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**The Renaissance of Impasse in American/Quebec Literary Relations:**

**Comparative Readings of Carlyle, Emerson, Melville, Aquin, Ducharme and Beaulieu**

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Submitted in partial fulfillment of the  
Ph.D. degree in English to the School  
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## Thesis Abstract

This study comprises a series of comparative readings of authors key to the high-cultural renaissances in the Romantic literature of nineteenth-century America and twentieth-century Quebec. The Introduction lays out the historical and theoretical foundation for such a cross-cultural, cross-temporal reading, by arguing that, on the basis of both intellectual/historical “influence” and a strong affinity of means and ends, the American Romantic canon should reasonably be extended to include Quebec writers from the 1960s. The comparative readings at issue thus approach the writers under scrutiny from the converging perspectives of literary history (as artists sharing in an intellectual tradition) and literary theory (as moderns or contemporaries similarly participating in a bid for “authority”). In the first instance, from the perspective of literary history, the assimilation of the highly representative thought and rhetorical practice of sixteenth-century French skeptic Michel de Montaigne into the mainstream of American Romanticism by such equally representative authors as Ralph Waldo Emerson and Herman Melville serves to suggest an explanation for the proximity of their ideas and aims with those of their twentieth-century Quebec counterparts. In the second, a survey of criticism on works from both periods complements that account by showing how such a complex body of criticism—it too enabled by a body of theory with verifiable affinities with the thought of Montaigne—tends to (re)duplicate the rhetorical practice of American and Quebec writers under scrutiny by finding in writers or critics from the opposite canon a call to autonomy, and thereby effectively assimilating them to their own enterprise.

Chapter One attempts to track the presence of Montaigne’s philosophic skepticism at the center of the revolutionary poetics, prophecy, and politics of Thomas Carlyle, whose work is

construed as basic to an understanding of the relationships between philosophical and political revolutions in the (post)Romantic era. The image of Carlyle as “problematic prophet” (Albert J. LaValley) which emerges from the rapprochement of his mysticism with the skepticism of Montaigne (and its eighteenth- and nineteenth-century avatars) is further borne out by a reading of the volutions of Carlyle’s poetics of history in Quebec’s belated “revolution of mentalities,” a version in small of both the Revolution in France and the “revolution in philosophy” effected by Kant, Friedrich Schelling and others in Germany, and by Coleridge and Carlyle in England. The impress of Carlylean poetics in particular on the work of Quebec New Novelist and polemicist Hubert Aquin is traced through writings from Jorge Luis Borges, a major source for Aquin, and an aficionado of *Sartor Resartus*. In keeping with that poetics, which construes the prophetic book of history as increasingly inscrutable, works from both Carlyle and Aquin are read as documenting a metaphysical, political and historical impasse, the result, ironically, of the very overturning of the traditional certainties of “the Old Order of values” (a trope prevalent in criticism of Victorian and Quebec literature) in which the authors are complicit.

Building on the first chapter, the second approaches Emerson, not in the tradition of prophecy and ethical direction with which he is conventionally associated, but from the standpoint of the (Post)Romantic and Existentialist enterprise of (re)visionary mythmaking in which he played such a significant role. A reassessment of Emerson from this perspective establishes the groundwork for a locating of his enterprise in a current of aestheticism extending from Poe, the Symbolists, the Decadents, and the Surrealists, on the one hand, and Nietzsche, on the other, which flow arguably culminates, in principle at least, in writings from Quebec’s Réjean Ducharme. While Ducharme wholeheartedly partakes in the Emersonian enterprise of

revisionary mythmaking, he does so no less demurringly, even *à rebours*: contrary to Emerson, but like Melville and Victor-Lévy Beaulieu, who are studied in the next chapter, Ducharme unequivocally disqualifies the artist from the nineteenth-century vocation of teacher, prophet and moralist.

Chapter Three concludes the thesis by bringing together the various dimensions of the problem engaged in Chapters One and Two, by a reading of Melville in relation to his devoted Quebec reader and student Beaulieu. The passing of the Old Order of values recorded by Carlyle and Emerson (and rehearsed by such diverse twentieth-century commentators as Walter E. Houghton and Robert Major) is coupled in Melville with the recognition that with such a demise must pass the age of romance and prophecy, since the authority of any new order or gospel can have no firmer moral or metaphysical basis than the Old. Beaulieu's Melvillean-style odyssey during the last decade of Quebec's Quiet Revolution replays his forerunner's career in disillusionment, thus serving to underscore once again the gap between the prophecy of romantic nationalism and the actuality of a secular world.

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## Preface and Acknowledgments

The following is a study of “relations” between authors belonging to periods, cultures and canons which may at first seem quite disparate—that of nineteenth-century America and twentieth-century Quebec. It attempts to account for cross-cultural, cross-temporal affinities between these authors and the organizing metaphors or tropes with which they are associated by having recourse to the history of ideas and literature, as well as to comparative readings of the authors themselves.

Even in the early stages of the dissertation project, it became clear to me that the very idea of such a comparative endeavor would meet with some resistance and skepticism, in particular on the part of Anglo-American readers. Part of the reason for that resistance and skepticism, I came to conclude, was that the analysis of what I call here organizing metaphors had gone out of fashion with a new era of specialization. The organizing metaphors (e.g. that of the passing of the Old Order of values and the triumph of Transcendental idealism) had not, however, for the simple reason that they had never been significantly challenged but rather assumed to comprise, emblematically, as it were, a standard history. My first task, then, would be to make an argument for the reexamination of these. Specifically, in period and individual histories such as F.O. Matthiessen’s *The American Renaissance*, on the one hand, and Stephen E. Whicher’s *Freedom and Fate*, on the other, the skeptical antecedents to nineteenth-century idealism in the *Essais* of Montaigne had been relegated to notes and annexes. The same condition obtained, to an even greater degree, in criticism of Carlyle’s work, an author whose importance to American writers of the period and Emerson and Melville in particular argued for his inclusion in this study.<sup>1</sup> In order to lay the groundwork for a comparative reading of

American and Quebec authors as belonging to literary and intellectual traditions not, at least, antithetical, these antecedents had to be brought to the fore. Consequently, this study offers an alternate history to that found in much (Post)Romantic criticism, wherein modern skepticism tends to be identified with, and so in a sense confined to, the project of Enlightenment reason. As the history of ideas bears out, however, nineteenth-century Romantic idealists found in Montaigne and his eighteenth-century avatars strong allies in the fight against a common enemy—the reason of the Scholastics and their master Aristotle, “prince des dogmatistes.”<sup>2</sup> And, again with reference to intellectual history, a reasonable case can be made that this same contest, *mutatis mutandis*, was fought in the 1960s by Quebec writers, the literary-philosophical inheritors both of Montaigne’s skepticism and the Romantic’s idealism.

The tripartite division and movement of each chapter (from antithesis to thesis and synthesis) principally seeks to demonstrate and account for this convergence. As such, within the scope of this study the cultural renaissance or *révolutions des mentalités* of 1960s Quebec and its distant intellectual origins are construed mainly as a supplementary context for a reading of its Anglo-American Romantic analogue, the latter necessarily being accorded logical and chronological priority. The resulting brevity of my treatment of the dilemmas facing Quebec writers, however, is somewhat deceptive, especially insofar as it is taken as an indication of their importance to the argument, since everything that precedes that treatment prepares the way for the tentative rapprochement which follows; in effect, the thesis hinges on that rapprochement. Moreover, by way of compensation, the Quebec authors are given, as it were, the last word, their work being said to (re)mark the impasse attendant on both Renaissance skepticism and Romantic idealism, which prove inimical to reasoned conviction and action and so tend to

undermine the establishing of the very certainties they posit and seek.

The substantial *dépaysement* required of readers of both canons by this study is, I readily concede, unsettling, as is the comparative method used to that end. However, this non-systematic, “big picture” approach, which might be characterized as historicist and intertextual, presented itself as the only one broad enough to effect the rapprochement which is the primary aim of the thesis. The trend in recent critical studies has been to further historicize and contextualize the writers in question. However, if (as the author of one such study notes) “Emerson’s political stance,” for example, “cannot be separated from his epistemology and metaphysics on one side and from his sense of vocational possibilities on the other,”<sup>3</sup> then it follows that a more general inquiry focussing on these aspects of the writings of Emerson and his contemporaries is still very much relevant and viable. In fact, the synthesis attempted here presents a twofold advantage: first, it offers a critically distanced reassessment of authors that tend to be idealized by their more “partisan” critics or apologists;<sup>4</sup> second, it brings some of the historical, political and ethical implications of their seminal writings “home” to the reader.<sup>5</sup> The extended use of analogy, apposition, and irony corresponds to these aims insofar as it challenges the currently prevailing synthesis by recurring to the organizing figures in the primary sources and gauging their validity. If this at times seems “too curiously to consider,” I can only allege that the intertextual method is the cornerstone of any comparative endeavor. By way of compensation for this necessary bias, detailing from the history of ideas and influence provides a further empirical basis for the comparative readings themselves. Attention has also been paid to the possible discrete motivations of each author; thus, for example, though temperamental and other affinities between the Anglo-American and Quebec authors under scrutiny are highlighted,

differences between these, the authors with whom they are paired, and the pairs of authors themselves are also respected. Finally, as critical theory past and present amply demonstrates, intertextual study presupposes that every text is in fact a complex, rife with indeterminacy because potentially infinite in its relations. The following, needless to say, is an investigation of some, not all, of these relations. My hope is that the journey across familiar and unfamiliar territory so charted prove in the end one of discovery and understanding, with points of recognition along the way.

This journey would have been impossible without the help of some key relations of my own. In particular, I must acknowledge a debt to Professor Camille R. La Bossière of the University of Ottawa, who first pointed me in the direction of this study and whose establishing of a relationship between the works of Carlyle, Emerson, and Melville, on the one hand, and that of Montaigne, on the other, serves as a basis for the attempt at synthesis which follows. I would also like to thank Professors Irene Makaryk, David Rampton, Bernhard Radloff, and David Lyle Jeffrey for their guidance; the School of Graduate Studies at the University of Ottawa and the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada, for their financial aid; and last, but most of all, my family, and in particular my wife Hayat, for their patience, kindness, and support.

## Notes

1. Carlyle's *Sartor Resartus* (1833-34) was first published as a book in America. It is also there that Carlyle first found an attentive audience.
2. Michel de Montaigne, *Essais*, ed. by Pierre Michel, with introductions by André Gide, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, and Albert Thibaudet, 3 vols. (Paris: Gallimard, 1962), 2.12.227. The larger backdrop alluded to here provides the terms of reference for the study as a whole.
3. Robert Milder, "The Radical Emerson?" in *The Cambridge Companion to Ralph Waldo Emerson*, ed. by Joel Porte and Sandra Morris (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 50.
4. I refer here, for example, to John Holloway and G.B. Tennyson on Carlyle; Stephen E. Whicher and Charles Lowell Young on Emerson; and F.O. Matthiessen and Joel Porte on Melville.
5. Conversely, I refer here in particular to Canadian readers, for whom the analogy between American and Quebec writers will undoubtedly add a sense of immediacy to metaphysical, ethical, or philosophical positions that might otherwise seem ahistorical.

## Introduction

### In the Wake of Renaissance:

### Reading/Writing Amérique/Quebec

The makings of “le destin littéraire du Québec,” avers eminent critic-historian Gérard Tougas in his 1982 study so titled, are to be found in the history of U.S. literary coming-to-power in the Matthiessen era rehearsed in his *Puissance littéraire des États-Unis* (1979).<sup>1</sup> And yet, curiously enough, given its deliberate patterning on that earlier history, Tougas’ book is by no means devoid of invention. Playfully casting himself in the role of haruspex to Quebec’s literary destiny, its author is, if not prescient, then certainly timely, studiously kenning as he does a lesson in imaginative revisionism underscored time and again in contemporary reassessments of the “American Renaissance” and its critical (re)construction. Harry R. Garvin’s 1983 introduction to a special issue of the *Bucknell Review* on “new” responses to the period may be said to sum up the view of another generation of scholars and students of the “American Renaissance,” so-called: past representative critics are construed as having “project[ed] desire onto reality . . . invent[ing] the very tradition they long[ed] for.”<sup>2</sup> A case in point: the tardy success of Herman Melville’s *Moby-Dick* (1851), its elevation within the canon to the status of a classic in world literature even as America was emerging as a world power, is, as Tougas’ history recalls, “une invention de la critique américaine contemporaine,” belatedly harkening to Ralph Waldo Emerson’s otherwise unheeded call to independence in *The American Scholar* (1837).<sup>3</sup>

As Garvin goes on to argue, such inventiveness suggests an affinity of purpose and method between the writers and the critics who “completed” them (to recast one of Harold Bloom’s terms) in the act of canonization.<sup>4</sup> F.O. Matthiessen’s *American Renaissance* (1941) is, of course, in this respect as in others, the *locus classicus*. Deliberately eschewing the “descriptive narrative of literary history” associated with Sainte-Beuve, Matthiessen’s study relies instead on the imaginative poetics educed by I.A. Richards and the New Critics from Samuel Taylor Coleridge.<sup>5</sup> So read, representative American authors become, in Matthiessen’s own words, “forerunners of our modern interest”—and thus potentially discordant visions of America past, present and future are reconciled and brought into harmony.<sup>6</sup> Implicit in this very revisionism is an acknowledgement of Matthiessen’s indebtedness to such literary precursors as Emerson and Friedrich Nietzsche, whose idiosyncratic way of reading their own forerunners in terms of the “needs and preoccupations”<sup>7</sup> of the present—a key tenet of Romantic poetics and historiography according to Sacvan Bercovitch—<sup>8</sup> patterns or adumbrates his own approach to the discipline of literary history and the study of influence. Treading in the steps of Matthiessen and other leading Americanists, Tougas brings the example home in his *Destin littéraire du Québec*, inviting critics, scholars, and *littérateurs* of the “Quebec Renaissance” to rewrite their past and author their authors in their own image. Not only does the future, by this view, remake the past, but to round out a self-fulfilling prophecy, the present makes the future.<sup>9</sup>

A renaissance of a “renaissance of the renaissance,”<sup>10</sup> the drive to modernity, autonomy and authority in the literature of 1960s Quebec and its criticism may strike some students and scholars, for whom Matthiessen’s account of the efforts of representative American writers to revive the “metaphysical strain” beginning with the Renaissance (neo)Platonists has long been a

staple of established literary history,<sup>11</sup> as a tad belated or *passé*. And yet, as suggested above, for all its attempts to generate “new” readings, rediscoveries and departures, the lesson in readerly self-reliance tacit in so much recent theoretical discourse on/in the literary history of the “American Renaissance” does not differ substantially from that which Tougas gleans from Matthiessen in his *Destin*, as evidenced by J.C. Rowe’s conclusion to his study of the same year. A round of deconstructive readings in/of the “American Renaissance” charting a “regressive history . . . which reads backwards from twentieth-century ‘influences’ to nineteenth-century ‘followers’” and so effectively conflates firstcomer with latecomer, pursuer with pursued, reader with writer, and critic with artist, Rowe’s *Through the Custom-House: Nineteenth-Century American Fiction and Modern Theory* (1982) comes full circle with the Americanist’s admission of his complicity in the very ideology he deconstructs: “America . . . has invented its own precursors,” he remarks, adding elsewhere that it has “*invented itself*” in the process.<sup>12</sup> His theoretical comparativism notwithstanding, Rowe’s avowal of a debt to Emerson for that key insight makes the lineage of American (post)Romantic (re)visionaries or *scripteurs* to their literary-philosophical ancestor through Nietzsche salient enough to need little or no remarking.<sup>13</sup>

In fact, Emerson’s “philosophy”—that “self is the sole subject we study & learn,” and concurrently, that “one man wrote all the books of literature”—<sup>14</sup> is the expression of an idealism still very much implicit, albeit tempered and chastened with due irony and self-reflexion, in contemporary U.S. criticism. If American Transcendentalists, as Bercovitch argues,<sup>15</sup> naturalized the sublime they inherited from Coleridge, Thomas Carlyle, and the English Romantics, “translat[ing] the past of Europe into the future of . . . America,”<sup>16</sup> then their critics, by analogy and in turn, have responded to the tide of Continental theory sweeping over America

a century later with an assertion of imaginative will-to-power no less formidable, recasting theoretical discourse on/in literary history into a self-reflexively deconstructive enterprise wherein America, as in Gregory S. Jay's *America The Scrivener: Deconstruction and the Subject of Literary History* (1990), figures as writer, reader and written.<sup>17</sup> However, that U.S. critics have in fact long been assiduous in reading by the light of the texts they gloss, darkly, and endlessly, is suggested (to pursue our initial example) by *Moby-Dick as Doubloon* (1970), "a conspectus of conflicting interpretations" representative of criticism and scholarship on *Moby-Dick* from its initial reception up to 1970.<sup>18</sup> In their preface, editors Hershel Parker and Harrison Hayford celebrate the interpretive freedom afforded by the "inviolable" inscrutability of Melville's autotelic text.<sup>19</sup> So construed-(re)doublingly, reflexively, in a glass darkly, as it were-, Melville criticism and scholarship since 1851 bears out John Seelye's conclusions regarding the upshot of the author's art of indirection: disconcerting and unavailing to early readers as much for what it suggested as concealed, this same obliquity proved congenial to critics versed in the procreative and reflexive virtues of ambiguity and indeterminacy.<sup>20</sup>

And yet, redundant though it seems in the wake of the renaissancing it revives, such comparativism as Rowe, Tougas and others practice does, however, serve to foreground the fact that the recurrent modernist will to authority and autonomy necessarily involves writers and critics in a transtemporal and transcultural dialogue. Donald E. Pease has pointed out, for example, how Matthiessen's early doctoral work on translation as an Elizabethan art anticipates his seminal study.<sup>21</sup> As an artform, the kind of translation which interested Matthiessen was "translation" in a double sense—that is to say, it consisted (in his own words) in "naturalizing the qualities of the original" so that "foreign classics" such as Plutarch and Montaigne were

assimilated “deep into the national consciousness” and thus brought into the “main tide of English literature.”<sup>22</sup> This process may be read as analogous to Emerson’s more conscious efforts to “translate the past of Europe into the future of America,” an expression of democratic and revolutionary idealism key to Matthiessen’s own “international undertaking.”<sup>23</sup> Scattered references to Michel de Montaigne throughout the *American Renaissance*, for example, suggest that Emerson and Melville were as successful as their Elizabethan counterparts in naturalizing his “organic wholeness.”<sup>24</sup> And Matthiessen’s assessment is born out by a close reading of Emerson, whose essay on Montaigne in *Representative Men* (1850) makes plain enough the appeal of the self-described “homme . . . universel” of the *Essais* to the like-minded Sage of Concord: “It seemed to me as if I had myself written the book, in some former life, so sincerely it spoke to my thought and experience.”<sup>25</sup> In his journals, Emerson goes so far as to anglicize Montaigne, inscribing him in the canon of English classics.<sup>26</sup> So translated, Montaigne becomes an antetype of the American scholar, present and future.

For their part, and by the same token, readers acquainted with French literary history need not apprehend any great *décalage* in the future that Tougas forecasts in his *Destin*. Roundabout as it is, his recharting of territory previously scouted by his American forerunners is designed to leave those readers on familiar ground. Indeed, his ascertaining of literary Quebec’s *destin* is not without its reminiscences of the past. So rooted, he concedes, is the “conscience nationale” in Counter-Reformation Catholicism that its writers are bound (even as they venture out “à la découverte de la signification du monde”) to take the *scientia* of Aristotle and Aquinas, so long a light to Quebec’s cultural elite, as their guide.<sup>27</sup> Similarly, Quebec’s critics are to find the origins of its cultural awakening in Quebec’s ancestral, mythical past, as Tougas’ work itself

demonstrates: kin both to Rabelais and Cartier, “citoyen du monde” and the New World, Quebec authors are by virtue of that literary-intellectual heritage destined, according to Tougas, to assume their rightful place in the vanguard of contemporary French literature, a place comparable to that of U.S. writers in the larger English-speaking world.<sup>28</sup>

As literary history attests,<sup>29</sup> Tougas’ use of such terms or points of reference locates Quebec’s new literature in *le grand courant* of French letters and ideas extending back to the Renaissance. In fact, Tougas’ penchant for a romantic, prophetic-style history and criticism invites comparison with the method of Jules Michelet, the historian of the Revolution, in his seminal account of that period: “Every civilization is like the Renaissance, and creates its own heritage out of everything in the past that helps it to surpass itself,” in the words André Malraux used in his 1936 essay “The Cultural Heritage” (cited at the outset of Matthiessen’s *American Renaissance*) to sum up the aim of a mode of renaissancing inspired by Michelet, amongst others, for a readership intent on the relationship between tradition and (re)invention.<sup>30</sup> The long “age of transition”<sup>31</sup> between medievalism and enlightenment which, by Victorian reckoning, reached its salient point in the French Revolution thus finds its analogue and its continuation, so Tougas and his contemporaries would seem to concur, in the rebirth of Quebec culture, “an age of beginnings and inventions,” enlightening the “long, empty Duplessis night” of the Old Order.<sup>32</sup>

And yet, for all the inventiveness and deftness evinced in his rhetorical handling of Quebec’s literary history and instructive as it is for the socio-critical genealogy and practice it so actively pursues as to make pellucid, Tougas’ dual prophecy of literary Quebec’s *destin* as the realization of its cultural capital and the achievement of a modernity patterned on that of the

U.S. partakes of an unintentional but revealing irony, suggesting as it does that the confluence of American and Quebec literature and theory and the shifting of borders dividing nationalistic and linguistic canons is as much a matter of past as of future record. “By going one step farther back in thought,” as Emerson contends in his essay “Circles,” “discordant opinions are reconciled, by being seen as two extremes of one principle”: “Aristotle platonizes.”<sup>33</sup>

As the above reading of Tougas in tow with his American counterparts is intended to suggest, the art of creative reading has come full circle in the Quebec critic-artist’s bid for independence, which consummates a marriage of American and French literary-intellectual culture long in the making. In his three-volume study of Melville, influential writer-polemicist and publisher Victor-Lévy Beaulieu, an author deemed exemplary by Tougas for his inventive use of his predecessors, pictures representative nineteenth-century American writers longing for a national literary tradition as antetypes of modern Quebec writers at the eve of their renaissance.<sup>34</sup> An appropriation of the Melvillean/Emersonian “Over-Soul,” Beaulieu’s semi-fictitious, (auto)biographical study ironically puts into practice their lesson in readerly self-reliance: “*Je m’appelle Herman Melville. Mettons,*” he jokes, in imitation of Ishmael, as he sets out again in pursuit of the mythical whale.<sup>35</sup> Here Beaulieu, significantly, takes his cue from French writer-critic and worthy disseminator of deconstructionist lore Maurice Blanchot’s review-essay heralding the appearance of Jean Giono’s 1941 translation of *Moby-Dick* in France. For Blanchot, Melville is Ahab, for he, too, “seeks to encompass everything.”<sup>36</sup> By that logic, which Blanchot, in concert with his French and American coterie, has worked diligently to canonize, Beaulieu is right to call himself Herman Melville. To be sure, this is merely rhetorical legerdemain. But though not found in any textbook on Aristotle, the baroque-romantic logic of

imaginative synthesis put into play by Tougas, Rowe, Beaulieu, and Blanchot at the conflux of American, French, and Quebec literary culture does have a long history, and thus, a beginning and an end. That history, not surprisingly, is adumbrated in those very nineteenth-century works deemed canonical or representative by twentieth-century criticism and theory.

If the Quebec author embarked on the quest described above still seems a small fish in big waters, it might be wise to recall the story of the pilot-fish in Montaigne which Melville alludes to, in Cotton's translation, in the "Extracts" prefacing *Moby-Dick*:

'Tis said that the whale never moves that he has not always before him a little fish, like the sea gudgeon, for this reason called the guide-fish, whom the whale follows, suffering himself to be led and turned with as great facility as the helm guides the ship: in recompense of which service, whereas all other things, whether beast or vessel, that enter into the dreadful gulf of this monster's mouth, are immediately lost and swallowed up, this little fish retires into it in great security, and there sleeps, during which time the whale never stirs; but as soon as it goes out, he immediately follows: and if by accident he lose sight of his little guide, he goes wandering here and there, and strikes his sides against the rocks, like a ship that has lost her rudder . . .<sup>37</sup>

An illustration, in Montaigne's view, of the "society and confederation" amongst disparate in Nature, the story may further be read as an allegory of American/Quebec relations. Like Nature, literary history (so the return to "history" above works to show) loves crossings. Thus, in following the lead of their Leviathanical American counterparts, writers themselves busy, like Melville here, taking their bearings in and remapping that history, Quebec authors are arguably treading in their own steps. Indeed, in light, first, of Emerson's prior Englishing and glossing of

Montaigne (“self is the sole subject we study & learn” repeats a Montaignesque “commonplace,” as the editors of Emerson’s journals point out),<sup>38</sup> and second, of Montaigne’s highly representative status in contemporary French literary circles,<sup>39</sup> it seems only fitting that some 1960s Quebec writers and their critics have inspired themselves, directly or indirectly, from the canon of “American” literature as if it were their own, or else have demonstrated marked affinities with writers and critics from that canon. Standing as they did at the crossing of the transatlantic fluxions of American and Continental culture, Quebec New Novelists were susceptible to influences from Europe and America, past and present, and their writings naturally remark upon that confluence in ways both overt and oblique. The comparative readings which constitute this study, consequently, approach the writers under scrutiny from the converging perspectives of literary history—as artists belonging to a single intellectual tradition—, and literary theory—as moderns or contemporaries participating in a similar bid for authority—, rather than on the basis of recognized influence, though such influence, to the extent that it could be traced, directly or indirectly, has been noted.<sup>40</sup>

There is, however, one respect in which logical priority must be given to the Anglo-American writers over their French counterparts in North America. Just as the confluence of the two literary cultures was in many way predictable, so, too, by the same token, the *dénouement* to Quebec’s renaissance is similarly far from suprising, and indeed, in some sense, predestined. As Melville’s epic goes on to show, *pace* Tougas, Rowe and company, the work of the self-pursuer in search of the “ungraspable phantom of life” mirrored in the “story of Narcissus” is a treacherous one indeed (*Moby-Dick* 14). One instance of the Melvillean art of misdirection serves to illustrate that point: in a book that ends in a shipwreck, Melville, in the guise of

*Moby-Dick*'s "sub-sub-librarian," omits all reference to the pilot-fish in the extract from Montaigne's *Apology*. Tuck in, tuck in! o ye "superficial skimmer of pages"! To an even greater extent than Nathaniel Hawthorne's dark conceit "Young Goodman Brown," Melville's is a work "calculated to deceive."<sup>41</sup> Melville had, in fact, begun by warning the reader "not . . . [to] take the higgledy-piggledy whale statements, however authentic, in these extracts, for veritable gospel cetology" (*Moby-Dick* 2). And with reason. For Melville as for Montaigne, the circularity or self-reflexivity of all human endeavour is an index to its vanity. In a world conceived as circular, every step forward entails one step back: "Nous n'allons point, nous rôdons plutôt, et tournoyons ça et là. Nous nous promenons sur nos pas."<sup>42</sup> Unknowingly, for the most part, but no less tellingly, the roll-call of author-critics above attests, in one idiom or another, to the hemiplegia or paralysis which (as Montaigne goes on to conclude) faces the subject bound to such an infinite round. Readers intent, for example, on resolving the ambiguities of Melville's oeuvre, so Rowe, Parker, Hayford, Seelye, and Tougas would seem to concur, reflect, instead, their subjective biases, which acts of misprision effectively duplicate or mirror the "ethical and textual impasse" allegorized, according to Gregory S. Jay, in Melville's mature work.<sup>43</sup>

Such, in any case, is the fate which awaits those who have abandoned all traditional moorings, to voyage chartless on "a sea of Pyrrhonism."<sup>44</sup> In his study of Thomas Carlyle, for example, Philip Rosenberg laments "how much the [Victorian] antirationalists were willing to concede to their opponents" by "allow[ing] rationalist thought to hold undisputed possession of the terrain over which they were fighting."<sup>45</sup> He points out earlier that "the rationalist definition of rationality [as enlightened self-interest] is markedly different from the scholastic

understanding of the term, which saw rationality as a standard by which one measured the accuracy of intellectual methods”—that is, as “the rules of logic.”<sup>46</sup> The rejection of such a standard may be traced back, foundationally, for the purposes of this study, to Montaigne’s skeptical *Apologie de Raimond Sebond*.<sup>47</sup> However, as Tougas suggests above, Aristotelian reason has continued to be a guide for Quebec writers in their exploration of the world.

Accordingly, there is evidence that those writers Tougas marks out as pilot-fish have each, after the fashion of their Anglo-American forerunners some hundred years earlier, and in some cases with even greater perspicacity, fathomed something of the impasse (historical, ethical, epistemological, and metaphysical) in which the Romantic idealism of the “Quebec Renaissance,” also founded on a dismissal of reason analogous to Montaigne’s, was bound to culminate. In the manner of a double-take, then, the following step-by-step account seeks to trace the coincidence in impasse of American and Quebec literary-intellectual culture.

Chapter One attempts to track the presence of Montaigne’s philosophic skepticism at the center of the revolutionary poetics, prophecy, and politics of Thomas Carlyle, whose work is construed as basic to an understanding of the relationships between philosophical and political revolutions in the (post)Romantic era. The image of Carlyle as “problematic prophet” (Albert J. LaValley) which emerges from the rapprochement of his mysticism with the skepticism of Montaigne (and its eighteenth- and nineteenth-century avatars) is further borne out by a reading of the volutions of Carlyle’s poetics of history in Quebec’s belated “revolution of mentalities,” a version in small of both the Revolution in France and the “revolution in philosophy” effected by Kant, Friedrich Schelling and others in Germany, and by Coleridge and Carlyle in England. The impress of Carlylean poetics in particular on the work of Quebec New Novelist and polemicist

Hubert Aquin is traced through writings from Jorge Luis Borges, a major source for Aquin, and an aficionado of *Sartor Resartus*. In keeping with that poetics, which construes the prophetic book of history as increasingly inscrutable, works from both Carlyle and Aquin are read as documenting a metaphysical, political and historical impasse, the result, ironically, of the very overturning of the traditional certainties of “the Old Order of values” (a trope prevalent in criticism of Victorian and Quebec literature) in which the authors are complicit.

Building on the first chapter, the second approaches Emerson, not in the tradition of prophecy and ethical direction with which he is conventionally associated, but from the standpoint of the (Post)Romantic and Existentialist enterprise of (re)visionary mythmaking in which he played such a significant role. A reassessment of Emerson from this perspective establishes the groundwork for a locating of his enterprise in a current of aestheticism extending from Poe, the Symbolists, the Decadents, and the Surrealists, on the one hand, and Nietzsche, on the other, which flow arguably culminates, in principle at least, in writings from Quebec’s Réjean Ducharme. While Ducharme wholeheartedly partakes in the Emersonian enterprise of revisionary mythmaking, he does so no less demurringly, even *à rebours*: contrary to Emerson, but like Melville and Victor-Lévy Beaulieu, who are studied in the next chapter, Ducharme unequivocally disqualifies the artist from the nineteenth-century vocation of teacher, prophet and moralist.

Chapter Three concludes the thesis by bringing together the various dimensions of the problem engaged in Chapters One and Two, by a reading of Melville in relation to his devoted Quebec reader and student Beaulieu. The passing of the Old Order of values recorded by Carlyle and Emerson (and rehearsed by such diverse twentieth-century commentators as Walter

E. Houghton and Robert Major) is coupled in Melville with the recognition that with such a demise must pass the age of romance and prophecy, since the authority of any new order or gospel can have no firmer moral or metaphysical basis than the Old. Beaulieu's Melvillean-style odyssey during the last decade of Quebec's Quiet Revolution replays his forerunner's career in disillusionment, thus serving to underscore once again the gap between the prophecy of romantic nationalism and the actuality of a secular world.

### Notes

1. Gérard Tougas, *Le Destin littéraire du Québec* (Montréal: Québec/Amérique, 1982), 11; and *La Puissance littéraire des États-Unis* (Lausanne: L'Âge d'Homme, 1979).
2. Harry R. Garvin, ed. with introduction *The American Renaissance: New Dimensions* (Lewisburg and London: Bucknell University Press and Associated University Presses, 1983), 12.
3. Tougas, *Destin*, 137, 16.
4. See Harold Bloom, *The Anxiety of Influence: A Theory of Poetry* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1973), 68, for his rendering of poetic misprision in the American tradition.
5. F.O. (Francis Otto) Matthiessen, *American Renaissance: Art and Expression in the Age of Emerson and Whitman* (London: Oxford University Press, 1941), vii. On Matthiessen's debt to Richards and on the anti-historical bias of the New Criticism, see Jonathan Arac, "F.O. Matthiessen: Authorizing an American Renaissance," in *The American Renaissance Reconsidered: Selected Papers from the English Institute, 1982-83*, ed. by Walter Benn Michaels and Donald E. Pease (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press,

1985), 99-100; and Donald E. Pease, "F.O. Matthiessen (19 February 1902–31 March 1950)," in *Modern American Critics, 1920-1955*, vol. 63 of *The Dictionary of Literary Biography* (Detroit: Gale, 1988), 142-44.

6. Matthiessen, *American Renaissance*, xiii.

7. *Ibid.*, 101. The critic, in the words Matthiessen cites from Nietzsche and relates to Emerson's "conception of history," must needs be "the master of the present and the architect of the future" (*American Renaissance*, 629n.2). The continuing relevance of Matthiessen's endeavor to later studies in American literature is argued by the fact that the preceding citation is taken from an essay by Nietzsche, "On the Use and Misuse of History for Life," which also serves as a catalyst to leading theorist Paul de Man's more recent meditation on "Literary History and Literary Modernity" (*Blindness and Insight* [Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1983], 142-65).

8. See Sacvan Bercovitch, "Emerson the Prophet: Romanticism, Puritanism, and Auto-American-Biography," in *Emerson: Prophecy, Metamorphosis and Influence*, ed. with a foreword by David Levin (New York and London: Columbia University Press, 1975), 6-7. "Rendering subjectivism the touchstone of faith," writes Bercovitch, "[the Romantics] freed the individual to choose (or invent) his identity, and then impose his own patterns upon . . . history . . ." (6-7).

Bercovitch's allusion earlier in the same essay to the Romantics' "Promethean journey . . . *through* the Center of Indifference to an affirmation of the self as divinity incarnate" evokes the seminal figure of Thomas Carlyle. Although the Coleridgean conception of the imagination is clearly predominant in *The American Renaissance*, Carlyle's reformulation thereof is implied in Matthiessen's emphasis on "*felt experience*" (*American Renaissance* 336;

stress in original), which echoes the former's appeal to the "felt indubitable certainty of Experience" in the pivotal "Everlasting Yea" chapter of his *Sartor Resartus*.

9. Tougas, *Destin*, 148.

10. See Arac, 94.

11. Matthiessen, *American Renaissance*, 132.

12. John Carlos Rowe, *Through the Custom-House: Nineteenth-Century American Fiction and Modern Theory* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1982), 193; and his "Deconstructing America: Recent Approaches to Nineteenth-Century Literature and Culture," in *ESQ: A Journal of the American Renaissance* 31 (1985): 61; emphasis in original. "We ought neither to imitate nor translate the writings of our poets and philosophers," Rowe argues in his introduction to *Through the Custom-House*, citing Roland Barthes and Harold Bloom's Nietzschean redefining of literary history; "we ought to *use* those texts in the very interpretive spirit in which they were written to discover in a new sense the intelligibility of our own times" (26). Rowe's reliance on such critics as Barthes, Bloom and Paul de Man would seem to put him in the company of the Yale school of aestheticized deconstruction he goes on to criticize in a later essay. See his "Postmodernist Studies," in *Redrawing the Boundaries: The Transformation of English and American Literary Studies*, ed. by Stephen Greenblatt and Giles Gunn (New York: MLA, 1992), 179-208.

13. "The modernity of nineteenth-century American fiction is not presented as primarily a historical anticipation of twentieth-century thought," Rowe reflects apropos his method, but concedes immediately that "a convincing historical argument could be offered in terms of a more traditional approach" (*Through the Custom-House*, 26). Cf. George J. Stack, *Nietzsche*

and Emerson: *An Elective Affinity* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 1992).

14. *The Journals and Miscellaneous Notebooks of Ralph Waldo Emerson*, ed. by William Gilman et al., 16 vols. (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University, 1960-82), , 4.68, 9.58.
15. See Bercovitch, 1-28.
16. Rowe, *Through the Custom-House*, 193.
17. Gregory S. Jay, *America the Scrivener: Deconstruction and the Subject of Literary History* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1990), ix.
18. Hershel Parker and Harrison Hayford, eds. *Moby-Dick as Doubloon: Essays and Extracts, 1851-1970* (New York: Norton, 1970), xvii.
19. Ibid., xix.
20. John Seelye, *Melville: The Ironic Diagram* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1970), 1-2.
21. Pease, 141.
22. F.O. Matthiessen, *Translation: An Elizabethan Art* (New York: Octagon Books, 1965, c1931), 7, 4; see also e.g. 141.
23. Rowe, *Through the Custom-House*, 193; Arac, 93.
24. See e.g. Matthiessen, *American Renaissance*, 35, 58n.6, 71, 128, 406, 467, 579.
25. Michel de Montaigne, *Essais*, ed. by Pierre Michel with introductions by André Gide, Albert Thibaudet and Maurice Merleau-Ponty, 3 vols. (Paris: Gallimard, 1962, 1965), 3.2.45; and *The Complete Works of Ralph Waldo Emerson*, Centenary edition, ed. Edward Waldo Emerson, 12 vols. (Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1903-4), 4.162. For additional confirmation of Emerson's close affinity to Montaigne, see Harold Bloom's introduction to

*Modern Critical Views: Montaigne* (New York: Chelsea House Publishers, 1985); and his chapter on Montaigne in *The Western Canon: The Books and School of the Ages* (New York, San Diego, London: Harcourt Brace & Company, 1994), 151ff.

26. Cf. *JMN* 9.61: "A true course of English literature would contain . . . Cotton's Montaigne."

27. Tougas, *Destin*, 82.

28. *Ibid.*, 15, and see 183-5.

29. With special reference to Jules Michelet and Jacob Burckhardt, Arac discusses at some length the genesis of the term "renaissance" as it came to be understood in the nineteenth century (97). As Burckhardt's contribution to the making of that history argues, the Renaissance is the age of "cosmopolitanism" and "*l'uomo universale*," of outer and inner discovery (*The Civilization of the Renaissance in Italy*, transl. by S. G. C. Middlemore with an introduction by Benjamin Nelson and Charles Trinkaus [New York: Harper, 1958], 1.145, 147).

30. Matthiessen, *American Renaissance*, xv. "I had never taken up such a huge mass of material, or brought into harmony . . . so many apparently discordant elements," writes the Michelet of *The Renaissance* (1855). "All these elements had existed in me for a long time but only as something with which I was acquainted; they became today *my* feelings, *my* own thoughts; if all this external history is now very simple, the reason is that *after finding* it within me it becomes myself" (cited from Lucien Febvre, "How Jules Michelet Invented the Renaissance," in *A New Kind of History: From the Writings of Febvre*, ed. by Peter Burke and transl. by K. Folca [London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1973], 267n.11). On Michelet's reception of Emerson, see Ralph L. Rusk, *The Life of Ralph Waldo Emerson* (New York and London: Columbia University Press, 1949), 327-28.

31. See Walter E. Houghton, *The Victorian Frame of Mind, 1830-1870* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1957), 1-2.
32. Kathy Mezei, "The Literature of Quebec in Revolution," in *The Human Elements: Critical Essays*, ed. by David Helwig (Ottawa: Oberon, 1978), 35, 34.
33. *The Complete Works of Ralph Waldo Emerson*, 2.308.
34. Victor-Lévy Beaulieu, *Monsieur Melville*, 3 vols. (Montreal: VLB, 1978), 2.70-71.
35. *Ibid.*, 2.159.
36. Cf. the titular essay to *The Sirens' Song: Selected Essays by Maurice Blanchot*, ed. with introduction by Gabriel Josipovici and transl. by Sacha Rabinovitch (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1982), 63. For Blanchot's initial response to Melville, see his "Le Secret de Melville," in *Faux pas* (Paris: Gallimard, 1943), 282-86.
37. *The Essays of Michel Eyquem de Montaigne*, transl. by Charles Cotton and ed. by W. Carew Hazlitt (Chicago: Encyclopedia Britannica, 1952), 2.12.228.
38. See *The Journals and Miscellaneous Notebooks of Ralph Waldo Emerson*, 4.68n.156.
39. In his *La Condition post-moderne: rapport sur le savoir* (transl. by Geoff Bennington and Brian Massumi, with a foreword by Fredric Jameson, as *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge* [Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984]), an influential 1979 report commissioned by Quebec's Conseil des Universités, Jean-François Lyotard adopts the logic of the (post)modernist avant-garde (Nietzsche, Proust, Joyce) as a basis for proposals radically at odds with the traditional outlook of Quebec's institutions. And yet, the post-Kantian penchant for self-authorship and innovation has a long history, as Lyotard is brought to reflect, one going back as least as far as Montaigne's *Essais* (81). For a detailed study of the influence of

Montaigne's ideas and style in the nineteenth-century and beyond, see Charles Dédéyan's *Montaigne chez ses amis anglo-saxons: Montaigne dans le romantisme anglais et ses prolongements victoriens*, 2 vols. (Paris: Boivin & Cie, 1943). Dudley M. Marchi's *Montaigne Among the Moderns: Receptions of the Essais* (Providence and Oxford: Berghahn, 1994) shifts the focus from the content and form of the *Essais* and their place and influence in a literary history conceived as linear to Montaigne's idiosyncratic mode of reading the past as an anticipation of the revisionism of his literary "followers." Especially relevant to my argument is his discussion of the intertextual relations between Montaigne, Emerson, Nietzsche and de Man, whose early essay "Montaigne et la transcendance," in *Critique* 9.79 (1953):1012-22, sets the tone for his later speculations on the relationship between literary history and literary modernity. Finally, for a study examining the relationship between the musical thinking of popular critic and theorist Roland Barthes, something of an *eminence grise* for Gérard Tougas and the Quebec New Novelists under consideration, and that of Montaigne, see Reda Bensmaï's *Barthes à l'essai* (Tübingen: G. Narr, 1986), translated as *The Barthes Effect: The Essay as Reflective Text* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987). Bensmaï argues that Barthes theorized (and so effectively disseminated) the essayistic genre or mode invented and practiced by Montaigne.

40. In his introduction to the papers collected by the English Institute on the "American Renaissance," Pease circumscribes the larger implications of the term "renaissance": "Once designated as the *locus classicus* for America's literary history . . . the American Renaissance does not remain located within the nation's secular history so much as it marks the occasion of a rebirth from it. Independent of the time kept by secular history, the American Renaissance

keeps what we could call global renaissance time—the sacred time a nation claims to renew when it claims its cultural place as a great nation existing within a world of great nations” (vii).

41. “Hawthorne and His Mosses,” cited from the Norton critical edition of *Moby-Dick*, 549.

42. *Essais*, 3.6.167.

43. Jay, 27. For a parallel account of “impasse” in the shape of an “unhistorical freezing” in Matthiessen’s imagining of the American Renaissance, see Arac’s essay (98). The late Matthiessen wondered if he was “an enthusiast trying to be a critic . . . a rhapsode trying to be an Aristotelian” (qtd from Arac, 107). Marchi also uses the term “impasse” to designate the “post-modern” condition of “radical individuality” anticipated by Montaigne, Emerson, Nietzsche and De Man (165).

44. The phrase is Carlyle’s, in *The Works of Thomas Carlyle*, Centenary edition, ed. by H.D. Traill, 30 vols. (London: Chapman and Hall, 1898-99), 28.38.

45. Rosenberg explains that “rationalism was allowed to control the terminology, for its definition of the rational went unquestioned” (*The Seventh Hero: Thomas Carlyle and the Theory of Radical Activism* [Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1974], 74-75).

46. *Ibid.*, 72.

47. See e.g. the first chapter of Houghton’s study, which includes a survey of the importance of Montaigne’s skepticism to English writers of the mid- to late-nineteenth century.

## Chapter One

### “Some Two Centuries Still to Fight”:

#### Eleutheromaniac Philosophism and the Quiet Revolution in 1960s Quebec— A Supplementary Context for Carlyle’s Revolutionary Poetics, Prophecy and Politics

“What a work, O Earth and Heavens, what a work! Battles and bloodshed, September Massacres, Bridges of Lodi, retreats of Moscow, Waterloos, Peterloos, Tenpound Franchises, Tarbarrels and Guillotines;—and from this present date [4 May 1789], if one might prophesy, some two centuries of it still to fight!”

– Thomas Carlyle, *The French Revolution* (1837)

### Introduction

In 1978, writer-polemicist and author of the politically resonant *Two Solitudes* (1945) Hugh MacLennan took stock of the situation at home in the wake of the Quiet Revolution. MacLennan’s account is notable for its sedateness in a time of apparent upheaval. In spite of signs to the contrary, the author abides by the essentially optimistic diagnosis or prophecy he had made some thirty-three years earlier in his landmark novel—namely, that though “psychologically” and now politically “polarized,” the “two solitudes” somehow (in the words of

poet Rainer Maria Rilke that served as an epigraph to that work) “protect, and touch, and greet each other.”<sup>1</sup> Such is the contexture of the two solitudes in fact, according to MacLennan, that neither politicians nor ideologues have “ever been able even to suggest a formula for taking [the nation] apart without ruining everyone, including themselves.”<sup>2</sup>

MacLennan’s own lecture-essay “Two Solitudes” (1978) is evidence of that alliance or synthesis in opposition and divergence. Skeptical in such wise of revolutionary formulas, abstractions and ideologies, MacLennan (so his editor Elspeth Cameron insightfully points out) addresses the “paralysis” besetting his nation “in the tradition” of fellow Scot and Victorian sage-prophet Thomas Carlyle.<sup>3</sup> And yet, as proof of that secret contiguity and colloquy which he alludes to, he concludes by citing and commending, not the representative wisdom of Carlyle, but that of Michel de Montaigne.<sup>4</sup>

Like the two solitudes, such life-philosophies as Carlyle and Montaigne embody would seem wholly disparate. As Charles Dédéyan’s history of ideas and influence suggests, “Deux pôles, deux extrémités irréconciliables” separate the archetypal Victorian dogmatist and the Renaissance doubter *par excellence*, the one devoted to his didactico-religious and social “parti pris,” the other to “une pensée individuelle et individualiste.”<sup>5</sup> For the former, as *The French Revolution* (1837) forcefully argues, “all available Authority is *mystic* in its conditions”;<sup>6</sup> for the latter, it is merely tautological: “les lois . . . sont lois. C’est le fondement mystique de leur autorité.”<sup>7</sup> From this radical incompatibility of doctrine and purpose—between public service and private dream—Dédéyan logically concludes, “toute alliance entre le penseur romantique et le philosophe humaniste nous paraît impossible.”<sup>8</sup> Here as with the solitudes, the traditions or *mentalités* at issue would seem to be so radically opposed as to allow for no dialogue in words.<sup>9</sup>

A *fin de non recevoir* or bar without appeal to such a meeting of minds is effectively signed, in Dédéyan's view, by Carlyle's skeptical silences in the face of all of his friend Ralph Waldo Emerson's talk of Montaigne.<sup>10</sup>

Dédéyan makes a good case, given the meagre evidence afforded by Carlyle's correspondence. And Carlyle's oeuvre as a whole, the "public continuation" (as Kenneth Marc Harris reads it) of his "private dialogue" with Emerson,<sup>11</sup> lends considerable substance to that case, sustaining as it does his key insight—that Montaigne's representative skepticism played a definitive part in fashioning the historical-intellectual backdrop against which Carlyle's equally representative idealism or mysticism reacted and took shape. Repeatedly underscored by his critics, Carlyle's so-called "transition" from fiction to fact, poetry to history, and revelation to revolution after *Sartor Resartus* (1833-34), in particular, would seem to provide further and decisive ammunition for Dédéyan's camp, suggesting as it does, by analogy, a similar shift from thought to action.<sup>12</sup> No friend (as Emerson had hailed him) to Montaigne, the prophet of the "Everlasting YEA" was on the contrary—so Dédéyan's history of Montaigne's place "chez ses amis anglo-saxons" rightly recalls—a mortal "ennemi" of "la libre pensée française" and its English counterpart.<sup>13</sup> On those who, with Montaigne student David Hume and his "innumerable followers," would "launch us on a sea of Pyrrhonism" or contemplative indifference, Carlyle had waged war absolute and eternal (*W* 28.26, 38). Voltaire, for example, he dismissed as a "mere Man of the World," a term which, for William Lecky in his *History of the Rise and Influence of the Spirit of Rationalism in Europe* (1900), would come to epitomize the wise skepticism of Montaigne,<sup>14</sup> Voltaire's philosophical ally, but which, in the context of that same history as told by Novalis and rehearsed by Carlyle, serves to designate the whole philosophic-sansculottic

priesthood, intent on “disrobing the world of all its variegated vesture” (*W* 26.425, 466). Like Novalis, Coleridge, and the German Transcendentalists on whom he would later pattern the sartorial philosopher of *Sartor Resartus*, Carlyle was profoundly skeptical of such “Closet-Logic” (*W* 26.467). Rational inquiry, “where the truths all stand in a row, each holding by the skirts of the other,” he rejected as a groping by the “Hand-lamp of . . . Attorney Logic,” unfit to guide anyone by day (*Sartor* 41, 54).<sup>15</sup>

How, then, can we account for the substantial coincidence and agreement of the voices of Carlyle and Montaigne in MacLennan’s assessment of the likely outcome of the Quiet Revolution? A closer diagramming of the battle-lines opposing Carlyle to Montaigne as drawn in and around Carlyle’s *The French Revolution*, followed by a tracking of the often occult presence of the *Essais* at the center of the latter’s revolutionary poetics, prophecy and politics, may suggest an answer to that question, and so serve, by analogy and extension, to articulate some of the embattled silences punctuating the debate between MacLennan’s two solitudes.

## 1

**Harmony in Discord:****Montaigne and the Skeptical Backdrop to Carlyle's Motifs in *The French Revolution***

“... spiritual music can spring only from discords set in unison . . . but for Evil there were no Good . . .”

–Thomas Carlyle, *Sartor Resartus* (1833-34)

“Our life is composed, as is the harmony of the World, of contrary things; so of divers tunes, some pleasant, some harsh, some sharpe, some flat, some low and some high: What would that Musition say, that should love but some of them?”

–“Experience,” in Florio’s translation of *The Essays of Montaigne* (1603)

“Doubt,” affirms Carlyle, “is the indispensable inexhaustible material whereon Action works,” as on a “canvas of Darkness,” and there “has to fashion itself into Certainty and Reality” (*W* 5.26). His own lifelong struggle with unbelief began early, with his studies at Edinburgh, “the citadel of the eighteenth-century Scottish Enlightenment.”<sup>16</sup> Having abandoned a vocation to divinity, he briefly considered a career in law in 1820, only to dismiss it as “a shapeless mass of absurdity & chicane.”<sup>17</sup> At the time, his only “literary” endeavors consisted of hack work done for David Brewster’s *Edinburgh Encyclopaedia*. By coincidence, Carlyle was commissioned to sketch the lives of two *philosophes* who (as former jurists) were well

acquainted with the law's shapeless mass of absurdity and chicane: Montaigne and his "countryman" Montesquieu, the author of *L'Esprit des lois*. Collected in the last volume of Carlyle's *Critical and Miscellaneous Essays* in the Centenary edition of his *Works*, the sketches were left uncollected and otherwise unpublished in his lifetime, which fact has argued their relative insignificance for Dédéyan and other critics.<sup>18</sup> But while these biographical sketches have none of the wild speculative insights of Carlyle's later writings, threads of them are, in keeping with his view of history as the "essence of innumerable Biographies," woven into his attack on *la grande lignée* or current of French skeptical thought running from Montaigne to Voltaire, Diderot, Montesquieu, Rousseau and other freethinking *philosophes* (*W* 2.130).<sup>19</sup>

Taken up again in *Sartor*, a jotting in Carlyle's notebook for 7 December 1826 puts the grounds for his indictment of that tradition of "eleutheromaniac Philosophism" (*W* 28.46) in the most cogent of terms: "The end of man is an *Action*, not a *Thought*," he copies out of Aristotle's *Ethics*.<sup>20</sup> "Characteristics" (1831) cites and extends that axiom by providing its logical corollary or antecedent—"the end of Understanding is not to prove and find reasons," writes Carlyle, "but to know and believe" (*W* 28.25, 5). And yet, if the inquirer knew and believed, so the new-awakened sage of that essay argues, he would not inquire at all: "The beginning of Inquiry is a Disease," he asserts, and proceeds to marshal aporiae—"everywhere there is Dualism, Equipoise; a perpetual Contradiction dwells in us"—in favor of his argument for an unconscious, organic view of life (*W* 28.2, 27). Starting out, unlike a Luther, a Napoleon, or a Goethe, from no fixed belief or intuition, but from understanding or reason alone and unaided, the "dialectic man-at-arms . . . armed cap-a-pie in syllogistic mail of proof, and perfect master of logic-fence" works at cross-purposes, attempting as he does "to educe Conviction out of Negation" (*W* 28.6, 27). The

underlying absurdity of such an undertaking is ironically imaged by Carlyle as an illustration of the law of gravity and reflexive action: “System-makers and builders of logical card-castles” are compared to gyrating acrobats setting out only to end where they begin, “like Spinning Dervishes” (*W* 28.6). Just as the attempt to escape one’s own shadow leads to vicious circling—as of a contortionist endeavoring “to fold his own body in his arms, and, by lifting, lift up *himself*”—so, too, the attempt to become fully conscious of one’s own consciousness involves an infinite regress: “Metaphysical Speculation, as it begins in No or Nothingness, so it must needs end in Nothingness; circulates and must circulate in endless vortices; creating, swallowing—*itself*” (*W* 28.27). “[O]nly by victoriously penetrating into Things themselves,” as Carlyle would later put it in *Sartor Resartus*, “can [one] find peace and a stronghold” (155). What follows is, accordingly, in the words of Harris, “a sort of philosophical Great War,” with the French Revolution as backdrop, in which “the entire Anglo-French skeptical alliance is arrayed against Carlyle’s various Germans,”<sup>21</sup> or (in Carlyle’s terms) “Sceptical . . . Inquisitory Metaphysics” against “Dogmatical . . . Constructive Metaphysics,” the former likened to a disease, the latter to a convalescence (*W* 28.26).

Raised in such wise to the level of a moral, metahistorical reflection in the review essays leading up to *Sartor*, Carlyle’s vigorous counter-offensive against eleutheromaniac Philosophism reaches its logical apogee in *The French Revolution* (1837). As a moral drama centered on the life of the time-spirit, *The French Revolution* may be read as the symbolic or prophetic unfolding of the aphoristic conclusion to its first volume on the taking of the Bastille: “Is not Suspicion itself the one thing to be suspected,” writes Carlyle, “as Montaigne feared only fear?” (*W* 2.286). Again, as in “Characteristics,” Carlyle takes aim at those who would educe conviction out of the

“infinitude of doubt”: “What is the Belief of France?” he asks. “Properly that there shall be no Belief; that all formulas be swallowed. The Constitution which will suit that? Alas, too clearly, a No-Constitution, an Anarchy” (*W* 3.273, 2.216). Torn between “Guelf Factions and Ghibelline Factions,” France has come to an impasse—“motion and counter motion, with jargon and hubbub, *cancel* one another, like the fabulous Kilkenny Cats; and produce, for net-result, *zero*” (*W* 2.217, 216). The point of Carlyle’s simile, surely, is that, like the Kilkenny Cats, who fought till only their tails remained, the opposing parties have the ends but not the means; as his revisiting of “that great devouring, self-devouring French Revolution” in the last of the lectures collected and dedicated to his pietist-stonemason father in *On Heroes, Hero-Worship, and the Heroic in History* (1841) reiterates, “you cannot of nothing make something.”<sup>22</sup> Belief cannot be erected on unbelief, affirmation on negation: “The bricklayer with his bricks, no longer heedful of plummet or the law of gravitation, have toppled, tumbled and it all welters as we see!” (*On Heroes* 229).

Thus tallied, Carlyle’s sallies against the tradition of eleutheromaniac Philosophism culminating in the French Revolution would seem to confirm, analogically, the *fin de non recevoir* documented by Dédéyan and others. Also implied in the association of Montaigne with the skeptical, inquisitory style in metaphysics which he inspired, however, is a much larger history evoked by Carlyle at the end of “Characteristics.” “[T]he Old has passed away: but, alas, the New appears not in its stead; the Time is still in pangs of travail with the New,” writes Carlyle in 1831 (*W* 28.32), so designating, according to Walter E. Houghton’s *The Victorian Frame of Mind, 1830-1870* (1957), the long “age of transition” and “doubt” to which he and his contemporaries believed they belonged.<sup>23</sup> In the last essay of *On Heroes*, for example, Carlyle

detects “a natural historical sequence” between the Protestantism of Luther and the Sansculottism of Camille Desmoulins (230).<sup>24</sup> Because they both question the authority of the outdated customs and laws of the Old Order or *Ancien régime*, both partake of the dialectical conflict which, for Carlyle, “makes up the true History of the World,—the war of Belief against Unbelief” (*On Heroes* 235). Given this larger backdrop, the gist of Carlyle’s unspoken but no less tacit critique of Montaigne’s skepticism can be reasonably, and more directly, inferred from the historical record.

Amidst the “guerres intestines” or civil wars of the League (*Essais* 2.15.368), Montaigne had remained (in the phrasing of Lecky’s history) “poised with an indifferent mind between opposing sects,” condemning “revolution no less than repression, and for the same reason.”<sup>25</sup> While this posture may appear a rather precarious one—“au Gibelin j’ étai Guelfe, au Guelfe Gibelin,” writes Montaigne—, in reality, as he goes on to say, “il n’y avait où mordre” (*Essais* 3.12.328, 329). And with reason. As numerous commentators have remarked, the philosophic doubleness of the *Essais* renders their author’s true convictions well-nigh impenetrable.<sup>26</sup> As such, it is, in the expression of Emerson’s “Montaigne; Or, the Skeptic,” “a position taken up for better defence.”<sup>27</sup> But here again the record speaks for itself: during the Revolution, Montaigne, far from being deemed an antagonist, Guelf or Ghibelline, was embraced as a brother-in-arms by partisans on both sides, the *Essais* providing slogans for the *Almanach des sans-culottes*, the *Journal des sans-culottes* and *Le Vieux Cordelier*, as well as consolation to the aristocrats these pamphlets attacked.<sup>28</sup> “Wise as serpents; harmless as doves,” Carlyle’s epithet in *The French Revolution* for the French philosophic-parliamentary “Attorney-class,” fits this parti-colored, protean Montaigne to a tee (*W* 2.153, 19).<sup>29</sup> Indeed, while Montaigne’s double-edged skepticism

acts as a good safeguard for his closet or speculative radicalism, it has less than tangible results in the arena of political practice, as Carlyle's epic repeatedly illustrates: antagonists "flinging down the . . . weapons of reason," as does Montaigne in the *Apologie de Raimond Sebond*,<sup>30</sup> are like to be "mutually skewered," and so with those revolutionaries and counter-revolutionaries attempting, comically and tragically, to ground the state on the skeptic's "branloire perenne" (*W* 3.116; *Essais* 3.2.44).

