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**‘THE MARKET-PLACE  
IS THE LOUVRE OF THE  
COMMON PEOPLE’**

**CRITICAL & COMMERCIAL VALUE SYSTEMS  
IN THE EARLY & LATE WRITINGS  
OF RALPH WALDO EMERSON**

**Dominic JAECKLE**

**Thesis submitted to Goldsmiths, University of London, for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy**

**September 2020**



*The essays, on my lap, lie. A finger  
Of light, in our pressurized gloom, strikes down,  
Like God to poke the page, the page glows. There is  
No sin. Not even error. Night,*

*On the glass at my right shoulder, hisses  
Like sand from a sandblast, but  
The hiss is a sound that only a dog's  
Ear could catch, or the human heart. My heart*

*Is as abstract as an empty  
Coca-Cola bottle. It whistles with speed.  
It whines in that ammoniac blast caused by the passage of stars, for  
At 38,000 feet Emerson*

*Is dead right*

**ROBERT PENN WARREN**

'Homage to Emerson, On Night Flight to New York' (1966) \*

*I hope you hate Carlyle  
& Emerson's insufferable essays,  
wisdom in every line, while his wife cried upstairs  
disgusting Emerson*

**JOHN BERRYMAN**

*Dream Songs* (1969) †

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\* Robert Penn Warren, 'Homage to Emerson, On Night Flight to New York,' *The Collected Poems of Robert Penn Warren* (Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University Press, 1998), 194

† John Berryman, '294', *The Dream Songs* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux; 1969), 316



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## Abstract

*“The market-place,” [Napoleon] said, “is the Louvre of the common people.”*

RALPH WALDO EMERSON

‘Napoleon, or the Man of the World’ (1850)<sup>‡</sup>

Presenting a unique revision of the works of Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803-1882), this thesis considers Emerson’s practical and theoretical interest in quotation and appropriation relative to his developing position on American political economy and the intellectual outcomes of antebellum economic expansionism. I will reflect on the ways in which recent scholarship has sought to examine the political and economic investments of Emerson’s authorship through his conceptualizations of the act of reading; and examine Emerson’s relationship with cultural, critical and commercial value systems relative to his historic, political and socioeconomic contexts.

Emerson’s analysis of the mechanisms and responsibilities of literary criticism depends upon the coalescence of capitalist and culturalist imperatives. I will investigate the ways in which the intersection of criticism and commerce impacted his use of metaphor, ideas of critical exchange and intellectual proprietorship; and effects his efforts to conceptualize what he called the ‘mechanics of literature.’<sup>§</sup> Reading across two major periods of activity—1836 to 1850 and 1860 to 1875—the alliance of Emerson’s early and later works will be foregrounded in order to consider the development and coherency of his thinking. His cumulative efforts to explore the cultural, political and practical effectivity of literary criticism will be read as an indicator of the value Emerson placed on market-based economics and as foundation for an examination of his ideas of cultural progress and critical practice more widely.

Through the act of quotation and appropriation, in particular, the political implications of Emerson’s thinking are underscored by an identification of the importance of context and proprietorship as determiners of cultural and critical value. I will argue that this position is informed by Emerson’s receptivity to the ascendance of market ideologies in the nineteenth century, and both underpins Emerson’s conceptualization of the act of reading and effects the ways in which Emerson has subsequently been read in twentieth and twenty-first century American Studies.

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<sup>‡</sup> Emerson, ‘Napoleon, or the Man of the World’ (1850), CW.IV., 240

<sup>§</sup> Emerson, ‘Literature’ (1837), in (eds.) S. E. Whicher, W.E. Williams, R.E. Spiller, *The Early Lectures of Ralph Waldo Emerson*, Vol.II., 1836-1838 (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press; Harvard University Press, 1964) 63

*Further references to this volume will be noted as EL.II.*





## Abbreviations & Primary Sources

Ralph Waldo Emerson, (ed.) E. Emerson, *Complete Works: Centenary Edition*, 12 Volumes  
(Boston, MA: Houghton and Mifflin, 1903-1904)

- 1836 *Nature: Addresses and Lectures* (CW.I.)
- 1841 *Essays: First Series* (CW.II.)
- 1844 *Essays: Second Series* (CW.III.)
- 1850 *Representative Men* (CW.IV.)
- 1856 *English Traits* (CW.V.)
- 1860 *The Conduct of Life* (CW.VI.)
- 1870 *Society and Solitude* (CW.VII.)
- 1875 *Letters and Social Aims* (CW.VIII.)
- 1884 *Poems* (CW.IX.)
- 1883 *Lectures and Biographical Sketches* (CW.X.)
- 1856 *Miscellanies* (CW.XI.)
- 1894 *Natural History of Intellect, and Other Papers* (CW.XII.)

Ralph Waldo Emerson, *Journals and Miscellaneous Notebooks*, 16 Volumes  
(Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press; Harvard University Press, 1960-1982)

- 1960 **JMN.I.** (1819-1822)  
(eds.) W.H. Gilman, A.R. Ferguson, G.P. Clark, M.R. Davis
- 1961 **JMN.II.** (1822-1826)  
(eds.) W.H. Gilman, A.R. Ferguson, G.P. Clark, M.R. Davis
- 1963 **JMN.III.** (1822-1826)  
(eds.) W.H. Gilman, A.R. Ferguson
- 1864 **JMN.IV.** (1822-1826)  
(ed.) A.R. Ferguson
- 1965 **JMN.V.** (1835-1838)  
(ed.) M.M. Sealts
- 1966 **JMN.VI.** (1824-1838)  
(ed.) R.H. Orth
- 1969 **JMN.VII.** (1824-1838)  
(eds.) A.W. Plumstead, H. Harrison
- 1970 **JMN.VIII.** (1824-1838)  
(ed.) W.H. Gilman, J.E. Parsons
- 1971 **JMN.IX.** (1819-1822)  
(ed.) R.H. Orth, A.R. Ferguson
- 1973 **JMN.X.** (1822-1826)  
(ed.) M.M. Sealts
- 1975 **JMN.XI.** (1822-1826)  
(eds.) A.W. Plumstead, W.H. Gilman, R.H. Bennet
- 1976 **JMN.XII.** (1822-1826)  
(ed.) L. Allardt
- 1977 **JMN.XIII.** (1835-1838)  
(ed.) R.H. Orth, A.R. Ferguson
- 1978 **JMN.XIV.** (1824-1838)  
(ed.) S. Sutton Smith, H. Harrison
- 1982 **JMN.XV.** (1824-1838)  
(ed.) L. Allardt, D.W. Hill, R.H. Bennett
- 1982 **JMN.XVI.** (1824-1838)  
(ed.) R.A. Bosco, G.M. Johnson



**Introduction:**  
**Ayn Rand Beforehand**  
*or Emerson's Marketplace of Meaning*

*Emerson [...], doesn't he dimly seem some Ayn Rand beforehand?*

**WILLIAM H. GASS**  
*'Emerson and the Essay' (1985)*<sup>1</sup>

*Your debts and credits, and your web of habits, are the very best basis of poetry.*

**RALPH WALDO EMERSON**  
*From his Journals and Miscellaneous Notebooks (1849)*<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> William H. Gass, 'Emerson and the Essay,' *Habitations of the Word: Essays* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1985), 10

<sup>2</sup> Emerson, 'Journal TU' (Undated, 1849), JMN.XI., 134

Emerson's career-long analyses of the symbolic and practical consequences of the ownership of ideas—borne out by the movement of information, idea or image—are acutely informed by his vision of culture as a marketplace of meaning. In this thesis, I will argue that Emerson's investigations of literary criticism and creativity are illuminated by his persistent evaluation of the ideological implications of the circulation of literary matter.

As America's industrial, economic and technological evolution were read by Emerson as a 'silent revolution' so too was his conceptualization of national culture and literary engagement informed by the revolutionary changes wrought by an increasingly market-led United States of the nineteenth century.<sup>3</sup> I will map the ways in which Emerson sought to consider this 'revolution' in ways both practicable and theoretical, and consider the function of the marketplace as a central metaphor for the organisation and conceptualisation of his reflections on the dialectical progress of a national literary culture.

In this respect, Emerson's work is representative of both a practical and theoretical consideration of how forms of cultural labour are effectuated in moments of economic, industrial and technological change. As his work responds in part to the cultural consequences of financial crisis in 1837, Emerson's conceptualist engagement with literary criticism is equally enhanced by a sensitivity to the ideological, intellectual and symbolic properties of market dynamism and depression. Emerson would not only comment on these socioeconomic circumstances in his work directly, he would also seek to systematise and analyse the practical, theoretical and intellectual aims and ambitions of literary criticism by assessing the philosophical and 'scientific' value of financial collapse as key to the advancement of an American culture of letters.<sup>4</sup> Answering to the economic disequilibrium and uneven regional development that took place in the 1830s and onwards, the consequences and effects of the subsequent period of economic recovery are also evidenced in his structures of thought as author, his examinations of the act of reading, and both his use of metaphor and analysis of the function of metaphor itself. The crisis of 1837 will be read

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<sup>3</sup> In the 'Seventh of March Speech on the Fugitive Slave Law' (1854), Emerson notes that the new media form of the newspaper 'has wrought [...] a silent revolution;' see Ralph Waldo Emerson, 'Seventh of March Speech on the Fugitive Slave Law' (1854) in (eds.) R.A. Bosco, J. Myerson, *The Later Lectures of Ralph Waldo Emerson*, Vol I., 1843-1871 (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 2001), 334

*Further references to this volume will be noted as LL.I.*

<sup>4</sup> See Emerson, 'Journal C' (May 14, 1837), JMN.V., 304

as significantly impacting his conceptualist relationship with value formation and intellectual property, and an analysis of the ways in which this period of depression and recovery speaks to both early and late period works in Emerson's canon will be essential to this thesis. Emerson's interest in appropriation and quotation will be central, and argued as a conceptual means of consolidating a career-long examination of the juncture of market economics and the 'mechanics' of critical enterprise.<sup>5</sup>

Examining the intersection of Emerson's politics and poetics in two later essays in particular—'Wealth' (1860) and 'Quotation and Originality' (1875)—I will examine the political and philosophical consequences of his interest in 'the art of appropriation,' as he terms it.<sup>6</sup> 'Quotation and Originality' will be regarded as a keystone essay in this revision of Emerson's conceptualizations of literary criticism.<sup>7</sup> Alternately pedagogical and conceptualist in character, Emerson's own explication of his 'art' will be shown to merge his literary and political aspirations through an active investigation of the circulation, use and retooling of received ideas and extant cultural materials. As will be shown, it is in 'Quotation and Originality' and 'Wealth'—amongst other essays—that Emerson's theoretical and practical relationship with appropriation and quotation will be centralized in pursuit of this idea, and I will investigate the ways in which these essays compound an interest in the circulation, dissemination and ownership of ideas as can be chronologically traced from his early period writings through to his later publications.

An analysis of how Emerson himself read, how he would demand that we ourselves should read, and how he has subsequently been read, represent the tripartite ambitions of this study. But that he should so repeatedly refer to the ways in which we borrow, plagiarise and repurpose appropriated or 'ready-made' cultural matter demands further investigation and will thus also be a focal point of my analysis.<sup>8</sup> Emerson's sense of the political and philosophical instrumentality of literary engagement will be foregrounded, as will

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<sup>5</sup> Emerson, 'Literature' (1837), EL.II., 63

<sup>6</sup> Emerson: 'Our country, customs, laws, our ambitions, and our notions of fit and fair, —all these we never made, we found them ready-made; we but quote them. Goethe frankly said, "What would remain to me if this art of appropriation were derogatory to genius? Every one of my writings has been furnished to me by a thousand different persons, a thousand things.' See 'Quotation and Originality' (1875), CW.VIII., 200

<sup>7</sup> An essay that, although published in 1875 (eight years prior to Emerson's death, 1882), 'Quotation and Originality' would be first delivered as a lecture in 1859; its parallelism with 'Wealth' is thus notable as they would have been initially authored in tandem.

<sup>8</sup> Emerson, 'Quotation and Originality' (1875), CW.VIII., 200

his suggestion that literary engagement can serve as a metaphor for various forms of civic and economic participation. His interest in the parallelism of cultural and capitalist economics will be investigated relative to the development of the American marketplace in the 1830s and 1840s, the institutionalization of scholarship, the indenturing of print and publishing cultures in the antebellum, the ideological effects of technologization, and the multi-layered nature of his critical legacy in twentieth and twenty-first century Emerson Studies. However, rather than subjecting Emerson to an investigation of his historical contexts alone, I will examine the ways in which he would look to the circuitry of capitalist economics to investigate the importance of ‘the concept of context’ more broadly.<sup>9</sup>

What are the aims and ambitions of Emerson’s practical interest in the development of criticism as an American institution? How do the intellectual outcomes of economic depression, recovery and expansionism inform his efforts to establish a definition of reading that is both conversant with and cognizant of the expansionist economic veuve of his hour? As we will see, the idiosyncrasies of Emerson’s interest in literature are best represented by his want to analyse critical processes rather than cultural products; by his formulating a marketplace of meaning that stresses the importance of the exchange of cultural materials over and above any consideration of their creation. I will explore the ways in which Emerson’s interest in the development of a cultural economy, dependent upon the use of ‘secondhand’ ideas, is both a response to his own economic circumstances and an ideological reaction to the progress of an American culture of letters.<sup>10</sup>

This remains an understudied and underexplored element of Emerson’s career-long examination into the cultural and symbolic implications of criticism as both act and institution, and his self-professed interest in the commercial, institutional and industrial ‘mechanics of literature’ (to borrow his term) will prove fundamental.<sup>11</sup> Looking specifically to Emerson’s early lectures ‘The American Scholar’ (1837), ‘The

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<sup>9</sup> A phrase and focus I borrow from Benjamin Pickford in ‘Context Mediated: Ralph Waldo Emerson’s Political Economy of Plagiarism,’ *Nineteenth-Century Literature*, 72.1. (2017), 39

<sup>10</sup> Although not widely acknowledged by his recent critics, Emerson’s sense of the ‘simultaneous richness and sterility of secondhand material’ has been argued by Andrew Delbanco as indicating Emerson’s ‘considerable salience for a modern and even postmodern sensibility.’ See Andrew Delbanco, in introduction to *Representative Men: Seven Lectures* (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press; Harvard University Press, 1996), xii-xiii

<sup>11</sup> Emerson, ‘Literature’ (1837), EL.II., 63



Present Age' series (1838 to 1839), 'Man the Reformer' (1841) and 'The Young American' (1844)—alongside recent and now-canonical revisionist critical responses to Emerson's cultural and canonical standing—I will suggest that a complex engagement with the ethics and aesthetics of market exchange are essential to Emerson's philosophical definitions of criticism. The importance of Emerson's own intertextual allusions and the ways in which he himself has been read since the mid-twentieth century will form a part of this enquiry and, in this context, several notable acts of appropriation within his writings (both accredited and unacknowledged) will be investigated. Emerson liberally borrows from the works of Johann Wolfgang von Goethe (1749-1832); Napoleon Bonaparte (1769-1821); Gulian C. Verplanck (1786-1870); Francis Wayland (1796-1865); and Karl Marx (1818-1883), and his use of these writers' works will illuminate the complexity of his developing relationship with appropriation over the course of his authorship, and act as indicators of a conceptualist and practical position on the circulation of culture as he sought to facilitate.

Such an analysis cannot be staged without an acknowledgment of how the American Transcendental (or what Emerson would term 'Transcendental Criticism') connects to his interest in technology and the technologization of the cultural sphere.<sup>12</sup> Looking to doctrinal and theoretical materials contemporary to his major publications—and to recent historicist accounts of his receptivity to America's economic development—the introduction of new technologies (such as the rotary printing press), and the institutionalization and industrialization of American publishing (1815 to 1850), will also be investigated as a means to consider Emerson's interest in our 'conductorship' or operation of culture,<sup>13</sup> and our capacity to 'control' or operate cultural matter.<sup>14</sup> The ways in which revisionist readers of the American

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<sup>12</sup> Emerson, 'Journal E' (Undated, 1840), JMN.VII., 352

<sup>13</sup> A term I borrow from Albert S. Southworth, whom—in a distinctly Emersonian tone—describes the faculty of critical 'observation' explicitly as 'the locomotive to be attached to the train of thought and engineered under your own conductorship; the power which turns the revolving wheels must be created by fuel from your own stores.' See Albert S. Southworth, 'An Address to the National Photographic Association of the United States, Delivered at Cleveland, Ohio, June 1870,' *Philadelphia Photographer* 8.94 (1871), 315-23, in Merry A. Foresta and John Wood, *Secrets of the Dark Chamber: The Art of the American Daguerreotype* (Washington D.C.: Smithsonian Institute Press, 1995), 297-99.

<sup>14</sup> Emerson's interest in 'control' in both political and cultural domains is noteworthy, and indicators of its conceptual significance can be gleaned across his writings. For example, see the following summative examples; on government and self-determinacy: 'Hands off! let there be no control and no interference in the administration of the affairs of this kingdom of me;' on the formation of critical opinion: 'Self-control is the rule;' on inspiration and taste: 'Are these moods in any degree within control? If we knew how to command them!' Respectively, see Emerson, 'New England Reformers' (1844), CW.III., 255.; 'Social Aims' (1875), CW.VIII., 86.; 'Inspiration' (1875), CW.VIII., 274

Transcendentalist tradition have analysed the economic ‘strain’ in Emerson’s writings will also be explored in this context, and an identification of the intersection between literary culture and capitalism within his essays and addresses—between critical and commercial value systems—will be shown to disrupt recent critical insistence that his earlier and later works contradict one another.<sup>15</sup>

In terms of his use of the marketplace as both an ideological and economic paradigm, critics such as Sacvan Bercovitch, Christopher Newfield and Michael T. Gilmore have argued that we can keenly distinguish between the anti-market stance of Emerson’s early essays and addresses and the apparently pro-market, libertarian character of his works post-1843.<sup>16</sup> However, I will maintain that there is sufficient evidence to counter such a position and propose, instead, that a more consistent and coherent position on the co-dependency of culture, technology and circulatory economics can be identified across his works.

An examination of the connection between Emerson’s interests in culture and capital is not unique to this project, however. Whilst Daniel Aaron would name Emerson the ‘seer of laissez-faire capital,’<sup>17</sup> historian Charles Sellers has argued Emerson as ‘the mid-century prophet of the corporate/capitalist millennium;’<sup>18</sup> a figure who would all too regularly confuse what he called the ‘merchant’s craft’ with the critic’s calling.<sup>19</sup> Although these evocative characterizations of Emerson’s Transcendentalism are often posed without sufficient explication, they commonly look to his later writings to best qualify and anchor his cultural and critical influences. Similarly, novelist William H. Gass’s identification of Emerson as an ‘Ayn Rand beforehand,’ looks to explore the potential application of Emersonian thought to a twentieth-century context. However, beyond this fleeting and tendentious comparison, Gass fails to locate ample evidence to support such a claim (beyond an acknowledgment of Emerson’s critical legacy and his place

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<sup>15</sup> Richard A. Grusin, ‘Put God in your Debt: Emerson’s Economy of Expenditure,’ *PMLA*, 103.1. (1988), 35

<sup>16</sup> In particular, see Michael T. Gilmore, ‘Emerson and the Persistence of Commodity,’ *American Romanticism and the Marketplace* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1988), 18-35.; Sacvan Bercovitch, ‘Emerson, Individualism, Liberal Dissent,’ *Rites of Assent: Transformations in the Symbolic Construction of America* (New York, NY: Routledge, 1993), 307-353; and Christopher Newfield, ‘Market Despotism: The Poet Affirms the Laws,’ *The Emerson Effect: Individualism and Submission in America* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 153-174

<sup>17</sup> See Daniel Aaron, ‘Emerson and the Progressive tradition,’ in (eds.) M.R. Konvitz, S.E. Whicher, *Emerson: Critical Essays* (Englewood, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1962), 85-99.; 93-94

<sup>18</sup> Charles Sellers, ‘The Bourgeois Republic,’ *The Market Revolution: Jacksonian America, 1815-1846* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1992), 380

<sup>19</sup> Emerson, ‘Wealth’ (1850), CW.VI., 87

within American popular culture more generally).<sup>20</sup> Nonetheless, as this thesis will show, his comparison is entirely justifiable.

Presenting a summary of her interest in the ethics and aesthetics of economization, Rand's *Romantic Manifesto* (1971) argues 'capitalism' as a 'monopoly system of mysticism';<sup>21</sup> as a means with which to describe 'the pattern of issues' that permeate Romanticism's aesthetic and critical cultures and represent an effort to correlate the creative arts with theories of political economy.<sup>22</sup> Whilst Rand notes that 'there is generally no accepted definition of Romanticism (nor of any key element of art, nor of art itself),' we can perceive a Romantic 'theory of intellect' as 'a product of the nineteenth century' and as resulting of two key influences—'Aristotelean thought' and 'capitalist economics.'<sup>23</sup> 'Aristotelianism [...] liberated man by validating the power of his mind,' she writes; 'capitalism,' conversely, 'gave man's mind the freedom to translate ideas into practice (the second of these influences was itself the result of the first).'<sup>24</sup> We find no explicit working definition of 'capitalism' in Emerson as we would do in Rand's work.<sup>25</sup> However, the term

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<sup>20</sup> Rand would unpack her position in 'The Goal of My Writing' (1963): 'the motive and purpose of my writing can best be summed up by saying that if a dedication page were to precede the total of my work, it would read *To the glory of man*. [...] My purpose is the presentation of an ideal man,' she writes; '[and I work] to define and present the conditions which make him possible and which his existence requires [...]. I had to present the kind of social system that makes it possible for ideal man to exist and to function—a free, productive, rational system, which demands and rewards the best in every man, great or average, which is, obviously, laissez-faire capitalism.' See Rand, *The Romantic Manifesto: A Philosophy of Literature* (New York, NY: Signet Books; Viking, 1971), 162-173. See also John B. Ridpath, James G. Lennox, 'Ayn Rand's Novels: Art or Tract? Two Additional Views,' *The American Journal of Economics and Sociology*, 25.2. (1976), 213-214.; Max E. Fletcher, 'Harriet Martineau and Ayn Rand: Economics in the Guise of Fiction,' *The American Journal of Economics and Sociology*, 33.4. (1974), 367-379.; Ruth Rosen, 'Ayn Rand: A Romantic, Secular Libertarian,' *Reviews in American History*, 39.1. (2001), 190-195; and Jennifer Burns, in introduction to *Goddess of the Market: Ayn Rand and the American Right* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 4

<sup>21</sup> Ayn Rand, 'What is Romanticism?', *The Romantic Manifesto: A Philosophy of Literature* (New York, NY: Signet Books; Viking, 1971), 94-95

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 95

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*,

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>25</sup> In introduction to *Capitalism: The Unknown Ideal* [1946], Rand cites *The Encyclopedia Britannica* to explain her use of the term: '**CAPITALISM**, a term used to denote the economic system that has been dominant in the western world since the break-up of feudalism. Fundamental to any system called capitalist are the relations between private owners of non-personal means of production (land, mines, industrial plants, etc., collectively known as capital) and free but capital-less workers, who sell their labor services to employers.... The resulting wage bargains determine the promotion in which the total product of society will be shared between the class of laborers and the class of capitalist entrepreneurs.' See *Encyclopedia Britannica*, Vol. IV. (1964), 839-845; see Ayn Rand, in introduction to *Capitalism: The Unknown Ideal* (New York, NY: Signet Books, 1966), 13-14

does recur in Emerson's writings, and thus demands that we better contextualize Gass' laconic aside.<sup>26</sup>

The simpatico between Emerson and Rand that Gass quietly identifies depends more on the conceptual 'power of mind' that Emerson asserts than it does his critical vocabulary, and his assertion that our capacity for a technical 'translation' of thought into action owes a great deal to the industrialization and economization of antebellum America.<sup>27</sup> Commenting on Rand's key ideas, Roxanne Fand argues that Rand viewed 'Democracy and capitalism [as] the twin pillars of individualism, upholding the doctrine of equal and unalienable rights for all.' However, she notes that the interpolation of these two concepts prove contradictory; 'the principles of majority rule and individual rights conflict within democracy; while private profit and fair public trading conflict with capitalism.'<sup>28</sup> Thus, Fand notes, Rand sought to engineer a 'Romantic' philosophical perspective that would elucidate the co-dependency of democratic and capitalistic principles: in other words, a means of considering literature as a socioeconomic force. This, Gass infers, was also Emerson's prerogative.

Of course, it is Emerson and not Rand that I will focus on herein, but this set of conflicts—majority rule and individual right; private profit and fair trade—are essential components within Emerson's writings

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<sup>26</sup> See 'The Transcendentalist' (1844), wherein Emerson cites 'the sturdy capitalist' in his depiction of the conflict between self-trust and faith in social and economic systems he acknowledges as a preponderate problem amidst his contemporaries. See Emerson 'The Transcendentalist' (1844), CW.I., 331. David Leverenz describes this passage as indicative of Emerson's want to satirize the economic circuitry of the early antebellum, describing Emerson's 'sturdy capitalist' as a 'wonderful send-up of old Boston bankers and new venture capitalists alike [...].' See 'The Politics of Emerson's Man-Making Words,' *PMLA*, 101.1. (1986), 42

<sup>27</sup> Cyrus K. Patell argues that '[Emersonians] rely upon a methodological individualism in which they shift the ground of inquiry from culture and society to the individual and translate moments of choice into moments of individual choice.' He contends that 'commercialization' underpins Emerson's method. See Cyrus K. Patell, 'Emersonian Strategies: Negative Liberty, Self-Reliance, and Democratic Individuality,' *Nineteenth-Century Literature*, 48.4. (1994), 440-479. Rather than 'translation,' Emerson would himself use the phrase 'awkward imitation' and enlist the expression of thought as an act of reproduction: 'Your action is good only whilst it is alive, —whilst it is in you. The awkward imitation of it by your child or disciple, is not a repetition of it, is not the same thing but another thing. The new individual must work out of the whole problem of science, letters, & theology for himself, can owe his father's nothing. There is no history; only biography.' See Emerson, 'Journal D' (Undated, 1839), JMN.VII., 202. These ideas are more famously encountered in 'History' (1841), CW.II., 10.; somewhat ironically, Emerson also appears to be both practicing and preaching his position, as these ideas relay an instance of conceptual appropriation. See Thomas Carlyle's 'On History' (1837)—'History is the essence of innumerable biographies'—in *Critical and Miscellaneous Histories*, Vol. II., (Boston, MA: J. Munroe & Co., 1838), 247. Editors of Emerson's *Journals and Miscellaneous Notebooks*—A. W. Plumstead, H. Hayford—note that 'Emerson undoubtedly read this essay when it first appeared as 'Thoughts on History,' *Frazer's Magazine* (Nov. 1830), 413-418,' and that this edition of the magazine Emerson's can presently be found in Emerson's own, private library.

<sup>28</sup> Roxanne J. Fand, 'Reading *The Fountainhead*—The Missing Self in Ayn Rand's Ethical Individualism,' *College English*, 71. 5. (2009), 486-505

on agency, interpretation, the act of reading, critical exchange and intellectual proprietorship. Centralizing what Emerson would term ‘the force of two in literature,’ I will allege that his characterization of critical exchange as a form of cultural or economic ‘cooperation’ wholly depends upon a conceptualization of the mores and mechanisms of America’s market economy and elucidates a complex awareness of the intersection of ‘public’ and ‘private interest.’<sup>29</sup> As such, this thesis will justify Gass’s comparison as a means of connecting the concerns, tropes and metaphor of both his early and later works. I will argue that the politics of Emerson’s poetics are exposed by his efforts to draw correlation between the ascendance of the market as both ideology and institution and the development of a distinctly American literary culture.

In order to best ascertain this correlation between Emerson’s early and late-period writings, I will take Emerson’s metacritical investments in the act of reading as a starting point and lens with which to scrutinize broader patterns and recurrences within his public and private writings. The symbolic and significant function of the reader as a figure within his works, his pedagogical commentaries on the act of reading, the intertextual and intratextual mechanisms employed in the interrelation of his private journals and published works, and his concern for the practical and theoretical consequences of scholarship will be read through an analysis of nineteenth-century American political economy and recent critical responses to America’s economic and political progress across the 1830s and 1840s. In so doing, I will investigate such categorizations of Emerson’s cultural philosophy as succinctly ‘capitalist’ in character and examine the ways in which such readings are self-consciously foregrounded by Emerson himself. I will argue that Emerson’s position should not be isolated to an analysis of his later works alone but, instead, operate as an extension of both his private and public writings of the late-1830s onwards.

Emerson not only reacted to the industrialization of an American cultural domain, but he also sought to assimilate its terms and systems. Mercantile cultures of exchange—the idea of use and surplus—are exploited to explore critical activity and cultural relation within a period defined by economic collapse, recovery and expansion on the one hand and by the institutionalization and formalization of a national literary culture on the other. In order to examine the implications of Emerson’s interest in the act of reading,

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<sup>29</sup> Emerson, ‘Quotation and Originality’ (1875), CW.VIII., 189

the agency of interpretation, and the cultural effects of circulatory economics, I will study how—within Emerson’s lifetime—industrialization, economic expansionism and rising literacy levels affected the social and civic responsibilities of scholarship and literary culture. But the ways in which such ideas impact Emerson’s relationship with quotation and appropriation will be crucial.

‘It has come to be practically a sort of rule in literature, that a man having once shown himself capable of original writing, is entitled thenceforth to steal from the writings of others at discretion,’ Emerson writes in 1850.<sup>30</sup> ‘Thought is the property of him who can entertain it and of him who can adequately place it. A certain awkwardness marks the use of borrowed thoughts; but as soon as we have learned what to do with them they become our own.’<sup>31</sup> I will pinpoint such a theory of ‘use’ as can be identified in Emerson’s writings, as a means to both examine the ‘economic strain’ of his reflections on criticism, and as a basis from which to investigate the coherence of his early and late-period publications. In order to address both the contents and contexts of his works, Emerson’s theorizations of what it means to read and *be* a reader must be seen as a wider form of cultural labour that is self-conscious and sympathetic towards both public intellectualism and the institutionalization of scholarship. I will propose that Emerson’s conceptualist and practical relationship with appropriation and quotation serves as a fulcrum from which we can investigate how a market-based economics influenced his work across periods and genres. Emerson’s assimilation of systems, metaphors and ideological positions from the marketplace not only illuminates his own practice as a writer and thinker but also underwrites his advocacy for the kind of relationship with a literary text that we ourselves should practice in the contexts of a commercial present.

A corpus of seven addresses and essays will prove key to this study: ‘The American Scholar’ (1837), ‘The Present Age’ series (1838 to 1839), ‘Man the Reformer’ (1841), ‘The Young American’ (1844), and the later essays ‘Wealth’ (1859), ‘Poetry and Imagination’ (1875) and ‘Quotation and Originality’ (1875). Whilst ‘The American Scholar,’ ‘The Young American,’ and ‘Wealth’ have garnered significant attention in contemporary Emersonian scholarship; ‘The Present Age’ and ‘Quotation and Originality,’ however,

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<sup>30</sup> Emerson, ‘Shakespeare, or the Poet’ (1850), CW.IV., 198

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*

remain curiously maligned in recent revisionist reactions to his corpus and influence.<sup>32</sup> These lesser studied works will be highlighted as key texts in this investigation, and argued as crucial for an acknowledgment of the coherency and clarity of Emerson's thinking. I will contextualize these essays with reference to both his journals, notebooks and parallel publications and—so as to foreground the development and consistency of his thinking—approach Emerson's writings and thematic concerns chronologically. Emerson's reference to his first major essay collections of 1841 and 1844 as a 'Series' is also significant. It is imperative that we read Emerson's works sequentially and cumulatively, and his exacting definition of his major works as in 'Series' arguably constitutes an overlooked instruction for the study of Emerson's published materials. Looking for progression between these collections, and for supplementary materials in his journals and notebooks, I will begin with his early works of the late-1830s and seek to establish correlation between his early public lectures and essays, 1836 to 1850, and subsequent consolidation in his later writings, 1860 to 1875, by examining repetitions and recurrences as between his private papers and published writings.

Part One—'COMMERCIAL VALUES'—consisting of one chapter divided into three subsections—will examine Emerson's critical legacy in order to contextualize his early work on criticism, cultural labour and the metaphoric implications that abound through an analysis of the act of reading. Beginning with a brief survey of recent reactions to Emerson's work to preface an outline of his early conceptualizations of critical practice, I will look particularly at the ways in which a critical 'reconstruction' of Emerson's writings has both politicized his philosophy and inspired a self-reflexive exploration of the act of scholarship itself. The works of Cary Wolfe and Vernon Louis Parrington will frame this investigation, and I will survey the ways in which Emerson articulates the symbolic value of critical work and the importance of the relationship between a reader and writer. I will look chiefly at the early essays 'Self-Reliance' (1841) and 'Thoughts on Modern Literature' (1840) and investigate how Emerson's interest in the conceptual bind of self and state correlates with his reflections on reader/writer relations and interpretative agency. This will preface an exploration of Emerson's interest in the dissemination and circulation of idea and image relative to his

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<sup>32</sup> See Newfield, 'The Market in Quotations,' *The Emerson Effect*, 161

remarks on the industrialization and technologization of the literary sphere as a form of ‘silent revolution.’ Joel Porte’s work on Emerson’s critical legacy—and Emerson’s essays ‘History’ (1841) and ‘The Young American’ (1844)—will be key to this discussion, and these ideas will preface the final part of this chapter, wherein Emerson’s thoughts and reflections on ‘silent revolution’ are defined in relation to various patterns of exchange, marketization and economy. One of these strands, Emerson’s transference of individualism as a European school of thought into a more practical American context, allows for the development of a theory of critical exchange in his private writings across a 24-year period, 1836 to 1860; a theorization of cultural economy he would refer to as ‘OTHERISM.’ Looking chiefly at the repetition of words, phrases and images across this date range, Emerson’s use of metaphor is particularly pronounced in his establishment of this position: one that has been entirely overlooked in his early writing by recent critics and can be argued as informed by the ascent of market ideologies both in terms of concept and symbolic vocabulary.

Emerson’s ‘OTHERISM’ speaks to the development of his interest in political economy as discipline and circulation as concept over the course of his early-career publications. In his desire to detail a metaphorical marketplace, he coins the term in order to explore the connections between criticism and capital through an evocative reading of exchange mechanisms that—beginning as a theory of critical transaction in 1836—is restaged as a theory of ‘COMMERCIAL VALUE’ in 1845. In order to further the chronology and coherency of Emerson’s thinking, I will examine the ways in which these ideas are developed in his private writings prior to their subsequent appearance in published works such as ‘Wealth’ (1860) and ‘Quotation and Originality’ (1875).

Part Two moves on to consider Emerson’s historical and cultural contexts more directly. ‘GEOLOGY AFTER AN EARTHQUAKE,’ divided into three distinct chapters, focuses more on the technological and industrial development of American literary culture, 1815 to 1850, to examine the interrelation of Emerson’s early and later works. I will concentrate on the cultural effects of economic downturn, depression and recovery during Emerson’s early authorship and examine in more detail how he conceptualizes labour, proprietorship and critical enterprise in his early works only to compound his position in his later writings. I will examine ‘The American Scholar’ (1837); ‘Man the Reformer’ (1841); and ‘Wealth’ (1860); ‘The Man of Letters’ (1863); ‘Progress of Culture’ (1875) and ‘Quotation and



Originality' (1875), and an investigation of these essays will be accompanied by parallel commentaries posed in Emerson's journals and notebooks.

In Chapter **ii.i.**—‘**THE ETHICS & AESTHETICS OF FINANCIAL PANIC**’—I will examine the ways in which the financial panic of 1837 affected his conceptualization of the act of reading and the agency of interpretation as drawn across both early and later works. This climactic event enables a mapping of recent, reticulated critical reactions to Emerson's work, and encourages further consideration of the ways in which the panic of '37 operated as a turning point in Emerson's intellectual development (or a 'conceptual shift,' as Randal Fuller would term it, 'from a concern with political process to concern with the representation of politics').<sup>33</sup> An investigation of Emerson's comments in his journals, 1835 to 1845, will be significant here, as will be the later essays 'Wealth' (1860) and 'Quotation and Originality' (1875). In Chapter **ii.ii.**, 'REVOLUTIONS IN RELATION,' an array of legalistic movements concerning copyright cultures and intellectual proprietorship, 1815 to 1850, will provide a secondary context for Emerson's theoretical interest in the responsibilities of scholarship and the expansion of the American book trade, the professionalization of the American publisher, and how technological modes of production changed the circulation of paper materials. The works of three historians will be of significant value to this study: Meredith McGill, Charles Sellers and Richard Teichgraeber. Examining the ways in which all three classify Emerson's age as radical in character—a 'revolution' in American publishing (McGill), a 'market revolution' (Sellers); and a technological 'revolution' (Teichgraeber)—an analysis of these forms of cultural transformation will allow for an identification of the complexity of Emerson's assertion that his age must be read as one of 'silent revolution.'<sup>34</sup> Emerson's desire to establish a 'new literature' fostered and fed by America's industrial and economic progress will be read relative to these studies so as to preface a close reading of Emerson's interest in the 'mechanics of literature' and appropriation as will follow.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> Randal Fuller, in introduction to *Emerson's Ghost: Literature, Politics and the Making of Americanists* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2007), 6

<sup>34</sup> See Meredith McGill, *American Literature and the Culture of Reprinting, 1834-1853* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2003); Charles Sellers, *The Market Revolution: Jacksonian America, 1815-1846* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1991); and Richard F. Teichgraeber III, *Sublime Thoughts/Penny Wisdom* (Baltimore, MD: John Hopkins University Press, 1995).

<sup>35</sup> Emerson: 'There is no topic that may not be treated, and no method excluded. Here, everything is admissible, philosophy, ethics, divinity, criticism, poetry, humor, anecdote, mimicry,—ventriloquism most,—all the breadth and versatility of the

Chapter **ii.iii.**, ‘APPROPRIATING THE AMERICAN SCHOLAR,’ will investigate Emerson’s ‘art of appropriation’ and both examine and contextualize theories of critical engagement and cultural participation, looking again to the later works ‘Quotation and Originality’ (1875) and ‘Wealth’ (1860). Emerson’s assimilation and absorption of the works of others—and the ways in which he both practiced and preached this ‘art of appropriation’—will be mapped further. This chapter will consider the ways in which instances of appropriation in Emerson’s writings can be identified and theorized in the context of ‘the market-place’ and the efficacy of commercial systems of circulation. Emerson’s ‘art of appropriation’—and the overall significance of ‘Quotation and Originality’ as an essay—will be further defined through his appropriation of the works of American banker and politician Gulian C. Verplanck (1786-1870) and his references to (and appropriations of) works by Johann Wolfgang von Goethe (1749-1832), Napoleon Bonaparte (1769-1821), and Karl Marx (1818-1883). Emerson’s conceptualizations of creativity and authenticity will be argued as crucial for an understanding of his appropriation of the works of others, most noticeably in his late period writings.

In conclusion, the centrality of ‘appropriation’ within Emerson’s works will be expanded into an analysis of the intratextual mechanisms we can identify within his authorship more broadly: a theory of critical ‘constellation,’ as Emerson would himself term it.

As questions regarding the nature of Emerson’s cultural canonization and his currency of his own works as forms of cultural capital re-emerge in the twentieth and twenty-first century, the links between his conceptualist and practical ideas regarding reading and criticism remain paramount. This thesis will examine not only how such concerns have been registered in recent analyses of Emerson’s corpus and cultural purchase but will also charter the ways in which such ideas can be concretely and consistently identified across Emerson’s oeuvre.

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most liberal conversation, and of the highest, lowest, personal, and local topics—all are permitted, and all may be combined in one speech.’ See (eds.) Ronald A. Bosco, Joel Myerson, *New England*, Lecture III: ‘New England: Genius, Manners and Customs,’ LL.I., 48



# I

## **COMMERCIAL VALUES**

EMERSON'S PRIVATE AND PUBLIC PAPERS, 1836 to 1860

*Steam is no stronger now than it was a hundred years ago;  
but is put to better use.*

**RALPH WALDO EMERSON**  
'Wealth' (1860)<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Emerson, 'Wealth' (1860), CW.VI., 104-105

Emerson's cultural legacy has consistently undergone a process 'perennial refocusing' both inside and outside of the academy in the years subsequent to his death in 1882.<sup>2</sup> Consequently, twentieth and twenty-first century Emerson Studies has witnessed a concerted effort to address the ways in which he sought to establish 'a mode of expression' in which 'philosophy and literature would bear a relation to each other not envisioned in the given, outstanding traditions of philosophy in in England and in Germany.'<sup>3</sup> This 'mode,' particular to his historical and national context, has resulted in a radical distinction between the ways in which Emerson was read at the onset of the twentieth century and its end. 'No one ever accused Emerson of being predictable,' writes Cary Wolfe in 1994, so it is only fitting that, in considering the cultural drift of Emerson's reputation, recent 'critical reconstructions' of his corpus have both philosophically and culturally 'produced a figure who little resembles the "Yankee sage" of American Studies at mid-century.'<sup>4</sup> The 'old Emerson,' as Wolfe portrays him, 'was energetic but wild, inspiring but misty, brilliant on the level of the sentence, and even paragraph, but a house of cards when it came to cumulative power and compelling, overall coherence.'<sup>5</sup> The 'new' Emerson, as Wolfe terms him, 'is something else' entirely.<sup>6</sup> 'Less an untamed metaphysician than a powerful and persuasive stylist,' this later iteration of Emerson's cultural commentaries renders him less 'a serious philosopher,' than an 'incisive, if problematic, social and cultural critic.'<sup>7</sup>

Fed in part 'by the growing influence of Marxist theory in American Studies and the challenging politicization of culture by ideological critiques of all kinds,' such 'reconstructions' of Emerson's work—according to Wolfe—centre 'less on the Transcendentalist trying to make his break and his peace with the religious tradition, and more on the promise and peril of liberal individualism.'<sup>8</sup> A summation of Wolfe's argument, simply put, is that Emerson's metacritical interests in scholarship, the agency of interpretation,

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<sup>2</sup> P. Adams Sitney, 'Emersonian Poetics,' *Eyes Upside Down: Visionary Filmmakers and the Heritage of Emerson* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 1-20

<sup>3</sup> Stanley Cavell, in introduction to (ed.) D.L. Hodge, *Emerson's Transcendental Etudes* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2003), 4-5

<sup>4</sup> Cary Wolfe, 'Alone with American: Cavell, Emerson, and the Politics of Individualism', *New Literary History*, 25.1. (1994), 137

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 137

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 137-138

and the socio-economic indices of cultural engagement argue that we need not only analyse the content of Emerson's writings themselves; but we also need consider the ways in which Emersonian cultural criticism has fostered an investigation of the culture of critical consumption that has itself emerged around his works. Such a position has clear bibliographic precedent, and will be the focus of this chapter, which will both survey recent 'reconstructions' of this 'new' Emerson and introduce the complex textual systems that Emerson would establish in the first phases of his authorship.

Internal schisms, rifts and contradictions accompany Emerson's efforts to explore the codependency of private enterprise and public welfare in his exploration of the act of reading as metaphor for economic participation, and this is reflected in recent criticism. Although Emerson does detail an aggressive interest in 'the purposes of art' and 'of study' across his works, any clarity as per the philosophical and political indications of his thinking has proven hard to come by.<sup>9</sup> A 'fog,' as Stanley Cavell puts it, clouds our receipt of his writings today, and our experience of reading Emerson in the contemporary is shrouded in an atmosphere of critical confusion.<sup>10</sup> Critics concede that his habitual tendency towards stylistic and poetic abstraction complicates any critical classification of his writings from the standpoint of either a philosophical or political category. His cultural commentaries are so diverse in their critical indication that a close reading of his writings requires a theory of personal 'control,' writes Joel Porte.<sup>11</sup> A 'typographical mystification' accompanies any evaluation of his works,<sup>12</sup> and 'matters are genuinely in a tangle' writes Jonathan Bishop,<sup>13</sup> and Emerson's politics are governed by an irrational and unerring faith in self-determinacy, as Mark Patterson would state.<sup>14</sup> His aesthetics are so diffuse that they require 'perennial' and constant 'refocusing,' writes P. Adams Sitney.<sup>15</sup> Irving Babbitt—and Van Wyck Brooks before him—would also famously publish ardent criticisms of Emerson's writing that lament his

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<sup>9</sup> Emerson, 'Self-Reliance' (1841), CW.I., 81

<sup>10</sup> Stanley Cavell, 'Emerson,' *Cities of Words: Pedagogical Letters on a Register of the Moral Life* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004), 20

<sup>11</sup> Joel Porte, 'The Problem of Emerson,' *Consciousness and Culture: Emerson and Thoreau Reviewed* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2004), 32-33

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 33

<sup>13</sup> Jonathan Bishop, *Emerson on the Soul* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1964), 158

<sup>14</sup> See Mark R. Patterson, 'Ralph Waldo Emerson and the American Representative' in *Authority, Autonomy and Representation in American Literature, 1776-1865* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1988), 137-140

<sup>15</sup> P. Adams Sitney, in introduction to *Eyes Upside Down: Visionary Filmmakers and the Heritage of Emerson*, 20

lack of lucidity. Babbitt would note that although Emerson is ‘an important witness to certain truths of the spirit in the age of scientific materialism,’ in end, he proves ‘too satisfied with saying about half the time that everything is like everything else, and the rest of the time that everything is different from everything else’ to be of any palpable philosophical value.<sup>16</sup> This broken system of simile underpins a corpus of works that Babbitt admits can be defined as ‘disquieting’ at times, but primarily due to the ‘vagueness’ of its philosophical and political direction, the ‘lack of grip’ his works commonly exercise in their ‘dealing with the particulars,’ and the ways in which he so freely interchanges political specificity with poetic platitude.<sup>17</sup>

Examining Emerson’s investigative analysis of the act of reading, and the origins of his interest in economic circularity and the forms of commercialism upon which his theories of cultural engagement depend, this chapter will contest the ‘fog’ that Cavell attests troubles our reading of Emerson. I will examine Emerson’s continuous and cumulative study of scholarship, and Porte’s sense of our need to ‘control’ the critical indications of Emerson’s work will be key. Identifying interrelations between Emerson’s early and later works, I will explore the ways in which Emerson’s more naïve reconnoitering of the philosophical and political dimensions of scholarship and subjectivist interpretative practice in the 1830s and 1840s—a theoretical study of ‘use’ or critical ‘control’—informs the more astute analysis of appropriation he would put forward in his later years and more mature publications of the 1850s, 1860s and 1870s.

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<sup>16</sup> Irving Babbitt’s *Literature and the American College: Essays in Defence of the Humanities* cited by Robert Bloom in ‘Irving Babbitt’s Emerson,’ *The New England Quarterly*, 30.4. (1957), 457

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*



i.

NATURE *spoke*  
To each *apart*

RALPH WALDO EMERSON  
'Progress of Culture' (1867)<sup>18</sup>

Emerson's own (self-confessed) 'experimental literary procedures' and 'his highly ambivalent attitude toward his own age have always made him a Rorschach exercise for his reader's projects of self-discovery.'<sup>19</sup> More acutely than as capable of scaffolding any effort to engage any particular form of social exigency, David Smith argues it is Emerson's interest in persona as a cultural object and as the autotelic endpoint of critical engagement that chiefly preoccupies his engagements with culture.<sup>20</sup> As such, and as Douglas R. Anderson remarks in his *Philosophy Americana* (2006), 'for many argument-riffers and intellectual historians Emerson does not appear to be *doing* philosophy.'<sup>21</sup> For Anderson, this is partly why, 'for most of the twentieth century, his work lived only in literature programs.'<sup>22</sup>

Rather than engage 'the immense form of society at large' (in philosophical terms), Emerson considers the metonymic propensities of the single subject; how we can read exegetically outward to consider the relationship between an individual reader and their political contexts.<sup>23</sup> However, if we are to put Emerson's theory to work, his position appears to prioritize the process of critical application to such a degree that the subjectivist core of critical engagement proves foregrounded. In short, our own critical desire determines the value of a text as much as its original intent. As Peter Carafiol notes, a distinctly

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<sup>18</sup> Emerson, 'The Progress of Culture' (1867), CW.VIII., 205

<sup>19</sup> David L. Smith, 'Representative Emersons: Versions of American Identity,' *Religion and American Culture: A Journal of Interpretation*, 2.2. (1992), 159-160. Emerson would himself speak to his practice as an 'experiment' explicitly; see Emerson, 'Circles' (1841), CW.II., 318

<sup>20</sup> Smith, 'Representative Emersons,' 318

<sup>21</sup> Douglas R. Anderson, 'Emerson's Platonizing of American Thought,' *Philosophy Americana: Making Philosophy at Home in American Culture* (New York, NY: Fordham University Press, 2006), 189

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

'Emersonianist' form of interpretation has therefore proven pivotal 'not so much to [the development of] American writing as to American criticism;' a claim that appears to support Anderson's comment regarding the self-direction of the Emersonian reader.<sup>24</sup> To read in an 'Emersonian' fashion, he infers, is not to identify what a text says but to identify best what *we* want it to communicate.<sup>25</sup> In this respect, the critical 'reconstruction' of Emerson that Wolfe identifies cannot be divorced from the still prevalent idea that Emerson's strength lies in the ability of his writings to communicate all things to all readers.

The value that Emerson affords the act of reading owes to his want to ally 'objective reality' and 'subjective experience,' and frames what Wai-Chee Dimock has referred to as a 'general economy of selfhood' wherein processes of economic 'circulation' are mirrored in our individual processes of mind, 'and whose standard of movement registers only subjective affect.'<sup>26</sup> In sum, Emerson was interested in the ways in which we allot value to select signs, symbols and subjects relative to our own, singular logic and our own critical intent.<sup>27</sup> Dimock argues that Emerson's interest in the 'circulation' of ideas through the act of reading is emblematic of his want to analyse 'the empirical fact of America's abundance.'<sup>28</sup> How the economic progress of an independent America in the early 1800s 'enabled him to posit something called the self' by virtue of the emphasis placed on an 'ownership' of matter by mercantile ideologies and imperatives in ascendance.<sup>29</sup> However, the application of Emerson's thoughts on reading and criticism in practice—the 'Emersonianist' mode, as Carafiol regards it—has become something of a distilled convention and proves central to the development of American Studies as both discipline and institution.

