeared under such difficult circumstances, Emerson contended, and concluded that Borrow had neglected to report the consolations of nomadic existence. Emerson was particularly displeased with Borrow's confirmation of the belief that the gypsy was "void of conscience," since it was the critic's belief that all men are essentially the same.[126]

Less than a year later, Emerson reviewed The Bible in Spain, or the Journeys, Adventures, and Imprisonments of an Englishman in an Attempt to Circulate the Scriptures in the Peninsula. The reviewer called it ". . . a charming book, full of free breezes, and mountain torrents and pictures of romantic interests."[127] "A self-sufficing man of free

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[125] Loc. cit.

[126] Loc. cit.

[127] "Review of The Bible in Spain," The Dial, III, 534.

nature . . .," worthy to describe the land of Don Quixote, Barrow had ". . . the merit, almost miraculous today, of leaving us almost always to draw our own inferences from what he gives us."[128] The book, with its leisurely pace and its richly woven pictures, presents the gypsies ". . . with even more spirit than in his other book."[129] Borrow still ". . . sketches men and nature with the same bold and clear, though careless touch."[130]

Brisbane, Albert. In Emerson's review of Brisbane's Social Destiny of Man: or Association and Reorganization of Industry, there is no literary comment.[131] Emerson felt that this study and explanation of Fourier's philosophy would be welcomed by American readers. He cautioned readers to separate the theories from the French-oriented examples, as social conditions varied from country to country.

Browning, Robert. Emerson reviewed Paracelsus, probably on the occasion of a reprint, since its publication predates the other Browning works mentioned in the review. Pippa Passes Emerson remembered as being ". . . full of bold openings, motley with talent like this, and rich in touches of

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[128] Loc. cit.

[129] Loc. cit.

[130] Loc. cit.

[131] "Review of Social Destiny of Man," The Dial, I, 265.

personal experience."[132] The critic was ". . . pleased to see each man in his kind bearing witness, that neither sight nor thought will enable [man] to attain . . . wisdom."[133]

Emerson praised Browning's pictures of nature and rated the poet's description much higher than his philosophy.[134] In his reference to the "music" of the last scene, Emerson seemed to be alluding to the finely drawn relationship of the characters, rather than to the lyricism of their dialogue.[135]

Brownson, O. A. In his comments on A Letter to Rev. Wm. E. Channing, D. D., Emerson condensed Brownson's religious message and explained terminology, but made no mention of literary merit or fault.[136]

Bryant, William Cullen. Bryant, according to Emerson, was one of a "trinity of Bryant, Dana, and Percival," venerated by American magazines.[137]

> Bryant has a superb propriety of feeling, has plainly always been in good society, but his sweet oaten pipe discourses only pastoral music.[138]

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[132] "Review of Paracelsus," The Dial, III, 535.

[133] Loc. cit.

[134] Loc. cit.

[135] Loc. cit.

[136] "Review of A Letter to Dr. Wm. E. Channing, D. D.," The Dial, III, 276.

[137] "Review of The Dream of a Day, and Other Poems," The Dial, IV, 271.

[138] Loc. cit.

Burke, Edmund. Emerson evidently considered Burke a master of political persuasion. He spoke of the conservatives' need to find an apologist of Burke's stature to do "full justice to the side of conservatism."[139] Emerson referred to Carlyle's Past and Present as the finest writing of its type since the political tracts of Burke and Milton.[140] Burke's literary style was commendable, too: "Burke sometimes reaches to that exuberant fulness [sic], though deficient in depth."[141]

Burton, Robert. "Burton's Anatomy of Melancholy is an encyclopaedia of authors and of opinions, where one who should forage for exploded theories might easily load his panniers."[142] Emerson, in a comparison of old and new seekers of knowledge, quoted a passage from Anatomy of Melancholy on daemonology. Burton was ". . . quoted to represent the army of scholars who have furnished a contribution to his moody pages."[143]

Byron, George Gordon. Byron was among the first English writers to adopt the German attitude of subjectiveness, Emerson notes; but

> . . . in Byron . . . it [subjectivity] predominates;
> . . . it is blind, it sees not its true end--an infinite

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[139] "Lecture on the Times," The Dial, III, 6.

[140] "Review of Past and Present," The Dial, IV, 96.

[141] Ibid., p. 101.

[142] "Thoughts on Modern Literature," The Dial, I, 144.

[143] Ibid., p. 145.

> good, alive and beautiful, a life nourished on absolute beatitudes, descending into nature to behold itself reflected there. His will is perverted, he worships the accidents of society, and his praise of nature is thieving and selfish.[144]

Emerson regarded Byron's work as "the poetry of vice and disease."[145] Although Byron had once held sway over the hearts and minds of impressionable young men, Emerson perceived that other influences ". . . with no tithe of Byron's genius . . ." had taken over the power.[146]

Carlyle, Thomas. The first number of The Dial contained Emerson's promise to make "distinct and faithful acknowledgment" of ". . . the quality and the energy of . . . [Carlyle's] influence on the youth of this country."[147] Carlyle's name appeared in editorial notes telling of current literary projects and of his unfortunate ventures in the purchase of worthless American stocks.[148]

In a full-length article, Emerson reviewed Past and Present, introducing it as an "Iliad of English woes," unequalled in political writing since Burke and Milton.[149] This

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[144] "Thoughts on Modern Literature," The Dial, I, 149.

[145] "Europe and European Books," The Dial, III, 516.

[146] Ibid., p. 521.

[147] "Thoughts on Modern Literature," The Dial, I, 151.

[148] "Intelligence," The Dial, I, 135.

[149] "Review of Past and Present," The Dial, IV, 96.

"brave and just book," written by a "powerful and accomplished thinker," has amazing perspective on current history and the power to cut through superfluity to reach the real source of difficulty: "Like every work of genius, its great value is in telling such simple truths."[150] Carlyle's theories reminded Emerson of "the morals of the Orientals or early Greek masters, and no modern book."[151] The truth of Carlyle's theory must wait for proof until distance provides perspective; but since reaction to the book would not wait for that distance, Emerson saluted Carlyle for his courage in speaking now:

> It is a costly proof of character, that the most renowned scholar of England should take his reputation in his hand, and should descend into the ring. . . .[152]

Past and Present is "full of treason" but with "not a word . . . punishable by statute."[153]

> The wit has eluded all official zeal; and yet these dire jokes, these cunning thrusts, this flaming sword of Cherubim waved high in the air illuminates the whole horizon, and shows to the eyes of the universe every wound it inflicts.[154]

Carlyle's reverence for English tradition is apparent despite his "treason."

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[150] Ibid., p. 97.

[151] Loc. cit.

[152] Ibid., p. 98.

[153] Loc. cit.

[154] Loc. cit.

Emerson's chief objection to the work was:

> . . . a certain disproportion in the picture, caused by the obtrusion of the whims of the painter. In this work, as in his former labors, Mr. Carlyle reminds us of a sick giant.[155]

Although Carlyle's weaknesses are more appealing than the best efforts of lesser minds, his ". . . habitual exaggeration of the tone wearies whilst it stimulates. . . . It is not serene sunshine, but everything is seen in lurid stormlights."[156]

Emerson forgave Carlyle for over-emphasis of specific circumstances and repeated his conviction that in a few hundred years, when trivia is forgotten and the essential truths of the age are clear, history would reveal Carlyle's Englishmen to be much the same as other men of any time. Despite "some over-coloring of the picture," Carlyle is a credit to the traditions of scholarship.[157] He maintains a dignity and a humanitarian attitude, although Emerson regretted that Carlyle's "morbid temperament" creates a "somewhat bloated character" in his rhetoric.[158] Rhetoric is saved, however, by Carlyle's ability to abandon his clamorous passages to ". . . lance at him [the reader] in clear level tone the very word . . ." needed to

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[155] *Loc. cit.*

[156] *Ibid.*, p. 99.

[157] *Ibid.*, p. 100.

[158] *Ibid.*, p. 101.

bring the thought into focus.[159] Carlyle's writing demonstrates the beginnings of a new style, full of "vigor and wealth of resource."[160] Since it is "the first experiment," Emerson feels that ". . . something of rudeness and haste must be pardoned to so great an achievement."[161] This "giant-like" Carlyle with laughter like "earthquakes" is ". . . altogether too burly in his frame and habit to submit to the limits of metre, yet his writing is full of rhythm and music."[162] Carlyle's style makes him the "indubitable champion of England."[163] Emerson paid Carlyle a high compliment when he said that: "As a literary artist, he has great merits, beginning with the main one, that he never wrote one dull line."[164]

Cervantes, Miguel de. Emerson reviewed Longfellow's The Spanish Student by quoting an excerpt from Cervantes' La Gitanilla, containing a discussion of poetry.[165] In another review, on Borrow's Bible in Spain, Emerson spoke of the

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[159] Loc. cit.

[160] Loc. cit.

[161] Ibid., p. 102.

[162] Loc. cit.

[163] Loc. cit.

[164] Ibid., p. 101.

[165] "Review of The Spanish Student," The Dial, IV, 270.