In fact, when thus and still further considered in the context of Montaigne's canonical efforts at diagnosing the folly of all wisdom, including his own, Carlyle's plan of assault on the citadel of enlightened philosophism becomes considerably clearer in outline. Just as philosophism is for Carlyle the "cardinal symptom" of the "malady" or "fever" of the age (*W* 28.40), so, too, for Montaigne, "Scribling," which substitutes the name for the virtuous action, is "a Symthome or passion of an irregular and licentious age" (*Essays* 3.9.186). Frenchmen, having, by ancient custom, made it a virtue to lie, justice and religion, so Montaigne argues in the *Apologie*, are now little more than cloaks, arguments in favor of this or that measure or party, mere ornaments, "as in the mouth of a Lawyer" (*Essays* 2.12.133). And like the "Attorney-class" pictured as "so many Montesquieus" in Carlyle's *The French Revolution*, such scribes excel at nothing so much as "the art of producing zero" (*W* 2.54, 217). "Quel remède?" (*Essais* 3.9.241). The question, of course, is rhetorical. "Il n'y a de remède" is Montaigne's constant refrain (*Essais* 3.1.33; see also 1.24.202, 26.226; 2.14.360; 3.1.39, 2.55, 5.119). His book not only registers but, by his own admission, partakes in the general "babil" or jabberwocky, "one judgement . . . uncessantly subverting another" (*Essais* 2.12.275). However, true to his emblemizing of the Pyrrhonian or Skeptical "fantaisie" of "Ataraxie" or

indisturbance in the shape of the self-interrogation “Que sais-je?,” Montaigne can at times contradict himself and be perfectly frank and consequential, as when he confesses that if that same fantasy (“every proposition *implies* the existence of its opposite,” so that “every affirmation involves a contradiction,” as Hume’s *Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding* repeats)<sup>31</sup> were to be actualized, the practical outcome would be indifference, inaction, and inanition: “there were noe remedy, but to die of thirst and of hunger” (*Essais* 2.12.222, 253; *Essays* 2.14.340). Concurrently, since the whole “policie” of a nation rests on the good faith speech of its citizens—“If that faile us we hold our selves no more, we enter-know one another no longer,” writes Montaigne—to entrust the governance thereof to a reason or principle so volatile would be tantamount to folly or suicide (*Essays* 2.18.403). Imaged in his self-cannibalizing cannibals, who ironically and prophetically mirror the decay of his own society, the self-canceling syntax of the equivocator made to represent reasoning humanity is, logically and figuratively speaking, self-devouring, “[un] dédire de sa parole . . . de sa propre science” (*Essais* 2.18.428).

Similarly, for Carlyle as for Johann George Hamann and Novalis, the epoch of the Glorious Revolution is the culmination of the suicidal powers of reason deployed in Hume’s skepticism.<sup>32</sup> The hunger and unreason resulting from that skepticism is summed up for the author of *The French Revolution* in Peter Baille’s unwitting epigram: “*Tout va bien ici, le pain manque*, All goes well here, food is not to be had” (*W* 3.244). Paris, indeed, is “flooded with pamphlets (*regorge de brochures*)”; but the people can no more eat paper than they can “eat grass,” as one aristocrat all too glibly suggests (*W* 2.94, 112). “Bread; not so much discoursing! *Du pain; pas tant de longs discours!*” is the common dole, making plain, in Carlyle’s view, the

spiritual and practical bankruptcy of “eleutheromaniac Philosophism,” which, for all its patching up of “Constitutional Fabric,” “has yet baked no bread” (*W* 2.268, 4.303, 2.130, 198, 130). A translation into plain English of Carlyle’s symbolic representation of the Revolution as the product of Montaigne-Hume’s self-swallowing skepticism might go something like this: because it is based initially on no fixed or sustaining principle, no “Virtue . . . or Customariness,” relying solely on the claims of truth-disrobing reason and taking no heed of the “primitive,” atavistic reality of Sansculottism, the Revolution ends in acts of self-cannibalism (*W* 4.47, 91). Thus, while the enemies of France are denounced loudly in the Assembly as “*mangeurs d’hommes*,” it is the “Sansculottic Nation” in fact which, for lack of “rule or vesture,” has gone cannibal, “devouring its own children,” in Vergniaud’s evocative phrase (*W* 3.241; 4.67, 254).

*The French Revolution*, in other words, may be read as dramatizing the action of a self-wounding doubt or reason analogous to Montaigne’s. In keeping with the larger frame of reference according to which the Revolution represents only an eddy in the vast whirlpool that is universal history, for example, the taking of the Bastille which crowns the first volume replays such archetypal events in classical and biblical history as the Fall of Troy and Jericho.<sup>33</sup> Undoubtedly the most resonant archetype in terms of the work as a whole, however, and one which is evoked in the very name Bastille (French for “building,” as Carlyle points out), is the confusion of “Babel,” a paradigm of “mutual unintelligibility” (*W* 2.131, 100). Like the builders of Babel, the theoretical apostles of the “Gospel according to Jean-Jacques” are guilty, in the Carlylean scheme of things, of over-reaching, since “Doubt,” he contends, is “but half a magician; she evokes the spectres which she cannot quell” (*W* 3.38, 2.53). That last contention, of course, finds palpable confirmation in the spectacle of France “firing . . . on itself” in

internecine warfare, with “trust nothing” as its call to arms (*W* 2.196; *On Heroes* 233). Under the aegis of universal doubt, France has become a huge powder-keg such as that on which one Patriot sits obstinately smoking (*W* 2.198). “I am suspect, thou art suspect, he is suspect, we are suspect, ye are suspect, they are suspect!” is the complaint of a Procureur undone by the reign of terror of which he is an instrument (*W* 4.250). And yet his fate, like that of other revolutionary engineers caught in their own “baited springes” or blown to bits by their own petards, simply dramatizes, for Carlyle, the logical outcome to the “Preternatural Suspicion,” “infidel-faith” and “credulous incredulity” governing the “empire of Suspicion” and “unreason” (*W* 2.110; 4.265; 3.134; 2.52, 286, 126). Such conflict symbolically replays the original confusion of Babel, “cette infinie et perpétuelle altercation et discordance d’opinions et de raisons” imaged in Montaigne’s monument to human vanity, the *Apologie* (*Essais* 2.12.287). Founded as they are on an attempt to educe a universal principle of authority out of that original confusion, the Parliament’s “Montesquieu-Mably card-castles” or paper-constitutions, all amendings, in Carlyle’s view, of the Rousseauistic *Contrat Social*, prove no more impregnable, finally, than the Bastille (*W* 2.215).<sup>34</sup> All are accordingly toppled in the “*Culbute Générale*” or “General Overturn” which is to usher in an end to the “EMPIRE OF IMPOSTURE” (*W* 2.226, 4.322). The battle-lines, then, are clearly drawn, and Carlyle’s forces, as at the end of “Characteristics,” are poised to carry the day.<sup>35</sup>

And yet, on closer inspection, Carlyle’s attack on the “empire of Suspicion”—as inimical to conviction and action and so culminating, in the language of his essay on Novalis, in “a universal . . . act of Suicide”—itself proves self-wounding, and ultimately, in the image of Montaigne’s *Apologie*, suicidal (*W* 2.126, 27.36). As Carlyle himself was forced to concede,

when questioned by John Stuart Mill regarding his serio-comic “mode of writing” in *Sartor Resartus*, “Irony is a sharp instrument; but ill to handle without cutting *yourself*” (L 6.448-9). Carlyle’s “hyperbolic opinions,” John Sterling complained to similar effect in his review of *Sartor*, “have fallen over the battlements they were placed to defend.”<sup>36</sup> Nor has the locating of “random and amorphous assertions, which, like bursting cannon and reverting Congreve-rockets,” tend to “injure [Carlyle’s] own cause at least as much as that which he combats,” been peculiar to his first and only published work of fiction.<sup>37</sup> Colin N. Manlove’s imaging of *Sartor*’s riddling, implosive manner, for example—the “No” it utters is “no less everlasting than its opposite,” so that, in effect, “every mental castle we make . . . lights a keg of gunpowder in its cellars”—evokes not only the imagery but the very syntax of *The French Revolution* in the assessment of Albert J. LaValley: “Sentences start, suddenly stop, or turn back on themselves, are contradicted, and frequently end with a Carlylean irony”—that is, with “no finality of resolution.”<sup>38</sup> In fact, useful as it is for diagrammatic purposes or as a “centre to revolve around” (*On Heroes* 234), Carlyle’s so-called “transition” from fiction to fact, poetry to history, revelation to revolution (and by implication, thought to action) after *Sartor* is by no means so marked as has sometimes been argued. As most critics agree, it is anticipated by the final book of *Sartor* itself. And like his diabolico-angelical protagonist in the final chapters of that work,<sup>39</sup> Carlyle seems to have been reluctant to renounce his devilish antics in *The French Revolution*, much to the consternation of his critics and contemporaries.

Indeed, albeit Carlyle’s most popular book, *The French Revolution* drew heavy fire from several quarters. In an unsigned review for the *Athenaeum*, Lady Sydney Morgan dismissed the work as “three long volumes of misplaced persiflage and flippant pseudo-philosophy”: “The

author's mind is so little accustomed to weigh carefully its own philosophy, and is so thoroughly inconsistent with itself," she complained, "that the grossest absurdity in speculation does not prevent his perceiving and adopting truths in the closest relation of opposition to it."<sup>40</sup> Even largely sympathetic reviews, such as Herman Merivale's in the *Edinburgh* and Mill's in the *London and Westminster*, did not differ significantly on this point. "[Carlyle] never weighs, and reasons, and arrives at balanced conclusions," the former noted; the author, consequently, is not to be numbered with "those formal and useful guides who fall under the general denomination of historian."<sup>41</sup> Mill's review concurs: Carlyle is no "ordinary historian." "His own method," writes Mill, "[is] that of the artist, not of the man of science."<sup>42</sup>

Mill's account, of course, is also famous for its defense of *The French Revolution*, notwithstanding, as "the truest of histories," because "the history of the French Revolution, and the poetry of it, both in one."<sup>43</sup> Unlike the characters depicted in the histories of Hume and Gibbon, mere "figures in a phantasmagoria, colorless, impalpable, gigantic," but like Shakespeare's, Carlyle's heroes are "beings of . . . flesh and blood," argues Mill—that is, they are the products of that "creative imagination, which, from a chaos of scattered hints and confused testimonies . . . summon[s] up the Thing to appear before it as a completed whole."<sup>44</sup> "Carlyle's aesthetic," writes G.B. Tennyson in his pioneering study of *Sartor*, analogically confirming the justness of Mill's account of the inner workings of *The French Revolution*, "continually returns to the principle of polarities and their unification."<sup>45</sup> The unity of *The French Revolution*, in other words, is poetic or "dramatic," not logical, in nature.<sup>46</sup> It follows that the lack of formal resolution noted by its critics is not necessarily indicative of an absence of consecutive design.

Mill's apology for Carlyle as a poet or artist is instructive. The muted criticism therein, however, is even more so. A *tour de force* of romantic historiography, *The French Revolution* makes plain enough its author's "contempt" for the "opposite method," hinted at, *sotto voce*, by his apologist.<sup>47</sup> In fact, that contempt points to a major thematic component of the work. As the fictional devices in the non-literary essays leading up to *The French Revolution* attest, Carlyle had not abandoned his concern with the mode of fiction; indeed, upon close inspection, *The French Revolution* proves just as self-consciously metafictional as *Sartor*. Aware of the line dividing Fact from Fiction, Carlyle paints his own "Story and tissue" as the "faint ineffectual Emblem of that grand Miraculous Tissue, and Living Tapestry named *French Revolution*" (*W* 3.185). The inadequacy here underscored results (so Carlyle's preliminary forays into the epistemology of history in near contemporary essays repeatedly emphasize) from the limits of linear narrative, in particular its incommensurability with its object, which is universal history. The unconscious dream-life from which springs the "mystic significance of the State," its laws, religion and other social institutions, so Carlyle had argued as early as "Characteristics," "cannot be reasoned of; except *musically*, or in the language of Poetry, cannot yet so much as be spoken of" (*W* 28.14). Already, in *Sartor*, he had likened the efforts of "your Montesquieu" at historical, rational explanation to those of "a clever infant spelling Letters from a hieroglyphical prophetic Book, the lexicon of which lies in Eternity" (28). The Poet's "mystic unfathomable song" alone, so "The Hero as Poet" (1840) echoes Ludwig Tieck's appraisal of Dante and Coleridge's opinion of poetry, is capable of "penetrat[ing] into the inmost heart" of existence and evoking "the inward harmony of coherence which is its soul" (*On Heroes* 103, 94-95).

In this perspective, even the broadsides of Carlyle's staunchest critics can be reinterpreted, ironically, as praise. That *The French Revolution* should have abandoned "the sound canons of criticism and of logic," as Lady Sydney Morgan pointed out, was only to be expected in the admitted offspring of "an epoch of transition," of "revolutions, literary as well as political."<sup>48</sup> An "Epic Poem" hymning the Revolution, Carlyle's work, in fact, explodes those "canons": "It is a wild savage Book, itself a kind of French Revolution," as the author was brought to acknowledge to Sterling in a letter of 17 January 1837 (*L* 9.116). Like the anarchic, infernal Revolution it strives to mimic or emblemize, Carlyle's book is "one boundless inarticulate Haha" (*W* 2.288). And yet, by the same token, so defined—that is, negatively, as the wholesale rejection of the science, reason or logic of the "old order" conflated by the author here and elsewhere with skepticism—<sup>49</sup> Carlyle's method, manner or mode implies a measure of sympathy with the skeptic. In fact, the conflicts made salient by Dédéyan in Carlyle's reception of Montaigne have been located in Carlyle himself: "A perpetual antagonism prevails throughout all that he does," his friend and revolutionary Joseph Mazzini remarked in his review of Carlyle's *Works*; "his instincts drive him to action, his theory to contemplation."<sup>50</sup> More recently, Philip Rosenberg has tracked Carlyle's oscillating between "quietism and resigned withdrawal" and "political involvement" throughout his major writings, noting that, though "it is natural among critics to try to divide a man up into 'periods,'" Carlyle will not be so dissected: "Carlyle dragged his quietistic impulses along with him into his career as a political essayist, and traces of them are to be found on practically every page he wrote."<sup>51</sup>

A closer look at Carlyle's Transcendental "theory" suggests an explanation.

Acknowledging his receipt of four numbers of *Sartor Resartus* in his first letter of 14 May 1834

to Carlyle, Emerson had gone on to congratulate him: "I am glad," he wrote, "that one living scholar is self-centred & will be true to himself . . . who, as Montaigne says, 'puts his ear close by himself, & holds his breath, & listens'" (C 98). Implied in Emerson's allusion to Montaigne is an analogy between the skeptic and Carlyle which Sterling would later endorse in his response to *Sartor*.<sup>52</sup> As he always did when Emerson brought up Montaigne, Carlyle abstained from comment—that is, faced with "contradictions" between Emerson and himself that he could "neither resolve nor accept," Carlyle "withdrew into silence and took up something more promising," just as he would when he scored the line separating Emerson's aims in *Representative Men* (and by analogy and extension, Montaigne's in the *Essais*) from his own.<sup>53</sup> But, in light of Emerson's rapprochement, Carlyle's silence seems a good deal less unequivocal than Dédéyan contends.

"Speech is of Time, Silence of Eternity," asserts *Sartor Resartus* (166). For Carlyle, silence bespeaks the unspeakably significant, the underlying unity of Finite and Infinite, Good and Evil eluding doctrinal statement, but not art. "Carlyle's whole aesthetic," reflects Tennyson, "appears to be posited on the assumption that art is a means of unifying contrary or disparate things."<sup>54</sup> The terms of that "assumption" closely parallel those found in Coleridge's circumscription of the Imagination, drawn from the work of Friedrich Wilhelm Joseph von Schelling, in chapter 14 of the *Biographia Literaria*. "Imagination," writes Coleridge, is that "power" which "reveals itself in the balance or reconciliation of opposite or discordant qualities."<sup>55</sup> By the agency of "Silence and Speech acting together" in and through a symbol, so *Sartor* gives further articulation to that doctrine, "comes a doubled significance," in which "there is concealment yet revelation" (166). Silence, in other words, is to speech as "canvas" to

“pigment,” “darkness” to “light”; “the one is essential to the other, not possible without the other,” Carlyle explained to Emerson in a letter of 8 December 1839 (*C* 252). Signed by his skeptical silences vis-à-vis all of Emerson’s talk of Montaigne, Carlyle’s demarcation of a radical disjunction between Emerson and himself is a case in point: for, revealing as it was of and perfectly consistent with Carlyle’s taste for stark, absolute contrasts, that demarcation also concealed a good deal of agreement and affinity.<sup>56</sup> Similarly, though their inner voice prompted them to convictions and ends which, to the ear trained on rational or positive distinctions, at least, seemed diametrically opposed, Carlyle and Montaigne, too, shared an unspoken “common of silence” (to borrow a phrase from Emerson’s essay on “Circles”) in that timeless realm which is the history of ideas; so that one need only take “one step farther back in thought” to find their “discordant opinions reconciled, by being seen to be two extremes of one principle.”<sup>57</sup> Both skeptic and mystic had rejected as mere closet- or attorney-logic the “Logicall and Aristotelian ordinances” of the “common school Logic” (*Essays* 2.10.101; *Sartor* 41). Equally attuned (so Emerson’s 1834 letter suggests) to “la vie . . . muette” or contemplative life (*Essais* 3.10.302), both had tapped instead into that tide of Platonic renaissancing whose undercurrents, as Jorge Luis Borges so astutely illustrates, citing Carlyle in evidence, flow or eddy back, to Heraclitus, Plotinus, and the anti-rationalists, and forward, to Bishop George Berkeley, his student David Hume, and the German idealists.<sup>58</sup> And key to that long and various tradition, as Émile Montegut’s essay on Carlyle and Emerson additionally serves to recall, *pace* Dédéyan, is the intricate alliance of skepticism and mysticism.<sup>59</sup>

Montaigne’s borrowings from Catholic speculative mystic Nicholas of Cusa’s “doctrine de l’ignorance” to build his *Apologie* attest to such an alliance (*Essais* 2.12.216). The Socratic

or “Platonically subtilty” informing Cusa’s refutation of positive science is glossed from the *Meno* in the last of the *Essais*: “neither those which know have no further to enquire,” writes Montaigne, “forsomuch as they know already: nor they that know not, because to enquire, it is necessary they know what they enquire after” (*Essays* 3.13.365). If we truly knew or truly remained ignorant, we would not inquire at all, Montaigne and Cusa concur with the Platonic Socrates: “all those who make an investigation judge the uncertain proportionally, by means of a comparison with what is taken to be certain,” explains *De Docta Ignorantia*. “Therefore, every inquiry is comparative and uses the means of comparative relation.”<sup>60</sup> Whether we proceed inductively or deductively, X must be investigated by way of -X, -X, by way of another, unknown term; and so on “à l’infini”: “nous voilà au rouet,” remarks Montaigne (*Essais* 2.12.347). Indeed, as a condition of our finitude, all human inquiry, Montaigne and Cusa maintain, “is circular”:<sup>61</sup> “And we, and our judgement, and all mortall things else do uncessantly rowle, turn, and passe away” (*Essays* 2.12.329). For Montaigne as for Carlyle, the endlessness of the spirit’s self-inquiry is epitomized by the “arte” of legislating: he compares jurists, for example, to children attempting to model quicksilver (*Essays* 3.13.330). The “infirmity” of the spirit is such that “She doth but quest and firret, and uncessantly goeth turning, winding, building and entangling herself in hir owne worke,” suffocating, like the silkworm, in a cocoon of her own making (*Essays* 3.13.331-32). But if the “beginning of Inquiry” is indeed “a Disease,” as Carlyle asserts (*W* 28.2), the cure, Cusa and Montaigne similarly urge, is to be found in the logic of the *coincidentia oppositorum* or ‘coincidence of opposites,’ whereby extremes—hot and cold, good and evil, wisdom and unknowing—meet (*Essais* 1.54.428-29). Inaccessible to the old Scholastic logic, the mystery at the center of existence must be

investigated indirectly, by means of negation or symbol: “you must merge the center and the poles, aiding yourself as best you can by your imagination,” so Cusa writes of a universe conceived “as a wheel in a wheel . . . having its center and circumference nowhere.”<sup>62</sup>

Circuitous though it is, the intellectual journey mapping the confluence of Cusa’s mysticism and Montaigne’s skepticism in the Socratic idealism Carlyle inherited from the writers of the German Renaissance and translated home to England in the shape of *Sartor Resartus*’ “revolutions in Thought” (9) is salient enough in its broad outlines.<sup>63</sup> The contribution of Cusa’s “polar logic and dynamic philosophy,” by way of his philosophical pupil Giordano Bruno, to the “revolution in philosophy” effected by Immanuel Kant and Schelling is detailed in the *Biographia Literaria*.<sup>64</sup> Albert Béguin’s survey of a much-travelled Renaissance *topos* in Romantic thought and practice, *L’Âme romantique et le rêve* (1939), complements and extends that account by charting the volutions of the Cusan principle in the idealism of Johann Gottfried von Herder, Hamann, Goethe and beyond, to (post)symbolist French poets similarly intent on reconciling things “logiquement inconciliables.”<sup>65</sup> Finally, Montaigne’s own contribution to the rise of synthetic logic and subjectivity in the nineteenth century is well documented by Dédéyan, who begins his study by noting Montaigne’s “infiltration” (via the Anglo-French skeptical alliance) of the Romantic cult of nature and self in Germany.<sup>66</sup> A “paradigm of the ambiguity of human powers,” Hume’s skepticism, in particular, proved instrumental, in the hands of Kant and Hamann, in the undermining first of the Scholastic metaphysics and then of Enlightenment philosophy.<sup>67</sup>

Noted by Harris and Philip Rosenberg, and further implied by Carlyle’s own divining of similitude between the Protestantism of Luther and the Sansculottism of Camille Desmoulins in

*On Heroes*, Carlyle's and the Transcendentalist's siding with Voltaire, Hume, and Diderot in the war against the French-Scottish dogmatists is evinced in the "fever-paroxysms of doubt" registered in his mercurial works beginning with *Sartor Resartus* (60).<sup>68</sup> Doubling Montaigne's "fièvre continuelle . . . qui n'a point de remède" (*Essais* 1.24.202), *Sartor* describes (in its own expression) "a universal medley of high and low, of hot, cold, moist and dry" (60), a condition redoubled again, symptomatically, as it were, in *The French Revolution's* "mad fits of hot and of cold" (*W* 3.74). Montaigne's *Essais*, and his *Apologie* in particular, are in this one respect, at least, prophetic. Mounting to his pulpit to praise science, champion the true faith, and denounce human presumption, the latter had diagnosed "les nouvelletés de Luther" as an epidemic of subjectivity threatening to infirm the ancient authority of law and custom, thus putting all creeds "en doute et à la balance" (*Essais* 2.12.139).<sup>69</sup>

Nor is the conflux delineated above limited to historical backdrop merely. The substantial agreement between Montaigne and Carlyle so suggested may be attributed to a corresponding affinity in the realm of poetic in-sight. In fact, for all his demurring from its final "inconsistencies," Carlyle had praised Montaigne's thought in 1820 as a "faithful delineation of human feelings in all their strength and weakness . . . a mirror to every mind capable of self-examination" (*W* 30.66). "Our life is composed, as is the harmony of the World, of contrary things," Montaigne had written of his findings in that mirror; the true musician-artist, consequently, is he who can create concord out of these contraries, rhyming and blending the "goods and evils, which are consubstantiall to our life" (*Essays* 3.13.359). Here, at least, Carlyle seems in perfect accord with Montaigne: "spiritual music," so *Sartor* resonates in concert with the *Essais*, "can spring only from discords set in unison . . . but for Evil there were no

Good” (98). “Carlyle,” Emerson seems to have concluded from the evidence, “is of Montaigne’s opinion concerning poetry.”<sup>70</sup> Theirs, indeed, is the artistic “indifference” or disinterestedness resulting from the apprehension of “beauty” and “harmony” at the heart of a world of “contradiction,” which faculty Carlyle credits Montaigne and Shakespeare with in his article on Jean-Paul Richter, the author most often cited in conjunction with *Sartor* (*W* 26.17). That Carlyle indeed gazed into the mirror of human passions and contradictions analogically figured in the *Essais* (to Henry James, Jr. in 1883, he wore the aspect of “a man . . . hanging over a black gulf . . . the reflection of its bottomless deeps in his face”)<sup>71</sup> is confirmed by a look at *The French Revolution*, the product, by Carlyle’s own reckoning to Emerson, of “mean internecine work” (*C* 144).

Carlyle’s method in *The French Revolution*, as Mill argues, is that of the poet or mystic: “To *know*; to get into the truth of anything, is ever a mystic act,—of which the best Logics can but babble on the surface” (*On Heroes* 65-6). Since it relies on “resources cognate . . . with those of the artist in words,” in John Holloway’s classic description in *The Victorian Sage* (1953),<sup>72</sup> and principally, the Imagination, it is a method or mode suited both to the author’s subject (“the infinite gulf of human Passion shiver[ing] asunder the thin rinds of Habit”) and to the “high Gospel” which he harkens through the resulting cacaphony (*W* 28.42). Preached by Napoleon, “*La carrière ouverte aux talens*, The implements to him who can handle them” was in fact adopted by many a Romantic visionary, including Carlyle himself, as the new “Political Evangile” (*On Heroes* 276; *Sartor* 136).<sup>73</sup> And yet, as readers from Sterling and Mazzini to Philip Rosenberg have noted, Carlyle’s closet or “speculative Radicalism” (*Sartor* 189), like that of Montaigne before him, results in the kind of “double vision” evinced in “his characteristic

tendency to sympathize with every struggle, and turn away from the fruits of every victory.”<sup>74</sup> As La Valley points out, “in his very prophecy [Carlyle] embodies the problematic, the tentative, the doubtful, the negative, the skeptical and self-questioning, and even the futile.”<sup>75</sup>

Thus, for example, unlike the historian who studiously undertakes a “*recherche sur les causes*,” the author of *The French Revolution*, striving to apprehend the event in its totality, intimates, from the very outset, the “motive” or “argument” operative in his epic drama.<sup>76</sup> Recalling “that aphorism of Montesquieu’s, ‘Happy the people whose annals are tiresome,’” an anonymous “paradoxical philosopher” reminiscent of the sage of “Characteristics” and *Sartor* carries its Montaignesque wisdom to its “uttermost length”—of vacancy (*W* 2.27).<sup>77</sup> Since “Silence is divine,” all “disruption” from fixed, unconscious belief is more or less “a disease”: “Stillest perseverance were our blessedness; not dislocation and alteration,—could they be avoided” is the plaint chorused, with various modulations, throughout *The French Revolution*, as it allegorically unfolds the inexorable, tragic outcome of such dislocation in the spectacular “Death-Birth” of the “World-Phoenix” (*W* 2.27, 213).<sup>78</sup>

As chaotic and contradictory in tone as it is, however, *The French Revolution* is not without a thematic center: “ultimately,” so G.B. Tennyson writes of Carlyle’s art, “the dualism resolves into a unity and the poles are subsumed in one.”<sup>79</sup> In fact, like *Sartor Resartus*, *The French Revolution* contains in its penultimate chapter an inversion of its own “fictional situation” that more narrowly circumscribes that center and unity.<sup>80</sup> With its suggestion of infertile, mock-sensuality, Carlyle’s portrait of cloth-worshipping Dandies sporting “flesh-coloured drawers” offers a gross contrast, of course, to the true poverty and wretchedness of the Sansculottes (*W* 4.315). But, more terrifically still, it recalls his allusion to the “Tannery of

Human Skins” in Meudon, where “breeches” were manufactured for the Sansculottes out of the flesh of guillotined aristocrats (*W* 4.247). “[M]en call that barbarisme which is not common to them,” Montaigne in “Des cannibales” had reflected on the relativity of all knowledge viewed through the “mire” or glass of self-reference (*Essays* 1.30.221; *Essais* 1.31.303). *The French Revolution*, which begins where *Sartor*’s clothes-anthropology leaves off, with an ironic sally pitting the faithless “white European” against the superstitious “Black African,” at the former’s expense, teaches the same lesson, according to John D. Rosenberg,<sup>81</sup> who sees in Mercier’s remark on the eve of regicide—“*Tout est optique . . . The world is all an optical shadow*”—an apt epigraph for the work as a whole, since it strives to render the truth of a “most fictile world” analogous to Montaigne’s (*W* 2.6, 4.103, 2.6). Thus “we . . . sleep deepest while fancying ourselves most awake,” from *Sartor*’s chapter “The World Out of Clothes,” translates the idiom of the *Essais* (*Sartor* 43; comp. *Essais* 2.12.342). Fittingly, then, and again as in *Sartor*, whose “incessant dialectic of contraries” this sequel continues, Carlyle’s “leading metaphors for the Revolution are the dream and the theatre.”<sup>82</sup> Like the “baseless fabric” of “the great Globe itself” (*Sartor* 203; *The Tempest* IV.i.151-6), “man’s civilisation,” so Carlyle is led to infer from the spectacle at Meudon, is “only a wrappage, through which the savage nature of him can still burst, infernal as ever” (*W* 4.247). The implication, as in Montaigne’s essay, is that the difference between civilization and savagery is little more than a matter of “breeches” or “no” breeches (*Essays* 3.30.232). So conceived, history is no longer the record of human progress, but rather the dramatic, spectacular organization of forces antithetical, but ultimately indistinguishable, since bound dialectically within the same circle of necessity. In Florio’s apt translation of Montaigne’s “branloire perenne,” “The world runnes all on

wheelers" (*Essays* 3.2.21). "All things are in revolution . . .," agrees Carlyle: "in this Time-World of ours there is properly nothing else but revolution and mutation, and even nothing else conceivable" (*W* 2.211).

In this perspective, much of the inconsistencies and contradictions noted by Lady Sydney Morgan and others vanish. It is not, as Merivale argues, citing the author's "account of the Bastille affair," that Carlyle had not, like the good historian, the "military eye to disentangle" contradictory histories of the same event. The "bathos" Merivale detects as a result of the discrepancy between Carlyle's rendering of the siege—"full of warlike clamour and riotous hubbub, just about as like the real event as the sieges in *Ivanhoe* and *Old Mortality*"—and its net-result in terms of casualties ("eighty-three besiegers, and *one* of the besieged") is intended. Merivale's own commentary is a case in point: it can do no better, in effect, than mimic the diction and syntax of the original. Carlyle, writes Merivale, "*has all but* missed the one military point of the story, namely, that after several hours of ineffectual shouting and musket-firing on the part of the mob, the arrival of a piece or two of cannon belonging to the *Gardes Françaises* decided the event."<sup>83</sup> In fact, Carlyle has no more missed the mark here than he does at the conclusion of *The French Revolution*, in which the "Whiff of Grapeshot . . . promised" by Broglie at the outset of the Revolution is delivered by Napoleon's soldiers in the Cul-de-sac Dauphin (*W* 4.320). The Revolution is literally "blown" to bits, and Carlyle's drama cancels itself out, "crackling, like paper-scroll," in a cloud of smoke (*W* 4.320, 323).

The symmetry between the book's beginning and ending serves once again to highlight the effect of Carlyle's synthetic style: he is, in the words of John D. Rosenberg, "the poet of the insubstantiality of the 'real' and the reality of the phantasmagoria, the one always heightened by

the other.”<sup>84</sup> Acknowledging to Emerson his “fatal talent of converting all Nature into Preternaturalism,” into a “horrible Phantasm-Reality” juxtaposing “heavenly radiances . . . in intimate union, with the hideousness of Death and Chaos,” Carlyle concluded that, “on the whole, it is better to hold one’s peace about it” (C 348). Like the “Sphinx-questions” it evolves, the Revolution is “unutterable,” finally, because it is not only an emblem but also a cypher for the prophetic book or “Bible of World-History” and nature of which it is a part (*W* 2.217; 3.68; 28.251). Concurrently, the fact that Carlyle’s book itself—the “faint ineffectual Emblem” of that Revolution—ends with a parody of Carlylese voiced by the arch-quack Cagliostro explains the impression shared by its most discerning readers: that it leads not to a resolution, but to a figural and historic impasse analogous to the literal cul-de-sac mentioned in its last chapter. Though Carlyle titles that chapter “Finis,” he begins by pointing out that “Homer’s Epos,” an antetype for his own, may be likened to “a Bas-Relief sculpture: it does not conclude, but merely ceases,” being only a chapter in “Universal History” (*W* 4.321). True to its tortuous syntax and imagery, *The French Revolution* comes full circle, culminating with “a regression to the structure of the old order whose demise Carlyle has been so intensely urging.”<sup>85</sup>

Prompting Emerson to write that he had taught “fever & famine to dance & sing”—“O ungodliest divine man!” (C 167)—, Carlyle’s “angelico-diabolical Indifference” in *The French Revolution*, like that of “some incarnate Mephistopheles, to whom this great terrestrial and celestial Round . . . were but some huge foolish Whirligig” (*Sartor* 25), predictably confounded most, if not all, of his partisan readers.<sup>86</sup> And yet, it is the logical outcome to the “mutual criticism or dialectic of the ‘masks’ of selfhood” which *The French Revolution* takes up from *Sartor*.<sup>87</sup> As Jerry A. Dibble renders the sum of that dialectic, the reader is invited to rise “into a

higher stage of consciousness which contains and cancels all opposition.”<sup>88</sup> In keeping with Mill’s defining of its unitary logic, the logic of the dream and the theatre, Carlyle’s history strives to depict the contradictory facets of the event, ironically confirming Oscar Wilde’s skeptical conclusion to his essay “The Truth of Masks” (“A Truth in Art is that whose contradictory is also true”), as well as his tacit inclusion of Carlyle as an example of that axiom.<sup>89</sup> The “thing” faithfully—that is, poetically—depicted, so Mill had pursued in his review of *The French Revolution*, “[the author’s] logical propositions concerning the thing may be true, or may be false; the thing is there, and any reader may find a totally different set of propositions in it if he can.”<sup>90</sup> Many of Carlyle’s aptest disciples went on, in fact, to infer a “totally different set of propositions” from his work. Worded as praise, George Eliot’s survey of Carlyle’s “influence”—it “is best seen in the fact that many of the men who have the least agreement with his opinions are those to whom the reading of *Sartor Resartus* was an epoch in the history of their minds”—<sup>91</sup> contains, in this respect, a revealing irony.

Concurrently, if Mill’s defense successfully militates in favor of the unity of Carlyle’s history, it also seriously mitigates its claim to the kind of “didactic” truth which, according to John Holloway, the author was seeking as a prophet-historian: “Properly told,” *The Victorian Sage* explains, “[history] teaches men their own true nature and how they should live, it reveals to them how the world they live in is organized.”<sup>92</sup> For Wilde, on the contrary, “in art there is no such thing as a universal truth”.<sup>93</sup> the historian of the French Revolution, as he implies in “The Truth of Masks” and elsewhere in his *Intentions* (1891), is best described, not as a social prophet, but as a fabulist, an artist-metaphysician revelling, like Shakespeare, in his masquerade.<sup>94</sup>

And, in fact, all joking aside, and *pace* Carlyle's apologists, Wilde's likeness itself is not entirely fabulous. Like Montaigne and the slippery double agent of modernist inspiration, the author of *The French Revolution* "has it both ways."<sup>95</sup> He is, in Emerson's apt burlesque of Carlyle, Carlylese and everything Carlylean, "a covenanter-philosophe & a sansculotte-aristocrat,"<sup>96</sup> "a paradox embodied" or "living contradiction," like the Sage of *Sartor* in more recent assessment, whose "world . . . unites opposites."<sup>97</sup> G.B. Tennyson, who insightfully remarks that "the questions that persist in plaguing the literary critic of *Sartor* are those posed early in the career of that remarkable work," provides the following explanation for the contradictions noted by Mazzini, Lady Sydney, Sterling, Emerson, and others: "It is . . . Carlyle's mysticism," he writes, "that makes him conservative, even though radical."<sup>98</sup> Similarly, in his analysis of Carlyle's "radicalism," Philip Rosenberg ascribes "the limitations beyond which [Carlyle] never fully passed" to his "cosmic perspective."<sup>99</sup> He goes on to accuse Carlyle of stopping short, where his readers most required guidance: "Carlyle's uncompromising attitude toward all 'remedial measures' adds up to a rejection of politics as a mode of human action."<sup>100</sup> Indeed, in the arena of political practice and outcomes, at least, the statements by Carlyle and Montaigne cited at the very outset of this chapter are, for all intents and purposes, of cognate meaning,<sup>101</sup> bottoming as they both do the authority of laws in a mystic darkness—"what remedy?" the former sings in chorus with the latter in *The French Revolution*, as he surveys the "mad fits of hot and of cold" which, like "cannon-fever," betoken the "Death-Birth of the World" (see e.g. *W* 3.12, 73, 108, 161, 4.142, 157; and 3.74, 4.55). Immured, like Goethe's Montaigne,<sup>102</sup> in his own "private citadel" of transcendent conviction, the Carlylean sage would also have us passively incline before the "wheel-spokes of Destiny" (*Sartor* 178). Skeptic and

mystic thus find their essential kinship in a fever-wracked humanity; for in a world imaged as “weltering . . . like an Egyptian pitcher of tamed Vipers,” in the “unquiet slumber of sick Life,” Transcendental Love’s devotee is, by necessity, “drawn two ways at once”—towards yea and nay (*Sartor* 18, 17, 81). Accordingly, the poet-sage “station[s] himself in the middle” (*Sartor* 52), condemning both revolution and repression, and for the same reason.<sup>103</sup>

If Carlyle’s oeuvre does not suggest an exit to the dead-ending it documents, however, it does assure his place in a “dominant modern tradition” mapped by LaValley’s study—“that of the artist as problematic prophet, the seer who is himself a quester into self and society.”<sup>104</sup> It is to this Carlyle, the artist-metaphysician of *Sartor Resartus*, that Jorge Luis Borges, most notably, acknowledges his debt in the prologue to his *Ficciones* (1944). And that debt is significant. Like the writers of the “American Renaissance” before him, it was largely by way of Carlyle that Borges first breathed in the aura of German Transcendentalism, and it was on that basis, as well as in the contiguous tradition of the “baroque,” that he would go on to fashion the conception of “magic realism” which won him so many readers and admirers in France and elsewhere.<sup>105</sup>

Among those readers and admirers was Hubert Aquin.<sup>106</sup> A look at some of the volutions of Carlyle’s revolutionary poetics, prophecy, and politics in Aquin’s imaginative reprise of the greater part of the “two centuries” of revolution “still to fight” prophesied by Carlyle at the beginning and end of *The French Revolution* (*W* 2.133, 4.311) suggests that the latter’s prophetic work continues to speak with equal relevance, though, of course, ambiguously, by indirection and irony, to the political and historical impasse in post-1960s Quebec signaled not only by Aquin, but by such a politically opposed spokesman as Hugh MacLennan. A version in small both of the Revolution in France and the “revolution of consciousness” effected by Kant

and Schelling in Germany and Coleridge and Carlyle in England,<sup>107</sup> Quebec's belated *révolution des mentalités* may thus serve as a supplementary context for a rereading of Carlyle's "problematic" contribution to post-Romantic discourse on and around politics.

## 2

### *Paso Doble:*

#### **The Silent Revolutions of Thomas Carlyle and Hubert Aquin— A Comparative Reprise and Conclusion**

"The Revolution is . . . one boundless inarticulate Haha . . ."

– Thomas Carlyle, *The French Revolution* (1837)

"La révolution . . . n'est qu'un immense et inaudible cri . . ."

– Hubert Aquin, *Trou de mémoire* (1968)

G.B. Tennyson has written of Carlyle's "baroque" manner in *Sartor Resartus* that, notwithstanding its allusive and elusive texture, it has its "origins," clearly enough, "in skeptical thought."<sup>108</sup> Carlyle's "enigmatic manner," concurrently, has been likened repeatedly to Montaigne's.<sup>109</sup> Similarly, though often as tortuously and well-nigh impenetrably involved as

*Sartor* or the work of his near contemporary Vladimir Nabokov,<sup>110</sup> the labyrinth fashioned as a result of Hubert Aquin's relentless exploration of the baroque nonetheless has an Ariadne's thread in the logic tracing his filiation to the canonical works of Renaissance speculation which had proved equally seminal to the German and Anglo-American Romantics, as they sought to elevate Imagination to a metaphysical principle.<sup>111</sup> Adumbrated in the *Essais*—"my booke hath made me," Montaigne reads in his book the lineaments of his own authoring (*Essays* 2.18.400)—, the baroque paradox at the center of Aquin's oeuvre is elucidated by Borges in his essay on Cervantes and Shakespeare. "Por qué nos inquieta," asks Borges, "que Don Quijote sea lector del *Quijote*, y Hamlet, espectador de *Hamlet*?" The answer, he says, is that if the characters of a fiction or play can be readers or spectators, we, too, its readers and spectators, may be fictitious: "la historia universal," he concludes more amply and speculatively with Carlyle's persona Herr Sauerteig in "Count Cagliostro" (1833), "es un infinito libro sagrado que todos los hombres escriben y leen y tratan de entender, y en el que también los escriben."<sup>112</sup> That "Bible of World-History" (*W* 28.251)—"volume sphérique, fini et sans limites, que tous les hommes écrivent et où ils sont écrits," so leading theorist Maurice Blanchot's *Le Livre à venir* (1959) translates in turn from Borges—is the naked truth or "livre innommé" which Aquin's first novel *Prochain épisode* (1965) (un)veils, according to René Lapiere's aptly titled study thereof *Les Masques du récit* (1980).<sup>113</sup> Displaying an intelligence no less "encyclopedic" than Carlyle's in its "allusion to all knowables,"<sup>114</sup> Aquin's work in fact reads like a page, or episode, taken from the revolutionary, cyclical history that *The French Revolution* so brilliantly adumbrates.

And with reason. Just as the "sceptical blindness" of the Revolution is not for Carlyle the "whole truth," but only a moment in the "transition from false to true," seeking a "centre to

revolve around” in a history “ever contradictory yet ever coalescing” (*On Heroes* 234; *W* 28.250), so, too, Aquin lends to Quebec’s *révolution des mentalités* a global or universal significance.<sup>115</sup> To this effect, he cites Roland Barthes’ appreciation of Jules Michelet, the historian of the Revolution: “Idéalement, la Révolution étant une essence, a sa place partout . . . en n’importe quel point des siècles.”<sup>116</sup> Also adduced to that end, popular philosopher-theologian Pierre Teilhard de Chardin’s vision of a “universe” of “convergence” manifested in the very “*within* of things . . . the internal or radial zone of spiritual attractions,” an elaboration of Nicholas of Cusa’s polar logic, further contributes to making Aquin’s call for the reconciliation of the two solitudes on a higher plane more resonant still than that of Hugh MacLennan or any other writer in Quebec.<sup>117</sup> In Aquin’s work, as in Carlyle’s, secular history is converted into prophetic text.

“Événement nu, mon livre m’écrit . . . ,” Aquin’s narrator-author-hero reflects in *Prochain épisode* (90), as he strives, like Carlyle, to picture the “Miraculous Tissue” of the Revolution emblemizing the cosmos (*W* 3.185). Though closely interwoven with the nationalist conspiracy which serves as its backdrop or “trame historique” (a conspiracy inaugurated, coincidentally, in 1837, the year of the publication of *The French Revolution*), *Prochain épisode*’s symbolic intrigue thus eddies out, in the manner of Carlyle’s “paper-whirlpools,” to immerse the reader “dans l’eau séculaire des révolutions” (*Prochain* 90; *C* 288; *Prochain* 92). In the process Aquin effectively retraces much of the “two centuries” of revolution “still to fight” prophesied by Carlyle at the beginning and end of his epic, “till, in some perfected shape, [the ‘soul of Sansculottism’] embrace the whole circuit of the world!” (*W* 2.133, 4.311). The protagonist’s solemn vow to put an end to the skeptic’s “ataraxie” or

indifference in *Prochain épisode* (91) follows from Aquin's commitment to that ideal and accords with the role he ascribes to the Quebec writer in his "Profession: Écrivain," an avant-garde manifesto published in the militant separatist journal *Parti pris* in 1963. Here as in a journal entry for August of the next year, Aquin takes aim at "les spécialistes de la fuite, de la double vie esthétique": the *écrivain engagé* breaks with the linear logic of history and fiction-making, immersing himself in the mysterious workings of the Revolution.<sup>118</sup> Not for him the studied detachment of his counterparts in English Canada, as epitomized in the calm retrospective by MacLennan cited at the outset of this chapter. "Condamné à une certaine incohérence ontologique, j'en prends mon parti," Aquin, for his part, unequivocally affirms his attachment to the cause of *la mère patrie* (*Prochain* 12).

And yet, as the write-up found on the back-cover to the original edition of *Prochain épisode* suggests, the phrase "parti pris," like the classification of the novel as "un roman d'action," involves a substantial paradox (*Prochain* 131). Like Carlyle's *Sartor Resartus*, Aquin's novel seems as though woven "of a woof of light . . . yet on a warp of mystic darkness" (*W* 28.181). Specifically, just as the Editor in *Sartor* and Carlyle's readers have grappled with the seeming gap between the "deepseated Sansculottism" apparent in the sage's "high silent, meditative Transcendentalism" and the "Moral . . . Didactico-Religious" tendencies evinced in his "science of Affirmation and Re-construction" (*Sartor* 13, 12, 15), so too discussion of Aquin's *Prochain épisode* tends to revolve around the issue of his withdrawal or commitment to action.<sup>119</sup> And with reason. For what *Prochain épisode*'s lyrical counterpoint plots, in the manner of "un tissu de Damas," is precisely the truth of its author's "double vie,"

the national “impasse” of a dual allegiance which he apprehends as his “destin” (*Prochain* 43, 87, 131). Defined by Borges as “the style that deliberately exhausts (or tries to exhaust) all its possibilities,”<sup>120</sup> the “baroque” provides Aquin with the means apposite to documenting that historic impasse. The paradoxical ideal art so conceived impossibly strives towards, explains Gabriela Massuh in her exposition of Borges’ “estética del silencio,” is its own negation, “un grado cero de significación” such as the Symbolists sought to produce in their monuments to the ineffable.<sup>121</sup> These latter in turn have been read by the Abbé Henri Bremond as an enactment of Carlyle’s “Gospel of Silence”: “the dualism resolves itself into a unity and the poles are subsumed in one,” as G.B. Tennyson images *Sartor Resartus*’s polar logic in the idiom of Cusa, another favorite, coincidentally, of Borges.<sup>122</sup>

Aquin’s method, like Carlyle’s, then, is that of the mystic or poet: “On ne peut vouloir la révolution dans la sobriété, ni l’expliquer comme un syllogisme, ni l’appeler comme on procède en justice,” contends his hero (*Prochain* 91). In fact, Carlyle’s skeptical observation in *The French Revolution*—“All things are in revolution . . . in this Time-World of ours there is properly nothing else but revolution and mutation, and even nothing else conceivable” (*W* 2.211)—might serve as an epigraph to Aquin’s book. But, again as in the case of Carlyle, Aquin’s rejection of any appeal to the sober attorney-logic of cause-and-effect and syllogism comes at a substantial price. Borges’ own remarks on *Sartor* in the prologue to his *Ficciones* succinctly convey the double bind facing the author so bent on cyphering a universe of mystery, revolution and convergence. Carlyle’s work, he writes, remains ‘tautological’ (*tautológico*) for instead of simply producing a review of a fictional book, Carlyle writes a book and thus (in theory if not in practice) ends up with two books instead of one.<sup>123</sup> That conundrum, of course, is not unique to

Carlyle. As the editors to the English reader of Borges' oeuvre note in their introduction, Borges himself "belongs to that family of writers . . . Rabelais, Cervantes, Sterne"—and, we might add, Montaigne, Carlyle, Gide, Nabokov and Aquin—"who produce two texts at the same time." If the first text is more or less realistic, the "second is opaque, reflecting only itself."<sup>124</sup>

Similarly, for all his advocacy of action and commitment, Aquin repeatedly comes up against the symbolic impasse of tautology and paradox awaiting the play of correspondences or *mise en abyme* found in the baroque: "le produit littéraire . . . est de plus en plus comparable à un tissu d'art ou à un tableau," he remarks in a 1968 article with reference to the autotelic modernist text.<sup>125</sup> A note to his novel of the same year, *Trou de mémoire*, adds this precision: "le 'tissu d'art' signifie . . . l'oeuvre superficielle, mince et opaque."<sup>126</sup> His is, by his own description, "un roman autiste," brilliant, but opaque and quiescent, "comme une étoffe décorée" (*Journal* 217).

Circling, in the manner of *Sartor*'s shadow-chasing protagonists and antagonists, in pursuit of each other and the "histoire inédite" which contains their story, the agents and counter-agents of Aquin's cloak-and-dagger intrigue are at grips with the labyrinthic intricacies of just such a book as Carlyle, Borges and himself describe above (*Prochain* 91). Written during his internment at the psychiatric Institut Albert-Prévost while awaiting trial for criminal, allegedly subversive activities, Aquin's novel relates a story which, paradoxically, "file à l'anglaise . . . comme un personnage qu'on pourchasse" (*Prochain* 239). Relayed by a female co-agent known only as K, the realistic plot dreamed up by Aquin's imprisoned author-narrator is typical enough of the genre: a Quebec agent masquerading as a correspondent for Canadian Press is sent to Switzerland to protect the secret identities of his fellow patriots from the

counter-espionage of an enemy agent feigning to be the president of a Saharian bank, itself a front for an anonymous society. So far, the dilemma confronting the agent-narrator is a simple one—"c'est vous ou moi. C'est la logique du combat," as he puts it point-blank (*Prochain épisode* 77). But events soon take an enigmatic turn when this agent begins to uncover the diabolical yet fraternal identity of his German double, known to him principally under the alias H. de Heutz, a professor-historian of the Caesarean wars and a specialist on Scipio Africanus.<sup>127</sup> He begins to suspect, as well, the possible infidelity of his lover and co-conspirator K (commonly construed as an acronym for Quebec, in its archaic spelling), whose eyes, like those of Carlyle's German Professor, possess a kind of magnetic power (*Prochain* 35). "Les coordonnées de l'intrigue se sont emmêlées," remarks Aquin's hero at this point. And with good reason, for in shadowing his own shadow-pursuer, he necessarily comes to tread in his own steps: "Je reviens sur mes pas" (*Prochain* 150). In fact, like the dreamy meditations of Carlyle's Teufelsdröckh, the soliquizing of this sleeper launched on a circular odyssey couples motion with stasis, "the rest of infinite motion, the *sleep* of a spinning-top" (*Sartor* 13). "Tout est mouvement; pourtant je reste figé . . . ," confesses Aquin's protagonist, made dizzy with vertigo (*Prochain* 159).

The narrator's silent astonishment is not surprising. Like the cypher signing the author-narrator's diabolical black double and German adversary, a "noeud gordien" in which he is twice ravelled, Aquin's mystery novel is a "chef-d'oeuvre de confusion," a Dantesque "poème infernal" comprising "[un] mystère impénétrable" (*Prochain* 59, 124, 17) akin to that plotted in Joseph Conrad's *The Secret Agent* (1907), where the "drawing" of "innumerable circles" by a stuttering, inarticulate idiot savant similarly serves to suggest "a rendering of cosmic chaos, the

symbolism of a mad art attempting the inconceivable.”<sup>128</sup> Emblematized in the medallion embossed in the Italian Louis XIII dresser which confronts the hero in a castle at Echandens, the “image-motrice” or secret motif woven by Aquin’s intrigue—really a single episode (or series of sequels) repeated with the author’s characteristic baroque improvisations—is of two antagonists “locked,” like the fraternal parties in *The French Revolution*, “at a dead-grip” (*W* 3.81; comp. *Prochain* 21, 139). The warrior (so the narrator pauses to speculate at this juncture) has no armor greater than his beauty. His greatest strength lies in the fact that he presents himself, like Montaigne’s Stoic cannibals and the skeptic himself in the *Apologie*, “nu devant l’ennemi” (*Prochain épisode* 128; see *Essais* 1.31.307). However, such a counter-feint or trap—that of provoking wonder and doubt in one’s victim by disarming oneself and allowing him to slip into “la peau du vainqueur,” all while secretly investing his skin, armor or citadel (to provide some of *Prochain épisode*’s variations or volutions on its single episode)—is ultimately suicidal, since nothing hinders one’s opponent from doing the same (*Prochain* 82, 96). “Mon stratagème ressemblait singulièrement à la roulette russe,” confesses Aquin’s narrator-hero (*Prochain* 113). Very nearly impenetrable though it is, the antic or cloak-and-dagger play of the terrorist who, like Hamlet, secretes his own counsels (as Aquin had imagined him in 1963) can also be, so he was to learn soon after, as self-immuring as the armor Montaigne pictures in “Des armes de Parthes” (see *Essais* 2.9.100). “Je suis emprisonné dans ma folie, emmuré dans mon impuissance surveillée, accroupi sans élan sur un papier blanc comme le drap avec lequel on se pend,” the author of *Prochain épisode* writes of his own internment (23).

The allusion to suicide analogically recalls the skeptic’s act of self-disqualification as teacher or prophet in a world where the nature of convictions and actions is no longer

discernible by way of the principles of reason, this latter having been reduced to mere attorney-logic (*Essais* 2.12.143). According to Peter Burke, the religious and political unscience of Montaigne's *Essais* ("By different means one may arrive at the same result, and by the same means, at different results") is meant rather faithfully to translate the conflict of convictions and appearances of his day, in which "Extremes met," Catholic rulers counterfeiting Protestants and vice versa.<sup>129</sup> And so with the work of Carlyle and Aquin. Like Hamlet's Denmark and Carlyle's France, the Quebec of Aquin's imagining is booby-trapped with hidden springes and hoisting petards: "each image has a double face" so that, in effect, "dream and history, madness and reason, turn into their seeming opposites."<sup>130</sup> In such an element, the business of revolutionaries, and in particular "les hommes doubles" (*Essais* 3.1.32), is a treacherous one, as Montaigne and Carlyle argue and as Aquin's fiction analogically confirms: "La révolution m'a mangé," so the narrator of *Prochain épisode* is made to echo Vergniaud's pronouncement on the French Revolution (131). In fact, Aquin's work, like the "Mouse-Trap" featured in *Hamlet's* play-within-a-play,<sup>131</sup> is a baroque "miroir à suicide": "pris de panique: je suis parti . . .," the Byronic-Balzaquian hero-narrator-author of *Prochain épisode* confesses the truth of his unreason in the midst of relating his "autobiographie incroyable" to his adversary, this to conceal the 'truth' of his secret, revolutionary identity, which in turn is perhaps only a mask concealing his impotence (*Prochain* 30, 51, 82). In Aquin's next novel *Trou de mémoire* (1968), a modern rendering of Hans Holbein's *The Ambassadors*, the feints and counter-feints or revolutionary "two steps binaire" which similarly serve to captivate ("enferrer") the imagination of the readers of his opaque text are compared to the passes of the muleta preceding the fatal outcome in a bull fight (*Trou de mémoire* 38, 156).

The symbolism of Aquin's first two novels implies a conclusion analogous to that which Arthur Koestler puts in the mouth of Rubashov, the revolutionary undone by his own logic in *Darkness at Noon* (1940, translated in French as *le Zéro et l'infini*). Striving to account for the "pendulum movement of history" from "tyranny" to "freedom" and back following "the storming of the Bastille," Rubashov is brought to confess that "doing the work of prophets without their gift" is a game of blind-man's buff at best:

We replaced vision by logical deduction; but although we all started from the same point of departure, we came to divergent results. Proof disproved proof, and finally we had to recur to faith—to axiomatic faith in the rightness of one's own reasoning . . . . Geometry is the purest realization of human reason, but Euclid's axioms cannot be proved. He who does not believe in them sees the whole building crash.<sup>132</sup>

Certainly, neither Carlyle nor Aquin would demur. In Aquin's universe, as in Carlyle's, plotting and counter-plotting, motion and counter-motion, eventually cancel themselves out, producing, for net-result, "zéro" (*Prochain* 115, *Trou de mémoire* 33, 152). "Vanitas vanitatum!"—so *Trou de mémoire* (150), markedly more somber and sardonic in tone than *Prochain épisode*, concludes with Holbein, Montaigne, Hamlet and Carlyle with respect to the fateful vicissitudes and reversals awaiting actors in the temporal world (*W* 2.18). By the end of Aquin's follow-up, *L'Antiphonaire* (1969), the music of the spheres is correspondingly reduced to the briefest echo of Hamlet's silence at the prospect of a universe of nescience: "Le reste . . ."<sup>133</sup>

For Carlyle, that condition of nescience and silence is so basic to humanity as to be inescapable: "To *know*; to get into the truth of anything, is ever a mystic act,—of which the best Logics can but babble on the surface" (*On Heroes* 65-6). All metaphysics—skeptical and

dogmatical—“babbles on” until it comes to rest, finally, on the dead wall of silence. Occasioned by the late Thomas Hope’s *Essay on the Origin and Prospects of Man* (1831) and the late Friedrich von Schlegel’s *Philosophische Vorlesungen, insbesondere über Philosophie der Sprache und des Wortes* (1829), Carlyle’s “Characteristics” is a case in point. If it is predictably vitriolic in its attack on the former, pronouncing it inarticulate, the review essay is no more chary in criticism for the latter. The “last Work of Friedrich Schlegel, the unwearied seeker,” is said to “end abruptly in the middle; and, as if he *had not* yet found, as if emblematically of much, end with an ‘Aber–,’ with a ‘But–!’” (*W* 28.35). Given the subject of Schlegel’s lectures (the ‘Philosophy of Language and the Gift of Speech’), Carlyle’s emblematic use thereof hardly requires much in the way of glossing.