Dedicated to what Gene Wise has referred to as the study of 'paradigm drama,' Wise suggests that American Studies has sought to 'recapitulate' American culture by asking a train of significant questions of it commonly thought of as Emersonian in nature; 'What imperatives are there in the larger culture and social structure, and in the culture and social structure of academe, which have made possible the quest for

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<sup>24</sup> Peter Carafiol, 'Reading the Tradition: The Rhetoric of Transcendentalist Scholarship,' *The American Ideal: Literary History as a Worldly Activity* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 42

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> Wai-Chee Dimock, 'Scarcity, Subjectivity and Emerson,' *boundary 2*, 17.1. (1990), 90-91

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 91

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

an integrating American Studies? How have these imperatives changed over time?’<sup>30</sup> Dealing simultaneously with two central and primary issues—‘Who we are?’ and ‘Where we are heading?’—Wise proposes that a conflict between presentism and prospect underscores American Studies as ‘movement,’ and facilitates a radical rereading of America’s cultural past that considers cultural and political progress perpendicularly.<sup>31</sup> As noted, his summation of the grounding theses of American Studies is founded on Emersonian questions. Look to Emerson’s ‘Experience’ (1844), for example—and the essay’s grounding thesis and opening remark in particular—‘WHERE do we find ourselves?’ This foundational statement is of undeniable importance to Wise’s assessment of the intellectual aims and ambitions of American Studies as discipline, but is also key to Emerson’s own development of his ‘Transcendental Criticism’ as he would term it in his journals, 1840.<sup>32</sup> ‘Criticism must be transcendental, that is, must consider literature ephemeral & easily entertain the supposition of its entire disappearance,’ Emerson writes,<sup>33</sup> and the critic’s ‘aim’ needs be ‘on life and not on literature,’ as he would later suggest.<sup>34</sup> Thus, the ‘Emersonianist’ or ‘Transcendental’ critic should consider the real-world application of critical ideas rather than simply sequester their significance to the institution of criticism or cultural convention.

As Emerson argues, ‘The astronomer discovers that geometry, a pure abstraction of the human mind, is the measure of planetary motion. The chemist finds proportions and intelligible method throughout matter; and science is nothing but the finding of analogy, identity, in the most remote parts.’<sup>35</sup>

If it were only for a vocabulary, the scholar would be covetous of action. Life is our dictionary. Years are well spent in country labors; in town; in the insight into trades and manufactures; in frank intercourse with many men and

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<sup>30</sup> Gene Wise, ‘Paradigm Dramas in American Studies: A Cultural and Institutional History of the Movement,’ *American Quarterly*, 31.3. (1979), 298

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

<sup>32</sup> See Emerson, ‘Experience’ (1844), CW.III., 45. Richard A. Grusin offers an interesting reading of the philosophical importance of ‘Experience’ and Emerson’s guiding question, suggesting that it situates his perspectivism as radically exploring and engaging forms of cultural mediation that seat him as within a complex and progressive philosophical cosmogony. See ‘Radical Mediation,’ *Critical Inquiry*, 42.1. (2015), 129

<sup>33</sup> Emerson, ‘Journal E’ (Undated, 1840), JMN.VII., 352

<sup>34</sup> Emerson: ‘[The] receiver’s aim is on life, and not on literature, will be his indifference to the source. The nobler the truth or sentiment, the less imports the question of authorship. It never troubles the simple seeker from whom he derived such or such a sentiment. Whoever expresses to us a just thought makes ridiculous the pains of the critic who should tell him where such a word had been said before. ‘Quotation and Originality’ (1875), CW.VIII., 192

<sup>35</sup> Emerson, ‘The American Scholar’ (1837), CW.I., 88

women; in science; in art; to the one end of mastering in all their facts a language by which to illustrate and embody our perceptions. I learn immediately from any speaker how much he has already lived, through the poverty or the splendor of his speech. Life lies behind us as the quarry from whence we get tiles and copestones for the masonry of to-day. This is the way to learn grammar. Colleges and books only copy the language which the field and the work-yard made.<sup>36</sup>

Interpretative agency, in other words, is the ‘finding of analogy’ for ‘country labors’ and the ascendent culture of ‘trades and manufactures.’ Its scientific, political and philosophical worth is vital to Emerson’s mind; and his characterization of the scholar as a kind of searcher, and assertion that the ‘finding of analogy’ needs itself be regarded as a significant labour form, has proven key to recent considerations of the contemporary resonances of Emerson’s thoughts on criticism within the field of American Studies.<sup>37</sup>

The ‘Emersonianist’ reader, according to Carafiol, is both lens and discerner of analogy, but such a characterization is present in Emerson’s writings themselves. A distinctly metacritical self-consciousness that sought to consider the aims and ambitions—both institutional and personal—that underpin scholarly work. Considering the history of American Studies’ institutionalization over the course of the twentieth century, and the implementation of Emerson’s ideas on analogy and ‘original relation’ therein, Wise signals Emerson’s place as at the very foundation of this movement.<sup>38</sup> However, he does so by inference rather than by explicit textual evidence. Nevertheless, for Wise, a critical canon of early twentieth century critics exacts a vital antecedent to the ‘reconstruction’ of the Emersonian Transcendental that Wolfe indicates.

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<sup>36</sup> Ibid., 97-98. Emerson’s remarks on scholarship and its remove from quotidian (and proletarian) experience are interestingly summarized by Reza Hosseini in ‘Emerson and the Pale Scholar,’ *Dialogue: The Canadian Philosophical Review*, 57.1. (2018), 115-135

<sup>37</sup> This idea is also raised by Jay Gurian in ‘American Studies and the Creative Present,’ *Midcontinent American Studies*, 10.1. (1969), 76-84

<sup>38</sup> In ‘Nature,’ his career would famously begin with a nod toward a need to radically rework both canon and convention: ‘OUR age is retrospective’ he writes: ‘Why should not we also enjoy an original relation to the universe? Why should not we have a poetry and philosophy of insight and not of tradition, and a religion by revelation to us, and not the history of theirs? [...] [Why] should we grope among the dry bones of the past, or put the living generation into masquerade out of its faded wardrobe?’ This infamous complaint that introduces Emerson’s debut is emblematic of his rejection of any critical ‘obligation to the historical, cultural and intellectual situatedness that we encompass under the shorthand context,’ as Benjamin Pickford has argued; ‘Establishing a theme that is thereafter never completely absent from his work.’ See Emerson, ‘Nature’ (1836), CW.I., 3; and Pickford, ‘Context Mediated: Ralph Waldo Emerson’s Political Economy of Plagiarism,’ 35

Looking to the works of Perry Miller, Robert Meredith, *et al*, Wise depicts the ways in which a historiographic and revisionist critical treatment of Emerson's work reflects the broader aims of American Studies as a young discipline. However, he does not remark on the fact that the form of critical enterprise Emerson would himself detail in his efforts to consider the subjectivist principles of a critic's engagement with culture entirely echo his terms of argument.<sup>39</sup> Instead, Wise looks to the works of Vernon Louis Parrington to ground his investigation of the first steps of American Studies as an accepted academic institution. Coining what he terms the 'Parrington paradigm,' he is keen to explore the ways in which the axis of an argument corresponds to the personal and political aims of the individual reader.<sup>40</sup>

According to Wise, 'more than any other Americanist,' it was Parrington's seminal *Main Currents in American thought* (1927) that reanimated the idea of cultural scholarship as a socially responsible and radical form of political engagement; specifically, by way of an analysis of Emerson's early address, 'The American Scholar.'<sup>41</sup> A 'passionate mind encountering a dynamic world, sans the mediating forms of convention,'<sup>42</sup> Parrington's reading of Emerson's resituated 'the genteel Transcendentalist' as 'the most searching critic of America' and its cultural and political offices.<sup>43</sup> For Wise, Parrington's scholarly response to Emerson's remarks *on scholarship* engineers an 'incisive' form of 'cultural criticism.' Parrington reads Emerson's work as facilitating a politically predicated and philosophically dedicated analysis of 'the tragic gap between the real and the ideal' (echoing what Emerson would term 'gulf between every me and thee').<sup>44</sup> In so doing, and seeking to speak to the further canonization of Emerson, he would argue Transcendentalism as a means of considering the aims and ambitions of a particularly Americanist philosophical tradition.

However, as Randall Fuller notes, such is the creativity of the work underpinning Parrington's assessment of this revolutionary form of cultural critique that Parrington's work could itself be addressed

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<sup>39</sup> See Carafiol, *The American Ideal*, 89, 100-101

<sup>40</sup> Wise, 'Paradigm Dramas in American Studies,' 315

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, 298

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>43</sup> Vernon Louis Parrington, *Main Currents in American Thought: The Romantic Revolution in America, 1800-1860* (New York, NY: Harcourt Brace, 1954), 383

<sup>44</sup> Parrington, *Main Currents in American Thought*, 386.; see also, Emerson: 'There will be the same gulf between every me and thee as between the original and the picture.' 'Experience' (1844), CW.III., 77

as a subtle act of censorship or appropriation. Parrington ‘wholly ignored’ Emerson in the various guises that he appears across his works; eliding any sense of how ‘Emerson the metaphysician, Emerson the poet, Emerson the prose stylist and Emerson the mystic’ may effectuate his argument or question its aims.<sup>45</sup> Parrington’s project, to Fuller’s mind, thus pictures the ways in which ‘a canonical figure may fill the personal and cultural needs of a reader or a critic in ways that may have little to do with that canonical figure’s actual texts.’<sup>46</sup> Parrington’s treatment of Emerson as an object sculpted as much out of the aims, ambitions and intent of the individual reader’s own critical desire as from the content of the work itself could be considered problematic. However, it is another critical trait identifiable in Emerson’s writing.

In ‘The American Scholar,’ Emerson arguably justifies the liberties Parrington takes with his source material by positing what he would term ‘creative reading.’ ‘There are creative manners, there are creative actions, and creative words; manners, actions, words, that is, indicative of no custom or authority, but springing spontaneous from the mind’s own sense of good and fair,’ Emerson notes:<sup>47</sup>

I would not be hurried by any love of system, by any exaggeration of instincts, to underrate the Book. There is creative reading as well as creative writing. When the mind is braced by labor and invention, the page of whatever book we read becomes luminous with manifold allusion. Every sentence is doubly significant, and the sense of our author is as broad as the world.<sup>48</sup>

Rather than a theory of creativity, Emerson’s position on ‘creative reading’ intuits the act of reading as constituting a form of property—as a literalized act of knowledge formation—and as a mean of taking ownership of the inventions and allusions a work contains. A reading, in this regard, becomes a cultural object as vital as the literary work that catalyses it; it is an object that itself needs circulate and, in so doing, forge or ‘create’ further reactions, ‘creating’ both new readings and, incidentally, an economy of participation and invention in so doing. We read only to partake in ‘an ever-expanding knowledge

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<sup>45</sup> Randall Fuller, ‘How to Dismantle American Culture,’ *Emerson’s Ghosts: Literature, Politics and the Making of Americanists* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 71

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>47</sup> Emerson, ‘The American Scholar (1837), CW.I., 90-93

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*

[system],<sup>49</sup> and to participate in the ‘slow growth’ of a cultural economy.<sup>50</sup>

This dialectical view of the participatory qualities of critical and cultural progress has continued to resonate with critics seeking to explore the conflict between critical desire and social exigency that underpins scholarly attention. Furthermore, it has been employed as a means with which to consider the pedagogical application of Emerson’s thinking on the agency of criticism to the contemporary, commercial university.<sup>51</sup> As David LaRocca infers, Parrington’s employment of Emerson as a vehicle for his own critical and political predilection is indicative of a continuous pattern amidst Emerson’s modern-day readers. Introducing an anthological survey of Emersonian criticism, *Estimating Emerson* (2010)—a collection that spans an expansive period, 1834 to 2008—LaRocca endorses Parrington’s treatment of Emerson by proxy.<sup>52</sup> He argues that Emerson’s philosophical formations and portrayed fascination in the mechanisms of critical engagement endorses the singular reader’s possible contribution to (and revolutionary capacity to alter) apparently fixed systems or structures of thought through ‘creative’ interpretative engagement. In so doing, he proposes Emerson as an ideal philosopher fit for an analysis of the structures of thought and market imperatives of our contemporary academic system.<sup>53</sup>

Axiomatic to Emersonian scholarship is a form of critical self-reflexivity, LaRocca suggests; one in which revisionist accounts of Emerson’s philosophical scaffold can call into question the validity of the critic’s social function and the university’s ability to foster such radical forms of cultural analysis. ‘One crucial aspect of Emerson’s legacy,’ he writes, ‘is that he [has] prompted many academics [...] to explore the meaning of academic discourse and the role that the academy plays in intellectual and everyday life.’<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> Ibid., 88

<sup>50</sup> Emerson, ‘Quotation and Originality’ (1875), CW.VIII., 182

<sup>51</sup> A connection between America’s developing critical institution of the 1830s and ‘40s and a university informed more by ‘postindustrial economy’ than pedagogy is a focus of Christopher Newfield’s argument in *Unmaking the Public University: The Forty Year Assault on the Middle Class* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2008); Newfield cites Emerson particularly as an early theorizer of this process of economization. See ‘The Three Crises and the Mass Middle,’ 28-29

<sup>52</sup> David LaRocca, in introduction to (ed.) D. LaRocca, *Estimating Emerson: An Anthology of Criticism from Carlyle to Cavell*, (London: Bloomsbury, 2010), 19

<sup>53</sup> Such ideas are key to the work of Rita Felski, whom—without direct reference to Emerson—would argue a similar form of creativity as preponderate in her own analysis of present-day scholarship. For example, see Rita Felski, ‘Recognition,’ *The Uses of Literature* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2008), 23-50.; and ‘Digging Down and Standing Back,’ *The Limits of Critique* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2015), 52-85

<sup>54</sup> LaRocca, in introduction *Estimating Emerson*, 19

Several of the most ‘prominent’ of academic critics of Emerson’s work, as such, ‘undertake metacritical reflections of the academic profession, including its conceptual categories, assigned titles, accepted disciplines and fields of inquiry.’<sup>55</sup> In this way, ‘Emerson’s writings retain an ongoing challenge—truly a perpetual provocation—to any mode of complacency over the meaning and relevance of the academy.’<sup>56</sup> Such ideas are redolently laced into Emerson’s ‘American Scholar.’ ‘Books are the best of things, well used; abused, among the worst,’ he notes. ‘What is the right use? What is the one end which all means go to effect? They are for nothing but to inspire’ and, in so doing, antedate action and instigate ‘metacritical’ and reflexive self-reflection on interpretation as a cultural institution.<sup>57</sup>

LaRocca’s position speaks more to an ‘Emersonianist’ critical legacy than it does any textual providence, but such claims are undeniably evocative in terms of the implications borne by Emerson’s emphatic sense of the cultural resonance and significance of a ‘reader’ at work. Nonetheless, an increasing awareness of the ways in which pivotal thinkers such as Parrington have arguably appropriated Emerson’s works for the sake of their own critical agenda has resulted in recent scholars seeking to explore the consistency and continuity of Emerson’s ideas and their ideological suggestion. When a lack of consistency is established, it is Emerson’s receptivity to the evolving complexity of commercial systems in the antebellum marketplace that is often seen as fundamental. F. O. Matthiessen, for example, has argued that the ‘want of continuity’ in Emerson’s authorship is a ‘natural product’ of the rapid industrialization of his historical moment.<sup>58</sup> As such, a sense of critical ‘vertigo’ can be identified in his early writings as Emerson altercates between the spiritual and pastoral basis of his youth and the broader, more existential and ideological concerns as can be identified over the course of his maturation (following the publication of his *First* and *Second Series* essay collections, respectively, 1841 and 1844).<sup>59</sup>

Emerson was conscious of a need to ally his interests in spiritualism and the practical and political

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<sup>55</sup> Ibid., 19-20

<sup>56</sup> Ibid., 20

<sup>57</sup> Emerson, ‘The American Scholar’ (1837), CW.I., 90-93

<sup>58</sup> F. O. Matthiessen, ‘In the Optative Mood,’ *American Renaissance: Art and Expression in the Age of Emerson and Whitman* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1968), 56

<sup>59</sup> A term Cary Wolfe uses to describe the sensation of reading Emerson’s early writings of the late 1830s and 1840s; see Cary Wolfe, ‘The Eye is the First Circle: Emerson’s Romanticism, Cavell’s Skepticism, Luhmann’s Modernity,’ in *The Other Emerson*, 271-301



effectivity of market cultures and industrialization in order to stage a more conceptualist reading of scholarship and the agency of interpretation. He valued scholarship unequivocally and would repeatedly connect the idea of studentship with a conceptualization of social progress and social connection. ‘We think too lowly of the scholar’s vocation,’ he would write in his journals, 1838, lamenting the rank of scholarship in the bulwark of America’s cultural institutions of the late-1830s. ‘A scholar is a selecting principle,’ he notes: ‘He takes only his own out of the multiplicity that sweeps & circles by him. He is like one of these nets or frames that are set out from the shore on rivers to catch driftwood, &c. So, in every community where aught new or good is going on, God sets down one of these Perceivers and Recorders. What he hears is as homogenous ever with what he announces.’<sup>60</sup> Emerson would deliver his famous paean to the progress of American scholarship, ‘The American Scholar’ (1837), a mere five years after his resignation from the pulpit in the Second Unitarian Church of Boston in 1832, and the apparent exchange of interests from the theocratic to the socio-economic systems of governance that accompanies this shift is distinct.<sup>61</sup> Through an increased receptivity to new labour forms and conceptualizations of work transformed by this period of industrialization, economization and technologization, Emerson’s explicit remarks on the difficult equation of disparate labour forms and social cohesion in ‘The American Scholar’ are particularly significant. ‘Man is priest, and scholar, and statesman, and producer, and soldier,’ he notes in ‘The American Scholar’—‘In the divided or social state these functions are parcelled out to individuals, each of whom aims to do his stint of the joint work, whilst each other performs his.’<sup>62</sup> However, he argues that labour has become so definitive a means of ascribing our personal contribution to a social whole that the process of individuation that a division of labour proves to inspire also problematizes the establishment of a social imaginary; of our envisaging society as a cohesive entity:

[The] individual, to possess himself, must sometimes return from his own labor to embrace all the other laborers. But, unfortunately, this original unit, this fountain of power, has been so distributed to multitudes, has been so minutely subdivided and peddled out, that it is spilled into drops, and cannot

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<sup>60</sup> Emerson, ‘Journal D’ (Undated, 1838), JMN.VII., 40

<sup>61</sup> See Paul Grimstad, ‘Emerson’s Adjacencies’ in (ed.) B. Arsić and C. Wolfe, *The Other Emerson*, 251-271

<sup>62</sup> Emerson, ‘The American Scholar’ (1837), CW.I., 83

be gathered. The state of society is one in which the members have suffered amputation from the trunk, and strut about so many walking monsters, —a good finger, a neck, a stomach, an elbow, but never a man.<sup>63</sup>

For Emerson, the division of labour can be extended into a process in which the scholar—through their reflection on the citizenry of this ‘divided state’—becomes another form of labourer. Here, the scholar—his ‘delegated intellect’—is explicitly charged with the conceptual task of simultaneously understanding the ‘state of society’ as well as the ‘fate of its members.’

Man is thus metamorphosed into a thing, into many things. [...] The priest becomes a form; the attorney a statute-book; the mechanic a machine; the sailor a rope of the ship. In this distribution of functions the scholar is the delegated intellect. In the right state he is *Man Thinking*. In the degenerate state, when the victim of society, he tends to become a mere thinker, or still worse, the parrot of other men’s thinking.<sup>64</sup>

This is one substantiation of the ways in which Emerson’s interest in labour, in ‘the dignity of ministry,’ operates in tandem with his more conceptualist engagement with the responsibilities of criticism. His characterization of the processes and philosophies that support the ‘*Thinking*’ individual in his writings cannot be divorced from the mechanisms and agency of critical interpretation, but also serves a pivotal and political function; to ‘think’ through the possible connection of disparate ‘laborers,’ and to position our ‘own labor’ (as scholars) so as to consider the concept (and contexts) of ‘labor’ more broadly.

The critic, scholar or reader (as Emerson would interchangeably describe them) is thus a figure essayed as capable of allying the disparate parts and elements of an uneven and unequal social whole.<sup>65</sup> Emerson suggests that our process of ‘selecting’ or electing the resonant symbols (both aesthetic and political) that accompany a period of economic and industrial acceleration is the very object of scholarly

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<sup>63</sup> Ibid.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid., 83-84

<sup>65</sup> For a thorough investigation of this idea relative to the importance of Emerson’s thinking to the division of thought and action in contemporary scholarship, see Reza Hosseini, ‘The Pale Scholar’ in *Emerson’s Literary Philosophy* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2021), 57-81.

work and that the ‘scholar’ is the sole figure capable of reticulating these ideas into a socio-political and economic entity or network. From the onset, however, these ideas contain the paradox that Emerson will later seek to unravel in his work on quotation, appropriation and intellectual authenticity. On the one hand, the critic’s capacity for ‘selection’ sits at odds with his fear that the ‘thinker’ simply stands as a ‘parrot’ of the ideas of others. On the other hand, however, the act of quotation or appropriation—a more technical and deliberative form of ‘parroting’—allows him to consider the ‘creativity’ of critical enterprise by foregrounding the ‘secondary use’ of cultural material, and by positioning the self as a critical lens capable of refracting the intimations of a work of literature rather than simply reflecting and repeating them.<sup>66</sup> This complex theory of ‘use’ is key, and exacts a foundation from which we can consider Emerson’s efforts to assess the aims and ambitions of critical enterprise as directed toward the analysis of ‘life’ and ‘not literature.’ This is not only vital for an analysis of Emerson’s view of reading as a practice—and the ways in which Emerson has himself been read—it is also crucial for an understanding of the conceptual importance of circulation to Emerson’s thinking: how an image or idea moves from place to place only to attain new resonances, new value.

As a means of countering critical allegation that Emerson’s interest in reading begins and ends with an assertion of the power of subjectivist repose, his fascination in the social systems that support culture’s circularity buttress his interest in political economy. As previously mentioned, he appears more invested in the dissemination of ideas than their authorship and, in so doing, establishes the marketplace as a metaphor for his reflections on cultural participation. But the fact that he would so explicitly draw correlation between critical and commercial forms of value, and assert both forms as contingent upon circulatory economics, is an element of his aesthetic philosophies that has proven largely overlooked. Rather than representative of a formal interest alone, Emerson sensed that literature needed be regarded as metaphor for modes of social connection and correlation.

In ‘Quotation and Originality,’ he would make the following remark as per his feeling for the

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<sup>66</sup> Emerson: ‘The primary use of a fact is low; the secondary use, as it is a figure or illustration of my thought, is the real worth. First the fact; second its impression, or what I think of it.’ See ‘Poetry and Imagination’ (1875), CW.VIII., 11

symbolic resonances of critical enterprise:<sup>67</sup>

Can we not help ourselves as discreetly by the force of two in literature?  
Certainly, it only needs two well placed and well-tempered for coöperation,  
to get somewhat far transcending any private enterprise!<sup>68</sup>

Terms such as ‘cooperation’ and ‘private enterprise’ are not seen as contesting one another if we are to sit Emerson’s theory of ‘the force of two in literature’ in the contexts of his early writings. Moreover, they are regarded as co-dependent. That Emerson would so explicitly establish a connect between his interests in the cultural and political power of both criticism and commerce will thus be the focus of this survey of both Emerson’s interest in the symbolic authorities of criticism and the symbolic indications of marketization. The ‘discrepancy between the dissident power of Emerson’s ideas in the sphere of culture and their manifest weakness in the sphere of politics’ is regarded as a mainstay of in analyses of Emerson’s practice, and depends upon the idea that Emerson’s ‘mythified’ voice speaks to theorizations of individuality more astutely than any collective or social concern.<sup>69</sup> To counter such an idea, Emerson’s early reflections on the act of reading relative to his thoughts on the correlation between self and society in his oft-cited paean to self-determinacy, ‘Self-Reliance’ (1841), prove particularly pertinent.

The Latinate epigraph and verse that introduces ‘Self-Reliance’ is misleading when read within the canon of works: *Ne te quaesiveris extra / Do not seek for things outside of yourself*.<sup>70</sup> Keeping in mind Parrington’s selective/elective reading of Emerson’s early remarks on scholarship, the major concepts and ideas that we encounter Emerson’s early period have been read in a wildly diverse number of ways and ‘Self-Reliance,’ as both concept and essay, is a good candidate for considering how Emerson has been recently read, revised and ‘reconstructed.’

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<sup>67</sup> See Jacques Rancière’s reading of Emerson’s early lectures in his work *Aisthesis: Scenes from the Aesthetic Regime of Art* (2013). Rancière sees Emerson as drawn towards an affective, interpretative ‘infinitezation’—a realization of the ‘common potential’ of ‘material life’ or ‘sensible materiality’ within a work of literature. He cites Emerson’s essay ‘The Poet’ to elucidate his position, suggesting that Emerson looks to widen participation by stressing the multivalent and associative meaning of poetic language rather than narrow it down to individual agency. See Jacques Rancière, (trans.) Zakir Paul, ‘The Poet of the New World: Boston, 1841—New York, 1855’, in *Aisthesis: Scenes from the Aesthetic Regime of Art* (New York, NY: Verso, 2013), 65

<sup>68</sup> Emerson, ‘Quotation and Originality’ (1875), CW.VIII., 189

<sup>69</sup> Christopher Newfield, ‘Emerson’s Corporate Individualism,’ *American Literary History*, 3.4. (1991), 673

<sup>70</sup> Emerson, ‘Self-Reliance’ (1841), CW.I., 43

Disregarding the essay's infamous celebration of 'Whim' as a key characteristic of critical enterprise, 'Self-Reliance' has broadly been read as delineating a theory of social connectivity and relation rather than simply a celebration of self-governance in order to politicize Emerson's critical value.<sup>71</sup> As Prentiss Clark writes, a brief review of critical reactions to this major early work draws up a wide array of interpretations. For Harold Bloom, 'Self-Reliance' is 'the American religion [that Emerson] founded' which 'converts solitude into a firm stance against history, including personal history,' while—for Lawrence Buell—it is 'a personal life practice' emphasizing 'personal integrity' and delineating a 'robust' theory of 'coexistence.' Conversely, Stanley Cavell argues 'Self-Reliance' as a form of moral perfectionism and analysis of thought that precedes the institutional extension of twentieth century language philosophies.<sup>72</sup> 'Self-Reliance' is a 'democratic' theory of 'individuality,' according to George Kateb; a 'program of recovery from alienation as well as the very essence of positive freedom,' as Lou Ann Lange would similarly characterize it; or a theory of 'radical self-dependence,' as Stephen E. Whicher would define it.<sup>73</sup> As Clark notes, an Emersonian theory of 'Self-Reliance' is thus far from a determinative concept, even within the sphere of Emersonian Studies itself. It is 'most often considered synonymous with, or expressive of, individualism—individualism in both fruitful and destructive forms—and evaluated in connection to the health of democracy,' and yet scholars simultaneously see 'Self-Reliance' as underpinning a panoply of socio-political paradigms. In this sense, these various readings and redefinitions

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<sup>71</sup> Emerson: 'I would write on the lintels of the door-post, Whim. I hope it is somewhat better than whim at last, but we cannot spend the day in explanation.' *Ibid.*, 52. Emerson would return to this point in 'History,' and suggest that our inability to clearly state a thought—that a published idea is always liable to be misread and regarded associatively—is something of a cultural predicament: '[It] is the fault of our rhetoric that we cannot strongly state one fact without seeming to belie some other.' See 'History' (1841), *CW.I.*, 39

<sup>72</sup> This is an idea central to Stanley Cavell's career-long engagement with Emerson's works, and effort to explore the efficacy of Emerson's ideas from within the conventions of twentieth century European philosophy and an American intellectual cosmogony; see, in particular, *This New and Unapproachable America: Lectures After Emerson, After Wittgenstein* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1989)

<sup>73</sup> Prentiss Clark, 'Pulse for Pulse in Harmony with the Whole: Hearing Self-Reliance Anew' in *Nineteenth-Century Literature*, 69.3. (December 2014) 319-321. For sources of these various derivations and definitions, see Harold Bloom, 'Introduction,' in (ed.) Harold Bloom, *Ralph Waldo Emerson* (New York: Chelsea House Publishers, 1985), 7; Lawrence Buell, *Emerson* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2003), 63, 65, 78; Stanley Cavell, *Conditions Handsome and Unhandsome: The Constitution of Emersonian Perfectionism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990); George Kateb, *Emerson and Self-Reliance* (Lanham, MD: Sage Publications, 1995), xviii; Lou Ann Lange, *The Riddle of Liberty: Emerson on Alienation, Freedom, and Obedience* (Atlanta, GA: Scholars Press, 1986), xxi; and Stephen E. Whicher, *Freedom and Fate: An Inner Life of Ralph Waldo Emerson*, (Philadelphia, PN: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1953, 1971), 50

of the term ‘Self-Reliance’ prove somewhat ironic, as critics have increasingly sought to consider Emerson’s thinking as a foundation for broader reflection on the political life of the individual subject. ‘Self-Reliance’ has been argued as championing human rights; as promoting self-culture; as nurturing equality; or conversely, as an apotheosis of America’s corporatist spirit. Whilst some have read ‘Self-Reliance’ as a means of engaging the relation of self and state, others have argued the essay as a distilled theory of capitalist competition and market convention.<sup>74</sup> As a celebration of the private self over public good; as negating sociality; as privileging self-absorption; as tending dangerously towards anarchy.<sup>75</sup> Nevertheless, debated as its definition may be, Clark suggests that the term seems to be the ‘handle’ that scholarship attaches to this ‘man without a handle’ (borrowing from Henry James Sr. and his famous dismissal of Emerson).<sup>76</sup>

As a maxim, Emerson’s epigram—*Do not seek things outside of yourself*—is a statement concordant with the general treatment of interpretation frequently posed in his works, and with regard to the popularity of ‘Self-Reliance’ in particular. However, such a position proves ironic if we look at Emerson’s treatment of the act of reading and his emphatic sense of the ways in which a reader is always a contingent and conditional figure. Ever dependent upon a book or an author to classify as a reader at all, Emerson (seemingly self-consciously) ironizes and complicates his theory of ‘Self-Reliance’ through a continuous exploration of critical reflection and critical exchange as can be identified across his works. As he would note in the late ‘Quotation and Originality’—an essay already signalled as representing a later confluence of ideas preponderate in Emerson’s early writings—‘The profit of books is according to the sensibility of the reader.’<sup>77</sup> Such an enumeration of the significance of ‘sensibility’ as at the foundation of critical practice is consistently restated in his early public and private works. ‘What can we read, see acquire but ourselves?’ he would write in his journals, 1832; ‘Take the book, my friend, and read your eyes out, you will never find there what I find.’<sup>78</sup> At first, the idea that our basis and foundation of criteria is informed by personal

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<sup>74</sup> Newfield cites Emerson as a particular significant thinker in retooling notions of ‘collaboration’ for the culture of competition that underpins market ideologies. See Newfield, ‘The Submissive Center,’ *The Emerson Effect*, 37

<sup>75</sup> Clark, *Pulse for Pulse in Harmony with the Whole: Hearing Self-Reliance Anew*, 391

<sup>76</sup> See Henry James, (ed.) Frederick W. Dupee, *Autobiography* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1983), 347. 8

<sup>77</sup> Emerson, ‘Quotation and Originality’ (1875), CW.VIII., 194

<sup>78</sup> Emerson, 18th February 1832, ‘Blotting Book III’ JMN.III., 327.; this line is repeated in ‘Spiritual Laws’ (1841)— ‘Take the book into your two hands and read your eyes out, you will never find what I find.’—CW.I., 149

experience or ‘sensibility’ over and above such arena as event; the authority of text, the celebrity or renown of an artist or maker, the power of political circumstances, or the sway of social exigency appears anathema to Emerson. A surface reading gives us sense of the significance of ‘self-reliance’ and self-determinacy as his chief political and intellectual ambitions, and scholarship provides a means of testing his thinking within such an institutional and ‘impersonal’ context as critical enterprise.<sup>79</sup> Such statements as these seem to suggest that Emerson’s exploration of the ‘profit’ of critical engagement is, in end, the aid it offers us as we work towards our projects of self-discovery and self-realization within an increasing socialized public sphere; that literature is a field we till only to foster a more pronounced, legible—and archly personal—interior life. Thus, *Do not seek for things outside of yourself*.

However, Emerson’s interest in the ‘profit’ of critical enterprise can be seen to be systematized if we are to explore the interrelation of his private writings in the 1830s and his published works of the 1840s and 1850s. Evidence of the importance of ‘sensibility’ to critical practice is repeated across Emerson’s major publications. In his mid-period collection *Representative Men* (1850)—and the theoretical essay that would introduce the six portraits of cultural celebrity that follow, ‘Uses of Great Men’ (1850)—he explores the ways in which that which is latent or undeveloped in consciousness is produced through the application of structures of private thought to public discourse. Twice in ‘Uses of Great Men’ he tropes on a botanical term to explore the co-dependency of private thought and its public catalysts. First, ‘Man is that noble endogenous plant which grows, like the palm, from within outward. His own affair, though impossible to others, he can open with celerity and in sport.’<sup>80</sup> And second, ‘Man is endogenous, and education is his unfolding. The aid we have from others is mechanical compared with the discoveries of nature in us.’<sup>81</sup> Although Emerson’s sense that this is a ‘mechanical’ process sits at odds with his organic (and organicist) metaphor, his realization that the latent and ‘endogenous’ content we strive for is inconceivable without the aids of external stimuli (thus his stress on ‘education’ as a vital element of this ‘mechanical’

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<sup>79</sup> According to Sharon Cameron’s reading of Emerson, the central claim of his thought is that ‘the impersonal [...] leads to the social in its highest form,’ and that the person is a fleeting and unstable construct; that ‘nothing is ours except rhetorically, or positionally.’ See Sharon Cameron, ‘The Way of Life by Abandonment: Emerson’s Impersonal,’ *Impersonality: Seven Essays* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2007), 85, 89.; and 79-107

<sup>80</sup> Emerson, ‘Uses of Great Men’ (1850), CW.IV., 31

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*

procedure).<sup>82</sup> Emerson emphasizes this point one final time near the end of this essay to suggest, in sum, that to *produce*, one must first *consume*: ‘We are equally served by receiving and by imparting [...] It seems a mechanical advantage, and great benefit it is to each speaker, as he can now paint out his thought to himself.’<sup>83</sup> Such comments are directly in conflict with Emerson’s sense that we should not ‘seek’ for things ‘outside of [ourselves],’ on the contrary, here he explicitly suggests that we need ‘mechanically’ work with external stimuli to more keenly gain access to our own thinking. These remarks are indicative of the way in which Emerson would regularly essay analyses of our ‘methods of interpretation’ and repeatedly reinstate the importance of our assimilating public matter only to subject it to our own unique and ‘creative’ reading.

A number of recent critics who have deliberately worked to identify a more radical theory of reading in Emerson’s major works have argued our need to revise Emerson’s critical methods. In the main, this is due to Emerson’s inconsistency. In his early works, he would lament ‘our preposterous use of books,’<sup>84</sup> latterly, he would less tendentiously call for an analysis of ‘our use of literature.’<sup>85</sup> However, the plural element of both claims proves deceptive. Emerson would often home in on the importance of personal ‘sensibility’ to cultural engagement as he highlights the importance of our forging an identifiably unique interpretation of cultural matter, notes Tracy Scott McMillin. Fixated by the ‘solemn engagement

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<sup>82</sup> Emerson’s choice of term here is of interest; ‘mechanic’ or ‘mechanical’ was listed in Noah Webster’s *An American Dictionary of the English Language* (New York, NY: S. Converse, 1828) as follows: **1.** Pertaining to machines, or to the art of constructing machines; pertaining to the art of making wares, goods, instruments, furniture, etc. We say, a man is employed in mechanical labor; he lives by mechanical occupation.; **2.** Constructed or performed by the rules or laws of mechanics. The work is not mechanical.; **3.** Skilled in the art of making machines; bred to manual labor.; **4.** Pertaining to artisans or mechanics; vulgar., i.e., *To make a god, a hero or a king, or Descend to a mechanic dialect.*; **5.** Pertaining to the principles of mechanics, in philosophy; as mechanical powers or forces; a mechanical principle.; **6.** Acting by physical power; as mechanical pressure. ‘The terms *mechanical* and *chymical*, are thus distinguished; those changes which bodies undergo without altering their constitution, that is, losing their identity, such as changes of place, of figure, etc. are *mechanical*; those which alter the constitution of bodies, making them different substances, as when flour, yeast and water unite to form bread, are *chymical*. In the one case, the changes relate to masses of matter, as the motions of the heavenly bodies, or the action of the wind on a ship under sail; in the other case, the changes occur between the particles of matter, as the action of heat in melting lead, or the union of sand and lime forming mortar. Most of what are usually called the mechanic arts, are partly mechanical, and partly chymical.’ Emerson’s use of the term appears to play on these various definitions of the term; punning on the connotations that pertain to ‘manual labor,’ on the one hand; artisan cultures, on the other; and the increasing technologization and industrialization of the American landscape.

<sup>83</sup> Emerson, ‘Uses of Great Men’ (1850), CW.IV., 31

<sup>84</sup> Emerson: ‘Byron says of Jack Bunting, —“He knew not what to say, and so he swore.” I may say it of our preposterous use of books.’ See ‘Spiritual Laws’ (1841), CW.II., 164

<sup>85</sup> Emerson, ‘Circles’ (1841), CW.II., 312



or entanglement of [a reader] with a text;’ by the ‘potential significances’ of a work of literature that abound, relative to the critical investments of an individual reader; and by ‘the interaction of different contexts in which reader and text operate,’ his theory of ‘sensibility’ emerges as a theory of critical self-interest.<sup>86</sup> Emerson’s allusion to the ‘mechanical advantage’ of textual engagement is thus noteworthy. Evidence of his fascination in the ways in which we ‘operate’ (rather than engage) literary material as though it were a ‘mechanical’ instrument designed to aid us in our need to better ‘paint out [our] thoughts to [ourselves]’ is consistent in both his private and public writings. Nonetheless, Emerson’s emphasis on our assimilating ideas purely for the betterment of self-understanding is in itself a politically loaded perspective.

It is true that, at first glance, Emerson’s suggestion that ‘sensibility’ sits at the foundation of critical practice appears to speak to his radical and reactionary sense of the ‘infinitude of the private man,’<sup>87</sup> and ‘The [self-] sufficiency of the private man’ is a sentiment we can equally (and repeatedly) locate in his works.<sup>88</sup> ‘I set the private man first,’ he would proclaim in a lecture of 1856. ‘He only who is able to stand alone is qualified to be a citizen,’ Emerson argues; and his feel for the importance of literature as a form and cultural field appears to support and fortify his sense of the importance of the ‘private’ life.<sup>89</sup> In ‘Thoughts of Modern Literature,’ for example—an early lecture of 1839 that he would redraft for its subsequent publication in *The Dial*, 1840—he argues that ‘The poetry and the speculation of the age are marked by a certain philosophic turn which discriminates them from the works of earlier times,’<sup>90</sup> noting an intellectual ‘turn’ towards a widespread acceptance of self-interest as a prominent feature of authorial activity.<sup>91</sup> ‘The poet is not content to see “*how fair the apple hangs from the rock,*” what melody “*a sunbeam awoke in the groves,*” but now resolves what is the apple to me? and what the birds to me? [...] and what am I?’ This, writes Emerson, ‘is called *subjectiveness*’—a critical mode in development (and one that he would subsequently be regarded as a significant champion thereof) that sought to sophisticate the idea that critical

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<sup>86</sup> Tracy Scott McMillin, ‘Writing in the Name of Emerson,’ *Our Preposterous Uses of Literature: Emerson and the Nature of Reading*, 2000), 47-48

<sup>87</sup> Emerson, ‘New England Reformers’ (1844), CW.I., 254

<sup>88</sup> Ibid.

<sup>89</sup> Emerson, ‘Speech at the Kansas Relief Meeting in Cambridge’ (1856), CW.XI., 258

<sup>90</sup> Emerson, ‘Thoughts on Modern Literature’ (1840), CW.XII., 312

<sup>91</sup> Ibid.

engagement functions as a perennial form of autobiographical reflection.<sup>92</sup> Picturing the process of a reader at work at a text or an observer engaging a scene, he proposes that ‘As the eye is withdrawn from the object in nature’ it is ‘fixed on the subject or mind.’<sup>93</sup> Thus, our relationship with external matter depends upon its being refracted along the axis of personality; rendered unique by our own corpus of ideas, events and desires that are operatively our own. Emerson thus appears to argue the act of reading as valuable only in so far as it is able to assist us in a *relational* development of identity; in an identification of self that is expressed relative to the sensible world around it: *What is the apple to me?*

We can track this idea across both Emerson’s early and later writings. As he would note in ‘Nature’ (1836), all that which is ‘NOT ME’ is a tool to better qualify and elucidate that which is, and his stress on the ‘sensibility’ of the reader is arguably founded in such thinking if we are to examine the development of his thinking.<sup>94</sup> In the late essay ‘Success’ (1870), he argues that it is ‘the good reader that makes the good book;’ that ‘a good head cannot read amiss,’ and ‘in every book he finds passages which seem confidences or asides hidden from all else and unmistakably meant for his ear.’<sup>95</sup> He would rephrase this idea in ‘Quotation and Originality,’ explicitly terming ‘sensibility’ as key to his characterization of the ‘good reader,’ and reinstating his sense of the all-important ‘selecting principle’ that underpins his conceptualization of critical engagement. Reflecting on his own experiences as a reader, he suggests that ‘We are as much informed of a writer’s genius by what he selects as by what he originates.’<sup>96</sup> Considering an encounter with a quotation—with a ‘select’ phrase recontextualized—he argues that his position on critical ‘sensibility’ is twofold in its significance. First, ‘sensibility’ facilitates a theory of personal resonance, a means of vitiating his ‘selecting principle’ by stressing the importance of critical desire to critical engagement. However, and second—and in a fashion similar to the theoretical ‘NOT ME’ that he proposes in ‘Nature’—our capacity to ‘select’ works from a public, cultural domain also pictures a co-ownership of

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<sup>92</sup> See Lawrence Buell, ‘Autobiography in the American Renaissance’ in (ed.) Paul John Eakin, *American Autobiography: Retrospect and Prospect* (Madison, WI: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1991), 54-55

<sup>93</sup> Emerson, ‘Thoughts on Modern Literature’ (1840), CW.XII., 312-313

<sup>94</sup> Emerson: ‘Philosophically considered, the universe is composed of Nature and the Soul. Strictly speaking, therefore, all that is separate from us, all which Philosophy distinguishes as the NOT ME, that is, both nature and art, all other men and my own body [...]’ See ‘Nature’ (1836), CW.I., 4-5

<sup>95</sup> Emerson, ‘Success’ (1870), CW.VII., 296

<sup>96</sup> Emerson, ‘Quotation and Originality’ (1875), CW.VIII., 194

canon by proxy.

Contending that ‘every house is a quotation out of all forests and mines and stone-quarries,’ an ability to recognize what’s ‘mine’ and that which contravenes my argument is an idea literalized in ‘Quotation and Originality.’ Emerson portrays the works of others—a cultural canon—as though a ‘mine’ or ‘quarry.’ A space in which we toil and hunt for ideas of ‘an equal mind and heart’ to our own:

We read the quotation with his eyes and find a new and fervent sense; as a passage from one of the poets, well recited, borrows new interest from the rendering. As the journals say, “*the italics are ours.*” The profit of books is according to the sensibility of the reader. The profoundest thought or passion sleeps as in a mine until an equal mind and heart finds and publishes it. [...] Observe also that a writer appears to more advantage in the pages of another book than in his own. In his own he waits as a candidate for your approbation; in another’s he is a lawgiver. Then another’s thoughts have a certain advantage with us simply because they are another’s.<sup>97</sup>

Considering Emerson’s intersecting theories of selection, ‘sensibility’—and our co-custody of ‘*the italics*’—David LaRocca suggests that Emerson’s comments on critical engagement and the importance of the work of ‘another’ underpins a need to accordingly reread Emerson; to reconsider his standing as a ‘patron saint for the creative commons and open-access digital catalogues of today.’<sup>98</sup> Whether we side with LaRocca or no, such comments demonstrate how Emerson’s relationship with the act of reading necessitates a more radical revision of his canonical standing.

In this regard, Cornel West’s identification of ‘American evasion of philosophy’—a cultural want to explore ‘the near, the low, the common,’ to borrow Emerson’s terms—is key.<sup>99</sup> West argues that the

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<sup>97</sup> Ibid.

<sup>98</sup> David LaRocca, ‘Emerson Recomposed: Nietzsche’s Uses of his American Soul-Brother,’ in (ed.) M.T. Conrad, *Nietzsche and the Philosophers* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2017), 223

<sup>99</sup> Emerson: ‘I read with some joy of the auspicious signs of the coming days, as they glimmer already through poetry and art, through philosophy and science, through church and state. One of these signs is the fact that the same movement which effected the elevation of what was called the lowest class in the state, assumed in literature a very marked and as benign an aspect. Instead of the sublime and beautiful, the near, the low, the common, was explored and poetized. [...] The literature of the poor, the feelings of the child, the philosophy of the street, the meaning of household life, are the topics of the time.’ See ‘The American Scholar’ (1837), CW.I., 110-111

philosophical fortitude of Emerson's logic of refusal—the 'NOT ME' of 'Nature'—is not to be read bibliographically, nor in terms of a history of philosophical ideas themselves. West alleges that Emerson's lack of interest in method or philosophical scrutiny, or his inadequate understanding of Kant, Hegel, and European Romantic philosophies, problematizes any effort to clearly situate his writings within any specific intellectual lineage. However, West also argues that Emerson sought to evade the trappings of a philosophical past for more specific and political ends. 'To evade modern philosophy means to strip the profession of philosophy of its pretence, disclose its affiliations with structures of powers (both rhetorical and political) rooted in the past, and enact intellectual practices [...] that invigorate and unsettle one's culture and society,' West writes.<sup>100</sup> As he notes repeatedly throughout his discussion, this potentially makes Emerson kin with his contemporary Karl Marx (a point West stakes by borrowing from Emerson's own self-classification as an 'experimenter' whom 'unsettles all things').<sup>101</sup> Such an assertion results in a far more radical re-reading of Emerson's cultural centrality than we typically encounter in recent, revisionist responses to his thoughts on aesthetics, politics and the agency of interpretation:<sup>102</sup>

Like his contemporary (and major twentieth-century competitor) Karl Marx, Emerson is a dyed-in-the-wool romantic thinker who takes seriously the embodiment of ideals within the real, the actualization of principles in the practical—in short, some kind of inseparable link between thought and action, theory and practice [...]. Similar to Marx, Emerson focuses on the pressing concerns unleashed by the American, French, and Industrial Revolutions: *the scope of human powers and the contingency of human societies*. These concerns are

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<sup>100</sup> Cornel West, 'The Emersonian Prehistory of American Pragmatism,' *The American Evasion of Philosophy: A Genealogy of Pragmatism* (London: Macmillan, 1989), 37

<sup>101</sup> Emerson: 'Do not set the least value on what I do, or the least discredit on what I do not, as if I pretended to settle any thing as true or false. I unsettle all things. No facts are to me sacred; none are profane; I simply experiment, an endless seeker with no Past at my back.' See 'Circles' (1841), CW.I., 318

<sup>102</sup> Daniel M. Savage summarizes the conservatism of Emerson's political thought as follows: 'Emerson scholars have long noted the ubiquity of change in his perspective on the natural and social worlds. They have also called attention to the dialectical process that Emerson credits with driving such change. They have not, however, paid much attention to the fact that the standard Emerson applies to the pace of change in the social world is the same aesthetic standard that he derives from the world of nature, and applied to the world of art. Emerson refers to the aesthetically pleasing nature of flowing or graceful change (as opposed to abrupt) found in nature and art as *beauty*. When applied to the political, social, and religious worlds this pace of change results in what we call gradualism. Although Emerson frequently favored political, social, and religious reforms that were considered radical at the time, he believed that the proper pace of progress toward these goals was evolutionary rather than revolutionary.' See Daniel M. Savage, 'Progressive Change in Emerson's *The Conservative*,' *Humanitas*, 1.2. (2009), 125-142

addressed by highlighting the wilful self (or selves) up against and overcoming antecedent circumstances, or to put it in the language of social science, the relation between purposeful subjects and prevailing structures, conscious human agents and social constraints.<sup>103</sup>

For West, the link between thought and action, theory and practice lie in Emerson's engagements with literary culture and critical activity. These spheres serve symbolically to signal an interest in the social structures of governance and political rule: 'the scope of human powers and the contingency of human societies,' as he would put it. But however evocative it may be to sit Emerson and Marx side by side, the methodological differences between these two thinkers proves to exceed the legitimacy of their conceptual similarities; West's avowal that 'purposeful subjects' and 'prevailing structures' constitute comparative points being too vague in this regard. In Marx, recognition of 'prevailing structures' is the precursor to the development of class consciousness and the instigator of collective action to effect revolutionary change. Emerson's preoccupation with personality and subjectivity, conversely, forecloses his critique and limits its sphere of operation to culture rather than radical or revolutionary social progress.

As a number of recent critics have indicated, this is a problem that impacts our reading of Emerson today, and has proven to challenge the contemporary resonances of his work in application. Nonetheless, and despite Emerson's writings apparently holding a greater acuity in more culturalist than political quarters, his emphasis on critical 'speculation' as an act of self-reflection *has* been regarded as a foothold for us to retrospectively politicize his position, particularly with regards to the concept of 'privacy,' and with the commercialist character of his theory of 'sensibility' kept in mind.