Spanish countryside where ". . . we have so often enjoyed the company of Don Quixote."[166]

Channing, William Ellery [Dr. Channing]. In a column of editorial notes, Emerson reported Channing's death. Many tributes by eminent men had already been paid and many more were anticipated to honor the memory of "our Cato dear" whose rare abilities to express his moral beliefs had made him "a kind of public Conscience."[167] Channing was venerated as a judge of "literary morals" as well as an arbiter of business and social standards.[168]

Channing, William Ellery [Ellery Channing]. Channing was the anonymous young poet that Emerson introduced in glowing terms in "New Poetry":

> In an age too which tends with so strong an inclination to the philosophic muse, here is poetry more purely intellectual than any American verses we have yet seen, distinguished from all competition by two merits; the fineness of perception; and the poet's trust in his own genius to that degree, that there is an absence of all conventional imagery, and a bold use of that which the moment's mood had made sacred to him, quite careless that it might be sacred to no other, and might even be slightly ludicrous to the first reader.[169]

Interspersed with Channing's poems are Emerson's comments,

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[166]"Review of The Bible in Spain," The Dial, III, 535.

[167]"Literary Intelligence," The Dial, III, 387.

[168]Loc. cit.

[169]"New Poetry," The Dial, I, 222-223.

describing one piece as "honest, great, but crude" and another as showing "great feeling" though it lacks polish.[170]

This "poetry of hope" possesses ". . . no French correctness, but Hans Sachs and Chaucer rather."[171] One verse of an ode is "the most perfect in its kind" in Emerson's memory.[172] Other verses remind the critic of ". . . the austere strain in which Milton celebrates the Hebrew prophets."[173]

When Channing published his Poems in 1843, Emerson reaffirmed his ". . . faith in Mr. Channing's genius, which in some of the finest and rarest traits of the poet is without a rival in this country."[174] Emerson asserted that:

> The refinement and the sincerity of his mind, not less than the originality and delicacy of the diction, are not merits to be suddenly apprehended, but are sure to find a cordial appreciation.[175]

Chateaubriand, Vicomte François René de. In an analysis of Shelley, Emerson attributed to Chateaubriand, Richter, Manzoni, and Wordsworth ". . . the feeling of the infinite, which so labors for expression in their different genius."[176]

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[170] Ibid., p. 227.

[171] Loc. cit.

[172] Ibid., p. 228.

[173] Ibid., p. 229.

[174] "Review of Poems," The Dial, IV, 135.

[175] Loc. cit.

[176] "Thoughts on Modern Literature," The Dial, I, 150.

Chaucer, Geoffrey. Emerson spoke of Chaucer, in company with Homer, Horace, and Milton, as a poet whose writing possesses both "external meaning" and a loftier wisdom for those with perception enough to find it.[177]

The "trinity" of writers revered by the "old critics of England" consisted of "Chaucer, Gower and Lydgate," Emerson noted in a review of modern poetry.[178] In comments on Channing's poetry, Emerson contrasted Chaucer's lines of verse to "French correctness," suggesting that Chaucer's style is powerful but unpolished.[179] A review of Ancient Spanish Ballads judged the best of the ballads as being a "meet companion for Chaucer's 'Griselda.'"[180]

Coffin, N. W. Emerson's review of America--An Ode; and Other Poems reported failure on Coffin's part to create a great ode, despite success in several lyric passages. The thirty-five poems in the collection are ". . . neat, pretty, harmonious, tasteful, the sentiment pleasing, manful, if not inspired. If the poet have nothing else, he has a good ear."[181]

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[177]"Europe and European Books," The Dial, III, 515.

[178]"Review of Dream of a Day," The Dial, IV, 271.

[179]"New Poetry," The Dial, I, 227.

[180]"Review of Ancient Spanish Ballads," The Dial, III, 129.

[181]"Review of America--An Ode," The Dial, IV, 134.

Coleridge, Samuel Taylor. Coleridge was mentioned frequently by Emerson as a popular and influential literary figure.[182] Coleridge, as a critic, was lauded as a rare "man of ideas," as compared to the more common "man of thought."[183]

> Only from a mind conversant with the First Philosophy can definitions be expected. Coleridge has contributed many valuable ones to modern literature.[184]

Writing ". . . in the manner of Coleridge, with pen in hand, in the form of notes on the text of his author . . ." has produced valuable insights for other men.[185] Emerson felt that Shakespeare's reputation owed much to Coleridge for the hidden wealth his criticism had uncovered in the dramatist's writing.[186] Coleridge exemplified the new spirit of criticism for Emerson in his desire to encompass ". . . the whole problem of philosophy; to find, that is, a foundation in thought for everything that existed in fact."[187]

Emerson praised Coleridge's dictum that ". . . poetry must first be good sense."[188] Coleridge, one of the first

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[182] "Europe and European Books," The Dial, III, 512; "Young Americans," The Dial, IV, 484.

[183] "Walter Savage Landor," The Dial, III, 267.

[184] Loc. cit.

[185] "English Reformers," The Dial, III, 230.

[186] "Thoughts on Art," The Dial, I, 372.

[187] "Thoughts on Modern Literature," The Dial, I, 145.

[188] "Europe and European Books," The Dial, III, 515.

English writers to realize that the universal could be glimpsed through introspection, was, according to Emerson, one of the few who escaped the pernicious influences of subjectivity that frequently accompanied this method.[189] In one essay, Emerson quoted Coleridge's translation of Jacobi.[190] Coleridge was one of several writers described by Emerson as having unpredictable whims and prejudices excusable because of the sincerity and basic worth of the men themselves.[191]

Colton, George H. Emerson called Tecumseh; a Poem a "pleasing summer-day story" written by "a well-read, cultivated writer, with a skillful ear."[192] Colton was praised for a "metrical sweetness and calm perception of beauty" and for "the smoothness and literary finish of the cantos."[193] Scott's influence in the use of musical names in swift succession was so obvious to Emerson that it dulled his appreciation of Colton's use of Indian names. Emerson criticized Colton for concentrating too much on the superficial trappings of Indian culture and too little on the Indian's essential character.[194]

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[189] "Thoughts on Modern Literature," The Dial, I, 149-150.

[190] "Lectures on the Times: The Transcendentalist," The Dial, III, 301.

[191] "Walter Savage Landor," The Dial, II, 262.

[192] "Review of Tecumseh; a Poem," The Dial, III, 129.

[193] Loc. cit.

[194] Loc. cit.

Condillac, Étienne Bonnot de. Condillac, Emerson considered "perhaps the most logical expounder of materialism." A quote from Condillac was used by Emerson to prove that even the materialist must eventually acknowledge some idealistic truths.[195]

Confucius, Kŭng Fu-tse. Emerson accepted Confucius as one of the great minds, recognizable by any man's intelligence through the "one mind."[196]

Cowper, William. Cowper was well known in America, according to Emerson.[197] Of all metrical anti-slavery pieces, "Cowper's lines in The Task are still the best we have."[198]

Crabbe, George. Crabbe and Scott were authors ". . . who formed themselves on the past"; in contrast to many of their contemporaries, ". . . their poetry is objective."[199]

Dana, Richard Henry, Sr. In a review on Percival, Emerson commented that the three native writers favored by American magazines were Bryant, Percival, and Dana. Of the three men, "Dana has the most established religion, more

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[195]"Lecture on the Times: The Transcendentalist," The Dial, III, 299.

[196]"Thoughts on Modern Literature," The Dial, I, 148.

[197]"Young Americans," The Dial, IV, 484.

[198]"Review of Antislavery Poems," The Dial, IV, 134.

[199]"Thoughts on Modern Literature," The Dial, I, 149.

sentiment, more reverence, more of England . . .," than the other two.[200]

Dana, Richard Henry, Jr. Two Years Before the Mast: A Personal Narrative of Life at Sea was hailed by Emerson as "a voice from the forecastle."[201]

> Though a narrative of literal, prosaic truth, it possesses something of the romantic charm of Robinson Crusoe. Few more interesting chapters of the literature of the sea have ever fallen under our notice.[202]

Emerson predicted great success for this sea story, not only in securing Dana's literary reputation, but in initiating reforms in the treatment of sailors. The book is a "simple narrative, stamped with deep sincerity, and often displaying an unstudied pathetic eloquence."[203]

Dante, Alighieri. The works of Dante, Virgil and the prophets of the Bible were regarded as inevitable and enduring by the nineteenth century, Emerson contended, as though they had to exist and could not disappear.[204] Yet, Emerson believed that Dante knew, when he wrote, that true understanding and appreciation of his writing would be delayed.[205] Appreciation

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[200] "Review of Dream of a Day," The Dial, IV, 271-272.

[201] "Review of Two Years Before the Mast," The Dial, I, 264.

[202] Loc. cit.

[203] Ibid., p. 265.

[204] "Thoughts on Modern Literature," The Dial, I, 140.

[205] Ibid., p. 155.

for many readers was still limited, for the "mystic and subtle majesty" of Dante's Italian sonnets could not completely survive translation.[206]

Dante, Pindar, and Shakespeare all possessed the great gifts of the poet--". . . the just and open soul . . . the eye to see the dimmest star that glimmers in the Milky Way, the serratures of every leaf . . . and then the tongue to utter the same things in words that engrave them on all the ears of mankind."[207]

D'Israeli [Disraeli], Benjamin. Emerson knew Disraeli as a writer of "novels of Fashion" that ". . . belong to the class of novels of costume, because the aim is a purely external success."[208] Disraeli's aims were realized, Emerson believed, in the influence they exerted on contemporary social thought.