How, then, fares the author who would read and prophesy from the Bible of World-History, inscrutable, and indeed inimical, as it is to reason? As the history of its reception shows, Carlyle’s work itself is not exempt from that element of contradiction and paradox in which he contends all discourse and speculation must circulate. The “happy epigram” instanced by Henry James, Jr. to account for the vastness of Carlyle’s “enormous incongruities” is especially felicitous, suggesting as it does that his work (the “gospel of silence, in thirty volumes” is James’ epithet) not only participates in, but similarly stands in bold emblematic representation of, the very paradox Carlyle would overcome in the name of settled conviction.<sup>134</sup> In terms of rhetorical practice, of course, Carlyle’s “gospel of silence” was first adumbrated with sufficient clarity in his only work of published fiction. A product of the Transcendentalists’ “double vision,”<sup>135</sup> *Sartor Resartus* serves to promulgate the enigmatic truth or “Sphinx’s secret” of man’s unconscious dream-life, the unknowing at the center of his

existence, as emblemized in the “Sphinx-riddle” of “this phantasm world, where so much . . . mystery is” (43, 98, 14). Like *Sartor*’s self-swallowing “Serpent-of-Eternity,” a Romantic figuration of the perfect Poem encompassing the ineffable but unitary meaning of History confronting actors on the world-stage,<sup>136</sup> the Sphinx is a cypher for a universe where infinity and nothingness, good and evil, “Creation and Destruction,” are consubstantial, ringed in as they are, “wheel within wheel” (*Sartor* 154, 185, 153), by the same “high inscrutable Necessity.”<sup>137</sup> The symbolism of *Sartor* argues the mystic’s profound solidarity with the skeptic, for both conceive of the eternal and the one as unfathomable by way of reason and so of all forms and distinctions as essentially impermanent or artificial. “The world runnes all on wheelles,” in Florio’s apt translation of Montaigne’s “branloire perenne” (*Essays* 3.2.21). “All things are in revolution . . .,” Carlyle agrees (*W* 2.211). The proliferation of “Sphinx-questions” in *The French Revolution* itself follows from the “imaginative skepticism” basic to its author’s manner.<sup>138</sup>

And so with Aquin. As early as 1961, he meditates on such sphinx-logic, “l’énigme . . . réunit, dans l’ambiguïté, ceux qui sont inconciliables” (*Journal* 213). The skeptical, enigmatical syntax governing the plottings and counter-plottings of *Prochain épisode* and its sequel—that of a somnambulism containing “le principe même de son contraire” (*Prochain* 115)—extends almost organically to the *discordia concors* that is the author’s last novel *Neige noire* (1974), translated as *Hamlet’s Twin*.<sup>139</sup> *Prochain épisode*’s central baroque motif, of a contest between “twins who leapt into the world cleaving together” (to evoke John D. Rosenberg’s emblemizing of *The French Revolution*),<sup>140</sup> is here given its definitive treatment, for Hamlet and Fortinbras are twins in Aquin’s double-take, suggesting the ambivalent status of political identities throughout the

novel. Written in the form of an actor-director's autobiographical film script and interlarded with reflections on the nature of cinema as a specular medium, *Neige Noire*, like *The French Revolution*, frames its successive perspectives within the key paradox of the *theatrum mundi*, "ce théâtre illuminé . . . dont on ne sait pas si c'est l'extérieur ou l'intérieur qui est illuminé" (*Neige* 152). In the manner of anamorphic Renaissance art, with its elaborate use of optical contraptions, peculiar perspectives and *trompe l'oeil*, the equally elaborate scenario of *Neige Noire* deploys the visual pyrotechnics, camera angles and trick optics of modern cinematography so as to "redimension all structures in the stuff of an anti-structure, the stuff that dreams are made on," to invoke Jackson I. Cope's synthesis of the *theatrum mundi* and life-as-dream *topoi* as found in Renaissance drama.<sup>141</sup> Here, as in *The French Revolution*, "The world is all an optical shadow" (*W* 4.103): "Le monde est un rêve et le rêve est un monde . . .," the Hamlet of Aquin's is made to agree with Montaigne in his *Apologie* (*Neige* 184). Appositely enough, then, the latter's skeptical syntax lapsing into "Cimmerian darknesses" provides the main motif for Aquin's novel: "If you propose that snow is blacke," Montaigne gleans from Sextus Empiricus reading Anaxagoras, "they wil argue on the other side, that it is white. If you say it is neither one nor other, they wil maintaine it to be both" (*Essays* 2.12.323, 208). "Une mystique extasié des contraires," as René Lapierre describes Aquin's captive imagination in search of the unsayable,<sup>142</sup> the latter's work serves further to suggest the close affinity linking the mystic to the skeptic. Like the skeptic, the mystic neither categorically affirms nor denies, unless, conversely, he categorically affirms and denies: "Les hommes sont si nécessairement fous que ce serait être fou par un autre tour de folie de n'être pas fou," Aquin's Fortinbras answers to his shadowy, skeptical "semblable" (*Neige* 185), citing Pascal from Jean Rousset's

*Circé et le paon: La Littérature de l'âge baroque en France* (1954).<sup>143</sup> Between the skeptic and mystic, in other words, exists a kinship and sympathy even in enmity and opposition.

The logical terminus to a “science de . . . l’inscience” (*Essais* 2.12.472), Aquin’s marrying of these and other apparent contraries in *Neige Noire* further invites comparison with the destructive and procreative “Fire-baptism” of Carlyle’s “Shadow-hunter . . . Shadow-hunted” Teufelsdröckh in *Sartor*’s “CENTRE OF INDIFFERENCE” (129, 139, 142). At that very point where Carlyle’s “Everlasting NO” answers to his “Everlasting YEA,” individualists, homicides and suicides square off in paratactical “juxta-position,” like the syllogisms of “cherubic reasoning” translated into a dialectical “Battle-field” (*Sartor* 134, 137, 132). There, poised under an Arctic “June Midnight,” these dualists in the “logic” of the “UNFATHOMABLE” blast each other to bits and eternity, echoing to the deadly “Silence” hovering over the “mirror” of the “infinite Brine” as the sunlight “shoot[s] downward to the abyss” (*Sartor* 137, 138, 137). In the hyperborean, cannibalistic world of *Neige noire*, as well, “[l]e noir silencieux, le silence opaque” accompanies every elusive image: “L’image n’est qu’une absence, le négatif d’un fantôme qu’on chérit” (145, 196). Blackness itself being only an aggregate of whiteness, the blankness of snow, as in Melville’s famous chapter on “The Whiteness of the Whale” in *Moby-Dick*, “engendre une image de la réalité constituée autant par sa propre couleur que par l’absence même de toute couleur” (*Neige* 113). The gradual encroachment of universal nihilism finally shatters the darkened glass in which the “*cogito cogitatem*” finds no objective correlative except the infinite sadness sung by a melancholy *Discorso*, “cette chanson lancinante qui remplace l’irreprésentable” (*Neige* 196).

So directed, the author's expedition seems bound, like Teufelsdröckh's wanderings in *Sartor*, for the "frozen continent" looming prominently in the second book of *Paradise Lost* (II.246). In Aquin's "continent refroidi" as in Milton's, extremes meet in annihilation (*Neige* 88). As William Blake writes tellingly across the margins of Boyd's notes to Dante, "the extreme of black is white . . . of good Evil & of Nothing Something."<sup>144</sup> "[A]ll rounds itself off, into a kind of rhythmic coherence" or "inarticulate unfathomable speech," so Carlyle's "The Hero as Poet" correspondingly spells the logic of "fiery snow" (*On Heroes* 126, 195, 106). Sterling's remark apropos the diabolico-angelical indifference at the root of Carlyle's mysticism in *Sartor Resartus*—"his fundamental position is, the good of evil: he is forever quoting Goethe's epigram about the idleness of wishing to jump off one's shade"—might be applied, with equal justice, to the author of *Neige noire*, as the doubling of his diabolic twins by angelic sisters in the final pages of that novel attests.<sup>145</sup>

An 1831 entry in Carlyle's journal revisited in "The Hero as Poet" suggests a struggle to articulate the unitary logic underlying such a *discordia concors* as *Sartor* and *Neige noire* offer to the reader: "When Goethe and Schiller say or insinuate that Art is higher than Religion," writes Carlyle, "do they mean perhaps this: that whereas Religion represents . . . the Good as *infinitely* . . . different from the Evil, but sets them in a state of *hostility* (as in Heaven and Hell),—Art likewise admits and inculcates this quite infinite difference; but *without* hostility, with peacefulness; like the difference of two Poles which *cannot* coalesce, yet do not quarrel, nay should not quarrel for both are essential to the whole?" (*Two Notebooks* 204; comp. *On Heroes* 111). Thomas Browne's translation of Montaigne in *Religio Medici* accordingly scans the "spiritual music" of *Sartor* (98): "They that endeavour to abolish vice destroy also vertue, for

contraries, though they destroy one another, are yet the life of one another.”<sup>146</sup> And yet, for Carlyle, in contrast with Montaigne, Browne, Goethe, and Schiller, the reconciliation so effected between Art and Religion, as between Hell and Heaven, made for an uneasy truce, as Ikeler has shown.<sup>147</sup> As though to sustain that contention, the editor of the Temple edition of Dante’s *Divine Comedy* uses Carlyle’s “Everlasting NO” to gloss Canto XXXIV of the *Inferno*, Blake’s favorite. Described by Kenneth Burke as a “Zero Moment”—the fiery “Satan cancels himself, as the batting of his wings but sends forth draughts that freeze him all the more”—, the Canto could just as well be used to gloss Carlyle’s “capricious inexpressible . . . Work” as a whole (*Sartor* 157): “How icy chill and hoarse I then became,” apostrophizes the poet, “ask not, O Reader! for I write it not, because all speech would fail to tell.”<sup>148</sup> Grounded deep in the “CENTRE OF INDIFFERENCE . . . through which whoso travels from the Negative Pole to the Positive must necessarily pass” (*Sartor* 139), Carlyle’s “Gospel of Silence,” in fact, could lead him, and others, to either pole.<sup>149</sup> In *Neige noire*, the “indifférence ataraxique” of Montaigne’s skepticism has turned into the “passivité dévorante” contemplated in Carlyle’s “Everlasting NO,” wherein Teufelsdröckh’s heart, deprived of substantial food-stuff, “smoulder[s] in sulphurous, slow-consuming fire” (*Neige* 166; *Sartor* 128). A survey of Carlyle’s struggle with the same problem suggests an explanation.

More often than not, as Ikeler contends, Carlyle’s own puritan temper was in conflict with his transcendental faith, which hinged on a rejection of the logic of non-contradiction and thus of the very moral absolutes he sought to inculcate in his disciples.<sup>150</sup> Indeed, like his mentor the author of the *Second Faust* (in the estimate of José Ortega y Gasset), Carlyle seems to have been subject to a “confusion” or “perennial vacillation” between “the *ought to be* of

morality” and “the *has to be* of personal vocation.”<sup>151</sup> Predictably, then, scholarly focus and investigation on *Sartor* and Carlyle (as Jules Paul Seigel remarks in his survey of the critical tradition) has tended to be “polarized,” and has increasingly shifted from Carlyle’s sources and his message to his “enigmatic manner” (*Sartor* 60)—that is, to the ironies and ambiguities structuring his vision.<sup>152</sup> A common approach has been to highlight the role of the Editor-commentator as an intermediary between the Clothes-Philosophy and the reader. Himself a reader ravelled in the book he is reading even as he professes his disinterest and demands the same of his reader, the ano/pseudonymous Editor is very much (as Carlyle pointed out in a letter to his publisher) “the main Actor” in his masquerade.<sup>153</sup> In the key chapter “Natural Supernaturalism,” notes Jerry A. Dibble in *The Pythia’s Drunken Song* (1978), by far the most adept account of the tortuosities linking Carlyle’s two personae, “the masks fall away”; and when they are donned again in the following chapter (appropriately titled “Circumspective”) “they are reversed.”<sup>154</sup> In fact, much in the same fashion as Teufelsdröckh, whose “eloquence” at one point so infects the prose of Hofrath Heuschreckhe that he again suspects “some trick,” the disarming Editor has been plotting the reader’s capitulation all along, lifting the “spiked gates and impassable barriers” occluding his mind, only to “deceptively *inlock*” him in the “labyrinthic tortuosities” of the Clothes-Philosophy (*Sartor* 59, 5, 153).<sup>155</sup> The purpose of Carlyle’s masquerade in *Sartor*, as of Aquin’s in *Prochain épisode*, is clear enough. Like the Chinese agent-cum-English Professor confronted with his English counterpart, a Sinologist, in Borges’ equally labyrinthic mystery story “El jardín de los senderos que bifurcan” (1941), the reader is meant (in the words of Dibble) to attain “a higher stage of consciousness which contains and cancels all opposition.”<sup>156</sup>

“Let it be an alliance of two large, formidable natures, mutually feared, before yet they recognize the deep identity which, beneath these disparities, unites them,” Carlyle’s disciple and editor Emerson in “Friendship” wrote of the negative way of the Idealist life-philosophy, citing Montaigne in support.<sup>157</sup> But typically, Emerson left it up to his gloomy friend to educe and bring to their logical dead-ending the less sunny aspects of that philosophy.<sup>158</sup> Browne’s gloss to Montaigne’s essay on the same topic makes plain the paradox underlying the balance or synthesis of disparate natures and qualities sought by Emerson and Carlyle: “There are wonders in true affection,” in the words of *Religio Medici*; “it is a body of *AEnigmaes*, mysteries and riddles, wherein two so become one, as they both become two.”<sup>159</sup> If “friend and fact,” teacher and disciple, were “drawn to their counterpart,” as Emerson optimistically concluded in his essay on “Circles,” they met only “Where the wisest Muses falter,” in the words of “Etienne de la Boece,” his early poem celebrating Montaigne’s Platonic friendship.<sup>160</sup> In a world so conceived and directed, all expression, even of the self and its convictions, is necessarily metaphorical, and thereby doomed to unreason or silence: “nous sommes, je ne sais comment, doubles en nous-mêmes, qui fait que ce que nous croyons, nous le croyons pas,” reflects Montaigne on the contest of belief and unbelief in a universe of nescience (*Essais* 2.16.372).

Described as a “contest of incompatible temperaments,” in which, notwithstanding, both antagonists were “*unus et multis*” (one and many), at once each other’s critic and apologist,<sup>161</sup> Carlyle’s correspondence with Emerson analogically confirms or transposes the prohibitive sense of Montaigne’s observation in the dark looking-glass of the self. “I mourn over the impotence of Human Speech,” wrote Carlyle on 19 August 1842, “and how each of us, speak or write as he will, has to stand *dumb*, cased up in his own unutterabilities, before his unutterable Brother”;

and on 17 July 1846, in the same strain: “Man, all men seem radically *dumb*, jabbering mere jargons. . . the inner meaning of them,—of them and of me, poor devils,—remaining shut, buried forever” (C 327, 405). There is some irony, then, in Carlyle’s attack on Emerson’s (and no doubt, his own) detractors in the letter of 7 November 1838 in which he responded to the controversy surrounding Emerson’s “Divinity School Address” and his query concerning the author of the Montaigne article in the *Westminster Review*. Echoing the *Apologie*, “un taire parlier” or stop-gag, in its own description,<sup>162</sup> Carlyle accused these latter of not knowing the faith whereof they spoke.<sup>163</sup> He had done the same in his defense of “the hardened, kiln-burnt, altogether contradictory Professor Teufelsdröckh” to Sterling in a letter of 4 June 1835.<sup>164</sup> The “musical wisdom” proffered by *Sartor*, a “capricious inexpressible . . . Work,” in its own description (*Sartor* 157), provides an artistic equivalent to Carlyle’s silence on the twinned question of Teufelsdröckh’s faith and Montaigne’s doubt. Ethically neutral, such wisdom—that of a Goethe, a Dante or a Shakespeare—is, by definition, impervious to the dogmatism and sectarianism of the “System-builders and Sectfounders” Carlyle abhorred.<sup>165</sup> And yet, while effective for reducing one’s adversaries to silence, such a tactic, as Michel Butor contends in his *Essais sur les Essais* (1968), is ultimately petrifying, for the same argument of factitiousness may be used, in turn, on oneself, and with the same result.<sup>166</sup> The upshot of Carlyle’s defense of *Sartor* to Sterling, whose article, “a thing *untellable*” (C 252), had “shut” his “mouth” by his own admission, was that he himself would hereafter be confined to silence on the question of belief.<sup>167</sup> “*N’en parlons plus*,” he seemed to say to Sterling, as he had, on many occasions, to Emerson (C 305). Rather than retrace his steps and so contradict himself again as Emerson did,

Carlyle, realizing that he had placed himself “where no step could be taken,”<sup>168</sup> forbore and resolved, *malgré lui*, to continue to the end his “mute dialogue” with death and eternity (C 551).

Contemplative indifferency or quietism proved even more intolerable to the militant *parti priste-cum-mystic* Aquin. Where Hugh MacLennan’s 1967 novel on a Yeatsian theme, *The Return of the Sphinx*, may be said to answer the “Sphinx-questions” (W 2.217) presented by the Quiet Revolution with the pragmatic insouciance characteristic of his near contemporary article—*Quel remède?* the novel seems to ask—,<sup>169</sup> Aquin’s life and work attest to the practical nullity of such an alliance between mysticism and skepticism as his English counterpart would appear to celebrate in his portrayal of a nation consisting of two solitudes bound by enigma or fate. Though effective in combating all manner of formulae, and so key to the modern tradition of the “artist as problematic prophet” to which MacLennan, amongst others, belongs,<sup>170</sup> such an alliance, so the examples of Carlyle and Aquin argue, is not only incompatible with but in fact inimical to reasoned conviction and action. As Aquin, for example, analogically pictures the political and historical impasse confronting the Quebec nationalist in his 1962 essay “La fatigue culturelle du Canada français,” the French Canadian divided in his allegiances is “un agent double,” exhausting himself in the pursuit of a political Nirvana.<sup>171</sup> The image is ironically reminiscent of Carlyle’s benighted army at the end of “Characteristics.”<sup>172</sup>

In one of his last essays, “Le texte ou le silence marginal?” (1976), Aquin essentially assents to Cusa’s counsel to him who would fathom a universe of enigma beyond the reach of conceptual reason: “you must merge the center with the poles, aiding yourself as best you can by your imagination.”<sup>173</sup> But as Aquin concludes his article on silence by pointing out, citing Schiller: “Dieu seul et devant et autour. Et . . . ‘le milieu est plus consistant que les centres’.

On n'en sort pas et c'est pourquoi j'y reste. J'y reste en attendant la fin d'une fuite sans fin."<sup>174</sup>

Realizing that the quest to articulate the "Divine Silence" (as Carlyle dubbed it) was endless, and that consequently he could not keep his hopes for a cultural renaissance leading to a reconciliation of cultures on a higher plane inexpugnable to the last in the face of the historic and metaphysical impasse his work had so relentlessly documented, on 15 March 1977 Aquin opted, with Stefan Zweig, author of an essay on Montaigne, for the extreme remedy of suicide.<sup>175</sup>

### Notes

1. Hugh MacLennan, "Two Solitudes: Thirty-Three Years Later," in *The Other Side of Hugh MacLennan: Selected Essays Old and New*, ed. by Elspeth Cameron (Toronto: Macmillan, 1978), 288; and *Two Solitudes* (Toronto: Collins, 1945), n.p.
2. MacLennan, "Two Solitudes," 289.
3. Ibid., 294; and Cameron, 288. Cameron points to MacLennan's treatment of René Lévesque, but the essay as a whole is Carlylean in its emphasis on the "ironical" aspect of history, as well as in the highly aphoristic style the author chooses to diagram it, the pun on Lévesque's name (which can be translated as "bishop") being only one instance thereof ("Two Solitudes" 289, 294). MacLennan's assertion that the current impasse is the result of "nineteenth-century ideologies" explains his adoption of such a tone (295). For an appreciation of Carlyle as the preeminent critic of such "ideologies," see Émile Montégut, "Du culte des héros: Carlyle et Emerson," *Revue des deux mondes* 7 (1850), 736-37.

4. From his essay “De la vanité”: “Le monde est inepte à se guérir. Il est si impatient de ce qui le presse, qu’il ne vise que s’en désfaire, sans regarder à quel prix. Le bien ne succède pas nécessairement au mal. Un autre mal lui peut succéder, et pire” (“Two Solitudes,” 299).
5. Charles Dédéyan, *Montaigne chez ses amis anglo-saxons: Montaigne dans le romantisme anglais et ses prolongement victoriens*, 2 vols. (Paris: Boivin et C<sup>ie</sup>, 1943), 1.156, 155.
6. Cited from the Centenary edition of *The Works of Thomas Carlyle*, ed. by H.D. Traill, 30 vols. (London: Chapman and Hall, 1898-99), 3.2; hereafter *W* in text.
7. Michel de Montaigne, *Essais*, ed. by Pierre Michel, 3 vols., with introductions by André Gide, Maurice Merleau-Ponty and Albert Thibaudet (Paris: Gallimard, 1962, 1965), 3.13.362. For the benefit of my English readers I have adopted, whenever it seemed apposite, Florio’s translation of *The Essays of Montaigne*, ed. with an introduction by George Saintsbury, 3 vols. (New York: AMS Press, 1967).
8. Dédéyan, 1.154.
9. See MacLennan’s relation of the “dream” which gave rise to his novel: the antagonists in question are both deaf (“Two Solitudes” 279).
10. Asked by Emerson about the author of a *Westminster* article twinning Montaigne with Socrates and the Shakespeare of *Hamlet*, Carlyle provided the name, but remained otherwise mum on the matter, having recommended to Emerson silence on questions of conscience and personal conviction; and he would persist in that silence whenever Emerson mentioned the skeptic in their correspondence. Prelusive to Emerson’s own “long . . . ominous silences,” Carlyle’s response to the former’s *Representative Men* in a letter of 19 July 1850, for example, is revealing for its omission of any reference to the third essay on Montaigne as representative

skeptic (*The Correspondence of Emerson and Carlyle*, ed. with an introduction by Joseph Slater [New York and London: Columbia University Press, 1964], 44; hereafter *C* in text). Emerson's "portraits" Carlyle indeed found "full of *likeness*, and abounding in instruction and material for reflexion," commending, for instance, the portrait of Socrates in the first essay on "Plato." But his commentary lurches and comes to a dead stop with the second essay on Swedenborg: "I said to myself, on reaching your general conclusion about the man and his struggles: 'Missed the consummate flower and divine ultimate elixir of Philosophy, say you? By Heaven, in clutching at *it*, and 'almost getting it,' he has tumbled into Bedlam,—which is a terrible *miss*, if it were never so *near*! A miss fully as good as a mile, I sh<sup>d</sup> say!'" Two dashes follow the protracted harangue, after which Carlyle, as though momentarily dumbstruck, resumes: "In fact, I generally dissented a little about the *end* of all these Essays; which was notable, and not without instructive interest to me, as I had so lustily shouted 'Hear, hear!' all the way from the beginning up to that stage" (*C* 460). Such silences have been construed by their editor Joseph Slater and others as proof of opposition between Carlyle and Emerson. Indeed, Henry James, Jr.'s assessment in his 1883 review of their *Correspondence*—"the temperament of the one was absolutely opposed to the temperament of the other"—has pretty much remained the critical consensus since then (*Literary Criticism* [New York: Literary Classics of the United States, 1984], 242). "In principles as in temperament," writes Slater (88)—"in thought and character," concurs Emerson biographer Ralph L. Rusk—"they stand poles apart" (*The Life of Ralph Waldo Emerson* [New York and London: Columbia University Press, 1949], 195). Similarly, by analogy and extension, so Dédéyan astutely infers, Carlyle would have dissented a little (a little "fully as good as a mile") about the end of Montaigne's *Essais*, and accordingly, he too reads

silence as the voicing of discord, except that, in this case, the “ominous silences” were all on Carlyle’s side, and the opposition so imaged, between him and Montaigne.

11. Kenneth Marc Harris, *Carlyle and Emerson: Their Long Debate* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1978), 5.

12. See e.g. Kerry McSweeney and Peter Sabor’s survey of Carlyle criticism in their introduction to *Sartor Resartus* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), xxxii-iii; all quotations from *Sartor* are taken from this edition.

13. Dédéyan, 154.

14. Lecky cited in Dédéyan, 351n.1.

15. To similar effect, Coleridge’s *Biographia Literaria* compares the “infinite blindness” of medieval allegory to that of “a string of blind men, each holding the skirt of the man before him, reaching far out of sight, but all moving without the least deviation in one strait line” (cited from Mary Desaulniers, *Carlyle and the Economics of Terror: A Study of Revisionary Gothicism in The French Revolution* [Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1995], 24).

16. See A. L. Le Quesne, *Carlyle* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982), 4.

17. *The Collected Letters of Thomas and Jane Welsh Carlyle*, ed. by Charles Richard Sanders, Kenneth J. Fielding, et. al., 27 vols. (Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 1970-81), 1.231; hereafter *L* in text.

18. See Dédéyan, 155. In *Sartor Called Resartus: The Genesis, Structure and Style of Thomas Carlyle’s First Major Work* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1965), G.B. Tennyson calls it “an act of imaginative faith to see anything seminal” in the Montaigne article (32).

19. See Dédéyan, 154. Carlyle himself likens Montesquieu's manner to Montaigne's (*W* 30.83).

20. *Two Notebooks of Thomas Carlyle: From 23rd March 1822 to 16<sup>th</sup> May 1832*, ed. by Charles Eliot Norton (New York: Paul P. Appel, 1972), 81; *Sartor* 120. Carlyle first came across the term "*Eleuthéromane* (Liberty-mad)" which he would use to designate the skeptical, inquisitory style in metaphysics in his reading of Nageon, the editor of Diderot's *Works* (see *Two Notebooks* 253-54). A further case in point in his prosecution of French Philosophism, Carlyle's essay on "Diderot" (1833) accords with Aristotelian doctrine insofar as it emphasizes the significance of "the *end*," biographically, historically and metaphysically speaking, as well as the law of non-contradiction (*W* 28.179). Thus, for example, Carlyle instances Diderot's (dubbed "Denis the Fatalist") reciting of the "Sceptic's viaticum" as scripted in Montaigne's essay "On Vanity":

I plunge stupidly, head foremost, into this dumb Deep, which swallows me, and chokes me, in a moment,—full of insipidity and indolence. Death, which is but a quarter of an hour's suffering, without consequence and without injury, does not require peculiar precepts. (*W* 28.226)

By juxtaposing this confession immediately to the *philosophe*'s ironic consummation (eating an apricot, his last words "*Mais que diable de mal veux-tu que cela me fasse?*"), the bellicose satirist suggests the comic inanity of the former's whole life-philosophy, "a self-swallowing product of the Spirit of the Time," in his epitaph (*W* 28.226, 231). Montaigne's "dumb Deep" becomes, by ironic transposition, an apricot; "the principles of a stoic" (as Carlyle remarked in the conclusion to his 1820 article on Montaigne) are "incongruously mingled with the practice of an epicure," to deadening effect (*W* 30.68-69). The essay on "Diderot" thus repeats, by

implication or analogy, the verdict passed on Montaigne in 1820: mortal enemies of conviction and action, such “inconsistencies” as Carlyle had found at that time effectively served to invalidate the skeptic as moral teacher or exemplar (*W* 30.69).

21. Harris, 13.

22. *On Heroes, Hero-Worship, and the Heroic in History*, ed. by Archibald MacMechan (Boston: Athenaeum Press, 1902), 277, 275. The dedication reads “To my Father, who first taught me by word and deed the meaning of ‘Heroic.’”

23. Walter E. Houghton, *The Victorian Frame of Mind, 1830-1870* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1957), 2.

24. According to the perspective adopted in *On Heroes*, the Revolution is “the third and final act of Protestantism” (273).

25. Lecky quoted from Dédéyan, 351 n. 1; and see Peter Burke, *Montaigne* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1981), 29.

26. See e.g. Burke, 23, 27; and Alfred Glauser, *Montaigne paradoxal* (Paris: A.G. Nizet, 1972), 114, 119. The Montaigne of the *Apologie de Raimond Sebond* may initially come off, rather unequivocally, as an implacable, rock-ribbed *dogmatiste*. Like Lucretius, cited at the outset of Sir Francis Bacon’s *Essayes or Counsels, Civill and Morall*, Montaigne seems to find “no pleasure . . . comparable to the standing upon the vantage ground of Truth . . . And to see the Errors, and Wandrings, and Mists, and Tempests, in the vale below” (“Of Truth,” in *The Essayes or Counsels, Civill and Morall*, ed. by Michael Kiernan [Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985], 7). But there is in fact substantial and compelling evidence to the contrary. When he instances the passage from Lucretius found in Bacon, for example, Montaigne does so to evince the universal

promiscuity of virtue and vice from which not even the sage is exempt: just as our being is cemented with illnesses, so, too, he argues, is our public edifice (*Essais* 3.1.28). The skeptic thus ranges himself in the company of those physicians he mocks, who prescribe poisons for our preservation (*Essais* 3.2.57). In fact, the essay in Florio's Montaigne from which Bacon then avails himself of an aphorism describing the liar as "brave towards God, and a Coward towards men" would seem to give the lie to any implication of good faith on the Gascon's part (8-9). Bacon, in effect, cites Montaigne glossing Plutarch on the ancients. If all Frenchmen, on the contrary, are liars (as the Gascon reports), then his "livre consubstantiel" is true to the life it counterfeits only insofar as it masks another truth and another self (*Essais* 2.18.426).

27. *The Complete Works of Ralph Waldo Emerson*, Centenary edition, ed. by Edward Waldo Emerson, 12 vols. (Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1903-4), 2.160. On the function of the mask in Montaigne, see Alexandre Micha, *Le singulier Montaigne* (Paris: A.G. Nizet, 1964), 58. Michel Butor, in his *Essais sur les Essais* (Paris: Gallimard, 1968), repeatedly compares the *Essais* to a stronghold (see e.g. 93, 112, 113).

28. See Pierre Michel, *Montaigne* (Bordeaux: Éditions Guy Ducros, 1970), 72-74.

29. The epithet is reminiscent of Plutarch's trenchant caption for the liar cited above (see n.28). Indeed, though Montaigne's consubstantial oeuvre may seem, at first glance, a patchwork-bundle of conflicting designs and threads (as he himself is frequently led to describe it), its lineaments are discernible enough. A defense, after all, even if it consists in self-contradiction and self-treason as does the *Apologie*, is still a defense. Read as a defense of the ways of paradoxy delineated by Rosalie L. Colie in her conspectus of Renaissance *insolubilia* or enigma, Montaigne's *Apologie* is logically consistent with the decorum of that mode or genre. Like the

Cretan liar in the exemplary “Liar” paradox, the skeptic equivocates, abandoning defense in defense and so not abandoning defense. “That equivocation,” notes Colie, “is the paradoxist’s protection”; confronted with the “melee of Renaissance ideas,” he can effectively “postpone a philosophical or religious choice he might live to regret” (*Paradoxia Epidemica: The Renaissance Tradition of Paradox* [Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1966], 38). As the wily but harmless Montaigne puts it, in Florio’s apt translation, “Where the Lionskinne will not suffice, wee must adde a scantling of the Foxes” (*Essays* 1.5.24). A later essay suggests a less flattering, but no less apposite, comparison: “. . . en quelque manière qu’on se puisse mettre à l’abri des coups, fût-ce sous la peau d’un veau, je ne suis pas homme qui y reculasse,” Montaigne writes, mock-brazenly (*Essais* 1.20.146). When it comes to keeping his castle and closet inviolate, the sage takes cover under just such a cloak: “À la vérité, et ne crains point de l’avouer,” he confesses, “je porterais facilement au besoin une chandelle à saint Michel, l’autre à son serpent . . .” (*Essais* 3.1.30).

30. As André Gide remarks in his highly apropos preface to his selections from *Les Pages immortelles de Montaigne* (1939), Montaigne’s equivocal posture (“sans cesse il se contredit et se trahit lui-même”) must needs prove less pleasing to the militant archangel than his fork-tongued adversary (New York: Longmans, Green et C<sup>ie</sup>; and Paris: Éditions Corrèa, 1939), 37-38. In fact, much of the *Apologie* reads like an enactment, *avant la lettre*, of the folly of “system-makers and builders of logical card-castles” imaged in Carlyle’s angelico-diabolical universe (*W* 28.6); here as in Carlyle’s works, “one judgement . . . uncessantly subvert[s] another” (*Essays* 2.12.275). The working out of that principle of universal contradiction in an inherently ironic and self-reflexive form, the *Essais* themselves oppose pursuers and pursued,

beseigers and defendants, in an ironic tourney with their shadowy fate (see 1.4.71; 2.12.155-56). “Est-ce pas faire une muraille sans pierre, ou chose semblable que de bâtir des livres sans science et sans art?” asks their author (*Essais* 3.2.45). To that effect, Montaigne joins Pliny in jesting of physicians who, caught at the end of their tether (“au bout de leur corde”), strangle their own art, boasting, tongue in cheek, “they . . . are never able to bring mee a proposition, but I can presently frame another to the contrary of like force and consequence” (*Essais* 2.37.567; *Essays* 2.37.525). But Montaigne’s macabre fun is, typically, at his own expense. The whimsical student of Pyrrho here describes and indicts his own art—that of erecting “une science . . . de l’inscience” (*Essais* 2.29.472), of building ramparts and walls without bricks or plummet, in defiance of the laws and distinctions prevailing in a logically ordered universe, of up and down, right and left, inside and out. “Humane reason is a two-edged dangerous sword,” opines the skeptic (*Essays* 2.17.389)—and he teaches by example: “His scepticism cut[s] both ways” (Burke 29). An “essai de ruines,” in the apt phrasing of Alfred Glauser’s *Montaigne paradoxal* (121), the *Apologie* goes on to attack or countervail the very proposition it would buttress, illustrating the author’s keen observation concerning the folly or “bêtise” of humanity: “nous . . . nous enferrons de nos armes” (*Essais* 2.12.138, 3.8.193). Warring against himself, Montaigne is condemned to the endless circling he sees as our peculiar lot (*Essais* 3.6.167). It follows that his is at best a Pyrrhic victory, “a desperate thrust,” as he concedes to Marguerite de Valois, “gainst which you must forsake your weapons, to force your adversary to renounce his” (*Essays* 2.12.275). The (self)disarming, (self)wounding equivocator so pictured, to be sure, is no paladin. Suicidal in its defense, the *Apologie* “supports Sebond,” as one critic wryly remarked, “as the rope supports the hanged man” (Louis Cons, *Anthologie littéraire de la*

*Renaissance française* [New York: Holt, 1931], 143; cited in translation from Donald Frame, *Montaigne: A Biography* [New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1965], 170). In effect, Montaigne reduces “à zéro” the science of Sebond’s teachers, Saint-Thomas Aquinas and that “prince des dogmatistes” Aristotle, only to go on, “selon sa logique particulière,” to erect belief on that ground of doubt and unscience (Glauser 114).

31. Hume cited from Wylie Sypher, “The Late-Baroque,” in *Four Stages of Renaissance Style* (Garden City, New York: Doubleday & Co., 1955), 294.

32. See W.M. Alexander’s entry on “Hamann” in *The Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. by Paul Edwards (New York and London: Collier-Macmillan, 1967), 3.407; and Carlyle’s essay on “Novalis,” in *W* 27.36.

33. Cf. John D. Rosenberg, *Carlyle and the Burden of History* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985), 51).

34. For a systematic treatment of Carlyle’s relationship to, and “critique” of, contractualist thought, see Philip Rosenberg, *The Seventh Hero: Thomas Carlyle and the Theory of Radical Activism* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1974), 77-127.

35. Chiefly Carlyle’s remark in 1827: “The Germans . . . assail Hume, not in his outworks, but in the centre of his citadel. They deny his first principle, that sense is the only inlet of knowledge, that experience is the primary ground of Belief” (cited from A. Abbott Ikeler, *Puritan Temper and Transcendental Faith: Carlyle’s Literary Vision* [Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1972], 85-86).

36. John Sterling, “On the Writings of Thomas Carlyle,” in *Essays and Tales of John Sterling*, ed. by Julius Charles Hare (London: John W. Parker, 1848), 360.

37. *Ibid.*, 307.

38. Colin N. Manlove, "'Perpetual Metamorphoses': The Refusal of Certainty in Carlyle's *Sartor Resartus*," *Swansea Review* 2 (1986); reprinted in and cited from *The Critical Response to Thomas Carlyle's Major Works*, ed. by D.J. Trela and Rodger L. Tarr (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1997), 44; and Albert J. LaValley, *Carlyle and the Idea of the Modern: Studies in Carlyle's Prophetic Literature And Its Relation to Blake, Nietzsche, Marx, and Others* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1968), 135, 133.

39. "The end of Man is an Action, and not a Thought," the Editor feels compelled to remind "foolish Teufelsdröckh" in *Sartor Resartus*, as his wanderings skirt the "inexplicable Phantasmagoria" of existence (120, 119). The latter's eventual assertion of belief—"love God. This is the EVERLASTING YEA, wherein all contradiction is solved" (*Sartor* 146)—would seem to sign his assent to that purposive creed and so put an end to his devilish antics and aimless circumnambulating: "only, by a felt indubitable certainty of Experience, does [Speculation] find any centre to revolve around," the Editor concludes from Teufelsdröckh's narrative (*Sartor* 148). And yet, as tempting as it is to see in the "Everlasting YEA" an egress from the infernal "Center of Indifference"—for Montaigne, the end-term of all inquiry—, there is evidence in the third and last book of *Sartor*, which sets out Teufelsdröckh's social gospel, that the "diabolico-angelical Indifference" of the Sage continues unabated (*Sartor* 179). Like William Blake's etching of self-devouring simians in *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* (1793), a metaphor for church polemics over the dry bones of "Aristotles Analytics," the theo-philanthropical sage's allusions to cannibalism in the ulterior parts of *Sartor* are apparently meant to paint a grim picture of humanity ground through the "Logic-Mill" of positive reason and thereby "salted and barrelled"

for consumption (*The Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake*, ed. by David V. Erdman with a commentary by Harold Bloom [Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1965], 42; and *Sartor* 174). But, as suggested by Blake's mirror-wise gloss to Canto XXXIV of Dante's *Inferno*, in which glass the world appears "Upside Down When viewed from Hells Gate," and yet (inscribed in reverse below) "right When Viewed from Purgatory," such a conflating of reason and unreason, fact and metaphor, is precisely the product of Hell's misprision: "In Equivocal Worlds Up & Down are Equivocal," writes Blake (690). From the moment when the Editor, in his "Retrospective," recalls the "black deeps" of the Professor's "still and dreamy" eyes, uncertain whether the "gleams" coming therefrom be "of an ethereal or else diabolic fire," "reflexes of the heavenly Stars" or "glances from the region of Nether fires," he begins his dizzying tuition in the Sage's logic of perspectivism and topsy-turvydom: "Is that a real Elysian brightness . . . or the reflex of Pandemonian lava?" he asks of the vista opened up by Teufelsdröckh's idealist philosophy, uncertain whether it betokens "ethereal Love" or "malign coolness" (*Sartor* 13, 25, 55, 13). Penned, like Blake's *Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, with a view to "overthrow[ing] the tyranny of rational modes of thought and discourse" and inaugurating the reign of "Fantasy"—"the true Heaven-gate and Hell-gate of man" (*Sartor* 111)—, Carlyle's "revolution of consciousness" in *Sartor Resartus* (McSweeney and Sabor, xxix) partakes of the same infernal logic: "Without Contraries," asserts Blake, "is no progression" (34). Love, Fantasy's principle medium, is a kind of "Delirium," *Sartor* pursues, a "discerning of the Infinite in the Finite, of the Idea made Real; which discerning again may be either true or false, either seraphic or demoniac, Inspiration or Insanity" (110).

40. Lady Sydney Morgan, review of *The French Revolution* in the *Athenaeum* (20 May 1837); reprinted in and cited from *Thomas Carlyle: The Critical Heritage*, ed. with an introduction by Jules Paul Seigel (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1971), 49.
41. Herman Merivale, *Edinburgh Review* 71 (July 1840); cited from *The Critical Heritage*, 80.
42. John Stuart Mill, *London and Westminster Review* 27 (July 1837); cited from *The Critical Heritage*, 64.
43. *Ibid.*, 52.
44. *Idem.*, 55, 54, 58.
45. Tennyson, 98.
46. See e.g. Carlyle editor H.D. Traill's introduction to the same. Traill suggests that "*The French Revolution: A Drama*" would be a better title for the book (xii). For LaValley, as well, *The French Revolution* is dramatic in construction (9).
47. Mill, 64.
48. Morgan, 46, 47.
49. See Desaulniers, 76. Philip Rosenberg speaks in this respect of a "revolution in historical thought" (70) analogous to Sartor's "revolutions in Thought" (9): "one must recognize that the narrative techniques [Carlyle] developed . . . imply a profound dissatisfaction not only with traditional attitudes toward the practice of writing history, but with traditional philosophies of history as well" (*The Seventh Hero* 70).
50. Joseph (Giuseppe) Mazzini, "On the Genius and Tendency of the Writings of Thomas Carlyle," *British and Foreign Quarterly Review* 16 (January 1844); reprinted in and cited from *The Critical Heritage*, 260.

51. Rosenberg, *The Seventh Hero*, 21-22.

52. In his letter of 29 May 1835 to Carlyle, cited in Carlyle's *Life of John Sterling*, in *W* 11.108-17; reprinted in and quoted from *The Critical Heritage*. Like Montaigne, Carlyle, according to Sterling, is a "champion" for the "cause" or "right of thought in all competent minds, unrestrained by any outward authority" (28).

53. Cf. Harris, 83, and n.10 of this chapter.

54. Tennyson, 98.

55. Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Biographia Literaria*, ed. with an introduction by George Watson (London and New York: Everyman's Library, 1965), 174.

56. With the death of Emerson less than fifteen months after Carlyle's and with the publication of their *Correspondence* in 1883, that affinity (as Slater recalls in his introduction to the critical edition thereof) took on "a marmoreal, Demosthenes-and-Cicero aspect" (71-72n.33). To Henry James, for instance, the "united pair" pictured therein "present[ed] itself in some thing of the uplifted relief of a group on canvas or in marble" (233). So closely and inextricably paired in the minds of their contemporaries and successors were Carlyle and Emerson in fact that by the turn of the century James Joyce, surveying the history of "modern times," could list them in tandem, and as a matter of course, as the last of the many "giants" of that era still remembered for having held sway or "empire over the thinking world" ("Ibsen's New Drama," originally published in the *Fortnightly Review*; collected in *The Critical Writings of James Joyce*, ed. by Ellsworth Mason and Richard Ellman, with a foreword by Guy Davenport [Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1989], 48). Indeed, for well nigh half a century (so Dédéyan's revisiting of the 1847 lecture tour in which Emerson read from *Representative Men* and his essay "Montaigne;

Or, *The Skeptic*” repeats) Carlyle and Emerson shared between them the “pôles de la pensée anglo-saxonne” (1.263). That opposition has been construed as evidence of their fundamental antagonism (see n.10). And yet, by the same token, if such a coupling suggests itself so forcefully, it is as much for the classical symmetry of its parallels as of its antitheses. Not surprisingly, in view of their many disagreements, it is silence, according to their French translator E.L. Lapointe, which evinces the mystical unity—the co-presence of imagination—beneath the apparent diversity of the *Correspondence*: as antagonists and correspondents, critics and apologists, Carlyle and Emerson were “*unus e multis*” (one and many), their natures “invariablement tournées . . . vers les plus hautes spéculations de l’esprit, diversement orientées sans doute, mais également attentives, et par là se retrouvant en silence en leurs fondations, aux spectacles et aux suggestions de la vie profonde” (*Carlyle et Emerson: Correspondance (1834-1872)* [Paris: Librairie Armand Colin, n.d.], viii, x). For Slater, too, the *Correspondence* exhibits “discords . . . resolved . . . a pattern . . . completed” (94). Silence, then, need not be read as the voicing of unequivocal, fixed opposition, as Dédéyan and others suggest. See e.g. Camille R. La Bossière, “Carlyle and Montaigne: Their Silent Conversation,” in *The Victorian Fol Sage: Comparative Readings on Carlyle, Emerson, Melville, and Conrad* (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 1989), 20-37. Indeed, by the co-agency of speech and silence in a symbol, so *Sartor* professed Carlyle and Emerson’s common faith in the power of the synthetic imagination to grasp ideas beyond the reach of finite, conceptual reason, “the Infinite is made to blend itself with the Finite” (*Sartor* 166). And, in fact, for all his fire and brimstone, Carlyle could, in his less dogmatic moments, vibrate to a sympathetic chord. In answer to Emerson’s sibilant but “wholly human” voice, the only “*articulate voice*” (it often seemed to him) amidst the “jarring discords and jargonings of Babel,” Carlyle would write of

their agreement “in the great unfathomable meaning of a colloquy with the dumb Ocean, with the dumb Earth, and their eloquence” (C 395, 385, 172, 305-6). As “deep” as was his “dissent” from Emerson’s “Gymnosophist view of Heaven and Earth,” Carlyle found there “an agreement that swallows up all conceivable dissents”: “tho’ I see well enough what a great deep cleft divides us, in our ways of practically looking at this world,” he wrote on 19 July 1850, “–I see also (as probably you do yourself) where the rock-strata, miles deep, unite again; and the two poor souls are at one. Poor devils!” (C 477, 459).

57. *The Complete Works of Ralph Waldo Emerson*, 2.310, 308.

58. Jorge Luis Borges, “Nueva refutacion del tiempo,” from *Otras Inquisiciones* (1952); collected in *Prosa completa*, 2 vols. (Barcelona: Bruguera, 1980), 2.295. In his essay on Novalis, Carlyle remarks that “it is singular how widely diffused, and under what different aspects, we meet with [Idealism] among the most dissimilar classes of mankind” (W 27.23). He mentions Berkeley, the “ancient Pyrrho” and “modern Hume.”

59. Montégut, 724.

60. *De Docta Ignorantia*, transl. with an introduction by Jasper Hopkins (Minneapolis: The Arthur B. Banning Press, 1981), 50. On Montaigne as a reader of Cusa, see Burke, 15.

61. *Ibid.*, 70.

62. *Idem*, 116.

63. On the Socratic facet of German idealism, and Schlegel’s philosophy in particular, see Anne K. Mellor’s introduction to her *English Romantic Irony* (Cambridge and London: Harvard University Press, 1980), 12ff.

64. Coleridge, 87, 88.

65. Albert Béguin, *L'Âme romantique et le rêve: Essai sur le romantisme allemand et la poésie française* (Paris: José Corti, 1939), xv. Entitled “La Renaissance renaît,” Béguin’s chapter on the beginnings of German romanticism opens with a reminder of Cusa’s importance in the history of ideas he wishes to trace.
66. Dédéyan, 29-30. The success of Hume, Diderot and Rousseau as agents of Montaignesque (un)reason is evidenced by the continuing magnetism exerted by his “sagesse folle” on such *fin de siècle* Germanophiles as the Genevan Chair of Aesthetics and Philosophy Henri-Frédéric Amiel, a student, coincidentally, of Schelling. See Jean-François Leroux, “Henri-Frédéric Amiel,” in the *Dictionary of Literary Biography: Nineteenth-Century French Poets*, ed. by Robert Beum (Detroit: Gale, 2000), 6.
67. See Alexander, 407; and Jerry A. Dibble, *The Pythia’s Drunken Song: Thomas Carlyle’s Sartor Resartus and the Style Problem in German Idealist Philosophy* (Hague, Boston and London: Martinus Nijhoff, 1978), 46ff. “Hume and Kant go together,” Carlyle points out in his essay on Novalis, in holding “the logical mechanism of the mind [as] arbitrary . . . [A]ll inductive conclusions, all conclusions of the Understanding, have only a relative truth, are true only for us, and if some other thing be true” (*W* 27.27). For a complementary account of Carlyle’s relationship to the tradition detailed above, see La Bossière, 27-29.
68. See Harris, 25; Rosenberg, *The Seventh Hero*, 74-75; and Carlyle’s account of the contest between Hume and the Scotch Metaphysicians in “Signs of the Times” (1829) (*W* 27.64-65). Welcomed by Carlyle, the “ETERNAL NO” spoken by Diderot and the *philosophes* is the logical antecedent to the “Everlasting YEA,” pronouncing as it does sentence of death on all positive inquiry—“believe it thou must; understand it thou canst not” is a profession of belief and confession of ignorance the Carlylean sage shares in common with Cusa and

Montaigne (*W* 28.231; *Sartor* 198). Thus in “Characteristics,” Carlyle calls “Metaphysical Speculation” a “necessary evil,” “a disease expelling a disease,” as in the Paracelsian medicine (*W* 28.40). Like Montaigne, Carlyle sees such “speculative Thinking” as he himself trades in, as epitomized in the current vogue or “prevalence of Reviewing,” as both the “symptom” and the “cure” of the modern malaise (*W* 28.24-25, 32).

69. For Montaigne, Pyrrhonism and Lutheranism, though they differ in their ends, as the skeptical *Apologie* makes clear through its tone and its conclusions, are nonetheless alike insofar as they both take as their starting-point private judgment (“la foi seule,” “l’homme seule”) and so tend to subvert the metaphysical and rational bases for the authority of creeds, laws, and customs (*Essais* 2.12.141, 152). For this very reason, Montaigne has sometimes been mistaken for a closet Lutheran (see Burke 21).

70. *The Journals and Miscellaneous Notebooks of Ralph Waldo Emerson*, ed. by William H. Gilman et al., 16 vols (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University, 1960-82), 16.222.

71. James, 247.

72. John Holloway, *The Victorian Sage: Studies in Argument* (New York: Macmillan, 1953; Norton, 1965), 10. The sage’s writing, explains Holloway, “possess[es] a non-logical unity and compulsion like that of art in words” (10).

73. Cf. Maurice Descotes, *La légende de Napoléon et les écrivains français du XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle* (Paris: Minard, 1967); and Robert Major, *Jean Rivard ou l’art de réussir: Idéologies et utopie dans l’oeuvre d’Antoine Gérin-Lajoie* (Sainte-Foy: Les Presses de l’Université de Laval, 1991), 304.

74. Tennyson, 277; Sterling, “On the Writings of Thomas Carlyle,” 320.

75. LaValley, 2.

76. See Traill's introduction to *The French Revolution* (xiii, xii).

77. Comp. the *Essais*: "Heureux peuple, qui . . . se laisse mollement rouler après le roulement céleste" (2.27.416).

78. "Tragic" because for Carlyle, the ideal of freedom espoused by the revolutionaries, though "the one purpose, wisely aimed at, or unwisely, of all man's struggles," can never be entirely realized (*W* 2.183). "Inexorable" because "All things are in revolution . . . in this Time-World of ours . . . ." (*W* 2.211).

79. Tennyson, 277.

80. See Dibble, 56.

81. Rosenberg, *Carlyle and the Burden of History*, 66.

82. *Ibid.*, 100.

83. Merivale, 85-6; stress added.

84. Rosenberg, *Carlyle and the Burden of History*, 24.

85. See LaValley, 163.

86. Cf. Mazzini's remarks in 1844: "Wherefore does he speak to us at times in such beautiful passages of hope and faith, of the divine principle that is within us, of the duty which calls us to act, and the next instant smile with pity upon all that we attempt,—and point out to us the night, the vast night of extinction, swallowing up all our efforts." Some four years earlier, Mazzini had suggested an answer to his own question, when he wrote of Carlyle, "The eternal *cursus et recursus* inexorably devours ideas, creeds, daring, and devotedness. The infinite takes, to him, the form of Nihilation" (cited from Rosenberg, *The Seventh Hero*, 22).

87. LaValley, 9.

88. Dibble, 56.
89. Oscar Wilde, *The Artist as Critic: Critical Writings of Oscar Wilde*, ed. by Richard Ellman (London: W.H. Allen, 1968), 432.
90. Mill, 61.
91. George Eliot, unsigned review of Thomas Ballantyne's *Passages Selected from the Writings of Thomas Carlyle* in the *Leader* 6 (27 October 1855); reprinted and cited from *Thomas Carlyle: The Critical Tradition*, 410.
92. Holloway, 58. Similarly, according to Philip Rosenberg, for Carlyle, "truly meaningful action must be a transcendence or a realization of thought. It must be action that somehow serves as an extension outward of man's mind into the historical realm in which we pass our lives" (*The Seventh Hero* 54).
93. Wilde, 432.
94. Cf. Wilde's "The Decay of Lying: An Observation": "... in the works of Carlyle, whose *French Revolution* is one of the most fascinating historical novels ever written, facts are either kept in their proper subordinate position, or else entirely excluded on the general ground of dulness" (*The Artist as Critic* 304).
95. La Valley, 126; and see Richard P. Blackmur, *The Double Agent: Essays in Craft and Elucidation* (Gloucester: Smith, 1935). Blackmur sees in Montaigne and his Plato examples of modern "unindoctrinated thinking," the "only rational approach to the multiplication of doctrine and arrogant technologies" (273).
96. *The Journals and Miscellaneous Notebooks of Ralph Waldo Emerson*, 10.551.
97. Mellor, 125, 132.
98. Tennyson, 6, 326.

99. Rosenberg, *The Seventh Hero*, 32.

100. *Ibid.*, 34; and see also 36.

101. Carlyle's "all available Authority is *mystic* in its conditions" (*W* 3.2) might serve as a translation to Montaigne's "les lois . . . sont lois. C'est le fondement mystique de leur autorité" (*Essais* 3.13.362). Philip Rosenberg's discussion of Carlyle's "skeptical . . . attitude towards government" is instructive in this respect. Rosenberg distinguishes Carlyle's "hero theory" from "theories of legitimacy" (*The Seventh Hero* 120). Like Montaigne's position on the authority of laws, Carlyle's theory, in his view, tends towards "tautology": "the state is what it is . . . power is by definition whatever is in the hands of the strong and the strong are by definition whoever hold power" (120-21). Rosenberg goes on to paraphrase what is effectively Montaigne's position: "The state rules in fact because it can," not "because it should" (123). To align Carlyle thus with the skeptic and other "ideologues of force," however, is simultaneously to disqualify him for the vocation of teacher and prophet-historian assigned to him by Holloway, since this latter does not stop at "is" or "can"; rather, in Holloway's words, he "teaches men . . . how they should live" (58).

102. On Goethe's Montaigne, cf. Stefan Zweig, *Montaigne*, transl. by Jean-Jacques Lafaye and François Brugier with a preface by Roland Jaccard (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1982), 25.

103. Cf. Carlyle on the Reign of Terror: "To Marat and the Committee of Watchfulness, not praise;—not even blame, such as could be meted out in these insufficient dialects of ours; expressive silence rather!" (*W* 2.24). Philip Rosenberg explains that for Carlyle, "there is in the Reign of Terror"—and one might add, in the Revolution itself—"an ineffable, inexpressible quality that puts it beyond the reach of yes-no dichotomies with which human speech is wont to

pass judgments” (*The Seventh Hero* 105-6). Not for Carlyle, in other words, such a dichotomy as should and should not; thus in the last analysis, Rosenberg reflects, “might and right” in *The French Revolution* seem to “come down” (as in Carlyle’s famous “dictum,” though perhaps not quite in the spirit he intended) “to the same thing” (*The Seventh Hero* 121). Cf. also Mazzini’s insightful remarks on Carlyle’s “indifference” and “fatalism” as a result of his emphasis on “power” rather than moral, collective ends (258).

104. LaValley, 2.

105. On Carlyle’s influence on Borges, see Michel Berveiller, *Le Cosmopolitisme de Jorge Luis Borges* (Paris: Didier, 1973), 255-56. Berveiller remarks that Teufelsdröckh’s invective against the “illusions and legerdemain tricks of Custom” in the “Natural Supernaturalism” chapter of *Sartor Resartus* might serve as an epigraph to the *Ficciones* (*Sartor* 196). In his essay “La Flor de Coleridge,” Borges writes, “Durante muchos años yo creí que la casi infinita literatura estaba en un hombre” (*Prosa completa* 2.141). The first author he goes on to list is Carlyle. For an indication of Borges’ popularity in France and the Continent, see Paul de Man, “A Modern Master,” in *Modern Critical Views: Jorge Luis Borges*, ed. with introduction by Harold Bloom (New York: Chelsea House, 1986), 21-7.

106. From 1968 to 1970, at the Collège Sainte-Marie and the Université de Québec in Montreal, Aquin made Borges and the baroque an object of study and instruction. Cf. Guylaine Massoutre, *Itinéraires d’Hubert Aquin* (Montreal: Bibliothèque québécoise, 1992), 203, 230. Jacques Brault, in his *La Poussière du chemin: essais* (Montréal: Boréal, 1989), envisions Aquin translating Borges (213).

107. See McSweeney and Sabor’s introduction to *Sartor*, xxix.

108. Tennyson, 250.

109. Sterling's letter of 29 May 1835 to Carlyle puts *Sartor* in the company of the "master works of human invention" (those of Rabelais, Sterne, Swift, and especially, Montaigne) for its "Rhapsodico-Reflective manner" and "headlong self-asserting capriciousness" (cited from *The Critical Heritage*, 27); see also La Bossière, for whom ". . . Carlyle's fictional psycho-biography represents the work of an imagination cognate with Montaigne's" (29). The likeness or analogy is also tacit in other, more general accounts of Carlyle's style. Tennyson, for example, avails himself of Morris Croll's essay "The Baroque Style in Prose," in *Seventeenth-Century Prose: Modern Essays in Criticism*, ed. by Stanley Fish (New York: Oxford University Press, 1971), 26-52, to describe *Sartor*'s manner (243-47). Croll's chief examples of the baroque style—the "first modern manifestation of the Romantic Spirit," as he recalls a critical commonplace—are Thomas Browne, Thomas Burton and, of course, Montaigne (26). Cf. also Dibble, who similarly avails himself of Croll's criteria (37-43); and Mellor, whose reading of *Sartor* as a "self-consuming artefact" is indebted, of course, to Renaissance critic Stanley Fish (136). Indeed, as Tennyson goes on to assert, Carlyle's "baroque style" is "a function of his thought, of a mind restless with ideas, seeking and probing . . ." (250).

110. For a rapprochement between Carlyle and Nabokov, see LaValley (40); between Aquin and Nabokov, see Massoutre (37, 194, 233).

111. See La Bossière, 26-28.

112. Borges, "Magias parciales del Quijote," from *Otras Inquisiciones* (1952), in *Prosa completa*, 2.175.

113. Maurice Blanchot, *Le Livre à venir* (Paris: Gallimard, 1959), 119; Hubert Aquin, *Prochain épisode*, ed. by Jacques Allar, Claude Sabourin and Guy Allain (Montréal: Bibliothèque

québécoise, 1995), 91; and René Lapierre, *Les Masques du récit: lecture de Prochain épisode de Hubert Aquin* (La Salle: Hurtubise HMH, 1980).

114. *Selections from Ralph Waldo Emerson*, ed. by Stephen E. Whicher (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1957), 60.

115. Gérard Tougas, *Le Destin littéraire du Québec* (Montréal: Québec/Amérique, 1982), 37-38.

116. Hubert Aquin, "La fatigue culturelle du Canada français," in *Blocs erratiques*, ed. by René Lapierre (Montreal: Quinze, 1977), 103.

117. Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, *The Phenomenon of Man*, transl. by Bernard Wall and ed. with an introduction by Sir Julian Huxley (London: Collins, 1959), 264-5. Teilhard de Chardin alludes to Cusa in the same passage.