'Emerson's idea of radical change has ultimately looked to the individual rather than the group,' notes Johannes Voelz,<sup>104</sup> and Emerson's engagement with interpretative agency and the act of reading as practices grounded in the betterment of personal perspective (our ability to more keenly 'paint' our thoughts out for ourselves) has been accordingly assessed as a self-conscious means of exploring both the politics of

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<sup>103</sup> West, 'The Emersonian Prehistory of American Pragmatism,' *The American Evasion of Philosophy*, 10  
*Emphasis in original*

<sup>104</sup> Johannes Voelz, in introduction to *Transcendentalist Resistance: The New Americanists and Emerson's Challenge* (Dartmouth, NE: University Press of New England, 2010), 2

individualism and a fetishization of the individual in his major works. As David Leverenz suggests, considering the centrality of ‘privacy’ in Emerson’s early writings, ‘From the 1840s to the 1980s [...] Emerson’s cultural centrality had been ensured not by general assent, but by the advocacy of two very different pressure groups: intellectuals and businessmen,’ and ‘in political terms,’ Leverenz notes, we could call these two arena Emerson’s ‘interpretative constituencies.’<sup>105</sup> Leverenz suggests that Emerson’s interest in individuation thus hinges upon a conceptualization of privacy and proprietorship—a reification of the terms of ownership (of both objects and ideas) in which the idea of individualism speaks to both the professionalization of the critic and to the romanticist heroism of the entrepreneur within the wider history of American capital.<sup>106</sup>

Leverenz is not alone in fastening Emerson’s thinking and cultural worth to the development of an American economic culture and the maturity of marketplace ideologies, and such readings emphasize both the subjectivist heart of Emerson’s perspectivism and the ease with which his thinking can be applied to an American socioeconomic milieu of the late-twentieth and early-twenty-first centuries.<sup>107</sup> However, such

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<sup>105</sup> David Leverenz, ‘The Politics of Emerson’s Man-Making Words,’ 38-56

<sup>106</sup> A good example of Emerson’s influence in this regard is Norman Vincent Peale; an author whose mid-century, quasi-spiritual and psychiatric treatises mark him out as a significant vehicle for the popularization of Emersonian aphorism outside of the annals of the academy. Peale would persistently refer to Emerson throughout his popular psychological works of the 1950s and ‘60s, underscoring Emerson’s socio-cultural purchase as a pseudo-spiritual, agnostic saint for entrepreneurial agency. See Norman Vincent Peale, *The Power of Positive Thinking* (New York, NY: Fireside, 1952), 166. See also Ida M. Tarbull’s now-canonical *History of the Standard Oil Company* (New York, NY: McClure, Phillips & Co., 1904). The frontispiece to Tarbull’s *History* pairs Emerson’s ‘Self-Reliance’ with J.D. Rockefeller in a pair of epigraphs—‘*An institution is the lengthened shadow of one man.*’ — **EMERSON, IN AN ESSAY ON SELF-RELIANCE**; ‘*The American Beauty Rose can be produced in its splendor and fragrance only by sacrificing the early buds which grew up around it.*’ — **J.D. ROCKEFELLER, JR., IN AN ADDRESS ON TRUSTS TO THE STUDENTS OF BROWN UNIVERSITY**. For a good analysis of the philosophical contexts behind this epigrammatic employment of Emerson, and his stress on the intellectual fortitude of ‘whim’ in ‘Self-Reliance’ in particular, see Howard Horwitz, ‘The Standard Oil Trust as Emersonian Hero,’ *Raritan*, 6.4. (1987), 97-119

<sup>107</sup> Emerson’s works constitute a ‘ballast’ for the hegemonic extension of capitalist enterprise, writes John Updike in the *New Yorker* in ‘03 on the occasion of Emerson’s bi-centenary celebrations. ‘To be sure, [he] did not create American expansionism or our especial exploitive verve,’ Updike argues, but perhaps it was Emerson who ‘cemented’ the evolving cultural and ideological impact of capitalism by way of the ‘high-minded apology’ that his corpus constitutes for America’s commercialist character, elevation of the country’s commercialist cultural codes, and the economic prerogatives of the early 1800s onwards. See John Updike, ‘Big Dead White Male: Ralph Waldo Emerson turns 200,’ *The New Yorker* (August 4<sup>th</sup>, 2003), 77-81; John Updike, ‘Emersonianism’—a talk given delivered at University of California (Davis, CA) in 1983, and subsequently revised and published in *The New Yorker*, as ‘Emersonianism,’ June 4<sup>th</sup> (1984), 112-113; both pieces are reproduced in (ed.) D. LaRocca, 547-555 and 530-547, respectively. See also, Adam Cohen, ‘Editorial Observer; It’s Emerson’s Anniversary and He’s Got 21st-Century America Nailed,’ *The New York Times*, May 4<sup>th</sup>, 2003.

<<https://www.nytimes.com/2003/05/04/opinion/editorial-observer-it-s-emerson-s-anniversary-he-s-got-21st-century-america.html>>

(Accessed 20.05.20)

ideas owe wholly to the subjectivist centre of Emerson's theoretical treatment of critical agency. Emerson's works have 'spoken to readers in sharply different ways,' writes Lawrence Buell (evoking Clark's argument regarding the conflicting definitions of 'Self-Reliance' in recent Emerson Studies).<sup>108</sup> Noting that there is no one way in which Emerson's works *should* be addressed—Buell infers that a correlation *could* be drawn between the forms of critical free-association and interpretative agency that Emerson would seemingly advocate and, thus, he sits an onus on competition, gain, and deed-holding concomitant with the implementation and development of laissez-faire capitalism from the early 1800s to the onset of the twentieth century.

Such readings are further supported by the ways in which Emerson appears to encourage critical engagement solely to embolden the fortitude of the 'private man.' As Emerson would note in 'Literary Ethics' (1838), 'the resources, the subject, and the discipline of the scholar'—'the whole value of history, of biography'—is to 'increase my self-trust.'<sup>109</sup> A rewording his position on the 'endogeneity' of intellect as he would detail in 'Uses of Great Men,' this enlargement of 'self-trust' relies upon a theorization of interpretation, or what Emerson would refer to as 'spontaneous thought.' 'Men grind and grind in the mill of a truism, and nothing comes out but what was put in,' he writes; 'But the moment they desert the tradition for a spontaneous thought, then poetry, wit, hope, virtue, learning, anecdote, all flock to their aid.'<sup>110</sup> To return to the epigraph that opens 'Self-Reliance' with which I began, here, we've another indication of the inappropriateness of the line Emerson borrows from Beaumont and Fletcher (if we are to look beyond the irony that such an allusion is itself a second-hand citation): *Do not seek for things outside of yourself*. Artful thought appears unequivocally bound to a theory of personality or 'sensitivity.' However, that theory of personality itself appears contingent upon a theory of consumerism, upon the exchange and consumption of external goods, ideas and information.

The degree of 'spontaneity' Emerson would encourage is always a reaction to external stimuli, and the 'outside' is thus as essential to Emerson's thinking as the psychological interior; it aids in our exploring

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<sup>108</sup> Lawrence Buell, 'Emersonian Self-Reliance in Theory and Practice,' *Emerson*, 59

<sup>109</sup> Emerson, 'Literary Ethics' (1838), CW.I., 158, 160

<sup>110</sup> *Ibid.*, 165-166

the machinations of selfhood, and supplies the necessary tools, grammar and symbolic diction with which to express a self with greater celerity and legibility. To further understand the ‘sensibility’ of the reader we must, then, understand the link between the internalized versions of Emerson’s individualism and how it both relies on and modifies such external stimuli.

As seen, Emerson’s insistence of the self-centeredness of the individual reader should thus not be localized to a review of his later works alone.<sup>111</sup> If we look to his early writings, the position he would detail in ‘Quotation and Originality’ (that our attentions should be on ‘life’ and not ‘literature’) is not only antedated but also (and arguably more concretely) proves bound to a discussion of literary culture if we turn to Emerson’s early notebooks. In 1835, at the very beginnings of his career, Emerson poses a significant rhetorical question: ‘What is a book?’ he asks. Responding to his own query, he suggests that a ‘book’ is ‘Everything or nothing.’ That, as a material object, a book is ultimately expendable. ‘The eye that sees it is all.’<sup>112</sup>

What is the heaven’s majestic roof fretted with golden fire to one man, but a foul and pestilent congregation of vapors? Well, a book is to a paddy a fair page smutted over with black marks; to a boy, a goodly collection of words he can read; to a half-wise man, it is a lesson which he wholly accepts or wholly rejects; but a sage shall see in it secrets yet unrevealed; shall weigh, as he reads, the author’s mind; shall see the predominance of ideas which the writer could not extricate himself from, and oversee.<sup>113</sup>

Emerson’s ‘eye’ is redolent of his remarks in ‘Thoughts on Modern Literature,’ in which the apparent interchangeability of the observer/reader therein is also reminiscent of the oft-cited ‘transparent eyeball’ of his debut publication, ‘Nature’ (1836): ‘Standing on the bare ground,—my head bathed by the blithe air and uplifted into infinite space,—all mean egotism vanishes. I become a transparent eyeball; I am nothing; I see all; the currents of the Universal Being circulate through me.’<sup>114</sup> Under a certain light, Emerson’s

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<sup>111</sup> See Christopher Newfield, ‘Liberal Racism,’ *The Emerson Effect*, 180-183. Newfield explores this point by examining Emerson’s changing position on political partisanship across his early, mid-career, and late-period writings.

<sup>112</sup> Emerson, ‘Journal B’ (Undated, 1835), JMN.V., 93

<sup>113</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>114</sup> Emerson, ‘Nature’ (1836), CW.I., 10



comment in his journal as per his ‘indifference’ to the book as an object (as he would subsequently put it in ‘Quotation and Originality’) helps us unpack the complexities of this famously obscure declaration in ‘Nature.’<sup>115</sup> The ‘eye that sees [the book] is all’—‘the currents of the Universal Being circulate *through me*’ (emphasis my own).<sup>116</sup> The self is therefore held as a critical lens in Emerson’s hands; as a filter for the better explication of the external world, or a ‘subject lens’ as he would term it in ‘Experience.’<sup>117</sup> More importantly, it also supports his assertion that scholarship is governed by a ‘selecting principle,’ as he would come to term it in 1838—his belief that the ‘sage’ can ‘see secrets yet unrevealed.’

Such thinking not only impacts Emerson’s comments on an abstract and anonymized reader’s relationship with a text, but also reflects his own critical practice as a reader. Often critically categorized as a ‘reader,’ first and foremost,<sup>118</sup> Emerson classifies his own authorial activities by way of Coleridge’s four-classes of critics; the *hourglass*, *sponge*, *jelly-bag*, and the *Golconda*; and, in so doing, further compounds the importance of critical ‘selection’ to his thinking.<sup>119</sup> Here, Emerson’s favour for the subjective is again centralized. Drawing on Coleridge’s categories, personal identity is not only conceived of as a lens for the flat record of lived experience, but also as a filter for the election or ‘selection’ of symbolically and factually resonant materials: ‘The hourglass gives back everything it takes in, unchanged. The sponge gives back

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<sup>115</sup> Emerson: ‘[The] receiver’s aim is on life, and not on literature, will be his indifference to the source. The nobler the truth or sentiment, the less imports the question of authorship.’ See Emerson, ‘Quotation and Originality’ (1875), CW.VIII., 192

<sup>116</sup> Emerson, ‘Nature’ (1836), CW.I., 10

<sup>117</sup> Emerson: ‘Perhaps these subject-lenses have a creative power; perhaps there are no objects. Once we lived in what we saw; now, the rapaciousness of this new power, which threatens to absorb all things, engages us. Nature, art, persons, letters, religions, objects, successively tumble in, and God is but one of its ideas. Nature and literature are subjective phenomena; every evil and every good thing is a shadow which we cast.’ See ‘Experience’ (1844), CW.II., 76

<sup>118</sup> Robert D. Richardson, Jr., ‘Reading,’ *First We Read, Then We Write: Emerson on the Creative Process* (Iowa City, IA: University of Iowa Press, 2009), 8

<sup>119</sup> Coleridge sets forth his categories for the “reader” as follows: ‘Readers may be divided into four classes: **I.** Sponges, who absorb all they read, and return it nearly in the same state, only a little dirtied. **II.** Sandglasses, who retain nothing, and are content to get through a book for the sake of getting through the time. **III.** Strain-bags, who retain merely the dregs of what they read. **IV.** Mogul diamonds, equally rare and valuable, who profit by what they read, and enable others to profit by it also.’ See Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Notes and Lectures upon Shakespeare and Some of the Old Poets and Dramatists with other Literary Remains* (London: William Pickering, 1849), as cited by Timothy Corrigan, ‘Coleridge, The Reader,’ *Coleridge Language and Criticism* (Athens, GA: The University of Georgia Press, 1982), 10. The same train of categories also appears in Emerson’s journals and is attributed to Coleridge: ‘*House of Seem & house of Be.* Coleridge’s four classes of Readers. **1.** the Hourglass sort, all in all out; **2.** the Sponge sort, giving it all out a little dirtier than it took in; **3.** of the Jelly bag, keeping nothing but the refuse; **4.** of the Golconda, sieves picking up the diamonds only.’ See (ed.) Joel Porte, *Emerson in His Journals* (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University, 1982), 130

everything it takes in, only a little dirtier. The jelly-bag squeezes out the valuable and keeps the worthless, while the Golconda runs everything through a sieve, keeping only the nuggets.<sup>120</sup> According to his biographer Robert D. Richardson, Emerson was ‘the Golconda *par excellence*, [...] or what American miners call a high-grader—a person who goes through a mine and pockets only the richest lumps of ore.’<sup>121</sup> Figuratively toying with this ‘mine’—establishing the slippery terms of possession that accompanies his analysis of critical engagement by striving to distinguish between what belongs to us, as readers or authors, and what pertains more broadly to the cultural milieu to which we belong—the aptness of Emerson’s ‘eye’ becomes all the more apparent. His theory of ‘selection’ is here pronounced yet again, his position on critical ‘sensibility’ sophisticated, and his later assertion in ‘Quotation and Originality’ that ‘The profoundest thought or passion sleeps as in a mine until an equal mind and heart finds and publishes it,’ given precedence.

However, it is in Emerson’s remarks on the critic’s ‘eye’ in 1835 that he first establishes a conceptualist model of criticism or critical observation that we repeatedly encounter in his early writings. The ‘eye’ of his excursus is a semantic play on the first person ‘I’ so integral to his thinking; the book, as an object, is devalued as the process of critical reflection supersedes any interest in the book itself as point of interest. This early assessment of the importance of the reader as a character in Emerson’s writings is revelatory in terms of the politics of his poetics as well. The hierarchy of Emerson’s argument not only champions the reader, it reframes his position on interpretation as a complex form of collaborative or social labour by way of the dependency between a reader and writer. The reader helps ‘extricate’ ideas secreted behind the writer’s work; the writer enables that moment of enlightenment; a book is considered a meeting of minds rather than an indifferent object awaiting a reader’s attentions; but the reader and writer are entirely dependent upon one another, their reciprocal alienation being.

Whilst Emerson’s all-seeing ‘eye’ of his private papers in 1835 precedes the ‘transparent eyeball’ of published writings, 1836, the application of his thinking to a more concrete discussion of reader/writer relations destabilizes any critical supposition that Emerson’s early works are lacking in consistency or a

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<sup>120</sup> Richardson, Jr., ‘Reading,’ *First We Read, Then We Write*, 8

<sup>121</sup> *Ibid.*, 8-9

theoretical coherency. He repeatedly alludes to criticism as a form of ‘social’ work. ‘It is easy to see that what is best written or done by genius in the world was no man’s work, but came by wide social labor,’ he would note in ‘Shakespeare, or the Poet’ (1850).<sup>122</sup> In ‘Quotation and Originality,’ he would argue that cultural mythologies depend upon a systemic process of social circulation: ‘a legend is tossed from believer to poet, from poet to believer, everybody adding a grace or dropping a fault or rounding the form, until it gets an ideal truth.’<sup>123</sup> ‘Other men are lenses through which we read our own minds,’ he asserts again in ‘Uses of Great Men,’<sup>124</sup> and—again in ‘Shakespeare’—would propose that a published work of literature is ‘altered, remodeled and finally made [our] own’ through the process of our reading; that an interpretation, made public, will be subject to precisely that same process once again; and so the cycle continues.<sup>125</sup>

Together with Emerson’s overall refutation of the book as an important artefact in favour of the ‘I/eye’ that decodes its meaning, Emerson’s position on critical engagement is thus far more complex than it first appears. At first glance, his sense of the authority of the ‘eye’ appears to support the primacy of the ‘private’ mind so often associated with his perspectivism. Indeed, Emerson’s theory of ‘original relation’ appears a precedent to the development of such a line of thought. But how should we read his admonition that we seek out ‘our own works and laws and worships;’ that we identify a unique national culture despite the primacy of the ‘private man’ in his writings?

Rather than his theory of ‘original relation’ representing any simplistic refusal of tradition and convention, Emerson’s conceptualization of critical relation is contingent on forms of organization as well as on the spontaneity of independent, critical thought. Emerson regularly contravenes his emphatic stance on the authority of the ‘private man’ by alluding to the social systems that support interpretation. More importantly, it is literature that Emerson repeatedly looks to in order to elaborate on the complexities of such a position. In sum, Emerson is trying to build two intersecting theories of public and private value in tandem, and the distinction between critical reflection and ‘published’ thought allows him to consider the co-dependency of these two forms of critical worth and consider the interrelation of the private and public

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<sup>122</sup> Emerson, ‘Shakespeare, or the Poet’ (1850), CW.IV., 199

<sup>123</sup> Emerson, ‘Quotation and Originality’ (1875), CW.VIII., 194

<sup>124</sup> Emerson, ‘Uses of Great Men’ (1850), CW.IV., 5

<sup>125</sup> Emerson, ‘Shakespeare, or the Poet’ (1850), CW.IV., 201

modes that underwrite the process of critical engagement. The concatenation of a reader and writer through the act of exchange assists in our unpacking of Emerson's previous claim that a critic should work towards literature's 'ephemerality,' its 'disappearance.' His emphasis on this collaborative or 'social' practice of meaning-making and the systems of circulation that support culture's dissemination is both complemented and complicated by a consistent effort to devalue the special status afforded literature as a medium and the book as a cultural artefact. Echoing the 'everything or nothing' that he would note in his journals, 1835, Emerson claims in 'The American Scholar' (1837): 'I had better never see a book, than to be warped by its attraction clean out of my own orbit.'<sup>126</sup> The authority warranted a text is a limiter to interpretative freedom; it makes a 'satellite' of a mind instead of supporting the facilitation of any endogenous 'system.'<sup>127</sup>

This seeming elevation of the subjectivist autonomy of the reader is again accompanied by a general disregard for the literary object itself and a distinct disaffection for the act of writing. In the autumn of 1839, he states that 'Those only can sleep who do not care to sleep;' and that 'those only can act or write well who do not respect the writing or the act.'<sup>128</sup> The following year, he would consolidate these disparate diary entries and consider the aforesaid formation of a discrete, theoretical position—his 'Transcendental Criticism'—in which he argues that 'Criticism must be transcendental, that is, must consider literature ephemeral & easily entertain the supposition of its entire disappearance.'<sup>129</sup> 'In our ordinary states of mind, we deem not only letters in general but the most famous books parts of a preestablished harmony, fatal, unalterable,' he notes; 'but Man is critic of all such works and should treat the entire extant product of the human intellect as only one age, revisable, corrigible, reversible by him.'<sup>130</sup>

Such a voluminous rejection of the authority of canon is again redolent of Emerson's opening remarks in 'Nature.' His call for our rejection of 'the dry bones' and 'faded wardrobe' of 'the past.'<sup>131</sup> But the explicit attention he pays to the variety of work a critic should rehearse—and, indeed, the *ambitions* of that work itself—relays an interest in the 'mechanical' craft of criticism and the act of reading both. As

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<sup>126</sup> Emerson, 'The American Scholar' (1837), CW.I., 90

<sup>127</sup> Ibid.

<sup>128</sup> Emerson, 'Journal D' (Undated, 1839), JMN.VII., 244

<sup>129</sup> Emerson, 'Journal E' (Undated, 1840), JMN.VII., 352

<sup>130</sup> Ibid.

<sup>131</sup> Emerson, 'Nature' (1836), CW.I., 3

such, Emerson's call for 'original relation' requires some further unpacking, and especially with regard to the conflict between sociality and self-interest, between 'human intellect' and the 'endogenous' development of a critical perspective.

In the following part of this chapter, I will consider this conflict of interest as between self and society; between culture as a material, external realm and as a means to express a complex theory of privacy. What proves particularly striking are the ways in which Emerson explores these terms of argument by implementing a symbolic and conceptual vocabulary drawn from the capitalist expansion of the American marketplace. Seeking to better describe and depict the character and behaviourism of culture's circulatory systems, Emerson is interested in the '*profit*' of critical enterprise,<sup>132</sup> assured that our '*debts* and *credits* [...] are the very best basis of poetry,'<sup>133</sup> that we ought '*credit* literature with more than the bare word it gives us.'<sup>134</sup> As Luke Plotica notes, an investigation of both the practicable and symbolic effects of 'market principles and practices' resound across Emerson's writings, and a conceptual engagement with 'trade, wealth, competition, compensation, property, labor and vocation' informs his use of metaphor and symbol.<sup>135</sup> Emerson's 'purpose' was by no means to provide an 'unabashed endorsement' of American free enterprise. At the same time, even though Emerson's 'favorable use of the language of commerce is more than metaphorical' it reflects a genuine commitment to the market as a site of self-improvement' and cultural power.<sup>136</sup> As such, Emerson's concentration on privacy and the 'private man' and his use of 'fiscal metaphor' becomes a way to explore forms of democratic and economic participation across his era.<sup>137</sup>

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<sup>132</sup> Emerson, 'Quotation and Originality' (1875), CW.VIII., 194

<sup>133</sup> Emerson, 'Journal TU' (Undated, 1849), JMN.XI., 134

<sup>134</sup> Emerson: 'Observe moreover that we ought to credit literature with much more than the bare word it gives us. I have just been reading poems which now in memory shine with a certain steady, warm, autumnal light. That is not in their grammatical construction which they give me. If I analyse the sentences, it eludes me, but is the genius and suggestion of the whole. Over every true poem lingers a certain wild beauty, immeasurable; a happiness lightsome and delicious fills the heart and brain, as they say every man walk environed by his proper atmosphere, extending to some distance around him. This beautiful result must be credited to literature also in casting its account.' See 'Thoughts on Modern Literature' (1841), CW.XII., 310

<sup>135</sup> Luke Plotica, 'Emerson and Self-Reliance: Individualism Amidst the Market,' *Nineteenth-Century Individualism and the Market Economy: Individualist Themes in Emerson, Thoreau and Sumner* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), 71.

<sup>136</sup> Plotica, 73-74

<sup>137</sup> Emerson, 'Journal Y' (Undated, 1845), JMN.IX., 309. Emerson's habitual use of 'fiscal metaphor'—as both phrase and concept—is an idea that I borrow from Ian F.A. Bell, 'The Hard Currency of Words: Emerson's Fiscal Metaphor in Nature,' *ELH*, 52.3. (1985), 733-753

ii.

*The theory of politics which has possessed the mind of men, and which they have expressed the best they could in their laws and in their revolutions, considers persons and property as the two objects for whose protection government exists. Of persons, all have equal rights, in virtue of being identical in nature. This interest of course with its whole power demands a democracy. Whilst the rights of all as persons are equal, in virtue of their access to reason, their rights in property are very unequal. One man owns his clothes, and another owns a county.*

**RALPH WALDO EMERSON**  
'Politics' (1844)<sup>138</sup>

As previously discussed, Emerson imagines literary culture as an archly social domain—as a form of ‘social labor’—but, crucially, contingent on the estrangement of its participants. The ‘gulf between every me and thee,’ as he defines it in ‘Experience’ (1844), both promulgates and conditions any sense of subjective freedom a ‘reader’ could be allotted.<sup>139</sup> This leads to a crucial Emersonian impasse: how does one articulate a theory of autonomy when a form of social labour is necessary for its establishment?

He would frequently touch upon this issue in his journals and notebooks and, not uncommonly, suggest that a writer’s labours are best defined by the ways in which they open space for fresh interpretation. ‘[Write] on,’ he would note, 1838, ‘& by & by will come a reader and an age to justify all your context. Do not even look behind. Leave that bone for them to pick and welcome.’<sup>140</sup> Punning on the idea of a corpus of works as a corpse of materials—its various parts, pieces or ‘bones’ deliberately left exposed for dissection, further analysis, and critical application/recombination—Emerson also here alludes to the centrality of criticism to his thinking by toying with the idea of our ‘picking a bone’ as an argumentative gesture by

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<sup>138</sup> Emerson, ‘Politics’ (1844), CW.III., 201-202.

<sup>139</sup> Emerson, ‘Experience’ (1844), CW.III., 77

<sup>140</sup> Emerson, ‘Journal D’ (Undated, 1838), JMN.VII., 118

nature. Whilst a reader and writer are bonded in this participatory view of literary culture—dovetailing by virtue of the co-dependency of these two labour forms—that reader and writer can only work freely if the ‘gulf’ between them is maintained. A writing generates a reading; both activities requiring one another to function coherently and to enable a valorisation of the particulars of their work; but a complex and networked process of definition needs take place to make certain of the alienation and estrangement of its participants.

In spite of the occasional clarity of Emerson’s efforts to outline his privileging of the ‘reader,’ the muddy qualities of this romance of participation often hampers the lucidity of his position. In seeking to detail a complex system of connect/disconnect between reader and writer as it emerges in Emerson’s works, I will explore the concrete character of Emerson’s politics as a corollary to the kind of critical participation he portrays between a reader and writer. I will look to both Emerson’s own self-conscious engagement with this issue in his writings (looking to Emerson’s essay of 1841, ‘History,’ and address of 1844, ‘The Young American,’ in particular); and the ways in which recent criticism has sought to solidify a common understanding of the political investments of Emerson’s poetics.

In his essay ‘The Problem of Emerson’ (1973), Joel Porte argues that the academic amassing of Emerson’s corpus since mid-century—and an accommodation of his intellectual celebrity in American popular culture following his death in 1882—has led to a consistent manipulation of his original meaning.<sup>141</sup> Instead of working with any fidelity to Emerson’s initial arguments or intentions, his work is consistently subject to a process of decontextualization. This is true in terms of the progress of Emerson Studies, Porte notes, as an ongoing re-evaluation of his philosophy can be evidenced in line with the contemporary trends and interests of the academy. But is equally true if we look to the kind of treatment Emerson’s works have experienced outside of an academic context. Broken down into quotable phrases and aphorisms, his essays litter a cultural landscape in part more often than in their entirety, and the ‘bones’ of Emerson’s body of work have been subjected to precisely the process of recontextualization or decomposition that he would detail in his journals in 1838. For Porte, this impacts how Emerson has since

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<sup>141</sup> See Joel Porte, ‘The Problem of Emerson,’ *Consciousness and Culture: Emerson and Thoreau Reviewed* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2004), 28-55

been regarded, not to mention the philosophical and cultural significance of the American Transcendental as a school of thought:

Emerson's fate, somewhat like Shakespeare's, was that he came to be treated as an almost purely allegorical personage whose real character and work got submerged in his role as a touchstone of critical opinion. More and more, the figure of Emerson merged with current perceptions of the meaning and drift of American high culture, and the emblem overwhelmed his substance.<sup>142</sup>

There is an irony at play here—as previously discussed—as Emerson appears to have been well aware of the dangers of the dissimulation of an author's body of work. Furthermore, Emerson also seems to encourage such a critical process as Porte would outline. Nevertheless, recent critics have been sensitive to this issue in Emerson's writings. As Glen Johnson notes, Emerson's early lectures on criticism and literary culture portray a self-consciousness of 'two' prevailing 'problems' within his philosophy—'one social, and the other aesthetic.' According to Johnson, by concentrating on the craft, character, moral and philosophical dimensions and implications of critical engagement, Emerson identified 'a compromise that neither sacrifices the former nor ignores the latter.'<sup>143</sup>

A search for the particularities of this 'compromise' have proven key to the persistency of Emerson's popularity, both in and outside of an academic milieu.<sup>144</sup> Not only must we consider Emerson's 'allegorical personage' as developed by the consistent drift of 'critical opinion,' but also as informed by his want to explore the *idea* of America over and above the realities and lived experience of an American populace. An interest in the development of an 'American sentiment' can be traced across Emerson's early writings, as he would put it in 'The Young American' (1844).<sup>145</sup> A form of cultural patriotism that—echoing Adam Smith's 'invisible hand'—drives individual action at an ethical, critical and philosophical level to correlate individual activity and a conceptualization of 'public welfare,' as Emerson would himself term

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<sup>142</sup> Ibid., 30-31

<sup>143</sup> Glen M. Johnson, 'Emerson on "Making" in Literature: The Problem of his Professionalism, 1836-1841,' in (ed.) Joel Myerson, *Emerson Centenary Essays* (Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University Press, 1982), 65-69

<sup>144</sup> See Kenneth Dauber, 'On Not Being Able to Read Emerson, or Representative Man,' *boundary 2*, 21.2. (1994), 220

<sup>145</sup> See 'The Young American' (1844), CW.I., 364; 374-375



it.<sup>146</sup> But how such a ‘sentiment’ *reads* rather than the way it is written seems to be Emerson’s means of navigating the ‘compromise’ between critical engagement and its more abstract philosophical tenets. ‘We admire that poetry which no man wrote,’ he notes; ‘which is to be read in a mythology, in the effect of a fixed or national style of pictures, of sculptures, or drama, or cities, or sciences.’<sup>147</sup> A national feeling, ‘style’ or literature is more important to Emerson than each individual work, which is concordant with Porte’s sense of the ways in which the meaning and intimation of Emerson’s works have drifted with the tide of public opinion. Significantly, however, it is also a further indication of the ways in which the ‘Emerson problem’ Porte notes is self-consciously figured in Emerson’s own writings. For Porte, the need to explore the perpendicular relation of a literary canon to the drift of popular ‘critical opinion’ is intrinsically tied to the political determinates of academic work since the mid-twentieth century. Indeed, this leads to a potentially censorial relationship with literary work (as we have seen in Parrington’s treatment of Emerson). As the light and shadow of a work is explored relative to contextual interests as much as it is the content of a work itself, we ultimately seek to explore the changing shape of that canon relative to the political and institutional development of a discipline.<sup>148</sup> Arguably, Emerson’s aforementioned ‘Transcendental Criticism’—a form of reading that considers literature itself as ‘ephemeral’ and insignificant relative to its real-world application—infers a similar line of argument.

However, beyond a feeling that criticism should be recast as a radical form of cultural engagement capable of ‘transcending’ the trappings of culture itself—beyond staging a rallying call for the increased intellectual and political autonomy for the singular, American subject—Emerson seems at stalemate. Considering the implementation of his ‘American sentiment’ and its political ambitions, he is vocal in his want to stage a ‘revolution’ in the ‘offices and relations of men;’ and he knows that this ‘revolution’ need prove extensive to a wide array of social domains.<sup>149</sup> He cites ‘religion;’ ‘education;’ ‘association;’ and ‘property’ as ‘modes of living’ that need be subject to this ‘speculative’ and forward-thinking ‘revolution in

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<sup>146</sup> See Adam Smith, ‘Of Systems and Political Economy,’ in (ed.) M. Summary, *The Wealth of Nations* (New York, NY: Random House, 2000), 484.

<sup>147</sup> Emerson, ‘Quotation and Originality’ (1875), CW.VIII., 193

<sup>148</sup> Porte, ‘The Problem of Emerson,’ 31-34

<sup>149</sup> Emerson, ‘Self-Reliance’ (1841), CW.II., 77

relation.<sup>150</sup> But in practice, any expression of the machinations of such a ‘revolution’ lacks focus. Distanced from the inexorable violence and political ambitions of the historic American Revolution itself and, instead, effectuated by the ascent of new industrial and economic paradigm, Emerson’s engagement with revolution falls foul. According to West, it is Emerson’s fixation with subjectivity that restricts the effectivity of his argument, limiting his sphere of operation to culture, as noted. Nonetheless, in Emerson’s thoughts toward revolution, the progress of culture is deliberately foregrounded, whilst the development of any inclusionary socio-political ideology is largely disregarded.

Emerson’s sensitivity to the significance of revolution *can* be read down to the level of the sentence, however. It is noteworthy that there appears to be a distinction in his writings as between ‘Revolution’ (a public, historic moment of socio-political upheaval); and ‘revolution’ (a moment of progress or radical change experienced personally or locally). He capitalizes the term to denote a specific historical moment—as in ‘the French Revolution,’ or ‘the American ‘Revolution’ that rendered the country ‘politically independent,’ for example. The word is then in lowercase when he refers rhetorically to the evolution of personal feeling:<sup>151</sup> as in ‘Love’ (1841), in which an emotional charge such as a ‘divine rage [or] enthusiasm’ constitutes ‘a revolution in mind and body,’<sup>152</sup> or in ‘The American Scholar’ (1837), when he refers to the ‘gradual domestication of culture’ as a ‘revolution’ that will take place in the mind’s eye of the ‘private man.’<sup>153</sup> More interested in the dissemination of ideas than their actual political implementation, Emerson—more importantly—again calls upon literary forms to argue his point and, more specifically, the industrialization of the literary sphere characterizes the prospective revolution of his hour.

More interested in the potential of the newspaper, pamphlet or idea as a prospective radical agent than he is its specific application, in the ‘Seventh of March Speech on the Fugitive Slave Law’ (1854) he notes that the new media form of the newspaper ‘has wrought [...] a silent revolution.’ In ‘Worship,’ from *The Conduct of Life* (1860), and again in ‘The Progress of Culture’ (1867), he reuses the term to argue that technological innovations and new media forms have impelled a ‘silent revolution’ in both ideational and

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<sup>150</sup> Ibid.

<sup>151</sup> See James Russell Lowell, *My Study Windows* (Boston, MA: James R. Osgood and Company, 1874), 197

<sup>152</sup> Emerson, ‘Love’ (1841), CW.I., 169

<sup>153</sup> Emerson, ‘The American Scholar’ (1837), CW.I., 107

ideological contexts.<sup>154</sup> Thus—as Rob Wilson has noted—Emerson was intent on ‘refiguring more responsible forms and affiliations of radical dissent’ and, rather than simply advocate social upheaval without sufficient political cause, would look to the burgeoning book trade and print technologies to explore the dissemination of idea, image and information.<sup>155</sup> In identifying the book, newspaper or poem as ‘silent’ agents of revolutionary political progress, rather than endeavouring to identify the aims and ambitions of that revolution itself, Emerson’s reflections on what forms of cultural labour or cultural dissent he sought to champion are not always clear.<sup>156</sup> Indeed, the ‘silent revolution’ of Emerson’s excursus could be argued as a premeditated apology for the degree of quietism he would later be accosted for in twentieth- and twenty-first century reactions to his work (such was his stance on such moments of social exigency as the abolition movement, Indian removal, regional divisionism and economic disequilibrium that would result in the outbreak of Civil War in 1861).<sup>157</sup> Nonetheless, Emerson’s sense of the authority of this ‘silent revolution’ is foundational to his study of the interpretative ‘eye/I,’ and central to his metacritical engagement with the act of reading. The ‘individual’ should not be acknowledged as the endpoint of Emerson’s cultural commentaries, writes T. Gregory Garvey, but rather needs be regarded as the ‘locus’ of social change; as the operator or interpreter of this potent and revolutionary material (i.e., a reader of the daily news).<sup>158</sup> For Garvey, any prospective ‘revolution’ in Emerson’s writings needs be understood as cellular—as examining the power of the individual to influence the plural—and evidence of such thinking can be gleaned elsewhere in Emerson’s early works.

In Emerson’s ‘History’ (1841), ‘the publicness of opinion’ is argued as irrevocably bound to the

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<sup>154</sup> See Ralph Waldo Emerson, ‘Seventh of March Speech on the Fugitive Slave Law’ (1854) in (eds.) R.A. Bosco, J. Myerson, *The Later Lectures of Ralph Waldo Emerson*, Vol I., 1843-1871 (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 2001), 334; ‘Worship’ (1860), CW.VI., 208.; ‘The Progress of Culture’ (1867), CW.VIII., 209

<sup>155</sup> Rob Wilson, ‘Literary Vocation as Occupational Idealism: The Example of Emerson’s American Scholar,’ *Cultural Critique*, 15. (1990), 83-114

<sup>156</sup> See Paul Gilmore, ‘Mechanical Means: Emersonian Aesthetic Transcendence and Antebellum Technology,’ *MLQ: Modern Language Quarterly*, 65.2. (2004), 245-268

<sup>157</sup> Kenneth Dauber: “Do not tell me, as a good man did today, of my obligation to put all poor men in good situations. Are they my poor?” This is the aftermath of the panic of 1838.” I have quite other slaves to free than those negroes, to wit, imprisoned spirits, imprisoned thoughts.” This, in the wake of the Fugitive Slave Law. [...] Emerson was a “transcendentalist,” by his own confession. His idealism, so the argument runs, removed him from observation of the world.’ See Dauber, ‘On Not Being Able to Read Emerson,’ 221

<sup>158</sup> T. Gregory Garvey, ‘The Emerson Dilemma,’ an introduction to (ed.) T.G. Garvey, *The Emerson Dilemma: Essays on Emerson and Social Reform* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 2001), xi-xxiii

machinations of ‘private opinion,’ a process central to an understanding of cultural progress:<sup>159</sup>

Each new fact in [our] private experience flashes a light on what great bodies of men have done, and the crises of his life refer to national crises. Every revolution was first a thought in one man’s mind, and when the same thought occurs to another man, it is the key to that era. Every reform was once a private opinion, and when it shall be a private opinion again it will solve the problem of the age. The fact narrated must correspond to something in me to be credible or intelligible. We, as we read, must become Greeks, Romans, Turks, priest and king, martyr and executioner; must fasten these images to some reality in our secret experience, or we shall learn nothing rightly.<sup>160</sup>

Prior to the publication of Emerson’s *First Series* and ‘History,’ Emerson remarks in his journals—1838—‘That which is individual & remains individual in my experience of is of no value.’<sup>161</sup> Conversely, that which is rendered public, as in ‘History,’ heralds revolutionary potential. This statement in ‘History’ is, then, a counterpoint to Emerson’s more famous assertion in ‘Self-Reliance’ that ‘An institution is the lengthened shadow of one man.’<sup>162</sup> Complicating what would alternately read as another paean to his interest in the authority of the ‘private’ self, in ‘History’ Emerson unpacks a complex and dialectical system of exchange as contingent upon private thought and reflection as it is upon the publication and of ideas. The individual—a ‘locus’ of change, to borrow Garvey’s phrase—is required as a first lens. That individual transforms an object of attention along the axis of their understanding and experience—publishes that thought—only for the process to be reinstated. Culture’s progress, Emerson infers, is thus always contingent on a dialectical process of assimilation, adulteration, and secondary expression; the ‘selecting principle,’ his interpretative ‘I/eye,’ being the first link in this communicative chain that requires a theory of ‘secondary use’ to cohere and endure.

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<sup>159</sup> Emerson, ‘The Young American’ (1844), CW.I., 389

<sup>160</sup> Emerson, ‘History’ (1841), CW.I., 5

<sup>161</sup> Emerson, ‘Journal D’ (Undated, 1838), JMN.VII., 65

<sup>162</sup> Emerson: ‘An institution is the lengthened shadow of one man; as, Monachism, of the Hermit Antony; the Reformation, of Luther; Quakerism, of Fox; Methodism, of Wesley; Abolition, of Clarkson. Scipio, Milton called “the height of Rome;” and all history resolves itself very easily into the biography of a few stout and earnest persons.’ See ‘Self-Reliance’ (1841), CW.I., 61

Emerson's interest in a reticulated cultural economy is a quiet point within his writings; occasionally lost within his more voluminous and explicit commitment to an independence and autonomy of mind. But sufficient evidence can be tabled to suggest that he sought to engineer a more participatory form of culture as dependent on the balance of private reflection and the publication of thought—upon both thought and voice—elsewhere in his writings.

Picturing this system, he notes that 'we all involve ourselves in it the deeper by forming connections.'<sup>163</sup> 'Man the critic'—as he characterizes his cultural participant in heavily gendered language—is a figure fostered by the industrialization and institutionalization of the literary sphere. The ascendance of the 'subjective' reader, as he would describe them in his 'Thoughts on Modern Literature,' is thus both a product of the technological enhancement of publication and the engine of its evolution. Emerson's interest in the formation of a network culture provides a basis from which we can consider how critics have used (or appropriated) his works, and Emerson's aim—to examine literature's dependency on technological infrastructures capable of supporting this balance of private reflection and publication—is as topical today as in Emerson's epoch.<sup>164</sup>

As he would note in 'The Poet' (1844), the 'selecting principle' that would govern his conceptualizations of interpretative and creative thought, thus also effects our critical responsibility: a need to forge connections between the disparate elements of a commercial or industrial society. 'Readers of poetry see the factory-village and the railway, and fancy that the poetry of the landscape is broken up by these,' Emerson notes, 'for these works of art are not yet consecrated in their reading; but the poet sees them fall within the great Order not less than the beehive or the spider's geometrical web.'<sup>165</sup> Considering this 'geometrical web,' he suggests that a parity can be struck between its various nodes; that 'the belt of wampum and the commerce of America are alike.'<sup>166</sup> The individual 'eye'/'I'—by a process of 'ulterior

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<sup>163</sup> Emerson, 'Man the Reformer' (1841), CW.I., 234

<sup>164</sup> See David Shields' *Reality Hunger* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 2010), a collage text of appropriated aphorisms and ideas that deigned to explore creative license, quotation and appropriation in such contexts as film, television, literature and art; Emerson's desire to establish a 'new literature' is explicitly cited by Shields, 16, and Emerson is cited a further four times across this text (although without proper accreditation).

<sup>165</sup> Emerson, 'The Poet' (1844), CW.III., 19

<sup>166</sup> *Ibid.*

intellectual perception’—gives each symbol caught in this ‘web’ a newly allotted significance:<sup>167</sup>

We are symbols and inhabit symbols; workmen, work, and tools, words and things, birth and death, all are emblems; but we sympathize with the symbols, and being infatuated with the economical uses of things, we do not know that they are thoughts. The poet, by an ulterior intellectual perception, gives them a power which makes their old use forgotten, and puts eyes and a tongue into every dumb and inanimate object. He perceives the independence of the thought on the symbol, the stability of the thought, the accidenty and fugacity of the symbol.<sup>168</sup>

This theory of the ‘multiform’ meaning of materials,<sup>169</sup> to borrow Emerson’s term for it, is key an identification of the degree of sophistication that critics have identified in Emerson’s emphatic interest in our ‘use of literature’ rather than of literature itself as a medium, per se.<sup>170</sup>

How do we regard this theory of *use*? Emerson, ‘by his own admission,’ was not ‘a system-builder’ writes Norman Miller.<sup>171</sup> We will not find a ‘unified and internally consistent set of tenets built upon a premise or fact’ within his writings and will instead encounter a corpus ‘informed by the logic of a spider web rather than that of a skyscraper.’<sup>172</sup> Arguing that Emerson’s philosophical position proves ‘circular rather than linear, intuitional rather than syllogistic,’<sup>173</sup> Miller’s thinking is emblematic of the kind of critical treatment Emerson has received, but also proves to echo the kinds of system we can identify in Emerson’s early writings.<sup>174</sup>

It is of note that Emerson’s sensitivity to the economic divisionism of his contemporary society allows him to formulate a concept of alienation rather than the specificities of social inequality. While he seems to centralize a theory of ‘public welfare’ in his analyses of America’s cultural progress, without

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<sup>167</sup> *Ibid.*, 20

<sup>168</sup> *Ibid.*, 20

<sup>169</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>170</sup> Emerson, ‘Circles’ (1841), *CW.II.*, 312; see also, Hosseini, ‘Two Interpretations of Emerson’s Fragmentary Style,’ *Emerson’s Literary Philosophy*, 36-45

<sup>171</sup> Norman Miller, ‘Emerson’s *Each and All* Concept: A Reexamination,’ *The New England Quarterly*, 41.3. (1968), 381

<sup>172</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>173</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>174</sup> *Ibid.*

concrete riposte to the political exigencies of his hour, critics have likewise argued that Emerson's relationship with aesthetics also proves too muddled to propose any clear position. As Lawrence Buell notes, 'Emerson never wrote a treatise on aesthetics.' His later texts concerning critical praxis were little more than 'detached reflections' cobbled together by his literary executor James Elliot Cabot, and his early reflections on critical engagement too obtuse to be considered doctrinal.<sup>175</sup> Indeed, Emerson himself can be found to justify Buell's claim when, writing to Thomas Carlyle in an atypically confessional tone, 1838, he notes 'I sit & read & write with very little system,' and admits that any return to his own writing is accompanied by a sensation of bafflement and confusion.<sup>176</sup>

This self-confessed lack of structure and method has proven to affirm Emerson's reputation for obscurantism and abstraction; has complicated our means of either categorizing or applying his thinking beyond the antebellum precinct as a cultural and historical context.<sup>177</sup> However, I will argue that an investigation of Emerson's practical and theoretical interest in appropriation—and examination of his efforts to correlate conceptualizations of appropriation and market economics—argues a counter position: that a system *can* be struck in Emerson's writings, an 'aesthetic treatise' can be evinced, and evidence of such a system can be seen as in development from his earliest writings on.

This system—a 'method of mind,' as he would term it in 1836, or 'OTHERISM,' as he would succinctly define it—is persistently linked to the symbolic implications of an ownership of ideas.<sup>178</sup> I will explore this 'method' in more detail further on, but Parrington's own 'metacritical' treatment of Emerson is worth keeping in mind as we follow the progress of Emerson's position, 1836 to 1850, and as we consider

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<sup>175</sup> Lawrence Buell, 'Emersonian Poetics,' *Emerson*, 109. For a particularly useful and substantial account of Cabot's work as Emerson's literary executor and his work on the composition of Emerson's late 'synthetic' essays—such as 'Greatness' (1875), 'The Sovereignty of Ethics' (1878) and *Natural History of Intellect* (1893)—which were largely authored by quilting notes and statements from Emerson's notebooks and unpublished materials, see Nancy Craig Simmons, 'Arranging the Sibylline Leaves: James Elliot Cabot's work as Emerson's Literary Executor,' *Studies in the American Renaissance* (1983), 335-389

<sup>176</sup> Ralph Waldo Emerson, (ed.) J. Slater, *The Correspondence of Emerson and Carlyle* (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 1964), 185

<sup>177</sup> Alexander Kern: 'It makes a great difference whether a man is called a materialist or an idealist, yet within the province of economics Emerson has been called both. This sharp clash of critical opinion indicates that Emerson's economic thought has not been sufficiently examined.' See Alexander Kern, 'Emerson and Economics,' *The New England Quarterly*, 13.4. (1940), 678-696

<sup>178</sup> Emerson, 'Journal B' (Undated, 1836), JMN.V., 254

the ways in which Emerson's 'OTHERISM' informs his later remarks on aesthetics and critical activity; more significantly, it transmutes into what he would later call the 'art of appropriation,' 1875:

Πάντα ῥεῖ: all things are in flux. It is inevitable that you are indebted to the past. You are fed and formed by it. The old forest is decomposed for the composition of the new forest. The old animals have given their bodies to the earth to furnish through chemistry the forming race, and every individual is only a momentary fixation of what was yesterday another's, is to-day his and will belong to a third to-morrow. So it is in thought. Our knowledge is the amassed thought and experience of innumerable minds: our language, our science, our religion, our opinions, our fancies we inherited. Our country, customs, laws, our ambitions, and our notions of fit and fair, —all these we never made, we found them ready-made; we but quote them. Goethe frankly said, "What would remain to me if this art of appropriation were derogatory to genius?" Every one of my writings has been furnished to me by a thousand different persons, a thousand things [...].<sup>179</sup>

As vividly described in 'Quotation and Originality,' the ways in which we actively borrow, manipulate and repurpose 'ready-made' materials drawn from the public domain provides Emerson with a basis for a broader analysis of the possible interpolation of cultural and commercial methods of exchange. He argues a reading as a 'remodeling' of a fixed idea, as he would suggest in 'Shakespeare'—one that then entered back into circulation for further adulteration as he notes in 'History'—but here foregrounds our use of 'ready-made' materials over and above the creation or origination of new works. 'Every word and particle is public and tunable,' he notes in 'Quotation and Originality.' We need not invent new words, but consider instead new 'uses' of the 'amassed thought and experience of innumerable minds' we have access to.<sup>180</sup>

Describing his position on this process of critical 'flux' in more detail, Emerson explicitly alleges the marketplace serves as the ideal metaphor for considering the ways in which an image, idea or article of information changes hands, and he regards his position as inferentially, unerringly 'capitalist' in character. Designating critical exchange as a form of mutually beneficial 'transaction,' he suggests that "The capitalist

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<sup>179</sup> Emerson, 'Quotation and Originality' (1875), CW.VIII., 200

<sup>180</sup> Ibid., 182-200



[...] is as hungry to lend as the consumer to borrow; and the transaction no more indicates intellectual turpitude in the borrower than the simple fact of debt involves bankruptcy. On the contrary, in far the greater number of cases the transaction is honorable to both. Can we not help ourselves as discreetly by the force of two in literature?<sup>181</sup> If we are to extend this ‘art,’ to read it as both a practical rubric and ideological position, the ways in which it informs his own intratextual practices is as significant as his absorption and assimilation of the works of others. Whilst Emerson’s ‘art of appropriation’ will be the focus of later chapters, as will a range of examples of appropriation within Emerson’s writings, we need to first examine the material that leads to its later articulation and consider the work that precedes his ‘force of two in literature’ and the systems in place that support his own explicit identification of the act of quotation or critical exchange as ‘capitalist’ in character.

‘OTHERISM’ begins with an act of critical exchange within a study of culture’s circularity; a theoretical position that—entirely overlooked in recent scholarship—indicates the ways in which Emerson uses appropriation as a means with which to circuitously consider both the growth of the American marketplace and the industrial and technological advancement of culture during his lifetime. In order to examine Emerson’s ‘OTHERISM’ in earnest, I will first assess his complex relationship with individualism within his early works, and investigate the ways in which position exacts foundation for his later, radical efforts to incorporate critical and commercial value forms into a single analysis of critical exchange.