> Of the tales of fashionable life, by far the most agreeable and the most efficient, was Vivian Grey. Young men were and still are the readers and victims.[209]

Disraeli's influence on youth had usurped the position of Byron, who had more "genius."

Dryden, John. Emerson regarded Dryden as part of the literary wealth inherited by the present age and part of the

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[206] "Review of Michael Angelo Considered as a Philosophical Poet," The Dial, I, 401.

[207] "Europe and European Books," The Dial, III, 515.

[208] Ibid., p. 521.

[209] Loc. cit.

cultural influence exerted on America by Europe.[210] He admired Dryden for having both the poetic inspiration and the poetic technique needed to express that inspiration artfully.[211]

Edgeworth, Maria. In a discussion of novels, Emerson referred to the "Edgeworth and Scott romances" as "more splendid examples" of the genre.[212] Emerson suspected that all novels were formula productions with no essential differences ". . . excepting in the stories of Edgeworth and Scott, whose talent knew how to give to the book a thousand adventitious [sic] graces."[213] Again paired with Scott, Edgeworth was mentioned as a part of America's reading imported from Europe.[214]

Erasmus, Desiderius. Erasmus, one of the "treasures of wit" from the past, provided a source of material for many modern writers.[215] Many beautiful and profound passages in modern literature Emerson had traced to Erasmus.

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[210] "Walter Savage Landor," The Dial, II, 264.

[211] "Europe and European Books," The Dial, III, 515.

[212] Ibid., p. 520.

[213] Loc. cit.

[214] "Young Americans," The Dial, IV, 484.

[215] "Walter Savage Landor," The Dial, II, 264; "Senses and the Soul," The Dial, II, 376.

Euripides. Emerson quoted a prayer of Euripides, in his essay "Prayers."[216] Another quotation of Euripides, taken from Plutarch, appeared in the essay "The Comic."[217]

Fox, George. George Fox's "Journal" still had meaning for modern readers far removed from the time and circumstances of its writing, Emerson reported in his "Editor's Table."[218] Emerson named Fox an an example of reformers who became over-zealous through conviction that they offered the best solutions to social problems. Jacob Behman and George Fox had revealed "their egotism in the pertinacity of their controversial tracts."[219]

Garrison, William Lloyd. Garrison was well known and highly respected as an editor and lecturer when his Sonnets and Other Poems appeared in 1843. Emerson's praise was for the man, not his poetry. A man of such fine character could stand the disappointment of hearing that ". . . this volume contains little poetry [although] both the subjects and the sentiments will everywhere command respect."[220]

Gibbon, Edward. Emerson mentioned Gibbon's theory that ". . . it was combinations of circumstances that gave

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[216]"Prayers," The Dial, III, 78.

[217]"The Comic," The Dial, IV, 251.

[218]"Editor's Table," The Dial, II, 384.

[219]"Tantalus," The Dial, IV, 359.

[220]"Review on Sonnets and Other Poems," The Dial, IV, 134.

Christianity its place in history," in a passage on the Bible.[221]

Goethe, Johann Wolfgang von. Emerson had high praise for Goethe, who ". . . has gone the circuit of human knowledge, as Lord Bacon did before him, writing True or False on every article."[222] Goethe had studied the latest discoveries in every field. "Whatever the age inherited or invented, he made his own," so that ". . . a thousand men seemed to look through his eyes."[223] His extraordinary aptitude for learning and his enthusiasm for life enabled him to achieve greatness as a scholar and as a man. "He was knowing; he was brave; he was free from all narrowness; he has a perfect propriety and taste--a quality by no means common to the German writers."[224] There is no word unnecessary or untruthful in his writing.

Goethe was ". . . an apology for the analytic spirit of the period, because, of his analysis, always wholes were the result,"[225] Some of his works seem to exist simply to comment on some human truth he had neglected to illustrate previously.

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[221] "Thoughts on Modern Literature," The Dial, I, 139-140.

[222] Ibid., p. 145.

[223] Ibid., p. 151.

[224] Loc. cit.

[225] Ibid., p. 152.

Subjectivity assisted Goethe in finding theories behind ancient mysteries. Emerson gave examples of Goethe's fascinating hypotheses for phenomena unexplained by history. The critic regretted that Goethe occasionally revealed "that other vicious subjectiveness, that vice of the time" in his "patronizing air" of "Olympian self-complacency."[226] Goethe's writing was not marred by his "egotism," except that the "moral influence" was weakened.[227] Goethe's fault was not obvious, because he kept himself in the background, but he ". . . worked always to astonish . . .," which is a form of egotism.[228]

Emerson acknowledged Goethe's greatness of thought when measured against "the ordinary canons of criticism," but the German philosopher never became a true poet because he lacked "Dramatic power, the rarest talent in literature. . . ."[229] Goethe has revealed to less perceptive men, the special genius in Shakespeare that he lacks himself.[230] Without this gift for the dramatic, Goethe, even with his encyclopaedic knowledge and flawless logic, could pattern no masterpiece, yet Goethe

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[226] Ibid., p. 153.

[227] Loc. cit.

[228] Loc. cit.

[229] Loc. cit.

[230] Loc. cit.

was still "the king of all scholars," whose works should inspire American youth to study.[231] Wilhelm Meister, despite the genius it displayed, was too realistic for the idealist Emerson. In his opinion, the book failed because the reader received no inspiration or hope to transcend the senses.[232] Emerson could not forgive Goethe, in his greatness, "for not being more."[233] Because he lacked "moral perception proportionate to his other powers," Goethe forfeited a role as "a Redeemer of the human mind" and took his place among "the vulgar poets."[234]

Emerson concluded that Goethe must be recognized as

> . . . the poet of the Actual, not of the Ideal, the poet of limitation, not of possibility, of this world and not of religion and hope; in short, . . . the poet of prose and not of poetry.[235]

He quoted Goethe in several of his essays, in one instance using words spoken by a character in one of Goethe's novels.[236] Emerson viewed Goethe as a man peerless in talent, but regretfully, as one who had rejected the "ambition of creation."[237]

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[231] Ibid., p. 154.

[232] Ibid., p. 155.

[233] Ibid., p. 157.

[234] Ibid., p. 156.

[235] Loc. cit.

[236] "Europe and European Books," The Dial, III, 514; "Young Americans," The Dial, IV, 500.

[237] "Thoughts on Modern Literature," The Dial, I, 156.

Gower, John. Emerson spoke of "the triad of Gower, Lydgate, and Chaucer" held in reverence by "the old critics of England."[238]

Hallam, Henry. Hallam was named by Emerson as a historian who had analyzed English history in the new critical spirit of the age.[239] Hallam's history of the Italian republics was compared favorably with Manzoni's account. Emerson found Hallam's descriptions of the period ". . . greatly more luminous and memorable; partly from the advantage of his design, which compelled him to draw outlines and not bury the grand lines of destiny in municipal details."[240] Hallam's history of the "rise and establishment of the Papacy" was commended also.[241]

Herbert, George. In comparing Wordsworth to Herbert, Emerson said that nothing of Herbert's poetry could be "improvised," meaning that Herbert was technically precise in his verse.[242]

Herodotus. Men of truth will be defended by nature against the "whims and injustice of men," Emerson insisted, and presented, as evidence, the case of Herodotus:

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[238]"Review of Dream of a Day and Other Poems," The Dial, IV, 271.

[239]"Thoughts on Modern Literature," The Dial, I, 145.

[240]"Europe and European Books," The Dial, III, 514.

[241]Loc. cit.

[242]Ibid., p. 515.

> For ages, Herodotus was reckoned a credulous gossip in his descriptions of Africa . . . and now the sublime silent desert testifies through the mouths of . . . [recent investigators] to the truth of the calumniated historian.[243]

Homer. There are numerous allusions to Homer, and especially to the Iliad, in Emerson's writing in The Dial, but very few real comments. Emerson considered the Iliad one of the masterpieces of art and welcomed a new edition of Chapman's Translation of the Iliads of Homer enthusiastically, since previous editions were scarce in New England.[244]

Emerson observed that

> The Iliad, the Nibelungen, the Cid, the Robin Hood Ballads, Frithiof's Saga . . . are five admirable collections of early popular poetry of so many nations; and with whatever difference of form, they possess strong mutual resemblances, chiefly apparent in the spirit which they communicate to the reader, of health, vigor, cheerfulness, and good hope.[245]

Emerson included Homer in the "sacred class" of men who wrote "for the love of truth and beauty, and not with ulterior ends."[246] Modern men ". . . grudge to Homer the wise human circumspection his commentators ascribed to him."[247]

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[243] "Thoughts on Modern Literature," The Dial, I, 138.

[244] "Thoughts on Art," The Dial, I, 376; "Walter Savage Landor," The Dial, II, 264; "New Books," The Dial, IV, 272.