118. Hubert Aquin, *Journal, 1948-1971*, ed. by Bernard Beugnot (Montreal: Bibliothèque québécoise, 1992), 267.

119. See e.g. Robert Major, "'Prochain épisode et 'Menaud, maître-draveur': Le décalque romanesque," in *Canadian Literature* 99: 55-65; and Patricia Smart, *Hubert Aquin, agent double: La dialectique de l'art et du pays dans "Prochain épisode" et "Trou de mémoire"* (Montreal: Presses de l'Université de Montréal, 1973), 28ff. Smart remarks, "Au niveau 'autobiographique,' la dualité fondamentale du roman est la projection de celle qui existe entre l'écrivain et l'homme d'action" (28).

120. Borges cited from Paul de Man, 26.

121. Gabriela Massuh, *Borges: Una estética del silencio* (Buenos Aires: Editorial de Belgrano), 232, 236.

122. Henri Bremond, *La Poésie pure* (Paris: Grasset, 1926), 119-23; and Tennyson, 277. In the Cusan universe, notes Edmond Vansteenberghe, "il n'y a pas de pôles immobiles . . . Rien

n'échappe à l'universel mouvement . . ." (*Le Cardinal Nicolas de Cues: L'Action – La Pensée* [Frankfurt: Nachdruck, 1963], 242). On Borges as a reader of Cusa, see Estela Cédola, *Borges o la coincidencia de los opuestos* (Buenos Aires: Eudeba, 1987), 111.

123. Borges, preface to *Ficciones*, in *Prosa Completa*, 1.313-14. In his essay on Borges, Blanchot, less rigorous or consequential than his subject, comments that, "si le monde est un livre, tout livre est le monde, et de cette innocente tautologie, il résulte des conséquences redoutables" (117). The preceding, of course, is not a tautology at all, but rather a fallacy of the type so often encountered in criticism of Borges, Carlyle and Aquin. Far from celebrating a literary infinite, these authors rather express the finitude and inadequacy of literature vis-à-vis the book of universal history they seek, at best, to emblemize.

124. *Borges: A Reader*, ed. by Emir Rodriguez Monegal and Alastair Reid (New York: E.P. Dutton, 1981), ix.

125. Aquin, "Littérature et alienation," in *Blocs erratiques*, 128. Colie notes, with reference to Montaigne's *Apologie*, "Seeming to open out, the paradox turns in, acknowledging the wide world of alternatives, and denying autonomy to most of them. The very 'infiniteness' of paradox, its open-endedness, is balanced by its tautology, for all paradoxes . . . are self-enclosed statements with no external reference point from which to take a bearing upon the paradox itself" (38). Similarly, Smart calls the narrator of *Prochain épisode*'s "refus du baroque" in favor of "la lutte révolutionnaire" a "trompe-l'oeil, en ce sens que son refus du baroque est contenu dans une forme baroque" (13). Finally, on the subject of paradox and tautology in Carlyle, see Holloway, 52.

126. *Trou de mémoire* (Montréal: Bibliothèque québécoise, 1993), 57.

127. H., of course, is the initial to Aquin's given name, while de Heutz might be code for Dutch (i.e. H. the German). The use of such staple devices from the mystery novel and *roman à clef* to suggest a larger mystery invites comparison with Carlyle's procedure in *Sartor Resartus*. In *Sartor*, a note signed O.Y. (Oliver York, a.k.a. William Maginn, editor of *Fraser's*) points out that the Editor "communicates" through "some sort of mask, or muffler, and we have reason to think, under a feigned name" (10). The note, of course, is Carlyle's invention. Later, the Editor sits "deciphering" through "green spectacles" the "perplexed *cursiv-schrift*" exfoliating Teufelsdröckh's fictional (auto)biography (the Editor initially speculates that Hofrath Heuschrecke may have "purloined" his words from Teufelsdröckh), in which the author-protagonist himself first appears, coincidentally, as by "a trick of Imagination," under a "green veil" (*Sartor* 61, 59, 65). Finally, the wide-wandering, sansculottic Teufelsdröckh himself, the reader will remember, is almost "shot" by Napoleon's agents "as a spy," and is last reported to be in London on the eve of the Paris Revolution of 1830 after having been rumored to utter, "*Es geht an* (It is beginning)" (*Sartor* 136, 224-25).

128. Joseph Conrad, *The Secret Agent: A Simple Tale*, ed. with an introduction by Martin Seymour-Smith (New York: Penguin Books, 1963), 76.

129. Burke, 32, 31.

130. Rosenberg, *Carlyle and the Burden of History*, 65, 13.

131. David Scott Kastan, in "'His Semblance is his Mirror': *Hamlet* and the Imitation of Revenge," speaks in this respect of a "disabling symmetry" (*Critical Essays on Shakespeare's Hamlet*, ed. by David Scott Kastan [New York: Macmillan, 1995], 202-3).

132. Arthur Koestler, *Darkness at Noon*, transl. by Daphne Hardy (New York: Penguin, 1983), 135, 83. Aquin possessed a copy of the novel in its French translation (see Massoutre, 46).
133. Hubert Aquin, *L'Antiphonaire* (Montreal: Le Cercle du Livre de France, 1969), 179.
134. James, 247, 244.
135. Le Quesne, 11.
136. See M.H. Abrams, *Natural Supernaturalism: Tradition and Revolution in Romantic Literature* (New York: Norton, 1971, 1973), 271.
137. Cf. Sterling's letter of 29 May 1835 to Carlyle; reprinted in and quoted from *The Critical Heritage*, 33. The *Essais* similarly comprise, in the view of Glauser, "un serpent qui se mord sa queue" (152); and in Butor's, "[un] ensemble qui forme un cercle" (71). "The circle-figure," as Colie notes, "is also the figure for zero; the snake with his tail in his mouth may eat around to his head" (40).
138. Blackmur, 274.
139. Aquin, *Neige noire* (Montreal: Le Cercle du Livre de France, 1978).
140. Rosenberg, *Carlyle and the Burden of History*, 97-98.
141. Jackson I. Cope, *The Theatre and the Dream: From Metaphor to Form in Renaissance Drama* (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1973), 212. Cope begins his study with an appreciation of Cusa's contribution to the philosophic motifs he goes on to investigate in the works of Calderon and Shakespeare (15-28).
142. René Lapiere, *L'Imaginaire captif: Hubert Aquin* (Montreal: Quinze, 1981), 116.
143. Jean Rousset, *Circé et le paon: La littérature de l'âge baroque en France* (Paris: José Corti, 1954), 26.
144. Blake, 635.

145. Sterling quoted from *The Life of John Sterling*, in *W* 11.130. For a work key to Aquin's own developing sense of lyricism and preternaturalism, see Eugenio d'Ors evocation of "la naturalité du surnaturel" in his *Du Baroque*, transl. by Agathe Rouardt-Valéry (Paris: Gallimard, 1935), 129.
146. *Sir Thomas Browne: The Major Works*, ed. with introduction by C.A. Patrides (New York: Penguin, 1977), 140; comp. *Essais* 1.20.142. Patrides' introduction also alludes to Browne's affinity with Cusa (32.n17).
147. Ikeler finds in all of Carlyle "a divided allegiance" between the demands of religion and art, citing Harriet Martineau to the effect that he always spoke in "the most curious opposition to himself" (16, 104).
148. Kenneth Burke, *Language As Symbolic Action: Essays on Life, Literature, and Method* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1966), 475. Burke finds "the chapter on Yea as Nay-ridden as the chapter on No" (475). Manlove concurs: "every assertion [in *Sartor*] is wedded to its denial," the "No" it utters "no less everlasting than its opposite" (31, 44).
149. Ikeler deems Carlyle's "literary and political inconsistencies . . . symptoms of a 'life-long' vacillation between the security of dogmatic faith and the uncertainty of enlightened skepticism" (51-52). A case in point: as Harris points out, the verses which conclude the famous "chapter of questions" in *Sartor* ("We are such stuff / As Dreams are made of, and our little Life / Is rounded with a sleep!" [202; *The Tempest* IV.i.156-8]), admit, like the rest of his book, of contrary readings: they "may suggest a kind of after-life" (and thus man's alienated divinity, which the prophetic vision may yet reclaim), but they also "might with equal justice assert the meaninglessness of life and the oblivion which precedes and follows" (35-36). More importantly still, in terms of Teufelsdröckh's earlier profession of belief, the verses may suggest

the existence of God or (as they did to Jean-Paul Richter in the original version of his *Siebenkaes*) a godless universe (see Béguin, 184-85). Like Montaigne in the *Apologie*, Carlyle's persona in "Natural Supernaturalism," it has been suggested, acts as his own antagonist: he argues dogmatically against his own doubts (see Glauser, 119-20; and Harris, 32). The chapter, Tennyson explains, is "cast in the form of an imaginary dialogue, or even argument . . . . Teufelsdröckh himself poses the questions, attributing them to disbelievers; then he provides the answers" (230). But the questions, by his own count, far outweigh the answers, in a ratio of nearly three to one. "Faith and discouragement alternate in his works, as they must in his soul," Mazzini wrote insightfully of Carlyle in 1844, accusing him of "preach[ing] by turns life and nothingness" and so of "continually carrying [his readers] from heaven to hell, from hell to heaven" (260).

150. Cf. Ikeler, 160.

151. José Ortega y Gasset, *The Dehumanization of Art and Other Essays on Art, Culture, and Literature*, transl. by Helene Weyl (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1968), 151. In a passage reminiscent of Carlyle, Ortega y Gasset points out that the first half of this dichotomy ("our moral destiny") "will always be subject to dispute, as is everything 'intellectual,'" and goes on to argue that "Goethe emerges from his confusion" to assert that "'right is what accords with' the individual . . . . For the imperative of intellectual and abstract ethics is substituted the inner, concrete, vital imperative" (152). Carlyle seems to have shrunk from such a conclusion, which nevertheless is implicit in his thought. See e.g. Rosenberg, *The Seventh Hero*, 12ff.

152. Seigel, introduction to *Thomas Carlyle: The Critical Heritage*, 7. See also Mellor's reading of *Sartor*. For Mellor, "*Sartor Resartus* ends, not in a pleasant, harmonious unity, but in

unresolved—and irresoluble—conflict”; it is only the later Carlyle who “shed the motley of the buffooning romantic ironist” for “the sombre robes of the Victorian sage” (133-34).

153. *Letters of Thomas Carlyle 1825-1836*, ed. by Charles Eliot Norton, 2 vols. (n.a.: 1888; reprinted New York: Books for Library Press, 1972), 1.365.

154. Dibble, 55.

155. On the Editor’s complicity in effecting the reader’s “capitulation,” see Tennyson, 280.

156. Dibble, 56. See also Smart on Aquin’s dialectic, “dans laquelle les contradictions de toutes choses”—between art and history, universal and particular, Quebec and Canada, Europe and America (to mention but a few of the oppositions she goes on to enumerate)—“peuvent se réconcilier” (8).

157. *The Complete Works of Ralph Waldo Emerson*, 2.209. The passage also serves as an epigraph to Harris’ book on Carlyle and Emerson.

158. Though it ran wide and deep, the antagonism between Carlyle and Emerson (so Harris’ revisiting of their life-long debate serves to finesse a critical commonplace) was more the result of a difference in temperament than doctrine: the one committed to the ousting of sham verities and intolerant of contradiction and illusion, the other content to skate along surfaces, in endless circling, theirs was, according to Harris, a fundamentally different reflex vis-à-vis the impasses engendered by an idealism founded on doubt, paradox and enigma. As early as their first meeting at Craigenputtock Farm in 1833, so Emerson recalled in *English Traits* (1856), Carlyle “had the natural disinclination of every nimble spirit to bruise itself against walls, and did not like to place himself where no step can be taken” (*The Complete Works of Ralph Waldo Emerson* 5.18). Emerson, by contrast, so Carlyle complained to Gavan Duffy in 1849, “bore . . . with great good humour the utter negation and contradiction of his theories” (cited from

Harris, 107). Conceding that Emerson had “worked . . . out in a way of his own” the ideas he had borrowed from *Sartor*, Carlyle went on to lament the fact of his writings “suddenly stopping short and leading to nothing” (*ibid.*, 27, 38). He, on the contrary, would push on, having, as he noted in a self-admonitory journal entry for 28 April 1837, “a strange reluctance to renounce the road . . . entered on, how stony soever, how roundabout soever. You do not like to turn back: On then!” (*Two Notebooks* 266). And on he would push, stoically, until he reached such “an extremity,” Harris contends, that “contradictions” surfaced “he could not resolve and would not accept”; only then would he “give up the struggle, withdraw into silence . . . and take up something more promising” (83).

159. Browne, 143.

160. *The Complete Works of Ralph Waldo Emerson*, 9.82.

161. Ikeler, 211; and Lapointe, viii.

162. See La Bossière, 25. “Some make the world believe, that they believe things they never do,” Montaigne had written much to the same effect: “Others . . . persuade themselves they do so, as unable to conceive what it is to believe” (*Essays* 2.12.132).

163. Carlyle’s reply is quintessential Carlylese, half execration, half expostulation: “‘*Live*, for God’s sake, with what Faith thou couldst get; leave off *speaking* about Faith! Thou knowest it not. Be *silent*, do not speak’” (C 200). Carlyle seemed to be exhorting not only Emerson’s antagonists (and his own) to silence, but indeed all religious controversialists, including themselves. (When Emerson, for example, “zealously assured [Carlyle] of many deep (silent) friends in America,” the latter, according to his own account, “answered that for that very reason I ought to continue silent to them” [MS cited in Slater 42]). Repeatedly and increasingly, in their correspondence, Carlyle would come to urge upon Emerson (and himself) the blessings of

silence:

SILENCE is the great thing I worship at present; almost the sole tenant of my Pantheon.

Let a man know rightly how to hold his peace. I love to repeat to myself, "Silence is of Eternity." (C 172)

Be quiet, be quiet! . . . . It is better . . . to be silent than to speak. (C 182)

As for me I honour peace before all things; the silence of a great soul is to me greater than anything it will ever say, it ever can say. Be tranquil, my friend; utter no word till you cannot help it . . . (C 239)

The speech of men and American hero-worshippers is grown such a babblement: in very truth,—*silence* is the thing that chiefly has meaning—there or here. (C 388)

To keep silence . . . is among the principal duties at present. (C 434)

My respect for *silence*, my distrust of *Speech* seem to grow upon me. (C 435)

All "Literature" has grown inexpressibly unsatisfactory to me. Better be silent . . . (C 437)

Faced with Carlyle's growing intransigence and intent on fronting it with "the most serene skeptical calmness," Emerson, ever the faithful, attentive disciple, took the hint, answering his letters and queries, for the most part, with silence:

You must always thank me for silence, be it never so long, & must put on it the most generous interpretations. (C 433, 469)

You must not misconstrue my silences, but thank me for them all, as a true homage to your diligence which I love to defend. (C 482)

As "opposite in character" as "high and low, hot and cold, dark and light," both men had grown entrenched in their respective positions (Slater 88).

164. Cited from my edition of *Sartor*, 233. "*Wer darf ihn NENNEN* [Who dares name him]? I

dare not, and do not,” asserts Carlyle (235).

165. Ibid., 235.

166. Butor, 106.

167. MS cited in Slater, 252n.8; and Harris, 37.

168. See n. 158.

169. “The best lack all conviction . . .” goes William Butler Yeats’ “The Second Coming.”

Yeats provides Ikeler with the epigraph to his book on Carlyle: “We make of the quarrel with others, rhetoric, but of the quarrel with ourselves, poetry” (n.p.).

170. See e.g. the conclusion to Robert Kroetsch’s essay “Beyond Nationalism: A Prologue” (1981) in *The Lovely Treachery of Words: Essays Selected and New* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989): “Canadian . . . literature . . . compulsively seeking its own story (and to be prophetic after all: this will still be the case a century from now) comes compulsively to a genealogy that refuses origin, to a genealogy that speaks instead, and anxiously, and with a generous reticence, the nightmare and the welcome dream of Babel” (71). Carlylean echoes would seem to be *de rigueur* for the artist wishing to address such a scene.

171. Aquin, “La fatigue culturelle du Canada français,” 96.

172. “. . . let that vain struggle to read the mystery of the Infinite cease to harass us. It is a mystery which, through all ages, we shall only read here a line of, there another line of,” writes Carlyle. And a little further on he pursues with his famous analogy: “Here on Earth we are Soldiers, fighting in a foreign land; that understand not the plan of the campaign, and have no need to understand it; seeing well what is at our hand to be done” (*W* 28.43). Though the final emphasis here fall on “duty,” it is not clear what that duty would be outside the context evoked in the analogy, the basis for a rational ethics having been subverted in the body of the essay.

Implied in Carlyle's analogy, in other words, is his notion of hero-worship and an aristocracy of talent. But to assert this is only to beg the original question "What is to be done; and How is it to be done?" (*W* 28.27) for which Carlyle, as Mazzini points out in his comments on the passage, provides no answer (261).

173. Nicholas of Cusa, 116.

174. Aquin, "Le texte ou le silence marginal," in *Blocs érratiques*, 272.

175. The narrator of *Trou de mémoire* finds himself, like his author, obsessed with Zweig's suicide (133). On Zweig's relationship to Montaigne, cf. Roland Jaccard's critical preface to Lafaye and Brugier's translation of the former's book on Montaigne (5-11). Kathy Mezei concludes her survey "The Literature of Quebec in Revolution" by citing Aquin's suicide note: "Je me sens détruit. Je n'arrive pas à me reconstruire et je ne veux plus me reconstruire. C'est un choix. Je me sense [*sic*] paisable, mon acte est positif, c'est l'act [*sic*] d'un vivant. N'oublie pas en plus que j'ai toujours su que c'est moi qui choisirai le moment, ma vie a atteint son terme. J'ai vécu intensement; c'en est fini" (in *The Human Elements: Critical Essays*, ed. by David Helwig [Ottawa: Oberon, 1978], 51). Mezei remarks quizzically that the note and "gesture of despair" might constitute either a "warning" or a "promise" (51). But Aquin's emphasis is rather on the deliberate, final quality of the act, the month and day of which (the Ides of March) he had prophetically encoded in his first novel and repeatedly (re)imagined thereafter (see *Prochain* 201n.165 and 209.n219). Indeed, the choice of the date suggests that he had internalized those political contradictions he saw enacted at home and abroad: in Aquin's world-historical view, victim and victimizer, friend and foe, tyrant and liberator, are played finally by the same man, suggesting the necessary doubleness and ambiguity of any prophecy in a universe governed by enigma rather than reason.

## Chapter 2

### Deep unto Deep:

#### Of Exuberance and Inanition, Drunkenness and Lameness in (Post)Emersonian (Re)Visionary Mythmaking—A New Context for Reevaluating the Myths of Emerson

“ . . . we use defects and deformities to a sacred purpose, so expressing our sense that the evils of the world are so only to the evil eye. In the old mythology, mythologists observe, defects are ascribed to divine natures, as lameness to Vulcan . . . to signify exuberances.”

—Ralph Waldo Emerson, “The Poet”

“Let its grapes the morn salute  
From a nocturnal root,  
Which feels the acrid juice  
Of Styx and Erebus  
And turns the woe of Night,  
By its own craft, to a more rich delight.”

—Ralph Waldo Emerson, “Bacchus”

### Introduction

Written on the occasion of the publication of Thomas Carlyle and Ralph Waldo Emerson’s *Correspondence* (1883), journalist Montgomery Schuyler’s poetic commemoration of

their careers sought to evoke the latter's musical "elevation of thought" by likening him to "a white and steadfast star."<sup>1</sup> "Emerson was a far-reaching force," his student Walt Whitman agreed, "a star of . . . the very first magnitude . . ."<sup>2</sup> The verdict was to prove unanimous, as evidenced by George Santayana's critical appreciation of 1898, which locates the Sage of Concord's genius definitively in that firmament or constellation of minds (that of Hermes, Heraclitus, Empedocles, Plato, Plotinus, and others) which he describes in his essay on "Intellect."<sup>3</sup>

And yet, by the same token, what Emerson says with respect to that "high-priesthood of the pure reason" would seem also to apply to himself, and in particular, to his place in world literature outside the United States and England: "what marks its elevation and has even a comic look to us," Emerson writes, "is the innocent serenity with which these babe-like Jupiters sit in their clouds, and from age to age prattle to each other and no contemporary. Well assured that their speech is intelligible . . . they add thesis to thesis, without a moment's heed of the universal astonishment of the human race below, who do not comprehend their plainest argument."<sup>4</sup> If, for example, Belgian mystic Maurice Maeterlinck's preface to Marie Mali's French translation of Emerson's essays (1894, 1911) may be said to mark the ascent of his star in France and the Continent, where (as Frederic Ives Carpenter notes in his survey of the question) Emerson's brand of idealism reached the height of its popularity in the heyday of Symbolism and Surrealism before the Second World War,<sup>5</sup> that star, ironically enough, seems to have been eclipsed, in France at least, by the lesser light of one of his contemporaries in America, Edgar Allan Poe. With the notable exception of Friedrich Nietzsche,<sup>6</sup> Emerson the sage would seem to have had no fitting interlocutor, translator, or audience outside the Anglo-Saxon world.

Certainly, the image of Emerson as teacher and moralist tacit both in his work and in most studies devoted to him is out of keeping with the vision of the amoral artist found in the (Post)Symbolist milieu, and so continues to be a bar to comparative endeavors.<sup>7</sup> Poe himself was the first to point out that incompatibility in his vitriolic attacks on the “obscurity” and “affectation” of Carlyle, Emerson and their coterie as (to mention but a few of his expletives) “an assumption of airs or *tricks* which have no basis in reason or common sense”; a “pregnant compound indicative of confusion worse confounded”; “Taste kicking *in articulo mortis*”; and a “*reductio ad absurdum*.”<sup>8</sup> Though Poe’s renown amongst the Symbolists and their successors has always been a mystery to Anglo-American scholars, who are quick to point out, quite rightly, that these could just as well have taken their ideas from Carlyle and Emerson,<sup>9</sup> there is no mystery as to the target of Poe’s philosophy here: the unpardonable solecisms for which he reproaches the Transcendentalists all stem from their “frivolous attempts at reconciling the obstinate oils and waters of ethical discussion” in the province of poetry and art.<sup>10</sup> The strong disjunction between moralist and artist so drawn would seem to be confirmed by the fact that whereas studies abound finding in Poe *une âme soeur*, a spirit or wit kindred to that of his successors in France, none come to mind regarding Emerson.

There is, however, a good deal of scholarship linking Emerson back to Michel de Montaigne, whose contribution to *le courant libertin* extending from him to Charles Baudelaire and other (Post)Symbolist poets is a matter of record. A reexamination of Emerson’s affinity to Montaigne, consequently, may serve to explain why the former’s exalting of the “*diablerie* of . . . German studies”<sup>11</sup> to a science lends itself so readily, in the work of Poe, the Decadents, and their modern Quebec counterpart Réjean Ducharme, to a species of macabre metaphysical

vaudeville. Through his inversion of traditional values and common sense verities, Emerson, perhaps after all, for all his loftiness, also *une âme soeur*, proves his close kinship to “ces raffinés, les ironiques, les sceptiques, les beaux-esprits” whose cultivation of studied detachment (so Genevan mystic, diarist, and Schelling student Henri-Frédéric Amiel argued at the end of the nineteenth century) was to culminate in the triumph of “l’indifférence morale” as the dominant temper of the times.<sup>12</sup>

## 1

**A Mephistopheles Catholic and Jocund:  
Montaigne and Emerson as Brother Souls**

“To the poet and sage all things are friendly and sacred, all events profitable, all days holy, all men divine.”

–Friedrich Nietzsche, epigraph to the 1882 edition of *The Gay Science*, from Emerson’s “History”

“‘Tis an absolute and, as it were, a divine perfection, for a man to know how loyally to enjoy his being.”

–Michel de Montaigne, “Of Experience”

On the fly-leaf to the journal Emerson would keep of his second tour of England, in 1847-1848, is a passage transcribed from French poet Alfred de Vigny’s *Stello* (1831):

L'Angleterre est un vaisseau. Notre île en a la forme; la proue tournée au nord, elle est comme à l'ancre au milieu des mers, surveillant le continent. Sans cesse, elle tire de ces flancs d'autres vaisseaux faits à son image, et qui vont la représenter sur toutes les côtes du monde. Mais c'est à bord du grand navire qu'est notre ouvrage à tous. Le roi, les lords, les communes sont au pavillon, au gouvernail, et à la boussole; nous autres nous devons tous avoir la main aux cordages, monter aux mâts, tendre les voiles, et charger les canons. Nous sommes tous de l'équipage, et nul n'est inutile dans la manoeuvre de notre glorieux navire.

Mais, mon garçon, cria le gros Beckford, que diable peut faire le poète dans la manoeuvre?

Il dit, Le poète cherche aux étoiles quelle route nous montre le doigt du Seigneur.<sup>13</sup>

An oar to every hand, and every hand to its oar. Emerson apparently found the metaphor of England as a highly efficient ship or fleet most apropos, using it on at least two occasions—at a dinner held by the Saint George's Society in Montreal, on 23 April 1852, and again in *English Traits* (1856)—as an illustration of British practicality and ability in endeavor (*JMN* 10.507; *W* 5.41). His esteem for such qualities is apparent in an entry written on 25 January 1833, as he sailed from Boston for Malta on the brig *Jasper*: “Honour evermore aboard ship to the man of action,—to the brain in the hand. Here is our stout master worth a thousand philosophers” is Emerson's high praise (*JMN* 4.115). And yet, other entries logged during this first and his second crossing of the “liquid Sahara” (as he dubbed the Atlantic) betray some doubts and misgivings. “No trust to be put in a seaman's eye,” Emerson notes back on 19 January 1833: “He can see land wherever he wishes to see it & always has a cloud & ‘the stuff’ ready to cover

up a mistake" (*JMN* 4.112). His "Sea-Notes" for October of 1847 echo that skepticism with respect to the seaman's eye: in bad weather, he warns, "You shall put no more dependance on a dead-reckoning than on a dream" (*JMN* 10.201). Accordingly, as far back as 7 January 1833, Emerson took the "self-subsistent" Columbus for his patron and began to work diligently at "learning the use of the quadrant" (*JMN* 4.107). What he valued above all, to judge from these and other entries, was the skill of the "man who . . . with the sun & a three cornered bit of wood, & a chart, can find his way from Boston across 3000 miles of stormy water into a little gut of inland sea 9 miles wide with as much precision as if led by a clue" (*JMN* 4.115).

Like most of Emerson's casual observations, these were translatable into the world of the spirit which animated him. Thus he compared the scholar's task—"to catalogue those high commandments which in all mental history elevate themselves like towers," as he rephrased for his "chapter on Intellect" in his *Essays: First Series* (1841) a thought and a project dating back to *The American Scholar* (1837)—to that of astronomer William Herschel (*JMN* 11.52). An "eminent example" of that British "pertinacity" instanced above, Herschel had spent four years at the Cape of Good Hope cataloguing the stars of the Southern Hemisphere (cf. *JMN* 11.113; *W* 5.91). Emerson's answer to Beckford's question as to the poet's place in the rigging would not have differed substantially, then, from Stello's: the poet or orator's "office," in common with that of the American scholar or "Man Thinking," "is to cheer, to raise, and to guide men by showing them facts amidst appearances" (*W* 1.100). Clearly, Emerson perceived the pressing need for such instruction. As his "Lecture on the Times" (1841) insightfully describes the malady besetting the age, "We mistrust every step we take . . . our torment is Unbelief, the Uncertainty as to what we ought to do," ending in paralysis (*W* 1.282). What was wanted, then,

was a guide, “a teacher of prima philosophia,” such as Emerson had gone in search of on Christmas day 1832 (*JMN* 4.20).

In an entry for 23 March of that same year, Emerson cites a long passage from Edward Biber’s biography of Swiss reformer Henry Pestalozzi, obviously identifying with the protagonist, “who carries an unborn universe within his bosom . . . never . . . able . . . to explain himself fully & clearly to others or even to himself,” and who consequently seeks “the man who like a mirror would place his own ideas & feelings before his consciousness & enable him to pursue his course securely & successfully” (*JMN* 4.6). Shortly before setting off for the Mediterranean on his European tour, he copied, to like effect, this axiom by Novalis from an unsigned article in the *Edinburgh Review*: “Already my opinion my conviction has gained infinitely in sureness in force the moment another has adopted it” (*JMN* 4.15). Unbeknownst to Emerson, the author of the article was Thomas Carlyle. In Carlyle, in many ways the end-pole of Emerson’s first journey to Europe, and chief amongst those “beautiful beings . . . absorbed in their own dream” with whom he wished to converse on his second, the aspiring sage soon found the “friend” and “teacher of prima philosophia” he had been so ardently seeking as a mirror to his own ideas and feelings (*JMN* 10.339, 4.20). As journalist Montgomery Schuyler later epitomized Carlyle’s influential genius, he was “A bale-fire . . . / By night a blaze, by day a cloud,” for whose light “mariners” could be “glad.”<sup>14</sup>

And yet, though his “Germanick new-light writer” (as Emerson liked to refer to Carlyle) did provide him with the necessary “confidence” in his “principles” to get under way, by the end of his second trip to London Emerson had come to see, as well, the limits to Carlyle’s fiery genius (*JMN* 10.45). Light the Chelsea Sage certainly did confer, but it was of a spectral,

ominous hue. Faced with the materialism of his day, so Emerson, evincing his talent for portraiture, recalled in *English Traits* (1856), “Carlyle was driven by his disgust . . . into the preaching of Fate. In comparison with all this rottenness, any check, any cleansing, though by fire, seemed desirable and beautiful” (*W* 5.249). Explosive, all-consuming, Carlyle’s light was a warning beacon, an influx of the “Negative Diety”—not a guiding star such as the American looked for. The smoke, in particular, bothered Emerson. “They all feel the caprice & variety of his opinions,” he reported in 1847, concurring with the Tennysons in finding Carlyle guilty of the very fault he found “intolerable” in others, namely, of “inverting the common sense & experience of mankind on any subject whatever, and affirming the reverse” (*JMN* 10. 261, 343, 354). In fact, Arthur Clough’s parting plaint, as he saw Emerson off aboard the *Europa* on 15 July 1847 (with his “departure the young men of England would be left leaderless, for Carlyle had only led them into the desert and left them there”),<sup>15</sup> invites comparison with Emerson’s report of his own feelings over a decade earlier, on 1 and 2 September 1833, as he awaited his departure from Liverpool. “I am at a dead stand,” he wrote then. “If the vessel sail they say we shall be drowned on the lee shore[;] if we do not sail I perish waiting.” With “nothing external” to preoccupy him, Emerson was left alone to “spin . . . thread” from his “bowels” (*JMN* 4.81). The sages he had met with during his tour in England had left him, it seems, *sur son appétit*. They were particularly “deficient,” in Emerson’s first-hand assessment, “in insight into religious truth,” or “the first philosophy” of morals (*JMN* 4.79). If they “comforted & confirmed” him in his “convictions,” it was mainly through a frank confession of their ignorance: “they are above the meanness of pretending to knowledge which they have not & frankly tell you what puzzles them” (*JMN* 4.78, 79). And though Emerson then seemed to exempt Carlyle (“But Carlyle. . .”),

he would not do so some fourteen years later: “Carlyle looks for such an one as himself,” he wrote, “. . . but he will not find such a mate” (*JMN* 4.79, 11.60).

“Back again to myself,” then, traces both the beginning and the end to Emerson’s itinerary on his maiden journey across the Atlantic (*JMN* 4.83). By necessity partialists or half-lights, the sages of Europe had brought the “student” Emerson “no nearer the completion of [his] infinite orbit”; and so, along with Carlyle, they had effectively taught him to “trust” his own “instincts,” to sail according to his own compass (*JMN* 4.322, 292). Emerson was optimistic, as always, of his own prospects. “Another voyage would make an astronomer out of me,” he noted during his first cruise (*JMN* 4.107). His hopes and ambition were no less great, and no less unwavering, with respect to his own proper vocation: “’Tis very certain that this almanack of the soul may be written as well as that of Greenwich,” he wrote in 1842 after drawing the parallel between himself and Herschel (*JMN* 11.52). In contrast with all of Carlyle’s talk, his consisted, in his own understanding, of “short plain dealing, the communication of results” (*JMN* 11.60). The scholar’s “reasons” (so he had admonished himself as early as 1834) “should not be addressed to the imagination or to our literary associations but to the ear of plain men”; in fact, proceeding as they do from “the Divine light of reason” imparted to all, these reasons should be “such as plain men farmers, mechanics, teamsters, seamen, or soldiers might offer, if they would gravely, patiently, humbly reflect upon the matter” (*JMN* 4.356).

Captured in the paean to the self-reliant “heart” he composed as he was leaving his pulpit at the Second Church of Boston (*JMN* 4.48), the optimism evinced by Emerson in that maiden voyage of 1832-1833 and in the years of the great “challenges” (*Nature* [1836], *The American Scholar* [1837] and the *Divinity School Address* [1838]) which followed explains the exuberant,

triumphant tone with which his “biographer” Stephen E. Whicher, in his influential *Freedom and Fate: An Inner Life of Ralph Waldo Emerson* (1953), rings in his subject’s renunciation of “outward travels to sail the private sea” of his mind from the early 1830s to the late 1840s.<sup>16</sup> Emerson, in Whicher’s view, then succeeded in converting his latent skepticism into his self-reliant faith in “the God within.”<sup>17</sup> Charles Lowell Young’s earlier study of Emerson’s relation to one of the foremost exponents of skepticism would seem to confirm that estimate of Emerson’s achievement. “Emerson’s imagination . . . was not sympathetic enough to find elsewhere what was not already his own,” Young contends. Concurrently, he finds Emerson, even in his late essay on “Montaigne; Or, The Skeptic” for *Representative Men* (1850), “curiously indifferent” to Montaigne’s skepticism, and concludes from the evidence that the “skeptic” has “the least part in Emerson’s Montaigne,” as in Emerson himself.<sup>18</sup>

There is certainly a logical and historical neatness to Whicher/Young’s thesis, allying as it does Emerson, notably, to the Scottish Realist Dugald Stewart, an advocate for the “moral sentiment” so dear to the Concord Sage and an important source for his early knowledge of the history of ideas. For Stewart, as Emerson would have read in that philosopher’s *Second Dissertation* and elsewhere, the “strange and apparently inconsistent combination of knowledge and ignorance” in the “writings of Montaigne,” his capacity of “yielding passively to the current of his reflections and feelings, argu[ing], at different times, according to the varying state of his impressions and temper, on opposite sides of the same question,” was proof sufficient that “his genius and temper qualified and disposed him more to start the problem than to investigate the solution.”<sup>19</sup> In the course of Emerson’s journey on the contrary (so goes Whicher’s account) skepticism and the “paradoxical theories” of the modern “Philosophy of mind” that followed in

its wake and influence served merely as *un oreiller de doute*, “a needed if radical relief from the pressures of circumstances” and “the problems of mysticism” which chiefly consumed him, as he set out to cure the times (and himself) from the paralysis besetting them.<sup>20</sup>

And yet, more recent criticism has tended to locate the skepticism of Montaigne and his avatars at the heart of Emerson’s idealism. In fact, while so much of past and contemporary scholarship, following Whicher, may be said simply to gloss the “project” Emerson outlined for himself on 10 April 1834—“to look at every object in its relation to Myself” (*JMN* 4.272)—, there is a strand of criticism descending from George Santayana which explores the skeptical corollary or reverse to that idealistic project, in the shape of another aphorism Emerson copied, along with that of Novalis, from Carlyle’s “Characteristics.” Written by Schiller to Goethe nearly half a century earlier, “Genius is always a secret to itself” sums up, as well, Emerson’s relation to Europe, its sages, and the world (*JMN* 4.15). Scrutinizing the latter’s claim to canonical status from a purely literary standpoint, Santayana, for example, finds it “a fortunate incapacity in Emerson that he was never able to trace out and defend the universal implications of any of his ideas.”<sup>21</sup> The virtue of Emerson’s “method,” Santayana goes on to make clear, is this very inconclusiveness. “Incompatible with continuity of thought or unity and permanence of impression,” Emerson’s literary-philosophical mode translates into the characteristic openness which has won him favor and renown. “Both by temperament and conviction,” writes Santayana, “he was ready to open his mind to all philosophic influences, from whatever quarter they might blow . . .”<sup>22</sup> Whether in earnest or in jest, Santayana’s portrait puts Emerson in the company of those sages Montaigne mocks in his *Apologie de Raimond Sebond*: these, by “making,” like Protagoras, “man the measure of all things,” even as they ignore their own, prove

“the nullity of the compass and the compasser.”<sup>23</sup> Characterized by the author himself as “a looking-glass business,” Emerson’s travels to Europe “in search of a man,” far from justifying his maiden optimism, ironically confirm the justness of that conclusion (*JMN* 9.206).

Though “self” may be “the sole subject we study & learn” (*JMN* 4.67), in the phrasing of the Montaignesque “commonplace” jotted down by Emerson on 10 February 1833, as he lay under quarantine in the Harbor of Malta, there is (so he also asserted with Montaigne on his return from Europe) a “spiritual aid . . . which our friends afford us, of mirroring ourselves” (*JMN* 4.19-20, 270). “What is Europe but the chance of meeting with such a man as Montaigne?” Emerson would remark in 1847, having noted the felicity of William Ellery Channing’s “introduc[ing] Montaigne” into his *Conversations at Rome* (*JMN* 10.138, 106). According to his biographer Ralph L. Rusk, Emerson had, in fact, met with just such a man at Craigenputtock Farm in 1833.<sup>24</sup> Emerson himself would begin his correspondence with Carlyle by likening him to the French skeptic (*C* 98). But Emerson did not acknowledge the joke or the likeness in 1847, just as he would not then readily or openly acknowledge his close kinship and debt to Carlyle. It was precisely this “capacity for emotional detachment” in Emerson which the former found disconcerting, according to Kenneth Marc Harris, and this particularly in those “portraits,” so “full of *likeness*,” in *Representative Men* (1850), where the author’s ironic sallies struck so close to home (*C* 460). At bottom, what antagonized Carlyle, so Harris argues, was Emerson’s suicidal indifference to “antithetical tendencies” or ends.<sup>25</sup> Carlyle’s complaint to Gavin Duffy to the effect that Emerson’s essays tended to culminate in impasse, “suddenly stopping short and leading to nothing,”<sup>26</sup> sums up, as well, the grounds for his dissent from *Representative Men*, “a terrible *miss*,” as he said of Emerson’s “mystic” Emmanuel

Swedenborg. All of the 'heroes' fashioned by Emerson's imagination seemed to prove abortive. But it was his Plato which pleased Carlyle "least" of all (*C* 460). And with reason, for here the likeness was even greater, and thus all the more damning.

A case in point: John Michael's recent reassessment of Emerson's relationship to the tradition of skeptical thought begins by juxtaposing the vasty "ambition of individualism" in Emerson to that of his representative philosopher.<sup>27</sup> If that *rapprochement* hardly seems original or surprising, given the scope of Emerson's idealism and his place in the American canon,<sup>28</sup> Michael's contention that Emerson's depiction of Plato's posterity is equally apposite to the painter, and in fact, prophetic of the fate of Emerson studies is an insight worthy of further consideration, since it offers a significant challenge to the prevailing synthesis. In the image of Plato/Emerson's "theory of the world," Emerson scholarship is, in Michael's view,<sup>29</sup> "a thing of shreds and patches": "One man thinks he means this, and another that; he has said one thing in one place, and the reverse of it in another place . . . indeed, admirable texts can be quoted on both sides of every great question from him" (*W* 4.76-78; *JMN* 9.279). Harris essentially concurs; with Whicher's thesis specifically in mind, he reminds his reader that "there is a general rule in Emerson studies that evidence can always be found to contradict the most carefully considered conclusions."<sup>30</sup> As Montaigne writes of Plato in his *Apology*, so the student of Emerson might assert, with equal justice, of him: "some have looked upon [him] as a dogmatist, others as a doubter; others, in some things the one, and in other things the other . . . [N]ever did instruction halt and waver, if his does not"<sup>31</sup> (*Essays* 2.12.244). This, in the skeptic's view, argues Plato not a teacher, but a "poet," fit to paint the "*concordia discors*" that is the universe, but not to explain it (*Essays* 2.12.258, 259). Coincidentally, or concurrently,

recent Emerson criticism has tended to focus increasingly on the ironic detachment built into his rhetorical and hermeneutical mode, his Socratic “ability to endure the push and pull of contrary directions in his thought without a premature reaching after conclusions,” rather than on his statements of doctrine.<sup>32</sup> That tendency serves to suggest that the lack of direction and completion in *Representative Men*, a lack usually attributed to a resurgence of skepticism in the middle of Emerson’s career, can actually be read as characteristic of his oeuvre as a whole. A reading of his major works in the period of introspection spanning his first and second journey to Europe supports that claim.

In 1843, Emerson noted in his journal an anecdote by a Captain Rich concerning “a Boston pilot stripped of his branch” for his recklessness—“very instructive to artists” was his remark (*JMN* 8.366). He would later reprove Bronson Alcott with “the same vice”: “The poem must be *tenax propositi*,” he wrote, “the fable or myth must hold, or it is worth no man’s while to read it. If a pilot swings his vessel from the wharf with one intention, &, after letting go, changes his intention, & a vessel deceived by his first demonstrations is run afoul of & injured, the pilot loses his branch. Certainly we must hold the poet to as strict a law” (*JMN* 11.54, 9.296-97). Emerson might have heeded his own warning. By professing, according to the alternation of his moods and the flux of his impressions, his contradictory statements on “every great question,”<sup>33</sup> Emerson’s first book shows him, like Montaigne and his Plato, more “qualified” to illustrate the “paradoxical theories” of the Idealistic philosophy than to offer any egress or “solution” to its various impasses.

On 25 September 1833, Emerson, returning at sea from Europe, delighted in “a good jest” rehearsed by one of his fellow passengers aboard the *New York*, “a sea song in which two sailors in a storm . . . express their pity [for] the poor landmen”:

My eyes what tiles & chimney pots  
 About their heads are flying  
 Whilst you & I upon the deck  
 Are comfortably lying. (*JMN* 4.243)

Revolved in his mind during his European tour, Emerson’s “little azure-coloured book” *Nature* (1836) reproduces that “good jest” for its reader in the chapter on “Idealism”: “We are strangely affected by seeing the shore from a moving ship . . .,” writes Emerson; here, “by mechanical means, is suggested the difference between the observer and the spectacle—between man and nature” (*C* 157; *W* 1.50, 51). The lesson in perspectivism so achieved serves to “emancipate us”: “the world is a spectacle,” Nature teaches along with Reason and the Poet, both of which similarly show us “nature aloof” or “afloat before the eye” (*W* 1.51, 51-52, 49). There is certainly some irony, then, in Emerson’s earlier disavowal of those who “make themselves merry with the Ideal theory . . . as if it affected the stability of nature”: “God never jests with us . . . We are not built like a ship to be tossed, but like a house to stand,” he asserts (*W* 1.48). Emerson had similarly remonstrated with Carlyle for funning in his “Philosophical Poem” *Sartor Resartus* (*C* 107). “Mephistophelism,” he had warned Carlyle, could only “repel” his “audience” (*C* 99). Meanwhile, in excuse of such criticism, Emerson had professed his “defective apprehension for a joke.” Emerson’s light-hearted banter earlier in the same letter, however, gives him the lie on both counts: “none can be offended with the self subsistency of

one so catholic & jocund,” he writes, having just put Carlyle in the company of the “self centred” Montaigne (C 98).

If that description and prognosis do not quite so obviously apply to Carlyle, given his “vehicle” in *Sartor* (itself a reflection of his volcanic temperament), it suits Emerson to a tee. More “catholic” and “jocund” than anything in Carlyle’s philosophy, *Nature* argues its author a jester of Mephistophelean proportions, one worthy of the epithet assigned to him in James Russell Lowell’s *A Fable for Critics* (1848), of a “Plotinus-Montaigne.”<sup>34</sup> The Plotinian and Neo-Platonic aspect of *Nature* adumbrated in its original epigraph has, understandably enough, received much critical attention. That focus is all the more understandable given that Emerson’s sunny, azure-colored book deliberately plays down the skeptical antecedents to its Idealistic doctrine. These are, nevertheless, sufficiently tacit on closer inspection.

The treatise-like, teleological scaffolding or partitioning of *Nature*, announced in the dogmatic, scholastic tone of the “Introduction,”<sup>35</sup> has led critics such as Whicher and Jonathan Bishop to hail it, solemnly, as Emerson’s “most sustained attempt to formulate his religious and philosophical position,” and consequently, as “our primal book” in the “tradition of prophecy and art.”<sup>36</sup> But *Nature* and the journal entries leading up to its conception sufficiently attest to Emerson’s aversion to the “half-sight of science” deployed in “polemics, syllogism, & definition”—“so much waste paper,” he deemed these, frankly taking Montaigne’s part as “the only man who never lost sight of this fact” (*W* 1.69; *JMN* 5.57). And certainly, for their part, Montaigne’s *Essais*, and his *Apologie* in particular, give ample evidence of their author’s disregard for science. Even the logic of Aristotle, “the prince of all dogmatists,” is, in the skeptic’s view, only “a Pyrrhonism under a resolute form,” as he shows by citing the former’s

*Metaphysics*: “The sight of our judgment,” the arch-dogmatist is brought to confess his doubt, “has the same relation to truth that the owl’s eyes have to the splendour of the sun” (*Essays* 2.12.243, 267). Squinty-eyed, or half-blind, “reason,” naturally, “goes always lame and halting” (*Essays* 2.12.274).

For Emerson, to an even greater degree, Aristotle, by reason of his materialism, “is the European skeptic,” and the “religion most positively affirmed by men of the world”—that is, in accordance with the Aristotelian principles of the understanding—“barefaced skepticism” (*JMN* 9.276, 5.40). The last assertion occurs in a searching entry for 14 May 1835 in which Emerson outlines his aims for his own prospective essays. What passes for “infidelity & irreligion” in this world, he insists there, is in fact “sincere faith and . . . entire devotion” (*JMN* 5.40). But to the dogmatist, every “new statement . . . comes like an abyss of scepticism” (*W* 2.305). The problem, as Emerson has come to see it, lies in “weld[ing] the finite & infinite, the absolute & the seeming, together” without confusing the two, as does the “common eye.” In his *Apologie*, Montaigne, in order to tame the vulgar and *les innovateurs*, had put the divine and the absolute out of reach. “When will you mend Montaigne?” Emerson now prods himself (*JMN* 5.40). *Nature* is his answer.

The synthesis *Nature* seeks as a corrective to the “half-sight of science,” wherein “the end is lost sight of in attention to the means,” is epitomized by Emerson’s Platonizing of Aristotle in its final chapter “Prospects” (*W* 1.69). Confusing and conflating the *Republic* and the *Poetics*,<sup>37</sup> Emerson ascribes to Plato a “sentence” which more properly belongs to Aristotle: “Poetry comes nearer to vital truth than history” (*W* 1.69). The sentence sums up the argument of the “Introduction” and, in effect, *Nature’s raison d’être*. As the essay “Circles” goes on to

explain and illustrate, “Aristotle platonizes,” because by “going one step farther back in thought” (as in the Aristotelian search for the First Cause) “discordant opinions are reconciled by being seen to be two extremes of one principle” (*W* 2.308), this in a potentially infinite regress, so Montaigne similarly contends, since “no reason can be established but upon the foundation of another reason” (*Essays* 2.12.292). Accordingly, *Nature*’s is a Pyrrhonism or skepticism under resolute form, evincing a “probity” as “invincible” as that which Emerson would later ascribe to Socrates and Montaigne in *Representative Men* (*W* 4.74, 165). Emerson dogmatizes and generalizes only so that he may doubt all the more freely: earlier in “Idealism,” for example, he assimilates the philosopher to the poet by locating the “charm of one of Plato’s or Aristotle’s definitions” in the fact that “the solid seeming block of matter” is “dissolved by a thought”; a distinction which also, and more fully (as its Shakespearean echoes suggest) belongs to the Imagination, defined, still earlier in the same chapter, as the active part of “Reason”; which faculty in turn is defined, in the preceding chapter, as “Spirit”; and so on and so forth (*W* 1.55, 52, 27).

As this potentially infinite retrogression from great to greater shows, the power of Imagination or Reason, so defined and so allied, brings together “the farthest sundered things . . . by a subtile spiritual connection,” and so makes “outlines and surfaces . . . transparent” (*W* 1.52, 50). In fact, as his jumbling of Aristotle and Plato’s definitions bears out, the author of *Nature* is quite indifferent to such logical niceties as are involved in polemics, syllogism and definition. “In inquiries so general as our present one, the inaccuracy is not material . . .,” he asserts in the “Introduction.” “*Nature*, in the common sense,” he pursues, “refers to essences unchanged by man . . . . *Art* is applied to the mixture of his will with the same things, as in a house, a canal, a

statue, a picture. But his operations taken together are so insignificant,” he explains, “a little chipping, baking, patching, and washing, that in an impression so grand as that of the world on the human mind, they do not vary the result” (*W* 1.5). Given the sequel, Emerson’s sober preamble can only be seen, *pace* Whicher, Bishop, and company, as comical. Poetry comes nearer to vital truth, or rather an “original relation to the universe,” precisely because it is (re)creation (*W* 1.3). Fittingly, Emerson’s example of the archetypic poet is the sprightly, princely musician-magus of *The Tempest*.<sup>38</sup> As *Nature* goes on to provide ample illustration and example of, the poet-philosopher’s “imperial muse,” the Imagination, “tosses the creation like a bauble from hand to hand . . . [and] uses it to embody any caprice of thought . . .” (*W* 1.52). Emerson’s book evinces the sport of a similarly capacious imagination: “he bends Nature to suit the curve of his own temperament.”<sup>39</sup> In “Idealism,” in particular, the author “unfixes the land and the sea” and, dissolving the very “strong based promontory” of the world he has conjured for the reader earlier in the same chapter, makes fluid what seems stable, and stable what seems fluid (*W* 1.54).

*Nature* thus replicates the “charm of Plato” the “poet,” as Emerson would alliteratively render it in *Representative Men*: “The sea shore; sea seen from shore, shore seen from sea” (*JMN* 9.279). As Emerson goes on to explain the idiom of his own figure, “Thought seeks to know Unity in unity; poetry, to show it by Variety, i.e. always by an object or symbol. But Plato keeps the two vases, one of aether & one of pigment, always at his side, & invariably uses both” (*JMN* 9.279). In *Nature*, aether, the “type of Reason” hieroglyphed in the “blue east,” is clearly the poet-philosopher’s primary coloring, his “background,” to which he adds varying tints, according to his mood (*W* 1.18). The result is a painting in “harmonic colors,” as Emerson

describes Haydn's oratorios in the chapter on "Discipline," or (in the phrase he borrows from Mme. De Staël and Goethe's evocations of baroque architecture) a "frozen," "mute music" (*W* 1.44, 43, 18; *JMN* 4.335). "The long slender bars of cloud float like fishes in the sea of crimson light," Emerson sings in "Beauty." "From the earth, as a shore, I look out into that silent sea. I seem to partake its rapid transformations . . ." (*W* 1.17). A few pages later, Columbus' approach to the "shore of America" gives the "New World" a "pictorial air" (*W* 1.20-21, 50). In fact, *Nature* itself reads like a page torn from a Renaissance treatise on perspective—the latter, as the author contends in the same chapter, "integrates every mass of objects into a well colored and shaded globe" (*W* 1.15).

From the very beginning, then, it is clear that Emerson is approaching his subject in its "poetical sense" (*W* 1.8). The "end" of Nature at which he is driving is already dawning on the horizon when he writes that "Nature always wears the colors of spirit" (*W* 1.11). However, contrary to philosophers and cartographers of bygone ages, who, having arrived at the "extremities of our perquisition" or the "utmost bounds of known countries," would fill these in (according to Plutarch and Montaigne) "with marshes, impenetrable forests, deserts, and uninhabitable places" signifying our "misty astonishment" (*Essays* 2.12.262), Emerson paints all these all with the same brush, as though marking out "interminable oceans" for exploration (*W* 3.73). As a result of this "sky-blue sky-void idealism," as Carlyle dubbed it (*C* 358), *Nature* (so Kenneth Burke states what would fast become the critical consensus) is remarkably upbeat in tone and mood, well meriting Emerson the distinction of "professor of the Joyful Science" he later claims for himself in his essay "Prospects" (*W* 7.37).<sup>40</sup> Like Prospero, who "calls for music

to soothe the frantic Alonzo, and his companions,” Emerson “enchants” his readers with his “song” so that they may be “restored,” ostensibly, “to perfect sight”:

Their understanding

Begins to swell: and the approaching tide

Will shortly fill the reasonable shores

That now lie foul and muddy. (*W* 1.72,54; *The Tempest* V.i.79-82)

Such cheering unity as Emerson achieves in *Nature*, however, comes at some cost. At the end of the “noble doubt” passage which serves as an introduction to “Idealism,” the author, in order to avoid the shoreless seas of skepticism, was compelled to fall back upon the Cartesian-Berkleyan formula reiterated in his essay on “Montaigne”: “God is a substance, and his method is illusion” (*W* 4.178). But the move from transcendence to immanence in the following chapters of *Nature* effectively reintroduces the problem of the evil genius implicit in the noble doubt. As Emerson’s allusion to Xenophanes’ perception of “Unity” in the chapter on “Discipline” suggests (*W* 1.43), to find unity in the mind is to transfer the “crack” in the “book of Nature” into the self.<sup>41</sup> Thus his poetic persona in “Xenophanes” is made to repeat his remark of 10 February 1833 apropos the “philosophy” of Montaigne—namely, that “as self means Devil so it means God” (*JMN* 4.68):

. . . all things

Are of one pattern made . . .

[ . . . ] Beheld far off, they part

As God and devil; bring them to the mind,

They dull its edge with their monotony. (*W* 9.137)

In the more azure-colored passages of *Nature*, notably those which evoke the “blur of relatedness” found on the horizon, where “different elements meet and marry,”<sup>42</sup> Emerson’s monotonal optimism is indistinguishable from hellish indifference. “[T]he mind is its own place” (*JMN* 3.315-16), an early outline for the book echoes the Satan of Milton’s *Paradise Lost* and invites the sequel: if the mind is truly its own place, it can “make a Heav’n of Hell, a Hell of Heav’n” (l.254-55). A case in point, the Orphic dreamer or “advancing spirit” of the final chapter “Prospects,” argues B.L. Packer in *Emerson’s Fall: A New Interpretation of the Major Essays* (1982), is antetype to the self-enchanted solipsist in one of Wallace Stevens’ poems:

... my ears made the blowing hymns they heard.

I was myself the compass of that sea:

I was the world in which I walked, and what I saw

Or heard or felt came not but from myself.<sup>43</sup>

Emerson’s *Nature* charts the Greenwich almanack of the soul of just such a New World Columbus: “The dawn is my Assyria; the sunset and moonrise my Paphos, and unimaginable realms of faerie; broad noon shall be my England of the senses and the understanding; the night shall be my Germany of mystic philosophy and dreams” (*W* 1.17). As Emerson reflects in the opening chapter, “every hour and change corresponds to and authorizes a different state of mind” in the observer (*W* 1.9).

But how came Mephistopheles to be so catholic and jocund? “*Dumque petit, petitur: puriterque accendit, et ardet,*” Montaigne’s sighting of the self-pursuer burning for love of his image published in nature, suggests, more appositely still, the *locus classicus* for the myth basic to *Nature*’s genesis and evolution (*Essays* 2.12.289; *Metamorphoses* 3.424). The early

Emerson's affinity for (and with) the divine figure of Narcissus is a matter of some record.

"Poor dear Narcissus" his journal seems to mourn the fate of the old fellow, even as it suggests, by the same token, his yearning after "a new Narcissus," the "Inamorato of laws" and of "verdicts" incontrovertible because of his own making—"must I not respect him?" asks the sage of the hero he seeks, "an obscure country boy, halfwitted perhaps . . . seeing the reflection of man in Nature & dying of its beauty" (*JMN* 11.230, 109, 39). Emerson did not have to look quite so far, as evidenced by his *Nature*.

Montaigne reads the figure from Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, typically enough, as a personification of man's vanity and unreason. But Emerson's Narcissus is happy in spite of these defects. If the "enigmatic poesy" of Nature—"a veiled and shaded picture, breaking out here and there with an infinite variety of false lights to puzzle our conjectures," in Montaigne's translation of Plato—corresponds to Man, "the Little World" (*Essays* 2.12.258, 259), "as face to face in a glass" (*W* 1.33), then what it teaches in answer to the Delphic oracle's injunction to self-knowledge, Montaigne and Emerson agree, is the "doctrine" or "wisdom of ignorance" (*Essays* 2.12.238; *JMN* 4.312). "Deep calls unto deep . . ." The "unfound infinite" without answers to the infinite within, making "miraculous" and "common," "fact" and "poetry," one and the same to the "wise" (*W* 1.74, 75). For Emerson, the prospect of our "abysmal" or "universal ignorance" is an occasion for wonder. "Does not that word signify that state in which a man ever finds himself, conscious of knowing nothing but being just now ready to begin to know?" he writes in 1832 of Schiller's aphorism that "Truth never is, always is a-being" (*JMN* 4.18). The sentence from Schiller, in Carlyle's view and in that of many of *Nature*'s critics, leaves us "wandering on a sea of becoming and Pyrrhonism."<sup>44</sup> For Emerson, however, the fact

that the Transcendental “bridge”<sup>45</sup> overarching the “crack” between “Nature” and “Spirit,” originally intended to be published as separate essays (*L* 2.26), implies remoteness and estrangement as well as proximity (“It leaves God out of me . . . leaves me in the labyrinth of my perceptions, to wander without end”) is not cause for alarm:

In my utter impotence to test the authenticity of the report of my senses, to know whether the impressions they make on me correspond with outlying objects, what difference does it make, whether Orion is up there in heaven, or some god paints the image in the firmament of the soul? The relations of parts and the end of the whole remaining the same, what is the difference, whether land and sea interact, and world revolve and intermingle without number or end,—deep yawning under deep, and galaxy balancing galaxy, throughout absolute space,—or whether, without relations of time and space, the same appearances are inscribed in the constant faith of man? (*W* 1.47-48).