Emerson’s position on the relationship between self and society is informed by a significant intellectual lineage; one which we are aware of due to his habit of documenting his reading materials in his private journals. Reading lists from his early period number Joseph Fourier and Robert Owen amidst a cycle of familiar romantic antecedents to his Transcendentalism. He pens a favourable review of Albert Brisbane’s *Social Destiny of Man* in *The Dial* in 1840, for example, and publishes an article entitled ‘Fourierism and the Socialists’ in the same periodical, 1842.<sup>182</sup> The review appears to support the idea of a transference of European paradigmatic ideas to an American context, such as associationism and

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<sup>181</sup> *Ibid.*, 189

<sup>182</sup> See Emerson, ‘Fourier and the Socialists’ (*The Dial*, 1842) in (eds.) R.A. Bosco, J. Myerson, *Uncollected Prose Writings* (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press, 2013), 174-179

Fourierian Socialism.<sup>183</sup> Whilst an analysis of such bibliographic precedents is significant to this assessment of the sophistication of Emerson's standing, it is of note that Emerson reads (or misreads) the core tenets of such ideas.<sup>184</sup> As will be shown, Emerson's 'OTHERISM' appears to take 'associationism' literally, understanding the term as a semiotic formation rather than a political position. However, the form of associationism that Emerson espouses appears more concerned with economy—the percolation and development of market ideologies—and the circulation and ownership of ideas than any question of equality and has been argued as troubling the political implications of Emerson's thinking. An Emersonian view of 'equality does not eliminate so much as it relocates and reframes social division,' allowing alienation to become a social problem that carries personal rather than collective consequences.<sup>185</sup> To consider this idea, Larson refers to an infamous tautology in Emerson's mid-period address, 'New England Reformers' (1844). 'The union is only perfect when all the uniters are isolated,' he writes. Emerson's position requires further explanation because it is here that the complex character of his individualism first come to the fore. 'New England Reformers' is the first example of Emerson's employment of the term 'individualism' in his published writings; a term that takes centre stage in discussions surrounding social organization in his period.<sup>186</sup> Fuelled by 'the rise of Saint-Simonism,' 'individualism' defined America's cultural self-study in the 1830s and 40s, according to Cyrus K. Patel, and owed more to the philosophical practices and political contexts of European revolutionary thought than it did to America's claims to

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<sup>183</sup> Emerson can be seen to explicitly charter his suspicions of associationism as a movement in 'The Young American,' wherein he would comment on the ways in which agriculture needs mimic the associationism of 'great commercial and manufacturing companies' if it is to ever achieve 'economic success.' The only advantage of associationism he can conjure is its capacity to achieve greater, collective wealth: 'Community is only the continuation of the same movement which made the joint-stock companies for manufactures, mining, insurance, banking, and so forth. It has turned out cheaper to make calico by companies; and it is proposed to plant corn and to bake bread by companies.' Here Emerson's own theory of 'associationism' appears to have more in common with the cultures of corporatism in ascension in the 1830s and 1840s. See Emerson, 'The Young American' (1844), CW.I., 382-383. This is a mirror of the more famous remark Emerson would make in 'Self-Reliance' (1841), that 'society is a joint-stock company,' and 'Art' (1841), wherein Emerson considers the cultural significance of industrialization: 'Proceeding from a religious heart it will raise to a divine use the railroad, the insurance office, the joint-stock company; our law, our primary assemblies, our commerce, the galvanic battery, the electric jar, the prism, and the chemist's retort; in which we seek now only an economical use.' Respectively, see 'Self-Reliance' (1841), CW.II., 49.; and 'Art' (1841), CW.II., 368

<sup>184</sup> For an interesting definition and historical account of 'associationism' and its American implementation, see Carl J. Guarneri, 'The Associationists: Forging a Christian Socialism in Antebellum America,' *Church History*, 52.1. (1983), 36-49

<sup>185</sup> See Kerry Larson, 'Emerson's Strange Equality,' *Nineteenth-Century Literature*, 59.3. (2004), 315-339

<sup>186</sup> Emerson, 'New England Reformers' (1844), CW.III., 267

independence in the 1770s.<sup>187</sup> Opposed to ‘individualism’ was the newly coined ‘socialism,’ brought into common parlance by Alexandre Vinet partly in response to its more bureaucratic affiliate, ‘associationism.’<sup>188</sup> Considering individuality and individualism as distinct concepts the former, simply stated, infers the inalienable rights of one; and the latter, the necessary cohesion of self-determinate, alienable subjects within a community. One is singular (*individuality*); the other social (*individualism*). ‘Beware of confounding individuality with individualism,’ Alexandre Saint-Cheron would warn in 1831,<sup>189</sup> predating the definition that Tocqueville would subsequently establish in *Democracy in America* in 1835.<sup>190</sup> However, before we look to Emerson’s own version of individualism, and the ways in which it encompasses a theory of economic agency, it is worth comparing it to its European antecedents and, in particular, those that inspired Emerson’s thinking regarding the conflict between individualism and individuality.

Saint-Cheron identifies individualism in *La Revue encyclopédique* as ‘that mean egoism, lonely and disunited, which chokes all dignity, all the élan of the soul, all faith, while the sentiment of individuality is the holy exaltation of man, conscious of the life in him and all others, in God and nature.’<sup>191</sup> A year later, in a contribution to the same periodical in 1832, Pierre Leroux responded to the complexities of Saint-Cheron’s position by more explicitly advocating *individuality* over and above *individualism*: ‘We are neither individualists nor socialists. We believe in individuality, personality, liberty; but we also believe in society.’<sup>192</sup> This intellectual conflict feeds directly into Emerson’s major works, and the effort to balance belief in both society and individuality.

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<sup>187</sup> Cyrus K. Patell, ‘Emersonian Strategies,’ 448

<sup>188</sup> Alexandre Vinet, ‘Catholicisme et socialisme,’ *Le Semeur* (November 1831); cited by Yehoshua Arieli in *Individualism and Nationalism in American Ideology* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1964), n. 98, 405

<sup>189</sup> Alexandre Saint-Cheron, ‘Philosophie du droit,’ *La Revue encyclopédique*, 52. (1800), 600; cited by Arieli, *Individualism and Nationalism in American Ideology*, *Ibid.*, 232

<sup>190</sup> Claiming that ‘Our fathers only knew egotism,’ de Tocqueville defines “individualism” as ‘A calm and considered feeling which disposes each citizen to isolate himself from the mass of his fellows and withdraw into the circle of family and friends; with this little society formed to his taste, he gladly leaves the greater society to look after itself.’ See Alexis de Tocqueville, (trans.) Henry Reeve, *Democracy in America*, Vol. II (New York: Schocken, 1961), 118

<sup>191</sup> Saint-Cheron, ‘Philosophie du droit,’ *La Revue encyclopédique*, 52. (1800), 600; cited by Arieli, *Individualism and Nationalism in American Ideology*, 232

<sup>192</sup> *Ibid.*

Look again to Emerson's famous pronouncement in 'Nature': 'Standing on the bare ground, —my head bathed by the blithe air and uplifted into infinite space, —all mean egotism vanishes. I become a transparent eye-ball; I am nothing; I see all.'<sup>193</sup> Lifted from Emerson's famous 'Transparent Eyeball' passage, his semantic play with 'I' and 'all' as the 'eyeball' is a contraction that echoes Saint-Cheron's thinking. Whilst Saint-Cheron's remarks on individualism would detail 'that mean egoism, lonely and disunited,' Emerson would work to ideate a 'space' wherein 'all mean egotism vanishes.' Thus, the conflict between individuality and individualism as illustrated in the work of Saint-Simon and Saint-Cheron arguably finds a 'space' in Emerson's analysis of the philosophical character of the American union in 'New England Reformers.' This 'space' is not only a moral and philosophical domain, but an arena where the 'I' and 'all' of his argument conceptually coalesce. His tautological remark that 'The union is only perfect when all the uniters are isolated' thus appropriates the complex history of the term 'individualism' from his European antecedents, foregrounding Emerson's want to ally his conceptualizations of self and society, but—equally—frames the complexity of his position. Since Emerson, 'Americans have always conceived of individuality as a social formation,' remarks Patel; it is a means of organizing the terminological conflict between individuality and individualism into a new ideological position that would seek to enumerate both self and society as co-dependent terms.<sup>194</sup>

Exploring Emerson's emphasis on the 'first person,' Sacvan Bercovitch suggests that, in opposition to Fourier, Emerson was more keenly influenced by the writings of Pierre Leroux than Saint-Cheron. As a philosophical basis for a practical form of government and culture could grow, 'individualism,' according to Leroux, 1832, served to 'liberate the bourgeoisie' and support the expansion of a participatory and market-led economy. For Leroux, individualism conceptually underpins 'a political economy of everyone for himself,' notes Bercovitch; and, as such, his work represents a vital precedent to Emerson's thinking.<sup>195</sup> In Leroux's influential essay 'On Individualism and Socialism' (1834), Leroux champions a collectivist and utopian social imaginary in which: 'Every man is a fruit on the tree of humanity; but the fruit, although

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<sup>193</sup> Emerson, 'Nature' (1836), CW.I., 10

<sup>194</sup> Patel, 'Emersonian Strategies,' 441

<sup>195</sup> Bercovitch, 'Emerson, Individualism, Liberal Dissent,' *Rites of Assent*, 317; see also, James McClelland, 'Losing Grip: Emerson, Leroux and the Work of Identity,' *Journal of American Studies*, 39.2. (2005), 239-255

the product of the tree, is nonetheless complete and perfect in itself; [...] Thus each man within himself reflects the whole of society, each man is in a certain fashion the manifestation of his century, of his people, and of his generation, each man is humanity.<sup>196</sup> This lyrical impression of the relationship between self and society significantly influenced Emerson's own socio-political perspective.<sup>197</sup> For Emerson, the 'considered labors of man' are 'the ripe fruit' of society,<sup>198</sup> and 'An individual man [is as] a fruit which it cost all the foregoing ages to form and ripen.'<sup>199</sup>

These similarities between Emerson and Leroux have to be taken into account when we address Emerson's own theorizations of individualism as itself 'a breath-taking work of culture,' writes Bercovitch—'a wholesale appropriation of [...] all the forms of reform and revolution nourished on both sides of the Atlantic by the turmoil of modernization.'<sup>200</sup> It is in this context that Bercovitch refers to the ways in which Leroux's 'fruiting tree' is carried into Emerson's comments regarding the 'metaphysical' powers of capitalism.

In 1846, Emerson would connote 'community' or 'communitism' (as he puts it) as a form of 'bedlam.' By '47, he directly renounces the influence of 'Fourier, St. Simon, Leroux' and the Chartists as 'crazy men.'<sup>201</sup> According to Bercovitch, from 1842 to 1850, Emerson (either implicitly or explicitly) provides an 'unabashed endorsement' of what can only be described as 'free-enterprise ideology.'<sup>202</sup> In a note commending the thinking of Adam Smith, Emerson notes that 'Laissez faire is the only way' and continues to only allude to the fragility of Leroux's 'tree of humanity.' In his Journals, he writes '& I see you snap the sinews with your sumptuary laws. [...] The powers that make the capitalist are metaphysical; the force of method, & the force of will makes banks & builds towns. We must therefore leave the individual [...] to the rewards and penalties of his own constitution.'<sup>203</sup> Alongside 'considered labor,' Emerson cites

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<sup>196</sup> Pierre Leroux, 'On Individualism and Socialism' (1834), cited by Leo A. Loubère in 'The Intellectual Origins of French Jacobean Socialism,' *International Review of Social History*, 4.3. (1959), 427

<sup>197</sup> Bercovitch, 'Emerson, Individualism, Liberal Dissent,' 317

<sup>198</sup> Emerson, 'Lecture on the Times' (1841) CW.I., 271

<sup>199</sup> Emerson, 'The Method of Nature' (1841), CW.I., 206

<sup>200</sup> Sacvan Bercovitch, 'Emerson, Individualism, Liberal Dissent,' *The Rites of Assent: Transformations in the Symbolic Construction of America*, 342

<sup>201</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>202</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>203</sup> Emerson, 'Journal O' (Undated, 1846-1847), and 'Journal V (Undated, 1844-1845), JMN.IX., 424, 402, 100.

‘Commerce’ as ‘a single fruit’ on the boughs of Leroux’s tree, arguing for an intersection between capitalistic and individualistic forms of ‘constitution.’ Once again, a conceptual relationship with circulation is key to Emerson’s thinking. In Emerson’s hands, ‘poetic knowledge’—or rather a poetics of knowledge formation—centres around the movement and ownership of an image or idea. Emerson’s metaphor is of twofold value. ‘Commerce’ is a product of the collective forces that foster the growth and health of this tree (the plant, soil and cultural climate), but commerce itself is also the system that informs that tree’s growth. As David M. Robinson notes, it ‘is the pursuit of the larger contextual pattern that will make sense of an individual object by demonstrating its relation to a whole’ that we should understand as Emerson’s chief aim; and Robinson’s standpoint presents a good summation of the ways in which Emerson sought to exact a form of criticism enhanced by its commercial and industrial contexts.<sup>204</sup> Thus, whilst Emerson takes reading as a metaphor for perception—an idea we can support by way of the interchangeability of the ‘eye/I’ previously mentioned—his later writings also indicate a desire to organize knowledge and examine the relation of an individual thought to a broader, cultural and/or informational mass. Emerson’s position is far-reaching, extrapolatory, and analytical.

‘Natural objects,’ he writes in ‘Poetry and Imagination’ (1875), ‘if individually described and out of connection, are not yet known, since they are really parts of a symmetrical universe, like words of a sentence; and if their true order is found, the poet can read their divine significance orderly as in a Bible.’<sup>205</sup> Here, the process of reading emphasizes the idea of ‘connection’—a symmetrical or reciprocal reading of the process of understanding. See his notes on ‘reader and the book,’ from the late essay ‘Books’ (1870), for example: ‘one without the other is naught,’ he writes.<sup>206</sup> This desire to establish a cultural unity through an analysis of the relation of objects (rather than the individualistic qualities of an object itself) extends beyond the metaphor of a reader and writer, however, to also encompass the dependency of a public speaker upon their audience. In ‘Poetry and Imagination,’ Emerson remarks on the symmetrical, organic

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<sup>204</sup> David M. Robinson, ‘Toward a Grammar of the Moral Life,’ *Emerson and the Conduct of Life: Pragmatism and Ethical Purpose in the Later Work* (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 192

<sup>205</sup> Emerson, ‘Poetry and Imagination’ (1875), CW.VIII., 15

<sup>206</sup> Emerson: ‘O DAY of days when we can read! The reader and the book, —either without the other is naught. THAT book is good / Which puts me in a working mood. / Unless to Thought be added Will / Apollo is an imbecile.’ See Emerson, ‘Books’ (1870), CW.VII., 187

and organicist connectivity between ideas and their manifestation as constituting a scientific perfection: ‘The electric word pronounced by John Hunter a hundred years ago, arrested and progressive development, indicating the way upward from the invisible protoplasm to the highest organisms, gave the poetic key to Natural Science, of which the theories of Geoffroy Saint-Hilaire, of Oken, of Goethe, of Agassiz and Owen and Darwin in zoölogy and botany, are the fruits,—a hint whose power is not yet exhausted, showing unity and perfect order in physics.’<sup>207</sup> While the process of connectivity is anchored in symmetry and order it is also, crucially, about movement; a movement of mind that evaluates the linkage between reader and audience; so as to understand the *powers* of an audience. For Emerson, ‘the value of a trope is that the hearer is one,’ and we thus need examine the symbolic inferences of this ‘hearer’ in his hands.<sup>208</sup>

To explain the idea of connectivity he seeks to underscore, Emerson reinstates the conceptual importance of circulation. Once again, he is not concerned with the ‘primary meaning’ of an object; rather, its cultural power—the force of two in literature,’ as he would term it—relies as much on the implications of an idea as it does on its documentation. Emerson establishes a working definition of ‘poetry’ in ‘Poetry and Imagination’ that again foregrounds this interest in simile and ‘secondary use;’ in other words, the circulation of ideas secreted in metaphor.<sup>209</sup>

*Poetry.* —The primary use of a fact is low; the secondary use, as it is a figure or illustration of my thought, is the real worth. First the fact; second its impression, or what I think of it. The lover sees reminders of his mistress in every beautiful object; the saint, an argument for devotion in every natural process; and the facility with which Nature lends itself to the thoughts of man, the aptness with which a river, a flower, a bird, fire, day or night, can express his fortunes, is as if the world were only a disguised man, and, with a change of form, rendered to him all his experience. We cannot utter a sentence in sprightly conversation without a similitude. Note our incessant use of the word *like*, —like fire, like a rock, like thunder, like a bee, “like a year without a spring.” Conversation is not permitted without tropes; nothing but great weight in things can afford a quite literal speech. It is ever enlivened by

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<sup>207</sup> Emerson, ‘Poetry and Imagination’ (1875), CW.VIII., 7

<sup>208</sup> *Ibid.*, 15

<sup>209</sup> *Ibid.*

inversion and trope. God himself does not speak prose, but communicates with us by hints, omens, inference and dark resemblances in objects lying all around us.<sup>210</sup>

Emerson notes that the ‘delight’ we wrest from an ‘image’ owes to the re-contextualization of that image, in its sitting in ‘new dress’ or a new context. Note ‘the new virtue shown in some unprized old property, as when a boy finds that his pocket-knife will attract steel filings and take up a needle,’ he writes.<sup>211</sup> This explicit interest in the ‘secondary’ purchase of an idea or image is key to Emerson’s critical praxis. ‘Poetic knowing,’ to again cite Robinson, ‘is fundamentally a recognition that perception is connection,’ that we value the correlation of ‘facts’ or ‘feelings’ more acutely than we do the ‘fact’ or ‘feeling’ itself. What proves of note is that Emerson’s scrutiny of metaphor—and examination of the free agency of interpretation—should aim to examine such a process of reading as akin to the ‘power’ he acknowledges in ‘the perfect order of physics,’ how the result of private research facilitates concrete concept, furthering the project of a social body of knowledge. However, it is also Emerson’s interest in the ‘secondary’ idea that prefaces the political aspects of his criticism.<sup>212</sup>

Although these references pertain to Emerson’s later writings, we can read such thinking retrospectively into his earlier works. Both ‘Books’ and ‘Poetry and Imagination’ are essays that, although published in the 1870s, are rooted in lecture materials from the 1850s; but these ideas can be traced back even further. Emerson may not be explicitly interested in the procedural dimensions of political reform—‘I do not wish to push my criticism on the state of things around me to that extravagant mark,’ he notes in ‘Man the Reformer’ (1841)—but he nonetheless wants to embed his thinking within the social concerns of a popular audience.<sup>213</sup> Arguing against our ‘isolation from the advantages of a civil society,’<sup>214</sup> he cites ‘the near, the low, [and] the common’ as his locus of concern.<sup>215</sup> ‘The mind of this country, taught to aim at

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<sup>210</sup> Ibid., 11-12

<sup>211</sup> Ibid., 12-13

<sup>212</sup> Robinson, ‘Politics and Ecstasy,’ *Emerson and the Conduct of Life*, 43

<sup>213</sup> Emerson, ‘Man the Reformer’ (1841), CW.I., 247

<sup>214</sup> Ibid.

<sup>215</sup> Emerson, ‘The American Scholar’ (1837), CW.I., 110



low objects, eats upon itself,' he notes;<sup>216</sup> it automatically rejects ideas that appear 'too vague and indefinite for the uses of life,' and requires—instead—a practical philosophy of participation, application and custom.<sup>217</sup> What proves of note is that Emerson would explicitly link such a project to the study of 'economy.' In 'Man the Reformer,' he charges that we need 'learn [...] the meaning of economy. Economy is a high, humane office, a sacrament, when its aim is grand; when it is the prudence of simple tastes, when it is practiced for freedom, or love, or devotion.'<sup>218</sup> Emerson's desire to unpick the 'lesson' and 'meaning' of economy is equally present in his literary and philosophic research as his interest in individualism. A twenty-one-year-old Emerson lists Adam Smith's *Works* in a brief itinerary of 'BOOKS TO READ' in 1825 and, over the subsequent months, he notes that Smith moves from a pile of 'BOOKS TO READ' to a list of works he is actively 'READING.'<sup>219</sup> An explicit reference to Smith's *Wealth of Nations* (1776) also appears in Emerson's later works, where—in a lecture delivered to the Philorhetorian and Peithologian Societies of Wesleyan College in 1845—he cites Smith's conceptualization of Napoleon as an influence on a par with Swift's political pamphlets and Humboldt's 'system of nature.'<sup>220</sup>

In order to examine the significance of Smith's works to Emerson, Thomas Birch (in a rare essay dedicated to Emerson's relationship with the progress of American political economy) cites Francis Wayland—a professor of moral philosophy, president of Brown University, and 'acquaintance' of Emerson's. Wayland's 'popular college text' *The Elements of Political Economy*—published a year after Emerson's *Nature*, 1837—is particularly significant in terms of Emerson's want to articulate 'the meaning of economy.' Wayland's work contains 'simple' restatements of 'classic economic principles found in Adam Smith, David Ricardo, and J. B. Say,' but is also—according to Birch—'one of the most systematic

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<sup>216</sup> Emerson, 'The American Scholar' (1837), CW.I., 114

<sup>217</sup> Emerson, 'Literary Ethics' (1841), CW.I., 182

<sup>218</sup> Emerson, 'Man the Reformer' (1841), CW.I., 245

<sup>219</sup> 'READING: Taylor ; Herbert ; Lovelace ; Swammerdam ; Newton; Scougal; Fenelon ; Young ; Swedenborg; Abraham Tucker (Edward Search); Samuel Johnson ; Adam Smith ; Burke; Schlegel, *Guesses at Truth*; Schiller; Wordsworth, Dion, Rob Roy, Laodamia, Happy Warrior ; Mrs. Barbauld, The Brook ; Dugald Stewart ; Burns, *To the Deil* ; Kirby ; De Stael ; Schelling ; Scott ; Byron ; Campbell, Pleasures of Hope ; Coleridge ; Landor, *Imaginary Conversations* ; Muller ; Webster ; Everett.' See 'Wide World 12' (Undated, 1825), JMN. II., 212-213

<sup>220</sup> Emerson, 'Discourse Read Before the Philomathesian Society of Middlebury College in Vermont, 22<sup>nd</sup> July 1845,' LL.I.,

and original treatments of how intelligence functions in economy to be found at that time.<sup>221</sup> Birch summarizes Wayland's position as follows:

Wayland classified human industry or labor into three types according to the nature and degree of intellectual effort involved. The highest form is "discovery or investigation," which includes the work of philosophers such as Newton and Franklin, "who discover the laws of nature." Next is "application or invention," which "teaches us how to make application of the principle" discovered by the philosopher. This type of industry encompasses the work of "professional labor [force]," and although Wayland only cites doctors, lawyers, and manufacturers, he clearly means to refer to any capitalist with managerial responsibility. Finally, is "operative" human industry, which consists of pure "physical effort." Physical labor creates changes "of form or place in matter" and therefore concerns the development of "material products;" the first two types of labor produce and utilize knowledge, which is "immaterial" but increasingly vital to the growth of the American economy.<sup>222</sup>

The production of knowledge is unique in comparison to others forms of labour, Wayland argues, 'because he who first creates, has no means of monopolizing it.' Or as Birch puts it: a process of acculturation necessarily follows the dissemination of an 'idea' in print '[because] others cannot be barred from possessing knowledge once it has been discovered and because it can be reproduced at virtually no cost at all.'<sup>223</sup> Knowledge, Birch writes, is thus figured as 'a gift of nature,' because print technologies make it 'freely available to all.' Wayland argues:<sup>224</sup>

The product which [the philosopher or inventor] creates has an indefinite power of self-production. If a man discovers a law and reveal it to his neighbor, that is, create this change in his mind, his neighbor may create the same product in an hour, in the minds of a thousand persons, and each of

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<sup>221</sup> Thomas D. Birch, 'Towards a Better Order: The Economic Thought of Ralph Waldo Emerson,' 389

<sup>222</sup> See Francis Wayland, *The Elements of Political Economy* (New York: Leavitt, Lord and Company, 1837), 43-48

<sup>223</sup> Birch, 'Towards a Better Order: The Economic Thought of Ralph Waldo Emerson,' 390

<sup>224</sup> Wayland, *The Elements of Political Economy*, 47

these in the minds of a thousand more. And specially, by means of the press, this power is multiplied indefinitely.<sup>225</sup>

Wayland's 'power' is an interesting antecedent to Emerson's 'force of two in literature,' and echoes can also be found in Emerson's 'History.' But Birch notes that—at the time of writing—economic theory had yet to embrace a substantive and utilitarian conceptualization of the 'public good' in American thought.<sup>226</sup> Nonetheless, the idea is implicit in Wayland's discussion of intellectual production in which the public good, according to Birch, 'exhibits non-excludability' (i.e., all persons have free access to the product) and nonrivalry in consumption (i.e., one person's consumption of the product does not detract from another person's consumption). Conversely, a 'private good is characterized by excludability and rivalry;' it is driven by a conceptualization of 'material scarcity rather than abundance,' the market here being a space riven by conceptualizations of competition and ownership.<sup>227</sup>

Emerson comments on Wayland's theological writings in a journal entry of 1830; and acknowledges his attendance at Wayland's lecture on 'Human Life' in the spring of 1840.<sup>228</sup> However, above all, Emerson absorbed Wayland's sense of cultural and critical engagement as the 'highest form of human industry,' one in which the capacity to '[create] intellectual property that serves a public good' becomes a chief aim.<sup>229</sup> This, then, is a crucial element of Emerson's theorizations of the development of an antebellum market economy. For Birch, Emerson's interest in 'capitalism' is that it 'treats nature as a commodity,' and allows for 'an economy [to emerge] in which property and wealth are material, divisible and privately owned.'<sup>230</sup> The development of this network of proprietors is key, but—once again—literary culture provides Emerson with a means to consider the complexities of capitalism in action. Emerson—on the one hand—sought to facilitate a 'poet's economy,' in which nature, wealth and property coalesce into a common spiritual and cultural resource, 'indivisible and freely accessible to all.'<sup>231</sup> On the other, however,

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<sup>225</sup> Ibid.

<sup>226</sup> Birch, 'Towards a Better Order: The Economic Thought of Ralph Waldo Emerson,' 390

<sup>227</sup> Ibid.

<sup>228</sup> See Emerson, 'Blotting Book PSI,' (Undated, 1830) JMN.III., 208.; and 'Journal F2' (March 28<sup>th</sup>, 1840), JMN.VII., 489

<sup>229</sup> Birch, 'Towards a Better Order: The Economic Thought of Ralph Waldo Emerson,' 390

<sup>230</sup> Ibid.

<sup>231</sup> Ibid.

the intellectual effects of economic expansion would herald intellectual ramifications that he would note with some trepidation. Emerson can be seen to be ill at ease with the cultural ascent of capital in his earliest publications. In 'Nature,' for example, he locates a 'fear' that capitalism is constructing the 'selfish savage' as a stand-in for the American subject.<sup>232</sup> For Emerson, 'hope' for the 'moral and spiritual growth' of America's fledgling national culture 'resides in the poet's economy alone,' Birch writes, and not in a simple subjugation of mind to the rules of the marketplace. In this 'poet's economy,' a system present in Emerson's essays from his earliest publications on,<sup>233</sup> Emerson advocates a revolutionary economic system;<sup>234</sup> one that resembles a developmental model of free-enterprise, with poetic practice and 'thought' as a stand in for material goods and services, or a declaration of 'psyche' over 'sovereignty,' as Jeffrey Sklansky has put it.<sup>235</sup>

'The meaning of economy' may be something that Emerson stresses as a necessary object of intellectual attention, but it is also a more complex rewriting of Wayland's economic theories than Birch acknowledges. In 'Man the Reformer,' Emerson provides an assessment of Wayland's thinking. Rather than simply calling for a conceptual rereading of 'the meaning of economy,' 'Man the Reformer' actively reconsiders 'economy' as both a term and concept.<sup>236</sup>

The idea which now begins to agitate society has a wider scope than our daily employments, our households, and the institutions of property. We are to revise the whole of our social structure, the State, the school, religion, marriage, trade, science, and explore their foundations in our own nature; we are to see that the world not only fitted the former men, but fits us, and to clear ourselves of every usage which has not its roots in our own mind. What is a man born for but to be a Reformer, a Remaker of what man has made; a renouncer of lies; a restorer of truth and good, imitating that great Nature

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<sup>232</sup> Emerson: 'At present, man applies to nature but half his force. He works on the world with his understanding alone. He lives in it and masters it by a penny-wisdom; and he that works most in it is but a half-man, and whilst his arms are strong and his digestion good, his mind is imbruted, and he is a selfish savage. His relation to nature, his power over it, is through the understanding, as by manure; the economic use of fire, wind, water, and the mariner's needle; steam, coal, chemical agriculture; the repairs of the human body by the dentist and the surgeon. This is such a resumption of power as if a banished king should buy his territories inch by inch, instead of vaulting at once into his throne.' See 'Nature' (1836), CW.I., 72

<sup>233</sup> See Jeffrey P. Sklansky, 'Transcendental Psychology,' *The Soul's Economy: Market Society and Selfhood in American Thought, 1820-1920* (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 2002), 50-61

<sup>234</sup> Birch, 'Towards a Better Order: The Economic Thought of Ralph Waldo Emerson,' 390

<sup>235</sup> Sklansky, 'Transcendental Psychology,' *The Soul's Economy*, 39

<sup>236</sup> Emerson, 'Man the Reformer' (1841), CW.I., 245

which embosoms us all, and which sleeps no moment on an old past, but every hour repairs herself, yielding us every morning a new day, and with every pulsation a new life?<sup>237</sup>

His stress on the 'reformer' as a 'remaker of what man has made' reinstates the importance of Emerson's 'second use' of objects, of no less than a revision of 'our whole social structure.' The emphasis on 'remaking' or repurposing materials turns the reader into a form of primary labourer (recall his aforementioned comment that, in the moment of its engagement, a work of literature is 'altered, remodeled and finally made [our] own' through the process of reading). Here, Emerson argues that such logic reaches beyond the verges of literary culture into theory of political being, recasting his reader as a metaphor for the relation of a single subject to a 'social structure,' and indicating their capacity to alter its shape and form. For Birch, given the volume of Emerson's allusions to the conceptual importance of economy, these ideas infer that Emerson's reflections on economy are a kind of testimony to, if not credible theory of, the 'creative potential' of American capitalism.<sup>238</sup> They are ideas restated in Emerson's later essay 'Wealth' (1860), wherein he notes that all economies have both spiritual as well as ideological effects, and again correlates the singular subject with the psychological and economic character of a social whole. 'All things ascend,' he notes, 'and the royal rule of economy is that it should ascend also [...]. The merchant's economy is a coarse symbol of the soul's economy.'<sup>239</sup> But the dominance of America's cultural emphasis on economization can equally be identified in Emerson's earliest writings.

Writing again in his private journals, a matter of months after the publication of 'Nature' in 1836, he states that his contemporary historical moment 'will be characterized as the era of trade, for every *thing* is made subservient to that agency. The very savage on the shores of the N. W. America holds up his shell and cries "a dollar!" Government at home is conducted on such principles.'<sup>240</sup> In 1839, he restates this idea: 'Commerce is only a single fruit of the new habit of thought. Yet such is the predominance that belongs to Trade and its consequences, at the present day, that viewed superficially the age might easily be designated

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<sup>237</sup> Ibid., 245-246

<sup>238</sup> Birch, 'Towards a Better Order: The Economic Thought of Ralph Waldo Emerson,' 401

<sup>239</sup> Emerson, 'Wealth' (1860), CW.VI., 125

<sup>240</sup> Emerson, 'Journal B' (Undated, 1836), JMN.V., 237

as the age of Commerce.<sup>241</sup> Emerson's 1839-40 Winter series at the Masonic Temple, Boston, opened with these comments—on December 4th, 1839—focusing on 'trade and its consequences' in a fashion that would then carry over into the authorship of Emerson's *First* and *Second Series* essays of '41 and '44.

In this context, it is notable that this early phase of Emerson's authorship—and first experience of exposure as a public intellectual—would devote such attentions to a conceptualization of 'commerce.' A subsequent lecture delivered at the Lyceum (Salem, Massachusetts) on February 26<sup>th</sup> or 27<sup>th</sup>, 1840, presented as 'The Character of the Present Age' (and later repeated as 'The Present Age')—at the Concord Lyceum on March 4th, and again at the Franklin Lyceum (Providence, Rhode Island) on March 20<sup>th</sup>, re-articulates the centrality of 'commerce' as a pressing, thematic concern:

Commerce removes from nature that mystery and dread which in the infancy of society defend man from profanation before, yet his prudence and his conscience are enlightened. At this day amidst the grandeur of Commerce the philosopher may well occupy himself with the price of its gifts. There is nothing more important in the culture of man than to resist the dangers of Commerce. An admirable servant, it has become the hard master.<sup>242</sup>

Although Emerson notes 'the dangers of Commerce,' he also notes that a 'philosopher' should concern themselves with an analysis of its conceptual 'grandeur,' and we should characterize 'Commerce the Philosopher' as of equal importance in Emerson's early writings as his 'American Scholar.' As Emerson tries to deal with the contradictory notion of both the 'grandeur' and 'dangers' of Commerce as a cultural form, his description of 'Commerce' is whittled down to a single paragraph and yet even here, 'Commerce, dazzling us with the perpetual discovery of new facts, of new particulars of power, has availed to transfer the devotion of men from the soul to that material which it works.'<sup>243</sup> As before, Emerson deliberately identifies in economic phenomena a philosophical, political and ideological domain capable of establishing alignment between the labour of a reader and the productivity of a worker, an idea that he would return to

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<sup>241</sup> From the introductory lecture to the series 'The Present Age' (1840), EL.II., 190-191

<sup>242</sup> Emerson, 'Literature' (1837), EL.II., 190

<sup>243</sup> *Ibid.*, 191

in his later works. See 'Domestic Life' (1870), for example, wherein he notes that 'many things betoken a revolution of opinion and practice in regard to manual labor that may go far to aid our practical inquiry.'<sup>244</sup> Here, we've unequivocal evidence that Emerson's interest in the practicalities of critical agency drew heavily upon his reflections on America's labour systems.

Emerson's favouring of the term 'cooperation' over 'private enterprise' is—as John C. Gerber points out—proof that his version of cultural reception is always transactional by nature, always (ideally) of mutual benefit:<sup>245</sup> 'the capitalist of either kind is as hungry to lend as the loaner to borrow,' as Emerson notes in 'Quotation and Originality,' returning us to the idea of the 'force of two in literature.'<sup>246</sup>

Can we not help ourselves as discreetly by the force of two in literature? Certainly, it only needs two well placed and well-tempered for cooperation, to get somewhat far transcending any private enterprise! Shall we converse as spies? Our very abstaining to repeat and credit the fine remark of our friend is thievish. Each man of thought is surrounded by wiser men than he [...] Cannot he and they combine? Cannot they sink their jealousies in God's love, and call their poem Beaumont and Fletcher, or the Theban's Phalanx's?<sup>247</sup>

Emerson was aware of the possibility that his theorizing around the transactional nature of literature, quotation and appropriation as a form of social 'cooperation' might be read as disjointed and without coherency. In the mid-period lecture 'Recent Literary and Spiritual Influences' (1843), for example, he alludes to the works of Dante Alighieri to frame his thinking and rephrase his 1840 subjective theory of interpretation. 'Dante,' Emerson notes—'who described his [own] circumstances'—'would be unintelligible now. But a thousand readers in a thousand different years shall read his story and find it a picture of their story by making of course a new application of every word.'<sup>248</sup> A rephrasing of the remarks

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<sup>244</sup> Emerson, 'Domestic Life' (1870), CW.VII., 116

<sup>245</sup> John C. Gerber, 'Emerson and the Political Economists,' *The New England Quarterly*, 22.3. (1949), 356

<sup>246</sup> Emerson, 'Quotation and Originality' (1875), CW.VIII., 189-190

<sup>247</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>248</sup> Ralph Waldo Emerson, 'Journal J,' (Undated, 1841), JMN.VIII., 158.; Emerson would also weave this phrase into his late lecture 'Recent Literary and Spiritual Influences' (1843): 'There are certain deductions to be made. Swedenborg had this vice: that he nailed one sense to each image; one and no more. But in nature, every word we speak is million-faced or convertible to an indefinite number of applications. If it were not so, we could read no book. For each sentence would only fit the single case which the author had in view. Dante, who described his circumstance, would be unintelligible now. But a

on ‘subjectiveness’ Emerson would levy in ‘Thoughts on Modern Literature,’ Emerson’s emphatic interest in intentionality, instrumentality and the circulation of cultural matter as preoccupies him in his works of the early 1840s struggles to correlate the self-interest of his perspectivism—of ‘private interest’—with his concern for the efficacy of economic forms of participation or ‘cooperation.’

However, within the idea of ‘subjectiveness’ lies the desire to connect literary analysis with a philosophical ‘turn’ towards self-knowledge: ‘What is the apple to me? And what the birds to me? And what am I?’<sup>249</sup> In more complex terms, the theory of ‘subjectiveness’ is also about exploring the contingent or conditional status of the ‘I’ at work in thoughts towards cultural and critical engagement more broadly. But considering Buell’s declaration that Emerson ‘never wrote a treatise on aesthetics,’ I will propose that he did argue a position on intellectual property and critical exchange that we could retrospectively regard as notes towards a ‘treatise on aesthetics.’ Emerson’s stance is difficult to track, as it is propositioned cumulatively across a number of journal entries prior to its appearance in his later, published works; but his repetition of materials across the contexts of both his published and private writings is crucial. Not only did Emerson theorize a position on the subjectivist imperatives of critical engagement, he also put such a position to practice within his own authorship.

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thousand readers, in a thousand different years and towns, shall read his story and find it a version of their story by making a new application of every word’, LL.I., 69

<sup>249</sup> Emerson, ‘Thoughts on Modern Literature,’ (1840), CW.X., 108



iii.

*Property is an intellectual production.*

**RALPH WALDO EMERSON**

'Wealth' (1860)<sup>250</sup>

Under the moniker 'OTHERISM,' a mere matter of months after the publication of 'Nature' (1836), Emerson introduces a theory of cultural exchange in his journals that significantly antedates the ideas later accommodated in 'Thoughts on Modern Literature.'

#### OTHERISM

I see plainly the charm which belongs to Alienation or Otherism. "What wine do you like best, O Diogenes?" "Another's," replied the sage. What fact, thought, word, like we best? Another's. The very sentiment I expressed yesterday without heed, shall sound memorable to me tomorrow if I hear it from another. My own book I read with new eyes once a stranger has praised it. It is, (or is it not?) all the one and the same radical fact which I noted above, that the picture pleases when the original does not, that the subjective must be made objective for us & the soul, body. Or is the charm wholly in the new method by which it was classified; for, a new mind is a new method.<sup>251</sup>

In the establishment of his 'OTHERISM,' Emerson shows how value is established by the co-dependency of critical desire, personal need, and public pressure. As an object moves between parties involved in this minor economy, the importance of property as privately owned (and that ownership being defined by a distinction between what is 'mine' and what pertains to 'Another') not only affords a theory of personal resonance but also a theory of public value. Simply put, for an object to be *mine*, I need 'Another' so as to

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<sup>250</sup> Emerson, 'Wealth' (1860), CW.VI., 104-105.

<sup>251</sup> Emerson, 'Journal B' (Undated, 1836), JMN.V., 254

define the difference. Considering the ambitions of Emerson's 'OTHERISM,' his assertion that 'a new mind is a new method' requires some explication.

In the first phases of his career, Emerson sought to build a cultural encyclopaedia of concepts; composed exclusively of aphorisms (both borrowed and original).<sup>252</sup> Undertaken between 1824 and 1836, this project was ultimately abandoned and, instead, later mined for quotable phrases and workable conceits. Under the heading 'METHOD,' the entry runs as follows:

'Method is *progressive arrangement*.' — COLERIDGE; 'Method is union of like with like.' — CARLYLE; 'The popularity of Phrenology is because it is a method for the vulgar. What with Ideality, veneration, constructiveness, they can class facts they never approached near enough to separate before. Le Bourgeois Gentilhomme delights to classify.' — *Prose*. R.W.E.; 'A man is a method or principle of selection & gathers only what is like him as unerringly as a sparrow builds her nest.' R.W.E.; Classification is a delight. [blank].<sup>253</sup>

The significance of Emerson's new 'method' of mind (and interest in the 'sublime' or 'poetic' qualities of 'critical analysis' as he suggests) reappears across Emerson's authorship, demonstrating his creative, assimilative and appropriative impulses.<sup>254</sup> By adapting and conjoining Coleridge and Carlyle's phrasing, he declares 'A new mind is a new method,' in his journals, 1836,<sup>255</sup> and again, 1851.<sup>256</sup> In 'Spiritual Laws'

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<sup>252</sup> Emerson: 'When I was quite young I fancied that by keeping a Manuscript Journal by me, over whose pages I wrote a list of the great topics of human study, as, *Religion, Poetry, Love, &c*, in the course of a few years I should be able to complete a sort of Encyclopaedia containing the net value of all the definitions at which the world had yet arrived. But at the end of a couple of years my Cabinet Cyclopaedia though much enlarged was no nearer to a completeness than on its first day. Nay, somehow the whole pan of it needed alteration.' See 'Journal E' (Undated, 1839), JMN.VII., 302

<sup>253</sup> Emerson, 'Encyclopaedia,' (1824; 1836), JMN.VI., 222. The editors of the Harvard/Belknap publication of Emerson's journals note that the reference to Coleridge is paraphrased from a discussion of critical method in Essay IV, *The Friend*; see *The Complete Works of S.T. Coleridge*, Vol. II. (1853), 408-417. Emerson's fondness for this phrase can be asserted by way of its repetition; see JMN.III., 299.; and JMN.V., 114. For the reference to Thomas Carlyle in its original context, see 'Prospective,' in Thomas Carlyle, (ed.) K. McSweeney, P. Sabor, *Sartor Resartus* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 61

<sup>254</sup> Emerson: 'Literature is now critical. Well, analysis may be poetic. People find out they have faces & write Physiognomy; skulls, & write Phrenology; mysteries of Volition and Supervolition, & explore Animal Magnetism/Somnambulism. Chemistry is criticism on an apple & a drop of water & the glassy air which to our fathers were wholes but which we have resolved. Is not the sublime felt in analysis as well as in a creation? It seems very impertinent in us to fear a hurt in this tendency as if the gastric juices were beginning to dissolve the stomach & so the belly eat up its master.' See 'Journal E' (Undated, 1839), JMN.VII., 303

<sup>255</sup> Emerson, 'Journal B' (Undated entry, 1836), JMN.V., 254

<sup>256</sup> Emerson, 'Journal CO' (Undated, 1851), JMN.XI., 375

(1841), he takes the quote—repeating it almost verbatim—in order to further underwrite his creative process of ‘second use.’ ‘A man is a method, a progressive arrangement; a selecting principle,’ he writes (borrowing Coleridge’s wording).<sup>257</sup> The line then reappears once again, this time in the twilight stages of his career in ‘Powers and Laws of Thoughts’—an element of the late lecture series *Natural History of Intellect* (1870 to 1871). ‘Every man is a new method and distributes things anew,’ he writes. ‘If he could attain full size, he would take up, first or last, atom by atom, all the world into a new form.’<sup>258</sup> Emerson’s ‘method’ is consistent with his interest in the link between identity and criticism and belief that the idiosyncrasies of personality should inform critical engagement. However, whilst this ‘method’ is key, it is rendered all the more complex by virtue of the connotations borne by both Emerson’s own interest in cultural economy and his developing sense of the social and cultural significance of political economy over the course of the 1840s, evidenced—as we will see—in the ways in which ‘OTHERISM’ would evolve as a concept.

In a journal entry of 1845, he would explicitly return to ‘OTHERISM,’ albeit under a different name. Now under the evocative moniker, ‘COMMERCIAL VALUE,’ he notes that we should ‘Take away those peaches from under the tree. Carry them out of sight of the tree, & their value is enhanced a thousandfold to all eyes.’

That is the main consideration in fruit, to put the tree out of sight. Drop your penknife or pencil case on the ground: what a costliness it wears in that unaccustomed place! Bread & butter, say housekeepers, relishes better away from home. “Another’s wine,” said Diogenes. Jugglery, or the order of wonder, consists in putting the tree out of sight.<sup>259</sup>

‘The charm of alienation’ as he notes in 1836 (an echo of the ‘alienated majesty’ detailed by Emerson in ‘Self-Reliance’ in 1841) is now systematized as an ‘order of wonder.’<sup>260</sup> Returning to the twinned ideas of atomism and alienation allows us to consolidate the ideas discussed in previous chapters; namely,

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<sup>257</sup> Emerson, ‘Spiritual Laws’ (1841), CW.II., 144

<sup>258</sup> Emerson, ‘Powers and Laws of Thought’ (1893) CW.XII., 29. Delivered between 1870 and 1871 at Harvard, and as posthumously collated in a print-volume edited by his son, Edward W. Emerson.

<sup>259</sup> Emerson, ‘Journal Y’ (Undated 1845), JMN.IX, 309-310

<sup>260</sup> Emerson: ‘In every work of genius we recognize our own rejected thoughts; they come back to us with a certain alienated majesty.’ See ‘Self-Reliance’ (1841), CW.II., 46

Emerson's interest in the re-contextualization of objects as a way to denote new value, his receptivity to the publishing cultures of the early antebellum, and the authority he allots to the ways in which a movement or circularity of objects can alter and manipulate their accepted meaning and fixed value. Emerson's allusion to Diogenes not only intimates the 'flux' of culture that he details in 'Quotation and Originality,' it underlines the significance of the 'force of two in literature'—particularly given that the reference is to something decidedly external. In literary terms, this is another value system that not only looks beyond 'private enterprise,' it allows us to freely circulate objects—ideas, images, stories—that depend upon the 'cooperation' of the system's participants. In these terms, the 'force of two' is endemic of the form of 'capitalism' that Emerson signals in 'Quotation and Originality.' Restaging his 'OTHERISM' of 1836 as an explicit theory of 'COMMERCIAL VALUE' in 1845, this marks the traffic of Emerson's thinking from the late 1830s across the 1840s.

Emerson repurposes these ideas again in 1846 noting that 'the juggle of commerce never loses its power to astonish & delight us, namely, the unlooked-for juxtaposition of things.'<sup>261</sup> It is here, his theory of recontextualization—our need to assess and identify 'the unlooked-for juxtaposition of things'—emerges as a theory of ownership. 'Take the peaches from under the tree, & carry them out of sight of the tree,' he notes, '& their value is centupled.'<sup>262</sup> Here, his purposes are clearer; rather than detailing an act of exchange and re-contextualization, he now instructs that we need '*take*' the peaches, to seize a personal rather than public ownership of goods through the process of recontextualizing an object. Again, in an undated notebook entry of the same period, the image recurs:

Take the peaches from under the tree, & carry them out of sight of the tree, and their value is indefinitely enhanced. That is the main secret of commercial value to put the tree out of sight. Drop your penknife or pencil on the ground. What a costliness it wears in that unaccustomed place! Housekeepers say that tea & toast always relish better away from home. "Another's wine is best," said Diogenes.<sup>263</sup>

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<sup>261</sup> Emerson, 'Journal O' (31<sup>st</sup> July, 1846), JMN.IX., 375

<sup>262</sup> Ibid.

<sup>263</sup> Emerson, 'Notebook JK,' (Undated, 1847), JMN.X., 391-2

As an analysis of the origin of surplus value, Emerson's position is basic. But—if we are to look to his choice vocabulary the critical issue is nevertheless clear. 'Take' the peaches 'from under the tree,' Emerson writes, euphemistically sidestepping and concealing a principal cost of commercial peach production (at the time, nascent in the United States) which is the labour required to remove ripe peaches from the tree without bruising their delicate flesh. A windfall peach is an unsaleable peach and has no commercial value at all; Emerson's emphasis instead is on how we can recontextualize the object taken to market, concentrate on its movement from context to context (seller to buyer), and consider how its value is altered once the point of production—the 'tree'—is 'out of sight.'

The effortlessness of Emerson's model of value-creation is distinctive: it differs in the sharpest terms possible from the vitalist orthodoxies of Ricardian political economy in the early nineteenth century in so far as it foregrounds the act of exchange over and above any question of the labour involved.<sup>264</sup> But Emerson's version of this concept includes a critical additional element in the obscure allusion to Diogenes, which makes little sense unless one contextualizes it within the canon of Emerson's journals as an evocation of his 1836 definition of 'OTHERISM.' As Emerson writes, 'I see plainly the charm which belongs to Alienation or Otherism. "What wine do you like best, O Diogenes?" "Another's," replied the sage.' Surplus value in Emerson's thinking derives from an 'alienation' which is, these paired passages suggest, also a function of language; an 'alien' idea is 'charmed' as it is now open to the process of re-contextualization or 'juxtaposition' that he calls for. There is, however, an ironic plurality of meaning in Emerson's allusion. In positing a theory of surplus value premised on indifference to the rights of a primary labourer, Emerson apparently exploits this relic of his own 1836 labours as we follow the recurrence and development of this idea from his early writings through to his more mature works of the 1850s.

One such example can be found as Emerson's 'peaches' also reappear in part in the essay 'Wealth' published in 1860's *Conduct of Life* (but given as a lecture several times in the early 1850s):

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<sup>264</sup> As Catherine Gallagher has written, political economy in the 1820s-30s in Britain (where it was vastly more developed than was the case in the United States) 'coalesced [...] around Ricardo's analyses, [...] increasingly [becoming] a kind of life science: the quantity of vital human energy exerted in its production—that is to say, the quantity of labor—was acknowledged to be the only source of a commodity's exchange value.' See 'The Romantics and the Political Economists,' *The Body Economic: Life, Death and Sensation in Political Economy and the Victorian Novel* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2006), 22

When the farmer's peaches are taken from under the tree, and carried into town, they have a new look, and a hundredfold value over the fruit which grew on the same bough and lies fulsomely on the ground. The craft of the merchant is this bringing a thing from where it abounds, to where it is costly.<sup>265</sup>

Here, the complexity of his position is compounded into two acute sentences. On the one hand, it conveys the process of commodification according to standard rules of market value; on the other hand, it also pictures the authorial process described in Emerson's 'OTHERISM' as he pictures his process and explores the ways in which an idea or image shifts in intimation and meaning as it moves between contexts. From the private confines of his journals to the public stage and published page.