[245] "Review of Ancient Spanish Ballads," The Dial, III, 128.

[246] "Walter Savage Landor," The Dial, II, 265.

[247] "Thoughts on Art," The Dial, I, 372.

His art must be attributed as much to inspiration as to talent and wisdom.

Horace. Emerson imagined that Horace, one of the literary immortals, would understand and defend Wordsworth's departure from poetic tradition.[248]

The Huguenots in France and America. This book was reviewed by Emerson in his "New Books" column. No author was named and no details of publication were given. Emerson found it ". . . a very entertaining book, drawn from excellent sources, rich in its topics, describing many admirable persons and events."[249] This book ". . . supplies an old defect in our popular literature."[250] Although Emerson objected to the omission of Montaigne, he declared that the ". . . editor's part is performed with great assiduity and conscience."[251]

Hunt, Leigh. Hunt's "Abou Ben Adhem" was ". . . the poem of all the poetry of the present age, for which we predict the longest term."[252] Emerson found it ironic that ". . . one

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[248]"Walter Savage Landor," The Dial, II, 264; "Europe and European Books," The Dial, III, 515-516.

[249]"Review of The Huguenots in France and America," The Dial, IV, 270.

[250]Loc. cit.

[251]Loc. cit.

[252]"Europe and European Books," The Dial, III, 518.

of the best poems should be written by a man who has hardly written any other.[253]

Johnson, Samuel. Johnson, whose work was known by Americans as part of their cultural heritage from England, was described by Emerson as a man whose unpredictable prejudices often amused his readers, yet did not diminish the man himself.[254]

Jonson, Ben. Emerson stated that ". . . the best songs in English poetry are by that heavy, hard, pedantic poet, Ben Jonson."[255] "Jonson is rude, and only on rare occasions gay . . .," but his verse has the "natural manly grace of a robust workman."[256] Emerson used Jonson's phrase "rammed with life" to describe Goethe's Meister.[257]

Kant, Immanual. Kant was a practitioner of the "new criticism" who used this approach to ". . . nature and thought with an antique boldness."[258] Emerson traced the word "transcendentalist" to Kant:

> The extraordinary profoundness and precision of that man's thinking have given vogue to his nomenclature, in Europe

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[253] Loc. cit.

[254] "Walter Savage Landor," The Dial, II, 262; "Young Americans," The Dial, IV, 484.

[255] "Europe and European Books," The Dial, III, 517.

[256] Ibid., p. 518.

[257] "Thoughts on Modern Literature," The Dial, I, 155.

[258] Ibid., p. 145.

> and America to that extent that whatever belongs to the class of intuitive thought is popularly called at the present day, Transcendental.[259]

Keats, John. Despite the practice of booksellers of grouping Coleridge, Shelley, and Keats together, Emerson believed that ". . . the only unity is in the subjectiveness and the aspiration common to the three writers."[260]

Landor, Walter Savage. Emerson first commented on Landor as a man of rare abilities whose work had never received the proper notice, probably because Landor was not considered a part of any literary school or movement.[261] A year later, Emerson himself devoted a long article to satisfying the demand for criticism on Landor. Landor was described as the typical Englishman of his day except for his "elegant and accomplished mind."[262] Determined and proud, he had ". . . a profound contempt for all that he does not understand."[263] Landor, a "master of all elegant learning and capable of the utmost delicacy of sentiment . . ." was ". . . yet prone to indulge a sort of ostentation of coarse imagery and language."[264] These

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[259] "Lectures on the Times: The Transcendentalist," The Dial, III, 303.

[260] "Thoughts on Modern Literature," The Dial, I, 150.

[261] Ibid., p. 151.

[262] "Walter Savage Landor," The Dial, II, 262.

[263] Loc. cit.

[264] Loc. cit.

crudities that seemed ". . . to arise from a disgust at niceness and over-refinement," seriously marred his work.[265] Emerson reproached Landor for producing very little of literary value, despite an abundance of talent. Imaginary Conversations, written twenty years earlier, Emerson considered Landor's best work. His method, as ". . . a faithful scholar receiving from past ages the treasures of wit, and enlarging them by his own love . . .," made Landor "a friend and consoler of that small class who make good in the nineteenth century the claims of pure literature."[267] This class consisted of men who wrote ". . . for the love of truth and beauty, and not with ulterior ends. . . ."[268] One of Landor's greatest strengths, his "appreciation of character," caused Emerson to declare him unique in his understanding and depiction of man's essential qualities.[269] As a critic he ". . . has enhanced the value of . . . authors to his readers."[270] His criticism demonstrated the genius of many of the world's greatest writers, whom Landor loved, "yet with open eyes."[271]

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[265] Ibid., p. 263.

[266] Ibid., p. 264.

[267] Loc. cit.

[268] Ibid., p. 265.

[269] Ibid., pp. 265-266.

[270] Ibid., p. 267.

[271] Loc. cit.

Emerson praised Landor's style extravagantly: "His acquaintance with the English tongue is unsurpassed."[272] His words are precise. "He never stoops to explanation, nor uses seven words where one will do."[273] Landor is "a master of condensation and suppression," who is aware of "the wide difference between compression and an obscure elliptical style."[274] Landor's reputation would finally be secured for him, Emerson believed, by the simple majesty of his English sentences.[275]

Locke, John. American college textbooks acquainted students with Locke, making him a part of the culture borrowed from England.[276] Emerson mentioned Locke's philosophy in "The Transcendentalist."[277]

Lockhart, J. G. In a review of Ancient Spanish Ballads, Historical and Romantic, Emerson concentrated almost exclusively on sections dealing with the Cid, and expressed the hope that Southey's account would be reprinted soon.[278] Emerson

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[272] Loc. cit.

[273] Loc. cit.

[274] Loc. cit.

[275] Ibid., p. 268.

[276] "Young Americans," The Dial, IV, 484.

[277] "Lectures on the Times: The Transcendentalist," The Dial, III, 302.

[278] "Review of Ancient Spanish Ballads, Historical and Romantic," The Dial, III, 128.

considered "the best ballad" of the anthology, the "Count Alarcos and the Infanta Solisa," to be "a meet companion for Chaucer's 'Griselda.'"[279]

Longfellow, Henry Wadsworth. Emerson reviewed The Spanish Student; A Play in Three Acts by labeling it "a pleasing tale," and then quoting a passage on poetry by Cervantes.[280] The quotation, taken from La Gitanilla, suggests that Emerson considered Longfellow's play a pretty thing, but lacking in profundity.

Luther, Martin. Emerson, in his essay, "Tantalus," quoted Luther to support his thesis that men who are inflamed by conviction will probably achieve more.[281]

Lydgate, John. Emerson, in a review, referred to the "triad of Gower, Lydgate, and Chaucer" as the literary men held in highest favor by "the old critics of England."[282]

Machiavel [Machiavelli, Niccolo]. Machiavel, Dante, and Goethe, all dared to write things they knew might be long in gaining acceptance, Emerson said: "All great men have written proudly, nor feared to explain. They knew that the intelligent reader would come at last, and would thank them."[283]

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[279] Ibid., p. 129.

[280] "Review of The Spanish Student," The Dial, IV, 270.

[281] "Tantalus," The Dial, IV, 359.

[282] "Review of The Dream of a Day," The Dial, IV, 271.

[283] "Thoughts on Modern Literature," The Dial, I, 155.

Marston, J. Westland. Marston, Emerson remarked, was among the best writers for the London Monthly Magazine:

> Mr. Marston is a writer of singular purity of taste, with a heart very open to the moral impulses, and in his settled conviction like all persons of a high poetic nature, the friend of a universal reform, beginning in education.[284]

Emerson enjoyed Marston's tragedy, The Patrician's Daughter, although he questioned ". . . the fatal prescription, which in England seems to mislead every fine poet to attempt the drama."[285] Emerson found the play ". . . modern in its plot and characters, perfectly simple in its style; the dialogue is full of spirit, and the story extremely well told."[286] Emerson praised some of the characterizations, but disapproved of the artificial situation surrounding the denouement and of the wide time difference between two acts.

Massinger, Phillip. Massinger often served as a model for other writers, according to Emerson.[287]

Manzoni, Alessandro. Manzoni, a literary genius who possessed a "feeling of the Infinite," had been influenced by Sismondi's Italian histories, Emerson discerned.[288] His

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[284]"English Reformers," The Dial, III, 231-232.

[285]Ibid., p. 232.

[286]Loc. cit.

[287]"Europe and European Books," The Dial, III, 516.

[288]"Thoughts on Modern Literature," The Dial, I, 150; "Europe and European Books," The Dial, III, 514.

editor's column took notice of the appearance of Storia della Colonna Infame di Alessandro Manzoni.[289]

Marvell, Andrew. In a criticism of Wordsworth, Emerson praised Marvell as a poet greatly skilled in "deft poetic execution."[290]

Milton, John. Milton and Shakespeare, in Emerson's opinion, revealed ". . . a wisdom of humanity, which is superior to any talents which they exert."[291] Emerson welcomed Milton's influence on both European and American culture. The common man of England received benefits of judgment and wisdom from reading Milton, and young American writers knew him and his poetic style.[292] Milton and Bacon were considered by Emerson the modern writers whose styles were counted among the "few speciments of magnificence" of the ages.[293] Emerson imagined that Milton would defend Wordsworth's poetic theory, although he would ". . . curl his lip at [Wordsworth's] slipshod newspaper style."[294]

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[289]"New Books," The Dial, IV, 272.