In *Sartor Resartus*’ chapter “Natural Supernaturalism,” the questions “Whence . . . ? . . . Whereto?” (*W* 1.62) ultimately yield to intimations of “a formless Infinite” and “high inscrutable Necessity,” of phantoms flitting “from the Inane . . . into the Inane.”<sup>46</sup> But where Carlyle had stripped his readers of their “garment of moonshine,”<sup>47</sup> Emerson opted in the chapter “Prospects” and thereafter to keep it intact, to Carlyle’s constant objections. “I please myself rather with contemplating the penumbra of the thing than the thing itself,” writes Emerson characteristically on 7 September 1833 (*JMN* 4.238). “The world is enigmatical & must not be taken literally, but genially,” as he later puts it (*JMN* 9.351). Into that moonshine or “azure Inane,” the poet of *Nature* vanishes, “as an Apparition should.”<sup>48</sup>

The “greatest passages . . . the infinite conclusions to which poets owe their fame,” so Emerson pursues his thoughts on Schiller’s aphorism in another entry, “are only confessions. Throughout Goethe prevails the undersong of confession and amazement; the apothegm of Socrates; the recantation of Man.”<sup>49</sup> Not surprisingly, in view of his habit of reading his own lineaments in others, that undersong prevails throughout the work of Emerson as well. Cited by Emerson from the *Iliad* in an entry for 17 January 1833, as he sailed for Malta, “*Ατρυγετη θαλασση*” is an apt epithet for his interior odyssey, as well, as the record of his return plainly translates: “My thought recurs upon the uncertain sea . . .” goes the penultimate line to a poem he composed on 16 September of the same year (*JMN* 4.112, 242). As recent critics have demonstrated, the apparent stability of the perceiver in *Nature* and the book’s resultant placidity are actually, like the serenity of the tempest-tossed sailors in the sea song Emerson recorded as he was nearing port in Boston (*JMN* 4.243), the effect of the constant wavering between antithetical and often antagonistic ideas of a mind by “temperament and conviction . . . open to all philosophic influences, from whatever quarter they might blow.”<sup>50</sup> “Gladly we would anchor,” the Emerson of “Experience” writes, “but the anchorage is quicksand” (*W* 3.55). Just as gladly, so *Nature* and the essays which follow argue, would the author not anchor at all. God may never jest with us, but (as the essay on “Montaigne” jocosely suggests) Emerson invariably does: “a house founded on the sea” is the logical outcome to Emerson’s contradictory design in *Nature* (*W* 4.160).<sup>51</sup>

And yet, by the very same token, the idealism of the new, happy Narcissus is not without its occasional vicissitudes. Founded as it is on the subversion of Aristotelian reason in favor of the imagination, it is vulnerable to “the power of moods, each setting at nought all but its own

tissue of facts and beliefs" (*W* 4.175). The "way of all mind" (as Wallace Stevens himself came to ponder after the fashion of Emerson in his essay on "Montaigne") "is from romanticism to realism, to fatalism and then to indifferentism . . . back to romanticism all over again," in a "cycle" potentially endless.<sup>52</sup>

Montaigne had similarly reflected on the boundlessness of man's "invention" and its practical consequences for truth. "[W]hen any new doctrine presents itself to us," he argued, "we have great reason to mistrust it, and to consider that before it was set on foot, the contrary had been in vogue" (*Essays* 2.12.276). In the victory of the private reason or imagination (in the *Apologie* the terms are virtually synonymous), "all the vulgar, and we are all of the vulgar, would have their belief as turnable as a weathercock: for the soul, being so easily imposed upon and without resisting power, would be forced incessantly to receive other and other impressions, the last still effacing all the footsteps of that which went before" (*Essays* 2.12.276-77). Montaigne pleasantly demonstrates this by instancing his conversation with one who maintained that "the ancients were . . . mistaken in the nature and motions of the winds": "'What then,' said I, 'did those that sailed according to Theophrastus make way westwards when they had the prow towards the east! did they go sideward or backward?'" The interlocutors agree, finally, that, as in geometry, "there are found inevitable demonstrations that subvert the truth of all experience" (*Essays* 2.12.277).

Emerson had come across the same epistemological problem in Coleridge's *Aids to Reflection* (1825), where the author avails himself of Swiss mathematician Leonhard Euler's proposition regarding arcs: "All Experience is in contradiction to this; but this is no reason for doubting its truth" (*JMN* 4.332). The "sublime remark" recurs in "Idealism" as proof of the

superiority of mind or reason over matter (*W* 1.56). Here, as Whicher has argued, Emerson uses the “sceptical sense of idealism as a lever” to set the transcendent self “adrift from the belief in any reality external to [it]self”: “Outside is subjected to inside; the huge world comes round to the man.”<sup>53</sup> Long before Emerson, however, Montaigne had drawn from Lucretius “examples” of the “error and uncertainty of the senses”:

*Et fugere ad puppim colles campique videntur,*

*Quos agimus praeter navim, velusque volamus . . .*

(And the hills and plains, past which we row or sail, seem to flee away  
astern . . . ) (*Essays* 1.12.288)

And, again like Emerson in *Nature*, Montaigne had ended his *Apology* by citing “some traditions,” evoking, in particular, the Heraclitean Πάντα ῥεῖ or “flux of all things” (*W* 1.27).

But Montaigne had deduced, from the same *exempla*, what seems a radically different conclusion.

As the experiment of the parallax tried by Heraclitus and Protagoras shows, in Montaigne’s view, “both we and our judgment, and all mortal things, are evermore incessantly running and rolling, and, consequently, nothing certain can be established from one to the other, both the judging and the judge being in a continual motion.” And Montaigne pursues, “Where the compass, the square, and the rule are crooked, all proportions drawn from them, all the buildings erected by those guides, must of necessity be also defective” (*Essays* 2.12.292). In fact, the result of such discrepancies as he finds in Lucretius’ account of nature, so the essay “Of Coaches” goes on to imply, is “paralysis” (*Essays* 3.6.440). Since all being (as in the Lucretian theory of atoms) is submitted to constant flux and reflux, every step forward is also, so the skeptic illustrates at length and in himself, one in reverse:

*Qualis ubi alterno procurrens gurgite pontus,  
Nunc ruit ad terras, scopulosque superjacet undam  
Spumeus, extremamque sinu perfundit arenam;  
Nunc rapidus retro, atque aestu revoluta resorbens  
Saxa, fugit, littusque vado labente relinquit.*

(As when the sea, rolling with alternate tides, now rushes on the land and foaming throws over the rocks its waves, and with its skirts overflows the extremity of the strand: now, with rapid motion, and sucking in the stones, rolls back with the tide in its retreat, and with the ebbing current leaves the shore.) (*Essays* 2.12.276)

Once the divorce between truth and experience is complete, Montaigne maintains, what in one mind or mood might seem a useful theory yielding fresh optimism, in another simply amounts to Pyrrhonism or skepticism: “it had been Pyrrhonism, a thousand years ago,” for example, “to doubt the science of cosmography” advanced by the followers of Ptolemy (*Essays* 2.12.277).

For all his “love of the real” and of “permanence,” the Emersonian sage is not entirely exempt from such inner vicissitudes. As the Emerson of one mood, at least, acknowledges, “*Pero si muove*” is an axiom which applies not just to the world, but to man, the world in small, as well (*W* 3.55). Drunken, reeling (“un mouvement d’ivrogne titubant,” in Montaigne’s idiom),<sup>54</sup> the “judgement” of the introspective or narcissistic traveller—so the skeptic’s portrayal of himself as a tipsy-headed, self-lulled navigator on Catullus’ choppy seas shows—does “nothing but go and come . . . it floats and wanders”:

*Velut minuta magno*

*Deprensa navis in mari, vesaniente vento.* (*Essays* 2.12.274)

No less rife with contradiction than that of Lucretius or Montaigne, Emerson's "*De Rerum Natura*"<sup>55</sup> argues him a similarly inapt sailor.

"The weathers fit our moods," notes a sea-faring Emerson in 1845: "Men are weathercocks and like nothing long" (*JMN* 9.236, 172). The remarks go to confirm and make explicit the irony of an observation made over ten years earlier, on Emerson's maiden journey to Europe: "The weather cock is the wisest man," he writes on 3 January 1833 (*JMN* 4.105). Earlier in his journal, Emerson had criticized the "Everetts & Cannings" to like effect for their temerity: "they do not espouse the things they would do; live in the life of the cause they would forward & faint in its failure, but . . . their pert individuality is ever & anon peeping out to see what way the wind blows & where this boat will land them" (*JMN* 4.42-43). He would similarly go on to criticize both Carlyle and Alcott, whose mystic and Orphic utterances had provided the bases for the chapter on "Idealism" and the myths concluding "Prospects" respectively, for their lack of tenacious purpose (*JMN* 5.111-12; 11.54). And truly, though he cites Walter Landor's hailing of Prometheus as "the grandest poetical conception that ever entered into the heart of man" and speaks of the "terrible freedom" of him who would "trust to this inland sea," Emerson shows himself, by comparison with all of these, a remarkably careless, even-keeled traveler, one capable, one moment, of sympathizing with "the fickle wind" while rounding the rock of Gibraltar, and in another, of remarking how "narrow" the "line [is] that divides an awkward act" ending in catastrophe "from the finish of gracefulness" (*JMN* 4.44, 46, 108, 237). "I think it would not hurt me that is ducking or drowning," the new Narcissus remarks, characteristically, on 6 September 1833 (*JMN* 4.238).

So heedless of cross-winds and purposes is Emerson, in fact, that many were the readers of *Nature* to complain that they could not discern “the bearing of the writer’s argument” from “Idealism” onward: “The unimaginative reader is likely to find himself off soundings in the . . . chapter . . . *Spirit* . . . ,” wrote one reviewer.<sup>56</sup> Emerson’s doctrines, complained another, “are propounded as if they lay on the surface of truth and within the grasp of all men, and contained not problems . . . in the solution of which the lives of thoughtful men have gone by, leaving the giant contradictions of our moral being just as they were, standing face to face, irreconcilable.”<sup>57</sup> Other critics still, like the reviewer for *The Christian Examiner*, frankly confessed their “bewilderment.” The reviewer in question accused a weathercock-like Emerson of changing his tack about the middle of *Nature* and of “aim[ing] a back blow at the universe.”<sup>58</sup> And with reason, for there (as Packer points out) Emerson advances “an ‘infernal’ or Blakean reading” of the “exempla” he has just educed, by all appearances, “to prove the wisdom of God from evidences of design in the creation.”<sup>59</sup> In so doing, Emerson effectively turns the book of creation on its head, as he urges the reader to do in the same chapter (see *W* 1.51).

For more than one commentator, “to deny” the “testimony of [the] senses” in such a fashion was “to set oneself afloat upon the ocean of universal scepticism.”<sup>60</sup> “On reviewing what we have said of this singular work,” the critic for the *Christian Examiner* was forced to concede, “the criticism appears to be couched in contradictory terms; we can only allege in excuse the fact, that the book is a contradiction itself.”<sup>61</sup> Contradiction is the logical outcome of Emerson’s method. As Julie Ellison explains in her *Emerson’s Romantic Style* (1984), “the terms ‘Spirit’ and ‘Idealism’ refer to Emerson’s moods rather than to mental faculties or operations”—and so with his other headings; in fact, the chapters of *Nature* “are almost interchangeable,” making the

job of orienting oneself therein well nigh impossible.<sup>62</sup> Circling endlessly in pursuit of himself, Emerson's dizzy-headed Narcissus is embarked on a journey as aimless as it is delightful. "Gale & calm—pitch & rock—merrily swim we . . . ," writes Emerson on 16 September 1833 (*JMN* 4.240). "And life is but a dream," the reader of his book is tempted to rejoin, as in the famous lullaby. Like the "music" of Pierre Jean de Béranger's "Ménétrier de Meudon" or Pied Piper of Hamelin, the "power" of *Nature's* enchantment is such as "to make the drunken sober & the sober drunk" (*JMN* 10.77).

There is, however, another sense in which the inward diver is not so happy. If the self-lover is never at a loss, his is not necessarily the most wholesome of foods: "The hero is not fed on sweets, / Daily his own heart he eats," as Emerson would come to reflect (*W* 2.243). He who would (like the poet envisioned by Emerson in 1848) "digest . . . all" in his great "gizzard" must make a meal of himself as well (*JMN* 11.46). "Plato; Or, The Philosopher" accordingly goes on to spell a lesson dire to the overreaching "ambition of individualism": "the mouthful proves too large. *Boa constrictor* has good will to eat it, but . . . biting, gets strangled: the bitten world holds the biter fast by his own teeth" (*W* 4.77). Tasters of Emerson's work ("a Happiness Pill," according to Burke)<sup>63</sup> have not been long in detecting the same ups and downs in themselves. "Reading Emerson is like drinking," in critic Alfred Kazin's apposite observation: "You start so high that by the end . . . you cannot help getting depressed."<sup>64</sup> True to his name, Emerson's Narcissus induces narcosis. But drunk as he is on inanity or nothingness, his thirst can never really be sated: "Deep calls unto deep. But in actual life the marriage is never celebrated," concedes the author of *Nature* (*W* 1.74). For every high, there is a corresponding low. In the end (so a sobering thought intrudes in Emerson's otherwise sunny book) the idealist's vision may

amount to little more than “shadows in still water” (*W* 1.19). A case in point: what the author says of the beauty of sensual Nature—“who ever could clutch it? Go forth to find it, and it is gone; ’tis only a mirage as you look from the windows of a diligence,” he writes, later suggesting the experiment as a propaedeutic to the Idealistic philosophy (*W* 1.19, 50)—might with better reason be affirmed of his book, as the history of *Nature*’s conception and reception confirms.

“We look up sometimes with surprize to see that the tree, the hill, the schoolhouse are still there, & have not vanished in our mood of pyrrhonism” goes an entry for 14 August 1834 preparatory to *Nature*: “If there were many philosophers, the world would go to pieces presently all sand, no lime. *Quam parva sapientia*” (*JMN* 4.310). And, verily, though “we stretch forth our hands through love of the farther shore,”<sup>65</sup> the promise or hope held out by Emerson at the end *Nature* seems to lie, for most readers, “in Tantalian distance”: “That Nature, whose prophet he is,” one reviewer wrote, “gleams, bright and unloving, down from a cold, unsympathizing heaven,” like “far-off, high Arcturus.”<sup>66</sup> As usual, it was Carlyle who summed up the principal objections to Emerson’s design, when he wrote regarding his near contemporary lecture on the same topic, namely “The Method of Nature” (1841), “People cry over it: ‘Whitherward? What, What?’ In fact, I do again desiderate some *concretion* of these beautiful *abstracta*” (*C* 312). Even Emerson’s most sympathetic readers were compelled to “accuse him of stopping short, where the world most desires and needs further guidance,” of offering only “glimpses,” and no “philosophy.”<sup>67</sup> In this respect, Emerson is true to his teachers Plotinus and Swedenborg, of whom he would later write “They cannot feed that appetite they have created” (*JMN* 9.76). Ultimately, *Nature*’s “reach,” too, “exceeded its grasp.”<sup>68</sup> No more than the Everetts, Carrings and Alcotts could Emerson stay the course. As Packer concludes in what is by far the most

probing analysis of the “traditions” or myths capping off *Nature*, the chapter on “Prospects,” while it supplies like Carlyle’s “Natural Supernaturalism” a mythos explaining man’s paradoxical relationship to nature, “leaves” the “giant question” of the means to mend the “crack” in nature—between finite and infinite, absolute and seeming—“unanswered.”<sup>69</sup>

The response of Emerson’s readers to his *Nature* could not have come as much of a surprise to the author, however. “What a Tantalus cup life is!” an earlier draft for the book makes explicit the identification implied in the passage from *Nature* cited above (*JMN* 5.97; comp. *W* 1.19). It is from that bitter “Tantalus cup” of self-knowledge that Emerson’s Narcissus would drink, for, in common with Carlyle’s *Sartor Resartus*, *Nature* riddles the Goethean sphinx-question which John Sterling, among others, found so vexing: “‘What shall I teach you the foremost thing?’ / –Couldst teach me off my own shadow to spring?” (*JMN* 4.59).<sup>70</sup> As the philosophical counterpart to the astronomy of Hershel, Idealism principally serves to inculcate this separation between man and nature, perceiver and perceived: “It refers me to a higher state than I now occupy,” as Emerson observed from the deck of the *New York* (*JMN* 4.238). The opening of *Nature* accordingly affirms that “if a man would be alone, let him look at the stars. The rays . . . will separate between him and what he touches” (*W* 1.7). Contrary to Hershel, however, the “stars of the human mind” Emerson was bent on “cataloguing” in *Nature*, those “great circling truths whose only adequate symbol is the material laws,” were “obscure and nebulous,” as he would come to concede in *The American Scholar* (1837) (*JMN* 4.83; *W* 1.100-101). Asked by a fellow traveler aboard the *New York* to “define” what he meant by morals, Emerson declined, professing his inability to do so, his “own conceptions” being “so dim and vague” (*JMN* 4.86).

The fact that David Hume's name appears, *sous ratures*, before Berkeley's and Viasa's in the journal passage which served as a model for the final partition of "Idealism" suggests an explanation. Religion, Emerson contends there, "does that for the unschooled which philosophy does for Berkeley & Viasa" (*W* 1.58; *JMN* 5.123). And yet, for Stewart and the Realists, as Whicher recalls, "the end-product of the Ideal Theory was the scepticism of Hume."<sup>71</sup> The young Emerson himself had ranked Hume amongst that "brilliant constellation of minds" (with Gibbon, Byron, Franklin, and Robertson) who in "their dissent from the popular faith" had "taken out its welcome influence from the cause of good will to men & set it in the opposite scale"; their "light," like that of "the star seen in the Apocalypse," was "malign," darkening rather than brightening (*JMN* 2.108). Similarly, far from being an antidote to the paralyzing skepticism of the age, or simply doing for the "learned" what religion or ethics does for the "unschooled," the idealism of *Nature* seems rather to have the same effect as the apocalyptic star of Hume, Byron and company—that is, it "makes the mountains dance & smoke & disappear before the steadfast gaze of Reason," as Emerson wrote in the sequel to the journal passage linking Hume to Berkeley and Viasa, but omitted from the revised version in *Nature* (*JMN* 5.123). In fact, the effect of Emerson's idealism or spiritualism, as the subsequent controversy over his call to independence in the Divinity School *Address* makes clear, was to relativize the claims of faith. Like Montaigne and his student Hume, Emerson, in *Nature* and the *Address*, symbolically transvalues terms such as "miraculous" and "common," "monstrous" and "natural" (see *W* 1.74, 129). Not suprisingly, then, the latter discourse was dismissed by most of Emerson's contemporaries as an "incoherent rhapsody."<sup>72</sup> Andrews Norton and his allies were quick to point out Emerson's inconsistencies and contradictions, such as his calling for a "new

Teacher” and his lamenting the “death of faith,” even as he seemed to subvert the bases for one and the other: Emerson, they agreed, “bewilders his hearers amidst labyrinths of beautiful contradictions,” and “floats about among vague and impalpable abstractions.”<sup>73</sup>

Chief among those contradictions was the author’s own sense of his vocation. Thus, for example, though Emerson knew, having read Hume and Stewart, that such promptings or directions as he received from the moral sentiment were not “State Reasons” capable of enforcing “the burdensome doctrine of a Deity on the world,” but rather matter for “private conviction” (*L* 1.170), the deliberate omissions in *Nature* and journal entries dating from as early as 1834 and as late as 1846 show that he continued, nonetheless, to long for the eloquence of a preacher such as the pastor of the Seamen’s Bethel in Boston Edward Taylor, “that living Methodist the Poet of the Church” (*JMN* 4.381). “He says touching things, plain things, cogent things, grand things,” Emerson wrote of Taylor, “which all men must perforce hear . . . . ‘I am half a hundred years old . . . .’—‘I have been in all the four quarters of the world . . . .’” (*JMN* 10.400). Here, speaking from the voice of experience and “sure of his sentiment,” was that perfect self-reliance which Emerson had seen exemplified in the able seamanship of Captain Fox of the *New York* at Boston Harbor on his return from Europe in 1833 (*JMN* 10.400; 4.239). “The little needle always knows the north,” as Emerson’s hymn to “Self-Reliance” assures (*JMN* 4.48). But the preacher or orator, in fact, is something more (and less) than a pilot. Like the princely-divine philosopher-poets of *The Tempest* and *Nature*, he has the gift of imagination: “Everything dances & disappears changes & becomes its contrary in his sculpturing hands,” as he “rolls the world into a ball & tosses it from hand to hand” (*JMN* 9.235, 10.400). If Emerson

could not quite see his or the reader's way home at the end of *Nature*, consequently, he could always conjure up the prospect of land where there was none.

There is both irony and justice, then, in the author confessing himself, on 16 January 1833, "a dull scholar" in his attempts at learning the use of the quadrant, as well as in his knowledge of what, to many of his readers, would still have been the authoritative account of creation: "The good Captain rejoices much in my ignorance. He confounded me the other day about the book in the Bible where God was not mentioned & last night upon St. Paul's shipwreck" (*JMN* 4.110, 111). The "good Captain" would no doubt have agreed with Emerson's opinion of sailor-preacher Edward Taylor, though he might well have applied the judgment to Emerson as well. "He is incapable of thought . . . cannot analyze or discriminate; he is a singing dancing drunkard of his wit," wrote Emerson of the preacher (*JMN* 10.400). Like the sightings and the reports of the common sailor, who "can see land wherever he wishes to see it," "his talk . . . is all fantastic, all stuff . . . . Not the smallest dependence is to be put on his statement of facts" (*JMN* 4.112, 10.401). By a coincidence highly suggestive, the simile used by Emerson to describe Taylor's pulpit eloquence is the same which critic John Burroughs would later use to describe Emerson himself. "Emerson," remarked Burroughs, "was . . . like a sailing yacht that hovers about all shores and takes advantage of every breeze."<sup>74</sup> As Montaigne, after the example of the Pyrrhonians, had contended in his *Apology*, the philosopher, "if he goes to sea," must needs "suffer himself to be governed by appearances" or effects, relying upon such things as "the tightness of the vessel, the experience of the pilot, [and] the fitness of the season"; in other words, he must be willing to let himself be "carried away by the swing of the world without inquisition" (*Essays* 2.12.242). Not for him the governance of the vessel.

There is evidence in his *Essays: First Series* (1841) that Emerson had, by then, come to very nearly the same conclusion. “In a fortnight or three weeks, my little raft will be afloat,” he announced to Carlyle on 28 February the publication of the collection, adding, “Expect nothing more of my powers of construction, no shipbuilding, no clipper, smack, nor skiff even, only boards & logs tied together” (C 291). However ironically intended or read, especially in light of Emerson’s solemn entreaty to “Build . . . your own world” at the close of *Nature* (W 1.76), the description is apposite to the *Essays* in more ways than one. Here, by all accounts, is no sweeping synthesis, no attempt at a “doctrine or system of doctrines, logically drawn out,” as in *Nature*, but rather a series of essays comprising “detached observations, independent propositions . . . [and] enigmatical, oracular sayings” on various, sometimes antithetical topics.<sup>75</sup> The second of these, “Self-Reliance,” for all its incipient brag about man being “his own star,” ends with a skeptical, stinging rebuke accusing his present lameness (W 2.43). “Society never advances,” writes Emerson. “It recedes as fast on one side as it gains on the other” (W 2.84). Not only does the essay prudently warn against the “fool’s paradise” of travel—as “ridiculous” (adds the last essay in the series) “as a treadmill”—but contemporary man, in the author’s view, seems equally unfit for interior journeying: “The civilized man has built a coach, but has lost the use of his feet. He is supported on crutches, but lacks so much support of muscle,” goes Emerson’s lament (W 2.81, 362, 85). Though equipped with a “Greenwich nautical almanac,” this same man “does not know a star in the sky. The solstice he does not observe; the equinox he knows as little; and the whole bright calendar of the year is without a dial in his mind” (W 2.85). Even the report of the “aboriginal Self, on which a universal reliance may be grounded,” comes (as in Montaigne’s famous essay on the same topic and Shakespeare’s reworking thereof) in the

shape of fantastical hearsay (“If the traveller tell us truly . . .”)—of necessity, it might be argued, since the author has earlier opted to stay at home (*W* 2.84). To be sure, the hemiplegia or dead stand here diagnosed is still largely construed as a social evil. The essay on “Circles,” however, strikes at the very heart of self-reliance.

“Circles,” in the view of Whicher and most critics, implies a more sober appraisal of the individual poet or seer’s powers on Emerson’s part.<sup>76</sup> The author now acknowledges the crippling alternation and contradiction of moods to which a timebound spirit is heir: “Alas for this infirm faith, this will not strenuous, this vast ebb of a vast flow! I am God in nature; I am a weed by the wall,” he writes (*W* 2.307). In *Nature*, Emerson had experimented with the “great *parallax* in human nature ascertained by observing it from different states of mind,” and had come to realize, with Montaigne, that “Every thing has two sides” (*JMN* 4.22; *W* 2.120).

“Nothing is so supple and erratic as our our understanding; it is like the shoe of Theramenes, fit for all feet,” Montaigne had mused in his essay “Of Cripples”: “It is double and diverse, and the matters are double and diverse too” (*Essays* 3.11.502). But if “every man is bipolar,” then the sage, being a man, can no more be counted on for consistency than any other (*W* 1.44; *JMN* 4.331). His reach necessarily exceeds his grasp, and the thirst for the ideal must consequently go unquenched. “J’ai peur que nous ayons les yeux plus grands que le ventre,” Montaigne had warned, appositely, against the dangers of radical subjectivity—that is, to follow up with Cotton’s translation, “we grasp at all, but catch nothing but wind” (*Essais* 1.31.300; *Essays* 1.30.92). As Montaigne goes on to confess soon after thinking on Narcissus, the prospect of such an “infinite depth” is far from heartening (*Essays* 2.12.289). Not for him the wide “sea of speculation” and the “abyss of thought” of the Pyrrhonians likewise skirted by his reader Lord Byron: “a calm and

shallow station / Well nigh the shore . . . / . . . is best for moderate bathers” (*Don Juan* IX.xviii.).

Like Byron’s hero, Montaigne “doubt[s] even that he doubts,” and comes to faith by way of skepticism (*W* 4.159).<sup>77</sup>

Similarly, for all the imaginative daring of Emerson’s first book of essays, one of those essays exalts the virtues of prudence, which “consists in avoiding and going without . . . not in adroit steering”: “Prudence does not go behind nature and ask whence it is” (*W* 2.221, 224). It is almost as though Emerson had come round to writing the sermon he projected in the spring of 1832 on the “danger of unrestrained appetite and the need for temperance” (*JMN* 4.5). His letter of 28 February 1841 announcing the setting off of the first *Essays* to Carlyle implies that he, too, with Montaigne and Byron, whose complete works he carried with him on his first tour of Europe, had come to acknowledge the workings of Nemesis and so to renounce Narcissus the deep diver. “A ride near the sea, a sail near the shore,” so Emerson avails himself of an epigram from Plutarch to describe his leisurely drifting (*JMN* 9.296).<sup>78</sup>

And yet, this would be to read Emerson in a most un-Emersonian fashion, as though he was not bent on making “good” his “Optimism . . . against the eternal hell itself,” in the expression of Melville’s critical response to *The Conduct of Life* (1860).<sup>79</sup> Like the nimble Proteus that he images in *Nature* and in his essay on Montaigne, the indomitable Emerson is more “subtle and elusive” than that (*W* 1.43, 4.157). “Au coeur vaillant rien impossible,” he makes his own Henry of Navarre’s motto (*JMN* 11.232). Accordingly, Emerson’s 1841 book of essays suggests an inversion of values steeped as deep in the logic of hell as *Nature*’s infernal or Blakean reading of traditional exempla. Starving in the “slow-consuming fire” of the “Everlasting NO,” Carlyle’s Teufelsdröckh reaches for external food-stuff (*Sartor* 128, 130).

Not so Emerson. If his philosopher-poet cannot swallow everything without either drowning or swallowing himself, then he will be content with eating nothing. Better to starve in hell (so Emerson's finding of a mind congenial to himself in Milton's Satan invites a slight but apposite rewording of *Paradise Lost*) than to serve in heaven.

To the new Narcissus, in other words, there corresponds the new Tantalus, for whom the prospect of food "just beyond our reach" is no cause for despair: "Tantalus must have finer senses," Emerson insists time and again (*JMN* 11.146). All passions that can be tasted and digested, so Montaigne had asserted in his essay "De la tristesse," are mediocre (*Essais* 1.2.61). Emerson would seem to agree: "the indigence Tantalus suffers is precious to Emerson," as Camille La Bossière argues.<sup>80</sup> "O endless ends" sings his new hero, a mortal and truly an old fellow, but no less for all that heaven-aspiring, since "in metaphysics there is no terminus" (*JMN* 11.181, 235). For the "looking glass," Emerson now substitutes the "magnet" and the law of "polarity": "Mad contradictions flavor all our dishes" (*JMN* 11.230, 228). Indeed, like the "thirst" of a "fever" that cannot be quenched by drinking, such an endless inquiry, though neither "nourishing" nor "wholesome," can be "pleasant," as Montaigne repeatedly attests: "No generous mind can stop in itself; it will still tend further, and beyond its power . . . its pursuits are without bound or method; its aliment is admiration, the chase, ambiguity . . ." (*Essays* 2.12.245; 3.13.518). "We are interested in nothing that ends," Emerson concurs (*JMN* 11.159).

Emerson's "Experience" accordingly evolves an illustration of that new, self-imposed law from the *Apologie*:

Do you see that kitten chasing so prettily her own tail? If you could look with her eyes, you might see her surrounded with hundreds of figures, performing complex dramas,

with tragic and comic issues, long conversations, many characters, many ups and downs of fate,—and meantime it is only puss and her tail. How long before our masquerade will end its noise of tambourines, laughter, and shouting, and we shall find it was a solitary performance?—A subject and an object,—it takes so much to make the galvanic circuit complete, but magnitude adds nothing. What imports it whether it is Kepler and the sphere; Columbus and America; a reader and his book; or puss with her tail? (*W* 3.80)

In keeping with the circular, synthetic doctrine at the heart of his “masquerade” in *Nature* (*W* 1.3), Emerson thus makes the morally cognate fables of Narcissus and Tantalus true to his optimistic doctrine, and concurrently, converts the “vice” of inconsistency for which he reproved Alcott into a virtue. Our understanding may be supple and erratic, according to Emerson in his *Essays: First Series*, but this is precisely what makes it, like the shoe of Theramenes, apt for exploration: “He in whom the love of truth predominates will keep himself aloof from all moorings, and afloat,” in the words of the essay “Intellect.” Thus he “will abstain from dogmatism, and recognize all the opposite negations between which, as walls, his being is swung” (*W* 2.342). In this perspective, the questions “Whence?” and “Whereto?” become moot (*W* 1.62). Whereas “Self-Reliance” had admonished the genius “to stay at home,” “Circles” openly celebrates “the moment of transition . . . the shooting of the gulf . . . the darting to an aim”—that is, “the experience of poetic creativeness which is not found in staying at home, nor yet in travelling, but in transitions from one to the other,” an experience epitomized for Emerson in Montaigne (*W* 2.71, 69; *JMN* 9.296). The insuperable insouciance of the earlier Emerson has become synonymous, in other words, with prudence and suspended judgment. Characteristically, “Self-Reliance” dismisses “foolish consistency” as “the hobgoblin of little minds”: “The voyage of the best ship is a zigzag line of a

hundred tacks. See the line from a sufficient distance, and it straightens itself to the average tendency" (*W* 2.57, 59). Viewed at a sufficient distance, the tenacious Sage of Concord's lifelong enterprise in contradiction and synthesis, too, suggests a solution to his own indirections. If the myth or prophecy does not hold, Emerson seems to say, then change it: "the eye altering alters all," as he would later copy from William Blake's "The Mental Traveller" (*JMN* 16.90).

To Carlyle's charging him, in 1844, with some mystifying sort of "sky-blue sky-void idealism," Emerson could claim, then, and with some reason, though not without irony, to be making "progress . . . in the doctrine of Indifferency" (*C* 358). He had, in fact, "arrived," by way of self-reliance, "at a fine Pyrrhonism" or "equivalence and indifferency of actions" (*W* 2.317, 50). In the essay on "Compensation," understandably enough, he was more careful to justify himself by attempting to distinguish between the "doctrine of compensation" and the "doctrine of indifferency" (*W* 2.120). He could do so, however, only by reaffirming his boundless optimism, his ethereal faith that "[u]nder all this sea of circumstance, whose waters ebb and flow . . . lies the aboriginal abyss of real Being" or "Over-Soul" (*W* 2.121, 268). "This fact," he writes at the outset of "Circles," "as far as it symbolizes the moral fact of the Unattainable, the flying Perfect, around which the hands of man can never meet, at once the inspirer and the condemner of every success, may conveniently serve us to connect many illustrations of human power in every department" (*W* 2.301). The sentence could just as well serve as preamble to almost any Emerson essay. As the last of the essays in the *First Series*, "Art," makes clear, Emerson still hoped to reconcile the separate realms of art and life, spirit and nature, power and form, even though this marriage now seemed infinitely remote: "There is higher work for Art than the arts. They are abortive births of an imperfect or vitiated instinct. Art is the need to create; but in its

essence, immense and universal, it is impatient of working with lame or tied hands, and of making cripples and monsters, such as all pictures and statues are. Nothing less than the creation of man and nature is its end" (*W* 2.363). "The Poet" and "Experience," the two pieces which inaugurate his *Essays: Second Series* (1844), reiterate that longing, haltingly, in the alternate but cognate modes of hope and frustration, drunkenness and inanition.

The impatience exhibited by the author at the end of the essay "Art" is not, at first glance, so apparent in "The Poet," since it shifts the focus from means and medium to the subjective power of "metamorphosis" which makes poetry a "second nature" (*W* 3.22). By availing itself even of "defects and deformities," such as the "lameness" of Vulcan, "to signify exuberances," that power, Emerson maintains, effectively converts them "to a sacred purpose," and so "re-attaches things to nature and the Whole" (*W* 3.18). However, what "The Poet" does not say, but both "Art" and "Experience" imply, is that Vulcan is himself a personification or type of the poet and his muse. The "exuberances" of the essay in question are well known: "dream delivers us to dream, and while the drunkenness lasts we will sell our bed, our philosophy, our religion, in our opulence" (*W* 3.33). Thus while it acknowledges, with past essays, the "inaccessibility of every thought but that we are in," "The Poet" proclaims the visionary artist's power to effect renewal and change: "We are always on the brink of an ocean of thought into which we . . . do not yet swim" (*W* 1.33; *JMN* 4.274). His "reward" (so Emerson's apostrophe to the arch-poet concludes) is that "the ideal shall be real to thee, and the impressions of the actual world shall fall like summer rain, copious, but not troublesome to thy invulnerable essence" (*W* 3.42). And yet, the same imagery which here yields optimism, in "Experience" takes on the more somber hues of indifferentism, when Emerson's elegiac tone turns in upon itself to focus the reality of

solipsism. “The dearest events are like summer-rain,” writes Emerson, “and we the Para coats that shed every drop” (*W* 3.49). The hemiplegia the author had diagnosed in his “Lecture on the Times,” “Self-Reliance,” and “Art” recurs in “Experience,” but transferred to and intensified through experience: “grief” does not bring us “one step into real nature”; our friends “stand on the brink of the ocean of thought and power, but they never take the single step that would bring them there”; and so on and so on: “Dream delivers us to dream, and there is no end to illusion” (*W* 3.49, 56-57, 50).

These defects and deformities, then, are the “disagreeable facts” which the poet “disposes . . . of,” but not quite as “easily” as Emerson would like to have us believe in “The Poet” (*W* 3.18-19). In the very act of eliding such facts, as Whicher points out, the poet testifies to the “dislocation and detachment” which “Prospects” and the essays that followed *Nature* had attempted to remedy in vain: “the victory of the poet presupposes the earlier defeat. It is only because the poetic *life* is not realized, perhaps cannot be, that the poet’s *prophecy* of such a life can make him a liberating god.”<sup>81</sup> “*Ogni medaglia ha il suo reverso*”—the axiom governing Montaigne’s essay “Of Cripples,” and the *Essays* in general (3.11.502)—also translates, according to Packer, the close filiation between Emerson’s two major essays in the *Second Series*. “There is the same relationship between ‘The Poet’ and ‘Experience,’” writes Packer, “as between the mystical idealism of the Mahabharata and the skeptical idealism of Hume”—that is, they are flip sides of the “same coin.”<sup>82</sup>

In differentiating the freedom of the poet from the dogmatism of the mystic, for instance, Emerson asserts that only the former sees that “all symbols are fluxional,” and so recognizes “the independence of the thought on the symbol” (*W* 3.34). Like Montaigne and his Plato, the poet

must turn “incessantly the obverse and the reverse of the medal of Jove”: “Life is a pitching of this penny—heads or tails,” or “in the language of philosophy, Infinite and Finite; Relative and Absolute; Apparent and Real . . . .” (*W* 4.56, 149). But it follows from that independence or “detachment” of the “intellect” that the unity achieved in a poem or vision is dependent on a previous dislocation and susceptible to still further dislocation (*W* 3.35). The poet’s “reward, the reward he brings others,” Whicher explains, “is not self-union, but a magic flare of imagination, without means and without issue, an intoxicating glimpse of the inaccessible ideal.”<sup>83</sup> Immediately the allusion to the “Indian . . . laid under a curse” being “a type of us all,” in “Experience,” puts us in mind of the “fate of the poor shepherd” in “The Poet,” also “an emblem of the state of man,” who dies “blinded and lost in [a] snow-storm . . . within a few feet of his cottage door” (*W* 3.49, 33).

The very exuberances of “The Poet,” then, attest to the fact that Emerson’s muse is (to repeat the “common proverb” instanced in Montaigne) a “lame mistress” (*Essays* 3.11.501). In Montaigne’s view, “We wake sleeping, and sleep waking” (*Essays* 2.12.290), our life merely “a bubble and a skepticism, a sleep within a sleep” (*W* 3.65). “Shall we say that Montaigne has spoken wisely . . . on the conduct of life?” Emerson asks in “Montaigne; Or, The Skeptic” (*W* 4.170). The “doctrine of the Illusionists” is the last of “doubts” which go to answer that question in *Representative Men* (*W* 4.173). Accordingly, in “Illusions,” the final essay of *The Conduct of Life* (1860), Emerson gives his definitive reply to Montaigne’s skepticism.

“Life is a Spanish play,” so “Illusions” teaches with “The Poet” and “Experience”: “We wake from one dream into another dream” (*JMN* 9.254; *W* 6.313). But here again, Emerson’s tone is modulated. Whatever, at the outset of “Experience,” might have taken on tragic

dimensions, through a vision of man's cosmic isolation, now appears in the irrefragably Emersonian shape of romance, as he proceeds to the moral which the above *topos* receives in its classic Renaissance treatment—"todos sueñan lo que son, / aunque ninguno lo entiende," reflects Pedro Calderón de la Barca's ousted prince Segismundo in *La Vida es sueño*; "toda la vida es sueño, / y los sueños, sueños son" (II.ixx.2176-7, 2186-7).<sup>84</sup> Wisdom lies in knowing "que aun en sueños / no se pierde el hacer bien" (*La Vida es sueño* II.xxviii.2146-7), that "if life seem a succession of dreams, yet poetic justice is done in dreams also" (*W* 6.322). It is not, then, that Emerson had not, like Montaigne and Carlyle, some intimation that we are "little more than wind" (*Essays* 3.13.538); but rather, as Harris point out, that "he could accept the demand for belief," however indefinite, "as a form of belief in itself," one of life's saving illusions.<sup>85</sup> If, for Emerson as for Carlyle, "every route of escape is a mirage,"<sup>86</sup> this does not matter in the view of the former's Saadi-like wisdom, since we too inhabit the dream and are the stuff of its making. Deep answers to deep, idealism to skepticism, and dreamer to dream: "the sea & the ship are made of one stuff" (*W* 9.224). Thus just as the regal ship presumed lost in Shakespeare's *The Tempest* is found at last "tight and yare" (V.i.224), so, too, tragedy turns out to be the greatest illusion by the end of Emerson's "Illusions." The "pageant" fades, the "cloud lifts," and man finds himself "alone" with the gods: "I dreamed & did not know my dreams," Emerson comes to muse again (*JMN* 9.395).

Emerson's reworking of the Platonic myth of the cave, then, takes him, predictably, full circle—from realism, to fatalism and indifferentism, back to the idealism of his first book. His experience in the "Star-Chamber" of the Mammoth Cave in Kentucky, for example, recalls and elaborates the opening scene of *Nature*: "I saw or seemed to see the night heaven thick with stars

glimmering . . . over our heads,” he writes, the whole making a “serene picture” conducive to “song” (*W* 6.310). By the end of *Nature* already, Emerson had come to “accept,” as he writes in “Experience,” “the clangor and jangle of contrary tendencies”—that is, the part which “our organization” plays even in our experience of pleasure and pain (*W* 3.62, 6.311). As Montaigne had counselled in his essay on the same topic, “We must learn to suffer what we cannot evade; our life, like the harmony of the world, is composed of contrary things—of diverse tones, sweet and harsh, sharp and flat, sprightly and solemn: the musician who should only affect some of these, what would he be able to do?” (*Essays* 3.13.529). The artist-musician intent on singing life’s romance must know how to “mingle the goods and evils which are consubstantial with our life,” for to try to separate virtue from the “jarring sound of human nature” would be tantamount in effect, according to Montaigne’s rendering of Plato’s *Republic*, to trying “to cut off the hydra’s head” (*Essays* 3.13.529; 2.21.327). Emerson’s description in *Representative Men* (1850) of the archetypic poet Shakespeare, “the father of German literature” and singer of “the airs for all our modern music,” chimes in nicely with the preceding (*W* 4.213). If he would translate “the inmost truth of things into music,” the Poet must harken to “the transitions by which virtues and vices slide into their contraries,” and so “connect . . . irreconcilable opposites” (*W* 4.211, 215).

Not surprisingly, Emerson’s rendering of the poet also recalls Carlyle’s “The Hero as Poet,” where Shakespeare is coupled with Dante. Though omitted from *Representative Men*, “Dante . . . the Rhetorician” arguably occupies as large a place as Shakespeare in Emerson’s canon and enterprise as a writer (*JMN* 11.134). In his journal, he likens the latter’s “all wise music” to the former’s; in fact, citing the poet’s meeting in the *Inferno* with the one who whilom taught him “come l’uom s’eterna” (how man makes himself eternal), Emerson remarks, “I think

if I were professor of Rhetoric . . . to young men, I should use Dante as my text-book" (*JMN* 11.134, 133). Again, Emerson is in agreement with Montaigne, whose essay "Of the Education of Children" also finds in the *Inferno* appropriate tuition for the young. "*Che, non men de saper, dubbia m'aggrada,*" Montaigne cites from Dante (*Essays* 1.25.65): "to doubt is not less grateful than to know," in the translation of John Aitken Carlyle which Emerson brought back with him from England in 1848 and helped publish in America.<sup>87</sup> A look at Emerson's voicing of the Transcendental "doctrine of the Illusionists" in the essay on "Montaigne" shows how basic that infernal rhetoric is to the elaboration of his romance in "Illusions."

Packer has called Emerson's assertion of faith at the end of the "Montaigne" essay a "miraculous act of levitation."<sup>88</sup> Inscribed with the legend "*Fortis imaginatio generat casum,*" from the *Essais* (1.21.160), one of the drawings in Salvador Dali's pictorial tribute to France's representative man illustrates the shaping power of the imagination enabling such an act. In Dali's Surrealist drawing as in *Nature*, "the world is a spectacle": objects appear "afloat before the eye," and "we" (the figures so transposed) "tread on air" (*W* 1.51, 49, 57).<sup>89</sup> Elevated to a metaphysical principle or power in Montaigne, Shakespeare and their Romantic avatars, imaginative faith or reason is what allows Emerson, maugre all his doubts, to compose his romance here and in "Illusions." In the end, however, such faith is indistinguishable from the skepticism of Byron and Montaigne, putting as it does the divine out of reach. "The ardors of piety agree at last with the coldest scepticism,—that nothing is of us or our works,—that all is of God," so Emerson had concluded in "Experience," and now sees exemplified in the person of his friend mystic Charles Newcomb, himself an admirer of Montaigne (*W* 3.69). That agreement Emerson renders, appropriately, in terms of the logic of hellfire, or "frost in July" (*W* 4.174).

“For the believer, the hell of unsatisfiable desire and the heaven of inaccessible fulfillment are both contained in the circumference of the same Eternal Cause,” as Packer interprets the verse from William Ellery Channing’s “A Poet’s Hope” (“If my bark sink, ‘tis to another sea”) which concludes “Montaigne; Or, The Skeptic” and serves, in Whicher’s words, to convert “defeat into victory” (*W* 4.186).<sup>90</sup> As above, so below: “In Equivocal Worlds,” so Blake glosses the thirty-fourth canto of Dante’s *Inferno*, “Up & Down are Equivocal.”<sup>91</sup>

There is nothing equivocal, however, about the mythical and literary-historical provenance of a wisdom that could thus assert the “indifference of places” (*W* 2.81); in Blake’s circumscription of the ever-proliferating “convexities” in mystic-poet Swedenborg’s *Heaven and Hell*, “hell is the outward or external of heaven.”<sup>92</sup> Certainly, Montaigne’s celebration of the infernal pleasure afforded by endless dubitating, like his rhyming of virtues and vices, is, according to a long tradition, contrary to the greater scheme of Dante’s comedy,<sup>93</sup> as the skeptic’s own use thereof to chide the advice of philosophers suggests: “when he has upon him the thirst of a burning fever, what satisfaction can it be to remember the pleasure of drinking Greek wine? . . . *Che ricordarsi il ben doppia la noja*” (*Essays* 2.12.236; *Inferno* V.34). But this does not stop Montaigne or his counterpart Emerson from finding a like remedy in the very exercise of the imagination. “He seems, in some places, to know no difference between light and darkness, sweet and bitter,” as one critic, citing “Uriel,” remarked of Emerson’s “optimism confounding all moral distinctions.” That suggestion of “a moral indifference in all things”<sup>94</sup> puts Emerson again in the company of Heraclitus, Protagoras, and the Pyrrhonians as imaged in the *Apologie*, where such distinctions as “sweet” and “bitter” are similarly confounded.<sup>95</sup> By this same all-confounding logic, it matters little that man seems to fall short of the ideal, since he remains (as

in Protagoras) the “measure of all things,” including himself: “We are golden averages . . . ,” in the expression of “Montaigne; Or, The Skeptic” (*W* 4.161). Thus even in man’s very limitations, Montaigne finds “une absolue perfection, et comme divine” proportionate to his ambitions (*Essais* 3.13.415). Emerson would seem to agree. For example, a jotting in his journal—“What hell could be found for such an incorrigible Montaigne always Montaigne[.] The hero is always where he is” (*JMN* 14.279)—provides the makings of an allegory Emerson develops in *The Conduct of Life*, where the figure of Montaigne is replaced by that of an “excommunicated” monk capable of making “a kind of heaven” of “hell” and finally “canonized as a saint,” as Montaigne is in *Representative Men* (*W* 6.193-94; *W* 4.173). For Sherman Paul, in his *Emerson’s Angle of Vision* (1952), Emerson’s is also an “attempt to chart the inward heaven.”<sup>96</sup>

In keeping with that marked affinity of purpose, “Montaigne; Or, The Skeptic” suggests one sense in which Emerson’s assertion of the indifference of places and renunciation of travel has the ring of poetic justice. As his accounting of his closeness to Montaigne through metempsychosis therein shows, the former had no need to journey to Europe to find another Montaigne: “It seemed to me as if I had myself written the book, in some former life, so sincerely it spoke to my thought and experience” (*W* 4.162). He had in fact written that book, if not in some former life, then, in transmuted form, in his own essays. Emerson’s journey ends, fittingly, where it begins, in a mind congenial with itself.

## 2

**From Inferno to Limbo:****Réjean Ducharme's Existentialist Heroes**

“It is true that muses and love and religion hate these developments . . . . And we cannot say too little of our constitutional necessity of seeing things under private aspects . . . . And yet is the God the native of these bleak rocks. That need makes in morals the capital virtue of self-trust. We must hold hard to this poverty . . . and by more vigorous self-recoveries . . . possess our axis more firmly.”

–Ralph Waldo Emerson, “Experience”

“Toute la joie silencieuse de Sisyphe est là. Son destin lui appartient. Son rocher est sa chose. . . . Il faut imaginer Sisyphe heureux.”

–Albert Camus, *Le Mythe de Sisyphe*

“Le sommet appelle l’abîme. Plus on escalade . . . plus l’attraction du gouffre sous soi est grande.”

–Réjean Ducharme, *L’Avalée des avalés*

Shall we say that Emerson has spoken wisely on the conduct of life? Insofar as it implies Emerson’s fitness for the office of the nineteenth-century sage he sought to fill (“to express notions about the world, man’s situation in it, and how he should live,” in John Holloway’s

classic description),<sup>97</sup> the poem by Montgomery Schuyler and the parallel testimony cited at the outset of this chapter need to be read with a good deal of irony. The same might be said of Maurice Maeterlinck's apology or plea for the same, though it reposes on substantially different grounds. Whereas Emerson's "spiritual brother" Carlyle "leads us like a flock frightened by the tempest, toward unknown and sulphurous pastures . . . drives us into the profoundest depths of darkness . . . and there abandons us," Emerson, according to Maeterlinck, "does not lead us to the edge of a precipice."<sup>98</sup> The high-spirited Emerson avoids the impasse in which Carlyle would leave us, Maeterlinck pursues, because though he, too, makes the mundane mysterious and fantastic, he finds the source of that mystery and wonder not outside, but in the self.<sup>99</sup>

Notwithstanding the above, there is a strong measure of justness to Emerson's statement to Carlyle on 5 August 1850: "We are all in one boat . . . We are beleaguered with contradictions, and the moment we preach . . . things turn on their heel and leave us to fret alone," Emerson wrote then (*C* 461-62), and justifiably so. As Santayana points out and as Carlyle himself recognized,<sup>100</sup> Emerson never finished cataloguing the "high commandments" which, he argued, "elevated themselves like towers" throughout all intellectual history (*JMN* 11.52). In an earlier letter of 16 November 1838 to his brother William, he described himself whimsically but aptly enough as "floating drifting far & wide in the sea of 'Human Life' without port without chart & even a glass so thick over the compass that it is only once in a while I can sharply see where it points" (*L* 2.175). Emerson's proclivity for drifting would seem to invalidate him as the guide pictured by Schuyler and company. It does, however, square with Maeterlinck's portrait of him, albeit *à rebours*. "[W]hat a free and roving thing human reason is," Montaigne muses in "Des boiteux" ("Of Cripples"). Not for us, consequently, the "knowledge of causes" or

the “conduct of things”: “Let us not seek illusions from without and unknown, we who are perpetually agitated with illusions domestic and our own” (*Essays* 3.2.497, 500).

In their reading of Emerson’s shortcomings or defects as strengths and incentives, however, his disciples in America have been, like Maeterlinck, faithful to his way of thinking, which might be described (in the words Sainte-Beuve used to evoke Montaigne’s Protean thought) as “the skepticism that understands all things, that changes itself into each thing in turn, and that conceives human thought as the dream of all things and as creating the object of its dream.”<sup>101</sup> Thus the “best part of Emersonianism,” according to Walt Whitman in 1880, was that “it breeds the giant that destroys itself . . . No teacher ever taught, that has so provided for his pupil’s setting up independently.”<sup>102</sup> Some ten years later, John M. Robertson, another “ex-pupil,” would come to a similar conclusion: “Emerson,” he wrote, “helps you, half the time, to anti-Emersonise.”<sup>103</sup> And George Santayana would agree in 1898, finding it “a fortunate incapacity in Emerson that he was never able to trace out and defend the universal implications of any of his ideas.”<sup>104</sup> “In his work” (so Tony Tanner in 1965 adds his voice to a long list of Emerson students instructed by and in indirections) “it is wiser to seek the suggestive drift of the whole than to attempt a consistently developed system of thought.”<sup>105</sup> Borne out by Emerson’s career as a teacher, sage and moralist, the inversion of values tacit in much of his critical reception was also to become, by way of Emerson enthusiast Friedrich Nietzsche notably, a major theme and preoccupation of (Post)Symbolist, Decadent, Surrealist, and Existentialist literature in the first half of the twentieth century and on up to the 1960s, when the style of idealism Emerson was seminal in shaping arguably reached its apotheosis.<sup>106</sup>

The work of Quebec New Novelist Réjean Ducharme, in particular, may be said to reflect persistently and perceptively on that period and its exalting of “la puissance de l’imagination” to a happy science.<sup>107</sup> Though Ducharme originally circulated his first novel *L’Avalée des avalés* (1966), translated as *The Swallower Swallowed*, under the *nom de plume* Jean Racine, his heroine Bérénice is most certainly not the eponymous heroine of the latter’s tragedy, meekly inclining to her destiny. Rather, like all of Ducharme’s children-protagonists, she is schooled in the rugged “self subsistency” of that “prince of egotists” Montaigne (*C* 98; *W* 4.162). “Ce qui importe,” contends Bérénice, “c’est vouloir, c’est avoir l’âme qu’on s’est faite . . . . Il faut tourner le dos au destin qui nous mène et nous en faire un autre” (*L’Avalée* 42). Not for her those “abortive births” Emerson speaks of in “Art” (*W* 2.363). Like the subject pictured in Emerson’s essay, Bérénice is both artist and creation, sculpting herself out of the materials surrounding her: “Il faut se recréer, se remettre au monde . . . . je me réinventerai” (*L’Avalée* 42-43). The means apposite to that reinvention or “renaissance” the self-orphaned Bérénice finds, like Emerson, Nietzsche, the Symbolists, and the Surrealists, in the “womb” of her own “imagination.”<sup>108</sup> “Il se peut que l’adhésion d’imagination et de volonté donnée aux apparences de la vie devienne délirante, devienne du délire, devienne ivresse,” she reflects on the power of the intoxicated and intoxicating imagination to make and unmake appearances (*L’Avalée* 205). Like Emerson’s *Nature*, *L’Avalée des avalés* is replete with examples to that effect: following a series of roundabout trips on a “trolleybus,” a perambulating Bérénice imagines herself stationary, so that objects come, go and whirl about her; earlier, she hides in a bucket in the quarryman’s windlass and watches the clouds race as the wheel turns; finally, perched in a tree, she unfixes the world and turns it “sens dessus dessous,” in the idiom of

Ducharme, by imagining that its branches take root in the sky (222-23, 31, 26-27). “[J]e suis le nombril du monde,” declares Bérénice, as she envisions herself, like the imaginative traveller pictured in the preface to Emerson’s *Representative Men*, straddling the ocean, her head “bathed with galaxies” and her “feet tread[ing] the floor of the Pit” (*L’Avalée* 91; *W* 4.17). The world so transfigured “revolves upon an I,” in Herman Melville’s apposite rendering of an “eternal cosmic merry-go-round” in *Mardi*.<sup>109</sup> It is (so Ducharme’s frequent allusions to the turn-of-the-century movement in Symbolist-inspired aestheticism suggests a final rapprochement) a well-colored globe which Bérénice holds like a “crystal ball” in the palm of her hand and turns with the “wilful fancy” of the perennial “Narcissus” featured in Oscar Wilde’s *Intentions* and “Phrases and Philosophies for the Young.”<sup>110</sup>

As the late adolescent narrator to Ducharme’s next novel *Le Nez qui voque* (1967) explains, though thus to confound north and south, left and right, slow and fast, may seem like madness or delirium to minds dulled by reason, to the young and the imaginative “une double action en sens contraires est parfaitement claire, saississable, logique et comprise.”<sup>111</sup> Bérénice’s imagination naturally comes to rest, then, in such illustrations as, logically speaking, most befit and elucidate that view of the mind and its shaping, synthesizing powers. The exempla she educes invite comparison with those compiled by Emerson both prior and subsequent to publishing his *Nature* (1836).

The “ancient fables of poetry,” Emerson notes in 1850, are “realized” by the art of “engineers” well nigh capable of “manufacturing day out of night, time out of space & space out of time”: “extremes . . . meet” (*JMN* 11.308, 306, 308). His *Nature* had already concluded as much from experiences similar to those which Bérénice records above, in particular from a ride

in a “railroad car” speeding like “Hell in a harness,” the practical realization of the “Ideal Philosophy” (*W* 1.50; *JMN* 4.94). And yet, though written several centuries before the invention of the rail-road car, Montaigne’s *Essais* are not, for all that, left in the lurch when it comes to confounding sense or understanding. His essay “Des Coches” (Of Coaches) suggests an explanation. Man’s “invention” is such as to change day into night and make fables true not because of any art in particular, asserts Montaigne, but because of the force of his imagination, which makes its own cause and effect (*Essais* 3.6.156, 166). Imagination, as the text of *Nature* accordingly registers, brings together “the farthest sundered things . . . by a subtile spiritual connection” (*W* 1.52). Its subjective force is consequently best seen in the light of such paradoxes as would seem to overthrow common sense distinctions: “’Tis a pretty revolution which is effected in the landscape by simply turning your head upside down, or, looking through your legs . . . . It changes the lanscape at once from November to June . . . . Massachusetts is Italy upside down,” Emerson noted on 19 November 1848 (*JMN* 11.56). To the child-like mind capacious enough to “whirl with the whirling world,” life is a “game” (*JMN* 11.309) comprising an infernal romance such as that hymned by Emerson’s Uriel:

‘Line in nature is not found;  
 Unit and universe are round;  
 In vain produced, all rays return;  
 Evil will bless, and ice will burn.’ (*W* 9.14)

The logic of “fuego y yelo” or “fiery snow”<sup>112</sup> governing both Calderon’s dream-world and Dante’s *Inferno*, where, in the words of Milton, “parching Air / Burns frore, and cold performs th’effect of Fire” (*Paradise Lost* II.594-5), also has its appeal for Montaigne as he, too,

strives to unite contraries “by their two extremities”: “Extreme coldness and extreme heat boil and roast,” he notes in “Des vaines subtilités” (Of Vain Subtleties) (*Essays* 1.54.150). No less understandably do the celebrants of Ducharme’s “fête infernal” or infernal whirligig register their allegiance to the same.<sup>113</sup> In *L’Avalée des avalés*, Ducharme’s Bérénice tries the experiment outlined by Montaigne, seizing an iron grill in the dead of winter and finding it “bouillant de froid” (51). In Ducharme’s *L’Océantume* (1968), which critic Françoise Laurent has called “une sorte de négatif de *l’Avalée des avalés*,”<sup>114</sup> the heroine Iode Ssouvie similarly feels “la brûlure de la glace” as she spins out of control down an icy mountain slope.<sup>115</sup> It is not without reason, then, that Bérénice’s childhood companion complains that they are in hell (*L’Avalée* 224). “Je suis diabolique,” confesses Bérénice (*L’Avalée* 187).