Readers familiar with Emerson's journals and his compositional practice will find nothing peculiar in his use of repetition. Emerson always composed through a process of reiteration—a procedural 'double writing' as Benjamin Pickford terms it.<sup>266</sup> But what stands out here is the parallel between the content of these passages and the practice of their re-inscription; a process in which the context of an idea's conception, the time and place of some original labour of production, is 'put out of sight' by Emerson's procedural transcription and re-transcription of an idea across different works. Here, he is both practicing and preaching his 'method of mind,' and he would document his efforts to implement this critical method as an authorial procedure.

Indeed, 'OTHERISM' reappears in his journals, but is referred to as an experiment in process. 'I have learned in my own practice to take advantage of the aforesaid Otherism that makes other people's bread & butter taste better than our own & books read better elsewhere than at home,' he notes, 1838.<sup>267</sup> He would refer again to 'the fact of Otherism or the rotation of merits' in September of that year (wherein he also

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<sup>265</sup> Emerson, 'Wealth' (1860), CW.VIII., 87

<sup>266</sup> See Benjamin Pickford, 'Double Writing: Ralph Waldo Emerson's Theoretical Poetics' (2014); PhD thesis, University of Nottingham. See also F.O. Matthiessen, 'All of Emerson's books can be reduced to the same underlying pattern. They are hardly constructed as wholes. Even *Representative Men* (1850) and *English Traits* (1856) are collections of essays, written originally as lectures. Every lecture in turn, from 'The American Scholar' to those published after his death, was made up by grouping together sentences from his journals.' See F. O. Matthiessen, 'In the Optative Mood,' *American Renaissance: Art and Expression in the Age of Emerson and Whitman*, 64

<sup>267</sup> Emerson, 'Journal D' (Undated, 1838), JMN.VII., 72

suggestively sits notes on ‘Subjectiveness,’ ‘Otherism’ and ‘Originality’ side by side).<sup>268</sup> Such a self-consciousness—that Emerson is striving to both preach and practice his ‘OTHERISM’—is thus as intrinsically linked to the symbolic value of critical exchange as it is Emerson’s sense of the symbolic power of an object taken to market.

In a journal entry of 1847, the dominant ideas involved in the establishment of ‘OTHERISM’ are chartered yet again. Once again, his aim is to examine how the transaction between reader and writer mirrors the correlation of ‘Other’ with ‘Another,’ centralizing his theory of ‘commercial value,’ in order to argue for critical exchange as a form of mutual benefit or ‘cooperation.’ ‘Thought is the property of him who can entertain it,’ ‘who can adequately place it,’ notes Emerson in an attempt to stress that any theory of ownership is the result of a form of social interaction:

Again, that dream of writing in committee returns, the Beaumont & Fletcherism. The Seckle pear is the best in America. But it is small, & the tree is small. So we bud an apple tree just above the root from this pear, and the bud becomes root, and is assisted at the same time by the more succulent roots of the apple, and a most vigorous seckle pear is the result. Can we not help ourselves as discreetly by the force of two in literature? Certainly, it only needs two well-placed & well-tempered for cooperation, to get somewhat far transcending any private enterprise in literature.

But it requires great generosity & rare devotion to the aim in the parties & not that mean thievish way of looking at every thought as property.

Thought is the property of him who can entertain it. Thought is the property of him who can adequately place it.<sup>269</sup>

This is the source for the previously cited material from ‘Quotation and Originality.’ I cite the passage below again in full not simply to foreground the pertinence of Emerson’s interest in ‘cooperation’ and a process of ‘writing by committee,’ but as a means of further identifying the explicit connection Emerson would draw between critical, commercial and capitalist modes:

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<sup>268</sup> Ibid., 82

<sup>269</sup> Emerson, ‘Journal GH’ (Undated, 1847), JMN.X., 154-55

In literature, quotation is good only when the writer whom I follow goes my way, and, being better mounted than I, gives me a cast, as we say; but if I like the gay equipage so well as to go out of my road, I had better have gone afoot.

But it is necessary to remember there are certain considerations which go far to qualify a reproach too grave. This vast mental indebtedness has every variety that pecuniary debt has, —every variety of merit. The capitalist of either kind is as hungry to lend as the consumer to borrow; and the transaction no more indicates intellectual turpitude in the borrower than the simple fact of debt involves bankruptcy. On the contrary, in far the greater number of cases the transaction is honorable to both. Can we not help ourselves as discreetly by the force of two in literature? Certainly, it only needs two well placed and well-tempered for coöperation, to get somewhat far transcending any private enterprise! Shall we converse as spies? Our very abstaining to repeat and credit the fine remark of our friend is thievish. Each man of thought is surrounded by wiser men than he, if they cannot write as well. Cannot he and they combine? Cannot they sink their jealousies in God's love, and call their poem Beaumont and Fletcher, or the Theban Phalanx's?<sup>270</sup>

The repetition of material here is crucial, as it speaks to his earlier working definition of a 'Transcendental Criticism.' 'Criticism must be transcendental,' he writes, 'that is, must consider literature ephemeral & easily entertain the supposition of its entire disappearance.' All work is 'revisable, corrigible, reversible by [the critic].'<sup>271</sup> Emerson's 'force of two' may be a redrafting of this same line of thought, although noted down almost a decade later, but it is significant that his alienated 'Transcendental Critic' now explicitly requires 'Another' for their ability to 'revise' a work to function. The power of the 'critic' is here explicitly restaged as 'the power of two,' just as the 'reader' needs the 'book,' needs their author, in order for this transactional theory of critical exchange to take effect.

Not only does the 'force of two' indicate the need of 'Another' within the process of production—both culturally and commercially speaking—but it also implies an act of duplication *through* reproduction; that the movement of ideas, images and objects is tantamount to a theory of economic and cultural productivity. Traces of this movement or 'method of mind' from the singular to the plural can be identified

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<sup>270</sup> Emerson, 'Quotation and Originality' (1875), CW.VIII., 189-190

<sup>271</sup> Emerson, 'Journal E' (Undated, 1840), JMN.VII., 352



elsewhere in Emerson's writings, and it is crucial to his first establishment of 'OTHERISM' in 1836. Following his allusion to 'Diogenes,' Emerson alludes to the possibility that his theory of 'juxtaposition' could read as a theory of reproduction.<sup>272</sup> 'I noticed [...] that the picture pleases when the original does not,' that 'the subjective must be made objective,' and fresh ownership of an object in circulation accordingly accrues new meaning as name and material coalesce into something new or 'other.'<sup>273</sup>

This remark is repeated in the early lecture 'Literature' (1837),<sup>274</sup> and also—in part—in 'Experience' (1844);<sup>275</sup> and the line central to his enunciation of 'OTHERISM'—'What face thought, word, like we best?' Another's'—would be put to good effect in the early lecture 'Society' (1837), wherein he would seemingly test the idea as a means of not only considering critical enterprise, but also his thoughts on economic participation more broadly.<sup>276</sup> Emerson's interest in the symbolic value of 'Another'—and, indeed, his assessment of the necessity of 'Another' to qualify our own terms of ownership of an idea—has been alluded to as emblematic of the 'economic strain' in Emersonian thought. According to Alexander C. Kern, 'Although he was not an economist, and not even primarily interested in economics,' Emerson 'so frequently touched upon the subject' that 'an understanding of his economic thought is a prerequisite to the evaluation of his entire thought on any relative or absolute scale.'<sup>277</sup> Whether we regard Emerson as signaling capitalism's moral, ideological and practicable economic imperatives as 'a symptom of [his] times' or as a 'motivating cultural force,' the ways in which economics impacts his key philosophical conceits—as has been shown—is nonetheless paramount.<sup>278</sup> 'The principles of correspondence, melioration, [and] individualism' are all underpinned by a receptivity and sensitivity to the 'economic

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<sup>272</sup> It is perhaps also worth noting the pertinence of Emerson's allusion to Diogenes insofar as no written record of his thinking remains; all we know of Diogenes' work and thought is anecdotal, secondhand, and thus endemic of the importance of a thought made public (as Emerson would note in 'History'), and the importance of a network of readers, as he would detail in his 'OTHERISM.'

<sup>273</sup> Emerson, 'Journal B,' (Undated, 1836), JMN.V., 254

<sup>274</sup> Emerson, 'Literature' (1837), *The Early Lectures of Ralph Waldo Emerson*, Vol.II., 57

<sup>275</sup> See Emerson, 'Experience' (1844), CW.III., 55-77

<sup>276</sup> Emerson, 'Society' (1837), *The Early Lectures of Ralph Waldo Emerson*, Vol.II., 100

<sup>277</sup> Alexander C. Kern, 'Emerson and Economics,' *The New England Quarterly*, 678

<sup>278</sup> Ibid.

structures' that Emerson acknowledged as crucial, according to Kern. 'When these principles are used to explain his economic theories, [...] some of the apparent inconsistencies [in his works] will vanish.'<sup>279</sup>

Emerson's 'OTHERISM'—in its repetition, alteration, and restaging as a theory of 'COMMERCIAL VALUE'—supports Kern's claim. It speaks to the complexity of Emerson's interpolative treatment of culture and capital; and, more so, it is precisely the economic system that he details in his 'OTHERISM' that underpins his 'art of appropriation' as both a practice and concept. That we can trace these ideas through from the nascence of his authorship to his later writings provides a sense of consistency in Emerson's philosophical engagement with the 'reader'—not only as the protagonist of his essays—but as their chief operator; Emerson being apparently aware of his own need of 'Another,' and theorizing that contingency.

For Emerson, then, literature is dependent upon the 'force' of social participation; it is a form that axiomatically complicates the very idea of 'private enterprise.' A reader depends upon a writer (and vice versa) for a work of literature to do its work. But Emerson also locates a critical parity between pecuniary capitalism and critical engagement in so far as a 'dollar' is equally dependent upon both private and public terms of value. 'The value of a dollar is social,' he writes in 'Wealth' (1860), 'as it is created by society';<sup>280</sup> 'every word and particle is public and tunable,' as he notes in 'Quotation and Originality.'<sup>281</sup> Both literary language and financial value are represented as cultural fields (or forms of currency) underpinned by systems of valorisation and instrumentality that Emerson regards as inherently social, even though they equally depend upon private application and personal resonance. The critical value of a work of literature is artificially established by the co-work of a reader and writer, mediated by a text; and Emerson considers the value of a single dollar bill in similar terms. However, the conflict between self and society in his thinking is re-established as he considers that value of that dollar in circulation. 'The value of a dollar is social,' he notes, 'as it is created by society.'<sup>282</sup> And yet he elsewhere admits that 'Money' itself 'is of no value.' That dollar 'cannot spend itself,' and 'All depends on the skill of the spender.'<sup>283</sup> 'Money is

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<sup>279</sup> Ibid., 678-679

<sup>280</sup> Emerson, 'Wealth' (1860), CW.VI., 104

<sup>281</sup> Emerson, 'Quotation and Originality' (1859), CW.VIII., 182

<sup>282</sup> Emerson, 'Wealth' (1860), CW.VI., 104

<sup>283</sup> Emerson, 'The Young American' (1844), CW.I., 383

representative’—‘it follows the nature and fortunes of [its] owner’—and yet it remains a ‘delicate meter of civil, social and moral change’ as its etiological value.<sup>284</sup>

These contradictory impulses (shifting from personal to pluralist forms of critical and cultural value and back again) illustrates the importance of mediation to Emerson’s mind; a culturalist and critical form of valorisation that seeks to empower our own sense of the significance of a given cultural object. His ‘dollar’ is nothing but wastepaper stock without an economy above it, a social milieu to contextualize its value, and an individual on the ground to hold it up and apply its value to their own contexts and circumstances. Emerson’s ‘OTHERISM’ suggests that there is a distinct parity between a single dollar bill and a literary work to Emerson’s mind and, in this way, Emerson’s dollar becomes a tool to better unpick his complex relationship with literary culture. If the reader’s ‘aim is on life and not on literature,’ according to Emerson, then the high-minded connotations of the literary field mean little if we do not have the means of instrumentalizing and applying them.<sup>285</sup> ‘The scholar will feel that the richest romance, the noblest fiction that was ever woven, the heart and soul of beauty, lies enclosed in human life,’ he writes.<sup>286</sup> But that ‘life’ requires a social context for it to be afforded value to Emerson’s thinking. That he would claim that ‘The value of a dollar is social,’<sup>287</sup> but that ‘all depends upon the skill of the spender,’ suggests that the ‘meaning of economy’ for Emerson was its imposition of an organizational principle for examining how value is afforded and contingent upon both personal and public contexts.<sup>288</sup>

Emerson’s dollar bill dialectic of self and society is reminiscent of his remarks in ‘History,’ regarding the necessary publication of ‘private opinion.’<sup>289</sup> Value, be it critical or commercial in character, is a ‘secular and generic result’ result of the ‘prodigality of life,’ of participation.<sup>290</sup> Its ‘*Mechanics*’ denote an economic system that proves as dependent upon our private resources of mind as it does upon a public

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<sup>284</sup> Emerson, ‘Wealth’ (1860), CW.VI., 104

<sup>285</sup> Emerson: ‘In so far as the receiver’s aim is on life, and not on literature, will be his indifference to the source. The nobler the truth or sentiment, the less imports the question of authorship. It never troubles the simple seeker from whom he derived such or such a sentiment. Whoever expresses to us a just thought makes ridiculous the pains of the critic who should tell him where such a word had been said before.’ See ‘Quotation and Originality’ (1875), CW.VIII., 192

<sup>286</sup> Emerson, ‘Literary Ethics’ (1838), CW.I., 177

<sup>287</sup> Emerson, ‘Wealth’ (1850), CW.VI., 104

<sup>288</sup> Emerson, ‘The Young American’ (1844), CW.I., 383

<sup>289</sup> Emerson, ‘History’ (1841), CW.II., 5

<sup>290</sup> Emerson, ‘A Letter’ (Papers from *The Dial*, Undated), CW.XII., 404

determination of value. But Emerson's romance of participation—his scrutinous examination of culture's economic systems—is ultimately a theory of use. 'Use society, do not serve it,' he writes in his journals in 1838; 'use books, do not serve them.'<sup>291</sup> And new value can be created by way of our forging new connections within the economic network of 'others' he envisages.

Although the politics of Emerson's 'OTHERISM' as a poetic system proves vital to the development and sophistication of his thinking, Emerson's contribution to America's larger political tradition is scarcely explicitly registered, regardless of his sense that ideological paradigm owes to each individual's capacity to question and antagonize the connection between 'antecedent and contemporary traditions' through critical and cultural analysis.<sup>292</sup> Whilst Emerson's recent readers have proven increasingly keen to identify the corporatist and capitalist atmosphere that appears to accompany his allusions to the fortitude of the 'private man,' they do so without sufficient reference to the interrelation of commerce, capital and criticism as established in his early writings. However, and as shown, the notion that literary culture could relay a form of soft, governmental power—the idea that culture serves a significant political function by mirroring and challenging dominant ideas—is key to Emerson's thinking. Emerson's position can be contextualized, with regards to the cultural and political prerogatives of the American Revolution and its cultural effects in the first decades of the American 1800s. Considering the progress of American independence, a federalist newspaper in 1792 would ask, 'To what physical, moral or political energy shall this flourishing state of things be ascribed?' The answer posed therein would be 'general government,' disclosing a want to formalize and implement the country's constitutional basis at both a local and federal level.<sup>293</sup> Emerson, in 1837, largely poses the same questions to an audience of students and educators in 'The American Scholar.' However, his response—rather than to appraise the qualities of 'general government'—was to consider the calibre of literature as an agent of political change. 'Who can doubt that poetry will revive and lead in a new age, as the star in the constellation Harp, which now flames in our zenith, astronomers announce,

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<sup>291</sup> Emerson, 'Journal E' (Undated Entry, 1838), JMN.VII., 16

<sup>292</sup> Benjamin E. Park, 'Transcendental Democracy: Ralph Waldo Emerson's Political Thought, the Legacy of Federalism, and the Ironies of America's Democratic Tradition,' *Journal of American Studies*, 48.2. (2014), 483

<sup>293</sup> See Merrill D. Peterson, 'The Terror of '98,' *Thomas Jefferson and the New Nation: A Biography* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1970), 593

shall one day be the pole-star for a thousand years?'<sup>294</sup>

Emerson has since, accordingly, been argued as locating and advocating a form of 'liberal critique' as a favoured means of exploring forms of cultural relation that would foster America's burgeoning literary culture as a form of political power.<sup>295</sup> However, the dominance of the 'self' within Emerson's wider thinking and critical legacy continues to complicate the political application of his ideas, and continues to perplex his readers, in terms of his want to identify a politics of individualism in tandem with his 'market poetics.'<sup>296</sup> Emerson's well-documented solipsism, and the self-interest of Emerson's reader (the 'I' or 'eye' of his argument) has both historic and bibliographic precedent. As Alexis de Tocqueville notes in *Democracy in America* (published in translation in 1835), American writers often employ 'an oratory [that] often uses an inflated [rhetorical] style'—a kind of subjectivist impasse that Tocqueville sees as endemic to early American literary culture. The problem, as Tocqueville describes it, is that a significant form of symbolism has been warranted the act of self-reflection—the metonymic intimations of the American subject in the singular—and has proven a dominant culturalist trend since the country's inception. Picturing America's fledgling 'democratic' culture, he alleges that each citizen seems 'habitually engaged in the contemplation of a very puny object: namely, himself.'<sup>297</sup>

If we set that claim in its context, Tocqueville is confronting precisely the cultural syndrome that Emerson sought to entertain in his early analyses of 'our use of literature' and his sense of the symbolic implications that abound in his exploration of a reader's laborious engagements with a page.<sup>298</sup> I cite Tocqueville below at length:

If [the writer] ever raises his looks higher, he then perceives nothing but the immense form of society at large, or the still more imposing aspect of mankind. His ideas are all either extremely minute and clear or extremely general and vague: what lies between is an open void. When he has been drawn out of his own sphere, therefore, he always expects that some amazing

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<sup>294</sup> Emerson, 'The American Scholar' (1837), 82

<sup>295</sup> Wilson, 'Literary Vocation as Occupational Idealism: The Example of Emerson's American Scholar,' 84

<sup>296</sup> Newfield, 'Market Despotism,' *The Emerson Effect*, 165

<sup>297</sup> Tocqueville, 'Of the inflated style of American writers and orators...', *Democracy in America*, Vol. III., 160

<sup>298</sup> Emerson, 'Circles' (1841), CW.I., 312

object will be offered to his attention; and it is on these terms alone that he consents to tear himself for an instant from the petty complicated cares which form the charm and the excitement of his life. This appears to me sufficiently to explain why men in democracies, whose concerns are in general so paltry, call upon their poets for conceptions so vast and descriptions so unlimited. The authors, on their part, do not fail to obey a propensity of which they themselves partake; they perpetually inflate their imaginations, and expanding them beyond all bounds, they not unfrequently abandon the great in order to reach the gigantic. By these means, they hope to attract the observation of the multitude, and to fix it easily upon themselves: nor are their hopes disappointed; for as the multitude seeks for nothing in poetry but subjects of vast dimensions, it has neither the time to measure with accuracy the proportions of all the subjects set before it, nor a taste sufficiently correct to perceive at once in what respect they are out of proportion. The author and the public at once vitiate one another.<sup>299</sup>

This sense that an early American literature is beset by an inability to correlate the local and ‘gigantic’ issues that impact social being was a problem that Emerson was particularly attuned to. The ‘open void’ that Tocqueville refers to is only at a slight remove from Emerson’s emphasis on the ‘gulf between every me and thee’ that he would detail in ‘Experience,’<sup>300</sup> and in ‘Circles’ (1841), Emerson would allege that the progress of literary culture is largely correspondent to the period of radical change that the country had experienced over the course of the post-revolutionary period:

We all stand waiting, empty, —knowing, possibly, that we can be full, surrounded by mighty symbols which are not symbols to us, but prose and trivial toys. Then cometh the god and converts the statues into fiery men, and by a flash of his eye burns up the veil which shrouded all things, and the meaning of the very furniture, of cup and saucer, of chair and clock and tester, is manifest. The facts which loomed so large in the fogs of yesterday, — property, climate, breeding, personal beauty and the like, have strangely changed their proportions. All that we reckoned settled shakes and rattles; and

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<sup>299</sup> Tocqueville, ‘Of the inflated style of American writers and orators...,’ *Democracy in America*, Vol. III., 160-161

<sup>300</sup> Emerson, ‘Experience’ (1844), CW.III., 77

literatures, cities, climates, religions, leave their foundations and dance before our eyes.<sup>301</sup>

Such comments appear to regard the American Revolution as having resulted in a culture of anticipation rather than political agency. However, the apparent failure of Emerson's efforts to correlate his analyses of literary culture and effusive interest in self-determinacy—his inability to sufficiently analyze the 'rattle' of society and explicate the 'gigantic' issues of his hour—has resulted in a common dismissal of Emerson's capacity to find stratification as a 'serious philosopher.'<sup>302</sup> As with Tocqueville's remarks on the literary outlook of this new nation, the predominance of the 'private man' complicates Emerson's equation of self and society; self and culture.

As shown, Emerson's 'reader' or 'scholar' traffics as a symbol or cipher for his longstanding interest in self-determinacy; a decentralization of power; and the ultimate authority of 'the first person singular' within his writings.<sup>303</sup> However, to foreground his unerring interest in the fortitude of the 'private man'—and his interest in the institutionalization (and professionalization) of cultural and critical spheres—is to overlook the complex relationship with conditionality and contingency present in Emerson's explorations of subjective thought as an empowering critical tool.

Rather than merely an exegetic allusion that we can extract from Emerson's writings, how we deal with the question of our conditionality is explicitly mapped in Emerson's early essays. 'People forget,' he writes in (again in 'Circles'), that it is the 'eye' which 'makes' the 'mental horizon'—that we are the locus of a self-inventing optical illusion.<sup>304</sup> In 'Experience,' he would note that 'We have learned that we do not see directly, but mediately, and that we have no means of correcting these colored and distorting lenses

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<sup>301</sup> Emerson, 'Circles' (1841), CW.I., 311

<sup>302</sup> Wolfe, 'Alone with America,' 137. It is also noteworthy that Emerson himself seemed to struggle with 'serious philosophy'—in 'Journal D,' June 1838, he would refer to 'Schelling and Cousin' as a 'new dogmatism' in American thought, akin to some 'New Church or Old Church.' See 'Journal D' (Undated, 1838), JMN.VII., 32

<sup>303</sup> See Emerson, 'The Present Age: *Introductory*' (1839), delivered at the Masonic Temple, Boston. In (eds.) R. E. Spiller, W. E. Williams, EL.III., 188. Skeletal notes for this lecture can be found in Emerson's 'Δ Notebook,' JMN.XII., 197-198. Editors Wallace and Williams note that this lecture was repeated in Salem, MA, in 1840 as 'Analysis, the Character of the Present Age' and again at the New York Mercantile Library, 1840, as 'The Character of the Present Age.' It subsequently informed an introduction to the 'Present Life' series later that year and was the first lecture in the 'Human Life' series that drew heavily upon material from 'Present Life.'

<sup>304</sup> Emerson, 'Circles' (1841), CW.II., 301., 310

which we are.<sup>305</sup> Emerson's insistence on the limitations of sight, of sight as only a means of mediation, or of sight as a means with which to question the authenticity of critical perspective, can be read as branding Emerson a philosopher of 'sad self-knowledge' (to borrow his own phrase).<sup>306</sup> As Emerson admits, the 'fact that we exist' does not axiomatically guarantee an independence of mind, but rather a sense of our innate conditionality:<sup>307</sup>

Perhaps these subject-lenses have a creative power; perhaps there are no objects. Once we lived in what we saw; now, the rapaciousness of this new power, which threatens to absorb all things, engages us. Nature, art, persons, letters, religions, objects, successively tumble in, and God is but one of its ideas. Nature and literature are subjective phenomena; every evil and every good thing is a shadow which we cast.<sup>308</sup>

In this context, Emerson's Transcendentalism, although popularly held as a paean to the vitality of an alienable self, is as dedicated to the conditional elements of our critical faculty as it is our agency and intellectual freedom. Contra to any sense of the powers of 'self-reliance' and self-determinacy with which Emerson is more popularly associated, Emerson is all-to-aware that we require 'another' to self-define, as shown, and such a perspective complicates his remarks on the 'subject' and his reflections on social, cultural and economic participation.

Reading across his early writings, literature remains a favourite metaphor for an unpacking of this theory of critical contingency. 'Our souls are not self-fed,' he notes in 'Thoughts on Modern Literature,'

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<sup>305</sup> Emerson, 'Experience' (1844), CW.III., 75

<sup>306</sup> Ibid.

<sup>307</sup> Ralph Waldo Emerson, 'Uriel,' in (ed.) A. J. Von Frank, *The Major Poetry* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2015), l. 35., 16. Reflecting on the authorship of this poem in his journals, Emerson depicts this 'sad self-knowledge' as keenly prefigured by the intellectual pressures of social exigency; the poem is dedicated to the disjunction between *what is* and *what could be*—'what subsisteth' and 'what seems' (l. 14.)—and whilst Albert J. Von Frank notes that these ideas would traffic more explicitly into Emerson's published works by way of 1838's 'Divinity School Address,' his journals arguably more explicitly unpack the thinking behind this poem: 'At the first entering of the ray of light, society is shaken with fear & anger from side to side. Who opened that shutter? They cry, Wo to him! They belie it, they call it darkness that comes in, affirming that they were in light before. Before the man who has spoken to them the dread word, the tremble & flee.' Society's recalcitrance to the very idea of social change is here unswervingly documented. See Emerson, 'Journal D' (Undated, 1838), JMN.VII., 126.; see also, Carol Johnston, 'The Underlying Structure of the Divinity School Address: Emerson as Jeremiah,' *Studies in the American Renaissance* (1980), 41-49

<sup>308</sup> Emerson, 'Experience' (1844), CW.III., 76



‘but do eat and drink of chemical water and wheat.’ ‘We lie in the lap of immense intelligence, which makes us receivers of its truth and organs of its activity,’ Emerson claims (again inferring an interest in the networking of culture).<sup>309</sup> Condensing the complex social-political implications of such dependency down to a consideration of the formal axioms of a book and its requisite need for a reader and writer, his acute awareness of the intellectual difficulty involved in theorizing a form of critical independence is clearly phrased. Recall, in the late essay ‘Books’ (1870), his aforementioned remark as per the connect between ‘The reader and the book;’ that ‘—either without the other is naught.’<sup>310</sup> This two-way street of either ‘nothing or all’ is a familiar one. Again, it echoes the oft-cited ‘Transparent Eyeball’ passage of Emerson’s *Nature*,<sup>311</sup> and is reminiscent of his characterization of a book as either ‘Everything or nothing,’ depending on the discerning interests of that which is ‘signified’ in the individual ‘eye.’<sup>312</sup> However, Emerson’s interest in our ‘sad self-knowledge’ as a socially engineered sensation—a reflection of the maxim with which this thesis began (and epigraph that would open ‘Self-Reliance’) that we should not ‘look for things outside of ourselves’—is further complicated if we are to look again to ‘Quotation and Originality.’

‘Quotation and Originality’ provides a significant expansion of Emerson’s theory of ‘original relation’ as set forwards in ‘Nature.’ It is here that Emerson most explicitly deals with the mechanisms of critical work—quotation and appropriation (as the essay’s title predicates). However, the essay also displays variants of unerring faith in ‘self-trust,’ ‘sensibility,’ and ‘intellectual power’ as he would propound in ‘Self-Reliance’ by foregrounding our ‘use’ or appropriation of errant material.<sup>313</sup> Emerson’s sense of the agential power of a single intellect is complemented by what he terms our ‘assimilating power.’

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<sup>309</sup> Emerson, ‘Thoughts on Modern Literature’ (1840), CW.XII., 309.; an essay published in *The Dial*, 1841, but first delivered as a lecture in 1839. See ‘Literature’ (1839), EL.III., 202-237

<sup>310</sup> Emerson, ‘Books’ (1870), CW.VII., 187-188

<sup>311</sup> Emerson: ‘Standing on the bare ground, —my head bathed by the blithe air and uplifted into infinite space, —all mean egotism vanishes. I become a transparent eyeball; I am nothing; I see all; the currents of the Universal Being circulate through me; I am part or parcel of God.’ See ‘Nature’ (1836), CW.I., 10

<sup>312</sup> An idea Emerson would emphatically underscore in his journals: ‘What tyrannical makers are our eyes! In yonder boat on the pond, the two boys, no doubt, find prose enough. Yet to us, as we sit here on the shore, it is quite another sort of canoe, —a piece of fairy timber which the light loves, & the wind, & the wave, —a piece of sunshine & beauty. [...] Eyes are bold as lions—roving, running, leaping here & there; far, near; they wait for no introduction, they ask not leave of age or rank. The respect neither poverty nor riches, neither learning nor power nor virtue nor Sex but intrude & pierce & come again & go through & through you in a moment of time.’ See ‘Journal D’ (Undated, 1838), JMN.VII., 52

<sup>313</sup> Emerson, ‘Self-Reliance’ (1841), CW.I., 56, 74, 80

We expect a great man to be a good reader; or in proportion to the spontaneous power should be the assimilating power. And though such are a more difficult and exacting class, they are not less eager. “He that borrows the aid of an equal understanding,” said Burke, “doubles his own; he that uses that of a superior elevates his own to the stature of that he contemplates.”<sup>314</sup>

Emerson connects the cultural significance of this ‘assimilating power’ with a more explicit theory of quotation; and explores the ways in which the act and agency of quotation and appropriation proves extensive as to inform the industrial, technological and technocratic advancement of antebellum culture. Books, proverbs, customs, laws and machines are all enlisted as quotable materials; ‘We quote not only books and proverbs, but arts, sciences, religion, customs and laws; nay, we quote temples and houses, tables and chairs by imitation,’ he notes.<sup>315</sup> But Emerson also aims to further embolden his position by drawing comparison between a literary critic and ‘The Patent-Office Commissioner’ who ‘knows that all machines in use have been invented and re-invented over and over; the mariner’s compass, the boat, the pendulum, glass, movable types, the kaleidoscope, the railway, the power-loom, *etc.*’<sup>316</sup>

In line with Emerson’s interest in the decentralization of government and an ascendant culture of privatization in the American antebellum, his early addresses frame an explicit want to wrest authority from federal authority to highlight, instead, the significance of individual agency and the ordinance of personal or private power. As noted, Emerson evocatively argues literature as a key cultural form capable of supporting such an aim, but his explicit remarks on the form and function of American governance are particularly pointed. In ‘New England Reformers’ (1844), for example, he ‘confesses’ that ‘the motto of the *Globe* newspaper is so attractive to [him], that [he] can seldom find much appetite to read what is below it in its column, that *The world is governed too much.*’<sup>317</sup> ‘[Let] there be no control and no interference in the administration of the affairs of this kingdom of me,’ he notes.<sup>318</sup> In ‘Politics’ (1844), he argues that ‘all public ends look vague and quixotic beside private ones;’<sup>319</sup> and in ‘The Young American’ (1844)—

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<sup>314</sup> Emerson, ‘Quotation and Originality’ (1875), CW.VIII., 177-178

<sup>315</sup> *Ibid.*, 179

<sup>316</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>317</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>318</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>319</sup> Emerson, ‘Politics’ (1844), CW.III., 214

although he confesses that the ‘landscape seems to crave Government’—it is the authority of the ‘land lord’ rather than federal offices of Washington that he endorses.<sup>320</sup> Those ‘who understand the land and its uses, and the applicability of men, and those whose government would be what it should, namely, mediation between want and supply.’<sup>321</sup> Social progress is defined by the traffic of ‘private thought to the public opinion,’ as he notes in ‘The Young American’ (echoing the line of thought that would preoccupy him in ‘History’); and the sacrifice of ‘private interest for public welfare’ is key to his comments on America’s political and industrial development. Such an aim seems to steadfastly and unequivocally support the further industrialization, privatization and commercialization of the American scene; emphatically stressing a culture of ‘want and supply’ as a form of political order. The axis of thought upon which Emerson’s ‘Young American’ depends pictures the co-dependency of ‘private interest’ and ‘public welfare.’<sup>322</sup> ‘We build railroads, we know not for what or for whom; but one thing is certain,’ he writes; ‘that we who build will receive the very smallest share of benefit.’<sup>323</sup> An individual mediates the ‘want and supply’ of the broader social field to which they belong; but does so through investment in a mechanical expansion of the increasingly networked iteration of culture that Emerson seems so insistent upon exploring, expressing, philosophizing and eulogizing.

In ‘The Young American,’ we’ve an interesting rejoinder to the ‘profit’ system of interpretation with which I began. As noted, Emerson is interested in the ‘*profit*’ of critical enterprise;<sup>324</sup> insistent that we ought ‘*credit* literature with more than the bare word it gives us.’<sup>325</sup> The ‘benefit’ that Emerson describes in ‘The Young American’ is thus emblematic of the *feeling* of public betterment rather than the fact thereof; another iteration of the aforementioned ‘American sentiment’ that he would detail in this same essay. But

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<sup>320</sup> Emerson, ‘The Young American’ (1844), CW.I., 384

<sup>321</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>322</sup> *Ibid.*, 374

<sup>323</sup> *Ibid.*, 374-375

<sup>324</sup> Emerson, ‘Quotation and Originality’ (1875), CW.VIII., 194

<sup>325</sup> Emerson: ‘Observe moreover that we ought to credit literature with much more than the bare word it gives us. I have just been reading poems which now in memory shine with a certain steady, warm, autumnal light. That is not in their grammatical construction which they give me. If I analyse the sentences, it eludes me, but is the genius and suggestion of the whole. Over every true poem lingers a certain wild beauty, immeasurable; a happiness lightsome and delicious fills the heart and brain, as they say every man walk environed by his proper atmosphere, extending to some distance around him. This beautiful result must be credited to literature also in casting its account.’ See ‘Thoughts on Modern Literature’ (1840), CW.XII., 310

if we examine the 'The Young American' in more detail, Emerson's investment in the enhancement of a public sphere carries with it an even more explicit regard for the private sector and the forms of invention, entrepreneurship, and industrialization that he suggests would expedite the social, philosophical and political progress of America's cultural offices. As Eric Keenaghan argues, Emerson seems keen to figure a sense of America's political futurity as dependent upon a literalization of the term 'commonwealth.'<sup>326</sup> 'Trade,' Keenaghan supposes, has supplanted the monarchical English parliamentary prerogatives rejected by the American Revolution as a key form of governance.<sup>327</sup>

This idea can be located in 'The Young American.' Depicting this 'new and anti-feudal power of Commerce,' Emerson argues America's cosmopolitical and cosmopolitan future depends upon the legislative support of a 'commercial system.'<sup>328</sup>

We plant trees, we build stone houses, we redeem the waste, we make prospective laws, we found colleges and hospitals, for remote generations. We should be mortified to learn that the little benefit we chanced in our own persons to receive was the utmost they would yield. The history of commerce is the record of this beneficent tendency. [...] None should be a governor who has not a talent for governing. Now many people have a native skill for carving out business for many hands; a genius for the disposition of affairs; and are never happier than when difficult practical questions, which embarrass other men, are to be solved. All lies in light before them; they are in their element. Could any means be contrived to appoint only these! There really seems a progress towards such a state of things in which this work shall be done by these natural workmen; and this, not certainly through any increased discretion shown by the citizens at elections, but by the gradual contempt into which official government falls, and the increasing disposition of private adventurers to assume its fallen functions.

Rather than simply prizing the 'private adventurer' alone in this theorization of the 'history' and culture of 'commerce,' Emerson also looks to the inevitable corporatization of America's self-management; enlisting

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<sup>326</sup> Eric Keenaghan, 'Reading Emerson in Other Times: On a Politics of Solitude and an Ethics of Risk,' in *The Other Emerson*, 171

<sup>327</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>328</sup> Emerson, 'The Young American' (1844), CW.I., 385

the ‘fallen functions’ of government as having left a cultural lacuna in their wake. Such ideas are reminiscent of Emerson’s previously noted ‘silent revolution,’ wherein the newspaper is held as a symbolic stand-in for the expansion of America’s cultural field. Again, Emerson looks to written matter to explain the complexities of his thinking; he cites the post office, the ‘private telegraph’ and the ‘express companies’ as would technologize communication in the 1840s:

Thus, the national Post Office is likely to go into disuse before the private telegraph and the express companies. The currency threatens to fall entirely into private hands. Justice is continually administered more and more by private reference, and not by litigation. We have feudal governments in a commercial age. It would be but an easy extension of our commercial system, to pay a private emperor a fee for services, as we pay an architect, an engineer, or a lawyer. If any man has a talent for righting wrong, for administering difficult affairs, for counselling poor farmers how to turn their estates to good husbandry, for combining a hundred private enterprises to a general benefit.<sup>329</sup>

Emerson’s interest in the Post Office parallels the 1838 journal citation with which I began; ‘by & by will come a reader and an age to justify all your context.’<sup>330</sup> The postal service is emblematic of his want to consider the idea of textual communication and the object of our writing *for* ‘Another.’

That Emerson should so centralize the efficacy of a ‘commercial system’ of governance as a means of combatting America’s feudal past diverges from a popular characterization of his philosophy as anti-establishment in tone and indication. In this respect, Emerson’s emphasis on the efficacy—and the prospect of its privatization—is of interest.<sup>331</sup> Here, in ‘The Young American’ (his ‘first full defense’ of capitalism’s social mechanisms, according to Keenaghan), he argues that ‘commerce’ could defray the authority of feudalist social structures by our practically, ideologically and intellectually investing in the private sector instead.<sup>332</sup> The ‘public welfare’ he cites as the net result of ‘private’ work is only plausible if we privilege a conceptualization of self over society, however; an affiliated system of ‘private enterprises’ should be the

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<sup>329</sup> Ibid., 384-386

<sup>330</sup> Emerson, ‘Journal D’ (Undated, 1838), JMN.VII., 118

<sup>331</sup> See Sacvan Bercovitch, ‘The Problem of Ideology in a Time of Dissensus,’ *Rites of Assent*, 348; 353-377

<sup>332</sup> Keenaghan, ‘Reading Emerson in Other Times,’ 171

presiding focus of government, and ‘the easy extension of [a] commercial system’ our collective aim.<sup>333</sup> Emerson’s remarks on American commercialism would scan as provocatively to his contemporary audience as they read today and have been argued as politically opportunistic. Considering that Emerson’s interest in the ‘private man’ can thus be considered a political position rather than a philosophical paean to a romanticist individuality, Nathan Crick notes that 1841, the year in which Emerson published his *First Series*,<sup>334</sup> the Boston area was galvanized by a public sense of opportunity informed by ‘the crushing defeat of Van Buren by the Whig Party’s campaign machinery’ in 1840.<sup>335</sup> Economic recovery following the panic of 1837 was faltering, and Whig nominee William Henry Harrison would defeat the incumbent Van Buren of the Democratic Party in an election that would mark the first of two Whig victories in subsequent presidential elections, unsettling political foundations in Washington, and thus forging a demand for a new kind of cultural climate.<sup>336</sup> This atmosphere was a favourable one for Emerson, whose sense of the ‘commercial’ is anchored in a distinct suspicion of power systems and structures.<sup>337</sup> Although it is important to note that Emerson harboured no particular political ambitions, as Alfred von Frank suggests (speaking to the general critical reception of Emerson’s early works and the political contexts that Crick signals as so important). Nonetheless, Emerson’s *First Series* should be regarded as ‘a manual for young persons against the tyranny and authority of the age.’<sup>338</sup>

In this sense, Emerson’s epigraph to ‘Self-Reliance’—reference to Beaumont and Fletcher, ‘*Do not seek for things outside of ourselves*’—can be regarded as little more than an advert for American exceptionalism.<sup>339</sup>

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<sup>333</sup> Emerson, ‘The Young American’ (1844), CW.I., 385

<sup>334</sup> A collection that Emerson would himself refer to as his own ‘book of Genesis’ in a letter to Amos Bronson Alcott, Concord, April 16<sup>th</sup>, 1939: ‘I have been writing a little and arranging old papers more, and by and by, I hope to get a shapely book of Genesis.’ In (ed.) Ralph L. Rusk, *Letters of Ralph Waldo Emerson, Vol. II., 1836-1841* (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 1939), 194

<sup>335</sup> Nathan Crick, ‘The Transformation of Genius into Practical Power—Ralph Waldo Emerson and the Power of Eloquence,’ *The Keys of Power: The Rhetoric and Politics of Transcendentalism* (University of South Carolina Press, 2017), 104-105

<sup>336</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>337</sup> Emerson, ‘The Young American’ (1844), CW.I., 385

<sup>338</sup> Crick, ‘The Transformation of Genius into Practical Power—Ralph Waldo Emerson and the Power of Eloquence,’ *The Keys of Power*, 305

<sup>339</sup> See Jonathan W.D. Murphy, ‘The Other Heading of America: Derrida and Emerson on the Future of an Illusion,’ *The Comparatist*, 36. (2012), 43-66

Nevertheless, the simplicity of such an assertion does not accommodate the complexity of Emerson's reflections on the machinations of critical engagement and the weight of external or 'outside' influence. As John Carlos Rowe writes, by way of Bercovitch, Emerson 'hesitates' as he searches for the 'proper paradox' that could connect the aims of Jacksonian capitalism with the ambitions of European socialism.<sup>340</sup> Emerson's facilitation of a national cultural aesthetic (or 'sentiment,' to use his term), depends as much upon a theoretical engagement with alienation as it did any summary account of the political and ideological development of America as a nation-state ('build your *own* world,' as Emerson would famously declare).<sup>341</sup> However, literature does appear the 'proper paradox' by which Emerson could ally his interest in the private life of the mind and the public offices of social engagement. Part Two will investigate this idea in more detail, and consider Emerson's theory of the 'outside' by looking first to the economic and political contexts of his early works, and how such circumstances '[create] both man and methods.'<sup>342</sup> I will argue Emerson's 'art of appropriation' as a position conversant with Emerson's own economic contexts, and explore this critical praxis relative to the financial crisis of 1837, the industrial enhancement and impediment of cultures of print and publication, and as a continuation of his interest in the circulatory systems that underpin the forms of literary labour, as previously discussed.

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<sup>340</sup> John Carlos Rowe, 'Hamlet's Task: Emerson's Political Writings,' *At Emerson's Tomb: The Politics of Classic American Literature* (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 1997), 23

<sup>341</sup> Emerson, 'Nature' (1836), CW.I, 76

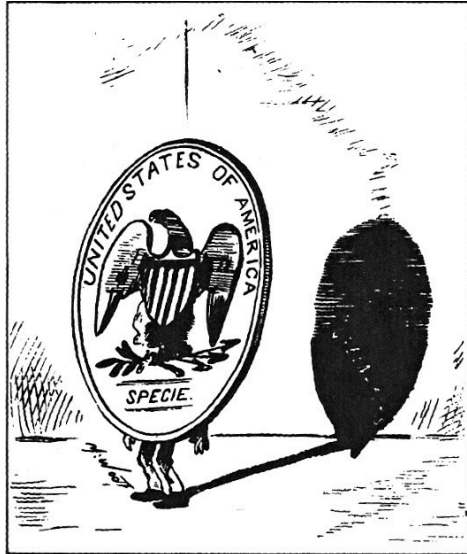
<sup>342</sup> Emerson, 'Natural History of the Intellect: Introductory' (1870), CW.XII., 64; see also Ronald A. Bosco's Introduction to 'His lectures were poetry, his teaching the music of the spheres: Annie Adams Fields and Francis Greenwood Peabody on Emerson's *Natural History of the Intellect* university lectures at Harvard in 1870,' *Harvard Library Bulletin*, 8.2 (1997), 7-26



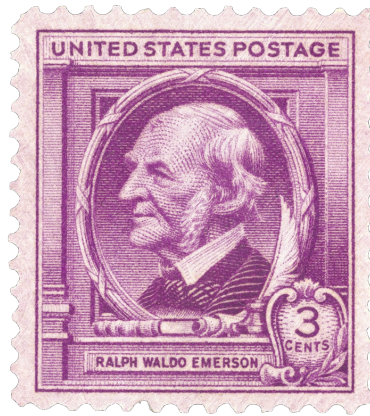
Annie Leibovitz, Above—Emerson's Library' (*detail*); Below—The contents of a study drawer, 'a miniature globe, a turtle shell, pocketknives, folding scissors, and a folding bottle opener.' 'The contents of Emerson's study are now in the Concord museum.' See *Pilgrimage* (London: Jonathan Cape, 2011), 185-196.







'America was the historical birthplace of the widespread use of paper money in the Western world, and a debate about the [value of] coined and paper money dominated American political discourse from 1825 to 1875. [...] The paper money debate was concerned with symbolization in general, and hence not only with money but also with aesthetics. Symbolization, in this context, concerns the relationship between the substantial thing and its sign. Solid gold (from which the ingots of gold coin were made) as associated with the substance of value. Whether one regarded paper as an appropriate symbol [...] or as an inappropriate and downright misleading one, that sign was insubstantial insofar as the paper counted for nothing as an [independent] commodity and was thus 'insensible' in the economic system of exchange. The paper of money was called an appearance or shadow. [The above cartoon], 'A Shadow is Not a Substance' (M.A Woolf, undated; nineteenth century) depicts the relationship between substance and shadow.' See Marc Shell, *Money, Language and Thought: Literary and Philosophical Economies from the Medieval to the Modern Era* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1982), 6.



**Under the direction of Franklin D. Roosevelt**, the U.S. Post Office would announce plans in 1938 for a series of stamps recognizing the twenty-nine American presidents who had taken office since independence and, in 1940, would follow that series with a companion run of a further thirty-five—issued over the course of a ten-month period—that would commemorate the country’s cultural legacy and craft ‘a philatelic message of hope and optimism to the American people.’

Alongside appearances by Louisa May Alcott, James Fenimore Cooper, Walt Whitman, and a litany of authors, poets and educators who had taken their place in an American cultural canon, Emerson’s portrait would appear on a 3¢ stamp in a bright burgundy hue. A select sample of the stamps in this series (the 1934 ‘National Parks’ series; the 1938 ‘Presidential’ series; and the 1940 ‘Famous Americans’ series) are displayed at The Smithsonian National Postage Museum, and a collation of philatelic scans of these commemorative stamps can be viewed online in notes supporting the exhibition *Delivering Hope: FDR and Stamps of the Great Depression* (June 9th, 2009—June 10th, 2010).

# II

## **GEOLOGY AFTER AN EARTHQUAKE**

THE CONTEXTS OF EMERSON'S 'ART OF APPROPRIATION,' 1815 to 1850

[These] *black times have a great scientific value. It is an epoch so critical a philosopher would not miss [...]. What was, ever since my memory, solid continent, now yawns apart and discloses its composition and genesis. I learn geology the morning after an earthquake.*

**RALPH WALDO EMERSON**

*From his Journals and Miscellaneous Notebooks* (1837)<sup>1</sup>

*I knew a draughtsman employed in a public survey who found that he could not sketch the rocks until their geological structure was first explained to him.*

**RALPH WALDO EMERSON**

'History' (1841)<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Emerson, 'Journal C' (May 14, 1837), JMN.V., 304

<sup>2</sup> Emerson, 'History' (1841), CW.II., 16

As Paul Jay has noted, ‘We cannot neatly separate economic from cultural commodities.’ ‘When commodities travel, culture travels, and when culture travels, commodities travel,’ and ‘materialist critics are therefore wrong when they claim that a culturalist model is inappropriate for studying what is essentially an economic phenomenon.’<sup>3</sup> Although Jay is commenting on our need for new terminologies and systems with which to better explore the changing landscape of literary studies in the twenty-first century, his position—as shown in the previous chapters—is pre-empted by Emerson in his careful and considered efforts to ascertain the link between culturalist and capitalist phenomena.

Whilst Emerson’s own theoretical response to the ‘travel’ of culture between contexts needs be kept in mind, his theoretical ‘OTHERISM,’ the following chapters in this second section will concentrate on the historic contexts that inform Emerson’s conceptualization of commerce and criticism and examine their accommodation in Emerson’s practical and theoretical responses to the act of reading. I will examine his sense of the prospective intersection of culture and capital relative to the sociocultural, economic and industrial pressures of his period, and study how the expansion of the American book trade, the professionalization of the American publisher, and the introduction of new technological modes of production effected the circulation of paper matter. As will be shown, these factors served to further influence Emerson’s relationship with critical enterprise, commercial cultures of exchange, and can also be acutely traced in Emerson’s use of metaphor, impacting his theorizations of labour and scholarly labour in particular. Emerson’s complex relationship with industrialization, economic expansionism and the ethics and aesthetics of financial panic are reflected and refracted in his conceptualizations of criticism and interpretative agency. In the following chapters, his sensitivity to the symbolic, political and cultural intimations of economic expansionism will be claimed to affect his conceptualizations of the act of interpretation and the ownership of ideas and will be argued as of fundamental significance to recent critical, revisionist ‘reconstructions’ of his canonical and cultural standing.

Such readings have ‘increasingly’ regarded Emerson’s philosophical relationship with literary culture, capital and commerce as a product of economic collapse, recovery and expansionism in his early

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<sup>3</sup> Paul Jay, in introduction to *Global Matters: The Transnational Turn in Literary Studies* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2010), 3

writings of the 1830s and 1840s (in response to the financial crisis of 1837 in particular).<sup>4</sup> As this thesis has sought to map, the distinction between an ‘old’ and ‘new’ Emerson pertains broadly to the dynamism and development of America’s economic biography, and Emerson can progressively be seen to identify the interplay of culture and commerce in his later writings.<sup>5</sup> His registration of the industrialization and institutionalization of literature as a cultural domain is particularly acute; and the clarity of his position is supported by a cache of tropes, topics and symbols informed by the ascendancy of market ideologies over the course of his era. However, I will argue that this nexus of signs and symbols is also present in his early works. A clear and cumulative effort to engage both literary culture and marketization from the late-1830s onward is particularly visible if we consider Emerson’s philosophical engagement with the forms of labour concomitant with America’s cultural development, and his efforts to explore the relationship between an individual worker and broader ideological (and economic) systems and structures.

Whilst the previous chapter concentrated more on the metacritical dimensions of Emersonian Criticism (vis-à-vis the works of Vernon Louis Parrington, Joel Porte and David LaRocca, amongst others), I will here turn to the political imperatives of recent critical responses and Emerson’s relationship with labour will be key. I will examine how, as Christopher Newfield notes, Emerson can be held as not only scrutinizing our ‘relation to external powers’ but also our ‘submission to them,’<sup>6</sup> how a ‘collective theory of self-determination’ is informed by a theory of ‘individual obedience to the determination of higher powers,’ and explored by way of determining the ascendancy of a market culture as both a practicable economic system and a new ideological paradigm.<sup>7</sup> As will be shown, a conceptualization of labour is key to such an investigation.