[290]"Europe and European Books," The Dial, III, 515.

[291]"Thoughts on Modern Literature," The Dial, I, 151.

[292]"English Reformers," The Dial, III, 240; "Young Americans," The Dial, IV, 484; "New Poetry," The Dial, I, 229.

[293]"Review of Past and Present," The Dial, IV, 101.

[294]"Europe and European Books," The Dial, III, 514-515.

Emerson alluded to the creation of universal systems by Milton and Dante in one essay, and quoted from one of Milton's tracts a passage on man's application of religion to his everyday life.[295] Emerson referred to Past and Present as the best political writing since Burke and Milton.[296]

Montaigne, Michael de. Montaigne, "with all his French wit and downright sense," had been superseded by the new wave of thinkers and writers, Emerson said, but his wisdom was still apparent, making him an immortal literary influence.[297] Montaigne's use of coarse expression, Emerson believed, was intended to end the French writer's association with polite literature.[298] Emerson expressed admiration for Montaigne's personal courage in one essay, and in a book review on the Huguenots in France and America, he declared the book flawed by the omission of Montaigne, "the greatest man in France, at that period."[299]

Moore, Thomas. Scott and Moore were poets described by Emerson as writing "the poetry of society, of the patrician and conventional Europe. . . ."[300]

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[295] "Lecture on the Times," The Dial, III, 2; ibid., p. 9.

[296] "Review of Past and Present," The Dial, IV, 96.

[297] "Thoughts on Modern Literature," The Dial, I, 143; ibid., p. 148; "Walter Savage Landor," The Dial, II, 264.

[298] "Walter Savage Landor," The Dial, II, 263.

[299] "Lectures on the Times: The Conservative," The Dial, III, 196; "New Books," The Dial, IV, 270.

[300] "Europe and European Books," The Dial, III, 516.

Percival, James G. Emerson reviewed The Dream of a Day and Other Poems by Percival, who, after an absence from poetic endeavors of sixteen years, produced this volume with

> . . . specimens of no less than one hundred and fifty different forms of stanza. Such thorough workmanship in the poetical art is without example or approach in this country, and deserves all honor.[301]

Emerson decided that Percival's experiments with national music patterns bordered on affectation, and that Percival had ". . . prejudiced the creative power."[302] The youthful fervor of the still popular Percival was missing: "Neatness, terseness, objectivity . . . characterize these poems."[303]

Of the "American trinity of Bryant, Dana, and Percival," Emerson declared that Percival had produced nothing so good as the other two, but ". . . surpasses them both in labor, in his mimetic skill, and in his objectiveness."[304] Percival, "the most objective of the American poets," was summarized by Emerson: ". . . Mr. Percival is an upright, soldierly, free-spoken man, very much of a patriot, hates cant, and does his best."[305]

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[301] "Review of Dream of a Day, and Other Poems," The Dial, IV, 271.

[302] Loc. cit.

[303] Loc. cit.

[304] Loc. cit.

[305] Ibid., pp. 271-272.

Pestalozzi, Johann Heinrich. Emerson quoted Pestalozzi on revolution as a means of social reform.[306] Respect for the Swiss reformer was implied in allusions to his friendship with James Pierrepont Greaves.[307]

Petrarch. The "infinite grace" of Petrarch's sonnets, Emerson feared, had not survived translation.[308]

Pierpont, John. In his review of Antislavery Poems, Emerson credited Pierpont with producing ". . . the most readable of all the metrical pieces we have met with on the subject."[309] Pierpont's talent produced "very spiritied verses, full of point," but Emerson detected a lack of logical sequence and of consistency in thought and taste:

> Neither is the motive of the poem ever very high, so that they seem to be rather squibs than prophecies or imprecations; but for political satire, we think the "Word from a Petitioner" very strong and the "Gag" the best piece of poetical indignation in America.[310]

Pindar. Pindar, Shakespeare, and Dante were poets honored by Emerson for possessing the three attributes of the true poet--inspiration, heightened sensibility to life, and

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[306] "Lecture on the Times," The Dial, III, 13.

[307] "English Reformers," The Dial, III, 228.

[308] "Review of Michael Angelo Considered as a Philosophical Poet," The Dial, I, 401.

[309] "Review of Antislavery Poems," The Dial, IV, 134.

[310] Loc. cit.

eloquence to express the results.[311] Allusions to Pindar's "genius," and to his odes supported this high opinion.[312]

Plato. Of the "few specimens of magnificence" of style, Emerson considered Plato "the purple ancient."[313] There are quotations from Plato throughout Emerson's work in The Dial. In "Thoughts on Art," Emerson used Plato's definition of art.[314] "Prayers" includes a prayer of Socrates from Plato's Phaedrus.[315] Emerson opened his essay, "The Comic," with a statement by Plato.[316] All allusions reflect Emerson's veneration of Plato.[317]

Plutarch. The writings of Plutarch and Augustine still had power to excite the modern reader, Emerson testified. His experience had revealed that, after a few moments' reading, ". . . lo! the air swarms with life; the front of heaven is full of fiery shapes; secrets of magnanimity and grandeur

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[311] "Europe and European Books," The Dial, III, 515.

[312] "Walter Savage Landor," The Dial, II, 267; "Thoughts on Art," The Dial, I, 376.

[313] "Review of Past and Present," The Dial, IV, 101.

[314] "Thoughts on Art," The Dial, I, 223.

[315] "Prayers," The Dial, III, 78.

[316] "The Comic," The Dial, IV, 247.

[317] "Thoughts on Modern Literature," The Dial, I, 141; "Walter Savage Landor," The Dial, II, 263; "Fourierism and the Socialists," The Dial, III, 89.

invite us on every hand; life is made up of them."[318] In "The Comic," Emerson quoted Plutarch in a passage that ". . . expresses the value of the jest as a legitimate weapon of the philosopher."[319] The allusions to Plutarch were all tributes.[320]

Pythagoras. The essay "Prayers" opens with a thought Emerson borrowed from Pythagoras.[321]

Ranke, Leopold von. Emerson regarded Ranke's "voluminous researches" as having "great value for their individual protraits," but they had not surpassed Hallam's history of the same area, "the rise and establishment of the Papacy."[322]

Robbins, Samuel D. Emerson reviewed The Worship of the Soul: A Discourse preached to the Third Congregational Society in Chelsea at the Dedication of their Chapel, on Sunday morning, September 13, 1840, in a column, "Select List of Recent Publications." The author was allowed to speak for himself; extensive quotations were used in the review. Emerson praised this sermon for its ". . . simple, fervent, and practical expositions of religious truths as are here set forth,"

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[318]"Thoughts on Modern Literature," The Dial, I, 140.

[319]"The Comic," The Dial, IV, 251.

[320]"Thoughts on Modern Literature," The Dial, I, 141; "Walter Savage Landor," The Dial, II, 264.

[321]"Prayers," The Dial, III, 77.

[322]"Europe and European Books," The Dial, III, 514.

yet he said, ". . . it indicates more than it unfolds; it is not a complete and harmonious whole."[323]

Schelling, Friedrich Wilhelm Joseph von. In "Intelligence," an editorial column, Emerson reported the tumultuous reception of lectures given by the aging Schelling in Germany.[324] Emerson's references to Schelling exalted the man's intellect, but rarely mentioned his writing.[325]

Scott, Sir Walter. A discussion on the growing tendency toward subjective poetry included Emerson's comment that "Scott and Crabbe, who formed themselves on the past, had none of this tendency; their poetry is objective."[326] Scott and Moore were labeled by Emerson as ". . . poets who write the poetry of society, of the patrician and conventional Europe."[327] In a review of an American's poems, Emerson suspected that the serene musical qualities and literary polish indicated that the poet was "an evident admirer of Scott and Campbell."[328]

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[323]"Review of The Worship of the Soul," The Dial, I, 402.

[324]"Intelligence," The Dial, III, 136.

[325]"Thoughts on Modern Literature," The Dial, I, 145; "Europe and European Books," The Dial, III, 512; "A Letter," The Dial, IV, 267.

[326]"Thoughts on Modern Literature," The Dial, I, 149.

[327]"Europe and European Books," The Dial, III, 516.

[328]"Review of Tecumseh; a Poem," The Dial, III, 129.