Not surprisingly, in view of the preceding, Ducharme’s work partakes of the diabolic exuberance or energy common to many key works of Romantic spirituality. Here, after all, as illustrated in the “Infernal wisdom” of William Blake’s “Proverbs of Hell” (“Excess of sorrow laughs. Excess of joy weeps,” writes the poet of *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*),<sup>116</sup> is the power to make the sober drunk and the “wise . . . joyous in their folly,” in the congenial expression of Nietzsche’s prologue to *Thus Spake Zarathustra*.<sup>117</sup> Children, as Montaigne points out, are particularly apt to “laugh and cry at the same thing” (*Essays* 1.37.106). Certainly, such comfort or joy as Ducharme’s children extract from the infernal element in which they swim is near allied to that evoked by Nietzsche in his “Drunken Song”: “All joy wanteth the eternity of all things, it wanteth honey, it wanteth lees, it wanteth intoxicated midnight, it wanteth graves . . . . *What* doth joy not want! it is thirstier . . . hungrier . . . than all woe: it wants *itself*; it bites into *itself* . . . .”<sup>118</sup> Indeed, the diehard idealist can make a meal of anything (air, rocks, coal,

iron), even of hell and the self, as Arthur Rimbaud's *Une Saison en enfer* similarly attests, since his composing of "un opéra fabuleux" pronouncing "la fatalité du bonheur" is not bound by the logic of non-contradiction basic to "la morale".<sup>119</sup> "in him," writes Nietzsche, "all opposites are blended into a new unity. The highest and the lowest energies of human nature, what is sweetest, most frivolous, and most terrible wells forth from one fount with immortal assurance." For this reason, Nietzsche asserts the superiority of his Zarathustra over "Dante . . . merely a believer and not one who first *creates* truth, a *world-governing* spirit, a destiny" secure in his "*azure* solitude."<sup>120</sup> The fact that Nietzsche's deconstruction of "la conscience" and "la science du bien et du mal" in the *Genealogy of Morals* (1887) provides additional incentive to self-creation for Bérénice in the final pages of *L'Avalée* suggests a measure of her sympathy with his, no less than Emerson, Blake, and Rimbaud's, endeavor (364). "Voici un damné qui essaie de s'extraire de l'enfer" (*L'Avalée* 343) describes the action of Ducharme's novel as well as the aim of his Romantic, Decadent, Surrealist, and Existentialist precursors, according to R.A. Yoder and Virginia A. La Charité.<sup>121</sup>

There is one respect, however, in which Ducharme's work suggests a slightly more traditional cast of mind than that of his nineteenth- and twentieth-century predecessors, one not so distant perhaps from that of Racine and his contemporaries. And that is by virtue of the very "impeccable logic" with which it intuitively grasps these same "antinomies of experience" located in the "imagination of man."<sup>122</sup> At one point in *L'Avalée*, the Cartesian-minded Bérénice even goes so far as to diagram or dissect, with the cold precision of a vivisectionist, the 'problem' confronting her. "Que faut-il faire pour être libre?" she asks; for, as she writes at the

outset of the novel and here illustrates for her classmates (and by extension the reader) on the blackboard: “Tout m’avale . . . je suis englobée” (*L’Avalée* 214, 9).

That sombre hypothesis is borne out by the book’s threatening and engulfing imagery, of gnawing and piercing teeth, pitchforks, rats, ticks, bloodsuckers, vampires, floods, hooks, traps, bars, nets, abysses, mews, guillotines, broken glass, mirrors, tombs, snow avalanches, cars, daggers, bacillus, cancer, tanks, cannons, fire, and death (*L’Avalée* 68, 87, 129, 146, 184-5, 190, 201, 204, 209, 219, 225, 250, 253, 281, 374). Buried, like the subject depicted at the outset of Walter Pater’s Emerson-like conclusion to *The Renaissance* (1873), “under a flood of external objects, pressing . . . with a sharp and importunate reality,”<sup>123</sup> Ducharme’s heroine is all the more intensely aware of the “divorce” between that ‘reality’ and her childhood dream or ideal.<sup>124</sup> Consequently, if Bérénice would free herself from the pull of a world or destiny she pictures here and elsewhere as a chthonic force (“le titan”), she is faced with only two alternatives—“tout détruire” or “tout avaler . . . tout englober” (*L’Avalée* 220, 216).

As always, Bérénice plies her lesson home by matching words to actions. The school of hard knocks, however, soon teaches her that the latter solution is impracticable: there is no thirst great enough (she realizes at age nine) to swallow all the water in the stream. In fact, just in attempting to navigate or soar above it, as on a main-mast, the unfledged child-toddler loses her footing, capsizes “quille par-dessus pont,” and is drowned, figuratively, “au fond de l’océan sourd et noir” (*L’Avalée* 10, 17). Suggestively, she loses four teeth in the process. As Ducharme’s protagonist Mille Milles comes to reflect in *Le Nez qui voque*, life is a Tantalus cup, in that it is too vast for the mind of man it holds like a fish in the sea: “Comment comprendre et régir ce qui m’englobe comme la mer englobe le poisson?” (193). “Experience,” in the words

of Pater, “. . . is ringed round for each one of us by that thick wall of personality . . . each mind keeping as a solitary prisoner its own dream of the world.”<sup>125</sup> But, like the Saadi-like Emerson of “Experience” and the Nietzsche of *Zarathustra*, Bérénice is undaunted by the prospect afforded by such “poverty,” to which she, too, rather clings by tooth and nail (*W* 3.81).<sup>126</sup> Since she cannot swallow everything without being herself swallowed, Bérénice opts, logically enough, for the second alternative—“tout détruire.” “Il n’y a que moi ici,” she insists time and again (*L’Avalée* 11). Inebriated with “cette force logique,” she erects a cult to Quebec symbolist poet Émile Nelligan (the most frequently mentioned author in Ducharme’s oeuvre), and in the manner of Rimbaud and the Surrealists, transforms the world with the alchemy of her verb, making her will and her word law (*L’Avalée* 259). She even creates her own private, hermetic language, “le bérénicien,” in order better to commune with herself (*L’Avalée* 337).

Such a change of headings, however, does not bring Ducharme’s heroine very far out of her initial orbit. On the contrary, though securely immured in her privacy, Bérénice, by the same token, can only go in circles, endlessly retracing her own steps, as when she mans a lamed tank dubbed, ironically, “Toupie” (see e.g. *L’Avalée* 366, 310, 338). In a baroque, whirligig world circular in design and direction (“La vie est dans ma tête et ma tête est dans la vie,” she remarks earlier), deep calls unto deep, and all action is reflex action: “Le sommet appelle l’abîme. Plus on escalade . . . plus l’attraction du gouffre sous soi est grande” (*L’Avalée* 45, 341-42). Thus, as Bérénice herself witnesses soon after during artillery practice, she who would fire on creation, even if that creation is nothing but a dream built on inanity, is like to have her own arms blown off by the recoil (*L’Avalée* 339). When one of her ‘students’ pointedly asks her what she will eat if she destroys everything, Bérénice’s response, then, is unequivocal enough. Logically, she must

starve to death: “Je meurs de soif,” she exclaims earlier, having tried the experiment (*L'Avalée* 134). Wishing to free herself from the world engulfing her, Ducharme's heroine must, like the muskrat she finds caught in a trap, chew off her own leg (*L'Avalée* 68-69, 259). The symbolic image which serves as a poetically just conclusion to Emerson's essay on Plato also aptly translates the action and motif represented in Ducharme's novel: “the mouthful proves too large,” writes Emerson. “*Boa constrictor* has good will to eat it, but . . . falls abroad in the attempt; and biting, gets strangled: the bitten world holds the biter fast by his own teeth” (*W* 4.77). “Je me roule, me mords . . .,” says Bérénice, to similar effect (*L'Avalée* 211).

As such, Ducharme's *L'Avalée des avalés* suggests an ironic reading of Emerson's inaugural-sounding invitation in an 1836 lecture: “Now that the age of reflection is arrived,” he asks, “shall we not eat of its good fruit?” (*EL* 2.20). *L'Avalée*, in fact, couples or conjoins, as deep unto deep, two myths dear to the Concord Sage. Peering down or inwards, Ducharme's Narcissus sees the figure of Tantalus, reaching up and outwards. “Voici une coupe à laquelle personne n'a jamais bu,” riddles Bérénice, adding, “Elle est remplie d'un vin violet clair comme un miroir” (*L'Avalée* 340). The cup no one has ever drunk from, but which Bérénice comes to taste, repeatedly, is the interior emptiness mirrored there. At once prey and predator, swallower and swallowed, Bérénice is (in Ducharme's brilliant reworking of Charles Baudelaire's poem inspired by Poe's original) the “Héautontimoroumenos” (*L'Avalée* 101), the vampire who consumes her own heart,<sup>127</sup> or alternately, to evoke a symbol of Romantic inspiration, the Ouroboros, “the serpent with its tail in its mouth.”<sup>128</sup> The latter is figured in *L'Avalée* in the shape of a “boa constrictor” winding and coiling around the object of its desire (45).

As deep calls unto deep, so, too, the stuff of the romantic ideal and gothic is the same. It is macabre fare, not for the queasy. The work of the artist chiselling herself out of the marble surrounding her, in particular, is ghastly business, carried out as it is “à coups de hache, de ciseau et de brosse” (*L'Avalée* 215). Freedom and wholeness are purchased, ironically, at the price of amputation. Severed from the world, the self-imprisoned solipsist (“Je suis seul,” Bérénice repeats time and time again) must make her own food: “il faut créer à mesure ce qu'on mange,” as Bérénice's counterpart Iode Ssouvie comes to reflect in *L'Océantume* (112). However, in a twilight world, so Bérénice herself observes, one cannot tell whether the very element one breathes is air or darkness; in any case, it is not very filling stuff (*L'Avalée* 317). As Iode, consumed inwardly by her “feu de l'enfer,” puts it in *L'Océantume*, “LES YEUX ONT FAIM FOLLEMENT SANS CESSÉ. QUAND ILS NE TROUVENT RIEN DE BON A MANGER DEHORS, ILS SE TOURNENT VERS L'INTÉRIEUR ET SE METTENT A MANGER L'AME” (155, 156). Like the *Essais* of Montaigne, which Alfred Glauser images in the shape of “un serpent qui se mord sa queue” (“Elle s'engendre et se nourrit d'elle-même”), Ducharme's books are the children of self-consuming introspection.<sup>129</sup> However, that such self-vampirism as the fervent idealist is brought to practice (at one point Bérénice chants a Symbolist slogan to the tune of *Il était un petit navire*, a song about cannibalism)<sup>130</sup> does not make for the most wholesome of foods, though, is what the haunting fate of the two orphaned daughters of a drunkard caught in the heroine's situation of spiritual exile implies: to break out of their pathetic isolation, they resort, ironically, to eating glass (*L'Avalée* 188).

Such meagre grub as is hers makes Bérénice, understandably, dizzy-headed, so much so that like the Montaigne taking delight in tasting himself which she ironically echoes (“je me

goûte . . . je me roule,” says the former), she is able to look without flinching and indeed with enthusiasm at that same feast of inanity (*Essais* 2.17.418). What more poetic and beautiful, after all, than a suicide. “On se soûle d’écoeurement. ‘Ma mie, cultivons nos rancoeurs,’” Bérénice intones with Nelligan’s “Hiver sentimental” and his *Romance du vin*, both of which poems, along with his “Le Vaisseau d’or” and “Rêve enclos,” she knows by heart (*L’Avalée* 277, 203). There is a good measure of poetic justice to that rapprochement. Like Montaigne, his Socrates and Nietzsche,<sup>131</sup> to varying degrees, Bérénice and her Ducharmian avatars would make themselves drunk on melancholy or *ennui*, that most lyrical of emotions for the Symbolists, and so warm themselves with the freezing cold of winter that congeals their hearts.<sup>132</sup> “Ah, there is ice around me; my hand burneth with the iciness! Ah, there is thirst in me; it panteth after your thirst!” Zarathustra sings in “The Night-Song,” as he drinks back into himself “the flames that break forth” from him and so finds “satiety” even in ravenous, “violent hunger.”<sup>133</sup>

By the same token, however, and in spite of all of Montaigne, Emerson and company’s assertions to the contrary, the art of the self-sufficient, comprehensive self, a private fantasy or dream aiming merely at “la vérité humaine” (*Nez qui voque* 57), is not apt to sate that “desire for the whole . . . raging, infinite; a hunger, as of space to be filled with planets; a cry of famine, as of devils for souls” which “every child” feels according to Emerson’s “Montaigne; Or, The Skeptic” (*W* 4.184). As Mille Milles jokes with reference to Rimbaud and his ilk, those who would swallow such truth as these proffer are fools, since their work is only an “aliment” for our curiosity (*Nez qui voque* 279). Thus, however fecund in principle or theory, in actual fact the imagination is far from suggesting satiety—to Ducharme at least. “Je suis stérile, vide,” says the vampire-like Bérénice, who takes morbid pleasure in the death of her friend and later uses her

living counterpart as a human shield (*L'Avalée* 134). Bérénice's alternating fits of bulimia, anorexia and drunkenness all amount to the same, since she can find no food of substance outside the self. Drawn simultaneously towards both "poles," of good and evil (cf. *Nez qui voque* 24-25), Ducharme's protagonists tend to gravitate towards the Dantesque "Centre of Indifference" (to use Carlyle's phrase from *Sartor Resartus*) imaged in the boiler room of the permanently grounded ship "Mange-de-la-merde" in *L'Océantume* (10).<sup>134</sup>

Ducharme's portrayal of his characters' odyssey into an interior darkness further invites comparison with that of Marlow on a "cripple of a steam-boat" manned by a "fool-helmsman" and in the company of faithless pilgrims in Joseph Conrad's modern allegory *Heart of Darkness*.<sup>135</sup> Drawing an additional parallel with Hieronymus Bosch's depiction of a Ship of Fools in Ducharme's *Les Enfantômes* (1976), the Quebec author's journey, too, is the working out of "a merciless logic for a futile purpose."<sup>136</sup> The torments of Ducharme's Promethean heroes and heroines are, like those of the fiery Lucifer in the innermost circle of Dante's *Inferno*, self-inflicted: they sweat and suffer as a result of the beating of the condor-wings lodged in their chest, which creates a "cyclone sans issue" (*L'Avalée* 362). The hell of the self-sufficient self is a total absence of love or reciprocity. "Nahanni," for example, one of the words coined by Bérénice, is described as "un appel à un appel," an echo merely (*L'Avalée* 337). However, where Carlyle's angelico-diabolical Teufelsdröckh reaches out and "clutches round him outwardly, on the NOT-ME for wholesomer food" (*Sartor* 130), Ducharme's diabolical children seem relatively content in their indifference and with their lack of purpose or destination. Described as a feverish "*Danse macabre*" in *L'Océantume* (31), the hemiplegia which, according to critic Maurice Blanchot, is the common lot of (post)Romantic literature, and its attendant impasse, of

inanity, are for the fork-tongued Mille Milles, for example, the occasion for not much more than a bad joke—*une mauvaise blague*.<sup>137</sup>

The author's mature novel *les Enfantômes* suggests an explanation. Given Ducharme's commitment to an amoral vision and art, as reflected in the world of his ghostly child protagonists, a better place to locate the provenance and direction of such truth as he conveys would be, not the inferno of Dante or that of Emerson and the Romantics, but rather limbo.<sup>138</sup> The artist's ken comprises human, mortal passions; it is the realm of fantasy, myth, and imagination, not of practice, reason, or true heroism.<sup>139</sup> Like the protagonists of Herman Melville and his modern Quebec counterpart Victor-Lévy Beaulieu, Ducharme's books have been described as orphaned children.<sup>140</sup> They are, in effect, infant souls, mute and unborn to the world.

### Notes

1. *The Early Lectures of Ralph Waldo Emerson*, ed. by Stephen E. Whicher et al., 3 vols. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1959-72), 2.171; hereafter *EL* in text. Montgomery Schuyler, "Carlyle and Emerson," *The Atlantic Monthly* 51 (June 1883); cited from *The Correspondence of Emerson and Carlyle*, ed. with introduction by Joseph Slater (New York and London: Columbia University Press, 1964), 72n.33; hereafter *C* in text.
2. Walt Whitman as cited by Frederic Ives Carpenter, *Emerson Handbook* (New York: Hendricks House, 1967), 229, from J.B. Moore, "The Master of Whitman," *Studies in Philology* 23

(January 1926), who cites vol. 3 of Horace Traubel's *With Walt Whitman in Camden* (New York: 1914-15).

3. George Santayana, "Ralph Waldo Emerson," in *American Prose: Selections with Critical Introductions by Various Writers*, ed. by George Rice Carpenter (New York: Macmillan, 1898); reprinted and cited from *Critical Essays on Ralph Waldo Emerson*, ed. by Robert E. Burkholder and Joel Myerson (Boston, Massachusetts: G.K. Hall & Co., 1983). Echoing (and qualifying) Whitman, Santayana pronounces Emerson "not a star of the first magnitude," but nonetheless "a fixed star in the firmament of philosophy" (263).

4. *The Complete Works of Ralph Waldo Emerson*, ed. by Edward Waldo Emerson, 12 vols., Centenary edition (Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1903-4), 2:345, 346-47; hereafter *W*.

5. Maurice Maeterlinck, *On Emerson and Other Essays*, transl. by Montrose J. Moses (Port Washington, New York: Kennikat Press, 1967); and see Carpenter, 252-54.

6. Cf. George J. Stack, *Nietzsche and Emerson: An Elective Affinity* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 1992). Nietzsche, Stack reminds his reader, found in Emerson, by his own admission, a "Bruder-Seele" (60).

7. Christopher Pearse Cranch considered Emerson "the great ethical teacher of the age" in 1883 ("Ralph Waldo Emerson," *Unitarian Review and Religious Magazine* 20 [July 1883]; reprinted in and cited from *Critical Essays on Ralph Waldo Emerson*, 209). Though considerably nuanced, that view persists in much of contemporary Emerson criticism. In his *Emerson on the Scholar* (Columbia University of Missouri Press, 1992), for example, Merton M. Sealts, Jr. argues that Emerson's purpose is "to awaken the intellect in others" (244). For Wesley T. Mott,

as well, Emerson is a “great teacher,” who “call[s] for thought and action that partakes of the very divinity of creation” (“‘The Age of the First Person Singular’: Emerson and Individualism,” in *A Historical Guide to Ralph Waldo Emerson*, ed. by Joel Myerson [New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000], 93, 69). More generally, but no less concurrently, the status of Emerson as “*the* founding figure in the American philosophical tradition” has been many times reiterated (see e.g. Joel Porte and Sandra Morris’ preface to *The Cambridge Companion to Ralph Waldo Emerson* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999], xiii). Accordingly, for Joel Porte, Emerson’s reputation may still be measured by “the extent to which the verbal universe he spins out of himself adequately represents the world in which we all live” (*Representative Man: Ralph Waldo Emerson in His Time* [New York: Oxford University Press, 1979], 323).

8. Edgar Allan Poe, *Essays and Reviews* (New York: Literary Classics of the United States, 1984), 461, 1040, 1031, 1303, 1393.

9. See e.g. Joseph Chiari, *Symbolisme from Poe to Mallarmé: The Growth of a Myth*, with a foreword by T. S. Eliot (New York: Rockliff Publ., 1956), 40-45.

10. Cf. Edgar Allan Poe’s satirical “Bon-Bon,” in *Poetry and Tales* (New York: Literary Classics of the United States, 1984), 165. The epigraph to the tale is from French vaudeville and features, fittingly enough, a drunken daredevil playing the “sage.”

11. *Ibid.*, 166.

12. Jean-François Leroux, “Henri-Frédéric Amiel,” in *Dictionary of Literary Biography: Nineteenth-Century French Poets*, ed. by Robert Beum (Detroit: Gale, 2000), 6. Amiel’s

journals make frequent reference to Emerson. See e.g. *Amiel's Journal*, transl. by Mrs.

Humphrey Ward (New York: A.L. Burt, 1890), 22, 27.

13. *The Journals and Miscellaneous Notebooks of Ralph Waldo Emerson*, ed. by William Gilman et al., 16 vols. (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University, 1960-82), 10.209-10; hereafter *JMN* in text.

14. Schuyler, "Carlyle and Emerson"; cited from Slater, 72.

15. Ralph L. Rusk, *The Life of Ralph Waldo Emerson* (New York and London: Columbia University Press, 1949), 357.

16. Stephen E. Whicher, *Freedom and Fate: An Inner Life of Ralph Waldo Emerson* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1953), 26.

17. *Ibid.*, 15ff.

18. Charles Lowell Young, *Emerson's Montaigne* (New York: Macmillan, 1941), 13, 25, 15.

Young claims this is the case even in the essay "Montaigne; Or, The Skeptic" in *Representative Men*, since Emerson makes no mention there of Montaigne's skeptical *Apologie de Raimond Sebond* (25).

19. Dugald Stewart, in *The Collected Works of Dugald Stewart*, ed. by Sir William Hamilton, vol. 1 (Edinburgh: T. Constable, 1854-60), and in an essay included in William Hazlitt's 1842 edition of Montaigne's *Essays*; both cited from Charles Dédéyan, *Montaigne chez ses amis les Anglo-Saxons: Montaigne dans le romantisme anglais et ses prolongements victoriens*, 2 vols. (Paris: Boivin et C<sup>ie</sup>, 1943), 2.38, 41, 40.

20. Ibid., 40; and Whicher, 16, 120. Stewart's essay puts Montaigne "[a]t the head of the French writers who contributed in the beginning of the seventeenth century, to turn the thought of their countrymen to subjects connected with the Philosophy of mind" (qtd in Dédéyan 39).
21. Santayana, 260.
22. Ibid., 262.
23. *The Essays of Michel Eyquem de Montaigne*, transl. by Charles Cotton and ed. by W. Carew Hazlitt (Chicago: Encyclopaedia Britannica, 1952), 2.12.270. As a courtesy to my English readers, whenever possible I have referred to Cotton's translation of Montaigne; it is the one Emerson would have read.
24. Rusk, 195.
25. Kenneth Marc Harris, *Carlyle and Emerson: Their Long Debate* (Cambridge and London: Harvard University Press, 1978), 84.
26. Gavin Duffy, *Conversations with Carlyle* (New York, 1892); cited in Harris, 38.
27. John Michael, *Emerson and Skepticism: The Cipher of the World* (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1988), ix.
28. In a note to "Plato; Or, the Philosopher," Edward Waldo Emerson points out the likeness, already a commonplace in Emerson's day. See *W* 4.318-19n.1.
29. Michael, x.
30. Harris, 68.
31. "All is dogmatism, assumption, dictation," opined Samuel Gilman, on the one hand ("Ralph Waldo Emerson," *Southern Rose* 7 [November 1838]; reprinted in and cited from *Critical Essays on Ralph Waldo Emerson*, 62). Orestes Augustus Brownson, on the other hand, insisted that

Emerson not be counted amongst “dogmatic teachers or scientific expositors,” though William Alfred Jones would do just that (“Emerson’s *Essays*,” *Boston Quarterly Review* 4 [July 1841]; “Ralph Waldo Emerson,” *Arcturus* 1 [April 1841]; both essays reprinted in and cited from *Critical Essays on Ralph Waldo Emerson*, 74, 86). And so on. For a later view of Emerson in agreement with Brownson, for example, see Frederic Dan Huntington, “Ralph Waldo Emerson,” *Independent* 34 (18, 25 May 1882); also reprinted in *Critical Essays on Ralph Waldo Emerson*, 199.

32. Whicher, vii. For a study putting Keats’ “negative capability” (Whicher 57) in historical context, see Julie Ellison, *Emerson’s Romantic Style* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1984), 370. Ellison refers her reader to Ann K. Mellor’s *English Romantic Irony* (Cambridge and London: Harvard University Press, 1980). Mellor begins by discussing the Socratic facet of German idealism, in particular that of Friedrich Schlegel (12ff.). In his introduction to his *Selections from Ralph Waldo Emerson* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1957), Whicher seems to have come to a conclusion similar to Michael’s and my own: “the modern re-evaluation of Emerson,” he writes, “. . . stresses not his doctrine but his spirit and method, his enactment of the self-created role of Man Thinking” (v). Whicher ends by comparing Emerson to his Plato.

33. Cf. again Emerson’s assessment of Plato in *Representative Men* (*W* 4.78); and Michael, ix-x.

34. James Russell Lowell, *A Fable for Critics* (New York: Putnam, 1848); cited from *Critical Essays on Ralph Waldo Emerson*, 131.

35. “Undoubtedly we have no questions to ask which are unanswerable,” writes Emerson: “We must trust the perfection of the creation so far as to believe that whatever curiosity the order of things has awakened in our minds, the order of things can satisfy” (*W* 1.3-4).
36. Whicher, *Freedom and Fate*, 52; and Jonathan Bishop, “Introduction” to his *Emerson on the Soul* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1964), cited from Merton M. Sealts, Jr. and Alfred R. Ferguson, eds. *Emerson's Nature—Origin, Growth, Meaning* (New York and Toronto: Dodd, Mead & Co., 1969), 140.
37. See Sealts and Ferguson, *Emerson's Nature*, 64-5.
38. In yet another indication of his desire to weld spirit and nature, Emerson inadvertently confuses Ariel and Prospero. Cf. *The Tempest* V.i.46-47; and comp. *W* 1.54.
39. Delia M. Colton, “Ralph Waldo Emerson,” *The Continental Monthly* 1 (1862); cited from *Emerson's Nature*, 112.
40. Kenneth Burke calls the essay a “Happiness Pill”: “it is so buoyant” (“I, Eye, Ay—Emerson’s Early Essay ‘Nature’: Thoughts on the Machinery of Transcendence,” in *Transcendentalism and Its Legacy*, ed. by Myron Simon and Thornton H. Parsons [Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1966]; cited from *Emerson's Nature*, 150).
41. *The Letters of Ralph Waldo Emerson*, ed. by Ralph L. Rusk and Eleanor M. Tilton, 10 vols. (New York and London: Columbia University Press, 1933-1990), 2.32; hereafter *L*. On Xenophanes as a teacher of the Skeptics or Pyrrhonians, see Montaigne (*Essays* 2.12.240).
42. Sherman Paul, *Emerson's Angle of Vision: Man and Nature in American Experience* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1952), 75; and Tony Tanner’s comments on Paul’s observation in his “Emerson: The Unconquered Eye and the Enchanted Circle,” *The Reign of*

- Wonder: Naivety and Reality in American Literature* (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 1965), reprinted and cited from *Critical Essays on Ralph Waldo Emerson*, 312.
43. Wallace Stevens, "Tea at the Palaz of Hoon," in *The Collected Poems of Wallace Stevens* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1954); cited from B.L. Packer, *Emerson's Fall: A New Interpretation of the Major Essays* (New York: Continuum, 1982), 70. Packer also suggests the rapprochement with Narcissus which follows (70).
44. See *The Works of Thomas Carlyle*, ed. by H.D. Traill, 30 vols., Centenary edition (London: Chapman and Hall, 1898-99), 28.38.
45. See Richard Lee Francis, "The Architectonics of Emerson's *Nature*," *American Quarterly* 19 (Spring 1967); cited from *Emerson's Nature*, 169.
46. Cf. John Sterling's letter of 29 May 1835 to Thomas Carlyle, in Carlyle's *Life of John Sterling* (1851), reprinted in and cited from *Thomas Carlyle: The Critical Heritage*, ed. with an introduction by Jules Paul Seigel (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1971), 33; and *Sartor Resartus*, ed. with an introduction by Kerry McSweeney and Peter Sabor (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), 201.
47. George Gilfillan, in his review of Carlyle's *The Life of John Sterling* for the *Eclectic Review* (Dec. 1851); quoted from *Thomas Carlyle: The Critical Heritage*, 20.
48. The phrase is Carlyle's and refers to his recollection of his first meeting with Emerson (C 101).
49. Emerson ends the passage in question by quoting Xenophanes: "All things complained the philosopher hasten back to unity" (*JMN* 4.298). Cf. fragment 24, "whole he sees, whole he thinks, and whole he hears," in Xenophanes of Colophon, *Fragments*, transl. with a commentary

by J.H. Leshner (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1992), 31. The fragment is found in Sextus Empiricus' *Against the Professors*, a frequent source for the *Apologie*. A later fragment, also cited in Sextus Empiricus, speaks of our uncertainty with respect to knowledge of the "gods" and concludes that "opinion is allotted to all" (34).

50. Santayana, 262.

51. For a more thoroughgoing study of the relevance of this *topos* in Emerson's work, see Leonard Neufeldt, *The House of Emerson* (Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 1982). Neufeldt's study also situates Montaigne's skepticism at the heart of Emerson's enterprise.

52. Stevens, letter of 12 January 1940 to Hi Simons, in *Letters of Wallace Stevens*, ed. by Holly Stevens (New York, 1966); cited from A. Walton Litz, *Introspective Voyager: The Poetic Development of Wallace Stevens* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1972), 125.

53. Whicher, *Freedom and Fate*, 53.

54. Michel de Montaigne, *Essais*, ed. by Pierre Michel, with introductions by André Gide, Maurice Merleau-Ponty and Albert Thibaudet, 3 vols. (Paris: Gallimard, 1962), 3.9.234.

55. Regis Michaud, *Emerson the Enraptured Yankee*, transl. by George Boas (New York: Harper, 1930); reprinted in and cited from *Emerson's Nature*, 129.

56. Samuel Osgood, "[Nature]," in *The Western Messenger* 2 (January 1837); and Oliver Wendell Holmes, *Ralph Waldo Emerson* (Boston and New York: Houghton, Mifflin, 1884); both reprinted in and cited from *Emerson's Nature*, 79, 120.

57. Cf. Richard Monckton Milnes, "American Philosophy—Emerson's Works," *The Westminster Review* 33 (March 1840); reprinted in and cited from *Emerson's Nature*, 105.

58. Francis Bowen, “[*Nature*],” in *The Christian Examiner* 21 (January 1837); reprinted in and cited from *Emerson’s Nature*, 83.
59. Packer, 27.
60. Orestes Augustus Brownson, “[*Nature*],” in *The Boston Reformer* (10 September 1836); reprinted in and cited from *Critical Essays on Ralph Waldo Emerson*, 18.
61. Bowen, 83.
62. Ellison, 88. Though the topics or “themes treated seem at first various,” writes Santayana, the “real subject is everywhere the same” (259). And, indeed, for all their disagreement, critics pretty much agree on this point. “All of *Nature* has one theme,” concurs Joel Porte (“*Nature as Symbol: Emerson’s Noble Doubt*,” in his *Emerson and Thoreau: Transcendentalists in Conflict* [Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 1966]; reprinted in and cited from *Emerson’s Nature*, 146). “The power of thought, or rather . . . of imagination,” writes Santayana, “is his single theme” (Santayana 260). See also Ellison’s comments to this effect in her discussion of Emerson’s “paradigmatic” or “essayistic structure”: “Abstract thought becomes a metaphor for power, a figurative equation that characterizes all of Emerson’s mature works,” she writes approvingly (87, 86). Ellison finds the “formal structure of *Nature*” still too rigorous: “[Emerson] fusses with logical sequences as though abstract thought had to be literalized in argumentative systems” (87).
63. Burke, 150.
64. Alfred Kazin, review of Joel Porte’s *Representative Man* in *The New Republic* (Feb. 24, 1979); cited from Packer, 198.
65. Burke, 163.

66. Colton, 111, 112.

67. Elizabeth Palmer Peabody, "Nature—A Prose Poem," *United States Magazine, and Democratic Review* 1 (February 1838); cited from *Critical Essays on Ralph Waldo Emerson*, 31.

68. Packer, 25. For Joseph F. Doherty, too, Emerson concludes *Nature* "without actually solving this epistemological impasse" ("Emerson and the Loneliness of the Gods," *Texas Studies in Literature and Language* 16 [Spring 1974]; reprinted in and cited from *Critical Essays on Ralph Waldo Emerson*, 426).

69. *Ibid.*, 43, 83. According to Packer, this is the "problem" Emerson chiefly needed to address in *Nature*.

70. Cf. *The Life of John Sterling*, in *The Works of Thomas Carlyle*: "I find in all my conversations with Carlyle that his fundamental position is, the good of evil: he is forever quoting Goethe's epigram about the idleness of wishing to jump off one's shade" (11.130). Similarly, Herman Melville would score, in his edition of Emerson's *The Conduct of Life* (1860), the author's assertion that "the first lesson of history is *the good of evil*," commenting in the margins, "He still bethinks himself of his Optimism—he must make that good somehow against the eternal hell itself" (cited from Jay Leyda, *The Melville Log: A Documentary Life of Herman Melville, 1819-1891*, vol. 2 [New York: Gordian Press, 1969], 715).

71. Whicher, *Freedom and Fate*, 15.

72. Andrews Norton, "The New School in Literature and Religion," *Boston Daily Advertiser* (27 August 1838); reprinted in and cited from *Critical Essays on Ralph Waldo Emerson*, 34.

73. Norton, 34; and Gilman, 62.

74. John Burroughs, *Literary Values and other papers* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1901), 196.

Compare Emerson on Taylor: "His whole work is a sort of day's sailing out upon the sea not to any voyage, but to take observation of the sun & come back again" (*JMN* 9.235).

75. Brownson, "Emerson's *Essays*," 73. Brownson adds, regarding the *Essays*, "the reader will be puzzled to round their teachings into a whole, or to discover their practical bearing on life or thought," and concludes that this is not in fact their purpose (73ff.).

76. See Whicher, *Freedom and Fate*, 94-105.

77. "So little do we know we're about in / This world, I doubt if doubt itself be doubting" (*Don Juan* IX.17); cited from Dédéyan, 127. Cf. Rosalie L. Colie on Montaigne's *Apologie*: "Seeming to open out, the paradox turns in, acknowledging the wide world of alternatives, and denying autonomy to most of them. The very 'infiniteness' of paradox, its open-endedness," she explains, "is balanced by its tautology, for all paradoxes . . . are self-enclosed statements with no external reference point from which to take a bearing upon the paradox itself" (*Paradoxia Epidemica: The Renaissance Tradition of Paradox* [Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1966], 38).

78. Plutarch's "Symposiacs" reads: "a Voyage near the Land, and a Walk near the Sea, is the best Recreation" (cited from *JMN* 9.296n.142).

79. Melville, 715.

80. Camille R. La Bossière, *The Victorian Fol Sage: Comparative Readings on Carlyle, Emerson, Melville, and Conrad* (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 1989), 56. As in the case of *Nature*, some critics of Emerson's later work complained of the author's tendency to

“tantalize his readers” (see e.g. George Gould’s review of *Representative Men* in the *Indicator* 2 [February 1850]; reprinted in and cited from *Critical Essays on Ralph Waldo Emerson*, 136).

81. Whicher, *Freedom and Fate*, 138.

82. Packer, 198.

83. Whicher, *Freedom and Fate*, 138.

84. Calderón de la Barca, *La Vida es sueño (Comedia, auto y loa)*, ed. by Enrique Rull (Madrid: Editorial Alhambra, 1980).

85. Harris, 167.

86. *Ibid.*, 169.

87. *The Divine Comedy of Dante Alighieri*, transl. by John Aitken Carlyle, Thomas Okey and P.H. Wicksteed, with an introduction by C.H. Grandgent (New York: The Modern Library, 1932). The verse in question is suitably Platonic: “O Sun! who healest all troubled vision, thou makest so glad when thou resolvest me, that to doubt is not less grateful than to know” (XI.62).

88. See Packer, 209. The context is a discussion of Montaigne’s skeptical *Apologie*.

89. Cf. *Essays of Michel de Montaigne*, transl. by Charles Cotton and selected and illustrated by Salvador Dali (Garden City, New York: Doubleday & Co., 1947), 408-9.

90. Packer, 211; and Whicher, *Freedom and Fate*, 124. Whicher remarks that “[Emerson] appears to have considered this shift a larger generalization that united the thesis of his transcendentalism and the antithesis of his skepticism in a synthesis that reconciled both,” but argues that it does not constitute a synthesis, since it means that Emerson is abandoning his “earlier individualism and self-reliance” (124). R.A. Yoder, on the contrary, argues that it is this same “strategy” of “dramatic reversal” (and he explicitly mentions the essay on “Montaigne”)

that “enables [Emerson] to keep his early ideal of a knowable nature and yet to take full account of the unknowable that lurks beyond reason and faith” (“Emerson’s Dialectic,” *Criticism* 11 [Fall 1969]; reprinted in and cited from *Critical Essay on Ralph Waldo Emerson*, 365). He likens this paradoxical position to Albert Camus’ Existentialist one in *The Myth of Sisyphus*, a balancing of the antinomy between “two certainties”: the “appetite for the absolute and for unity and the impossibility of reducing this world to a rational and reasonable principle” (qtd in Yoder 367n.19). Such a reversal of perspectives and values—from Transcendentalist to Existentialist—would answer to what Whicher himself sees as Emerson’s “dual necessity, at once divergent and identical, to be free and invulnerable” (57). On Transcendentalism, Emerson’s in particular, as an anticipation of Existentialism, see Stack (66n.44, 82, 158).

91. *The Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake*, ed. by David V. Erdman with commentary by Harold Bloom (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1982), 690.

92. *Ibid.*, 602. The verse from Channing recalls the mystical experiences of George Fox and Swedenborg alluded to earlier in “Montaigne; Or, The Skeptic.”

93. The editor of John Milton’s *Complete Poems and Major Prose* (New York: Macmillan, 1957) Merritt Y. Hughes, for example, refers the reader of *Paradise Lost* to Canto XXXII of Dante’s *Inferno* and Part III of St. Thomas *Summa Theologica* to gloss the lines “. . . the Parching Air / Burns frore, and cold performs th’effect of Fire” from the poem (II.594-95).

94. Cyrus Augustus Bartol, “Poetry and Imagination,” *Christian Examiner* 42 (March 1847); reprinted in and cited from *Critical Essays on Ralph Waldo Emerson*, 119.

95. “Heraclitus and Protagoras, forasmuch as wine seemed bitter to the sick and pleasant to the sound . . . thence argued that all subjects had in themselves the causes of these appearances; and

that there was some bitterness in the wine which had sympathy with the sick man's taste . . . which is as much as to say that all is in all things, and, consequently, nothing in any one, for where all is, there is nothing" (*Essays* 2.12.284). The Pyrrhonians, on the other hand, "would say that they know not whether it is sweet or bitter, or neither the one nor the other, or both . . ." (*Essays* 2.12.285). The context is a discussion of Plato's doctrine. Montaigne's summary of the logical implications to the first argument no doubt owes something to Sextus Empiricus' *Outlines of Pyrrhonism*. For a modern account finding the same implication in the "scepticism" of Kant, Hegel, and Emerson, see Henry Anthanasius Brann, "Hegel and his New England Echo," *Catholic World* 41 (April 1885); reprinted in and cited from *Critical Essays on Ralph Waldo Emerson*, 226-27.

96. Paul, 219.

97. John Holloway, *The Victorian Sage: Studies in Argument* (New York: Macmillan, 1953; Norton, 1965), 1.

98. Maeterlinck, 44-45.

99. Maeterlinck's preface repeats Lowell's famous opposition of Carlyle and Emerson in *A Fable for Critics* (see *Critical Essays on Ralph Waldo Emerson* 132), which opposition no doubt owes something, in turn, to Coleridge's description in chapter 14 of the *Biographia Literaria* of his and Wordsworth's opposed but apposite projects. In his introduction to his *Selections from Ralph Waldo Emerson*, Whicher refers to the same passage in the *Biographia Literaria*, comparing Emerson to Wordsworth (xiii-xiv).

100. Santayana, 260-61.

101. Sainte-Beuve, *Causeries du lundi*; cited in translation from Donald Frame, *Montaigne: A Biography* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1965), 318. “The world is but a firework, a sublime phantasmagoria, destined to cheer and form the soul,” so Amiel summed up Emerson’s philosophy, which he assimilated to that of Berkeley and Fichte (27).
102. Walt Whitman, “Emerson’s Books (the Shadows of Them)” (1880); cited from Carpenter, 228.
103. “Emerson,” in *Modern Humanists: Sociological Studies of Carlyle, Mill, Emerson, Arnold, and Spencer with an Epilogue on Social Reconstruction* (London: Swan Sonnenschein, 1891); reprinted and quoted from *Critical Essays on Ralph Waldo Emerson*, 236-37. According to Robertson, Emerson “sought to make out to himself that his defect [of logic] was rather an advantage” (234ff.). His critics have followed suit.
104. Santayana, 260. Cf. also Yoder on a proto-Existentialist Emerson: “To acknowledge the ineffable and yet affirm that things are knowable, is a greatness beyond consistency” (365).
105. Tanner, 310.
106. George J. Stack, in his *Nietzsche and Emerson: An Elective Affinity* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 1992), traces much of this lineage (vii-xi and ff.).
107. Cf. François Laurent, *L'oeuvre romanesque de Réjean Ducharme* (Montreal: Éditions Fides, 1988), 24; and Réjean Ducharme, *L'Avalée des avalés* (Paris: Gallimard, 1966).
108. Porte, xi. On Ducharme’s relationship to the Surrealists and Nietzsche, see Laurent (25) and Renée Leduc-Park, *Réjean Ducharme, Nietzsche et Dionysos* (Quebec: Les Presses de l’Université Laval, 1982).

109. Herman Melville, *Mardi, and A Voyage Thither*, ed. with an introduction by Tyrus Hillway (New Haven: New Haven College and University Press, 1973), 460; and William B. Dillingham, *Melville's Short Fiction, 1853-1856* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1977), 222.
110. Oscar Wilde, *The Artist as Critic: Critical Writings of Oscar Wilde*, ed. with an introduction by Richard Ellman (London: W. H. Allen, 1968), 359, 349, 434; and comp. *L'Avalée* 206. Not surprisingly, the artist imaged in Wilde's writings finds both Emerson and Montaigne congenial (292, 341), while Ellman notes in his introduction Thomas Mann's observation to the effect that "many of Nietzsche's aphorisms might have been expressed by Wilde" (xxv). The same might be said of Wilde and Emerson.
111. Réjean Ducharme, *Le Nez qui voque* (Paris: Gallimard, 1967), 24.
112. *La Vida es sueño* I.i.74 (see also n.); and Carlyle, "The Hero as Poet," in *On Heroes, Hero-Worship, and the Heroic in History*, ed. by Archibald MacMechan (Boston: Athenaeum Press, 1902), 106.
113. See J.-P. Ronfard's preface to Ducharme's *HA ha!...* (Paris: Gallimard, 1982), 9.
114. Laurent, 42.
115. Réjean Ducharme, *L'Océantume* (Paris: Gallimard, 1968), 79. The protagonists of the earlier *Le Nez qui voque* also repeat the experiment, with the same result: "Nos mains devenaient rouges comme du feu et brûlaient comme du feu," as Mille Milles recalls the experience of playing barehand in the snow (29). Ducharme's characters try other experiments suggested by Emerson as a propaedeutic to the Idealistic philosophy, such as a ride in a balloon (see *W* 1.50; and comp. *l'Océantume* 28-30).
116. Blake, 36.

117. Friedrich Nietzsche, *Thus Spake Zarathustra: A Book For All and None*, transl. Thomas Common (New York: Russell & Russell, 1964), 3.

118. *Ibid.*, 396-7. Stack applies to Nietzsche Maeterlinck's verdict on Emerson: "He has given . . . an acceptable meaning to this life which no longer has its traditional horizons, and . . . he has been able to show us that it is strange enough, profound enough, and great enough to have need of no other than itself" (xi).

119. Arthur Rimbaud, *Oeuvres poétiques*, ed. with introduction Michel Décaudin (Paris: Garnier-Flammarion, 1964), 134: ". . . je me consume," writes Rimbaud (133).

120. Friedrich Nietzsche, *Ecce Homo* (1888); reprinted in and quoted from *Philosophical Writings*, ed. by Reinhold Grimm and Caroline Molina y Vedia (New York: Continuum, 1995),

222. Emerson seems to have shared a similar view of "Dante's Inferno," which he once labeled "fabulous" (*W* 10.227). Fittingly, then, according to George Henry Calvert, Emerson's reflections belong to a realm remote enough (in time and value, if not in place) from those visited by Dante the believer to make their mythic, non-Christian implications clear: "[Emerson] will not lead you, like Dante, through Purgatory and Hell, but into calm Elysian Fields of contemplation" ("Ralph Waldo Emerson," *New York Quarterly* 1 [January 1853]; reprinted in and quoted from *Critical Essays on Ralph Waldo Emerson*, 161).

121. See n.90; and Virginia A. La Charité, *Twentieth-Century French Avant-Garde Poetry, 1907-1990* (Lexington: French Forum, 1992), 10. See also my introduction to *Dictionary of Literary Biography: Modern French Poets*, vol. 258 (Detroit: Gale), scheduled to appear in March of 2002.

122. Joel Porte, in his remarks on Poe's "Berenice" in *The Romance in America: Studies in Cooper, Poe, Hawthorne, Melville, and James* (Middletown, Connecticut: Wesleyan University Press, 1969), 80. On Ducharme's relationship to Poe, see Virginia A. Harger-Grinling and A. Thoms, "Decadence and Anguish: Edgar Allan Poe's Influence on Réjean Ducharme," *Journal of the Fantastic in the Arts* 2 (1988): 5-12. On the Cartesian or "intuitive" unity of Racine's play of the same name as the working out of the "logic of contradiction" figured in David Hume's "metaphysical rack"—"every proposition *implies* the existence of its opposite; consequently every affirmation involves a contradiction"—see Wylie Sypher, *Four Stages of Renaissance Style: Transformation in Art and Literature 1400-1700* (New York: Doubleday & Co., 1956), 295, 293, 294. Finally, for an Existentialist account of the antinomy between self and world, ideal and reality, unity and absurdity, confronting Bérénice, see Camus's *Le Mythe de Sisyphe* (Paris: Gallimard, 1942), 40ff. Significantly, Camus notes of this antinomy, "Détruire un de ses termes, c'est la détruire tout entière. Il ne peut y avoir d'absurde hors d'un esprit humain" (41).

123. Walter Pater, *The Renaissance: Studies in Art and Poetry*, ed. with introduction Adam Phillips (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), 151. Allegorized in a "short day of frost and sun," much of Pater's account of the life of the mind reads like a page from Emerson (152). For example: "This at least of flame-like our life has, that it is but the concurrence, renewed from moment to moment, of forces parting sooner or later on their ways" (150). Hailed by Harold Bloom as "the father of Anglo-American Aestheticism" who "yielded up the great societal and religious hopes of the major Victorian prose-prophets" (*Figures of Capable Imagination* [New York: Seabury Press, 1976], 45), Pater goes on to celebrate, like Emerson, the moment of transition: "To burn always with this hard, gem-like

flame, to maintain this ecstasy, is success in life" (152). In his introduction, Phillips alludes to the affinities between Pater's philosophy and that of Nietzsche (xiii).

124. See Laurent, 16.

125. Pater, 151.

126. See also Nietzsche's "Night-Song" in *Zarathustra*, 125. On the relationship between Emerson's Saadi and his Montaigne, cf. *JMN* 9.38.

127. "Je suis de mon coeur le vampire . . ." (Charles Baudelaire, "Héautontimorouménos"; cited from Michel Butor, *Histoire extraordinaire: essai sur un rêve de Baudelaire* [Paris: Gallimard, 1961], 178). Butor, who is also the author of a book on Montaigne, links the genesis of the poem and its tropes to Baudelaire's translation of Poe's "Berenice" (148ff.).

128. "A reading man or a child self-entertained is the serpent with its tail in the mouth," muses Emerson in 1842. "Let Saadi sit alone" (*JMN* 8.246).

129. Alfred Glauser, *Montaigne paradoxal* (Paris: Nizet, 1972), 152. The narcissistic narrator of *Le Nez qui voque* is also a self-taster: ". . . je me mangerais," he says. "Je suis l'amoureux et l'amoureuse" (317).

130. In *L'Océantume*, the refrain to the song is changed, fittingly enough, to "Il était un petit vampire" (16). In the original, it is, significantly, the youngest and most unexperienced sailor who draws the shortest straw ("On tira z'a la courte paille pour savoir qui serait mangé / Le sort tomba sur le plus jeune qui n'avait jamais navigué").

131. Montaigne's essay "De l'ivrognerie" (Of Drunkenness) features a drunken Socrates for its sage (*Essais* 2.2.27). On the contradictory relationship of Nietzsche the "artist-philosopher" and "philosopher-artist" to Socrates, see Reinhold Grimm's introduction to the former's

*Philosophical Writings* (xiv). Nietzsche would no doubt have been at peace with Montaigne's (and Emerson's) Socrates: this one knew how to marry "le divin avec le terrestre, le raisonnable avec le déraisonnable, le sévère à l'indulgent, l'honnête au déshonnête . . . ." (*Essais* 3.13.412).

132. "Que le froid des hivers nous réchauffe les coeurs!" (Émile Nelligan, "Hiver sentimental," in *Poésies*, ed. with a preface by Louis Dantin [Montreal: Boréal, 1996], 109). Like Montaigne, Emerson, and Nietzsche, Iode and her heroic successors find the prospect of world governed by "un processus de forme impersonnelle . . . et de fond imaginaire" bittersweet: "L'amer a suri, tourné; l'amer s'est changé en hilare," she remarks characteristically (*L'Océantume* 76). For Camus, "[l]a sagesse antique rejoint l'héroïsme moderne" in this affirmation of the happy coexistence of good and evil: "On ne découvre pas l'absurde sans être tenté d'écrire quelque manuel du bonheur," he pursues (125-26). Citing the motto to "Illusions" ("The hero is not fed on sweets, / Daily his own heart he eats"), Stack links Emerson to Nietzsche and Montaigne: all affirm the impermanency of things and so espouse the "idea of seeking to overcome one's previous beliefs or ideals" (cf. 69n.101, 70n.102).

133. *Zarathustra*, 126.

134. In the innermost circle of the *Inferno*, the poet passes through "the point to which all gravities from every part are drawn" (xxxiv.184). Of Iode's idiot brother Ino in *L'Océantume*, who lives in the boiler room, the reader is told that "malgré la chaleur suffocante des lieux, ses mains devenaient de glaces et ses lèvres mauves" (38). As his sister points out, in the geography that is hers (and that of Ducharme's other characters), "Le sud, le nord, l'est et l'ouest ont leur centre dans la chaufferie . . . ." (*L'Océantume* 40).

135. Joseph Conrad, *Heart of Darkness*, ed. by Robert Kimbrough (New York: Norton, 1971), 45.

136. Réjean Ducharme, *Les Enfantômes* (Ottawa and Paris: Lacombe-Gallimard, 1976), 71; and Conrad, 71.

137. Maurice Blanchot, *Faux pas* (Paris: Gallimard, 1943). “J’aime les phrases qui boitent. Je suis sadique: je les regarde boiter et je trouve cela drôle,” says the narrator of *Le Nez qui voque Mille Mille* (226). Later he and his companion Chateaugué find similarly hilarious the spectacle of a woman limping because she has lost the heel of her shoe (*Le Nez qui voque* 251).

138. Cf. *Les Enfantômes*, 19. Concurrently, Kathy Mezei, in “The Literature of Quebec in Revolution,” recalls André Brochu’s designation of the period from 1970 to 1976 in Quebec as its “purgatory” (in *The Human Elements: Critical Essays*, ed. by David Helwig [Ottawa: Oberon, 1978], 46). She goes on to instance Ducharme’s characters as examples of this state of suspended or “arrested” adulthood (48).

139. See e.g. the conclusion to *L’Avalée des avalées*. Bénénice lies, telling her brothers-in-arms that her friend willingly shielded her from the artillery fire. Wryly, she remarks, in the words that conclude the novel, “Ils m’ont crue. Justement, ils avaient besoin d’héroïnes” (*Avalée* 379). What Ellman has said of the implications of Wilde’s work—namely, that it suggests that art is both “disengaged from actual life and incriminated with it,” “sterile and . . . infectious”—is also true of Ducharme’s (xxvi). Ellman explains, “by its creation of beauty art reproaches the world,” its very “sterility . . . an affront or a parable.” But in Ducharme as in Wilde, “this ethical or almost ethical view of art coexists . . . with its own cancelation” (xxvii). Franca Marcato-Falzone, in her *Du Mythe au roman: Une trilogie ducharmienne* (Montreal: VLB, 1992), writes in this

respect of “[une] scission–irréparable–entre réel et idéal” in Ducharme’s work: “L’enfance–saison non corrompue de l’individu–donne . . . le départ à l’aventure du héros, qui est une tentative de transposer l’immobilité de l’absolu dans le déroulement du temps. Mais ce voyage s’avère une expérience corrosive de la vie qui consume tout idéal pour ne laisser place enfin qu’à la seule réalité” (11, 12). Marcato-Falzone’s survey of the fall from myth into history in Ducharme’s oeuvre recognizes its Promethean-Satanic underpinnings and its treatment of Judeo-Christianity as a mythos (17, 119), but neglects many of the specific myths treated as basic to that oeuvre here (even though she speaks for example of a “Plongeon du Moi narrant dans sa propre conscience” [64]), as well as their ironic reference to an Existentialist tradition which since Emerson, arguably, construes that same “fortunate fall” into history and consciousness in mythic terms.

140. Laurent, 10. Ducharme’s frequent and increasing allusions to the whale fishery invite the final rapprochement of his oeuvre with that of Melville and Beaulieu.

### Chapter Three

#### Of Pilot-Fish, Sharks, And Other Things Fishy:

#### Herman Melville's Prophetic Art Read in the (Con)Text of French America—

#### A Reprise and Reappraisal

“Having considered the proceedings of a painter that serves me, I had a mind to imitate his way. He chooses the fairest place and middle of any wall . . . wherein to draw a picture, which he finishes with his utmost care and art, and the vacuity about it he fills with grotesques . . . monstrous bodies, made of various parts, without any certain figure . . . order, coherence, or proportion.

*Desinit in piscem mulier formosa superne.”*

—Michel de Montaigne, “Of Friendship”

“From time immemorial many fine things have been said and sung of the sea. And the days have been, when sailors were considered veritable mermen; and the ocean itself, as the peculiar theatre of the romantic and wonderful.”

—Herman Melville, “Etchings of a Whaling Cruise”

#### Introduction

In a letter of 21 August 1847 to her new stepmother, Elizabeth Shaw Melville tallied her impressions of Quebec city, where she had “strolled about on the ramparts” the preceding day.

“[C]old and forbidding and comfortless,” she writes of the “huge citadel bristling with cannon.”<sup>1</sup> That the visit also left an indelible imprint on the mind of her companion at the time is suggested by a passage in his *Moby-Dick* (1851): whaleman-preacher Father Mapple, having ascended to the lone captaincy of his pulpit, draws in the “ship’s” ladder, “leaving him impregnable in his little Quebec.”<sup>2</sup>

Not surprisingly, Melville’s readers in Quebec have been struck by the suggestiveness of his allusion. Most notably, Robert Major’s revisionary history *The American Dream in Nineteenth-Century Quebec* (1996) is framed by the relation of two such cross-border journeys mapping, in his view, antithetical and mutually exclusive apprehensions of his topos.<sup>3</sup> Major begins by citing the above fictional record of the Melvilles’ honeymoon trip to Lower Canada. Quebec as foil to America, resisting the tides of its modernism and materialism—so Major glosses Melville’s text, as an allegory of the religious and social conservatism of the Old Order.

This first reading of American/Quebec relations in the nineteenth century is subsequently revised by Major so as to fit the more expansive world-view professed by Ralph Waldo Emerson to a receptive Montreal audience between 19 and 24 April 1852. At a dinner held by the Saint George’s Society, for example, Emerson pictured England as “a ship anchored in the sea, at the side of Europe, & right in the heart of the modern world,” and the English, those “sailors & factors of the globe,” as masters in “the game of annexation.”<sup>4</sup> Understandably, though, given its context and direction, it is not this lecture, but rather the one Emerson read before Londoners at Exeter Hall, in 1848, which receives careful treatment by Major. Delivered in the enemy’s cultural stronghold, capital to the “merchants of the world,” the Sage of Concord’s whimsical portrayal of a French general as antetype to the modern captain of industry, leveling the Alps and

transforming “old, iron-bound, feudal France . . . into a young Ohio or New York,” is a tactical coup worthy of the general himself, according to *The American Dream in Nineteenth-Century Quebec*.<sup>5</sup> Nor does the author of *The American Dream* hesitate to bring the example home. If Emerson’s Napoleon speaks the *lingua franca* common to “Paris and London and New York,” that of “commerce . . . money and material power,” it is a language equally familiar to Major’s subject Antoine Gérin-Lajoie and particularly, to his stepfather Étienne Parent, the influential lecturer of Montreal’s elite *Institut canadien* convinced of American Manifest Destiny.<sup>6</sup> “*La carrière ouverte aux talents*” (or in Thomas Carlyle’s famous translation, “The Tools to him who can handle them”)<sup>7</sup> is the Romantic gospel which *The American Dream* sings in concert with that nineteenth-century elite, as it goes on to hymn the virtues of the “*self-made man*.”<sup>8</sup> In defense against an ever-encroaching cultural imperialism, Major enjoins Quebeckers to follow the example of a hero schooled “à l’école des Anglo-Saxons,” and so to put an end, at last, to their “habitudes collectives suicidaires.”<sup>9</sup> Its rampart and defenses thus made permeable to “l’invasion américaine” insinuating its influence into a pregnable fortress, so Major rewrites Melville’s text, Quebec follows imaginatively in the way of conquest and independence—“Trust thyself: every heart vibrates to that iron string,” as Major’s last *cri de coeur*, a call to arms, echoes from Emerson’s “Self-Reliance.”<sup>10</sup>

Abounding as it does in material for reflection, Major’s revisiting of Emerson and Melville is, upon closer inspection, highly instructive. On the one hand, if not entirely faithful to the letter of Emerson’s text, Major’s reading thereof is certainly faithful to its spirit. His lax attending to the darker implications of the imperial self portrayed in Emerson’s republic of “little Napoleons,”<sup>11</sup> for instance, bespeaks the strength of his convictions, his unwavering

fidelity to a destiny so conceived and directed: “The little needle always knows the north,” so the poem “Self-Reliance” sings of the moral sentiment such as Emerson saw it exemplified in the pulpit eloquence of the pastor of the Seamen’s Bethel in Boston Edward Taylor, “that living Methodist the Poet of the Church.”<sup>12</sup> With Emerson as his guide, Major would similarly affirm as a dead certainty “the coincidence of sharp private and political practice with public spirit and good neighborhood,” in the words he cites, with approval, from the former’s essay on “Power” in *The Conduct of Life* (1860).<sup>13</sup> And to that end, he divests Emerson’s Napoleon of his military trappings.<sup>14</sup>

On the other hand, however, as Major himself goes on to concede, such analogies—between heroes and hero-worshippers, authors and readers, fiction and life, past and present, friend and foe—cut both ways, and the omnivorous imagination (“L’état, c’est Moi,” notes a young Emerson) is apt to swallow itself.<sup>15</sup> Texts, in particular, can act as mirrors for inversion as well as reflection, at times providing an ironic commentary on their commentators. Major’s use of Melville’s allusion to Quebec as counterpoint to his revisionary history represents one such instance of an ironic parallax.<sup>16</sup> Cited in Jay Leyda’s *Melville Log* (1969) and reproduced in “The Pulpit,” Melville’s likening of Quebec to the “fortress of Ehrenbreitstein” on 10 December 1849 confirms the substance (or letter) of Major’s finding (*ML* 345; *Moby-Dick* 43). In the words of author-critic Victor-Lévy Beaulieu, “pour Melville Québec est une forteresse.”<sup>17</sup> And yet, a closer reading of “The Pulpit” in the light of Melville’s work as a whole suggests that Major’s rewriting thereof is redundant.