Newfield’s remarks are tendentious. Toying with the apparent interchangeability of theocratic and economic forms of ‘higher power’ in Emerson’s works, he infers that Emerson’s choice use of the term

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<sup>4</sup> Grusin, ‘Put God in Your Debt: Emerson’s Economy of Expenditure,’ 35

<sup>5</sup> Although Wolfe more aggressively charts the distinction between an ‘old’ and ‘new’ Emerson, Porte also examines the ways in which a ‘new’ Emerson’s philosophical and political thinking has proven transformed in the second half of the twentieth century; ‘a figure whose complexities belied that older optimistic all-American aphorist once dear to captains of industry, genteel professors and hopeful preachers in search of suitably uplifting remarks.’ See Porte, ‘The Problem of Emerson,’ 28-29

<sup>6</sup> Newfield, ‘Emerson’s Corporate Individualism,’ 658

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

‘Transcendental’ to describe his critical practice demands further investigation.<sup>8</sup> Emerson would argue ‘the Transcendent [as] economy also,’ 1839, and I will argue that Emerson’s use of symbol and metaphor deliberately thus sought a new way to chart the ascendancy of a market culture that acts as both a practicable economic system and a new ideological paradigm.<sup>9</sup> His awareness of the significance of literary culture to the ascendance and sophistication of market ideologies will be argued as particularly pertinent, as will be his sense that the agency of interpretation and the act of quotation or ‘art of appropriation’ serves to indicate the practical relationship between scholarly activity and the economic progress of an independent America.

Historicist accounts of Emerson’s early thoughts on political economy are firmly anchored in the political life of antebellum America. However, this is not a question of political partisanship. Nonetheless, as Daniel Malachuk suggests, Emerson’s contribution to the philosophical development of Republicanism prior to the outbreak of the Civil War proves noteworthy if we are to consider the resonances of Emerson’s political thought today. Examining ‘often overlooked’ tropes and themes in Emerson’s early lectures, 1835 to 1840, Malachuk argues that the philosophies underpinning the development of the ‘grand old party’ are in line with Emerson’s interest in proprietorship, self-determinacy and forms of self-governance. For Malachuk, ‘three versions of modern Republicanism’ are present in Emerson’s writings: the ‘classical,’ the ‘liberal’ and the ‘cosmic.’<sup>10</sup> However, more important is the link between economization and governance that allows for these three iterations of governance to coalesce. Malachuk suggests that Emerson sought to explore the ways in which ‘a market economy’ could ‘decisively’ dethrone ‘feudalism’ as a key precept of the United States pre-independence, and did so by ‘synthesizing’ these three modes into ‘a unique republican philosophy of self-reliance’ anchored in a faith in market systems.<sup>11</sup> Emerson understood ‘the liberal republican view of commerce,’ and would ‘incorporate’ this position into his own thinking, Malachuk notes.<sup>12</sup> However, it is Emerson’s combinatory view of culture and commerce, together with his

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Emerson, ‘Journal D’ (Undated, 1839), JMN.VII., 259

<sup>10</sup> Daniel S. Malachuk, ‘The Republican Philosophy of Emerson’s Early Lectures,’ *The New England Quarterly*, 71.3. (1998), 405

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., 407

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 409

investment in the structures and systems of labour (and *literary* or *scholarly* labour, in particular) that continues to be a perplexing element of his thinking and has preoccupied recent, revisionist accounts of his political thought and culturalist philosophies.

Writing in his journals as a young student, 1822, Emerson would note that ‘In a money-making community literature will soon thrive.’<sup>13</sup>

It must always follow not precede successful trade. The first wants to be supplied are the native ones of animal subsistence & comfort & when these are more than provided for & luxury & ease begin to look about them for new gratification the mind then urges its claim to cultivation.<sup>14</sup>

Emerson’s analysis of America’s ‘claim to cultivation’ can be suggestively traced across his authorship. In ‘The Young American,’ for instance, he notes that he is fascinated by ‘Trade’ and its status as a social ‘instrument,’ but admits that it ‘must give way to [something] somewhat broader and better, whose signs are already dawning in the sky.’<sup>15</sup> ‘I pass to speak of the signs of that which is the sequel of trade,’ Emerson writes, ‘in consequence of the revolution in the state of society wrought by trade.’<sup>16</sup> Reading such a remark concordantly with Emerson’s early private writings, he explicitly signals his want to explore the cultural effects of commerce and its ideological inflections and inferences; the ‘sequel of trade,’ as he terms it. His investigation of the practicable and ideological effects of trade are, as we have already discussed in part, explored through an analysis of literary culture.

Reflecting on Emerson’s resignation from the pulpit and the Unitarian church, 1832, Mary Kupiec Clayton notes that ‘If religion had failed Emerson as an instrument of moral reform, it was literature, then, that still held out hope to him.’<sup>17</sup> Such thinking is not unique to Emerson, however, as the political ‘power’ of literature (recall Emerson’s evocative assessment of ‘the force of two’) owes in no small part to the writings of William Ellery Channing and Channing’s early work, ‘The Importance and Means of a

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<sup>13</sup> Emerson, ‘College Theme Book, XVII’ (Undated, 1819-1824), JMN.I., 215

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> Emerson, ‘The Young American’ (1844), CW.I., 379

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> Mary Kupiec Clayton, ‘Organicism,’ *Emerson’s Emergence: Self and Society in the Transformation of New England: 1800-1845* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1992), 7



National Literature' (1830), in particular.<sup>18</sup>

For Channing, 'as politics became more corrupt, literature was destined to succeed as an agent of progress and change.'<sup>19</sup> Channing argues that political progress needed a cultural parallel, a means examining the conceptual 'bonds,' 'symbols' and 'analogies' that allow a democratic society to coherently function.<sup>20</sup> For Channing, as for Emerson, the advent of a 'national literature,' a local economy of ideas and images, would prove a perfect accompaniment to the development of America's federal offices in the first decades of the nineteenth century. Literature and government alike are composed of systems of 'circulation,' writes Channing; ideological structures built of the 'most quickening and beautiful thoughts, which have grown up in men of laborious study or creative genius.'<sup>21</sup> Stating the case for the significance of 'laborious reading' to the country's cultural progress, one in which 'creative manners,' 'creative actions,' and 'creative words' are fundamental to the characterization of a national 'genius,' Emerson rephrases the core ideas of Channing's 'National Literature' in 'The American Scholar.'<sup>22</sup> Furthermore, his revisioning of Channing's 'creative genius' is a more dynamic iteration: 'genius creates,' Emerson writes; 'genius looks forwards.'<sup>23</sup> Where Channing sought to investigate the intellectual foundations of a 'national literature,' Emerson worked to examine its prospective and dialectical development; its progress rather than its produce. Emerson's conceptual appropriation and modulation of Channing's thoughts toward a 'national literature' are significant, but it is the fact that Emerson concentrates on the labour involved in the receipt of a national literature (rather than its authorship) that the following chapters will focus on: Emerson's 'art

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<sup>18</sup> Channing's expansive definitions of literature—in terms of its social purpose and political influence—undeniably informed Emerson's early writings. By 'literature,' Channing notes, 'we mean the expression of a nation's mind in writing. We mean the production among a people of important works in philosophy and in the departments of imagination and taste. We mean the contribution of new truths to the stock of human knowledge. We mean the thoughts of profound and original minds, elaborated by the toil of composition and fixed and made immortal in books. We mean the manifestation of a nation's intellect in the only forms by which it can multiply itself at home and send itself abroad. We mean that a nation shall take a place, by its authors, among the lights of the world. It will be seen that we include under literature all the writings of superior minds, be subjects what they may. We are aware that the term is often confined to compositions which relate to human nature, and human life; [...] but the worlds of matter and mind are too intimately connected to admit exact partition. All the objects of human thought flow into one another.' See William Ellery Channing, *The Importance and Means of a National Literature* (London: Edward Rainford, 1830), 4-5

<sup>19</sup> Cayton, 'Vocation,' *Emerson's Emergence*, 156

<sup>20</sup> Channing, *The Importance and Means of a National Literature*, 5

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 8-9

<sup>22</sup> Emerson, 'The American Scholar' (1837), CW.I., 90

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*

of appropriation.’ Not dissimilar to Emerson’s engagement with the works of Wayland and Channing, a vast array of textual and conceptual appropriations can be located in Emerson’s writings pertaining to a diverse range of totemic thinkers. Emerson appropriates and assimilates a panoply of ideas and images from Johann Wolfgang von Goethe (1749-1832); Napoleon Bonaparte (1769-1821); Gulian C. Verplanck (1786-1870); and Karl Marx (1818-1883). These occurrences of appropriation are crucial; not only because they elucidate the ways in which he self-consciously theorizes the act of appropriation, but also because he employs his own conceptualizations of cultural and economic forms of circulation to justify his ‘use’ of the works of others and consider the ‘meaning of economy’ more broadly.

This is the foundation of Emerson’s ‘OTHERISM,’ as previously discussed. However, that the act of appropriation is regarded as an ‘art’ in Emerson’s later writings requires further investigation. Although ‘OTHERISM’ pertains to the very beginnings of his career, and the ‘art of appropriation’ the very end, the conceptual coherency of these two critical formations portrays a more lucid, consistent and logically reasoned progression of ideas in Emerson’s writings than recent critics of his social and aesthetic philosophies have identified. The following analysis will identify some of the reasons why.

For Newfield, Emerson’s later works are keenly invested in the establishment of what he would term a ‘market poetics’ (as previously mentioned); a ‘turn’ towards the political that would see Emerson centralize ‘circulation and play’ as the central motifs in his engagement with the idea of ownership, the activity of critical exchange, and the economics of cultural progress.<sup>24</sup> To illustrate this idea, Newfield suggests that Emerson’s late period writings consider criticism as a metaphor for ‘the question of control’ in social contexts, and alludes to the ways in which the ecological system of metaphor in Emerson’s first major works—the idea of ‘natural history’ as an organic ‘ecosystem,’ as a means to consider the organicist interconnectivity and co-dependency of the various nodes of a networked society—is altered in his later writings. Where we first had a paean to an ecological order in ‘Nature’—both humanity and human enterprise being an extension of this regimen—Emerson would later consider ‘the continual exchange of shared materials’ as a means of regulating that order in a manner more akin to an economic system that

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<sup>24</sup> Newfield, ‘Market Despotism,’ *The Emerson Effect*, 165

any organic environment.<sup>25</sup> Newfield thus reads Emerson's 'market poetics' as the product of a cumulative study of criticism rather than as a feature present from the outset of Emerson's bibliography. However, drawing on both the portrayal of Emerson's engagement with the act of reading as figured in Part One of this thesis—and the more overt depiction of his relationship with economization as will follow—I will argue that a more unequivocal and precise categorization of the act of reading can be identified as in progress across Emerson's writings.

If we return again to Emerson's private notebooks and journals of the 1830s, a cogent characterization of critical enterprise as an 'economic phenomena' (to borrow Jay's terminology) can be discerned from his early reflections on scholarship and critical activity to his later and more defined engagements with scholarship. The symbolic intimations of the scholar's sociocultural responsibilities are frequently explored through 'fiscal metaphor,' as Ian Bell would note; and explicated in reaction to 'fiscal circumstances.'<sup>26</sup> As will be shown, Emerson's thinking proves contingent upon a theorization of labour that can be regarded as in reaction to the intellectual lacuna that would accompany financial crisis in the late 1830s; a recession of meaning instigated by an exposition of the frailty and 'fictionality' of financial systems and a market-led ideation of commercial value.<sup>27</sup>

For Andrew Kopec, Emerson's thinking is predicated by the social milieu to which he belonged. Kopec argues that a conceptualist reaction to the very idea of 'work'—one that centralizes notions of its symbolic function over and above the realities of labour itself—is keenly detailed in Emerson's early writings. However, he also suggests that Emerson's explicitly concentration on 'scholarly work' in the contexts of financial crisis demands further analysis.<sup>28</sup>

Situating Emerson firmly within the contexts of the panic of '37—and looking to 'The American Scholar' (1837) in relation to parallel public lectures of Emerson's early authorship—Kopec argues

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<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> Bell, 'The Hard Currency of Words: Emerson's Fiscal Metaphor in Nature,' 737

<sup>27</sup> A term and concept I borrow from Karl Polanyi; see 'The Self-Regulating Market and the Fictitious Commodities: Labor, Land, and Money,' *The Great Transformation: The Political and Economic Origins of Our Time* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1944, 2001), 71-81

<sup>28</sup> Andrew Kopec, 'Emerson, Labor and Ages of Turbulence,' *ESQ: A Journal of the American Renaissance*, 60.2. (2014), 251-284

Emerson was self-consciously informed by what he would himself term the ‘fever of the market’ in his ‘Address on Education’ (a significant precursor to Emerson’s ‘American Scholar,’ also 1837).<sup>29</sup> Emerson’s early conceptualizations of both work and criticism may well be a direct symptom of marketization; both the sophistication and acuity of his thinking can be read as the product of popular feeling. As he notes in his journals, 1838, this ‘fever’ needs be read relative to his conceptual interest in ‘original relation,’ as detailed in ‘Nature,’ and the relationships that exist within the economic circuitry of the market. ‘Our health is our sound relation to external objects, our sympathy with external being,’ he writes. However, the complexities of his present political and socioeconomic circumstance, of depression, facilitate a ‘cold obstruction’ that disturbs the clarity of this theory of ‘sound relation.’ Listing the direct symptoms of this malaise, he notes that ‘Today, a man wakes in the morning sick with fever; he perceives at once that he has lost his just relation with the world. Every sound in the lower parts of the house, or in the street, falls faint & foreign on his ear.’<sup>30</sup> The only cure for this ailment is direct contact with the world which, for Emerson, entails an imminent, sensory and empirical consideration of our social and cultural being; a realization of our interconnectedness to a social unit or, in other words, a logic and order of ‘relation.’ Once again, the desire to connect to the external life, to prove (in a sense) that literature enables an absolute connection between the inner and outer life poses a set of problems for Emerson. On the one hand, he argues for an ideal or ‘Transcendent’ criticism able to render literature ‘ephemeral.’ On the other hand, he considers the failure of his contemporaries to encapsulate the political climate in a singular work of literature as a proof ‘that we have lost our just relation to the world.’ In so doing, Emerson’s terminology again suggests a position that is both radical and—simultaneously—impossible.

To deal with this intellectual deadlock, Emerson coins a neologism more commonly associated with twentieth-century American literature than nineteenth-century American philosophy. ‘Faction,’ a form of literature intent on synthesizing the real and the factual with the creative prerogatives of its author, is a term typically attributed to Norman Mailer (and that Mailer is typically held as defining). However, Emerson precedes Mailer and suggests that ‘faction’ is a literary trend resulting of this period of economic

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<sup>29</sup> Emerson, ‘Address on Education’ (1837), EL.II., 197

<sup>30</sup> Emerson, ‘Journal D’ (September 28<sup>th</sup>, 1838), JMN.VII., 91

difficulty (a pun on the partisanship or ‘factional’ qualities of an ascendant popular press and its extension to the more creative offices of literature). ‘A foolish formula is the Spirit of faction,’ Emerson notes, ‘as it is used in books old & new. Can you not get any nearer to the fact than that, you old granny? It is like the answer of children, who, when you ask them the subject of the sermon, say simply it was about Religion.’<sup>31</sup> Here, Emerson is explicit in his want to engage the truth value of a text; how, when seen only for its generic qualities, its social and interpretative application proves entirely limited. In this sense, his allusion to ‘religion’ is particularly significant, as Emerson endeavours to argue the case for literature’s ‘ephemerality,’ for its essentially supplicant significance when considered relative to its real-world application. Emerson’s early period journals are riven with private remarks as per the limits of literary enterprise; with a want to ‘get nearer to the fact.’<sup>32</sup> ‘You are wrong in demanding of the bible more than can be in a book,’ he notes in the Winter months of 1838, for example,<sup>33</sup> even ‘the devil can quote texts’ to justify an action.<sup>34</sup>

While Mailer, in the late 1970s, argues the case for the (American) novel as a medium capable of dealing with the political and social exigency of late-twentieth century (American) life,<sup>35</sup> his ‘faction,’ inspired in no small part by Truman Capote’s *In Cold Blood* (1966) and the ‘New Journalism’ movement of the 1970s,<sup>36</sup> formally presents a ‘revision’ or ‘reworking of historical incidents in novel form.’<sup>37</sup> Juxtaposing ‘the historically viable with the imaginary’ in a hybrid practice that would fuse a documentarian impulse with the conventions of prose fiction, Mailer’s ‘faction’ attempted to consider the fictional potential of contemporaneous life.<sup>38</sup> ‘All my writing life, I’ve been writing fiction in order to make nonfiction believable to me,’ Mailer notes (ahead of the publication of *Harlot’s Ghost* in the *New York Times*, 1991).<sup>39</sup> Mailer’s

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<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

<sup>33</sup> Emerson, ‘Journal D’ (Undated, 1838), Ibid., 153

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., 109

<sup>35</sup> See Robert Begiebing, ‘Twelfth Round: An Interview with Norman Mailer’ (1983) in (ed) J.M. Lennon, *Conversations with Norman Mailer* (Jackson, MI: University of Mississippi Press, 1988), 327

<sup>36</sup> For a contemporary summary of the development of this movement, see James Ridgeway, ‘The New Journalism,’ *American Libraries*, 2.6. (1971); ‘Faction’ is a neologism dated 1960 in the Oxford English Dictionary and defined as ‘a literary and cinematic genre in which real events are used as a basis for a fictional narrative or dramatization.’

<sup>37</sup> See Andrew Wilson, ‘Faction,’ *Norman Mailer: An American Aesthetic* (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2008), 241

<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

<sup>39</sup> Mailer in conversation with journalist Scott Spencer; see Scott Spencer, ‘The Old Man and the Novel,’ *The New York Times*, 22<sup>nd</sup> September 1991

<<https://archive.nytimes.com/www.nytimes.com/books/98/05/10/specials/mailer-spencer.html>>

'faction' was considered an opponent of the aims and ambitions of late twentieth century American literary fiction. See Diana Trilling, for example, who would disregard and deride Mailer's prose experiments and critical proclamations to suggest that his position is ultimately 'anti-artist,' and 'deeply distrustful of art,' if only because he aims to 'put a shield between the perception and the act' by drawing concrete correlation between creative fabrication, fantasy, fabulation and real-world political circumstance.<sup>40</sup> What proves of interest is the fact that Emerson appears to both pre-empt both Mailer *and* his critics.

Cynical as Mailer's approach may be, 'faction' has been argued as key to the progress of the twentieth century American novel; and the fact that we can trace the term back to Emerson is of undeniable significance. However, if we are to read Emerson's definition of 'faction' in the contexts of depression, his call for a new and more intimate relation with the 'facts' of life arguably exacts itself as an early justification of his privileging a reader's processes over and above any sense of the value of a literary product. Detailing a problem that he argues as effecting a reading of both 'books old and new,' Emerson's urgent demand is that we need be 'nearer to the fact,' *not* examine the facts from a cultural remove. That we are focused on 'life' and 'not literature,' as he would put it in 'Quotation and Originality.' Emerson's immediate response to the cultural effects of financial crisis thus appear to directly impact his ongoing investigation of the 'mechanics' of critical enterprise and, once again, it is the reader's ability to discern the nuances of the sermon that enable them to see it as more than simply a product of 'religion' or social convention. Just as the value of a literary product is determined by the agency of the reader, so too must we realize that the text is never entirely made up and governed by the writer's 'sensibility' alone.<sup>41</sup>

Remarking on this process of thought—the need to move from an intellectual plain to a real-world context—Emerson's 'fever' appears to be a response to the artificiality of the market itself as a system; as a kind of fiction that determines its own set of laws, characters and conventions and separates itself from both governmental order and principles of self-determination. A response to this 'fever' can be gauged elsewhere in Emerson's early writings. However, his thinking consistently oscillates around a want to

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(Accessed 21.08.20)

<sup>40</sup> Diana Trilling, 'The Radical Moralism of Norman Mailer' in (ed.) L. Braudy, *Norman Mailer: A Collection of Critical Essays* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall; Spectrum, 1972), 42-66

<sup>41</sup> Emerson, 'Journal D' (September 28<sup>th</sup>, 1838), JMN.VII., 91

contest both the ways in which we think about work as concept; how we need classify ‘thinking’ as itself a form of work; and, furthermore, examine the ways in which new forms of labour are engineered by new economic circumstances.<sup>42</sup> Emerson notes that this ‘fever’ has ‘infected the brain of the scholar and the clerk and removed ‘the dreams of the poet’ only to replace such ambitions with a sense of the cultural significance of ‘mechanical force.’<sup>43</sup> What proves of note, however, is that he explores the effects of this ‘fever’ across his early period writings through a deliberative examination of the act of reading as a form of intellectual *and* ‘manual labor.’<sup>44</sup> In this way, Emerson’s exploration of critical activity becomes a means of exploring labour cultures more broadly.

In what he would term the ‘Doctrine of Hands,’ 1837, he alleges that a reification of labour as a market device has transformed our perception of a ‘man’ as a social entity. Rather than a distinct identity, ‘A man, in the view of political economy, is a pair of hands,’ he writes. ‘A useful engine to subdue the earth, to plant and build it over.’<sup>45</sup> This idea recurs across Emerson’s authorship, as are his efforts to marry such a characterization of ‘man’ as a ‘useful engine’ with his want to figure critical thinking as itself a form of ‘manual labor.’ As we will see, this is key to some of the dichotomies in Emerson’s rhetoric concerning the congruence between literature and market forces as well.

We look to the late essay ‘Domestic Life,’ for example—a lecture delivered in 1859 but composed of patchwork materials pertaining to the late 1830s—and see Emerson explicitly delineate the importance of ‘manual labor.’<sup>46</sup> However, here, the question is not what work such ‘hands’ should be put to; rather, the question concerns the symbolic function of ‘man’ as a revolutionary ‘engine’ capable of impacting both thought and action:

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<sup>42</sup> Kopec, ‘Emerson, Labor and Ages of Turbulence,’ 264

<sup>43</sup> Emerson, ‘Address on Education’ (1837), EL.II., 197

<sup>44</sup> Emerson, ‘Domestic Life’ (1870), CW.VII., 101-133

<sup>45</sup> Emerson, ‘Doctrine of the Hands’ (1837), EL.II., 230-231

<sup>46</sup> The editors of the Riverside edition of Emerson’s *Society and Solitude* note that ‘Mr. Emerson seems to have first treated this subject in a lecture called ‘Home’ in the course on Human Life given in Boston in the winter of 1838-39. A passage from this lecture survives in the present essay and another in that on Education, in *Lectures and Biographical Sketches*. Probably the same, with suitable changes for an English audience, was the lecture called ‘Domestic Life,’ one of the three given in Exeter Hall. The lecture in its present form was read to Mr. Parker’s Society in the Music Hall in Boston, November 13, 1859.’ See ‘Domestic Life’ (1870), CW.VII., 101-133

I see not how serious labour, the labor of all and every day, is to be avoided; and many things betoken a revolution of opinion and practice in regard to manual labor that may go far to aid our practical inquiry.<sup>47</sup>

‘Another age may divide the manual labor of the world more equally on all the members of society,’ he writes, ‘and so make the labors of a few hours avail to the wants and add to the vigor of the man. But the reform that applies itself to the household must not be partial. It must correct the whole system of our social living.’<sup>48</sup> Indicating yet another form of ‘silent revolution’ as can be encountered in Emerson’s writings—a ‘revolution of opinion and practice’—in ‘Domestic Life,’ Emerson notes the ways in which our private life must relate to public discourse and, in so doing, transform the concept of ‘manual labor’ into the precept for a much larger concept of reform. An individual household, for example, is a symbol for ‘the whole system of our social living’ in ‘Domestic Life’—hence, the behaviour of one need aim to ‘correct’ an entire system.<sup>49</sup> In this revolution, every household is a prospective agent of change. In ‘Nature,’ although Emerson’s call for ‘original relation’ first appears to stand as another paean to the importance of personal perspective, the ‘we’ that he repeatedly calls upon in the opening lines of that essay can thus also be read as an appeal to forms of socio-political participation; thus, entailing the self-same position he details in ‘Domestic Life.’

Looking, then, at early essays from ‘Nature,’ ‘Domestic Life,’ his 1837 ‘Address on Education,’ and its more famous counterpart of that same year, ‘The American Scholar,’ Emerson’s thoughts on ‘relation’ and ‘revolution’ together establish a theory of ‘serious labor’ that considers the theoretical implications and aims of labour as a concept rather than the realities of work itself. It is, as the following analysis will show, Emerson’s attempts to connect various representational haptics—this symbolization of the power of touch, grasp and control as cited in his ‘Doctrine of the Hands’—with his characterization of ‘man’ as machine and ‘engine’ that situates ‘political economy’ at the heart of his work. The following will look closer at ‘The American Scholar’ (and Kopec’s thinking) in order to unravel the complexities of

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<sup>47</sup> Ibid., 116

<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid.



Emerson's developmental relationship with political economy within the context of his own historical circumstances.

Divided into three chapters, this second part of the thesis will thus examine the complexity of Emerson's thinking on culture's economic provenance; but I will first concentrate on Emerson's aforementioned theory of 'creative reading' as he would term it in 'The American Scholar' (1837). If we are to accept the idea of 'creative writing,' Emerson argues that must admit the significance of 'creative reading as well.'<sup>50</sup> The work of our own 'creative genius,' to again borrow Channing's term, is again channelled towards an analysis of an American audience over and above the efficacy of American authorship. Emerson details the practice of interpretation—homing in on the first glimpses of inspiration wherein 'the page of whatever book we read becomes luminous with manifold allusion.'<sup>51</sup> This is a constructive process to Emerson's mind—a building of meaning—and thus needs be deemed *creative* in character. He explicitly describes his position as a theory of 'labour and invention,' and his terminology indicates the constructivist aims of his 'creative reading.' But if we consider his interest in economy and literature as functioning cooperatively rather than at cross purposes, whether Emerson is more invested in the 'creation' of an economic system, or in the 'creation' of new work ripe for circulation within this system, requires further examination.

Emerson's proposed new discipline, his 'creative reading,' has been regarded as a somewhat simplistic demonstration of the appropriateness of Emerson's thinking for the progress of literary study and institutionalization of literary creativity today. Regarding recent interest in 'Creative Writing' as academic discipline, Lawrence Buell notes that 'had the Harvard curriculum of 1820 included Creative Writing workshops as it does now, Emerson would very likely have wanted to sign up.'<sup>52</sup> However, keeping in mind Emerson's evocative explication of his theory of 'creative reading' as a theory of 'labor,' Emerson can be seen to circuitously approach the *idea* of creativity by looking to the activities of an array of definitions of both labour and productivity, only to complicate his position and undermine the simplicity of Buell's

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<sup>50</sup> Emerson, 'The American Scholar' (1837), CW.I., 90

<sup>51</sup> Ibid., 93

<sup>52</sup> Buell, 'Emersonian Poetics,' *Emerson*, 115

assertion.

I will explore this claim by examining the correlation of a variety of workers as they appear in Emerson's writings: the 'reader,' 'scholar,' 'builder,' and 'spender.' In Emerson's own exploration of the economics of cultural work, these figures appear almost interchangeably in his envisioning of a 'creative reading.' The following chapters will—amongst other things—consider how some of these figures coalesce in Emerson's theorizations of literature and its attendant labour forms. But before continuing to explore the impact of the financial crisis of 1837 upon Emerson's early thinking, it is his evocative portrayal of the 'builder' that we need first identify.

In the early address 'Literary Ethics' (1838), Emerson portrays language as 'the beautiful museum of human life.' Considering the array of works that would populate the galleries of this 'beautiful museum,' Emerson arranges and organizes his ideas in this 'museum' by way of an array of fiscal processes. Every told story relays the evidence 'of earnings, and borrowings, and lendings, and losses,' he writes, and every object in this 'museum' is thus the biproduct of some form of financial transaction.<sup>53</sup> This evocative image is key to the complex character of Emerson's interest in literature and in 'written composition.' But it also elucidates the ways in which he leans on political economy as a means of organizing his thinking. Emerson's interest in the act of 'borrowing' is expressed as in a kind of twinship with his theory of the 'builder' and a 'building' of meaning; how a builder's processes are contingent upon their use of pre-existent materials, and how a theory of debt helps clarify the complexities of their work. Examining the interrelation of these ideas, the significance of Emerson's investment in economic metaphor to consider the terms and aims of a 'creative reading' are arguably made more apparent.

As he notes in 'Nature,' language has evolved as a kind of a debt system:

Every word which is used to express a moral or intellectual fact, if traced to its root, is found to be borrowed from some material appearance. *Right* means *straight*; *wrong* means *twisted*. *Spirit* primarily means *wind*; *transgression*, the crossing of a line; *supercilious*, the raising of the eyebrow. We say the heart to express emotion, the head to denote thought; and thought and emotion are

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<sup>53</sup> Emerson, 'Literary Ethics' (1838), CW.I., 177

words borrowed from sensible things, and now appropriated. [...] Throw a stone into the stream, and the circles that propagate themselves are the beautiful type of all influence.<sup>54</sup>

We owe 'natural history' its proper accreditation, he writes, 'the use of natural history is to give us aid in super-natural history; the use of the outer creation, to give us language for the beings and changes of the inward creation.'<sup>55</sup> All our 'words' are 'signs of natural facts.'<sup>56</sup> However, all such 'words' are 'appropriated' from nature, 'borrowed from sensible things.' Emerson's 'beautiful museum' is, in this regard, a collection of images and metaphors 'appropriated' from the natural world; a pool of resources that allow us to better reflect upon and express the details of an inner life and consider its expression through the 'second use' of signs and symbols. Furthermore, if we look his early lecture series 'The Philosophy of History' (1839), and his remarks on literature therein, they too allude to the ways in which an engagement with nature's systems (and thus the curatorial implications of his 'beautiful museum') may work towards an ascendant or ideological system. As we will see, it is the formation of this ideological system that allows for the metaphor of the builder to function as a constituent element within a wider and more structured investigation of the idea of language *as work*.

In the 'Literature' lecture of the 'Philosophy of History' series, Emerson reiterates his interest in a 'creative' or 'laborious' form of reading; one in which every individual work of literature can and will contribute to the enlargement and sophistication of a 'national' culture of letters. Echoing Channing once again, he argues that 'Written composition [...] can surpass any unwritten effusions of however profound a genius; for, what is already writ is a foundation [for] a new superstructure, a guide to the eye for new foundation, and a provocation to proceed; so that the work rises, tower upon tower, with ever new and total strength of the builder.'<sup>57</sup> Emerson's own metaphoric tower—a Babel of his own—portrays his theory of language in terms both constructive and acquisitive. He notes that he is not so interested in the 'structure

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<sup>54</sup> Emerson, 'Nature' (1836), CW.I., 25

<sup>55</sup> Ibid.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid.

<sup>57</sup> Emerson, 'Literature' (1837), EL.II., 64

of literary works' as he is 'the *Mechanics* of literature;' how a work of literature *works*.<sup>58</sup> Just as it is the 'circumstance' that supports the authorship of a work, it is the reader's ability to glean the underlying structure and build upon it that enables—as Emerson notes— 'a new foundation' for further activity. This, however, is just one of the ways in which our 'direct dependence [on] the author' is diminished. It is when we look to contextualize a work of literature either within the contexts of canon, or within the real-world socio-political 'circumstance' of its reception, that the 'mechanics' of its construction also emerge:

It is difficult to overestimate the value of letters. [...] Whilst the form of literary works, as tragedy, history, romance, varies with ever age, and is not at the option of the writer but is determined for him by the state of mankind around him, there is an important circumstance relating to the structure of literary works that may be called the *Mechanics* of literature, which seems somewhat to modify this direct dependence of the author upon the absolute Reason. I mean the art of composition or the manner in which a continuous work like *Hamlet* or *Don Quixote* or *Paradise Lost* is created. I suppose that I say what all know, when I say that it is impossible that one of these works could be an improvisation. And an attention to the difference between a grand work like these a lyric effusion discriminates the advantage of written literature. [...] It can be best illustrated by seeing a similar aid in architecture. It is what is already done that enables the artist to accomplish the wonderful.<sup>59</sup>

Without forgoing a Western literary canon, Emerson nonetheless turns the 'mechanics of literature' towards a new vernacular that Americanizes the process. Built on the 'strength' of the individual 'builder' as opposed to the processual 'building' of meaning, the representative qualities of an alienated 'builder' functions metonymically for a culture of 'building' more broadly. In line with his want to explore both the establishment and progress of a sociocultural 'superstructure' (or 'sentiment,' as he would term it in 'The Young American'), Emerson's 'builder' is thus a 'creative' character; a figure engaged in the continual building of said 'superstructure,' rather than that already *built*. 'It is what is already done that enables the artist to accomplish the wonderful,' he notes; that which is 'already done' that the 'builder' works to further

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<sup>58</sup> Ibid., 63

<sup>59</sup> Ibid.

develop and alter. It is not merely that the process of ‘building’ is set up as a parallel to that of ‘creativity,’ it is about acknowledging the influence that the ‘state of mankind’ has on the prospective evolution thereof: an acknowledgment of the importance of context and lineage needed to ‘accomplish the wonderful.’

As noted, Emerson terms his period ‘the age of the first person singular,’ and the self-interest of Emerson’s critical position has been held as a substantial difficulty in recent efforts to distinguish the critical mores and mechanisms of his works. As critics strive to enumerate the possible extension of his thinking into a conceptualization of the social, they are commonly interrupted by the subjectivist impasse that seems to be intrinsic to Emerson’s canonical standing. As we have seen, however, the work of Emerson’s isolated ‘builder’ is articulated in numerous guises: intimating both a process of self-discovery *and* a conceptualization of culture as a social economy. Emerson’s parallel between literary culture and ‘architecture’—relative to his remarks on the symbolism of the individual household in ‘Domestic Life’—appeal to both the expansive qualities of his want to incorporate the ‘builder’ into a more conceptualist revision of the dialectical progress of daily life and his interest in the cultural predominance of literary work (rather than literature itself, *per se*). Homebuilding is a literary exercise, to Emerson’s eye: ‘every house is a quotation out of all forests and mines and stone-quarries,’ he notes in ‘Quotation and Originality;’ ‘Language is a city to the building of which every human being brought a stone.’<sup>60</sup> In similar terms, a book is considered a kind of a dwelling space—a physical cell that we can inhabit—but each book is cellular in its relation to the construction of a broader cultural whole: ‘Our benefactors are as many as the children who invented speech, word by word,’ Emerson notes; ‘yet [nobody is] to be credited with the grand result than the aculeph which adds a cell to the coral reef which is the basis of the continent.’<sup>61</sup> Every book being symbolically representative of the whole; that whole being dependent upon the particular; each individual book, the possible ‘foundation for a new superstructure.’

For Naomi Greyser, such a line of thought owes to Emerson’s ‘critique of idealist autonomy,’ but his own assertion that literature and architecture are similar disciplines offers a clearer insight into his

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<sup>60</sup> Emerson, ‘Quotation and Originality’ (1875), CW.VIII., 176, 199

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, 199

position.<sup>62</sup> Emerson elsewhere refers to a ‘Cyclopean architecture’ so as to again highlight the symbolic propensities of the ‘builder’ and ‘building’ as metaphors within his early works.<sup>63</sup> ‘One man [...] can build a church on solid blocks able to up uphold a mountain,’ he writes, again in ‘Philosophy of History,’<sup>64</sup> preceding his more famous assertion that ‘An institution is the lengthened shadow of one man’ in ‘Self-Reliance’ (1841).<sup>65</sup> The individual builder at work on a building is indicative of the ways in which a single thinker can cultivate a popular concept or accepted idea that holds significant public value; an idea or ‘church’ that a public can employ for their own purposes. He lists a litany of examples to prove his point: ‘Monachism, of the Hermit Antony; the Reformation, of Luther; Quakerism, of Fox; Methodism, of Wesley; Abolition, of Clarkson. Scipio, Milton called “the height of Rome;” and all history resolves itself very easily into the biography of a few stout and earnest persons.’<sup>66</sup> ‘Every true man is a cause,’ Emerson writes, we just need study the process of causation. How such a ‘man’ may act as a catalyst in a fashion not dissimilar to his sense of our need to consider the traffic of an idea from the interiority of mind through to a public domain.<sup>67</sup>

Emerson’s interest in the symbolic powers of language as a ‘museum of human life’ helps to explain the complexity and currency of his architectural metaphor; and we might argue that it provides space for the complexities of his relationship with literary culture and the act of reading. A museum houses a ‘retrospective’ solely with future-facing ambitions, to maintain the culture of the past for the sake of a prospective future. As Emerson decries in ‘Nature,’ his ‘age is retrospective,’ and needs be invested in the advancement of culture rather than critical hindsight.<sup>68</sup> Emerson’s ‘museum,’ in sum, thus serves as a metaphor for a cultural canon; like a ‘museum,’ a canon should serve to facilitate the progress of a culture ‘forwards and not back,’ as he would put it in ‘The American Scholar.’<sup>69</sup> This, in essence, is the work of

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<sup>62</sup> Naomi Greyser, ‘A Paper Trail of Tears: Sentimental Sovereignty, Indian Removal, and Staking Claims to North America,’ *On Sympathetic Grounds: Race, Gender & Affective Geographies in Nineteenth-Century North America* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2018), 56-57

<sup>63</sup> Ralph Waldo Emerson, ‘The Philosophy of History’ (1838), EL.II., 64

<sup>64</sup> Ibid.

<sup>65</sup> Emerson, ‘Self-Reliance’ (1841), CW.II., 61

<sup>66</sup> Ibid.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid.

<sup>68</sup> Emerson, ‘Nature’ (1836), CW.I., 3

<sup>69</sup> Emerson, ‘The American Scholar’ (1837), CW.I., 90

the museum;<sup>70</sup> and the imaginary works that populate Emerson's metaphorical 'museum' provide a way to consider the value of an individual speech act or literary work in its relation language as an 'institution' as well.<sup>71</sup> To engage the world in language is thus to allude to the idea of language as a 'social force' as Emerson puts it in 'Nominalist and Realist' (1844):

We infer the spirit of the nation in great measure from the language, which is a sort of monument to which each forcible individual in a course of many hundred years has contributed a stone. And, universally, a good example of this social force is the veracity of language, which cannot be debated. In any controversy concerning morals, an appeal may be made with safety to the sentiments which the language of the people expresses. Proverbs, words and grammar-inflections convey the public sense with more purity and precision than the wisest individual.<sup>72</sup>

Again, Emerson could be argued as channelling Channing here; given his want to examine an explicitly national form of scholarship. What stands out, however, is the use of the vernacular as a more accurate barometer for public culture; a culture that can contain this sense of the 'public' and 'individual' value of language in practice.

The recurrence of the museum as metaphor in Emerson's writings suggests that it is far more than simply a repository of historical meaning. In 'Wealth', he again returns to the image of the 'museum' in order to posit it as a symbolic locale for a democratic articulation of how cultural productivity should function within the New Republic. Once again, Emerson considers the works accommodated within a metaphorical museum, and asks that we consider a singular sculpture in relation to the museum's broader collection.

The brave workman, who might betray his feeling of it in his manners, if he do not succumb in his practice, must replace the grace or elegance forfeited, by the merit of the work done. No matter whether he makes shoes, or statues, or laws. It is the privilege of any human work which is well done to invest the

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<sup>70</sup> See Boris Groys on the 'museological impulse' in 'The Rheology of Art,' *In the Flow* (London: Verso, 2019), 1-6

<sup>71</sup> Emerson, 'Journal TU' (1849), JMN.XII., 134

<sup>72</sup> Emerson, 'Nominalist and Realist' (1844), CW.III., 230-232

doer with a certain haughtiness. He can well afford not to conciliate, whose faithful work will answer for him. The mechanic at his bench carries a quiet heart and assured manners and deals on even terms with men of any condition. The artist has made his picture so true that it disconcerts criticism. The statue is so beautiful that it contracts no stain from the market but makes the market a silent gallery for itself.<sup>73</sup>

Language, ‘a beautiful museum;’ the market, ‘a silent gallery’—these two provocative and evocative ‘institutions’ are key to an analysis of Emerson’s relationship with culture, cultural labour, and the idea of the ‘builder’ or ‘reader’ as working towards the betterment of an ascendent ideological or cultural ‘superstructure.’ The works that haunt Emerson’s ‘silent gallery’ are portraits of work itself, and the ‘grace and elegance’ of labour is key to Emerson’s cultural enquiry. The idea that—be it a shoe, law, statute, or statue—they are all objects produced through a process of conscientious labour and therefore ingrained with the signature of a manufacturer. A trace of the ‘doer,’ to borrow his term, always registers in the done. But it is the parallelism between language and the market that I wish to home in upon here as Emerson so loudly considers the value of the ‘second use’ of an object or phrase and, in so doing, its value as a circulatable entity. Recalling Emerson’s portrayal of ‘the beautiful museum of language’ as a house of ‘earnings, and borrowings, and lendings, and losses,’ he consistently reinstates the idea that literary culture is not only defined by economic dynamism, but that literary culture assists us in our efforts to define political economy itself. As he would note in the late essay ‘Poetry and Imagination’ (1872), ‘we shall never understand political economy until Burns or Béranger or some poet shall teach it in songs.’<sup>74</sup>

While the image of the museum posits both a stationary dwelling place for the progressive nature of American culture and a locale for amassing the products of that culture, Emerson’s awareness of the potential problems surrounding the economic dynamism of the United States must also be taken into account. Not only does Emerson absorb the cultural atmospherics of the panic of 1837, his later assessments of culture as a pedagogical device able to explain our socioeconomic circumstances are instigated by this moment of economic collapse. In ‘The American Scholar’ (1837), he would argue such

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<sup>73</sup> Emerson, ‘Wealth’ (1850), CW.VI., 92

<sup>74</sup> Emerson, ‘Poetry and Imagination’ (1872), CW. VIII., 37



a line of thought unequivocally. ‘Events, actions arise that must be sung,’ he notes; but admits that these ‘Events’ will ‘sing themselves.’<sup>75</sup> That little needs be done to qualify the significance of such ‘events’ through any act of creative or cultural elaboration; that they inescapably inform and rewrite the meaning and intimation of any cultural or sociopolitical ‘song’ as could be ‘sung.’ This off-hand remark is emblematic of a broader anxiety that Emerson appears to maintain across the bulk of his cultural commentaries in the late 1830s and as informing his later interest in proprietorship. Emerson admits that—engaging these sociopolitical ‘songs’ as we may—we can’t help but want to attain a singular ownership and proprietorship of the idea or implication carried in these events. ‘Sometimes,’ he writes in ‘Wealth,’ ‘could I only have music on my own terms.’<sup>76</sup> Whilst these sociopolitical ‘songs’ are redolent of our cultural being, we also need a personal relationship or sense of ownership of said song for a sense of cultural belonging to cohere. A ‘song’—as Raymond Williams has remarked—is a crucial and folkloric means of ascertaining a culture’s cohesion. ‘The song of the land, the song of rural labor, the song of delight;’ every industrial culture carries with it a long, ethnomusicological history of ‘song’ as a means of bonding a disparate population through a common cultural form.<sup>77</sup> Emerson’s early works argue ‘literature’ as a cultural form capable of achieving such cultural cohesion. However, his early reference to the ‘song’ and to history’s capacity to ‘sing’ is striking.

Of course, whilst a song is a dominant culture force, a song does not exist. It is an immaterial form of culture—with its roots in an oral tradition—and defies objectification until the moment it is documented. Emerson was alert to precisely this conflict as between the material and immaterial cultural forms. Indeed, he admits that America’s ‘song’ is yet to be vocalized. ‘Our log-rolling, our stumps and their politics, our fisheries, our Negroes and Indians, our boats and our repudiations, the wrath of rogues and the pusillanimity of honest men, the northern trade, the southern planting, the western clearing, Oregon and Texas, are yet unsung,’ he writes in ‘The Poet’ (1844).<sup>78</sup> But the radical tenor of his perspective owes to his want to consider cultural memory as a material and/or immaterial form (thus his interest in the symbolic

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<sup>75</sup> Emerson, ‘The American Scholar’ (1837), CW.I., 82

<sup>76</sup> Emerson, ‘Wealth’ (1860), CW.VI., 98

<sup>77</sup> Raymond Williams, ‘The Border Again,’ *The Country and the City* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1973), 271

<sup>78</sup> Emerson, ‘The Poet’ (1844), CW.III., 37-38

stature of the museum as an institution). As he would suggestively propose—again in ‘Wealth’—the simple fact that ‘property is an intellectual production’ disputes the value of cultural property as a physical entity but does not dispute its significance.<sup>79</sup>

The following chapters will continue an investigation into Emerson’s theorizations of labour, creativity and property. I will examine how such ideas prove key to the development of Emerson’s ‘OTHERISM’—1836 to 1845, and impact the authorship of his later essays—‘Wealth’ (1860) and ‘Poetry and Imagination’ (1875), in particular—before exploring the ways in which Emerson would self-consciously detail his engagement with cultural labour and critical exchange as ‘capitalist’ in character and scope in ‘Quotation and Originality’ (1875), and how such thinking informs his investment in the act and ‘art of appropriation.’

Beginning with a return to Emerson’s ‘creative writing,’ I will consider the significance of the financial panic of 1837 to both Emerson’s conceptualizations of reading *and* recent readings of Emerson’s cultural commentaries. This will preface an analysis of the ways in which historicist readings have engaged the cultural effects of industrialization and economization across his first major period of productivity as author, 1836 to 1845. Within this analysis will be a consideration of the metaphorical value that Emerson imparts on technology and tools as an extension of scholarly work, the labours of his ‘builder,’ and the instrumental value of literature or a ‘book’ as a technological device in itself. Emerson’s interest in the ‘mechanics of literature’ and how this can be read within the wider framework of a mechanization of culture will precede my concluding chapter. By correlating Emerson’s ‘OTHERISM’ with his ‘art of appropriation’ the critical partnership between his early and later works will be further identified.

The key term in this appraisal of secondary, mediated production is *charm*—the ‘charm of alienation,’ as he puts it in 1836. Bewitched, enchanted, or fascinated by ‘Alienation or Otherism,’ Emerson appears to avow the complex social mediatory systems inherent in cultural labour that displace the primacy of a work’s creator. Unlike Hegel, who conceived of alienation as the (dialectically self-affirming) registration of ‘the mind’s inability to recognize itself in an externalization which it nevertheless knows to

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<sup>79</sup> Emerson, ‘Wealth’ (1860), CW.VI., 99

be its own,' Emerson insinuates that the productive disengagement which ostensibly represents a loss for the agent should instead be considered in terms of innovation and development through a process of collaboration that he acknowledges as key to both sociocultural and economic discourses.<sup>80</sup>

Rephrasing his 'OTHERISM' in *Representative Men*—'Uses of Great Men' (1850)—he notes that 'society is glad to forget the innumerable laborers who ministered to [its] architect;' that 'we are multiplied by our proxies. How easily we adopt their labors!'<sup>81</sup> In 'Wealth,' he articulates his position once again, writing that 'he is the richest man who knows how to draw a benefit from the labors of the greatest number of men, of men in distant countries and in past times.'<sup>82</sup> Such ideas distinctly appeal to the significance Emerson would later allot the act or 'art of appropriation,' the ways in which a retooling or 'remodelling' of extant ideas (to borrow his phrase) is as dependent upon the alienation of subject and the elevation of that subject as informing an identificative 'selecting principle' for the valorisation and retooling of cultural matter. However, considering the form of collectivism he deigned the best fit for a description of these ontoepistemological conditions—the best means of categorizing the ideological indications of his 'richest man' capable of profiting from the 'labors of the greatest number of men'—Emerson remarks, 'Well, the man must be capitalist.'<sup>83</sup> It is this self-conscious classification of his argument as 'capitalist' in character that I will concentrate on in the following chapters.

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<sup>80</sup> Louis Dupré, 'Hegel's Concept of Alienation and Marx's Reinterpretation of it,' *Hegel-Studien* 7 (1972), 218

<sup>81</sup> Emerson, 'Uses of Great Men' (1850), CW.IV., 12

<sup>82</sup> Emerson, 'Wealth' (1860), CW.VI., 89

<sup>83</sup> Emerson, 'Wealth' (1860), CW.VI., 93

**ii.i.**

**The Ethics and Aesthetics of Financial Panic:  
Emerson's Dollar Bill Dialectics, 1837–1860**

*The coin is a delicate meter of civil, social and moral changes. [...] A dollar is not value, but representative of value, and, at last, of moral values. Wealth is mental; wealth is moral.*

**RALPH WALDO EMERSON**

'Wealth' (1860)<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Emerson, 'Wealth' (1860), CW.VI., 102

This chapter will read Emerson's theory of 'creative reading' relative to the financial panic of 1837. Further compounding the importance of the 'reader' and 'builder' as characters in his writings, I will explore his interest in the circulation of culture (and the act of reading) as encouraged by his receptivity to the sociocultural effects of economic downturn and depression. In this context, Emerson introduces the idea of the 'spender' in 'Wealth'—a figure that will constitute another significant link between Emerson's early and later writings, and whom should be regarded as paralleling the aforementioned 'builder' as a character and trope. I will examine his investigation into the circulation of currency relative to his interest in the circulation of literary matter, and how the figure of the 'spender' can be read as a constituent part of Emerson's take on the 'philosophic' and 'scientific' value of the panic of '37, as seen in his journals. My analysis will be interlaced with an assessment of the ways in which critics have recently sought to centralize this historic event as fundamental to Emerson's intellectual development. However, we should begin by examining Emerson's references to 'creative reading,' as it appears in 'The American Scholar' and elsewhere in his early writings, and by exploring the ways in which his thinking prefaces an engagement with the economics of intellectual proprietorship and critical exchange as will follow.