Scott, as a novelist, had produced some of the "more splendid examples" of the romance, Emerson decided:

> Excepting in the stories of Edgeworth and Scott, whose talent knew how to give the book a thousand adventitious [sic] graces, the novels of costume are all one, and there is but one standard English novel. . . .[329]

Emerson attested to Scott's popularity and influence in America in several essays.[330]

Shelley, Percy Bysshe. The grouping of Shelley with Coleridge and Keats by book dealers seemed to Emerson one example of the influence the subjective approach was exerting: "The only unity is in the subjectiveness and the aspiration common to the three writers."[331] In Emerson's opinion,

> Shelley, though a poetic mind, is never a poet. His muse is uniformly imitative; all his poems composite. A good English scholar he is, with a good ear, taste, and memory, much more, he is a character full of noble and prophetic traits; but imagination, the original, authentic fire of the bard, he has not. He is clearly modern, and shares with Richter, Chateaubriand, Manzoni, and Wordsworth, the feeling of the infinite, which so labors for expression in their different genius. But all his lines are arbitrary, not necessary.[332]

The enlightened middle-class Englishman was familiar with Shelley's writing, Emerson contended, and agreed with Shelley and with Milton on the pressing philosophic issues of

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[329] "Europe and European Books," The Dial, III, 520.

[330] Ibid., p. 512; "Young Americans," The Dial, IV, 484.

[331] "Thoughts on Modern Literature," The Dial, I, 149-150.

[332] Ibid., p. 150.

the time. The typical Englishman, receptive to reform, was ". . . for temperance, for non-resistance, for education, and for the love-marriage. . . ."[333]

Shakespeare, William. Shakespeare was acknowledged by Emerson as "the first literary genius of the world."[334] Although ". . . the moral is not the predominating element," in this genius, Emerson contended that Shakespeare ". . . leans on the Bible; his poetry supposes it."[335] Emerson believed that an examination of Shakespeare would reveal reflections of the Bible and a reverence for "the Traditional morality."[336]

Emerson found "the wisest part of Shakespeare and Milton" to be ". . . a wisdom of humanity, which is superior to any talents which they exert . . .," together with their freedom from egotism that allowed them to ". . . utter their whole heart manlike among their brethren."[337] This ability to set aside personality and opinion and to apply reason to a situation resulted in pure art: "The wonders of Shakspeare [sic] are things which he saw whilst he stood aside, and then returned to record them."[338]

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[333]"English Reformers," The Dial, III, 240.

[334]"Thoughts on Modern Literature," The Dial, I, 139.

[335]Loc. cit.

[336]Loc. cit.

[337]Ibid., p. 151; ibid., p. 153.

[338]"Thoughts on Art," The Dial, I, 373.

Many poets have exhibited gifts, but very few could claim the three essential qualities for greatness:

> The Pindar, the Shakspeare [sic], the Dante, whilst they have the just and open soul, have also the eye to see the dimmest star that glimmers in the Milky Way, the serratures of every leaf, the test objects of the microscope, and then the tongue to utter the same things in words that engrave them on all the ears of mankind.[339]

Emerson assured his reader that works of art, such as Shakespeare's plays, were ". . . not all made for sport, but in grave earnest, in tears, and smiles of suffering and loving men."[340]

Familiarity with Shakespeare is indicated by Emerson's use of a situation and dialogue from Othello in illustration of a point in one essay, and his analysis of Falstaff as an example of "a character of the broadest comedy" in another.[341] Emerson used seven lines from a Shakespearean play as an epigraph for his essay, "Prayers."[342]

The favorite study for the preceding century and a half had been, by Emerson's observation, the examination of Shakespeare's works and their influences. The pre-eminent position Germany occupied as an intellectual power, Emerson

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[339] "Europe and European Books," The Dial, III, 515.

[340] "Thoughts on Art," The Dial, I, 376.

[341] "Lectures on the Times: The Transcendentalist," The Dial, III, 300-301; "The Comic," The Dial, IV, 249.

[342] "Prayers," The Dial, III, 77.

traced to the first German studies of Shakespeare. The implication was that Shakespeare had been the impetus for the stimulating new ideas in all realms of knowledge, emanating from Germany and affecting the whole world.[343] The benefits of Shakespearean criticism flowed both ways: "Even Shakspeare [sic] of whom we can believe everything we think indebted to Goethe and to Coleridge for the wisdom they detect in his Hamlet and Anthony [sic]."[344]

Other mentions of Shakespeare provide no meaningful addition to Emerson's views, but simply attest to Emerson's high opinion of the man's work and his influence.[345]

Sismondi, Jean Charles de. Sismondi's History of the Italian Republics had reminded modern man of past riches, ravaged by time, and had influenced literary men to choose themes and characters from Italy of the era he described. Emerson feared that most readers remembered the book chiefly by impressions of violence and confusion. Although Emerson compared this history unfavorably with Hallam's work on the same period, he thought its influence had been felt by men such as Manzoni.[346]

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[343] "Thoughts on Modern Literature," The Dial, I, 142.

[344] "Thoughts on Art," The Dial, I, 372.

[345] "Thoughts on Modern Literature," The Dial, I, 154; "Young Americans," The Dial, IV, 484; "The Problem," The Dial, I, 122.

[346] "Europe and European Books," The Dial, III, 514.

Socrates. Emerson quoted a prayer of Socrates, recorded in the Phaedrus of Plato, in his essay "Prayers."[347] Elsewhere he spoke of the "superb structure" of the sentences of Socrates.[348]

Southey, Robert. Southey was named by Emerson as part of America's "domestic reading," but the only other mention of the writer was in Emerson's published desire to see a reprint of ". . . Southey's Chronicle of The Cid, which is a kind of 'Harmony of the Gospels' of the Spanish Romance. . . ."[349]

Spenser, Edmund. In his comments concerning the influence of the "adventitious" on art, Emerson said that "the highest praise" awarded the artist is that the observer credits the artist with possessing the emotion he evokes through his art: "We hesitate at doing Spenser so great an honor as to think that he intended by his allegory the sense we affix to it."[350]

Swedenborg, Emanuel. Swedenborg's philosophy and writing were not readily understood by ordinary men, Emerson suggested. Heraud's study of Swedenborg was "the first

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[347]"Prayers," The Dial, III, 78.

[348]"Walter Savage Landor," The Dial, II, 268.

[349]"Young Americans," The Dial, IV, 484; "Review of Ancient Spanish Ballads," The Dial, III, 128.

[350]"Thoughts on Art," The Dial, I, 372.

adequate attempt to do justice to this mystic."[351]

Taylor, John Edward. The publication of Michael Angelo, Considered as a Philosophical Poet, with Translations, occasioned Emerson's comments on Taylor, who translated the poems and added an essay. Taylor's essay indicated to Emerson a knowledge of ancient writers and ". . . the degree of insight which reverence and delicacy of mind have given to the author."[352] Emerson recognized the inadequacies of translation: "Fidelity must be the highest merit of these translations, for not even an Angelo could translate his peer."[353] The review ended with Taylor's preface, which seemed to Emerson to be well thought out.[354]

Tennyson, Alfred. Editorial notes in The Dial announcing and welcoming new collections and editions of Tennyson's poems attest to the popularity he enjoyed in mid-nineteenth-century America.[355] Emerson, in a review of Tennyson's Poems, greeted this collection of old and new pieces

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[351]"English Reformers," The Dial, III, 230-231.

[352]"Review of Michael Angelo, Considered as a Philosophical Poet," The Dial, I, 401.

[353]Loc. cit.

[354]Ibid., p. 402.

[355]"Intelligence," The Dial, III, 135; "Europe and European Books," The Dial, III, 514; "New Books," The Dial, IV, 272.

as a relief from the standard poetry of the day with its failings of subjectivity, sentimentality, and didacticism.[356] Emerson considered Tennyson ". . . more simply the songster than any poet of our time. With him the delight of musical expression is first, the thought, second."[357] It was not, Emerson later explained, that Tennyson ". . . wanted nobleness and individuality in his thoughts, or a due sense of the poet's vocation; but he won us to truths, not forced them on us."[358] Tennyson's appeal to the senses is not limited to the sound he creates: "Next to . . . his delicate, various, gorgeous music, stands his power of picturesque representation."[359] Emerson was entranced by Tennyson's ability to create "eye-pictures, not mind-pictures," with rare "simplicity and ease."[360]

The later poems in the two-volume edition seemed to Emerson less sensuous and more thoughtful, and he rhapsodized on their subtle "sweetness."[361] The critic detected a trend in Tennyson's verse from his previous concern with "forms of

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[356] "Review of Poems," The Dial, III, 273.

[357] Loc. cit.

[358] Loc. cit.

[359] Ibid., p. 274.

[360] Loc. cit.

[361] Loc. cit.

outward beauty" toward the revelation of "the secrets of the shaping spirit."[362] Emerson used lines from the verses liberally in the review; he observed Tennyson's knack in ". . . the mere catching of a cadence in such slight things as 'Break, break, break, / On thy cold gray stones, O sea. . . .'"[363] The review ended with reiteration of Emerson's belief that Americans appreciated Tennyson more than Englishmen:

> England, we believe, has not shown a due sense of the merits of this poet, and to us is given the honor of rendering homage more readily to an accurate and elegant intellect, a musical reception of nature, a high tendency in thought, and a talent of singular fineness, flexibility, and scope.[364]

Further enumeration of the commendable traits Emerson discerned in Tennyson appeared in an essay on European literature:

> The elegance, the wit, and subtlety of this writer, his rich fancy, his power of language, his metrical skill, his independence on any living masters, his peculiar topics, his taste for the costly and gorgeous, discriminate the musky poet of gardens and conservatories of parks and palaces.[365]

Despite this extravagant praise, Emerson joined in ". . . the popular objection that he [Tennyson] wants rude truth, he is too fine."[366] Emerson felt that Tennyson relied too heavily

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[362] Loc. cit.