Modelled on the Whaleman Chapel in New Bedford (cf. *ML* 111), “The Pulpit” in fact conveys a measure of Melville’s own commitment to the cause of self-reliant, romantic

nationalism. And though considerably more ambivalent than Emerson's, that commitment runs fathoms deep in Melville's oeuvre. The allegory of "spiritual withdrawal" found in "The Pulpit," and by extension in *Moby-Dick's* republic of "Isolatoos" the *Pequod* (43, 108), is a case in point, recalling as it does Melville's starkly incongruous imaging of American Manifest Destiny in his prototype of the "ship as . . . microcosm" in *White-Jacket* (1849).<sup>18</sup> Patterned on the frigate *United States* aboard which the author sailed from 17 August 1843 to 14 October 1844, the *Neversink* is described as "a lofty, walled, and garrisoned town, like Quebec."<sup>19</sup> In spite of its bellicose nature, however, Melville, ascending to the "lofty mast-head of an eternal principle," subsequently puts the U.S. "ark of . . . liberties" in the "van of the nations": "let us remember that with ourselves . . . national selfishness is unbounded philanthropy; for we can not do a good to America, but we give alms to the world," so Melville concludes his famous jeremiad (*White-Jacket* 189). As a testament to Melville's early or incipient transcendentalism, the passage goes a long way towards explaining why many critics recognized in him a student of Emersonian "indifferentism" (*ML* 437); he, too, could assert "the coincidence of sharp private and political practice with public spirit and good neighborhood."

Thus contextualized, the passage from "The Pulpit" alluded to at the outset seems less a contrapuntal than an allegorical reading of Quebec/American relations. In fact, given the relatively recent revival of Quebec's nationalist aspirations, Melville's *rapprochement* or likening of America's errand to the erstwhile ambitions of imperialist New France, as imaged in its seventeenth-century garrison, seems rather prophetic. A further case in point: for Major as for critic-historian Gérard Tougas, the path to Quebec's destined literary and cultural independence lies across waters already familiar to the student of nineteenth-century American

literature.<sup>20</sup> Ironically, however, though plotted on just such a course or heading, the imaginative voyages of such leading authors of the “Quebec Renaissance” as Victor-Lévy Beaulieu and Hubert Aquin culminate, in the view of both Tougas and Major, in an impasse, “une fin de non recevoir.”<sup>21</sup> A survey of Melville’s oeuvre underscoring his increasing awareness of the absence of a coincidence between romance and reality, dream and destiny, private and public, provides one possible explanation for that impasse.

## 1

**“Studying to Play the Fool”:**

***The Piazza Tales* and the Culmination of Melville’s Art**

“Preaching, prosing—scud and run,  
Earnestness is far from fun.  
Bless me, Blanche, we’ll frisk to-night,  
Hearts be ours lilt and light—  
Gambol, skip, and frolic, play:  
Wise ones fool it while they may!”

—Herman Melville, “Montaigne and His Kitten”

As the preface to the “rather man-of-warish” *White-Jacket* serves to suggest the reason for the book’s central incongruity, Melville’s deepest and only true commitment, as always, was to the “interior life”—that is, to the self-reliant religion of the heart which he had adopted in

reaction to “the counting-room philosophy of Paley,” and which he later saw spelled out in seventeenth-century French libertine Charles de Saint-Evremond’s pronouncement on the Christian religion (*ML* 316, 317, 651). For Melville, that commitment meant, from the outset, engaging in polemical combat with the established or civilized forms of religion in the man-of-war world. “Who well considers the Christian religion,” Saint-Evremond had written—and Melville went on to copy on the back of the New Testament he received shortly after his return from the South Seas—“would think that God meant to keep it in the dark from our understandings, and make it turn upon the motions of our hearts” (*ML* 231). Inspired largely by Michel de Montaigne, Saint-Evremond’s reflections on religion adumbrated doubts and conflicts, not only between faith and reason, but between God and world, charity and policy, which Melville would eventually deepen.<sup>22</sup> These were already inchoate, however, in the discrepancy between romancing and fact in his “Frenchy coloured picture of Marquesan islanders” *Typee* (1846) (*ML* 206).

In his debut review for *The Literary World*, Melville seemed to lament the fact that such books as J. Ross Browne’s *Etchings of a Whaling Cruise*, “a book of unvarnished facts” such as he claimed his first novel *Typee* and its follow-up *Omoo* to be, tended “to impair the charm with which poetry & fiction have invested the sea” as the “peculiar theatre of the romantic & wonderful” (*ML* 238). His books, of course, had no such effect. Nor was the editor of *The Literary World* Evert Duyckinck fooled, as his letter of 13 March 1846 to Nathaniel Hawthorne cited above suggests: if not “over philosophical,” Melville’s first book was the product of a mind palpably unwilling to relinquish its longstanding “relish” for the “poetry of salt water” sung in “Byron’s spiritual address to the ocean” (*ML* 206, 238). The author’s nostalgic allusion, in the

same review, to “the days . . . when sailors were considered veritable mermen” suggests the extent to which his was a hybrid creation, part autobiography, part romance (*ML* 238).

In his preface to *Typee*, however, Melville had begun his plea for “the confidence of his readers” in the truth of his “yarn” by arguing that “many things which to fire-side people appear strange and romantic, to [sailors] seem as common-place as a jacket out at elbows.”<sup>23</sup> He asked for their faith in a world not bounded by the already reasoned. But at the same time, his ensuing remarks are tailored to suggest his restraint when dealing with the apparently fabulous: he sustains the impartiality of his observations of “barbarous” Typee “customs,” concerning the “origin and purposes” of which he will not speculate; only regarding the work of the Christian missionaries has he drawn “conclusions” from the “facts” he has amassed, and just as these latter admit “of no contradiction,” so his conclusions, he urges, are “unavoidable” (*Typee* 34). His, in other words, is a balanced account, and many of his best critics found at least some verisimilitude in it.

But if Melville’s indictment of the missionaries and if his logic to this point is admirably pellucid, his colorful, romanticized treatment of barbarous customs, in particular cannibalism, and the conclusions he draws (or does not draw) therefrom are just the reverse. Here both reason and faith cease to be sure guides, and the narrator’s response to the moral mysteries of existence, as shadowed forth in the Typee religion, is (as his preface implies) a profession of ignorance and suspense of judgment: “. . . I saw everything, but could comprehend nothing” (*Typee* 244).

Attacking civilization and the world in the name of what he would later hail, in *Moby-Dick*, as that “one insular Tahiti,” Melville finds it already “encompassed by all the horrors of the half known life,” the “universal cannibalism” or “eternal war” of brutish nature raging within as well

as without (*Moby-Dick* 235-6).<sup>24</sup> As a consequence of that not-at-all Rousseauistic finding of “Truth . . . centrally located . . . between two extremes” (*Typee* 277), Melville’s whole account of the cannibals seems just as contradictory as that of Montaigne in his famous essay on the same subject. For Montaigne, the meeting of the Old and the New, Edenic World, since it makes plain the corruption of the former and portends the “contagion” of the latter, finally conjures the image of a “universe” in “paralysis”: “one member will be useless, the other in vigour,” he writes when he come to reconsider the fate of his cannibals in “Des Coches” (“Of Coaches”).<sup>25</sup> By accident or design, the hero-narrator of *Typee*, oscillating mediately between “romanticism’s extremes,” embodies, in his person and narrative, the same conclusion.<sup>26</sup> Indeed, his initial encounter with the Marquesan islanders, in which he first takes the females for “a shoal of fish” and then compares them (not without confusion or ambiguity) to “so many mermaids” corrupted by “contaminating contact with the white man,” acts as metonymy for the rest of the narrative (*Typee* 48, 50). This narrative in turn (so critics have come to realize) adumbrates the pattern of ironic disillusionment Melville would go on to use to greater effect in his vasty and avowedly metaphysical romances, *Mardi* and *Moby-Dick*.<sup>27</sup>

*Mardi* (1849), readers tend to agree, is not a success. One reader, typically, complained that it was “Fiction in a double sense—beginning with water & ending with spray” (*ML* 356). Melville was hardly more content with the result, as his letter of 5 April 1849 to Duyckinck concerning the book goes to show: “Would that a man could do something & then say—It is finished.—not that one thing only, but all others—that he has reached his uttermost, & can never exceed it. But live & push—tho’ we put one leg forward ten miles—its no reason the other must

lag behind—no, *that* must again distance the other—& so we go till we get the cramp & die” (*ML* 296). By its very nature incomplete and interminable, *Mardi* only manages to defer the state of paralysis diagramed by Melville in *Typee*; in the assessment of a more recent reader, for example, the romance depicts “an eternal cosmic merry-go-round” which its hero “can never stop or escape from.”<sup>28</sup>

For all its spray, however, and miles short as it is of Melville’s aim, *Mardi* is not without direction or unity. Like its weighty successor *Moby-Dick*, and like Pierre Bayle’s equally ponderous *Dictionary Historical and Critical*, the purchase of which Melville mentions in the same letter to Duyckink,<sup>29</sup> *Mardi* explores every metaphysical topic from “Tom Brown [*sic*]” to the “Phaedon” in its encyclopedic attempt to unriddle the complex of existence (*ML* 296). Its apparent disorder and incompleteness, then, are in fact, to a large extent, the rather predictable result of the author’s delving into the “library of Pyrrhonic writings” of which Bayle’s *Dictionary* is a compendium.<sup>30</sup> Concurrently, that Melville’s two romances again elicited and indeed in some ways encouraged polemic and incomprehension is, in this perspective, likewise not especially surprising. In his *Clarification*, Bayle had already had to answer to those who saw no reason for his mentioning the “objections that the Gospel mysteries can furnish to the Pyrrhonists” or Skeptics.<sup>31</sup> By way of elucidation, he had cited Saint-Evremond, Thomas Browne and Saint Paul on the supremacy of faith and revealed religion over reason and morality. As a pious Calvinist, Bayle used such testimony in conjunction with the arguments of the Pyrrhonists polemically so as to urge “revelation as the only secure and satisfactory haven for man.”<sup>32</sup> But as Browne’s *Religio Medici* had warned beforehand, such over-confidence and “immoderate zeal after Truth” could be dangerous: “A man may be in just possession of Truth as

of a City, and yet be forced to surrender,” writes Browne; “’tis therefore far better to enjoy her with peace, then to hazzard her on a battel.”<sup>33</sup>

The “Everlasting No” with which *Mardi* culminates shows that for Melville, at least, Bayle’s solution was untenable.<sup>34</sup> In fact, that romance’s Browne-inspired, metempsychic dream-sequence serves to illustrate Melville’s radicalization of the skepticism of Saint-Evremond and Bayle. To reject reason in the name of faith (as did Bayle) was, in Melville’s view, to make “St. Paul . . . arg[ue] the doubts of Montaigne” (*Mardi* 307), a conclusion Bayle’s *Clarification* emphatically, but not very successfully, sought to deny. What Melville had come to realize with *Mardi* is that the posture of self-reliant spiritual isolatoes is an inherently precarious one, with “one foot on confidence and the other on suspicion,” as he would put it when he revisited Saint Paul’s text in *The Confidence-Man* (1857).<sup>35</sup> Indeed, as his letter to Duyckinck and the imagery and dénouement to *Mardi* all tend to suggest, the contest of reason and faith, head and heart, and finite and infinite which resulted from that reading of tradition could only result in impasse or exhaustion, for the one could never hope to outdistance the other. And so *Mardi* ends with the prospect of a pursuer “pursued . . . over an endless sea” (540).

By making the unreliability of all texts, revealed or otherwise, its subject, *Moby-Dick; Or, The Whale* (1851) picks up where Melville left off in *Mardi*. Referring to the “Extracts” found, in lieu of preface, at the head or helm of his book, the narrator begins by admonishing the reader not to “take [these] higgledy-piggledy whale statements, however authentic . . . for veritable gospel cetology” (*Moby-Dick* 2). And with reason. The first non-biblical or profane extract is from Philemon Holland’s translation of Plutarch’s *Morals*. The passage in question is faithfully duplicated in the extract from Montaigne’s *Apology* which follows, since Plutarch is

his source. But the head and tail of Plutarch's relation are clipped by Melville, purposefully, as evidenced by his similar treatment of Montaigne's, to omit any reference to the pilot-fish or hegemon (Greek for "captain or leader").<sup>36</sup> The effect is to leave the reader with no clue as to the true direction of the original. And, in fact, Melville's text, "calculated to deceive . . . the superficial skimmer of pages,"<sup>37</sup> has had its many dupes and victims, not least of which those who glibly persist in inviting its readers to harken to its "matchless, sirenian strains".<sup>38</sup> "The drama enacted between Ahab and the whale," Maurice Blanchot points out in what amounts to the first, prototypical reading of the book as a counter-allegory of textual indecisiveness, ". . . is similar to that between Ulysses and the Sirens. Each protagonist seeks to encompass everything, to be the whole world, so that their coexistence is impossible, while at the same time their one desire is for coexistence and encounter. It is precisely the secret desire to confine into a single space Ahab and the whale," adds Blanchot, ". . . that turns . . . Ahab into Melville . . ." <sup>39</sup>

Certainly, Melville can be as monomaniacal in his pursuit of "the image of the ungraspable phantom of life" as his protagonist (*Moby-Dick* 14). But Melville's end is not that of his narcissistic or solipsistic hero. Where Blanchot and those who follow in his wake would leave author and reader "lost and swallowed up" in the "dreadful gulf" or "chaos" of the "monster's . . . mouth" (*Moby-Dick* 3), Melville's intention, by contrast, is clearly not to celebrate the enchantments of art for their own sake. Playfully, to be sure, but no less so seriously, the narrator's prefatorial admonition to the "Extracts" is meant to alert the careful reader to deeper, intertextual meanings. In the *Apologie de Raimond Sebond*, Montaigne had used Plutarch's arguments regarding the presence of reason in beasts, as dramatized in the latter's dialogues between Circe, Ulysses and Gryllus, to devastating effect, subverting Sebond's

natural theology, and arguably philosophy as a whole, by evoking that vanity of vanities, *l'humaine bêtise*. The “promise of knowledge” (so Montaigne reminds his reader, instancing the Sirens in the *Odyssey* [xii. 188] and adding Saint Paul’s monition in Colossians 2:8 to Homer’s) is nothing but a lure (*Essays* 2.12.232-33). Melville goes one step further in *Moby-Dick*. By omitting all reference to the pilot-fish, an illustration, for Plutarch and Montaigne, of the “society” and “confederation” found in the natural order, Melville covertly conveys his theme, which is the inscrutability and enormity at the bottom of leviathanical Nature. And further, by thus intimating the mystery or absurdity of the Book of Nature, the author evinces his doubts and misgivings concerning the larger design of which it is a part and an exponent.

In other words, like the prefaces to *Typee* and *Mardi*, “The Extracts” are concerned with the issue of trust-policy versus charity. The whale, notes Plutarch, “follows” the hegemon “as the ship follows the helm, directing his course with confidence.”<sup>40</sup> In his preface to the 1870 Harvard edition of the *Morals*, which made ample use of Holland’s translation, Emerson would go on to praise the author’s apprehension of the “moral sentiment,” on which sentiment, as on a pilot-fish, the moralist in question based “the doctrine of the Divine Providence.”<sup>41</sup> And yet, for his part (so his emending of Plutarch and Montaigne and the marginalia found in his editions of Emerson’s *Essays* and *The Conduct of Life* forcefully argue) Melville could never abide or rest in the latter’s belief that the “ambition” of man “is exactly proportioned to his powers” or that “the first lesson of history is *the good of evil*” (*ML* 648, 715). Where Bayle’s solution to the moral dilemma of existence must have seemed naive, even unreasonable to Melville, Emerson’s Transcendental optics, his “intensely intellectual” angle of vision in “The Poet” for example, clearly amounted, in his view, to a “blindness . . . a defect in the region of the heart” (*ML* 649).

For the heart also rebelled against a faith too cold and cerebral; thus in his marginalia, in *Pierre, or the Ambiguities* (1852), and in the posthumously published *Billy Budd*, Melville, taking his cue from Bayle,<sup>42</sup> opposed the mystery of the Gospel epitomized in the “Sermon on the Mount” to Emerson’s facile optimism (*ML* 648).

In contrast with Emerson, then, Melville could “neither believe, nor be comfortable in his unbelief, and . . . [was] too honest and courageous not to try to do one or the other,” as Hawthorne famously summed up his friend’s life-long quarrel with himself in 1856 (*ML* 529). Honesty had led Melville to affirm his doubts, but courage, as Hawthorne recognized, impelled him on his quests to quell them, again and again. As Melville was led to joke later in life, instancing “a little rhyme of his about a Kitten” (“Montaigne & His Kitten”), the writer so engaged, at once “serious” and “frolicsome,” was open to the suspicion “of being a two-faced old fellow and not to be trusted” (*ML* 793-4). Without faith, or at least the suspension of disbelief, the quest for a moral order, so integral a part of any romance, was impossible. Brought to revolve that same metaphysical conundrum, Emerson had ciphered it by way of a “kitten chasing . . . her own tail,” like a “reader” in search of the meaning of “his book”: “A subject and an object,—it takes so much to make the galvanic circle complete.”<sup>43</sup> Predictably enough, however, where Emerson’s whimsical optimism sustained him even in the inherent absurdity of such a chase, Melville’s deep pessimism consistently made his fictional pursuits take an ironic turn and end in an imaginative impasse—that of “a god-like mind without a God” (to use the phrase he coined to gloss Cervantes’ allegory in *Don Quixote de la Mancha* around the same time as Hawthorne made his famous observation). Just as, in the simile Melville cites from Cervantes, “a knight-errant without a mistress is like a tree without leaves, a building without

cement, a shadow without a body . . .’ or as Confucius said ‘a dog without a master’” (ML 508)—so, too, such a mind, all Melville’s fiction after *Moby-Dick* argues, is without fruit, substance, coherence, object, or direction, and so is left either to work out the tyranny of its own will or to abide, increasingly still, at a dead stand.

Published late in Melville’s career, the much-neglected and in many ways retrospective *Piazza Tales* (1856) may be read as a series of variations on the above “parables” (ML 508). Appropriately enough, then, their common theme is introduced in “The Piazza,” the frame-tale written especially for that purpose, by way of “Don Quixote, that sagest sage that ever lived.”<sup>44</sup> The wisdom of Don Quixote is that of traditional romance, upon which wisdom Melville’s satiric tales provide an ironic commentary by confirming the literal truth of the Don’s statement to the effect that “the enchanted never eat” (*Piazza* 6).

“The Piazza” itself is a case in point. Drawn from Shakespeare’s *Cymbeline*, its epigraph (“With fairest flowers, / Whilst summer lasts, and I live here, Fidele—”) alludes to the name that the eponymous heroine of that play adopts as part of her disguise, a name that turns out, nevertheless, to be “the true emblem of her character,” just as her feigned death (which the rest of the lines here truncated refer to) is revealed to be part of that fortunate or providential design which, according to Theodore Spencer, underlies all of Shakespeare’s late “romances”: “the appearance may be evil but the reality is good.”<sup>45</sup> As a key actor in the play resonantly expresses his faith in that design, “Fortune brings in some boats that are not steer’d” (*Cymbeline* IV.iii.46). In *Cymbeline*, only those are frustrated who, like the courtier Cloten on his knave’s errand, confuse interior with exterior (III.v.130-45). By contrast, in “The Piazza,” exterior and interior

(or “in-doors” and “out-doors”) are, as the narrator begins by pointing out, indistinguishable (*Piazza* 1). The picturesque landscape itself, as a later sketch suggests, is little more than a “meditative image” of the narrator-author (*Piazza* 142). As such, no greater compliment could be paid to Melville’s “fine art of concealment,”<sup>46</sup> the necessary adjunct to the “great Art of Telling the Truth” in a “world of lies” (“Mosses” 542), than that of contemporary reviewers of *The Piazza Tales*. Taking their cue from this first of many genial narrators and protagonists, these commonly swallowed Melville’s *Tales*, hook, line and sinker, for a charming “summer book,” a fit “companion for an afternoon lounge” or “Summer tour.” The *Tales*, wrote one hapless reviewer, “would each form the feast of a long summer’s noon.”<sup>47</sup> On the contrary, however, far from revealing, as Richard Harter Fogle has more recently argued in his study *Melville’s Shorter Tales* (1960), “a sustaining core of intense life, like a fine picture in a fantastically decorative frame,” the introductory sketch’s “dangerously overwrought,”<sup>48</sup> manneristic ornateness is, typically, pure baroque artifice, an antic mask concealing inanity.

The sheer profusion of literary allusions in “The Piazza” underscores this artifice. In his depiction of the setting, for example, the author deliberately recalls the atmosphere of moral confusion or witches’ “cauldron” at the outset of *Macbeth* (*Piazza* 4). Like the “enchanted” valley of *Typee*, which the narrator’s likening of Marianna to a “Tahiti girl,” his mention of the “relics of my tropic sea-going,” and the general topography all call to mind, this “paradise of painters” conceals lurking poison; but as the mention of the “orchard” in *Hamlet* additionally serves to suggest, it is poison of a far more subtle, insidious kind, such as one might find daubing a picture or book in a revenge play (*Piazza* 8, 1, 2). Indeed where Melville in his first book had left the symbolic implications of his “fairy tale” to be unravelled by the reader (*Typee* 91), here,

at the height of his powers, he deliberately makes plain the fantastic or romantic status of his story; the “charmed ring” which the narrator seeks out is only an illusion of perspective, a vanishing-point, such as one would expect to see in a “picture” framed by a Renaissance-style piazza (*Piazza* 1). “Everything disillusions . . . ,” concedes Fogle.<sup>49</sup>

A circumspective look at Melville’s work before and after *The Piazza Tales* suggests an explanation. Whereas Melville had once praised the tragedian Shakespeare for his “sane madness” and “great Montaignism” (“Mosses” 542; *ML* 291), and had in fact sought to emulate these qualities in *Moby-Dick*, his treatment of the romance or tragi-comedy *Cymbeline* in “The Piazza” is clearly ironic, as some attention to his near contemporary novelistic send-off *The Confidence-Man: His Masquerade* (1857) shows. For the Fidèle (or faithful one) which is the elusive subject of “The Piazza” is also, of course, the name of Melville’s ship of fools therein. Melville’s text, as always, is the same—1 Corinthians 13. At the outset of his story, the author emphasizes the appeal to charity writ in that text by having a deaf mute scrawl, then erase, Paul’s variations on the theme on an otherwise blank slate, the “word charity” remaining “throughout uneffaced” (*Confidence-Man* 9).<sup>50</sup> Like the “study of stage illusion” in “The Piazza,”<sup>51</sup> the “comedy of action” or masquerade enacted on the not-so-“secure Malakoff of confidence” in *The Confidence-Man* has left more than one reader nonplussed as to what, if anything, “may follow” from it (81, 298).<sup>52</sup> In the perspective of Melville’s oeuvre, however, the ambiguous conclusion to *The Confidence-Man* makes perfect sense. It is the result of the ambiguity Melville reads in his original, Saint Paul, in his role as advocate for “the doubts of Montaigne.” By asserting that “we see as through a glass or veil darkly, mere riddles,” and only after death “face to face,” Paul would seem to be professing skepticism, not faith (1 Cor 13:12).

What the narrator of “The Piazza” meets in his *Fidèle Marianna*—“the personified spirit of romance,” according to Joel Porte—<sup>53</sup> is a type of the illusoriness evoked in 1 Corinthians 13: “to you, shadows are as things, though you speak of them as of phantoms,” says the narrator, referring to the shadowy figures flitting at her “fairy window” (*Piazza* 11, 10). These shadows, which “dusk her work” (and by extension, Melville’s) are disembodied, “lifeless.” “You watch the cloud,” says Marianna, but the narrator replies in the negative: “No, a shadow; a cloud’s, no doubt—though that I cannot see.” The narrator goes on to speculate that the last of these, in the shape of a “shaggy dog,” is cast by a rock outside, to which Marianna rejoins: “You see his head, his face?” (*Piazza* 11). She is speaking, of course, of the shadow, not the proverbial Rock (Ps. 18:2), but her confusion mirrors that of the narrator, as we see in retrospect, through the “mirage haze” summoned by her relation: just as the knight-errant must have a mistress, so, too, must she have her “King Charming”—or as the narrator, dropping the allegory, paraphrases “one Edmund Spenser . . . to reach fairy-land, it must be voyaged to . . . with faith” (*Piazza* 9, 6). Thus Marianna, who has not made the voyage to fairy-land, acts as a foil to the narrator-protagonist in his quixotic “quest” or “pilgrim’s progress” in reverse, a version in small of the voyage of the *Fidèle* in *The Confidence-Man*.<sup>54</sup> In search of the spirit of romance, the narrator, an avid reader of the *Midsummer Night’s Dream*, finds that it has as little substance as a dream, and so must abdicate, in the end, his claim to knighthood and authority.

The narrator of “The Piazza” first glimpses his goal one “wizard afternoon . . . late in autumn—a mad poet’s afternoon” (*Piazza* 4). Then one May day, he sees it again, this time at the “further end” of a rainbow: “Fairies there, thought I; remembering that rainbows bring out the blooms, and that, if one can but get to the rainbow’s end, his fortune is made in a bag of gold.”

Thus “viewed through the rainbow’s medium,” it appears like “some sort of glen, or grotto . . . it glowed like the Potosi mine” (*Piazza* 5). But though this initial “spot of radiance,” painted by the “indirect reflection” of the sun, grows steadily more “cheery” in the narrator’s mind (*Piazza* 4, 5), the romance of “Sweet Summer,” as Melville’s Pierre had already found out, does not last.<sup>55</sup> The September “day” which, a year or so later, seems so “sweet” to “the farmer’s banded children,” as if it harkened an “Indian summer,” to their more experienced fathers is only a “weather breeder,” recalling the narrator’s initial reference to the “ominous” air, with its deceptively “witching conditions of light and shadow,” under which he first, and alone, spotted his fairy view (*Piazza* 6, 4). Students of Melville’s writing will be aware that this spot of radiance and the fortune in a bag of gold it conjures for the narrator is only a “Quito” glow, like that emitted by the Ecuadorian doubloon in *Moby-Dick* (*Piazza* 2). In fact, just as in the “very bulb” or bud of his “Chinese creeper” (so the narrator is brought to muse) no doubt lay the “germs” of the “cankorous worms” now “feeding upon [the] blossoms” and “so shar[ing] their blessed hue, as to make it unblessed evermore” (*Piazza* 6), so the seeds of disillusionment are everywhere apparent at the outset of “The Piazza.”<sup>56</sup>

Reckless of these omens and the scoffing of his neighbor Dives, the convalescent narrator remains intent on chasing whatever fortune is blooming at the end of his rainbow. But though the evilly enchanted Marianna fits, in many ways, the role of a maiden in distress, he is no paladin. For her “wakeful weariness,” which is the image of his own, he has no corresponding “cure” or “charm.” In the end, he can only leave her with her illusions by making a “profession of ignorance” (“I, too, know nothing . . .,” he says [*Piazza* 12]) which Fogle insightfully likens to Montaigne’s “*Que sais-je?*”<sup>57</sup>

The “fortune” that the narrator of “The Piazza” finds at the end of his rainbow, in other words, is akin to the “Bag of Doubloons” to which Teufelsdröckh’s Clothes-Philosophy is compared in Thomas Carlyle’s *Sartor Resartus*: it is the emblem of his divided “Soul,” a soul divided between conflicting convictions, past and present (*Sartor* 21). In an age of “failing faith,” shadows may provide some comfort, as Marianna herself attests (*Piazza* 2). But if so, it is cold comfort, like “the Somnambulism of uneasy Sleepers” which Carlyle envisioned when he stripped his readers of illusions and certainties in his exposition of the Idealistic philosophy: “in that strange Dream . . . ,” writes Carlyle, “we clutch at shadows as if they were substances; and sleep deepest while fancying ourselves most awake!” “This Dreaming, this Somnambulism” which “we on Earth call life” is imaged in Melville’s tale in the “drowsy cattle” which the narrator meets on his way, as well as in Marianna herself: “I think I do but dream,” she says (*Sartor* 43; *Piazza* 6, 10).<sup>58</sup> The personified spirit of romance is also “weariness personified.”<sup>59</sup> It is in this sense that the “voyage” of the narrator is a “true” one, in that it expresses the illusory aspect of the traditional romance, where maiden hope and knightly valor are ultimately rewarded and vindicated by Fortune (*Piazza* 4).<sup>60</sup> Melville’s story implies a revising of *Cymbeline*’s optimism: in “weathering Cape Horn” (as the sailor-narrator must know and as Melville’s response to another specimen of Emersonian indifferentism additionally serves to suggest) it is best not to rely overmuch on Fate as your captain or steersman (*Piazza* 3).<sup>61</sup> In this case, the narrator returns safely home, but he does so a sadder, wiser man. Night, like winter, he knows now, is sure to come, and henceforth “every night, when the curtain falls, truth comes in with the darkness.” Charged with dramatic irony, the narrator’s last words to Marianna—“well could [I] wish that I were that happy one of the happy house you dream you

see”—are true enough in their expression of pathos, as only the reader and the narrator, “haunted by Marianna’s face, and many as real a story,” can know (*Piazza* 12).

Many as real a story, of course, is what Melville follows up with in *The Piazza Tales*, beginning with “Bartleby, The Scrivener: A Story of Wall-Street.” Though “Bartleby” has, like the “view” from the windows of its narrator’s Wall-Street office, struck many as “deficient in what landscape painters call ‘life’” (*Piazza* 14),<sup>62</sup> the scrivener’s story (as Melville himself agreed with his publishers) is the logical follow-up to “The Piazza,” pretty plainly extending as it does the allegory from Cervantes he introduced therein (see *ML* 512). The victim of unanswered pleas for charity, Bartleby (whose name is an anagram for “Bible” and “Art”) is an apt symbol for Melville’s quarrel with God. Fed on the dead letter of the law (initially he “lives . . . on ginger-nuts,” in which, for the law student so dubbed, “the whole noble science of the law was contained”), and predictably finding little sustenance therein, Bartleby finally lives “without dining” and so dies by starvation, proof that “the enchanted never eat” (*Piazza* 23, 18, 45, 6).

Like the Roman sculptures Melville began lecturing on in 1857, “the works of visionaries and dreamers,” Bartleby is also a personification of the “ideal,” but the code of charity and the spirit of Christianity which might breathe life into him are even more out of place in the modern Wall-Street world than the “code of Justinian” and the “Roman spirit” to which the narrator is still at least partly tributary, as evidenced by the plaster-of-paris bust of Cicero in his office (*Piazza* 408). Fittingly, then, Bartleby is eventually transformed into stone, in the image of the law itself. “Bartleby” thus expresses the melancholy truth which Melville’s lecture on “Statues in Rome,” for all its glorification of ancient grandeur, cannot entirely conceal. The author’s true subject in that lecture, and by extension in “Bartleby,” is summed up by a

contemporary reviewer: “The expression of doubt, and dark groping of human speculation . . . when the old mythology was passing away, and men’s minds had not yet reposed in the new faith . . .” (*ML* 590). Melville appropriately pictures Bartleby as “a sort of innocent and transformed Marius brooding among the ruins of Carthage” and as “the last column of some ruined temple” (*Piazza* 28, 33). In “Statues in Rome,” the subject of the fragility and evanescence of all codes is most apparent in Melville’s treatment of the statue of Demosthenes, “the thunderer of Athens.” His “strong arm” and “muscular form” aside, Demosthenes “resembles a modern advocate, face thin and haggard and his body lean” (*Piazza* 400). Like the “pure marble” of the Roman sculptors, Bartleby eventually “puts on incorruption” and dons that “tranquil, subdued air such as men have when under the influence of no passion” (*Piazza* 408). But these same “mute marbles,” though they may endure when “states and constitutions have perished,” are as lifeless as the shadows which give comfort to Marianna; indeed, even Demosthenes’ renown has not withstood the incursions of time: “The arm that had gesticulated and swayed with its movement the souls of the Athenians has become small and shrunken” (*Piazza* 408-9, 400). Similarly, though Melville’s art arguably attains a kind of formal perfection in the finely chiseled “Bartleby,” his underlying theme is his old one, *Vanitas vanitatum* (Eccles. 1:2), or the “fumes of vanity” (*Piazza* 34).

“Bartleby” itself, according to William B. Dillingham’s study of *Melville’s Short Fiction, 1853-1856* (1977), is a “vanity”—that is, “a tale without foundation, a kind of lie,” in which the narrator asks the reader to share in his “unconscious duplicity.”<sup>63</sup> Though too literal-minded to realize the moral or spiritual implications of his acts, the genial narrator is (as he repeatedly stresses with respect to Bartleby and others) a man of “confidence,” who trafficks as much in

faith as in “bonds . . . mortgages and title deeds” (*Piazza* 26, 33, 14). His attitude towards the scrivener, in particular, is conditioned by his “assumptions” about the “bond of common humanity” and “an all-wise Providence” (*Piazza* 28, 37). Even as he is attempting to dispose of Bartleby, for example, he assures him that if “he found himself in any time in want of aid, a letter from him would be sure of a reply.” And yet, he himself has just discovered in Bartleby “the victim of innate and incurable disorder,” one of those walking “dead men” destined, like the “letters” in the “Dead Letter Office” where he is rumored to have worked, for “the flames” or (more logically still, since the story argues the passing of the myth of a theological order and justice) for a sort of moral and spiritual limbo, a sleep with “kings and counsellors” (*Piazza* 29, 45; cf. Jb 3:14). The narrator’s moral obtuseness culminates in his visit to Bartleby in the Tombs, where the latter is imprisoned, ironically, for vagrancy. The narrator arranges for Bartleby’s bodily sustenance with the grub-man, but when this latter mistakes the scrivener, and by association the narrator, for “a gentleman forger,” the narrator fails to see how fitting that description is (*Piazza* 44). With “his cadaverously gentlemanly *nonchalance*,” the figure of the scrivener with mournful countenance “keeping bachelor’s hall” in the narrator’s law office looks forward to that other “impostor” hidalgo pictured in “Benito Cereno” (*Piazza* 27, 64). Both, from the standpoint of knight-errantry, are indeed “impostors,” because, having realized the futility of the romantic quest, they no longer err, as their more quixotic counterparts do, but rather prefer to remain still, mutely contemplating the dead-wall revery that is a life without purpose or destination.

Concurrently, and by the same token, “Benito Cereno” also seems, from the perspective of high tragedy, with its concern for portraying an “ideal order,” deficient. As Fogle reads it, for

example, the tale unfolds an allegory of the decadence and erosion of the “old order” of which the *San Dominick*, like the *Neversink*, is a “microcosm.”<sup>64</sup> Read in the context of Melville’s evolution as a writer and reader, however, the masterfully crafted “Benito Cereno” shows the distance traveled by the author since *White-Jacket*. The latter ends with a vote of confidence in “Our Lord High Admiral”: it is true that we sail under “sealed orders,” our purpose and “last destination” hidden, with “the Articles of War” as “our domineering code,” but we should never, for all that, the author of *White-Jacket* argued, “train our murderous guns inboard” (504). In *Moby-Dick*, Melville had imaged precisely such intestine or internecine warfare in the omnivoraciousness of sharks feasting, “not only at each other’s disembowelments, but . . . their own; till those entrails seemed swallowed over and over again by the same mouth”; and he had reflected, through the ‘savage’ Queequeg, on what kind of God might have made such a creature (*Moby-Dick* 257).<sup>65</sup> “The Shark Massacre” has its counterpart in “Benito Cereno,” which describes (in Dillingham’s apt simile) “a microcosm where freedom and slavery revolve like a dog chasing its tail.”<sup>66</sup> Captain Delano likens dogs to sharks in speaking, more aptly than he thinks, of the fate of Benito Cereno’s friend, the slaver Don Alexandro (*Piazza* 61). These former in turn are associated by Delano with the blacks, and subsequently, by the author, with the whites, so that Melville’s tale, as critics have come to see, easily takes on the dimensions of a metaphysical drama—that of “a dog without a master,” or “a god-like mind without a God” (*Piazza* 84, 102; *ML* 508).<sup>67</sup>

Concurrently with this evolution of Melville’s artistic vision, the type of tragedy which now preoccupied him is signalled by his growing interest in Jacobean drama, which he read, increasingly, in the Mermaid series. It is an interest which dates back as far, at least, as the

review of "Hawthorne and His Mosses," wherein the author had made a plea for "those neglected old authors" (Marlowe, Webster, Ford, Beaumont, and Jonson) who shared the stage with Shakespeare (550). That the Jacobean quest for moral order and pessimism appealed to Melville as he sought to elaborate a "comedy of thought" similarly concerned with the springs of human action is understandable (*Confidence-Man* 87). At its most pessimistic, in John Webster's *The White Devil*, for example, Jacobean tragedy resumed something of the "Hamletism" or "Montaignism" he himself would come to explore in *Pierre* (164).<sup>68</sup> Like Montaigne, Webster paints in shades of gray.<sup>69</sup> The resulting moral confusion is symbolized by the dramatist through a set of apparent paradoxes: "Sweet-meats which rot the eater . . . Poison'd perfumes . . . Shipwrecks in calmest weather" (*White Devil* III.ii.80-82).<sup>70</sup> As one critic has remarked, "Webster's world is a mist without order or design, and with no certainty of a divine providence directing the affairs of men." It is a world governed instead by the equilibrium of "polar opposites": "Evil wears always the mask of good, and good disguises itself as evil, so that at last the two are indistinguishable."<sup>71</sup> For instance, a key actor in *The White Devil*, Francesco de Medici, disguises himself as a Moor to effect his revenge, which is plotted by none other than the Cardinal or white devil himself.

Melville's theme in "Benito Cereno," according to Dillingham, is also "similitude," his aim, similarly, "to fuse apparent opposites."<sup>72</sup> That theme and purpose are emblemized by the "shield-like stern-piece" of the *San Dominick*: "uppermost and central" amongst the "mythological or symbolical devices" that are "medallioned about" the "arms of Castile and Leon" is "a dark satyr in a mask, holding his foot on the prostrate neck of a writhing figure, likewise masked" (*Piazza* 49). These are the postures later assumed by Captain Delano and

Babo during the critical 'rescue' scene. At this point, according to the narrator, who abides closely to Delano's point-of-view, the "mask" is finally "torn away," and the "scales dropped from his eyes" (*Piazza* 99). This metaphorical unmasking very nearly coincides, however, with the actual unveiling of the *San Dominick's* portentous "figure-head," in the shape of "a human skeleton," shedding a spectral light on the now equally ominous legend below—"Seguid vuestro jefe" ("follow your leader") (*Piazza* 99, 49). Thus just as Captain Delano's "flash of revelation" retrospectively illuminates, in his mind, "every enigmatic event of the day," the figure-head, a grim *memento mori*, recalls, in the reader's, Delano's many "antic conceits" in relation to these (*Piazza* 99, 85). Looking aft, in fact, we see only an anticipation of what comes later: "Shadows present, foreshadowing deeper shadows to come" (*Piazza* 46).

The stern-piece of the *San Dominick*, most notably, symbolically adumbrates the same message as the figure-head, though that message is, once again, and fittingly, veiled. Like the "impregnable armor" of the tortoises in "The Encantadas," similarly described as "medallioned and orbed like shields" or "walled towns," the stern-piece is a reminder of death (*Piazza* 131). The masked satyr and the masked victim whose postures Delano and Babo later mimick appear chief above the heraldic or armorial Castile and Leon on the rearward escutcheon, as if, like the remains of Don Alexandro, by way of "comment" (*Piazza* 99). That the "harlequin ensign" is later draped over Don Benito as Babo shaves him, for example, suggests their respective roles in the story (*Piazza* 87). From the beginning, Captain Delano has taken Don Benito, his double, for some "invalid courtier," a "true hidalgo" or "bachelor-squire," and Babo for his faithful servant, the two forming "a spectacle of fidelity on the one hand and confidence on the other" (*Piazza* 58, 65, 82, 57). Maugre his doubts, this faith is reinforced by his "genially" taking to the blacks

“as other men to Newfoundland dogs”; like the sight of his boat the *Rover*, also likened to a “Newfoundland dog,” this attitude evokes “a thousand trustful associations” and so is conducive to “lightsome confidence” (*Piazza* 84, 77). But though the good-natured Captain Delano may be “incapable of satire or irony,” the author of “Benito Cereno” clearly is (*Piazza* 63). From the outset, Delano has been prey to “the effect of enchantment” surrounding the *San Dominick*. Just come from the *Bachelor’s Delight*, he approaches the ship “in distress” aboard the *Rover* as a knight-errant would approach a mistress imprisoned in some enchanted castle, to which, indeed, the narrator repeatedly compares the *San Dominick* (*Piazza* 47). In attempting to free Don Cereno from the spell of his gloom, however, the quixotic Delano only becomes enchanted in his turn: “Trying to break the charm, he was but becharmed anew. Though upon the wide sea, he seemed in some far inland country; prisoner in some deserted chateau, left to stare at empty grounds, and peer out at vague roads, where never wagon or wayfarer passed” (*Piazza* 74).

The scene in question is reminiscent of the “inland voyage to fairy-land” in “The Piazza” (*Piazza* 4).<sup>73</sup> Delano stands on the “abandoned Venetian-looking” starboard quarter-gallery, looking, “as from a stage-box,” around and below (*Piazza* 73, 78). His attention is drawn to “the row of small, round dead-lights, all closed like coppered eyes of the coffined, and the state-cabin door . . . calked fast like a sarcophagus lid” (74). Emblems of the protagonist’s unacknowledged metaphysical blindness, these “antic conceits” or “vagaries” (as he later calls them) beget in him, characteristically, “a dreamy inquietude, like that of one who alone on the prairie feels unrest from the repose of the noon.” The vista which confronts him is described, fittingly, in almost heraldic terms: “the ribbon grass, trailing along the ship’s water-line, straight as a border of green box . . . parterres of sea-weed, broad ovals and crescents . . . crossing the

terraces of swells, and sweeping round as if leading to the grottoes below." Uppermost is "the balustrade by his arm, which, partly stained with pitch and partly embossed with moss, seemed the charred ruin of some summer-house in a grand garden long running to waste" (*Piazza* 74). As in "The Piazza," the picturesque details and Delano's response to them recall the "boundless Phantasmagoria and Dream-grotto" and the "sleep of uneasy Sleepers" of Carlyle's "World out of Clothes" (*Sartor* 43, 42). And just as the "scenery" seen from the narrator's "box-royal" in the former story appears to be "magical—the illusion so complete," but turns out to be only very nearly so, so, too, the "enchantments" here are "a little disenchanting" by the sight of the "corroded main-chains" which evoke "the ship's present business" (*Piazza* 74). Like the balustrade itself, which crumbles in the next moment as Delano looks for the trusty boat that is no where in view, the lines the Captain has confidently drawn—between master and servant, prisoner and jailer, follower and followed, dream and reality, above and below—are here erased, and he very nearly topples into the indifferent sea.

Again, Melville's complex imagery suggests its own interpretation or commentary. Beneath the masks donned by the antagonists of "Benito Cereno," as they wrestle to be uppermost, is the selfsame face. Even satyrs, after all, though beastly below, wear the mask of a human face. The harlequin ensign donned by Don Cereno symbolizes the dual but unitary nature Melville wishes to depict. Opposite the "closed castle in a blood red field diagonal" on the Spanish ensign is a "lion rampant in a white" (*Piazza* 85). Delano has already likened the female slaves to "leopardesses" (*Piazza* 73). But trusting in "the benign aspect of nature" as he does, he sees only half of the picture, that clothed in white. The bloody revolt and the equally bloody recapture of the fortress-like *San Dominick* represent the other half of the picture.

“Naked nature” is not all “pure tenderness and love” as he thinks: “loving as doves,” the “uncivilized creatures” that he admires for their lack of sophistication are yet “ready to die for their infants or fight for them,” as the sequel shows (*Piazza* 73). The image of the dog-like, death-doing Rover following the *San Dominick’s* ghastly figure-head, to the mate’s ambiguously vengeful cry of “Follow your leader!”, rounds out the story’s compound ironies to zero, a cypher for all-encompassing nothingness and mystery (*Piazza* 102).<sup>74</sup> At the center of these revolutions stands the mulatto slave and “devil” with a “regular European face” Francesco, a symbol, like the Chinese creeper in “The Piazza,” of moral confusion and decay (*Piazza* 89).

All along “Benito Cereno,” and indeed to the very end, Captain Delano rests more or less secure in his faith that there are masters and servants, since, to his mind, to gainsay that order would be, “by implication,” to entertain “an almost atheist doubt of the ever-watchful Providence above” (*Piazza* 97). But through the Iago-like Babo’s words and actions Melville “craftily . . . insinuates . . . the sane madness of vital truth” (“Hawthorne and His Mosses” 541-42). Delano’s “confidence” in the spectacle afforded by Babo’s “fidelity,” as of “a shepherd’s dog,” turns out to be, like the comfort Marianna draws from the periodic appearance of Tray, a “shaggy shadow . . . not unlike a large, black Newfoundland dog,” of an illusory nature (*Piazza* 91, 51, 11). For that this dog has no master is what the story of the ill-named, ill-fated Benito Cereno demonstrates. Substituting Cereno’s friend Don Alexandro’s skeleton for the “ship’s proper figure-head, the image of Christopher Colon,” and pointing meaningfully to its “whiteness,” Babo instructs him, according to the deposition, to “Keep faith with the blacks . . . or you shall in spirit, as now in body, follow your leader” (*Piazza* 107). To Captain Delano, Cereno already appears “like one flayed alive,” an impression reinforced by his earlier conceit

(as he watches Babo barbering his supposed superior, but actually “evinced the hand of a master”) that “the negro seemed a Nubian sculptor finishing off a white statue-head” (*Piazza* 93, 87). In this respect as in others, Babo is less a realistic character than a caricature, a grotesque personification or ‘antike’ type of death, the ultimate barber and only true master.<sup>75</sup> He appears originally to Delano dressed as a kind of harlequin or “begging friar of St. Francis,” completing and complementing his first impression of the ship and its cargo as a “white-washed monastery” and a group of “Black Friars” respectively (*Piazza* 57, 48). The ringleader of the carefully concealed insurrectional plot, Melville’s anti-Fidèle also serves to direct the reader’s attention to the story’s hidden allegorical and spiritual meaning; as the allusion to “Ezekiel’s Valley of Dry Bones” implies, the *San Dominick* itself is a ship of death, and the action unfolding thereon, a *danse macabre* in which all the characters come to (im)personate death-in-life (*Piazza* 48).

The question of impersonation is one which Melville underscores, fittingly, by indirection. Initially, albeit only momentarily, Delano mistakenly suspects the captain of the *San Dominick* himself of being some “impostor” who has assumed “a sort of roving cadetship” in the “house” of Cereno (*Piazza* 64). But Don Benito proves truly chivalric in the end; in his deposition and in the interview with Captain Delano which follows, he is “courteous . . . to the point of religion,” maintaining that it was not he but Providence which saved Delano’s life: “God charmed your life, but you saved mine.” And it does, indeed, seem as though the Captain has “had the Prince of Heaven’s safe conduct through all ambuscades” (*Piazza* 115). Everything happens as if to confirm the sagacity of the gloss to the Golden Rule provided by the narrator of “Bartleby”: “Yes, this it was that saved me. Aside from higher considerations, charity often operates as a vastly wise and prudent principle—a great safeguard to its possessor” (*Piazza* 36).

And yet, Don Benito's "courteous" remark, however comforting to Delano, sets up a troubling dichotomy: the one's providence or salvation seems the other's perdition. For Cereno, too, is "charmed." Earlier he appears to Delano "like some somnambulist" or "as one in a dream" (*Piazza* 55). Not all "dreams," though, are good ones, as the barber's chair, a "grotesque, middle-age engine of torment," and the rest of Don Benito's quarters, "a sort of dormitory . . . sail-loft, chapel, armory, and private closet all together," serve to remind Delano (*Piazza* 83). Still haunted by the "shadow" of Babo, and comforted by neither prayer nor pillow, Don Benito retires to the monastery on the aptly named Mount Agonia, in full view of the Plaza where Babo's head, "that hive of subtlety," lies impaled; there, "three months after being dismissed by the court, Benito Cereno, borne on the bier, did, indeed, follow his leader" (*Piazza* 117). The conclusion to the tale amounts to a vote of non-confidence in "Our Lord Admiral" on the part of the author. In the *theatrum mundi* pictured in "Benito Cereno," life and hope are dreams merely, death the only certainty and reality.

The "Spanish tragedy"<sup>76</sup> enacted on the evilly enchanted *San Dominick* has its homiletic counterpart in the series of sketches grouped in Melville's "The Encantadas, Or Enchanted Isles." One long periphrasis on the evanescence and vanity of things earthly, the sketches read like a "Calvinistic text" pronounced before a "congregation of believers in hell."<sup>77</sup> Runaways, castaways, convicts and solitaries, the inhabitants of the Encantadas have, in lieu of a leader or deity, only the "strangely self-condemned" specter-tortoise into which, legend has it, "all wicked sea-officers . . . commodores and captains, are at death (and in some cases, before death) transformed" (*Piazza* 129, 128, 132). As their collective title implies, the sketches both elaborate and focus Melville's theme in *The Piazza Tales*—namely, that the "enchanted never

eat.” Initially, the unity of the sketches themselves was questioned, particularly by critics who saw in sketch sixth, on “Barrington Isle and the Buccaneers,” hints of the idyllic Golden Age portrayed in Shakespeare’s romantic comedies and tragi-comedies. Melville himself encourages that view by describing the isle in question as “a harbor of safety, and a bower of ease,” a spot “so unlike most of its neighbors, that it would hardly seem of kin to them” (*Piazza* 144, 145). However, the carefully chosen epigraphs heading up the other sketches, the bulk of them drawn from book two, canto twelve of Spenser’s *The Faerie Queene*, should alert the reader to the deceptiveness of such an alluring view. In that canto, the knight-errant Sir Guyon and his crew must navigate a series of perils, early among which come those “wandering Islands” with which Melville identifies the Encantadas in the epigraph to sketch first, a panoptic view of “The Isles at Large.” The twelfth stanza, from which Melville borrows the last three lines, reads in full:

Yet well they seeme to him, that farre doth vew,  
 Both faire and fruitfull, and the ground dispred  
 With grassie greene of delectable hew,  
 And the tall trees with leaves apparelléd,  
 Are deckt with blossomes dyde in white and red,  
 That mote the passengers thereto allure;  
 But whosoever once hath fastened  
 His foot thereon, may never it recure,  
 But wandreth ever more uncertain and unsure. (*Faerie Queene* II.XII.1-9)<sup>78</sup>

Sir Guyon’s quest ends with his confrontation of Acrasia, a type of Circe. Similarly, the penultimate skech of “The Encantadas” features in Oberlus “the victim of some malignant

sorceress,” who “seemed to have drunk of Circe’s cup” (*Piazza* 163). Oberlus is only one among the many victims of the isles’ enchantments, however. The epigraph, in other words, is carefully chosen by the author to alert the reader to his subject-matter both in that introductory sketch and throughout.

Accordingly, the identification of sketch sixth’s epigraph, from Beaumont and Fletcher’s *Wit Without Money*, has served to redirect attention to Melville’s “sustained irony” in *The Piazza Tales*.<sup>79</sup> Beaumont and Fletcher’s play has been described as “a tissue of ironic reversals” conducive to or suggestive of “moral ambivalence and aesthetic confusion.”<sup>80</sup> In his survey of the evidence, D. Mathis Eddy cites Charles Lamb’s opinion, noted by Melville, to the effect that Fletcher “is too mistrustful of Nature.”<sup>81</sup> Melville would probably have demurred, especially since he could not have failed to notice that Emerson, who used Beaumont and Fletcher by way of illustration to his essays on “Self-Reliance” and “Heroism,” was entirely blind to this aspect of their plays, preferring their assertion of such Stoic commonplaces as that “Man is his own star.”<sup>82</sup> The “victimized confidence” of the fish about Rock Rodondo in the circumspective sketch third of “The Encantadas” is on the contrary evidence, in the narrator’s view, that it is unwise to “inconsiderately trust” in a “human nature” one does not fully “understand” (*Piazza* 136). Rock Rodondo is identified by the author with the “Rock of vile Reproach” in Spenser’s *Faerie Queene* (II.viii), whereon the unwary are wrecked, and later, in what suggests Melville’s deepening of Spenser’s moralizing allegory, one of the “self-transforming and bemocking” isles is said to be a brooding, “meditative image” of that same nature (*Piazza* 142). As the rest of the sketches bear out, men are as likely to gull themselves as fish.

Indeed, whatever appearances to the contrary, Melville's theme in "The Encantadas" is always the same. Like Spenser's satirical beast-fable *Prosopopoia or Mother Hubberds Tale*, from which Melville avails himself of the other epigraph to sketch sixth, "Barrington Isle and the Buccaneers" concerns "adventures straunge / Continuallie subject unto chaunge" (ll. 91-92).<sup>83</sup> "[C]onsider the vacillations of a man," the "sentimental voyager" who serves as narrator to most of the sketch is brought to muse, before a "more charitable thought" intrudes, by the inconsistent character of the buccaneers (*Piazza* 146). Spenser's *Prosopopoia*, as the title implies, similarly has to do with counterfeiting and impersonation, in this case, and particularly in the passage cited by Melville, that of beasts aping the ways of men.<sup>84</sup> The buccaneers thirsting, like Spenser's Fox and Ape, after the gold they confuse with a Golden Age would do well, however, to heed the lesson taught in Melville's previous sketch.

The epigraph to sketch fifth, "The Frigate, And Ship Flyaway," is also from Spenser, but this time, significantly, from his "Visions of the World's Vanity." The sketch itself recounts an adventure which befell the frigate *Essex* during the war of 1812, namely her sighting of an enemy ship sailing swiftly under counterfeit colors while she (the *Essex*) "lay lifeless as if spell-bound." Though the "enchanted ship" eludes her, the canny *Essex* also manages to escape unscathed, only to give "up the ghost fighting two English frigates in the harbor of Valparaiso" (*Piazza* 143). In keeping with the mysterious or enchanted air of the isles, no reason is given for the initial becalming of the *Essex*. Once again, the recounting of the incident at first seems trivial, even irrelevant, from a thematic standpoint; indeed, the narrator feels required to justify its inclusion: "Mention is made of her here for the same reason that the buccaneers will likewise receive record," he interjects (*Piazza* 143). The reason he gives is simply that the *Essex*

is “associated” with the Encantadas. Albeit unstated, one, deeper reason for that association is suggested by the lines which complete the stanza on the “goodly ship” in Spenser’s “Visions of the World’s Vanity” from which Melville quoted in his epigraph. There, the becalming of the ship “with banners bravely dight” is ascribed to the “little fish, that men call Remora” (ll. 114, 122). As the poet glosses the moral from Pliny’s *Natural History*, that “so small a thing his happines may varie” is proof that man’s “state” is “most fickle and unsure” (“Visions” ll. 112, 168).

The theme of the vanity of worldly grandeur, a commonplace in the Renaissance, as well as this particular illustration thereof, Melville would have met with also in Montaigne’s *Apologie*, wherein Antony’s loss to Augustus, attributed to the same fish, is adduced as further evidence of man’s parity with beasts (*Essays* 2.12.223). Hence the episode, along with the eventual fate of the *Essex*, fits into the ironic pattern of “The Encantadas.” The “enigmatic craft—American in the morning, and English in the evening,” in particular, brings to mind the buccaneers, whose “piratic war,” while it allows them to cheat death and toil momentarily, also debases them into beasts of prey (*Piazza* 143, 144). To their victims, they are no “Brahmins and presidents of peace societies,” though they may initially, as they do to the genial narrator, appear so; rather, as outcasts “driven from Christian society,” they openly partake of the cannibalistic, man-of-war world (*Piazza* 145). Thus, comments D. Mathis Eddy, though “the buccaneers prey on the fortunes of others . . . they are, in turn, subject to ruin among themselves and preyed upon by time.”<sup>85</sup> The victimized fish about Rock Rodondo have their revenge in the greater scheme of things. The irony Eddy detects in the tone of Melville’s “sentimental voyager,” who “speak[s] genially of fellowship and communion with nature . . . but . . . does not fail to recognize that the

trees of the island, seemingly beautiful, bear no fruit,"<sup>86</sup> is analogous to that of Salvator R. Tammoor, the "lover of the picturesque" who serves as author-narrator to "The Encantadas" (*Piazza* 137). The only real "food" for eye, thought, or gizzard on the Enchanted Isles is the tortoise, an image and reminder of the "unverdured heap" imprinted on the narrator's mind and repeated time and again, as Dillingham has shown,<sup>87</sup> in the landscape itself (*Piazza* 138).

The society of the buccaneers, in other words, is no society at all. The next sketch, on "Charles' Isle and the Dog-King," is a *reductio ad absurdum* of the very idea of founding a "kingdom" along such principles as the buccaneers embrace. The property of a Creole adventurer and revolutionary, who got it "by his bravery and good fortune," this isle "resembles Barrington Isle," according to the narrator, "in being much more inhabitable than other parts of the group" (*Piazza* 147). The remark is ironic, as is the evocation of a paradise purchased by "wit" and "withouten toyle" in the second epigraph to the sketch, drawn, significantly, from the same passage in Spenser's *Prosopopoia* that provides the main epigraph to the preceding. In gross contrast with this second epigraph stands the first, a depiction of the "citizen-mob" which, in the Spenserian allegory from which it is culled, lays siege to the soul (*Faerie Queene* II.IX). Without any other principle of governance but the blind determinism of the emancipated will, Charles' Island predictably devolves from an autocracy where beasts preside over and do battle with men into "a permanent *Riotocracy*, which gloried in having no law but lawlessness" (*Piazza* 149). Like Carlyle's revolutionaries, with which they invite comparison, the new revolutionaries or anarchists "trust nothing" (*On Heroes* 233). But the freedom of these dogs without a master comes at the price of their isolation and divorce from the world, the island being declared "Anathema" by ship captains (*Piazza* 149).

Thus, although far more carefree and far less pathetic than the inconsiderately trusting Chola widow in sketch eighth, Melville's buccaneers, castaways and other spiritual isolatoes are really no more a match for "feline Fate" than she. The pose of Melville's gentlemanly persona-narrator throughout the sketches, consequently, is substantially the same as in "Norfolk Isle and the Chola Widow." "Unwittingly I imp this cat-like thing," he writes there, "sporting with the heart of him who reads; for if he feel not he reads in vain" (*Piazza* 156). As the author himself had reflected, joco-seriously, in his poem "Montaigne and His Kitten," the posture of a wisdom at grips with feline Fate is of necessity an equivocal, ironic one: "Wise ones fool it while they may!"<sup>88</sup> The statement is further evidence, if any was needed, of Melville's substantial affinity with and for the outcasts and desperadoes whose romantic "lore" he had made something of a living documenting, as he, too, sought to survive by his own wits (*Piazza* 146). "Fooling it" is not a bad phrase, as well, for what Melville does in "The Encantadas," particularly in this its most popular sketch. His appeal to the reader's sense of pathos (or "Pity's self," as she is personified in the second epigraph to the sketch), for example, is ironic. The epigraph is taken, appropriately enough, since the widowed Chola is another, more somber version of Marianna, from William Collins' "Dirge in Cymbeline." But as always in "The Encantadas," one should be wary of appearances. Though cunningly curtailed, the preceding epigraph to the sketch refers us to another of Sir Guyon's challenges, this time more subtle, because in the shape of "womanish fine forgery" (*Faerie Queene* II.XII.xxviii.8). Spenser's "dolefull Mayd" is a kind of mermaid, such as the knight encounters in the next stanza, and the Palmer accordingly admonishes the knight against "foolish pity," exhorting him, as always, to temperance or prudence (*Faerie Queene* II.XII.xxviii.2; ixxx.2).