Writing to a young Margaret Fuller in the late 1830s, Emerson would caution her not to read 'when the mind is creative.' 'Reading long at one time anything, no matter how it fascinates, destroys thought as completely as the inflections forced by external causes,' he remarks. He continues only to ascertain literary matter itself as one such 'cause.' 'Stop if you find yourself becoming absorbed at even the first paragraph'—'learn to divine books, to *feel* those that you want without wasting much time over them,' Emerson suggests; 'The glance reveals what the gaze obscures.'<sup>2</sup> Emerson's critical 'glance' evidences a more important theoretical position than the flippancy of word alone may indicate. His remarks to Fuller reinstate his regular identification of self-determinacy as the 'useful engine' that underwrites both his cultural and pedagogical engagements with literary criticism and, in other words, returns us to the primacy of the self in Emerson's 'creative' rubric. This logic traffics out of Emerson's correspondence with Fuller to his public writings. In 'The Transcendentalist' (1842)—a public lecture delivered to an audience assembled at

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<sup>2</sup> Emerson, in a letter to a young Margaret Fuller; see Margaret Fuller, (ed.) Robert N. Hudspeth, *The Letters of Margaret Fuller*, Vol.II (1839-41) (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1983), 68-69

Boston's Masonic Temple—he critiques the ways in which social and political exigency corrupts the clarity of interpretative thought. Extending his advocacy of the critical 'divination' that he advocates to Fuller, he appears to go against the literary as a realm driven by special interests and partisan pressures in order to instead advocate an archly apolitical form of interpretation.

The ideological inferences of economic culture are so instrumental and persuasive, to Emerson's eye, that the process of critical engagement needs to work doubly hard so as to overcome any overtly politicized perspective. 'Each *cause* as it is called'—emphasis his own—'say Abolition, Temperance, say Calvinism, or Unitarianism—becomes so speedily a little shop, where the article, let it have been at first so subtle and ethereal, is now made up into portable and convenient cakes, and retailed in small quantities to suit purchasers.'<sup>3</sup> Here, it seems that Emerson's aim is to engineer a critical movement capable of withstanding the commodification of various ideological groupings and positions. Rather than facilitate a vaguely defined movement against movements themselves, he suggests that we must be vigilant regarding the wholesale application of specific agendas (in a position reminiscent of his aforementioned remarks on 'the spirit of faction'). Again, in 'The Transcendentalist,' he condemns the social disengagement he reads in his peers and seeks to clarify his position on the 'individual culture' gaining ground—the tendency to remove oneself from the communal and political exigencies of the day. Referring to the market systems and ideologies in ascendance parallel to his authorship, he writes: 'It is a sign of our times, conspicuous to the coarsest observer, that many intelligent and religious persons withdraw themselves from the common labors and competitions of the market and the caucus, and betake themselves to a certain solitary and critical way of living, from which no solid fruit has yet appeared to justify their separation.'<sup>4</sup>

They hold themselves aloof: they feel the disproportion between their faculties and the work offered them, and they prefer to ramble in the country and perish of ennui, to the degradation of such charities and such ambitions as the city can propose to them. They are striking work and crying out for somewhat worthy to do! What they do is done only because they are overpowered by the humanities that speak on all sides; and they consent to such labor as is

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<sup>3</sup> Emerson, 'The Transcendentalist' (1844), CW.I., 389

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

open to them, though to their lofty dream the writing of Iliads or Hamlets, or the building of cities or empires seems drudgery. They are lonely; the spirit of their writing and conversation is lonely; they repel influences; they shun general society; they incline to shut themselves in their chamber in the house, to live in the country rather than in the town, and to find their tasks and amusements in solitude.<sup>5</sup>

‘Society, to be sure, does not like this very well,’ he claims; ‘it saith, Who so goes to walk alone, accuses the whole world; he declares all to be unfit to be his companions; it is very uncivil, insulting; Society will retaliate.’<sup>6</sup> Here, Emerson’s assessment of the social responsibilities of cultural critique sways in its emphasis from self-interest to social exigency. For Julie K. Ellison, this theory of ‘egocentric reading’ struggles to delineate any cogent or political position on the social attributes of the literary culture, however (partly because it questions its own significance to America’s sociopolitical progress). Indeed, the link between Emerson’s interest in the symbolic virtues of the ‘builder’ and the process or concept of ‘*Bildung*’ in the German Romantic tradition (translating as ‘self-cultivation’) is notable.<sup>7</sup> Emerson’s ‘builder’ appears to equate as much with the process of self-development as social progress, in this instance; and Emerson’s program appears to accentuate the apolitical emphases of his critical practice. This is a charge we can levy by virtue of the repetition of this material, and his repeated insistence that we need be wary of the intellectual and interpretative precedence of ‘external cause.’

In Charles Woodbury’s *Talks with Ralph Waldo Emerson* (1890), Woodbury—reflecting on the parlour seminars Emerson would deliver to small groups of students in the 1840s and 1850s—reports a range of ‘instructions’ that Emerson would pose to his audience so as to guide their intellectual development and hone their critical faculty. Notably, these comments rephrase the key ideas enlisted in Emerson’s ‘creative reading’—as Emerson would detail in ‘The American Scholar’ and in his letter to Fuller—and the advice he would pose Fuller is repeated to Woodbury verbatim. ‘Reading is closely related

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 340-341

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 342

<sup>7</sup> A link we can infer by way of Robert D. Richardson’s analysis of Emerson’s later, effusive and explicit remarks as per Goethe’s overall influence on his writings. See Richardson, *Emerson: The Mind on Fire*, 172



to writing,' he notes, and continues to assert the degree of care we need exercise so as to read away from the weight and stress of 'external' influence:<sup>8</sup>

When the mind is plastic there should be care as to its impressions. The new facts should come from nature, fresh, buoyant, inspiring, exact. Later in life, when there is less danger of imitating those traits of expression through which information has been receive, facts may be gleaned from a wider field.<sup>9</sup>

Arguing how we are to best combat the 'limestone condition' of a fixed intellectual position, as Emerson terms it, he repeats for Woodbury precisely the same directive he would pose to Fuller. 'Do your own quarrying,' he writes:<sup>10</sup>

Learn to divine books, to feel those that you want without wasting much time over them. Remember you must know only the excellent of all that has been presented. But often a chapter is enough. The glance reveals what the gaze obscures. [...] Learn how to tell from the beginning of the chapters and from glimpses of the sentences whether you need to read them entirely through.<sup>11</sup>

Gustaaf Van Cromphout argues this passage as key to our understanding the complexities of Emerson's engagements with criticism. Interested in what he would term 'tonic books' (a brand of philosophical self-help),<sup>12</sup> Emerson 'had scant respect for those he considers guilty of bibliolatry;'<sup>13</sup> the 'restorers of readings, the emendators, the bibliomaniacs of all degrees.'<sup>14</sup> He was interested in our ability to essay 'original thought' rather than 'copy or imitate,' and his conceptualization of our 'quarrying' through cultural matter is indicative of the *work* of critical engagement that he sought to champion.<sup>15</sup> As we have previously discussed, Emerson would dictate a 'sternly subordinated' role for the book as an entity;

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<sup>8</sup> Charles J. Woodbury, 'Counsels,' *Talks with Ralph Waldo Emerson* (New York, NY: Baker and Taylor, 1890), 24

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 24-25

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 25

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 27

<sup>12</sup> Emerson, 'Journal GH' (Undated, 1847), JMN.X., 167

<sup>13</sup> Gustaaf Van Cromphout, 'Literature,' *Emerson's Ethics* (Columbia, MO: The University of Missouri Press, 1999), 165

<sup>14</sup> Emerson, 'The American Scholar' (1837), CW.I., 89

<sup>15</sup> Cromphout, 'Literature,' *Emerson's Ethics*, 165

it is our capacity to render something tangible from the book that he was focused upon.<sup>16</sup> A book needed be considered of secondary significance to the forms of intellectual labour it enabled; and Emerson endeavoured to establish an ‘experiential critical discourse’ anchored in application and explicitly ‘anti-bookish’ in character.<sup>17</sup> But in his elicitation of a certain kind of ‘creative reading’—as we seen in the guidance he offers both Fuller and Woodbury—he espouses a form of critical ‘divination’ driven by feeling rather than fact. What comes to the fore here is the question of literature’s instrumental qualities; its ability to impact and effect daily life.

Emerson’s recommendation to both Fuller and Woodbury—that they need focus on the ‘creative’ qualities of a reading—is indicative of his efforts to practically facilitate his popular and aforementioned theoretical position that a ‘creative reading,’ as practice, must be of coeval importance of to the act of ‘creative writing.’ Despite the promise of a more ‘experiential’ critical discourse, Emerson’s ‘creative reading’ nonetheless holds implications that hit beyond the simple self-interest we can associate with the process of our educating our own critical eye through the offices of cultural engagement. That his position, again, depends upon the work of ‘others’ is key (as is his dependency on the resulting fruit of labour as a recurring metaphor), and the fact that his theories of creativity prove more reactionary than endogenous in character is also of significance.

In foregrounding the personal perspectivism of reading as practice, Emerson seems be considering the ways in which a ‘reading’ comports a form of property. A reading needs be considered something tangible; however, in considering a reading practice rather than the act of writing as his chief object of enquiry, Emerson opens up a struggle with immateriality, conceptually speaking: the simple fact that he needed retool the idea of interpretation to such an extent that a reading, an argument, could be considered an object of attention as valid as the work or idea that it engages. As I will argue, this is a direct result of economic disequilibrium in the late-1830s and affected by Emerson’s want to identify the intellectual outcomes of the panic of ’37. This anxiety, concerning the distinction between physical objects and

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<sup>16</sup> Emerson, ‘The American Scholar’ (1837), CW.I., 91

<sup>17</sup> Jeffrey Lawrence, ‘Hemispheric Literary Divides,’ *Anxieties of Experience: The Literatures of the Americas, from Whitman to Bolaño* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2018), 34-36

immaterial concepts, is notable and traffics through the major writings of his early period. In 'Experience' (1844), for example, Emerson explicitly laments his inability to corroborate immaterial concepts and material objects as 'graspable' entities. 'Property,' he notes—akin to 'reality'—'turns out to be scene-painting.' A concept of such 'lubricity' that it '[slips] through our fingers when we clutch the hardest.'<sup>18</sup>

If a work of literature is a coalescence of 'lubricious' concepts, and yet the act of authorship is regarded as a material craft (even a profession), the *work* of interpretation and critical agency needs be considered as a more concrete form of labour; a theory of 'manual labor,' as he would term it in 'Domestic Life.' The kinship between the 'builder' as a recurrent metaphor in Emerson's writings and his career-long concern for the social and personal implications of creative practice is anchored in such thinking; but, likewise, Emerson's interest in the aims, ambitions and efficacy of the 'American Scholar' should be considered a direct result of his engagement with 'property' as a concept. How intellectual property is 'created,' is 'built,' and how that property should then behave in a cultural or informational marketplace. As an industrial or institutional culture that seeks to plasticize, objectify or thingify concepts for the purposes of their communication, debate, acceptance and—ultimately—the dialectical progress of a culture, American 'scholarship' is a perfect forum to Emerson's mind; an arena designed to formalize various modes and methods of knowledge production and intellectual exchange. Emerson's desire to classify scholarship as itself a form of physical work is notable, as is his want to find parity between the symbolic virtues of 'manual labor' and the burgeoning 'revolution of opinion and practice' previously noted. However, the question remains, then, as to how Emerson's interest in 'market fever' would transmute into a response to the crisis of '37 and the effects of economic depression on literary practice.

The panic of '37 was treated as an intellectual opportunity more than it was a catalyst for social or political intervention on Emerson's part. As he would note in his journals, in the winter months of '37, 'I was born a seeing eye and not a helping hand,' and such remarks are indicative of the ways in which Emerson perceived social disturbances that would follow the crisis more as an intellectual problem rather than as underpinning a political or socioeconomic moment of difficulty.<sup>19</sup> But the commitment of

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<sup>18</sup> Emerson, 'Experience' (1844), CW.III., 49

<sup>19</sup> Emerson, 'Journal C' (May 14, 1837), JMN.V., 304

Emerson's self-confessed efforts to derive philosophical worth from this period depression are noteworthy.

Emerson's biographer Robert D. Richardson summarizes the contexts for this financial crisis as follows:

The supply of paper money had tripled in the United States between 1830 and 1837 as part of the general economic boom that had begun in 1825. Hoping to strengthen the central bank, President Jackson stipulated that all obligations to the United States be paid in specie. Overseas creditors made similar demands. Then the wheat crop failed in 1836 and the price of cotton fell as well. Bank after bank suspended payment. All the banks in Boston had suspended payment by May of 1837. Many failed outright. [...] Hard money was in very short supply.<sup>20</sup>

Robert Sampson usefully supplements Richardson's summary by synthesizing the panic's effects on labour:

The collapse of the inflationary and speculative boom of the 1830s coincided with the start of Martin Van Buren's administration. In New York City alone, six thousand construction artisans were thrown out of work. By September it was thought that nearly all of the East Coast's embryonic factories had closed. Clerks and salesmen in Philadelphia endured unemployment rates estimated at between one-half and two-thirds. Mothers begged in the streets of New York City for scraps to feed their children as poorhouses overflowed. Workers' wages dipped from one-third to one-fifth 1836 levels.<sup>21</sup>

Rather than pertinent to the development of Emerson's authorship alone, a trigger-point for his ongoing interest in public and private forms of value, the magnitude of this moment is often proposed as key to the intellectual development of antebellum culture more broadly.

Borrowing from Nicholas K. Bromell, Andrew Kopec suggests that the panic of '37 is best regarded as the era's first and broadest 'cultural contestation of the meaning of work.'<sup>22</sup> However, he also notes that

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<sup>20</sup> Robert D. Richardson, 'The American Scholar,' *Emerson: The Mind on Fire*, 260

<sup>21</sup> Robert D. Sampson, 'Founding the *Democratic Review*,' *John O'Sullivan and his Times* (Kent, OH: The Kent State University Press, 2003), 17

<sup>22</sup> Nicholas K. Bromell, 'Ain't that Work?,' *By the Sweat of the Brow: Literature and Labor in Antebellum America* (Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press, 1993), 1-15

Emerson was a key figure in directing this ‘contestation’ more specifically toward a conceptual reinvigoration of labour, and ‘scholarly labor in particular.’<sup>23</sup> Emerson saw the crisis as a pedagogical event and—as such—considered his own position on labour relative to the frailty of economic systems exposed by financial collapse. He understood that ‘the crisis affected labor,’ but also that ‘it seemed to be caused by labor as well,’ and believed ‘that Americans had misunderstood the nature of their work, indeed, they had construed labour as a material—rather than an ideal—process whereby they created saleable property.’<sup>24</sup>

However, Emerson nonetheless sought to envisage how we should define labour as concept, and cultural labour in particular, by considering the circulatory systems that, themselves essentially fictitious, served to decentralize power structures by establishing the merchant as a key political figure.<sup>25</sup> Emerson’s ‘scholar’ should be considered a parallel figure to Emerson’s ‘merchant,’ and ‘The American Scholar’ something of a manifesto for the ‘revolution of opinion and practice’ he sought to instigate. ‘The American Scholar’ was delivered in the immediate wake of the panic, August 1837; and Kopec argues the lecture as the first steps toward what he would term ‘Emerson’s political economic project’—an attempt to combat the errors and ills of fiscal speculation with ‘philosophical speculation.’<sup>26</sup> In order to characterize the progressive calibre of Emerson’s ‘project’ in its contexts, Kopec looks to the twenty-first century and the ways in which ‘a belief in critique’s social efficacy’ was sparked by the financial crisis of 2008,<sup>27</sup> a crisis that facilitated a ‘more dynamic account of how economics impinges on literary production’ and how ‘literary texts are capable of performing socially progressive work.’<sup>28</sup> Whilst the socioeconomic dislocation of twenty-first century financial crisis are not identical to those of the panic of ’37 in terms of cause nor scale, ‘Emerson had such critical ambitions,’ Kopec notes; he worked to overcome ‘the central problem of market economics’—namely, ‘scarcity’—and would do so by interlacing a theorization of labour and an ideation

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<sup>23</sup> Kopec, ‘Emerson, Labor and Ages of Turbulence,’ 251

<sup>24</sup> Andrew Kopec, ‘Emerson, Labor and Ages of Turbulence,’ 251-284

<sup>25</sup> Karl Polanyi, ‘The Self-Regulating Market and the Fictitious Commodities: Labor, Land, and Money,’ *The Great Transformation: The Political and Economic Origins of Our Time* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1944, 2001), 71-81

<sup>26</sup> Kopec, ‘Emerson, Labor and Ages of Turbulence,’ 261

<sup>27</sup> Frank Donoghue, ‘The Uneasy Relationship between Business and the Humanities,’ *American Academic*, 1. (2004), 93-109; and Christopher Lorenz, ‘If You’re so Smart, Why are You Under Surveillance? Universities, Neoliberalism and New Public Management,’ *Critical Inquiry* 38. 3 (2012), 599-629

<sup>28</sup> Kopec, ‘Emerson, Labor and Ages of Turbulence,’ 253

of creativity.<sup>29</sup> In short, the practice of meaning-making, of examining the ‘manifold allusions’ of a given page, should be read equally as a theory of economic productivity. As Randall Fuller has suggested, and as previously mentioned, the crisis of ‘37 should thus be argued as engendering a ‘conceptual shift’ in Emerson’s early works.<sup>30</sup> However, what proves crucial to this present study is that such a ‘conceptual shift’ is more than simply the product of any revisionist or historiographic ‘reconstruction’ of Emerson’s philosophical position (to again borrow Wolfe’s phrase for recent re-examination of Emerson’s philosophical and cultural merits). It is, as shown, self-consciously laced into Emerson’s own reflections on the panic itself.

Documenting the panic in his journals, Emerson would describe the event only to elucidate its philosophical and intellectual significance. Referring to the immediate cultural aftermath of the crisis, he would note that ‘[These] black times have a great scientific value,’ that ‘It is an epoch so critical a philosopher would not miss.’ ‘What was, ever since my memory, solid continent,’ he writes, ‘now yawns apart and discloses its composition and genesis. I learn geology the morning after an earthquake. [...] The artificial is rent from the eternal.’<sup>31</sup> As Harold Bloom has noted, the texture of Emerson’s language indicates that he would seemingly respond to the crisis of ‘37 with an ‘idealistic glee.’<sup>32</sup>

His comment on geology is more than an offhand aside, as such; it is a means with which to reticulate and organize Emerson’s thinking through an investigation of his use of metaphor. I will here concentrate briefly on Emerson’s interest in ‘geology’ in particular.

Emerson’s sensitivity to the economic dynamism of his era is particularly definitive but requires further explication. As Alexander Kern suggests, ‘the principles of correspondence, melioration, [and]

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<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 262

<sup>30</sup> Randall Fuller, in introduction to *Emerson’s Ghosts*, 6

<sup>31</sup> Emerson, ‘Journal C’ (May 14, 1837), JMN.V., 304

<sup>32</sup> ‘Emerson was electrified by financial storms,’ as Howard Bloom notes in an op-ed written for *The New York Times* in the wake of the collapse of the Lehmann brothers bank in 2008, and in the thick of an election campaign that would see Barack Obama first take office. ‘It may shock that the Sage of Concord should react to catastrophe with [...] idealistic glee,’ Bloom writes. ‘Emerson would have understood our current raging polarities; ‘That American cultural nationalism should have been stimulated by a banking disaster is a wholly Emersonian paradox.’ The crucial ‘enigma,’ for Bloom, ‘is the direct link between the lingering financial crisis and Emerson’s formulation of his mature, stance’ demonstrated in his theories of individuation.’ See Howard Bloom, ‘Out of Panic, Self-Reliance,’ *The New York Times*, October 11<sup>th</sup>, 2008.

<https://www.nytimes.com/2008/10/12/opinion/12bloom.html>

(Accessed 16.05.20)

individualism' that inform Emerson's philosophical position on culture and criticism can all be identified as underpinned by a receptivity and sensitivity to the 'economic structures' and systems in ascendance over the course of his early years. For Kern, the function of 'economy' in Emerson's works—if we are to explore how it pivotally informs his relationship with subjectivism as a philosophical position—can in fact counter the 'inconsistencies' that oftentimes disrupt a reading of Emerson today.<sup>33</sup>

However, the problem remains that Kern's argument remains elusive and, as Richard Grusin infers, has only bred further confusion as per the critical implications of Emerson's conceptualist engagements with commercial cultures. Grusin concedes the importance of 'economy' to Emerson's thinking, but argues that our assessment thereof (more often than not) results in a number of 'perhaps' statements, rather than any definitive position.<sup>34</sup> *Perhaps* Emerson's contribution to 'anthropology and economic theory is more widespread than has generally been understood,' he writes,<sup>35</sup> noting Emerson's brief cameo in Marcel Mauss's *Essai sur le don (The Gift, 1950)* as evidence.<sup>36</sup> But beyond our acknowledgment of a recurring pattern in Emerson's vocabulary ('debt,' 'expenditure,' 'credit,' 'reciprocity' and 'obligation' all recurring in his cache of topics and tropes), Grusin admits that Emerson's 'economic thought' remains so obtuse that all we can surmise from it is that, from 'the outset of his authorship,' he challenges us to 'repay him with interest.'<sup>37</sup>

Grusin's pun is evocative, as it incorporates Emerson's engagement with (and receptivity to) the sociocultural circumstances of his authorship and economic dynamism of his era into what (he proposes) has constituted and sustained Emerson's popularity and his philosophical appeal beyond the antebellum.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

<sup>34</sup> Kern, 'Emerson and Economics,' 680

<sup>35</sup> Grusin, 'Put God in Your Debt: Emerson's Economy of Expenditure,' 35

<sup>36</sup> Marcel Mauss, (trans.) W.D. Halls: 'The unreciprocated gift still makes the person who has accepted it inferior, particularly when it has been accepted with no thought of returning it. We are still in the field of Germanic morality when we recall the curious essay by Emerson entitled 'Gifts.' Charity is still wounding for him who has accepted it, and the whole tendency of our morality is to strive to do away with the unconscious and injurious patronage of the rich almsgiver.' *The Gift: The Form and Reason for Exchange in Archaic Societies* (London: Routledge, 2002), 83. See also Emerson, 'Gifts' (1844), CW.III., 157-166

<sup>37</sup> Grusin, 'Put God in your Debt: Emerson's Economy of Expenditure,' 44

<sup>38</sup> The popular press often occasions an effort to describe the progressive qualities of Emersonian thought and, at times, with significantly *less* difficulty than the conversation is warranted in academic circles. For example, for a good summary of the 'anticipatory' qualities, see Frederick Turner, 'Still Ahead of His Time,' *Smithsonian Magazine* (May 2003) <https://www.smithsonianmag.com/arts-culture/still-ahead-of-his-time-82186396/> (Accessed 30.04.20)

However, the specifics of our own 'interest' in Emerson often overlooks the systems and patterns in place within his authorship, as discussed, but also the explicit and clear minded assertion of the significance of economic systems to the early development of his thinking in the late 1830s.

Emerson's private sense that the financial crisis of 1837 is of 'scientific' or even 'philosophical' value is a key precedent to his later (and public) assertion that we need identify the 'meaning of economy' some four years later in 'Man the Reformer' (1841), and arguably underpins his eventual reestablishment of his theory of 'OTHERISM,' 1836, as a theory of 'COMMERCIAL VALUE,' 1845. However, his expression of a want to learn 'geology' from an 'earthquake' directly parallels his later identification of our need to wrest 'meaning from economy.' In 'History' (1841), Emerson notes that he 'knew a draughtsman employed in a public survey who found that he could not sketch the rocks until their geological structure was first explained to him.'<sup>39</sup> Emerson's interest in 'geology' is a want to identify the grounds and foundations of an American culture; however, following the panic of '37, he is explicit in his sense that we need understand how the 'geological structure' of a national identity is largely sculpted by the depth and pervasiveness of cultural event. Arguably, this contradicts Emerson's previously noted assertion that we need be wary of the gravitas of 'external cause' as capable of effecting the creativity and spontaneity of our own critical agency. However, it is of note that he should here so explicitly identify a want to examine the 'scientific value' of cultural trauma and consider the cultural impact thereof.

It is here, we could argue, that Emerson's interest in the intersection of literary culture and political economy is first and most astutely defined, but it is his fascination in the systems of circulation that would both provoke this 'earthquake' and emerge intact thereafter that I will concentrate on in the following two chapters. Emerson's interest in the circulation of money, and the introduction of a paper currency as a means of considering forms of social and personal signification is bound to an analysis of his economic history as a foundation for his analyses of the possibility of a national literary culture or scholarship. As we have seen, this is a quality of Emerson's thinking that previous critics have noted, but the contexts for Emerson's thinking are key.

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<sup>39</sup> Emerson, 'History' CW.II., 16



Marc Shell, for example, has argued that the Jacksonian ‘specie circular’ of 1836, pursuant to the Coinage Act, augured a significant pedagogical function in the development of an American culture of letters.<sup>40</sup> Read in partnership with rising literacy rates in the American North East, the introduction of the paper dollar instigated a complex relationship with value assignation as concept and signification as process amidst an increasingly literate American populace.<sup>41</sup> Due, in part, to the distinction between hard and soft currencies—between gold and paper—this cultural shift precedes the panic of 1837 but informs the kinds of questions that Emerson would pose in the wake thereof.<sup>42</sup> Shell refers to the Jackson administration’s assertion that land acquisition should be dealt with in hard rather than soft currency—in gold or silver rather than paper money—and suggests that this was a confusing accompaniment to the administration’s efforts to sufficiently introduce the country and culture to a new monetary system. Rather than expediting a general acceptance of the paper dollar, the ‘circular’ galvanized a public awareness of a distinction between forms of finance and proved effective primarily in its destabilization of a public sense of trust. The dollar became a code for the fictionality of financialist culture; the delicate and artificial value of paper money being foreshadowed by the hard and fast symbolic authority of gold or silver as signs and determiners of value. The introduction of the paper dollar, according to Shell, thus served to indicate the

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<sup>40</sup> Leon Jackson examines this statement through investigation the professionalization of authorship in antebellum America relative to the political support of the marketplace as both practicable economic system and ideological paradigm; see Leon Jackson, ‘From the Profession of Authorship to the Business of Letters,’ *The Business of Letters: Authorial Economies in Antebellum America* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2008), 9-53. Whilst Jackson’s assessment of the intercedence of cultural and market economics is one of the more thorough analyses of the evolution of American literature as industry and definable entity, Emerson’s exclusion from his array of case studies and enlisted commentators is noteworthy.

<sup>41</sup> Charles Sellers: ‘Wherever Yankees migrated [in the first decades of the nineteenth century] they outstripped natives in wealth and culture while pressing their example through multiplying churches, colleges, schools, libraries, and a new perceptual realm of mass literacy and cheap print. Voluntary associations spread rapidly across the North to promote missions and Sunday Schools, enforce morality and temperance, aid and uplift the poor, and maintain libraries and lyceum lecture series for cultural self-improvement. [...] By the 1840s an exfoliating cultural infrastructure and the powerful new medium of cheap print were carrying the American bourgeoisie to the most pervasive hegemony of any modern ruling class. [...] The cutting edge of the market’s cultural conquest was a surge of literacy and schooling. Ever since alphabetic writing set off a cultural revolution in Greece, literacy has fostered an analytical individualism that separated educated elites for two millennia from oral majorities attuned to communal memory. Literacy began to slowly widen only with the emergence of the printing press, bourgeoisie and Protestantism in early modern Europe. Colonial literacy seems to have extended little beyond elites, except among Bible-reading male Yankees and self-making Ben Franklins in centers of trade.’ See ‘The Bourgeois Republic,’ *The Market Revolution*, 364-365

<sup>42</sup> See Jackson, ‘From the Profession of Authorship to the Business of Letters,’ 49. Jackson would look to both the impact of the crisis on a public engagement with literature, but also in terms of the ways in which publishers would remunerate their authors.

degree of invention and faith involved in financial systems.<sup>43</sup> As a form that was liable to depreciate in value relative to the gold reserves elsewhere held that it was designed to signify, the dollar has thus been argued as codifying a certain kind of a nervousness amidst the American populace.<sup>44</sup> Whilst questions as per the value and validity of paper money were raised in the popular press, it also introduced fraud as a tripartite cultural predicament. Counterfeiting, notes Shell, was held to be as much an epistemological problem as it was both a legalistic and political concern.<sup>45</sup> The excessive speculation of land following the Indian Removal Act of 1830 brought with it an increasingly widespread counterfeit culture, and impacted public opinion as per the degree of trust that could be allotted federal, fiscal measures.<sup>46</sup>

Rather than consider the economic and cultural effects of the introduction of paper money to the American territories, Shell therefore proposes that it was the widespread circulation of fraudulent bills that served to sophisticate and enlighten an American readership. Foregrounding an awareness of the artificial construction of value; the discrete distance between an object and its signification; and the importance of circulation as a means of distilling both cultural and economic fortitude, the circulation of the paper dollar also drew attention to regionalized economic disequilibrium; the difference between an urban and rural working class; and—in essence—a disparity between personal need and public welfare.

Emerson was alert to the complex intellectual difficulties that accompanied America's early

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<sup>43</sup> Emerson would remark specifically on this in 'The Transcendentalist,' wherein he would note that 'the sturdy capitalist,' sits all their faith and enterprise in a system beyond their control; in so doing, they serve as a symbol of precisely that system: 'no matter how deep and square on blocks of Quincy granite he lays the foundations of his banking-house or Exchange, [the capitalist] must set it, at last, not on a cube corresponding to the angles of his structure, but on a mass of unknown materials and solidity, red-hot or white-hot perhaps at the core, which rounds off to an almost perfect sphericity, and lies floating in soft air, and goes spinning away, dragging bank and banker with it at a rate of thousands of miles the hour, he knows not whither,—a bit of bullet, now glimmering, now darkling through a small cubic space on the edge of an unimaginable pit of emptiness. And this wild balloon, in which his whole venture is embarked, is a just symbol of his whole state and faculty.' See 'The Transcendentalist' (1844), CW.I., 331-332

<sup>44</sup> Jonathan A. Glickstein, 'The Pauper Labor of the Old World, Free Labor, and Gresham's Law,' *American Exceptionalism, American Anxiety: Wages, Competition and Degraded Labor in the Antebellum United States* (Charlottesville, VA: University of Virginia Press, 2002), 183-210

<sup>45</sup> Marc Shell, 'The Gold Bug: Introduction to the Industry of Letters in America,' *Money, Language and Thought*, 5-24.; see also, Richard H. Timberlake, 'The Specie Circular and Sales of Public Lands: A Comment,' *The Journal of Economic History*, 25.3. (1965), 414-416.; and Richard H. Timberlake, 'The Specie Circular and the Distribution of the Surplus,' *Journal of Political Economy*, 68.2. (1960), 109-117

<sup>46</sup> David R. Johnson: 'According to the *New York Times*, nearly 80% of all bank notes in circulation in 1862 were counterfeit.' See 'The Social World of Counterfeiting,' *Illegal Tender: Counterfeiting and the Secret Service in Nineteenth-Century America* (Washington, DC: Smithsonian, 1995), 37

relationship with the dollar, and the ways in which this paper media affected Americans on both a personal and public level are keenly detailed in his later writings. If we look to ‘Wealth,’ for example, his somewhat wary relationship with inflation and value is explicit; the ways in which a single dollar accrues value in different contexts enabling a specific form of American atomism. As Emerson notes, ‘The value of a dollar is social,’<sup>47</sup> but equally that ‘all depends upon the skill of the spender.’<sup>48</sup> In short, Emerson’s argument is that ‘Money is of no value,’ that only an examination of its contexts and circulation could deem it as *of* value, and that such an argument needed to contend the coeval significance of both an active self and a participatory social economy for the ‘value of a dollar’ to be considered as of any worth whatsoever, just as a ‘building’ requires a ‘builder,’ to again borrow Emerson’s image once again.

It is this difficult correlation of self and state that Emerson details in ‘Wealth.’ How does a singular economic system accommodate the sheer diversity of labour forms that it depends upon to exist in the first place? Emerson’s response is partly to signal the ways in which a ‘dollar’ means different things in different places. First, he considers this idea relative to a consideration of labour as a determiner of value. ‘The farmer’s dollar is heavy, and the clerk’s is light and nimble,’ he writes, it ‘leaps out of his pocket; jumps on to cards and faro-tables: but still more curious is its susceptibility to metaphysical changes. It is the finest barometer of social storms and announces revolutions.’<sup>49</sup> However, rather than explaining his meaning nor the ‘metaphysical’ changes that cleave to the itinerant dollar—and considering the relationship between ‘revolution,’ ‘social storms’ and financial systems—Emerson explicitly notes that it is ‘civil advancement’ that ‘makes every man’s dollar worth more.’<sup>50</sup> However, it is not only the contexts of labour and expenditure that effect the public and private resonances of his dollar; Emerson also turns his attention to the breadth of America’s geography. The circulation of a single ‘dollar’ through a diverse and disparate number of territories, both urban and rural, both inflates and depreciates its worth.<sup>51</sup> ‘In California, the country where [the dollar] grew, —what would it buy? A few years since, it would buy a shanty, dysentery,

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<sup>47</sup> Emerson, ‘Wealth’ (1850), CW.VI., 104

<sup>48</sup> Emerson, ‘The Young American’ (1844), CW.I., 383

<sup>49</sup> Emerson, ‘Wealth’ (1860), CW. VI., 102

<sup>50</sup> Ibid.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid.

hunger, bad company and crime,' he notes; 'There are wide countries, like Siberia, where it would buy little else to-day than some petty mitigation of suffering. In Rome, it will buy beauty and magnificence.'<sup>52</sup> 'A dollar in a university is worth more than a dollar in a jail [...].'<sup>53</sup> This problem—the simple fact that inflation would stretch and narrow the purchasing power of a dollar dependent upon where his 'spender' happened to be situated—can only find resolution if an industrialization of American infrastructure could meet the growing demands of a burgeoning market economy. Looking to his own native Massachusetts, Emerson notes in 1860 that 'Forty years ago, a dollar would not buy much in Boston.' 'Now,' he suggests, 'it will buy a great deal more in our old town, thanks to railroads, telegraphs, steamers and the contemporaneous growth of New York and the whole country.'<sup>54</sup> The growth of America's economy serves to support the universal value of the dollar; just as a broader acceptance of the dollar's value will support the industrial enhancement of American culture.

Whilst this analysis of material wealth and the dollar value of goods amalgams Emerson's ideas of 'public welfare' with a general faith in the private sector as he would note in 'The Young American,' in 'Wealth' he continues to detail the ways in which the 'dollar' has both 'moral' and 'mental' significance as a symbol. 'A dollar is not value,' he writes, 'but representative of value, and, at last, of moral values. Wealth is mental; wealth is moral.'<sup>55</sup> Here, Emerson returns to his sense that the dynamism of America's economic expansion is of both 'scientific' and 'philosophical' value; that it informs the behavioural or 'moral' engagement that we should have with the world *and* it informs a 'revolution' of both 'opinion and practice.' 'The whole value of the dime is in knowing what to do with it,' he notes; 'One man buys with it a land-title of an Indian, and makes his posterity princes; or buys corn enough to feed the world; or pen, ink, and paper, or a painter's brush, by which he can communicate himself to the human race as if he were fire; and the other buys barley candy.'<sup>56</sup>

Emerson's assessment of the purchasing power of the dollar (in both moral, mental and material

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<sup>52</sup> Ibid., 102-103

<sup>53</sup> Ibid., 103

<sup>54</sup> Ibid., 102-103

<sup>55</sup> Ibid., 102

<sup>56</sup> Emerson, 'The Young American' (1844), CW.I., 383

terms), is enhanced by his reflections on counterfeit culture as well. Echoing Shell's appraisal of an American sensitivity to fraud as key to the progress of an antebellum literary culture, he notes that 'the Bank-Note detector is a useful publication'—'but the current dollar, silver or paper, is itself the detector of the right and wrong where it circulates.'<sup>57</sup>

If a trader refuses to sell his vote, or adheres to some odious right, he makes so much more equity in Massachusetts; and every acre in the state is worth more, in the hour of his action. If you take out of State Street the ten honestest merchants and put in ten roguish persons controlling the same amount of capital, the rates of insurance will indicate it; the soundness of banks will show it; the highways will be less secure; the schools will feel it; the children will bring home their little dose of poison; the judge will sit less firmly on the bench, and his decisions be less upright; he has lost so much support and constraint, which all need; and the pulpit will betray it, in a laxer rule of life.<sup>58</sup>

This correlation of the 'control of capital,' and its potential misuse, is accentuated by Emerson through another botanical metaphor in 'The Young American'—one that bears a crucial resemblance to 'Nature' in terms of its emphasis on relation, use and value:

An apple-tree, if you take out every day for a number of days a load of loam and put in a load of sand about its roots, will find out. An apple-tree is a stupid kind of creature, but if this treatment be pursued for a short time, I think it would begin to mistrust something.<sup>59</sup>

In this somewhat heavy-handed allusion—the idea that the growth of capital is equivalent to the living growth of a fruiting tree—'the value of a dollar is social,' but it is also markedly sculpted by society (just as an orchard must be tended to function efficiently). Rather than by an individualized acceptance of its 'representative' value alone, both social and labour contexts effect the facilitation of value.<sup>60</sup> However, such

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<sup>57</sup> Ibid., 103-104

<sup>58</sup> Ibid.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid., 104

ideas of growth and of mind, in Emerson's hands, not only pertain to the organic character of capital; they also impact his early theorizations of language, critical agency, and intellectual property.

In this passage from 'Nature,' for example—and the chapter on 'Language' in particular—Emerson reflects on the ways in which an ecosystem or language 'economy' needs be grounded in truth and in fact. The metaphor that he chooses to illustrate the difficulties and potential failures of this linguistic aim is nonetheless, once again, the potential 'perversion' of a paper currency:

The corruption of man is followed by the corruption of language. When simplicity of character and the sovereignty of ideas is broken up by the prevalence of secondary desires,—the desire of riches, of pleasure, of power, and of praise,—and duplicity and falsehood take place of simplicity and truth, the power over nature as an interpreter of the will is in a degree lost; new imagery ceases to be created, and old words are perverted to stand for things which are not; a paper currency is employed, when there is no bullion in the vaults. In due time the fraud is manifest, and words lose all power to stimulate the understanding or the affections. Hundreds of writers may be found in every long-civilized nation who for a short time believe and make others believe that they see and utter truths, who do not of themselves clothe one thought in its natural garment, but who feed unconsciously on the language created by the primary writers of the country, those, namely, who hold primarily on nature.<sup>61</sup>

Rather than simply a testament to the economic anxiety that Shell alludes to, the connection between language, meaning, and currency is here explicitly about the potential schism between sign and signifier, between falsehood and truth. We can insert this into the wider discourse employed in Emerson's early and later works on value and labour as concepts, but here, the malleability of a 'paper currency' is key. The consistency of Emerson's interest in circulation, and political economy more broadly, is not merely about the recycling of materials between his private journals, addresses and essays. It is about establishing a theory of critical value concomitant with the economic evolution of an independent American culture. For

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<sup>61</sup> Emerson, 'Nature' (1836), CW.I., 29-30

Emerson, in other words, the ability to render language without corruption, to interrogate the ‘sovereignty of ideas’ is not all that dissimilar to the wider circulation of capital. Once again, the financialist and the writer occupy the same marketplace, one in which the centrality of the dollar cannot be circumvented. In ‘Wealth,’ a single dollar has the value to subvert and disrupt the moral values of a society; in ‘Nature,’ a fraudulent word ‘perverted to stand for things with are not,’ is a false dollar: a paper bill that circulates ‘when there is no bullion in the vaults.’ These impressions argue a correlation and consistency of approach in Emerson’s writings that correlates his early writings, 1836, with his later and more explicit reflections on the development of market cultures, 1860.

To return to the ‘apple tree’ as a metaphor in ‘Wealth,’ the recurrence of both fruit and the fruiting tree as a favoured metaphor for consumption and critical relation is significant. As we have already touched upon, the fruiting tree functions as a symbol of fundamental importance to Emerson’s characterization of the mechanics of both critical and commercial culture. Consider his remarks in ‘Uses of Great Men’—his characterization of ‘mind’ as ‘endogenous,’ an organic object that aims to feed off external stimuli only to bud and produce. We’ve also his emphatic relation of the ‘apple’ and the ‘I’ in ‘Thoughts on Modern Literature’ (‘What is the apple to me?’); and his assessment of the commercial viability of the windfall peach that we can follow through the evolution of Emerson’s ‘OTHERISM’ and the later repetition of materials in ‘Wealth.’ As in his ruminations on the corruption of language that occurs once it is distanced from the origin of whatever metaphor it employs, so too is the fruit of labour when it is distanced from the site of production and taken (proverbially) to market. ‘Take the peaches from under the tree,’ he writes. Emerson’s interest in ‘Commerce’ as ‘a single fruit’ on the boughs of Leroux’s tree is, likewise, dependent upon the proper care to support its further cultivation and fruition.

That the aims and ambitions of our stewardship of the natural world is so popularly associated with Emerson’s early writings (Emerson famously enumerating the ‘medicinal’ qualities of time spent away from the demands of professional and urban life) is ironic, considering his want to consider both the tree’s relationship with its environment and the market potential of its produce: the fruits of labour.<sup>62</sup> Both the

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<sup>62</sup> Emerson: To the body and mind which have been cramped by noxious work or company, nature is medicinal and restores their tone. The tradesman, attorney comes out of the din and craft of the street and sees the sky and the woods and is a man

tree, its capacity to produce, and its fruit are seemingly preferred symbols for Emerson to consider the relationship between cultural production and critical consumption, as well as a way to identify the metonymy of market participation in general. The fruit is representative of the tree's growth; its growth is contingent on the purity of the soil; the fruit is thus emblematic of both the tree and the ecosystem that would produce it. In an oft-cited journal entry, 1840, he would note this process of thought in passing: 'I dreamed that I floated at will in the great Ether,' he writes, 'and I saw this world floating also not far off but diminished to the size of an apple. Then an angel took it in his hand and brought it to me and said, *This must thou eat*. And I ate the world.'<sup>63</sup> Here, we've an evocative rephrasing of Emerson's dollar bill dialectics, as they could be termed. The 'spender' is a metonym for the culture of expenditure that they participate in; the dollar bill both vitiates the 'spender' as a subject *and* the social system that affords their activity value; the 'spender' is representative of the social system that they partake in; and that system requires a multitude of isolated 'spenders' to remain coherent.

Among the many readings of this 'provocative dream,' of Emerson's desire to 'eat the world,' Eric Wilson suggests 'that Emerson revises Genesis in light of his celebration of nature—not scripture—as the locus for revelation.' The 'visionary' of Emerson's dream 'would eat from the tree of knowledge of good and evil and report his findings; only to better identify the causal interrelation of all and any such findings.'<sup>64</sup> Wilson also notes that such thinking underpins the conceptual attractiveness of 'economy' to Emerson. 'In the economy of the world [...] I can find no traces of a beginning, no prospect of an end,' Emerson writes, 1838.<sup>65</sup> In sum, whether we examine the 'spender' or the economic systems that supports their activity, the interrelation between them is circular and cyclical as both figures will always be symbolically and conceptually co-dependent.

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again.' See 'Nature' (1836), CW.I., 16. Richard Grusin argues Emerson's position here as key to the establishment and development of the American National Parks system and—comparing Emerson's position with architect and journalist Frederick Olmsted's efforts to further support the 'medicalization of that antebellum axiom, the sanative influence of natural scenery.' See Richard Grusin, 'Reproducing Yosemite: Olmsted, Environmentalism, and the Nature of Aesthetic Agency,' *Cultural Studies*, 12.3. (1998), 332-359

<sup>63</sup> Emerson, 'Journal F2' (Undated, 1840), JMN.VII., 525

<sup>64</sup> Eric Wilson, 'Poetry Realized in Nature,' and 'Sublime Science,' *Emerson's Sublime Science* (London: Macmillan, 1999), 1-17; 17-50

<sup>65</sup> Emerson, 'Humanity of Science' (1838), EL.II., 31-32



Returning to Emerson's evocative wording in his reflection on the ideological and analytical value of financial crisis, 'I learn geology the morning after an earthquake,' this referral to economy as a system in constant evolution and movement (with 'no traces of a beginning, no prospect of an end) appears in the midst of a conceptual paean to 'geology' more broadly; a discipline that Emerson regarded as though 'a book of Genesis, wherein we read how the worlds were made, and are introduced to periods as portentous as the distances of the sky.'<sup>66</sup> Emerson's reflections on the symbolic value of 'geology' are anchored in his reading of Charles Lyell's *Principles of Geology* (1833) and James Hutton's theories of the formation of coal that he likely appropriated from Playfair's *Illustrations of the Huttonian Theory of the Earth* (1802).<sup>67</sup> By aligning 'geology' and 'economy', the development of America's own history of 'political economy' emerges as Emerson's own 'Genesis' moment; an indication of the 'conceptual shift' that Randall Fuller identifies in Emerson's writings following the panic of '37.

How we are to best define Emerson's interest in 'economy' is the subject of a self-conscious and searching critical scrutiny in his writings. However, the ideas behind Emerson's use of the term, and his predilection that 'the Transcendent is economy also,' appear unequivocally bound to his efforts to consider our relationship with the exchange and ownership of ideas, the assignation of critical value, and an identification of the link between sign and signified.<sup>68</sup> Etymologically speaking, Emerson's thinking both mirrors and extends the lexical development of American English and the definition of the term 'economy' as can be localized to the early nineteenth century. Noah Webster, in 1828, collated the first dictionary of American English and, seeking to crystalize 'the meaning of economy' himself, insisted that the personal ramifications of 'economy' take premiership over and above its extension into the social domain of political economy.

**ECONOMY**, *n.* 1. *Primarily, the management, regulation and government of a family or the concerns of a household.* 2. *The management of pecuniary concerns or the expenditure of money.* 3. *A frugal or judicious use of money [...] and of time, of labor,*

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<sup>66</sup> Ibid., 32

<sup>67</sup> Wilson, 'Sublime Science,' *Emerson's Sublime Science*, 38

<sup>68</sup> Emerson, 'Journal D' (Undated, 1839), JMN.VII., 259

*and of the instruments of labor. 4. The disposition or arrangement of any work; as the economy of a poem. 5. A system of rules, regulations, rites and ceremonies [...]. 6. The regular operations of nature in the generation, nutrition and preservation of animals or plants; as animal economy; vegetable economy. 7. Distribution or due order of things.*<sup>69</sup>

Here, the word ‘economy’ first or ‘primarily’ refers to the management and organization of self and household—of society in miniature (as in ‘Domestic Life’)—ahead of its inferential shift to the fiscal structures that govern wider society; the ‘distribution’ or ‘due order of things’ (as in ‘Wealth’). Emerson’s own definition echoes Webster’s succinctly if we are to consider his sense of the representative value of ‘petty economy.’ ‘The interest of petty economy is this symbolization of the great economy,’ he notes in ‘Wealth’; ‘the way in which a house, a private man’s methods, tally with the solar system, and the laws of give and take, throughout nature.’<sup>70</sup>

Emerson’s thinking, relative to the historic contexts of the panic of 1837, are suggestive as per the prospective politics of his position. Keen to note the possibility that the panic could instigate a moment of collective action or revolution, Emerson is alert to the possibility that the panic of ‘37 is an instance capable of facilitating a radical overhaul of society’s economic and political management. He would note that the sixty thousand plus labourers ‘to be presently thrown out of work’ should form a radical collective. That they are best represented as ‘a formidable mob’ and should stand ready ‘to break open banks, rob the rich and brave the domestic government.’<sup>71</sup> But rather than consider how these ‘black times’ effect the realities of financial disequilibrium, or indeed the possibility of revolution, Emerson was more alert to the intellectual effects and cultural potential of this period of economic downturn.

It is of note, as such, that his epoch was largely defined by such ‘black times.’ In an early publication of the National Bureau of Economic Research on the growth and stability of the post-revolutionary period, Wesley Mitchell identifies fourteen depressions between 1790 and 1870 (1796-98, 1803, 1808-9, 1815-21, 1829, 1834, 1837, 1839-43, 1846, 1848, 1854-55, 1857-58, 1861 and 1866-67); and Joseph Fichtelberg suggests that, even if some of these downturns proved too brief to be considered genuine depressions by

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<sup>69</sup> Noah Webster, *An American Dictionary of the English Language* (New York, NY: S. Converse, 1828)

<sup>70</sup> Emerson, ‘Wealth’ (1860), CW.VI., 106

<sup>71</sup> Emerson, ‘Journal C,’ (Undated, 1837), JMN.V., 308

our contemporary standards, nineteenth-century American society experienced six ‘deep depressions’ before 1870 that would profoundly affect both material growth and cultural progress. Nevertheless, the cultural effects of the panics of 1819, 1837 and 1857 were particularly far-reaching,<sup>72</sup> and if we consider the major dates of Emerson’s authorship—with his first publication dated 1822, and his last, 1875—the fault lines of his period can therefore be unequivocally argued as largely defined by a cyclical process of downturn, depression, recovery and downturn again.<sup>73</sup> Resultingly, Emerson was alert to the spirit of ‘competition’ wrought by market economics; ‘We live in a market, where is only so much wheat, or wool, or land,’ he would note in ‘Uses of Great Men,’ ‘and if I have so much more, then every other must have so much less.’<sup>74</sup> But the ways in which he conceptualizes ‘competition’—and considers the practical terms of scarcity and want and supply—portrays a more complicated cultural evocation of market-based practices and ideologies than one might assume, and speaks to later critical reflection on the correlation of critical and commercial trends. ‘The power of the market is the power of public evaluation,’ as André Orléan has remarked; and from this perspective, we can go so far as to say that it is a power of opinion.<sup>75</sup> Orléan’s aside is antedated by Emerson’s supposition that the development of market cultures constitutes a ‘revolution in opinion and practice.’ But ‘exchange,’ as Georg Simmel has observed, ‘is the sociological phenomenon *sui generis*’ that demands further exploration in any analysis of market systems.<sup>76</sup> The power of the market informs public opinion, but proves contingent on private engagement, and Simmel’s assertion echoes Emerson’s position in a variety of ways; a system of expenditure requires a ‘spender,’ a building requires a ‘builder,’ a text requires a ‘creative reader,’ but all these figures contribute toward a broader ideological ‘superstructure,’ to borrow Emerson’s own phrase: in sum, a view of the market as a romance of participation.