[363] Loc. cit.

[364] Ibid., p. 276.

[365] "Europe and European Books," The Dial, III, 517.

[366] Loc. cit.

on tradition and not enough on intuition: "Tennyson's compositions are not so much poems as studies in poetry, or sketches after the styles of sundry old masters."[367]

"Ulysses," Emerson assigned to ". . . a high class of poetry, destined to be the highest, and to be more cultivated in the next generation."[368] Other poems he admired include "Godiva," "Locksley Hall," and "The Talking Oak." Although Tennyson was "too quaint and elegant," Emerson ventured the opinion that ". . . it will be long before we have his superior" as a lyric poet.[369]

Veeshnoo Sarma. In an introduction to excerpts from the Amiable Instructions of Veeshnoo Sarma, otherwise known as the Heetopades or, incorrectly, as Pilpay, Emerson expressed the hope that religion, and not literature, would eventually collect and consider, side by side, all the ancient moral teachings of the world, such as this book, in translation by Charles Wilkins.[370] Emerson made no direct literary comment.

Very, Jones. Emerson carefully and tactfully explained the circumstances of the publication of Very's Essays and Poems. Very believed that he could take no credit for his

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[367] Loc. cit.

[368] Ibid., p. 518.

[369] Loc. cit.

[370] "Introductory Note to Veeshnoo Sarma," The Dial, III, 82.

writing, because he acted only as a scribe for divine thought. Although he did not object to his friends arranging for the publication of his work, he did not feel ". . . at liberty even to correct these unpremeditated poems for the press. . . ."[371] Emerson surveyed the results: "There is no composition, no elaboration, no artifice in the structure of the rhyme, no variety in the imagery; in short, no pretension to literary merit."[372] Despite these obstacles, the verse revealed to Emerson a sweet flowing quality and purity of sentiment.

Inevitably, Emerson compared the poetry of the volume to songs of the Bible and concluded that many of the verses were ". . . indebted to the Hebrew muse for their tone and genius."[373] Throughout the review, Emerson employed terminology that would be agreeable to Very, whose extraordinary "transcendental obedience to the inward spirit" had caused some to question his sanity.[374] Emerson, who called this volume one of his favorite books, maintained a highly sympathetic tone throughout the review.

Virgil. Virgil's greatness, Emerson said, had made men forget the ephemeral quality of literature; they supposed

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[371] "Review of Essays and Poems," The Dial, II, 130.

[372] Loc. cit.

[373] Loc. cit.

[374] Loc. cit.

that his writing had been foreordained and was destined to survive forever.[375] Virgil was one of the men studied so well by Landor.[376]

Walpole, Horace. Walpole, in Emerson's estimation, could fairly be considered a representative man of his literary age:

> He has taste, common sense, love of facts, impatience with humbug, love of history, love of splendor, love of justice, and the sentiment of honor among gentlemen; but no life whatever of the higher faculties, no faith, no hope, no aspiration, no question touching the secret of nature.[377]

Wordsworth, William. Wordsworth had attained his position of eminence in English literature, not through his poetry, Emerson asserted, but through the profound influence of his philosophy of life and letters.[378] In spite of constant conflict with authority, this influence spread, ". . . resisting the popular taste, [and] modifying opinions which it did not change . . ." until significant results ". . . soon came to be felt in poetry, in criticism, in plans of life and at last in legislation."[379]

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[375] "Thoughts on Modern Literature," The Dial, I, 140.

[376] "Walter Savage Landor," The Dial, II, 267.

[377] "Thoughts on Modern Literature," The Dial, I, 145.

[378] Ibid., pp. 49-50.

[379] "Europe and European Books," The Dial, III, 517.

As a poet, what success Wordsworth found was the result of ". . . the idea which he shared with his coevals, and which he has rarely succeeded in adequately expressing," his Feeling of the Infinite.[380] Emerson said of Wordsworth that ". . . more than any other contemporary bard he is pervaded with a reverence of somewhat higher than (conscious) thought."[381] This intuitive power was not consistently obvious, Emerson thought, because Wordsworth was sometimes guilty of ". . . confounding his accidental with the universal consciousness. . . ."[382]

Wordsworth's primary strengths included ". . . that property common to all great poets, a wisdom of humanity which is superior to any talents which they exert."[383] Emerson called him ". . . a superior master of the English language . . . [whose] poems evince a power of diction that is no more rivalled by his contemporaries, than is his poetic insight."[384]

Emerson credited Wordsworth with ". . . the merit of just moral perception, but not that of deft poetic execution."[385] Much of Wordsworth's verse sounded "improvised" to

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[380] "Thoughts on Modern Literature," The Dial, I, 150.

[381] Ibid., pp. 150-151.

[382] "Europe and European Books," The Dial, III, 515.

[383] "Thoughts on Modern Literature," The Dial, I, 151.

[384] "Europe and European Books," The Dial, III, 515.

[385] Ibid., p. 514.

Emerson, with a "shipshod, newspaper style."[386] These poems would be adequate as ". . . vers de Société, such as every gentleman could write, but none would think of printing or of claiming the poet's laurel on their merit."[387]

"The Excursion" was a "dull" poem, Emerson said, except for "the narrative of the influences of nature on the mind of the Boy, in the first book"; that section ". . . awakened in every lover of nature the right feeling. . . ."[388] "The Excursion" was not a true poem, but it was poetic: "It was the human soul in these last ages striving for a just publication of itself."[389] Emerson praised "Laodamia" for the sole reason that Wordsworth had written on "such a subject in such a spirit."[390]

Although he admired Wordsworth's independence in creating his own style, rejecting the dictates of popular taste, and taking his themes from nature, Emerson agreed that if Wordsworth had not deserved all the abuse hurled at him, such as the harangue on the floor of Parliament, that at least,

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[386] Loc. cit.

[387] Ibid., p. 515.

[388] "Thoughts on Modern Literature," The Dial, I, 150.

[389] Loc. cit.

[390] "Europe and European Books," The Dial, III, 518.

he had invited it.[391] Emerson felt that the controversial Wordsworth's "capital merit" was that he had ". . . done more for the sanity of this generation than any other writer."[392]

These appraisals of books and authors, measured against his standards for literary endeavors, including criticism, provide a basis for analysis of Emerson as a literary critic.

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[391] Ibid., p. 515.

[392] Loc. cit.

CHAPTER IV

CONCLUSIONS

F. O. Matthiessen has commented that an analysis of Emerson's writing by his own standards is almost impossible because of the disparity there.[393] In The Dial, Emerson established important principles of literary theory, but as Matthiessen would have predicted, he frequently failed to illustrate what he advocated. In his first essay for The Dial, Emerson said that he wished to write poetic criticism that anticipated and demanded nothing but the reflection of life revealed by the writer's personal genius. Yet most of his criticism alternates between pedestrian prose and poetic passages that sometimes elevate the reader, but more often cloud the meaning. There are some notable examples of success, such as Emerson's poetic and felicitous description of Carlyle's ". . . habitual exaggeration of the tone [which] wearies whilst it stimulates. . . . It is not serene sunlight, but everything is seen in lurid stormlights."[394]

Emerson's formula for determining the national state of mind concerning literature can be applied to an analysis of the individual with equal success. What Emerson quoted,

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[393] Matthiessen, op. cit., p. 5.

[394] Ralph Waldo Emerson, "Review of Past and Present," The Dial," IV, 99.

what he wrote, and what he wished to write reveal his essence as a man of letters.

Walter Blair and Clarence Faust, Emerson scholars, have pointed out that all searches for Emerson's literary method inevitably arrive at Plato.[395] Emerson certainly quoted the ancients. Many of his essays were growths from the seed of definitions by Socrates, Plato, Aristotle, Euripides, Pythagoras, Augustine, or Plutarch. Ancient influence is apparent in Emerson's literary theories in The Dial, and some of his criticism indicates his reliance on old standards. Emerson's criticism of the time lapse between acts of Marston's play suggests that the unnamed Greek unities of drama were still his rule for drama.

Emerson wished to write criticism free from prejudice and arbitrary standards; yet, he persistently measured other men's writing by his own view of truth. He accused Borrow and Colton of faulty perception, because they saw men and society differently than an idealist would. Emerson praised Goethe's realism when character or beauty were the subjects, but the critic found fault with the realistic presentation of the more unpleasant aspects of life.

Emerson's insistence on the moral element in literature caused him to fluctuate wildly in his opinions on Shakespeare,

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[395]Walter Blair and Clarence Faust, "Emerson's Literary Method," MP, XLII (1944), 79-80.

Robert Falk has noted.[396] Emerson's fullest treatment of Shakespeare in The Dial was an attempt to link the poet with the Bible as an ethical basis for his writing. Emerson obviously felt driven to reconcile the writer whom he recognized as the world's greatest literary genius with his belief that the highest quality in books is moral.

Emerson echoed Wordsworth in his call for men of literature to use the plain language of common men, but the Concord farmers he overheard must have been exceptionally soft-spoken, for he objected to the coarseness of Landor and Montaigne. His praise for Channing's use of new imagery was accompanied by the admission that the average reader might find it ludicrous at first reading.