The narrator of "The Encantadas" seems not unmindful of such admonitions. Not only does he omit roughly "half" of the widow's story, under the premise that some things are better left "untold," but in the next sketch he proves most unsympathetic to the man-beast Oberlus, calling him "a creature whom it is religion to detest, since it is philanthropy to hate a misanthrope" (*Piazza* 157, 169). Apparently, he is of a mind with the "prudential" narrator of "Bartleby," for whom "pity" also has its limits: "So true it is, and so terrible too, that up to a certain point the thought or sight of misery enlists our best affections; but, in certain special cases, beyond that point it does not. They err who would assert that invariably this is owing to the inherent selfishness of the human heart. It rather proceeds from a certain hopelessness of remedying excessive and organic ill" (*Piazza* 29). To recoil thus from the spectacle of unremediable human misery, however, is tacitly to confess what Melville has been stressing all along, the truth which the narrator of "The Encantadas," confronted with the unspeakable, is forced to utter: "Events, not book, should be forbid. But in all things man sows upon the wind, which bloweth just there whither it listeth; for ill or good man cannot know. Often ill comes from the good, as good from ill" (*Piazza* 156). Not to "feel" the utter vanity of human wishes and actions is truly to read "in vain," for it is to stop short of Melville's tragic vision, where "Pity's self" merges with terror, as when the narrator, "faithless" as the fate he imparts, or rather impersonates, portrays Hunilla's loss of her husband and brother. "The real woe of this event," he writes, "passed before her sight as some tragedy on the stage," a mere "dumb show," whose "trance-like . . . mild pictorial effect" the narrator mimicks by compounding images of privation: "Death in a silent picture; a dream of the eye; such vanishing shapes as the mirage shows" (*Piazza* 154). The overt theatricality of the whole sketch should alert the reader to its

partly satiric intent. That intent is made plain in the following sketch on “Hood’s Isle and the Hermit Oberlus.”

The joke post-scripted to Oberlus’ epistolary “version of the affair” related therein shows him to be one of those “scoffing souls” which the narrator derides in sketch eighth (*Piazza* 157). As the narrator initially portrays him, Oberlus is not so much a Caliban (to whom he later likens him) as a Gryllus, “a European bringing into this savage region qualities more diabolical than are to be found among any of the surrounding cannibals” (*Piazza* 163). The narrator castigates him for his “beast-like” qualities, obviously preferring the pathetic Hunilla, but in so doing he only condemns himself. For Hunilla, too, is a “beast,” though a beast of burden rather than of prey (*Piazza* 162). Thus it is Oberlus, and not the narrator and his other critics, who has the last laugh, bequeathing to his successors on the isle the “chicks” of “an old fowl” who turns out to be “a starveling rooster, reduced to a sitting posture by sheer debility” (*Piazza* 169). The “clerkliness” and “satiric effrontery” of the letter alluded to by the narrator in his post-script to the sketch is, of course, the author’s own (*Piazza* 170). Recalling Salvator R. Tarnmoor’s intrusion in sketch eighth, Fogle provides the punch-line to Melville’s jest: “when a starving rooster produces chicks, then expect good will come from evil, then hope for the redemption of the blasted and accursed Encantadas, victims and instruments of the wrath of an inscrutable deity.”<sup>89</sup>

It is Oberlus, not Hunilla, who is the “unverdured heap” of “The Encantadas” “personified,”<sup>90</sup> the spirit of romance gone awry. Fittingly, then, in sketch ninth the reader finds a satire of all the preceding sketches. Like Melville’s buccaneers, revolutionaries and castaways, Oberlus claims to be a “gentleman” and “a patriot, exiled from [his] country by the cruel hand of

tyranny” and “robbed and beaten by men professing to be Christians” (*Piazza* 168). His fate (he sails aboard “the good boat Charity,” ostensibly, albeit ironically, for the cannibal Feegee Isles, only to end up, for all intents and purposes, where he left off, in a South-American jail of “sun-burnt brick”) would seem to confirm rather than contradict his counter-indictment of so-called Christians (*Piazza* 168, 169). Since he earlier returns the favor and imprisons and enslaves others, however, the tone conveyed by the narrative is not one of vindication, but rather of moral ambivalence. Like Fletcher and Beaumont’s *Wit Without Money*, “The Encantadas” is a tissue of ironic reversals.

Its last sketch, a kind of miniature *Urn-Burial*, unknots that living complex of relations in the only way that it can, by affirming, with “Bartleby” and “Benito Cereno,” that the only sure destination for all of our “letters” or wishes is “the great general monastery of earth” (*Piazza* 172).<sup>91</sup> The “doggerel epitaph” composed by the “forecastle poet and artist” which concludes “The Encantadas” is, appropriately, an exercise in baroque lyricism, wherein death once again becomes part of the all-encompassing decor:

Oh Brother Jack, as you pass by,  
 As you are now, so once was I.  
 Just so game and just so gay,  
 But now, alack, they’ve stopped my pay.  
 No more I peep out of my blinkers,  
 Here I be—tucked in with clinkers! (*Piazza* 173)

That epitaph in turn invites and repays comparison with the one which similarly serves as a dead-ending to the late *Billy Budd*. “Wise ones fool it while they may,” but fooling (so “Billy in the Darbies” intimates) is all that is:

. . . . But aren't it all sham?

A blur's in my eyes; it is dreaming that I am.

.....

. . . me they'll lash in hammock, drop me deep.

Fathoms down, fathoms down, how I'll dream fast asleep.

I feel it stealing now. Sentry, are you there?

Just ease these darbies at the wrist,

And roll me over fair!

I am sleepy, and the oozy weeds about me twist. (*Billy Budd* 78-79)

Joel Porte aptly likens these lines to Carlyle's and Emerson's favorite verses from *The Tempest*—“We are such stuff / As dreams are made on; and our little life / Is rounded with a sleep” (IV.i.156-8)—, but significantly, not without omitting the sequel (“Sir, I am vex'd: / Bear with my weakness; my old brain is touched”), an avowal, in his words, “that human experience and reflections on it finally dissolve in a perplexity.”<sup>92</sup> Thus, even as he restates F.O. Matthiessen's well-worn thesis that Billy Budd's striking down of Claggart depicts “a triumph of heart over head,” Porte problematizes any such simplification of Melville's tragic vision; in effect, the “clash of absolutes” figured on this inner plane duplicates the external conflicts and “contradictions” symbolized by the *Bellipotent*, itself a microcosm of the man-of-war world: “By their very contradictions they are made to coincide,” in Melville's expression.<sup>93</sup> It is these same

contradictions, according to Porte, which finally defeat Captain Vere, that grey-eyed reader of Montaigne. And with reason. In the manner of his avatar Emerson, Montaigne had made large allowances for those vices that “make up the seam in our piecing,” trusting in compensations: “nothing has insinuated itself into this universe that has not therein some fit and proper place” (*Essays* 3.1.381). But the conflict of convictions—between policy and charity, law and nature, special and universal—ultimately proves as insuperable for Montaigne as it does for those other instruments of state or God which he instances as “racked,” like Vere, “between . . . two extremes” (*Essays* 3.1.386). The cause of this ethical impasse, Montaigne goes on to explain, is that our reason is, in the very image of the moral and metaphysical questions it would make sense of, “double and diverse” (*Essays* 3.11.502). *Quel remède?* Here Montaigne, too, “studies to play the fool”: “We cannot do all we would, so that we must often, as the last anchorage, commit the protection of our vessels to the simple conduct of heaven” (*Essays* 3.1.381, 386).

Carlyle’s investigation of similar conflicts and insolubles in *Sartor Resartus* had likewise drawn from him a confession of amazement: “they only are wise who know that they know nothing,” Teufelsdröckh muses in “The World out of Clothes” (43). Man’s beginning and end, so “Natural Supernaturalism” concurs with the *Apologie*, is “Cimmerian Night”—“from the Inane . . . into the Inane” (*Sartor* 201). Here, where sense and faith falter, “Mystery” and “God” (so *Sartor* suggests a gloss to the verses from *The Tempest* cited above) are synonymous, interchangeable terms (202). In the end, and with much more courage and honesty than Carlyle,<sup>94</sup> Melville abided in that imaginative skepticism, with its suspended judgment. Like Montaigne, he would study to play the fool, rather than presume to knowledge or faith he did not have. To do otherwise, so the

epigraph to the author's earlier conceit or allegory "The Bell-Tower" suggests, was to risk "apoplexy," a further, and fatal, befuddling of the head (*Piazza* 174).

Omitted from the story when it was published with *The Piazza Tales*, the epigraph to "The Bell-Tower," from "a Private MS," suggests how fitting a conclusion to the collection it is, inviting as it has comparisons, not only with "Benito Cereno" and "Bartleby," but with the rest of the volume's tales.<sup>95</sup> And with good reason. It, too, after all, is concerned with the idea of confidence. As Dillingham insightfully remarks, the bell-tower is a kind of "lightning-rod sent up in recognition of . . . powers . . . temporal and spiritual."<sup>96</sup> The artist-mechanician Bannadonna, by analogy or extension, is a sort of confidence-man, trafficking in the hopes and fears of his own kind by promising, like the Lightning-rod man featured in an earlier *Piazza* tale, a temporal and spiritual "Gibraltar" (*Piazza* 120). The victims, literal or metaphorical, of treacherous lightning in *The Piazza Tales*, however, are numerous enough to suggest the author's skepticism vis-à-vis any such scheme or promise: the tree which "used to soothe" Marianna's weariness; the "man . . . killed one cloudless afternoon . . . in Virginia, by summer lightning" to whom the "thunderstruck" narrator of "Bartleby" likens himself; the "prostrate trunks of blasted pines" amidst which the narrator of "The Encantadas" sits musing on his "other and far-distant roving in the baked heart of the charmed isles"; and finally, the "fated ones" in the sketch on the Chola widow (*Piazza* 11, 34-5, 129, 154).

Fittingly, then, Dillingham has suggested that Melville, in his role as narrator, is also a type of confidence-man, playing on the credulity of his readers.<sup>97</sup> If so, the tendency to focus on the concluding lines of "The Bell-Tower" as the allegorical resolution to its underlying ambiguities and the unfolding of its "picturesque & profound morality" (in the words of its initial

editor) is evidence of Melville's success (*ML* 502). These lines, notes Fogle, toll with clockwork "precision, as it were one hammer blow to each nail."<sup>98</sup> "So the blind slave obeyed its blinder lord; but, in obedience, slew him. So the creator was killed by the creature. So the bell was too heavy for the tower. So that bell's main weakness was where man's blood had flawed it. And so pride went before the fall," writes Melville (*Piazza* 186-87). Thus on the surface the story is just what the epigraph announces so resoundingly, an allegory of "high-living ambition" and its "apoplexy" or "fall," the whole a swiftly self-fulfilling prophecy (*Piazza* 174). Here as in "The Piazza," the canker is already in the bud. But if this is so, Bannadonna's project is foredoomed; the only way the story, a retelling of the Genesis account, works on the allegorical level is if the reader ignores the obvious fact that the fall has already happened. This is the true "anachronism" to which Melville casually alludes in the note appended to his work. The "familiar comprehension of the story" relies on a trick, a sleight-of-hand (*Piazza* 187), but the resulting ambiguity—a dissonant clash between two orders of time, the one "horological," the other "chronometrical" (to borrow a set of terms from *Pierre*)—remains. Part of the supposed "originality" of Bannadonna's creation, for example, is that in it "bell-tower and clock-tower" are "united" (*Piazza* 175). In the context of Melville's oeuvre, that statement can only be seen as ironic. Bannadonna's one truly tragic, and fatal, action is to attempt to unite mutually exclusive orders of time—heavenly and earthly, infinite and finite—in "an original production" of his own making (*Piazza* 185). To the last, however, the duplex "tower-clock" remains without a "dial," faceless, as does his other creation, the domino, while, by way of contrast, the "expression of the unchanging face of the Hour Una" on the bell mocks the artist with its "fatal," "uncertain smile, and . . . fore-looking eyes" (*Piazza* 181, 179, 180).

As the Old Testament types and symbols alluded to in “The Bell-Tower” (Babel, Noah’s sons, Shinar, Shadrach, Deborah, Sisera, Jael, and the Titanic Anak) make abundantly clear, the pattern plotted by the author is one of betrayal: Bannadonna betrays the faith of the community, which, in turn, is betraying God, the whole ending with the automaton’s betrayal of its maker. And yet, paradoxically, in every case the “slave” is also “true” to its master, or what amounts to the same, to “its creation . . . its heedful winding up” (*Piazza* 186). The “utilitarian ambition” of Bannadonna, his rearing of a clockwork God in the image of modern, post-Enlightenment man, the “practical materialist,” is the logical result of the absconding of God, as witness deism and “the counting-room philosophy of Paley” (*Piazza* 185, 184; *ML* 651). That Bannadonna’s automaton Talus, ostensibly made to serve and protect man, is actually, as Dillingham points out, a gross parody of him, “a crude Caliban kind of monster controlled by a routine of slavish fixity, a creature without a soul,”<sup>99</sup> is also appropriate, for creatures and creators alike here are caught up in the “empire of necessity” referred to in the private MS (*Piazza* 174). Thus are they made to coincide by the similitudes underlying their very contradictions. The whole idea of “slave” and “master,” in particular, is turned on its head, since the world diagramed in “The Bell-Tower,” like that in “Benito Cereno,” which the allusion to the “negroes” in the epigraph recalls, is circular, not hierarchical. Here, in effect, as in “The Piazza,” “Benito Cereno” and “The Encantadas,” are only dogs without a master: when the bell is cast in its mould, the “unleashed metals bayed like hounds”; its maker is described as “a cynic solitaire”; and the fate of the domino is confused with that of a “spaniel, gone mad by fear” (*Piazza* 176, 179, 182). The whole is the work of “un sort artiste” (to use Montaigne’s resonant phrase) surpassing “l’humaine prudence.”<sup>100</sup>

Written well after the author had reached the height of his powers and experienced the nadir of his popularity, “The Bell-Tower” serves by nature of its very subject-matter (the tower is “the product of an age of innovation and human pride, the early Renaissance”)<sup>101</sup> as an appropriate summation, not only to *The Piazza Tales*, but to Melville’s oeuvre, as well. Dillingham has pointed out that the story is “willfully Melvillean” in tone: the author, he remarks, “appears to exaggerate . . . several of his basic characteristics as a writer.”<sup>102</sup> Capping off, with *The Confidence-Man*, Melville’s career as a writer, “The Bell-Tower” implies his emotionally distanced assessment of his own art and the period it contributed to. In particular, Melville had come to reexamine his earlier “belief in the invincibility of the intellect,” to use Tyrus Hillway’s phrase.<sup>103</sup> The result was something akin to the ironic acknowledgement of human limits found in Montaigne’s *Apologie*: “Infinis esprits,” notes the latter, “se trouvent ruinés par leur propre force et souplesse” (*Essais* 2.12.207). Though god-like in the scope of its imagination, the mind which sought to equal God was also, by the same token, committing an act of symbolic deicide. And without an identifiable origin outside itself, that mind was left compassless and chartless to navigate a world of similitudes and contradictions.<sup>104</sup> The new, Transcendental gospel, consequently, was on ground shakier still than was the old. Over it, and increasingly, over Melville’s quest as a writer, presided Oloo, the anaconda-like “god of suicides” in *Mardi* (289).

**“En queue de poisson”:**

**The Quixotic Pattern of Victor-Lévy Beaulieu’s Melvillean *Voyageries*–**

**An Envoi**

“Oui, il nous faut descendre comme dans l’escalier tournant d’un puits sans fin, et là même où cette infinitude est cachée au regard par la spire et par les ténèbres.

Mieux vaudrait être précipité dans l’espace en dehors de l’orbite solaire que de se sentir flotter en soi-même.”

–Herman Melville’s *Pierre*, as cited in the epigraph to Book III of Victor-Lévy Beaulieu’s *Oh Miami Miami Miami* (1973)

“... moi, Don Quichotte imprécis dans ma course éperdue de vie multiple.”

–Victor-Lévy Beaulieu, “L’écrivain québécois et la question nationale” (1976)

As the above reading serves to demonstrate, *pace* Robert Major and others, while Melville’s oeuvre effectively records the passing of the Old Order of values figured in the fortress-like pulpit in *Moby-Dick*, it also prophetically adumbrates the impasse which follows that demise. As Carlyle was brought to muse in 1831, “the Old has passed away: but, alas, the New appears not in its stead; the Time is still in pangs of travail with the New.”<sup>105</sup> That diagnosis, according to Walter E. Houghton’s *The Victorian Frame of Mind, 1830-1870* (1957), holds true for the period as a whole: “Though the Victorians never ceased to look forward to a

new period of firm convictions,” he writes, “. . . they had to live in the meantime between two worlds, one dead or dying, one struggling but powerless to be born, in an age of doubt.”<sup>106</sup>

Predictably, in view of the preceding, those writers belonging to Quebec’s “age of transitions and inventions” who have traded in their chapel for that imaged in the work of Melville, among others, similarly tend to attest to the spiritual and moral impasse Houghton discerns in their nineteenth-century counterparts.<sup>107</sup> A look at the course of Victor-Lévy Beaulieu’s Melvillean odyssey, which spans the last decade of the Quiet Revolution and resumes, according to Gérard Tougas,<sup>108</sup> the work of his close predecessors, suggests some such itinerary.

Like the work of his precursors Hubert Aquin and Réjean Ducharme, Victor-Lévy Beaulieu’s *Voyageries* (1973-1983) afford ample evidence of the cultural renaissance fostered by the Quiet Revolution. Joel Porte’s sizing up of Emerson’s ambition—to give “birth to himself out of the womb of his own fertile imagination”—<sup>109</sup> describes Beaulieu’s as well. In answer to that ambition, the author’s *Don Quichotte de la démanche* (1974), translated as *Don Quixote in Nighttown*, may be said to constitute both his earnest and finale: its theme, fittingly, is “la renaissance.”<sup>110</sup> An exploration of the mirror-logic governing its author-narrator’s “monde baroque” and an exercise in the literature of exhaustion, Beaulieu’s *Don Quichotte*, inherently ironic in design and tenor, plots “un champ d’angoisse parfaitement circulaire,” a grim whirligig action where the hero is engaged in an absurd, because endless, chase after the source and direction of his “inspiration,” literally running to catch his breath (25, 13, 67). Training his sights squarely, and with lethal accuracy, on Montaigne, Emerson, and Melville’s metaphysical high-jinxing, the author pictures himself pursuing this cat-like muse only to find her blind, deaf and mute, an emblem of the all-encompassing, impersonal, and consequently inscrutable

sameness which the imagination inevitably comes to evoke for the Melvillean seeker after truth in a universe of similitudes and contradictions merely. In Beaulieu's "monde cauchemaresque," the only mercy comes in the form of a bullet: "Pan pan: qui va là? Chat. Chat qui? Chatastrophe," he translates from Malcolm Lowry's allegory of modern man's journey into a Hell of his own making, *Under the Volcano* (1947) (*Don Quichotte* 211).<sup>111</sup>

As a survey of its baroque imagery suggests, such deadpan humour is characteristic of Beaulieu's work as a whole: the victim of a debilitating attack of polio, the narrator envisions his life, his world, and his book, in the manner of Carlyle's Teufelsdröckh, as a "huge foolish Whirligig" and tormentum (*Sartor* 25); a nest of "Vipers" or "Serpent-of-Eternity" curling (*Sartor* 18, 154), like the "entanglements" imaged in "Benito Cereno," in a series of inextricable knots (*Piazza* 76); a bottomless bag of illusions; a labyrinth in the shape of "une spirale fiévreuse";<sup>112</sup> and finally, a heap of guts gnawed by worms (see e.g. *Don Quichotte* 23, 71, 106, 159, 205, 216, 218, 222-3, 227, 247; 13, 16, 21, 185; 32; 133, 201; 254). In fact, the inhabitants of Beaulieu's dream-world, like those belonging to Montaigne, Carlyle, Emerson, and Melville's, are immersed in Cimmerian night: "tout finissait par se brouiller, le rêve et le réel . . . . Tout le flou retournait au flou" (*Don Quichotte* 22, 46). In such an all-confounding element, progress is difficult to measure. As Beaulieu, with a nod to "The Encantadas," leads the reader to infer, the acts of his author-narrator and other mental offspring are as purposeless as the struggles of a tortoise turned upside down, "faisant aller ses pattes dans le vide" (*Don Quichotte* 167, 274). Evidence of such futility is everywhere apparent in *Don Quichotte de la démanche*: one character in the novel rides a stationary bicycle, pedalling furiously; two others embark on a defunct, motionless Ferris wheel; while yet another walks against a moving band (147, 195, 221). Motion

and stasis are the same, since all are bound on the inexorable wheel of Fate, “cette roue roulant dans la ténèbre, cette roue roulant dans la ténèbre immobile et ne faisant rien d’autre que dessiner dans l’obscurité un cercle froid” (*Don Quichotte* 274).

At the head of this imaginary procession, which follows “à la queue leu leu,” and presiding over Beaulieu’s whole enterprise as a writer, is the figure of Melville’s Don Quixote. Thus, in the very image of the phenomena he would pierce through, Beaulieu’s hero himself (and not only his helmet as in Cervantes) is a “pasteboard” mask, as pictured in Mario Leclerc’s brilliant cover illustration to the novel (*Don Quichotte* 217, 252; cf. *Moby-Dick* 144).<sup>113</sup> Such mettle as the author’s protagonist possesses, consequently, is not proof against the universal cannibalism Leclerc sketches on the cover of another of Beaulieu’s novels in the same series, *N’évoque plus que le désenchantement de ta ténèbre, mon si pauvre Abel* (1976). Appropriately, the circular, self-swallowing *Don Quichotte de la démanche* finishes in the only way it can, “en queue de poisson” (42, 274). The novel ends where it begins, in still-birth, its hero defeated by the same forces which defeat Ahab in the book he claims, with some reason, to know so intimately that he could read it upside down: “Sombrant comme le *Pequod* melvilien défoncé à coups de queue par la baleine blanche!” (*Don Quichotte* 81-82, 247). Invariably, in Beaulieu’s work, Melville’s Calvinistic text serves as a tacit warning to those who, pronouncing the Old Order of ideas dead, would then “seek to conquer a larger liberty” (*Piazza* 174).

A survey of Beaulieu’s oeuvre, in effect, shows him consistently adopting the mature Melville’s ironic attitude vis-à-vis the proponents of the “American Dream.”<sup>114</sup> As late as his *Una: romaman* (1980), for example, Beaulieu is up to his old tricks. Like Melville’s Bartleby, who sleeps finally with “kings and counsellors,” Beaulieu’s Una attains the condition of nullity

described by Melville in his ode to “Buddha” and wished for by Job, as she rouses Leviathan (Jb 3:8-10) and eclipses the Book of Maya, “l’histoire impossible de ce qui aurait pu s’appeler MÈRES, de ce qui aurait pu s’appeler PÈRES, de ce qui aurait pu s’appeler ENFANTS.”<sup>115</sup> And yet, the single-minded Una then goes on, ironically enough, to give birth to Job J Jobin. The key to unlocking the secreted sense of Beaulieu’s earlier *Blanche forcée* (1976), according to its narrator Job J Jobin, lies in “le sens de l’entrelacs que forment mes initiales.”<sup>116</sup> The always incomplete stutter “J(e)” denotes a fractured, involuted I, continually recounting the story of Job in cycles whose center is the nugatory O in Job J Jobin: “. . . baleine! baleine! baleine!—évents—vapeur d’eau est toute vie.”<sup>117</sup> In the manner of Arthur Schopenhauer, whom Melville read previous to writing *Billy Budd* (see *ML* 831-33), Beaulieu, then, conceives the world as illusion: his *Una* is the story of an Ishmael-like orphan who obtains Nirvana and then recreates the universe through writing, recoloring the white world with “un grand tas de feuilles, des milliers de crayons de toutes les couleurs, mais rien qu’une gomme effaçante” (*Una* 109). However, though the world so read has become a fiction in the mind of a metaphysically orphaned solipsist, that same fiction is governed, significantly, by the “empire of necessity” personified in Melville’s unchanging Una (*Piazza* 174).

That impersonal, disinterested fate is an artist in the image of Beaulieu and his spiritual collaborator. As Melville admonishes the mental “tourist” or “traveller” in *Pierre*, he who would seek out the fixed point of “enthusiastic Truth” with the “directing compass of his mind” fares much like those “Arctic explorers” who “follow the trail of truth too far . . . for arrived at the Pole . . . there, the needle indifferently respects all points of the horizon alike” (*Pierre* 322, 195). “Appalling is the soul of man!” writes Melville in a related passage which Beaulieu avails

himself of in an epigraph to his satiric *Oh Miami Miami Miami* (1973): “Better might one be pushed off into the material spaces beyond the uttermost orbit of our sun, than once feel himself fairly afloat in himself.” (*Pierre* 322).<sup>118</sup> Like Pierre, who finds in the verses “allegorically overscribed within the arch of the outgoings of the womb of human life” in Dante’s *Inferno* a hint as to his destiny (“All hope abandon, ye who enter here” [*Pierre* 198]), Beaulieu’s “ombres dantesques” are prisoners of the element which their feverish author-narrator inhabits. “Je gèle!” he exclaims repeatedly, made cold by excess of heat (*Don Quichotte* 158, 274).

Indeed, the author who would (in the words of Melville’s poem “Art,” published alongside “Buddha” in the privately printed *Timoleon* [1891]) “pulsed life create” (*Poems* 223) must delve into his “labyrinthine interior” and there face “a continual sirroco and burning breeze” (*Piazza* 170). “What unlike things must meet and mate: / A flame to melt—a wind to freeze; / Sad patience—joyous energies . . . ,” as Melville goes on to rhyme the contraries fused in the artist’s “mystic heart” (*Poems* 223-24). His is the “March weather, savage and serene in one hour” and the “frost in July” imaged in Emerson’s “Montaigne; Or, The Skeptic.”<sup>119</sup> What he wrests from that contest with himself, however, as Melville’s poem makes clear by transposition, is not the guidance and wisdom concerning things ultimate sought by his spiritual counterpart Jacob, but rather (to apply to Melville and Beaulieu Carlyle’s assessment of the achievement of Montaigne and Shakespeare) an art whose “indifference” reflects as truthfully as possible the “harmony” at the heart of the world of “contradiction” he finds within and without.<sup>120</sup>

YEA AND NAY—

EACH HATH HIS SAY;

BUT GOD HE KEEPS THE MIDDLE WAY.

NONE WAS BY  
 WHEN HE SPREAD THE SKY,  
 WISDOM IS VAIN, AND PROPHECY,

sings Melville in his evocation of civil war in *Battle-Pieces* (1866) (*Poems* 37). Not for the Melvillean artist, so “The Conflict of Convictions” above argues, the inconsequence of the Victorian prose-prophet or of his latter-day (re)visionary proponents, asserting the coincidence of romance and reality, dream and destiny, private and public. Such solace as Melville’s (and by extension Beaulieu’s) work provide for its readers is akin to that which “the thousand mermaids” in *Moby-Dick* promise to “death-longing . . . men, who still have in them some interior compunctions against suicide.” It is a journey into the “hearts of infinite Pacifics,” full of “wonders supernatural,” at the end of which, however, lies no revelation. “Come hither, broken-hearted . . .,” sing Melville’s mermaids, in mockery of the epilogue to the Apocalypse, “Come hither! . . . Come hither! . . . till we marry thee!” (*Moby-Dick* 402).

### Notes

1. Jay Leyda, *The Melville Log: A Documentary Life of Herman Melville, 1819-1891*, 2 volumes (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1951, 1969), 257; hereafter abbreviated as *ML* in text.
2. Herman Melville, *Moby-Dick*, ed. by Harrison Hayford and Hershel Parker (New York: Norton, 1967), 43.

3. Robert Major, *Jean Rivard ou l'art de réussir: Idéologies et utopie dans l'oeuvre d'Antoine Gérin-Lajoie* (Sainte-Foy: Les Presses de l'Université de Laval, 1991), transl. by David Smith et al. as *The American Dream in Nineteenth-Century Quebec: Ideologies and Utopia in the Work of Antoine Gérin-Lajoie* (University of Toronto Press, 1996); all references are to the original.
4. *The Journals and Miscellaneous Notebooks of Ralph Waldo Emerson*, ed. by William Gilman et al., 16 vols (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University, 1960-), 10.507-8.
5. *The Complete Works of Ralph Waldo Emerson*, ed. by Edward Waldo Emerson, 12 vols, Centenary edition (Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1903-4), 4.90; see also Major, 199.
6. *The Complete Works of Ralph Waldo Emerson*, 4.225; see Major (197-207) and Guildo Rousseau, *L'Image des États-Unis dans la littérature québécoise, 1775-1930* (Sherbrooke: Éditions Naaman, 1981), 40-41, 64, 275.
7. Thomas Carlyle, *On Heroes, Hero-Worship, and the Heroic in History*, ed. by Archibald MacMechan (Boston: The Athenaeum Press, 1902), 279; and *Sartor Resartus*, ed. with an introduction by Kerry McSweeney and Peter Sabor (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), 136.
8. Major, 304.
9. These moribund habits of mind are typically associated, so Major recalls a critical commonplace, with the “noirceur clérico-bourgeoise” or ecclesiastical Dark Ages of the pre-Quiet Revolution era (289-90).
10. Major, 306.
11. *The Complete Works of Ralph Waldo Emerson*, 4.223.

12. *Journals and Miscellaneous Notebooks of Ralph Waldo Emerson*, 4.48, 381.
13. Major, 304.
14. Major, 200.
15. *Journals and Miscellaneous Notebooks*, 2.211; Major, 210.
16. In the chapter previous to "The Pulpit," the Platonic Ishmael reflects "that in looking at things spiritual, we are too much like oysters observing the sun through the water, and thinking that thick water the thinnest air" (*Moby-Dick* 41).
17. Victor-Lévy Beaulieu, *Monsieur Melville*, 3 vols. (Montreal: VLB, 1978), 2.112.
18. See Howard P. Vincent, *The Tailoring of Melville's White-Jacket* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1970), 72.
19. *White-Jacket or the World in a Man-of-War* (New York: Russell & Russel, 1963), 95.
20. See Gérard Tougas, *Destin littéraire du Québec* (Montreal: Québec/Amérique, 1982), 11, 65-66.
21. Cf. Beaulieu, *Monsieur Melville*, 2.70-71; Tougas, 109. See also Major's 1983 article "Prochain épisode et 'Menaud, maître-draveur': Le décalque romanesque," in *Canadian Literature* 99: 55-65. Responding to the impasse he sees recorded in Aquin's work, Major ends his article by suggesting that critics engage in cross-cultural, comparative studies of Quebec authors with those from other "chapels." "Un pas avant," a step forward, in the understanding of Quebec's own literature, would be taken by such comparative histories (Major 65).
22. Cf. Saint-Evremond's retrospective address "A Monsieur le Maréchal de Créqui . . ." and his "Réflexions sur la religion" in *Textes choisis*, ed. with an introduction and notes by Alain Niderst (Paris: Éditions sociales, 1970). "Quittons-nous Dieu pour le monde," writes Saint-Evremond,

“nous sommes traités d’impies: quittons-nous le monde pour Dieu, on nous traite d’imbéciles; et on nous pardonne aussi peu de sacrifier la fortune à la religion, que la religion à la fortune . . . .

Dans la plupart des chrétiens,” he continues, glossing Montaigne, “l’envie de croire tient lieu de créance: la volonté leur fait une espèce de foi, par les désirs, que l’entendement leur refuse, par se lumières. J’ai connu des dévots, qui, dans une certaine contrariété entre le coeur et l’esprit, aimaient Dieu véritablement, sans le bien croire” (284).

23. Melville, *Typee: A Peep at Polynesian Life*, ed. with an introduction by George Woodcock (New York: Penguin, 1972, 1977), 34, 33.

24. Both Tahiti and the Marquesas, as *Typee* records (51, 334), were besieged by Du Petit Thouars’ French men-of-war by the time Melville arrived there.

25. *The Essays of Michel Eyquem de Montaigne*, transl. by Charles Cotton and ed. by W. Carew Hazlitt (Chicago: Encyclopedia Britannica, 1952), 3.6.440.

26. See Woodcock’s introduction to *Typee*, 20.

27. Though the conflicts of Melville’s mature fiction are here foreshadowed, according to John Seelye’s *Melville: The Ironic Diagram* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1970), “nothing comes of it” (22). For more evidence of cross-purposes in *Typee*, see Woodcock (17-20).

28. William B. Dillingham, *Melville’s Short Fiction, 1853-1856* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1977), 222.

29. According to William H. Gilman, in *Melville’s Early Life and Redburn* (New York: Russell & Russell, 1972), Melville had borrowed a copy of the *Dictionary* preparatory to writing *Mardi* (165).

30. See Seelye, 2.

31. Pierre Bayle, *Historical and Critical Dictionary: Selections*, transl. with an introduction by Richard H. Popkin (Indianapolis/Cambridge: Hackett Publishing, 1991), 429; italicized in original.
32. Popkin xxii, xxiii. Popkin also alludes to Melville as a reader of Bayle and points to both their agreement and divergence. A comparison of the biblical passages scored by Melville for use in *Moby-Dick* (see *ML* 369-70) and those used by Bayle in his third clarification to the *Dictionary* shows their obvious affinity: according to Bayle, just as the New Testament subverts human wisdom, so the Old Testament “accounts of the heroes of the faith” undercut the “most evident, rationally justified moral maxims” (Popkin xxii).
33. Sir Thomas Browne, *The Major Works*, ed. with an introduction by C.A. Patrides (New York: Penguin, 1977), 65-6.
34. See Tyrus Hillway’s introduction to *Mardi, and A Voyage Thither* (New Haven: New Haven College and University Press, 1973), 12.
35. Melville, *The Confidence-Man: His Masquerade*, ed. with an introduction by Stephen Matterson (New York: Penguin, 1990), 270.
36. Cf. *Plutarch’s Morals*, corrected and revised by William W. Goodwin, with an introduction by Ralph Waldo Emerson, vol. 5 (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1878). The passage in Plutarch reads: “The fish which the Greeks call hegemon (or the captain or leader) is a small fish, in bigness and shape not much unlike a gudgeon . . . This fish always keeps company with one of the huge whales, and swims before him to direct his course, lest he should bruise himself upon the shallows, or fall into any marshy place or narrow haven . . . Therefore the whale follows him, as the ship follows the helm, directing his course with confidence. *All other things whatever,*

*whether skiff, whether beast or stone, that chance to light into the gaping gulf of the whale's mouth, immediately perish, being swallowed by the monster; but acknowledging his conductor, he receives him and lodges him, like an anchor, safely in his jaws. There he sleeps; and all the while he takes his rest, the whale lies still, as if he were at anchor; and when his guide comes forth again, the whale proceeds, never forsaking him night or day; or if he wander without his leader, the monster shipwrecks, like a vessel cast upon a rock without a helm" (206-7).* I have italicized the portion of Plutarch quoted by Melville from him and Montaigne. In citing the latter's *Apologie*, Melville substitutes the sea gudgeon alluded to by both authors in passing for the pilot-fish which is their true subject.

37. Melville, "Hawthorne and His Mosses," cited from the Norton critical edition of *Moby-Dick*, 549.

38. See e.g. Robert Finch, "Very Like a Whale," in his *Common Ground: A Naturalist's Cape Cod* (1981); reprinted in *The Norton Reader: An Anthology of Nonfiction Prose*, ed. by Linda H. Peterson et al. (New York and London: Norton, 1996), 395. Though Finch makes no explicit mention of *Moby-Dick*, the topic of his essay (as his title indicates) is obviously more literary than he acknowledges. It is precisely this inability to distinguish between fact and fiction—as between a sea gudgeon and a pilot-fish—or to follow the literal implications of metaphors to their logical conclusion of which Melville seems to be accusing his critics here as in the prefaces to *Typee* and *Mardi*.

39. Maurice Blanchot, in the titular essay to *The Sirens' Song: Selected Essays by Maurice Blanchot*, ed. with an introduction by Gabriel Josipovici and transl. by Sacha Rabinovitch (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1982), 63.

40. Cf. note 36.

41. *Plutarch's Morals*, xix.

42. According to Bayle, who seems to be glossing and extending Saint-Evremond's observations, just as there are "certain people who have religion in their minds but not in their hearts," so there are others "who have religion in their hearts, but not in their minds" (298-99).

43. *The Complete Works of Ralph Waldo Emerson*, 3.80.

44. *The Piazza Tales and Other Prose Pieces, 1839-1860*, ed. by Harrison Hayford, Alma A. MacDougall et al. with a historical note by Merton M. Sealts, Jr. (Evanston and Chicago: Northwestern University Press and The Newberry Library, 1987), 6.

45. Theodore Spenser, cited from Hallet Smith's introduction to *Cymbeline* in *The Riverside Shakespeare*, ed. by G. Blakemore Evans et al. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1974), 1519.

46. Dillingham, 4.

47. See *Herman Melville: The Contemporary Reviews*, ed. by Brian Higgins and Hershel Parker (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 477, 478, 482.

48. Richard Harter Fogle, *Melville's Shorter Tales* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1960), 85.

49. *Ibid.*, 90.

50. Joel Porte, in *The Romance in America: Studies in Cooper, Poe, Hawthorne, Melville, and James* (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 1969), reads the passage, suggestively, as an allegory of Melville's own career as a writer and his rehearsing of "the same tired materials" over and over again (159).

51. Fogle, 85.

52. In his note to the text Matterson points out that the “fortress of Malakhov at Sevastopol . . . considered impregnable . . . was captured by the French during the Crimean War” of 1855, and suggests, prudently, that “there could be an ironic allusion to the destruction of apparent security” (310n.81).

53. Porte, 154.

54. Fogle, 88.

55. Herman Melville, *Pierre Or, The Ambiguities*, with a foreword by Lawrance Thompson (New York: Hendrick House, 1949), 334-35. Pierre is the author of “The Tropical Summer: A Sonnet.”

56. See, for example, Seelye, 25-27.

57. Fogle, 91.

58. Fogle describes “The Piazza” as “a Lockean reflection on the doctrine of secondary attributes, in which the life and color of the phenomenal world have no real existence but in the eye of the beholder” (85).

59. Dillingham, 324.

60. Porte remarks, “the art of the night, Melville seems to suggest, reaches beyond illusion to truth” (154). While my agreement with Porte is substantial, his study of Melville’s romance overlooks, in my view, his ironic relationship to the tradition. In the last analysis, the only “truth” Melville’s romantic art evokes is the truth of a world of illusion.

61. “To one who has weathered Cape Horn as a common sailor what stuff all this is” was Melville’s response to a passage he scored in Emerson’s essay on “Prudence”: “The drover, the sailor, buffets [the storm] all day, and his health renews itself as vigorous under the sleet, as

under the sun of June.” His response to Emerson’s invocation to “Trust man” in the same essay was equally incredulous: “God help the poor fellow who squares his life according to this,” wrote Melville (*ML* 648).

62. To Melville’s contemporaries, the story seemed only a quaint sketch in the style of Poe, Irving or Dickens (see *Contemporary Reviews* 473, 482), while modern readers such as J. Hillis Miller have questioned whether it has any discernible “allegorical meaning” at all (“A Deconstructive Reading of Melville’s ‘Bartleby, The Scrivener,’” in *Versions of Pygmalion* [Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1990]; reprinted in and cited from *The Story and Its Writer: An Introduction to Short Fiction*, ed. by Ann Charters [Toronto: Bedford/St. Martin’s], 1510).

63. See Dillingham, 36. Nothing could be more ironic, in this respect, than the identification of “Bartleby” as a “portrait from life” (*Contemporary Reviews* 573).

64. Fogle 143; see also 130-31.

65. The answer is “one dam Ingin.”

66. See Dillingham, 233, 241. Dillingham also detects suggestions of cannibalism in the story.

67. The allusion to “pilot-fish” in “Benito Cereno” suggests another parallel with *Moby-Dick* (*Piazza* 53). In this case, the role of “pilot-fish” is played by Spanish and slave boys, who act as “runners” conveying what are ostensibly Don Benito’s (but really Babo’s) orders to the crew. For a survey of critical interpretations of the character of Babo (as a figure of vice, evil, etc.) and a contrasting reading of him as a kind of “Satanic hero,” see Dillingham (261-66).

68. On the relationship between Webster and Montaigne, see Richard Bodtke, *Tragedy and the Jacobean Temper: The Major Plays of John Webster* (Salzburg: Institut für Englische Sprache

and Literature Universitat Salzburg, 1977). Cf. also Melville's gloss to the verse "there is nothing either good or bad, but thinking makes it so" in *Hamlet* (II.ii): "Here is forcibly shown the great Montaignism of Hamlet" (*ML* 291).

69. Alfred Glauser, *Montaigne paradoxal* (Paris: A.G. Nizet, 1972), 42.

70. *The White Devil*, in *The Selected Plays of John Webster*, ed. by Jonathan Dollimore and Alan Sinfield (Cambridge, London et al.: Cambridge University Press, 1983).

71. Irving Ribner, *Jacobean Tragedy: The Quest for Moral Order* (London: Methuen, 1962), 100.

72. Dillingham, 239.

73. As the narrator of "Benito Cereno" later puts it, "the country and the ocean seem cousins-german" (*Piazza* 82).

74. See Dillingham, 235.

75. Cf. n. 67.

76. See Seelye, 105.

77. *Billy Budd, Sailor and Other Stories by Herman Melville* (New York: Bantam, 1962), 65.

78. *Edmund Spenser's Poetry*, second edition, selected and ed. by Hugh Maclean (New York and London: Norton, 1968, 1982).

79. Cf. D. Mathis Eddy, "Melville's Response to Beaumont and Fletcher: A New Source for *The Encantadas*," *American Literature* 40 (1968), 379.

80. Eugene Waith quoted in Eddy, 377; and Eddy, 378.

81. *Ibid.*

82. *The Complete Works of Ralph Waldo Emerson*, 2.43.

83. *Prosopopoia* and “Vision of the World’s Vanity” cited from *The Yale Edition of the Shorter Poems of Edmund Spenser*, ed. by William A. Oram, Einar Bjorvand, Roland Bond, et. al. (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1989).

84. Cf. William Oram’s introduction to Spenser’s poem, in *Shorter Poems*, 330-31.

85. Eddy, 379.

86. *Ibid.*, 380.

87. Dillingham, 86-88.

88. *Poems of Herman Melville*, ed. by Douglas Robillard (New Haven: College and University Press, 1976), 156.

89. Fogle, 113.

90. Dillingham, 86.

91. The title of the sketch itself, “Runaways, Castaways, Solitaries, Grave-Stones, Etc.,” is suggestive of this lumping together.

92. Porte, 192.

93. *Ibid.*, 188; Melville cited from Jonathan Arac, “F.O. Matthiessen: Authorizing an American Renaissance,” in *The American Renaissance Reconsidered: Selected Papers from the English Institute, 1982-83*, ed. by Walter Benn Michaels and Donald E. Pease (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1985), 101.

94. To Carlyle’s solution to the conundrum of evil, as he found it sung in Matthew Arnold’s “Empedocles on Etna,” in which man is said to have “No title from the Gods to welfare and repose,” Melville’s response was emphatically that of his “Western critic”: “If so, the devil take the Gods” (*ML* 718).

95. See e.g. Dillingham, 208-9. There is a “flawed bell” in “Benito Cereno” whose tolling fills Captain Delano “with superstitious suspicions,” and in “The Encantadas” Rock Rodondo is compared to “the famous Campanile or detached Bell Tower of St. Mark” (*Piazza* 96, 134).
96. Dillingham, 213.
97. *Ibid.*
98. Fogle, 69.
99. Dillingham, 218.
100. Michel de Montaigne, *Essais*, ed. by Pierre Michel with introductions by André Gide, Albert Thibaudet, and Maurice Merleau-Ponty, 3 vols. (Paris: Gallimard, 1962, 1965), 1.34.322.
101. Fogle, 64.
102. Dillingham 209n.3.
103. Hillway, 13.
104. Concurrently, Hillway calls Taji’s refusal “to admit his inability to grasp the nature of the absolute” at the end of *Mardi* a “symbolical suicide” (12).
105. *The Works of Thomas Carlyle*, ed. by H.D. Traill, Centenary edition, 30 vols. (London: Chapman and Hall, 1898-99), 28.32.
106. Walter E. Houghton, *The Victorian Frame of Mind, 1830-1870* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1957), 9-10. Houghton labels the period an “age of transition” away from the Middle Ages (1). His first chapter includes an assessment of the importance of Montaigne’s skepticism to the period.
107. See Kathy Mezei, “The Literature of Quebec in Revolution,” in *The Human Elements: Critical Essays*, ed. by David Helwig (Ottawa: Oberon, 1978), 35. Mezei notes that the

“problems of the [Quebec] writer in bringing forth his creations parallel the difficult and painful birth-pangs of a nation on the verge of creating and inventing itself” (44). She goes on to paraphrase or translate Victor-Lévy Beaulieu in his chronicles of the 1970s: “He claimed that although Québec is searching for a place and a direction she ends up looking only at her image; instead of using myths, the writers chase the myth of their selves, substituting . . . episodic tales for the epic” (46). Both the allusion to Beaulieu’s criticism and the assessment itself are evidence of his deservedly high standing as a critic of contemporary Quebec writing, including his own.

108. Tougas, 95.

109. Joel Porte, *Representative Man: Ralph Waldo Emerson in His Time* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1979), xi.

110. Victor-Lévy Beaulieu, *Don Quichotte de la démanche* (Montreal: L’Aurore, 1974), 252. The novel won the Governor-General’s Award in 1975.

111. Malcolm Lowry, *Under the Volcano*, ed. with an introduction by Stephen Spender (New York: Penguin, 1965), 136. The epigraph to *Don Quichotte de la démanche* is also taken from Lowry’s novel: “Veo que la tierra anda; estoy esperando que pase mi casa por aqui para meterme en ella . . . . I learn that the world goes round so I am waiting here for my house to pass by,” jokes the drunken, teetering Consul (*Under the Volcano* 355). Lowry’s “psychological affinity” with Melville is discussed by Spender in his introduction (xxiii). Like Melville, Lowry takes as the theme of his “authentic modern tragedy” the negation of charity or “acedia, the spiritual apathy of the religious who have become . . . hermetically sealed off from the source of their

religion" (xxx, xxviii). On Beaulieu's relationship to Melville and Lowry, see his "Melville-pot en finale Lowry," in *Entre la sainteté et le terrorisme: essais* (Montreal: VLB, 1983), 191-4.

112. Such as is imaged, for example, in the frontispiece to Beaulieu's *Névoque plus que le désenchantement de tes ténèbres, mon si pauvre Abel* (Montreal: VLB, 1976), 11.

113. The cover depicts a one-dimensional pasteboard horse and rider, with a circular hole where the head would be. The two-dimensional author-protagonist peers through this hole, trapped in the world of his imagining.

114. For a more extensive account of this aspect of the *Voyageries*, see Jean-François Leroux, "The End of America: Geology and Cartography in Herman Melville's *Pierre* and Victor-Lévy Beaulieu's *Voyageries*," in the *Canadian Review of American Studies* 27.1 (1997): 93-118.

115. *Una: romaman* (Montreal: VLB, 1980), 232-34.

116. *Blanche forcée* (Montreal: VLB, 1976), 13.

117. *Sagamo Job J* (Montreal: VLB, 1977), 118.

118. *Oh Miami Miami Miami* (Montreal: Editions du Jour, 1973), 229.

119. *The Complete Works of Ralph Waldo Emerson*, 4.175, 174. Rock Rodondo in "The Encantadas" is said to be "on the parallel of Quito" (*Piazza* 137), a symbol for Melville, as witness the chapter "The Symphony" in *Moby-Dick* (442), of the paradoxes or dualisms found in nature and humankind.

120. In his article on Jean-Paul Richter, cited from the Centenary edition of *The Works of Thomas Carlyle*, edited by H.D. Traill, 30 vols. (London: Chapman and Hall, 1898-99), 26.17.

## Conclusion

At the end of his “Signs of the Times” (1829), Thomas Carlyle spoke of “a boundless grinding collision of the New with the Old,” of which the French Revolution was the “offspring,” but the “final issue . . . not yet anywhere unfolded.”<sup>1</sup> He would conclude his *Sartor Resartus* (1833-34), as well, by alluding to the 1830 Paris revolution and announcing, “*Es geht an* (It is beginning).”<sup>2</sup> And again, at the conclusion of *The French Revolution* (1837), he would reiterate, “the end is not yet,” having prophesied some “two centuries” still to fight (*W* 4.314, 2.133). “[T]he Old has passed away,” so Carlyle had mused back in 1831, “but, alas, the New appears not in its stead; the Time is still in pangs of travail with the New” (*W* 28.32). Similarly, and ironically, given his lifelong commitment to the vocation of the sage or teacher, Carlyle’s student Ralph Waldo Emerson, in his late essay “The Preacher” (1879), still saw the age as one of “transition”: “We are born too late for the old and too early for the new faith,” he wrote.<sup>3</sup> And concurrently, those twentieth-century Quebec writers who have followed in the wake of their nineteenth-century counterparts have also been said, repeatedly, to belong to an “age of transitions” from old certainties to new.<sup>4</sup>

It may seem contradictory, consequently, to write a conclusion on a subject which appears inconclusive. By tracing the literary-philosophical basis for the Romantic idealism of the various authors under scrutiny back to Montaigne and his rejection of the reason of Aristotle and the Scholastics in the *Apologie de Raimond Sebond*, however, the previous study implies or suggests a number of conclusions with respect to what is often construed as the prophetic enterprise of these same authors.

First among these is that their work may read as symptomatic of the malaise created by the passing of the Old Order of values, rather than as a palliative or cure to it. Carlyle and Hubert Aquin's simultaneous opposition and acquiescence to the attorney-logic of positive reason found in the contractualist tradition, for example, may be said to point to the modern impasse or "crisis of legitimacy" (to use Jürgen Habermas' phrase) in political thinking, a crisis which has its immediate origins in the nineteenth century.<sup>5</sup> As Philip Rosenberg notes in his study of Carlyle *The Seventh Hero: Thomas Carlyle and the Theory of Radical Activism* (1974), "Nationalism is . . . to the political scene what Romantic individualism is on a narrower stage; each leads toward the abandonment of universal values . . ."<sup>6</sup> In the absence of such universal values or general principles, so Carlyle intimates and critics John Stuart Mill and Joseph Mazzini came to recognize with reference to his own work, it becomes impossible to gauge the legitimacy of political actions and convictions.<sup>7</sup> Carlyle and Aquin's mysticism follows from their abandonment of reasoned conviction and action. However, like Montaigne, they leave their readers with no way of bridging the gap between particular and universal. They are consequently compelled, in their separate contexts, to give their assent to the skeptic and political pragmatist's profession of ignorance and indifference, *Quel remède?*

It follows from that act of self-disqualification that the origin and aim of the art of the (post)Romantic visionary artist is private, not public. This is what Emerson argues, *malgré lui*, as does, much more consciously and openly, Réjean Ducharme. The Emersonian-Ducharmian artist's indifference to dogma and ethics, a necessary corollary of his disinterestedness in portraying the contradictions he finds in the world within and without, means that his work should not be taken for "veritable gospel" (in Herman Melville's phrase), but rather, as secular,

extra-moral fiction, symbol, or myth.<sup>8</sup> The increasing tendency in Carlyle and Emerson criticism to focus on their poetics or rhetoric, to the almost total exclusion of their doctrines, suggests as much.<sup>9</sup>

Regarded in light of the above, the contrary tendency in some Quebec criticism to look to the Anglo-American writers in question, Emerson (and his critics) in particular, as sources of legitimacy, authority, and prophecy seems both ill-timed and ill-fated. Most notably perhaps, the Melvillean odyssey of Victor-Lévy Beaulieu, their precursor in this regard,<sup>10</sup> demonstrates that the prophecy of romantic nationalism found in these key works is by no means unequivocal, but rather fraught with irony and doubt, a conclusion confirmed by Melville's own career as a writer.

Finally, implied in the above argument is the idea that if any true reconciliation or dialogue between French and Anglo-American culture is to occur, it will have to be effected through quite other means than that of imaginative prophecy. Towards the renewal of such a dialogue, the author of the present study hopes he has made some small contribution.

## Notes

1. *The Works of Thomas Carlyle*, ed. by H.D. Traill, 30 vols., Centenary edition (London: Chapman and Hall, 1898-99), 27.82.
2. *Sartor Resartus*, ed. with an introduction by Kerry McSweeney and Peter Sabor (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), 224.
3. *The Complete Works of Ralph Waldo Emerson*, ed. by Edward Waldo Emerson, 12 vols., Centenary edition (Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1903-4), 10.217.
4. Kathy Mezei, "The Literature of Quebec in Revolution," in *The Human Elements: Critical Essays*, ed. by David Helwig (Ottawa: Oberon, 1978), 35. See also Patricia Smart, *Hubert Aquin, agent double: La dialectique de l'art et du pays dans "Prochain épisode" et "Trou de mémoire"* (Montreal: Presses de l'Université de Montréal, 1973). Smart speaks of Aquin's keen awareness that "le Québec est en train de vivre une époque de transition, qu'il se tient précairement entre sa propre mort et la possibilité d'une résurrection ou d'une nouvelle naissance," a situation she finds analogous to that following the Renaissance (12). Ducharme's work, as well, involves a search for a "renaissance culturelle" and "un nouveau Mythe des origines," according to Franca Marcato-Falzoni, who also notes the sense of an "impasse" accompanying that attempt (*Du Mythe au roman: Une trilogie ducharmienne* [Montreal: VLB, 1992], 93, 92).
5. "Acquiescence" insofar as utilitarian reason, though eventually discarded as insufficient to an understanding of the world, is nevertheless defined as the only form of the rational. Cf. Philip

Rosenberg, *The Seventh Hero: Thomas Carlyle and the Theory of Radical Activism* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1974), 74-75.

6. *Ibid.*, 12-13.

7. Though largely sympathetic, Mill, in his review of *The French Revolution*, diverged from its author in finding in “general principles . . . necessary helps . . . . For, except by general principles,” Mill pursued, “how do we bring the light of past experiences to bear upon the new case? The essence of past experience lies embodied in those logical, abstract propositions, which our author makes so light of:—there, and no where else . . . . To start from some theory, but not to see the object through the theory; to bring light with us, but also to receive other light from whencesoever it comes; such is the part of the philosopher, of the true practical *seer* or person of insight” (*London and Westminster Review* 27 [July 1837]; reprinted in and cited from *Thomas Carlyle: The Critical Heritage*, ed. by Jules Paul Seigel [London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1971], 64-65). In his article “On the Genius and Tendency of the Writings of Thomas Carlyle,” Mazzini, the leader of the Young Italy Movement, similarly parted ways with Carlyle in speaking of “universal tradition” as one of the “criteria of certainty,” in the absence of which we can have no “sure object . . . for action, excepting those to which our individual instincts lead us” (*British and Foreign Quarterly Review* 16 [January 1844]; also reprinted in and cited from *Thomas Carlyle: The Critical Heritage*, 257, 261).

8. An indication both of this indifference and of the status of Emerson’s work as secular scripture or myth may be seen in Wesley T. Mott’s observation that though “invoked as often as Shakespeare or the Bible by politicians and social commentators,” Emerson is also

simultaneously “celebrated as an originator of our virtues, and damned for releasing our vices” (“‘The Age of the First Person Singular’: Emerson and Individualism,” in *A Historical Guide to Ralph Waldo Emerson*, ed. by Joel Myerson [New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000], 62). Mott’s conclusion that Emerson is an apostle of “self-culture,” a “stance that balks those who want either to vilify or to worship him” because an exploration of the “moods, states, and dimensions of self” is ultimately conducive to an admission of “flawed vision” and “paradox,” further confirms that his true vocation is the “existential” one of “creat[ing] meaning” by way of a personal mythology (93).

9. In his introduction to his *Selections from Ralph Waldo Emerson* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1957), for example, Whicher points out that “the modern re-evaluation of Emerson . . . stresses not his doctrine but his spirit and method, his enactment of the self-created role of Man Thinking” (v). Similarly, scholarly focus and investigation on *Sartor* and Carlyle, as Jules Paul Seigel remarks in his survey of the critical tradition, has tended to be “polarized” (24), and has increasingly shifted from Carlyle’s sources and his message to his “enigmatic manner” (*Sartor* 60)—that is, to the ironies and ambiguities structuring his vision. See e.g. G.B. Tennyson, *Sartor Called Resartus: The Genesis, Structure and Style of Thomas Carlyle’s First Major Work* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1965), 5ff.; Jerry A. Dibble, *The Pythia’s Drunken Song: Thomas Carlyle’s Sartor Resartus and the Style Problem in German Idealist Philosophy* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1978); Anne K. Mellor, *English Romantic Irony* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1980), 133-34; and Colin N. Manlove, “‘Perpetual Metamorphoses’: The Refusal of Certainty in Carlyle’s *Sartor Resartus*,” *Swansea Review* 2 (1986); reprinted in

*The Critical Response to Thomas Carlyle's Major Works*, ed. by D.J. Trela and Rodger L. Tarr (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1997), 30-45. Tennyson's remarks are still apposite today: though the Victorians once considered *Sartor* "a bible showing . . . the way from doubt to faith," more recent readers have come to realize, as some of his contemporaries did, that "Carlyle adumbrated no consistent philosophy; he was neither a metaphysician nor a logician," but rather an artist in words (3, 5).

10. See e.g. Gérard Tougas, *Le Destin littéraire du Québec* (Montréal: Québec/Amérique, 1982), 95. See also number 41 of *Tangence* (October 1993), devoted to the question of intertextuality in Beaulieu's work. The two essays by Jean-François Chassay and Jean Morency which deal specifically with Beaulieu's relationship to Melville focus mainly on his three-volume study *Monsieur Melville* (1978); Chassay quotes Melville's work only once, Morency not at all, implying that Beaulieu's reading may be taken as definitive. Similarly, noting that the "problems of the [Quebec] writer in bringing forth his creations parallel the difficult and painful birth-pangs of a nation on the verge of creating and inventing itself," Mezei goes on to agree with Beaulieu that already by the 1970s Quebec writers tend to "repeat themselves," effectively "chas[ing] the myth of their selves" (44, 50, 46). "Is the small nation of Québec becoming closed in on itself, unenlightened by reciprocal exchanges with other cultures?" she asks, and concludes that "the struggle of the [Quebec] writer between his role as a voice for the *collectivité* and as a voice of his own personal necessity, salvation and vision continues, and that the developing independence of Québec culture has certain drawbacks" (51). By taking as its starting-point a somewhat larger canvas, the preceding account attempts to detail and explain these drawbacks.

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