The careful distinctions Emerson had made between talent and genius faded in application through criticism. Goethe and Landor received some of his highest praise; yet, he denied them Parnassus because he felt they had rejected the gift of inspiration. The few writers Emerson considered men of genius, such as Channing and Very, fared no better. Emerson praised them for their faith in intuition, but gently complained of their limited facility for the expression of their genius. The greater praise went to writers Emerson called men of talent,

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[396] Robert Falk, "Emerson and Shakespeare," PMLA, LVI (1941), 542.

despite his theory. In his evaluations of Channing and Very, Emerson fell far short of his goal to emulate Landor in criticizing lovingly, "yet with open eyes."

Emerson urged poets to find their form in nature and not in other poems, but his criticism reveals his admiration for technical precision in verse and his distrust of experimental or casual versification. Marvell and Milton, Jonson and Herbert were the men he praised for their structural skills in The Dial, which supports J. Russell Robert's theory that Emerson was greatly influenced by the seventeenth-century writers.[397]

Frank Thompson has advanced the thesis that Emerson's poetic theory and verse were largely determined by Coleridge's criticism and Wordsworth's poetry; yet, in The Dial, Emerson clearly indicated that he considered Wordsworth's value to lie in his theory rather than in his poetry.[398] Coleridge was important to Emerson as a critic because of his definitions and his insistence that poetry be, first of all, good sense. Emerson defended Wordsworth's theories on poetic diction, but criticized the results in practice.

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[397] J. Russell Roberts, "Emerson's Debt to the 17th Century," Am Lit, XXI (1949), 310.

[398] Frank T. Thompson, "Emerson's Theory and Practice of Poetry," PMLA, XLIII (1928), 1170.

Although Emerson agreed that the form should fit the message and should not be artificially contrived, his own verse in The Dial follows traditional patterns. It is to Emerson's credit that he recognized Percival's fault in the over-manipulation of form, resulting in a display of precious posturing. Some of Emerson's most acute observations on form were made, seemingly, with no realization of their importance. In his extensive comment on Tennyson, Emerson considered the verse popular at the time "too fine," although he recognized Tennyson as a great lyricist. The critic predicted that "Ulysses" would be admired by future generations, and praised the rhythmic qualities of "Break, Break, Break." These poems, out of the volumes Tennyson produced, are the ones most frequently anthologized, while most of what was popular in his day is considered dated.

A few of Emerson's essays in The Dial, such as "Gifts," suggest the influence of Bacon's epigrammatic style. The influence of his contemporary writers could be argued in Emerson's aphoristic sentences, like Landor's, and in his occasional Carlylean "stormlights" of poetic flight. Emerson could not disenthrall himself completely from the magic of language uttered by men past and distant. He quoted the antique literary treasures, and he wrote in conventional patterns, but he foresaw an era of new literary freedom and declared the time ready for it. In his journal, at the

beginning of The Dial's last year, Emerson commented on the spirit of the time:

> When I see what fine people we have, I think it a sort of King Réné period: there is no doing, but rare and shrilling prophecy from bands of competing minstrels and the age shall not sneak out, but affirm all the beauty and truth in its heart.[399]

At the time Emerson wrote these lines, the men who would produce this affirmation were waiting in the wings. Whether they were listening for their cues from Emerson, or, as he would have had them do, listening to themselves, the drama of discovery was about to begin. A span of five years, 1850-1855, saw the appearance of Nathaniel Hawthorne's The Scarlet Letter, Herman Melville's Moby Dick, Henry David Thoreau's Walden, and Walt Whitman's Leaves of Grass, marking this period as perhaps the most remarkable assertion of creative energy known to American literary history.[400]

Two of these authors were unmistakably influenced by Emerson and his exhortations. Thoreau, Emerson's former protege, had first published in The Dial. Whitman admitted that Emerson had ". . . brought him to a boil," and scholars have confined themselves to measuring and dating this influence, rather than questioning it.[401] The theory that Emerson had

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[399]Ralph Waldo Emerson, Journals, op. cit., VI, 367-380.

[400]Matthiessen, op. cit., p. vii.

[401]John B. Moore, "Master of Whitman," SP, XXIII (1926), 77; Clarence L. F. Gohdes, "Whitman and Emerson," Sewanee R, XXXVII (1929), 81.

advocated, but never demonstrated, was realized in Whitman's poetry and in Melville's symbolism.[402]

The Dial, defunct since 1844, did not survive to welcome this auspicious period, but Hawthorne's earlier work had been reviewed in The Dial, not by Emerson, but by Margaret Fuller, who had also reviewed Melville's Typee for another publication.[403] Emerson and Hawthorne, who lived in the same community and shared the same friends, never really understood one another, because each was so completely an individual.[404]

Emerson's philosophy, with its optimistic view of human nature and its love of benign nature, did not equip him to comprehend Hawthorne, who knew man's innate depravity, or Melville, who knew the crushing force of Fate. The man who lacked the Vision of Evil would not understand these writers whose concepts of morality demanded the depiction of man in confrontation with evil.

His disdain for fiction would not have prevented Emerson's examination of the books of Hawthorne and Melville, for one of the surprises The Dial offers is Emerson's comment on romances and novels, indicating a wider reading background

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[402]Charles Feidelson, Jr., "Toward Melville; Some Versions of Emerson," Symbolism and American Literature, pp. 119-120.

[403]Miller, op. cit., p. 189.

[404]Matthiessen, op. cit., p. 194.

in the area than he ever professed to have. Although he revealed no fondness for fiction, Emerson's analysis of stock novels and his comment on well-known novelists support John Flanagan's contention that Emerson knew most of the important novels of his time and that he was a good judge of fiction.[405]

It seems that Emerson's contribution to American literature was almost precisely what he had envisioned it to be. He was the prophet who foretold and paved the way for the absentee American literature.[406] The Dial held its chief significance as a vehicle for Emerson's recognition of the spirit prevalent in the land and as a stimulus to creative action.[407]

Although his work in The Dial reveals some insight and taste in the evaluation of literature, Emerson emerges, not so much a critic, as a literary theorist, whose theory was only one facet of his idealistic philosophy. Emerson did not always adhere to his forward-looking principles in his criticism or in his creative efforts. His catholic reading habits, indicated by his numerous allusions, brought the influences of the world's literature to bear on a man whose prime determination was to usher in a truly American literature.

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[405] John Flanagan, "Emerson as a Critic of Fiction," PQ, XV (1936), 31.

[406] Perry, op. cit., p. 20; Newton Dillaway, Prophet of America: Emerson and the Problems of Today, p. 111.

[407] Holmes, op. cit., p. 394.

Paradoxically, Emerson could never be the leader of literary disciples, because he taught self-trust and disregard for outside authority; yet, as each generation sloughs off old forms in search of new means of expression, it is fulfilling Emerson's prophecy. The regularity with which Emerson is quoted in current periodicals indicates that he was speaking for future generations as well as for his own.

Attention to Emerson, as a literary critic, has been limited because of his seeming inconsistencies and his failure to produce examples of what he defined; however, scholars continue to consult Emerson for sources of American literary thought. Emerson might well have preferred the title of prophet to describe his contribution. The coming of age of American literature, for which he set the stage, was commanding world-wide attention before his death. His prophecy in the last number of The Dial, that the opening of the West would produce the quintessential American author, was fulfilled in Mark Twain, in the seer's own lifetime.[408] Emerson had envisioned a literature that he would neither write nor fully recognize, but if he ever realized it, he might have reflected that prophets are sometimes denied entry into the land they have promised to others.

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[408]Ralph Waldo Emerson, "Young Americans," The Dial, IV, 491.

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APPENDIX

APPENDIX

RALPH WALDO EMERSON'S PIECES IN THE DIAL

Emerson's contributions to The Dial, as determined by George Willis Cooke, are listed below with the addition of explanatory labels in brackets.[409] The volume is indicated by Roman numeral; the number of the quarterly journal follows; and the initial page number of each work appears in the third column.

I	1	1	The Editors to the Reader [essay]
		84	To . . . (To Eva.) [poem]
		122	The Problem [poem]
	2	137	Thoughts on Modern Literature [essay]
		158	Silence (Eros.) [poem]
		220	New Poetry [essay and criticism]
		242	Wood Notes [poem]
		264	Dana's Two Years Before the Mast [review]
		265	Fourier's Social Destiny of Man [review]
	3	339	The Snow-Storm [poem]
		347	Suum Cuique [poem]
		348	The Sphinx [poem]
		367	Thoughts on Art [essay]
		401	Michael Angelo Considered as a Philosophical Poet [review]
		402	Robbin's Worship of the Soul [review]
	4	523	Man the Reformer [essay]
II	1	130	Jones Very's Essays and Poems [review]
	2	205	Painting and Sculpture [essay]
		205	Fate [poem]
		207	Wood Notes II [poem]
		262	Walter Savage Landor [critical essay]
		373	The Park [poem]
		373	Forbearance [poem]
		373	Grace [poem]

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[409] Cooke, op. cit., II, 213.