Examining the co-dependency of individual and collective forms of economy, Christopher

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<sup>72</sup> Joseph Fichtelberg, ‘Legends of the Fall,’ *Critical Fictions: Sentiment & the American Market, 1780-1870* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 2003), 11

<sup>73</sup> For the best annotated account of Emerson’s chronology and bibliography, see Albert von Frank, *An Emerson Chronology*, 2 Vols. (Boston, MA: G.K. Hall, 1994)

<sup>74</sup> Emerson, ‘Uses of Great Men’ (1850), CW.IV., 22

<sup>75</sup> André Orléan, (tr.) M.B. DeBevoise, ‘Liquidity and Speculation,’ *The Empire of Value: A New Foundation for Economics* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2014), 224

<sup>76</sup> George Simmel, cited by Orléan, *Ibid.*, 4

Newfield notes there is sufficient evidence to evince the claim that Emerson was more interested in contractility than he was property; in our ‘spiritualist adherence’ to the contractual obligations of exchange culture rather than the material exchange of goods or ideas itself. Newfield suggests that Emerson would repeatedly highlight the prospective connection of a singular mind to an ‘othered, or private, or otherwise inaccessible corporate [body],’ an idea that he puts forwards with no mention of Emerson’s ‘OTHERISM,’ and instead focuses on how Emerson sought to facilitate an ‘understanding of agency as a participatory and collective activity.’<sup>77</sup> In this way, the privilege afforded to the individual mind can co-exist with that mind’s freedom being reliant on a social body as well. In this context, a ‘book’ can be an effective vessel for our economic being and the instrumental qualities of literary culture in an industrial or commercial milieu. As has been shown, Emerson’s interest in our ‘use of literature,’<sup>78</sup> our ‘use of books,’<sup>79</sup> becomes a way to repeatedly analyse and romanticize forms of economic participation and contractual correlation, the constancy of his emphasis on ‘use,’ a way to assess how individual freedom and social conciliation can be symbolically traced in the relationship between a reader and a writer.<sup>80</sup> This has not uncommonly led to the association of his cultural philosophies with the development of laissez-faire economic systems and ideologies in antebellum culture, and Emerson repeatedly seems keen to explore the possibility of culture as an intellectual and ideological beneficiary of these ‘black times,’ portraying critical exchange as simply another kind of corporatism, but one distanced from the dynamics of downturn and recovery.<sup>81</sup>

Emerson’s sense of the intellectual significance of economic depression—pooled with his realization of the frailty of paper currencies—are two vital, co-dependent elements of his self-reflexive cultural analysis; both his investigation of culture *and* his investigation of that investigation itself. However, the etiological impact of economic growth and collapse can also be directly linked to Emerson’s development of a ‘creative reading.’ Look to ‘The Poet’ (1844), for example, wherein Emerson explores the ‘use of emblems’ as instruments of public office.<sup>82</sup>

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<sup>77</sup> Ibid., 39

<sup>78</sup> Emerson, ‘Circles’ (1841), CW.II., 312

<sup>79</sup> Emerson, ‘Nominalist and Realist,’ CW.III., 233

<sup>80</sup> Gilmore, ‘Mechanical Means,’ 247

<sup>81</sup> Christopher Newfield, ‘Emerson’s Corporate Individualism,’ 684

<sup>82</sup> Emerson, ‘The Poet’ (1844), CW.II., 16

The schools of poets and philosophers are not more intoxicated with their symbols than the populace with theirs. In our political parties, compute the power of badges and emblems. See the great ball which they roll from Baltimore to Bunker Hill! In the political processions, Lowell goes in a loom, and Lynn in a shoe, and Salem in a ship. Witness the cider-barrel, the log-cabin, the hickory-stick, the palmetto, and all the cognizances of party. See the power of national emblems. Some stars, lilies, leopards, a crescent, a lion, an eagle, or other figure which came into credit God knows how, on an old rag of bunting, blowing in the wind on a fort at the ends of the earth, shall make the blood tingle under the rudest or the most conventional exterior.<sup>83</sup>

The aesthetics of political power are indicative of a symbolic language in American culture—‘the power of emblems and badges’—and Emerson argues that our capacity to read these symbols is the practice of both self-identification and an identification of authority. ‘The schools of poets and philosophers are not more intoxicated with their symbols than the populace with theirs,’ he writes, and ‘our political parties’ are no different. The act of recognition is a creative act, an act of reading that acknowledges both political power as composed through symbols; and a realization of political participation is delineated through a realization of our ability to understand said symbols. Such thinking arguably underpins Emerson’s theory of ‘creative reading,’ and if we are to regard ‘The American Scholar’ as itself a product of financial crisis (as would Kopec, amongst others), that such a position on the legibility of culture should emerge out of a period of financial collapse indeed indicates the radicality of Emerson’s engagement with scholarship and political economy.

Emerson’s initial reactions to the poverty indentured by the panic of ’37 were staunchly idealistic but—equally—unrealistic. Rather than a demonstration of Emerson’s political engagement, his theorizations of value in the late 1830s and early 1840s indicate his distance from the inexorable poverty that would follow the panic of ’37. Emerson’s own finances were left relatively unscathed by the collapse. He would note in 1838 that his estate would include domestic property, \$22,000 worth of stocks, and an income from his public appearances in the range of \$400 to \$800 a year. In short, his security was assured whilst the gulf between rich and poor—landowner and the labourer—exponentially broadened in the New

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<sup>83</sup> Ibid., 16-17

England area.<sup>84</sup> As Cary Wolfe notes, the year preceding Emerson's delivery of 'The American Scholar' was unquestionably the 'worst' in the country's economic history to date. Thousands had rioted in New York, protesting inflated prices for food, writes Wolfe; the city's flour warehouses were raided; cotton had depreciated in value by one-half; public land sale in the West had decreased by 82%. Although financial collapse had wholly diminished the extension of banking systems outwards from New York, 'the depression left the Massachusetts and the Boston Banks relatively unscathed, which allowed [Emerson] to coolly investigate the meaning of the panic from a safe economic distance.'<sup>85</sup> This is notable in the somewhat detached critical disposition and rhetorical flair of Emerson's reflections on the 'loud cracks in the social edifice' engineered by the crisis of '37, but also speaks to the ideological volume of his reactions to financial collapse.<sup>86</sup> 'Hard times,' writes Emerson, documenting the view from his study window; 'men breaking who ought not to break; banks bullied into the bolstering of desperate speculators; all the newspapers a chorus of owls.'<sup>87</sup>

For Emerson, this historic moment had exposed 'the ridiculous fiction of a society governed by economic law [...] for the delusion he always knew it to be, and he took no small satisfaction in such revelation.'<sup>88</sup> However, these 'hard times' are arguably key to our contextually corroborating the form and content of Emerson's early essays, as has been noted by a number of recent critics. Considering the ways in which he would foreground the importance of interpretative agency, self-determinacy and independence in his early works, it seems an easy intellectual leap to allege that such ideas are the result of the collapse of a system so reliant upon collective participation, cultures of exchange, and a hierarchical class system that Emerson would compare to the 'feudalist' organization of British Colonial Rule. But these direct and political allegations are relatively few, and this period of depression and disequilibrium both stylistically and conceptually impacts Emerson's 'experimental' authorship more acutely than it would inform the

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<sup>84</sup> William Charvat, 'American Romanticism and the Depression of 1837,' in (ed.) M.J. Bruccoli, *The Profession of Authorship in America, 1800-1870; The William Charvat Papers* (Columbus, OH: Ohio State University Press, 1968), 58

<sup>85</sup> Cary Wolfe, 'Critiques of Capitalist Production,' *The Limits of American Literary Ideology in Pound and Emerson* (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 41

<sup>86</sup> Emerson, 'Journal C' (May 14, 1837), JMN.V., 304

<sup>87</sup> Emerson, 'Journal C' (April 22<sup>nd</sup>, 1837), Ibid.

<sup>88</sup> Wolfe, 'Critiques of Capitalist Production,' *The Limits of American Literary Ideology*, 42

partisan persuasions of his politics.<sup>89</sup>

Considering the weight of his socioeconomic conditions and their influence upon his aesthetic philosophy—and the period of collapse, recovery and economic expansion that would parallel the ascendance of Emerson’s popularity—Carolyn Porter locates in Emerson’s economic and historic moment as ‘a set of geographical, social, and political conditions which were to foster a relatively, even uniquely, unimpeded capitalist expansion.’<sup>90</sup> It was a period that cultivated a ‘rapidly accelerated’ process of ‘atomization and alienation’ in America that presages the ‘European, and modernist, fact,’ notes Porter; and Emerson’s astute awareness of the ways in which a period of depression would inform the cultural and ideological progress of the 1800s should be registered.<sup>91</sup> Wolfe agrees and, in *The Limits of American Literary Ideology* (1993)—a text that explores the comparability of Emersonian and Poundian ‘newness’ by correlating Modernist and Transcendentalist tropes—alleges that ‘the standard features usually associated with Modernism (anomie, subjectivism, and so on)’ are anticipated in the literature of the antebellum American North East ‘because the economic conditions of modernity are anticipated there as well.’<sup>92</sup>

Michael Gilmore would take Porter and Wolfe’s arguments a step further. Considering the rapid cultural reification of ‘American Romanticism’ in a late nineteenth century culture of letters and the ‘retreat into unintelligibility’ exemplified by the avant-garde habits of the movement’s key practitioners (he numbers Emerson, Hawthorne, Melville and Thoreau as particularly indicative exemplars), Gilmore argues that what first appears a deliberate ‘estrangement from the market system’ in the works of this period behaves, in end, as a question of literary culture’s complicity in its expansion. ‘The power of the market’ is elucidated by virtue of a need to clearly characterize precisely the economic systems they deigned to attack.<sup>93</sup> As Cornel West notes, this logic particularly troubles our receipt of Emerson’s writings today.

Emersonian notions of ‘power, provocation and personality in the context of academic culture’ are—as we have seen—unarguably underpinned by an interest in ‘capitalist industrialization’ and the

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<sup>89</sup> Smith, ‘Representative Emersons: Versions of American Identity,’ 160

<sup>90</sup> Carolyn Porter, in introduction to *Seeing and Being: The Plight of the Participant Observer in Emerson, James, Adams & Faulkner* (Middletown, CN: Wesleyan University Press, 1981), 19

<sup>91</sup> Wolfe, ‘Critiques of Capitalist (Literary) Production,’ *The Limits of American Literary Ideology*, 40

<sup>92</sup> Ibid.

<sup>93</sup> Gilmore, in his ‘Afterword’ to *American Romanticism and the Marketplace*, 150-153

‘national consolidation’ of a ‘market’ culture as something greater than merely a theory of economic productivity; it is a means of organizing and disseminating commercial produce, on the one hand, but also the traffic and trade of ideas.<sup>94</sup> In some respects, this is an attribute of Emerson’s historical specificity. The overall cultural effect of America’s movement ‘from agrarian to urban industrialization, from vocational education to professional training, and from entrepreneurial capitalism to monopoly capitalism’ not only forging ‘new circumstances and challenges’ for Emerson’s authorship, but also for our interpretation of ‘Emersonian discourse’ (with the benefit of hindsight and historical retrospect kept in mind).<sup>95</sup> But whilst West would argue that the ascent and development of capitalist culture influences how we read Emerson, the form and function of Emerson’s own engagement with political economy remains unclear as his inconsistent relationship with capitalist culture troubles our capacity to cleanly type Emerson as either protesting or participating in the hegemonic expansion of a market culture.

To better elucidate the confused character of Emerson’s early works, West also cites the significance of the financial panic and subsequent depression of 1837 as key to the development of Emerson’s political consciousness. ‘The depression of 1837 not only adversely affected Emerson’s personal fortunes,’ he writes, but also impacted upon his otherwise ‘complacent’ worldview.<sup>96</sup> It was both a practical and theoretical crisis; an awakening from ‘slumber.’<sup>97</sup> To depict America’s emerging capitalist ‘edifice’ in Emerson’s own words is to represent a position that would, at first glance, avail an anti-market sensibility. Characterizing the marketplace as a socio-symbolic ‘system of selfishness, [...] of distrust, of concealment, of superior keenness, not of giving but of taking advantage,’<sup>98</sup> Emerson would declare that ‘out of doors all seems a market;’<sup>99</sup> that ‘Trade is the lord of the world nowadays,’ and exact the idea of ‘government as only a parachute to this balloon.’<sup>100</sup> Less the ‘seer of *laissez-faire* capitalism,’ that Daniel Aaron would

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<sup>94</sup> West, ‘Emerson as Organic Intellectual,’ *The American Evasion of Philosophy*, 35

<sup>95</sup> Ibid.

<sup>96</sup> Ibid., 27

<sup>97</sup> Emerson, ‘Journal C,’ (Undated, 1837), JMN.V., 304

<sup>98</sup> Emerson, ‘Man the Reformer’ (1841), CW.I., 147

<sup>99</sup> Emerson, ‘The Young American’ (1844), CW.I., 239

<sup>100</sup> Emerson, ‘Journal TU’ (Undated, 1849), JMN.XI., 135



recognize in Emerson,<sup>101</sup> ‘than a critic of the marketplace’ for whom nature,<sup>102</sup> regarded solely as a commodity, ‘is debased, as if one looking at the ocean can remember only the price of fish,’ here Emerson himself appears to contradict his initial and tendentious response to the panic, and—accordingly—his politics are difficult to define.<sup>103</sup>

Regardless of these evocative assertions and insistences as per ‘the danger of commerce,’ West, as would Newfield, argues that it is thus the variety of Emerson’s interest in market exchange that is crucial. ‘Unlike reification in capitalist exchange relations that objectify and thingify persons,’ West writes, ‘the aim of Emersonian provocation is to subjectify and humanize unique individuals’ and to address the morality of proprietorship rather than the mores and mechanisms of the marketplace.<sup>104</sup> In so doing, ‘Emerson projects a conception of self that can be easily appropriated by market culture for its own perpetuation and reproduction.’<sup>105</sup> Jeffrey Sklansky agrees, and argues that Emerson seemed attuned to the ways in which cultures of proprietorship, contractual obligation and forms of commercial exchange were proving to transform the collectivist structure and ambition of an identificative American culture. For Sklansky, Emerson’s conceptualization of literary agency is contingent on the twinship between spontaneity and proprietorship; ‘property, like beauty, was in the eye of the beholder, not the deed of the proprietor’ to Emerson’s mind.<sup>106</sup> Emerson was more interested in the acquisitive, intellectual and spiritual components of property than he was the bureaucratic offices of contract culture,<sup>107</sup> and Emerson can be argued as chiefly concerned with elucidating the economic impact on a cultural ‘psyche’ borne by economic disturbances than he was the bureaucratic ‘sovereignty’ of property itself.<sup>108</sup>

However, his thinking is arguably more complex than either West or Sklansky allow for; and, once again, it is ‘Wealth’ that appears to offer a compound response to such readings. Writing in his journals, 1850, Emerson would return to his analysis of the ‘scientific’ and ‘philosophical’ value of economic fallout

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<sup>101</sup> Aaron, ‘Emerson and the Progressive tradition,’ 85-99; 93-94

<sup>102</sup> Gilmore, in introduction to *American Romanticism and the Marketplace*, 19

<sup>103</sup> Emerson, ‘The Method of Nature’ (1841), CW.I., 131

<sup>104</sup> West, ‘Emerson as Organic Intellectual,’ *The American Evasion of Philosophy*, 27

<sup>105</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>106</sup> Sklansky, ‘Transcendental Psychology,’ *The Soul’s Economy*, 43

<sup>107</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>108</sup> *Ibid.*, 39.

as he considers the possibility of his establishment of a conclusive position on ‘political economy.’ Referring to a number of ideas that would eventually find publication in ‘Wealth,’ Emerson notes the following in his private papers, an apparent allusion to the authorship of that essay:

I thought last night that the right Conclusion of my Chapter on polit. Economy is the statement that the merchant is right—infinately right; —all his rules are the laws of the Universe, and there only needs a liberal expounding of them. He is a reduced copy, —you must give us a new draught of the size of life. The Merchant’s economy is a coarse symbol, but a faithful one of the soul’s economy. It is to spend for power & not for pleasure, it is to invest all its income(s), that is to say, to take up particulars into generals, days into integral eras—literary, emotive, practical...<sup>109</sup>

The editors of the Harvard publication of Emerson’s journals and miscellany note that the next ‘leaf’ is torn out, but Emerson’s satisfaction with his conclusions can be postulated as large swathes of this material would traffic verbatim into his published work:<sup>110</sup>

All things ascend, and the royal rule of economy is that it should ascend also, or, whatever we do must always have a higher aim. Thus, it is a maxim that money is another kind of blood, *Pecunia alter sanguis*: or, the estate of a man is only a larger kind of body and admits of regimen analogous to his bodily circulations. So there is no maxim of the merchant which does not admit of an extended sense, *e. g.*, “Best use of money is to pay debts;” “Every business by itself;” “Best time is present time;” “The right investment is in tools of your trade;” and the like. The counting-room maxims liberally expounded are laws of the universe. The merchant’s economy is a coarse symbol of the soul’s economy. It is to spend for power and not for pleasure. It is to invest income; that is to say, to take up particulars into generals; days into integral eras—literary, emotive, practical—of its life, and still to ascend in its investment. The merchant has but one rule, *absorb and invest*; he is to be capitalist; the scraps and filings must be gathered back into the crucible; the gas and smoke

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<sup>109</sup> Emerson, ‘Journal BO’ (Undated, 1850), JMN.XI., 312-313

<sup>110</sup> *Ibid.*, 313

must be burned, and earnings must not go to increase expense, but to capital again.<sup>111</sup>

Appropriating Rabelais (who would first declare that '*Pecunia est alter sanguis*'), 'The royal rule of economy' is the 'capitalist' process of 'absorption' and 'investment' to Emerson's mind. To absorb an idea only to invest again and return that idea, now transformed, 'to capital again.'<sup>112</sup> He parallels the 'bodily circulations' of an individual, the circulation of blood, as akin to a 'larger kind of [social] body'—a position that again foregrounds the work of the 'builder,' 'spender' and 'reader' in Emerson's works and their collective aim to 'take up particulars into generals.' To contribute to the facilitation of a social superstructure.

Such a position reinforces West's sense of the comparability of Emerson and Marx's work. Furthermore, Emerson's wording curiously parallels a summary position that Marx would stake as characterizing his own philosophical inquiry into the form, function and intimations of political economy as discipline. 'The reader who wishes to follow me at all must resolve to climb from the particular up to the general,' Marx would write in preface to his *Critique of Political Economy* (1859).<sup>113</sup> This idea will prove significant to the following chapter. I will remain with Emerson's historical contexts—and investigate the ways in which both Emerson and his recent readers have regarded his period as 'revolutionary' in scope—but will look particularly to the institutionalization and industrialization of literary culture as alluded to by Emerson in his reference to the progress of a 'silent revolution.' The coalescence of literary and market cultures will again be foregrounded, and I will consider the pertinence of Emerson's 'revolution in opinion and practice' as a means of considering the industrialization and technologization of literary culture in adjacency to his early writings and conceptualizations of labour.

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<sup>111</sup> Emerson, 'Wealth' (1860), CW.VI., 125-126

<sup>112</sup> François Rabelais, (tr.) D. M. Frame, 'The Third Book of the Heroic Deeds and Sayings of the Good Pantagruel,' *The Complete Works of François Rabelais* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1999), 386

<sup>113</sup> Karl Marx, as cited by V.R. Smith, in 'Marx's Social Ontology and Contemporary Social Economics., in (ed.) J. Cunningham Wood, *Karl Marx's Economics: Critical Assessments* (New York, NY: Routledge, 1993), 30

**ii.ii.**

**Revolutions in Relation: Contextualizing Emerson's 'Silent Revolution,' 1815-1850**

*It is easy to see that a greater self-reliance must work a revolution in all the offices and relations men; their modes of living; their association; in their property; in their speculative views.*

**RALPH WALDO EMERSON**

'Self-Reliance' (1841)<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Emerson, 'Self-Reliance' (1841), CW.II., 77

Under the heading ‘SKEPTICAL’ in a private notebook, titled ‘Literature,’ Emerson would remark that ‘We must not inquire too curiously into the absolute value of literature.’ It is ‘Enough,’ he writes, ‘that it amuses and exercises us.’<sup>2</sup> Here, Emerson dismisses the cultural significance of literature in order to assert a parity between the ‘resources of a statesman, of a socialist, of a scholar.’<sup>3</sup> Arguing an ‘equivalence’ between these characters as indicative of the intellectual consequences of commercialism and trade, his remarks on American industrialization in the late ‘Progress of Culture’ (1875) summarize his position on labour as seen in earlier works:

In this country the prodigious mass of work that must be done has either made new divisions of labor or created professions. Consider, at this time, what variety of issues, of enterprises public and private, what genius of science, what of administration, what of practical skill, what masters, each in his province, the railroad, the telegraph, the mines, the inland and marine explorations, the novel and powerful philanthropies, as well as agriculture, the foreign trade, the home trade (whose circuits in this country are as spacious as the foreign), manufactures, the very inventions, all on a national scale too, have evoked!—all implying the appearance of gifted men, the rapid addition to our society of a class of true nobles, by which the self-respect of each town and state is enriched.<sup>4</sup>

This chapter will concentrate on the ‘enterprises public and private’ that inform Emerson’s conceptualizations of literary culture. As seen above, Emerson’s interest in ‘practical skill’ is enhanced by technological and industrial developments, allowing him to add literary culture to his itinerary of powerful ‘circuits’—‘the railroad, the telegraph, the mines, the inland and marine explorations, the novel and powerful philanthropies, as well as agriculture, the foreign trade, the home trade.’ I will explore how the technological enhancement of print and publication cultures fed Emerson’s analysis of the cultural effects of economic circuitry and impacted his conceptualizations of critical agency more broadly.

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<sup>2</sup> Emerson, ‘Books’ (1870), CW.VII., n. 1, 189

<sup>3</sup> Emerson, ‘Progress of Culture’ (1875), CW.VIII., 210, 213

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 210

Shifting our attention from the beginnings of Emerson's career to the late address 'The Man of Letters' (1863), we see Emerson return to a number of the ideas he would raise in his analysis of the aims and ambitions of 'American Scholarship' in the late 1830s.<sup>5</sup> Retrospectively summarizing the economic contexts of the last three decades, he remarks that 'The country was full of activity, with its wheat, coal, iron, cotton; the wealth of the globe was here, too much work and not men enough to do it. Britain, France, Germany, Scandinavia sent millions of laborers; still the need was more. Every kind of skill was in demand, and the bribe came to men of intellectual culture.'<sup>6</sup> 'Come, drudge in our mill,' was the key maxim that underwrote mass migration to America's shores, Emerson notes.<sup>7</sup> But the disparity he acknowledges as between forms of material and immaterial labour—between cultural progress and material providence—dominates his response to the industrial revolution of his era.

Speaking of the cultural sway of the gold rush at mid-century, Emerson notes that 'America at large exhibited such a confusion as California showed in 1849, when the cry of gold was first raised.'<sup>8</sup>

All the distinctions of profession and habit ended at the mines. All the world took off their coats and worked in shirtsleeves. Lawyers went and came with pick and wheelbarrow; doctors of medicine turned teamsters; stray clergymen kept the bar in saloons; professors of colleges sold cigars, mince-pies, matches, and so on. It is the perpetual tendency of wealth to draw on the spiritual class, not in this coarse way, but in plausible and covert ways. It is charged that all vigorous nations, except our own, have balanced their labor by mental activity, and especially by the imagination, —the cardinal human power, the angel of earnest and believing ages.<sup>9</sup>

The priority afforded certain forms of labour over and above 'the cardinal human power' would trouble Emerson consistently. It is as apparent in his comments on the social impact of financial crisis in the 1830s as it is here, in his efforts to reassert the significance of criticism as an institution whilst America was

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<sup>5</sup> Emerson, 'The Man of Letters' (1863), CW.X., 240-258

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 242

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 243

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

proving again economically transfigured by another ‘earthquake,’ to borrow his phrase, the outbreak of Civil War. Although Emerson does propose the war as itself a demanding moment in America’s biography (he anecdotally draws on the Napoleonic wars as a means of distinguishing the significance of the ongoing war to America’s cultural identity), he nonetheless again turns his attentions to the cultural significance of scholarship and the character of scholarly work in a moment of stark, social exigency. A scholar should evade political evangelicalism, he notes (‘A scholar defending the cause of slavery, of arbitrary government, of monopoly, of the oppressor, is a traitor to his profession’);<sup>10</sup> a scholar should evade political influence (‘The fears and agitations of men who watch the markets, the crops, the plenty or scarcity of money, or other superficial events, are not for him’).<sup>11</sup> And yet the scholar does serve distinct political purpose in Emerson’s argument: ‘The scholar is bound to stand for all the virtues and all the liberties,—liberty of trade, liberty of the press, liberty of religion,—and he should open all the prizes of success and all the roads of Nature to free competition.’<sup>12</sup>

That this triptych of concerns should underwrite his interest in scholarship—and so succinctly ally his interest in the freedom of interpretative agency with the ‘free competition’ of the marketplace—provides an evocative means with which to reconsider the kind of work Emerson seems deem his ‘American Scholar’ should be undertaking. Detailing a failure to correlate the practical and ideological dimensions of ‘labor’ in America, he argues that ‘The fault lies with the educated class, the men of study and thought.’<sup>13</sup> It is ‘Thought makes us men,’ he writes; thought that ‘ranks us;’ thought that ‘distributes society;’ thought that ‘distributes the work of the world.’<sup>14</sup> In sum, the management and control of a cultural or informational economy is as important as any stewardship of the country’s economic and industrial progress. As will be shown, it is Emerson’s interest in ‘distribution’ that proves particularly instrumental as he strives to define the ideological dimensions of labour.

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 247

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 254

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 252

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.



From Stanley Elkins' 'intellectual without responsibilities' and Carlos Baker's 'eccentric' to Taylor Stoehr's 'nay-sayer,' academic characterizations of Emerson have drawn a compelling portrait of their 'teacher' as an isolated individual 'whose philosophical idealism ensured at best a tangential relationship to the work-a-day world of Jacksonian America.'<sup>15</sup> In part, this is due to the tendency towards abstraction in Emerson's writings. 'From the tenets of sincerity and self-reliance' to 'advice from novels and courtesy books,' Emerson's 'ambivalence' and abstractions allowed Bostonians to react to a 'range of gentlemanly standards whilst political conflicts festered' outside the Lyceum's windows.<sup>16</sup> According to Charles Capper, this type of self-awareness and self-centeredness can indeed be located in Emerson's writings. If we look to either his 'antebellum wildflowers' or the 'more manicured landscape of the postbellum years,' Emerson is ever a tiller of 'self-conscious soil,' writes Capper.<sup>17</sup>

Capper's disparaging reading of Emerson's self-interest is largely anchored in his analysis of Emerson's later work, and 'Historic Notes of Life and Letters in New England' (1867) in particular. In 'Historic Notes,' an essay largely written in fragments and delivered in a patchwork lecture some thirteen years later, Emerson argues the central motif of his age as that of the 'self-conscious individual.'<sup>18</sup> Reflecting on his authorship, he claims that 'The key to the period appeared to be that the mind had become aware of itself. [...] This perception is a sword such as was never drawn before it detaches bone and marrow, soul and body, yea, almost the man from himself. It is the age of severance, of dissociation, of freedom, of analysis, of detachment.'<sup>19</sup> Emerson's professionalism (his self-consciousness of his own celebrity) is an interesting extension of his own thinking as per the powers of the 'first person;' his awareness of his

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<sup>15</sup> Peter S. Field, 'The Transformation of Genius into Practical Power: Ralph Waldo Emerson and the Public Lecture,' *Journal of the Early Republic* (2001), 469. See also Stanley Elkins, *Slavery: A Problem in American Institutional and Intellectual Life* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1959); Taylor Stoehr, *Naysaying in Concord: Emerson, Alcott, and Thoreau* (Hamden, CT, Archon Books, 1979)

<sup>16</sup> Katherine Wolff, *Boston's Culture Club: The Curious History of the Boston Athenaeum*, (Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Press, 2009), 11; 118

<sup>17</sup> Charles Capper, 'A Little Beyond: The Problem of the Transcendentalist Movement in American History,' *The Journal of American History*, 85.2. (1998), 505

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>19</sup> Emerson, 'Historic Notes of Life and Letters in New England' (1867), CW.X., 326

increasing authority of voice after some thirty years on the public stage.<sup>20</sup> But given the predominance of his efforts to scaffold an enquiry as per our best ‘use of literature,’<sup>21</sup> and his simultaneous condemnation of our ‘preposterous use of books,’ Emerson’s receptivity to the ways in which the literary field was increasingly marked by technologization, industrialization and marketization also demands further investigation.<sup>22</sup>

That Emerson should propose that literary culture should be side-lined and, instead, superseded by a broader interest in the industrial and commercial mechanisms of antebellum societal and industrial expansion is key to his conceptualization of interpretative agency and practical interest in our ‘use’ of culture. It signals his sensitivity to the industrialization of the cultural sphere and its subjection to distinct economic systems. In ‘Self-Reliance’ (1841), he would famously note that the particular brand of self-determinacy he was calling for could facilitate ‘a revolution in all the offices and relations of men; in their religion; in their education; in their pursuits; their modes of living; their association; in their property; in their speculative views.’<sup>23</sup> Interestingly, such a position is not underpinned by Emerson’s interest in instrumentality and ‘use’ alone, but also how the dissemination of ideas—the circulation of literary matter—could transform cultural behaviours. In this chapter, I will explore how academics have articulated various forms of ‘revolution’ as affecting Emerson’s era, before looking to the ways in which Emerson’s own expressed interest in market systems prove extensive to his metacritical engagements with interpretative and critical agency. I will examine Emerson’s ‘silent revolution’—his ‘revolution of opinion and practice’—relative to the expansion of the American book trade; the professionalization of the American publisher; and the introduction of new technological modes of production. In ‘The Method of Nature’ (1841), Emerson affords ‘manual labor’ or ‘mechanical craft’ a purpose beyond the products manufactured: ‘I look on trade and every mechanical craft as education also’, Emerson writes.<sup>24</sup> Keen to

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<sup>20</sup> For a particularly interesting account of Emerson’s canny professionalism (including analyses of royalty payments and estate management), see Joel Myerson, ‘Money,’ in (ed.) Wesley Mott, *Emerson in Context* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 213-221

<sup>21</sup> Emerson, ‘Circles’ (1841), CW.II., 312

<sup>22</sup> Emerson, ‘Spiritual Laws’ (1841), CW.II., 164

<sup>23</sup> Emerson, ‘Self-Reliance’ (1841), CW.I., 77

<sup>24</sup> Emerson, ‘The Method of Nature’ (1841), CW.I., 192

establish work as a reticulated or networked domain rather than a strictly hierarchical schema, it is Emerson's interest in 'political economy' that allows us to unpick how such a domain might operate. Whilst Emerson would argue that 'economy' is 'transcendent,' 1839, two years later, he would refine his position to encompass a more practical instruction in 'Man the Reformer' (1841): 'a man should have [...] a mechanical craft for his culture' as 'a basis for higher accomplishment.'<sup>25</sup> Emerson's interest in economy appears to corroborate a want to consider the conceptual interrelation of workers in America rather than their estrangement or alienation either in terms of class, pecuniary wealth, or the social importance (or cultural stigma) as may be attached to any particular form of work. Still, it is in his merging of these fields of inquiry—of labour and economy—that allows Emerson's poetics attain a significant political context. In fact, Emerson's poetics are particularly marked by labour cultures, the industrialization of the literary sphere, and the ascent of an American culture of print and publication.

As Richard Brown claims, by the time of Jefferson's first presidential administration, 1801, even conservative Federalists were trying to figure the possibility of an all-inclusive 'republic of letters [where], as every man has some influence, it is very natural he should use what he has to recommend his own notions of government.' It was 'the right of all men to debate and chat about political principles, to build castles in the air, or governments on paper [...] and to shed in ink discussing speculative points at their leisure.'<sup>26</sup> Such a philosophy was employed to drive down the price of the daily newspaper so as to exponentially broaden an American readership. The idea of foregrounding availability and access in order to increase participation was argued repeatedly by early nineteenth-century commentaries. See William Manning, for example—a farmer of Billerica, Massachusetts—who, considering the rising cost of printed matter, would envisage the general audience in America as the general labourer and insist that print cultures need work to the terms, interest and needs of such an audience. It is the 'common farmer & laborer that

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<sup>25</sup> Emerson: 'The doctrine of the manual labor of society ought to be shared among all the members, there are reasons proper to no person. A man should have a farm or a mechanical craft for his culture. We must have a basis for our higher accomplishments, our delicate entertainments of poetry and philosophy, in the work of our hands. [...] Manual labor is the study of the external word.' See 'Man the Reformer' (1841), CW.I., 234

<sup>26</sup> Anonymous, 'Editorial: For the Palladium,' *New England Palladium*, (Boston, MA), November 2<sup>nd</sup>, 1804. Cited by Richard D. Brown in 'The Revolution's Legacy for the History of the Book,' *A History of the Book in America: An Extensive Republic; Print, Culture and Society in the New Nation, 1790-1840* (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press; The American Antiquarian Society, 2010), 67

are the most interested in the measures of the times,' he writes; it is the common work that needs 'git any information from them,' and thus the cultural significance of contemporary political movements and current affairs cannot be characterized by virtue of 'the expense of the time & money they cost.'<sup>27</sup> As was the case for the daily news, the American audience for political writing had also grown in the first decades of the 1800s. Breaching 'traditional social boundaries,' the widened participation of peoples involved in this cultural conversation constituted a codification of civic membership.<sup>28</sup> But rather than simply constituting an evolution in cultural feeling, this print culture was contingent on the advent and introduction of new print technologies in the American North East.

A revolution in cultural mechanization, a 'revolution in relation,' new print mechanisms were expediting the growth of an American cultural voice and fast becoming a self-conscious characteristic of the 1830s and 1840s. The introduction of the cylinder rotary press, for example, 'made for a dramatic increase in the productive power of American publishing,' writes Richard Teichgraeber.<sup>29</sup> An American publishing industry was both indentured and transformed by virtue of the introduction of such new technological mechanisms, and the widening of an American readership as a result of these technological developments proves significant. Where we previously had a parlour activity for the wealthier classes, we now have a major industry evolving to cater to 'the demands of a new mass reading public';<sup>30</sup> 'the partial and noisy readers of the hour,' as Emerson disparagingly terms them.<sup>31</sup> These technologies were accompanied by the enlargement of an increasingly complex schemata of copyright laws that saw local networks of oral communication extended and expanded upon by the potential reach of new print cultures.<sup>32</sup> As Teichgraeber suggests, the broadening ambitions of an American literature can be argued as

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<sup>27</sup> William Manning 'The Key of Liberty,' in (ed.) S.E. Morison, *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3.13 (1956), 205-206, 232, 247-254. Cited by Brown in 'The Revolution's Legacy for the History of the Book,' Ibid.

<sup>28</sup> Michael Warner, in introduction to *The Letters of the Republic: Publication and the Public Sphere in Eighteenth-Century America* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1990), 12

<sup>29</sup> Richard F. Teichgraeber, *Sublime Thoughts/Penny Wisdom: Situating Emerson and Thoreau in the America*, xiii.; 158

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., 163

<sup>31</sup> Emerson: 'There is no luck in literary reputation. They who make up the final verdict upon every book are not the partial and noisy readers of the hour when it appears, but a court as of angels, a public not to be bribed, not to be entreated and not to be overawed, decides upon every man's title to fame. Only those books come down which deserve to last. Gilt edges, vellum and morocco, and presentation-copies to all the libraries will not preserve a book in circulation beyond its intrinsic date.' See 'Spiritual Laws' (1841), CW.II., 154

<sup>32</sup> Teichgraeber, *Sublime Thoughts/Penny Wisdom*, xiii

unequivocally linked to the technological sophistication of print cultures and technologies over the course of the antebellum.

Between 1815 and 1850, a glut of printed information in newspapers, magazines and books became the essential means of mass communication and an increasingly dominant source of cultural activity.<sup>33</sup> In sum, while production for the market had been widespread since the political revolution of 1776, during the antebellum period the term ‘market’ came to characterize ‘a greater range of activities than ever before in American history.’<sup>34</sup> Emerson was particularly sensitive to this ‘politics of print,’ to borrow a phrase from Meredith McGill. Cultures of reprinting—and new systems established to support the dissemination of literary materials—provided a means by which a ‘centralization of American culture was forestalled,’<sup>35</sup> and the expansion of trade networks wrought by the introduction of new publishing houses and paper cultures facilitated a dynamic economy of ‘things’ and ‘thoughts’ that, in their circulation, would champion a further decentralization of power. Cultural commerce, the movement of ideas and images from place to place, became as important a means of working towards a common culture as the relation of state and federal offices of government.

The chronology of Emerson’s publications roughly runs from 1836 to 1850,<sup>36</sup> and this historical phase crudely mirrors the period that Meredith McGill has argued as America’s ‘print revolution,’ 1834 to

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<sup>33</sup> Ibid. Such thinking has also been argued as key to Emerson’s involvement in the establishment of *The Atlantic Monthly*. A ‘mission statement’ published in the first issue of *The Atlantic*, in the late winter months of 1857, would frame such an aim succinctly. The founders of the periodical disavowed prejudice, writes Annika Neklason, and promised to ‘be the organ of no party or clique,’ and to pursue morality and truth no matter where they stemmed from or led to. They sought too to advance American writing and the ‘American idea’ wherever ‘the English tongue is spoken or read;’ ‘a reflection of Emerson’s desire for a national intellectual identity that could transcend the country’s institutions and borders.’ Emerson’s magazine work can be read as a reaction to his general contempt for the popular press; Emerson would name and number ‘the measles, the influenza, and the magazine’ as the three scourges afflicting literary Boston in the early 1850s.

See Annika Neklason, ‘Ralph Waldo Emerson’s American Idea,’ *The Atlantic*, November 2019.

<<https://www.theatlantic.com/ideas/archive/2019/11/the-atlantic-and-ralph-waldo-emersons-american-idea/602689/>> (Accessed, 03.01.2020); and Ralph Waldo Emerson, as cited by Jessie Roberts in ‘A Magazine is Born,’ *The Atlantic* (August 2007) <<https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2007/08/a-magazine-is-born/306164/>> (Accessed 03.01.2020).

<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

<sup>35</sup> Meredith L. McGill, ‘The Matter of the Text,’ *American Literature and the Culture of Reprinting: 1834-1853*, 13-14

<sup>36</sup> A range of dates I cite as it frames the publication of Emerson’s most widely read essays writings: his debut publication ‘Nature,’ published in 1836; his *First Series* essays, 1841; second series, 1844; and the collection *Representative Men*, 1850. Emerson would continue to publish and lecture into the 1870s, however. The *Daily Alta California* would publish an account of his final lecture, 18<sup>th</sup> May 1871. See USR Centre for Bibliographic Studies, *The California Digital Newspaper Collection*: <<https://cdnc.ucr.edu/cgi-bin/cdnc?a=d&d=DAC18710518.2.9&e=-----en--20--1--txt-txIN-----1>>

(Accessed 03.05.2019)

1853,<sup>37</sup> broadly paralleling the period that Teichgraeber proposes as so significant to the development of an American cultural voice, 1815 to 1850.<sup>38</sup> During this timeframe, McGill argues that a clear link exists between ‘conceptions of literary property’ and theories of ‘American cultural production’ unequivocally related to the availability of such technologies as the rotary press.<sup>39</sup> She suggests that, ‘in this period, legal and political resistance to tightening controls over intellectual property produced a literary marketplace suffused with unauthorized publications’ and the implications of this surfeit of pirated literary matter is indicative of a cultural effort to support and sophisticate the idea of an American ‘reader’ in tandem with attempts to bolster the cultural prestige of an American publisher (as opposed to the inalienable value of an author).

Emerson was observant of such developments; interested popular and populist cultures both, he was particularly invested in the ways in which an increased access to cultural matter could support the development of culture as a form of soft, political power. For Emerson, *high literature* should be ‘as available as the newspaper’—arguing that ‘the power of the newspaper is familiar in America, and in accordance with [the country’s] political system’—and he would accordingly and explicitly celebrate the work of the ‘cheap press’ and American publishing house as ardently as he would either the author or poet in his enumeration of America’s burgeoning literary culture.<sup>40</sup> For example, he would explicitly celebrate Bohn’s Library; a press that—to his mind—‘have done for [American] literature what railroads have done for internal intercourse,’<sup>41</sup> transforming literary culture into an industrial resource, a new, ‘national’ cultural

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<sup>37</sup> See McGill’s *American Literature and the Culture of Reprinting, 1834-1853*. Particularly of note are subchapters ‘Dissemination and the State,’ 58-63., and ‘Maintaining Decentralization: Reprinting and the Syncopation of the National Imaginary,’ 102-109., wherein McGill details the ways in which Federal policy and democratic ideals infiltrated a view of the necessary management of a literary marketplace and, axiomatically requiring a conceptual participation of “readers” in this culture of consumption, proved to develop literary culture as analogous for the health of American democracy ideologically, intellectually and economically speaking.

<sup>38</sup> Teichgraeber, *Sublime Thoughts/Penny Wisdom*, xiii

<sup>39</sup> McGill, ‘The Matter of the Text,’ *American Literature and the Culture of Reprinting*, 1. See also, Michael Winship, ‘The Transatlantic Book Trade and Anglo-American Literary Culture in the Nineteenth Century,’ in (ed.) S. Fink, S. Williams, *Reciprocal Influences: Literary Production, Distribution and Consumption in American* (Columbus, OH: Ohio State University Press, 199), 98-122

<sup>40</sup> See Emerson, ‘The Times’ (1856), CW.V., 261.; and Emerson, ‘Plato, or the Philosopher’ (1850), CW.IV., 53

<sup>41</sup> Emerson, ‘Books’ (1870), CW.VII., 196

institution.<sup>42</sup> Publishing houses like Bohn's are 'like the new railroad from ocean to ocean,' Emerson notes, highlighting the forms of communication and connectivity afforded the general public by the book trade.<sup>43</sup> However, McGill's claim that American literary culture during the antebellum was chiefly supported by the circulation of 'unauthorized' or pirated materials requires a little more unpacking.

The mass-market for literature in America was 'built and sustained by the publication of cheap reprints of foreign books and periodicals,' and 'the primary vehicles were uncopyrighted newspapers and magazines.'<sup>44</sup> Rather than any kind of literary landgrab, this was a cultural trend facilitated by congressional support that would herald far-reaching implications in the development of an antebellum culture of letters. 'Although we have come to think of the classic works of mid-nineteenth-century American authors as national property, these texts emerged from a culture that was regional in articulation and transnational in scope.'<sup>45</sup> Essentially, cultural copyright was dogeared by Congress not only as a means of establishing internal mechanisms for cultural communication between American citizens, but also to better consider how this new American would self-represent to the rest of the world.

As such, the first decades of the nineteenth century would witness the establishment and enhancement of a technologized communication network 'as complex and sophisticated to its participants as ours is to us.'<sup>46</sup> As Stacy Margolis notes:

Social networks are old; network theory is new. At least this is what we've been told in countless recent books that link the emergence of network theory to the rise of the digital age. Instant and global electronic connections not only have transformed our ability to form and manage groups, create new social ties, and foment political change, but these theorists maintain, have fostered

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<sup>42</sup> In an obituary for Henry George Bohn (1796-1884), the periodical *The Bookseller* would refer to him as 'the bookseller of the nineteenth century' (4<sup>th</sup> September 1884), and *Book Monthly* (April 1904) would commend Bohn's legacy, considering all he had achieved in the provision of a 'literature for all the masses' in America. See Brian Louis Pearce, 'Henry George Bohn: The Bookseller,' *RSA Journal*, 140.5434. (1992), 788-790. Robert D. Richardson notes the importance of books carried in Bohn's library to the preparation of the *Representative Men* lectures for publication in the late 1840s. See Robert D. Richardson, 'The Science of Liberty,' *Emerson: The Mind on Fire*, 467

<sup>43</sup> Emerson, 'Books' (1870), CW.VII., 203-205

<sup>44</sup> McGill, 'The Matter of the Text,' *American Literature and the Culture of Reprinting*, 1

<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

<sup>46</sup> Robert Darnton, 'An Early Information Society: News and the Media in Eighteenth-Century Paris,' *American Historical Review*, 105.1 (2000), 1-35

new interest in figuring out exactly how such networks function. According to Duncan J. Watts, [...] “the science of networks” emerged in response to a newfound sense of global connection: “Surprised by the meteoric rise of the internet, stung by a series of financial crises from Asia to Latin America, and stunned by ethnic violence and terrorism from Africa to New York, the world has learned the hard way that it is connected in a manner few people had anticipated and no one understood.”<sup>47</sup>

Whilst Margolis finds an echo in the international political and economic circumstances that beset the nineteenth and twenty-first centuries, her sense of the ‘meteoric’ rise of the daily newspaper is key. Echoing McGill’s sense of the increased circulation of information amidst an American public as a kind of revolution in literary culture, or ‘silent revolution’ as Emerson would term it.<sup>48</sup>

As David Paul Nord suggests, Emerson’s audience—the bourgeois ‘reading classes’ of the American East Coast—had, after ‘[American independence] and its aftermath,’ been left ‘with a heightened taste for newspaper reading.’<sup>49</sup> By 1794, Philadelphia alone had eight newspapers, four of them dailies, and these newspapers carried at least ten times as much material as had the city’s two weeklies in 1764.<sup>50</sup> More often than not, this material was circulated outside of the control of copyright law and an analysis of this free-floating intellectual ‘property,’ information or material further qualifies Teichgraeber and McGill’s of the importance of circulatory print cultures to Emerson’s period, but also provides a framework for the central role the reader would come to stake in Emerson’s cultural commentaries.

William Charvat notes that, in early nineteenth-century America, ‘the general or common reader (he who stands somewhere between the avant-garde and the consumers of mass diversion)’ had ‘a greater and more direct influence on the writer than his counterpart in Europe.’<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> Stacey Margolis, ‘Network Theory circa 1800: Charles Brockden Brown’s *Arthur Mervyn*,’ *Novel: A Forum on Fiction*, 45.3. (2012), 344.; Margolis cites Duncan J. Watts, *Six Degrees: The Science of a Connected Age* (New York, NY: W.W. Norton, 2003), 13

<sup>48</sup> Emerson, ‘The Fugitive Slave Law’ (1854), CW.XI., 218

<sup>49</sup> David Paul Nord, ‘Communities of Reception,’ *Communities of Journalism: A History of American Newspapers and Their Readers* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2001), 202

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>51</sup> William Charvat, ‘Publishing Centers,’ *Literary Publishing in America*, 22-23



Reciprocity between writer and reader [...] has been of essence in our literary history, and it is this which leads me to define the American cultural center as the place or places in which reciprocal influences are explicitly and crucially operative; where the publisher not only accepts or rejects but influences literary work through his knowledge of taste in the country as a whole; and where changes in public taste are often initiated through a publisher's willingness to let a writer open up new literary territory.<sup>52</sup>

This culture of 'reciprocity' was keenly anchored in the development of trade relations and commercial infrastructure, notes Charvat; whilst the railroads were key 'from 1830 on,' publishing centres were first fostered by 'deep harbor water' as 'the ocean was the chief highway between [America's] towns' (and 'because it made a considerable difference to a publishers prosperity whether the first copy of a new work by Byron or Scott was taken off a boat in their city or some other').<sup>53</sup> Thus, 'New England was [initially] publishing chiefly for itself,' notes Charvat, and the ambitions of attaining a national audience were more ideological fantasy than functional, working reality.<sup>54</sup> Within such a context, it is important to remember that the early works of 'The Transcendentalists of Brook Farm' were initially self-serving, ideologically grounded 'financial failures.'<sup>55</sup> However it is the development of both an intellectually curious public *and* their demand for a culture of public intellectualism that would recur as a focus in Emerson's writings.

Nonetheless, the history of authorship in an American context is a complex one. The 'author,' as Peter Jaszi describes them, has been the central protagonist in a drama played out on the parallel stages of literary and legal culture in the years leading towards industrialization in both European and American critical and cultural contexts. By the mid-seventeenth century, Jaszi notes that writers began to assert claims to special status by designating themselves *as* authors; and during the eighteenth century, the idea of authorship became intimately associated with the Romantic movement in literature and art.<sup>56</sup> The author became, then, a kind of proponent for a codified cultural heroism, a testimony to the value of individual

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<sup>52</sup> Ibid.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid.

<sup>56</sup> Peter Jaszi, 'Towards a Theory of Copyright: The Metamorphoses of Authorship,' *Duke Law Journal*, X. (1991), 455

experience. It is this form of artisanry and artistry that is more popularly associated with Emerson's philosophical project. However, whilst the traditional understanding of an author serves so as to foreground the private ownership of a literary object—and thereby conceal its capacity for social circulation and personal resonance—the development of copyright cultures in a post-revolutionary America of the 1780s and 1790s counters such a reading. As will be further explored, Emerson's study of the progress of a 'silent revolution' is intrinsically linked to the cultural and critical literacy of the reader, who in turn, cannot be divorced from the circulation of print material, regardless of how it enters into the public domain.<sup>57</sup>

This makes the figure of the author all the more significant to the early years of American independence, but primarily with regard to the advent of new copyright laws and questions of proprietorship. A legal iteration of an author as an individual who creates new ideas through the power of the intellect and holds the claim of author's rights—often denoted natural property rights—first appeared in the context of state copyright statutes legislated in the early 1780s. In 1783, Joel Barlow—one of the first beneficiaries of authorial copyright in America—wrote to convince Congress that 'the rights of authors should be secured by law,' and his position depended upon a conceptualization of the rights of authors as an ideated form of natural (rather than *national*) property. 'There is certainly no kind of property, in the nature of things,' he would note, 'so much his own, as the works which a person originates from his own creative imagination. [...] It is a principle of natural justice that he should be entitled to the profits arising from the sale of his works, as a compensation for his labor in producing them.' The demarcation of an authored work as a privileged kind of commercial object would '[give] a laudable direction to that enterprising ardor genius.' According to Barlow, 'We are not to expect to see any works of considerable magnitude [...] offered to the Public till such security be given [to the author] as the fact of intellectual property.' As Oren Bracha puts it, 'The same mix of imagery of authorship, natural property rights, and utilitarian arguments can be found in virtually all twelve state copyright statutes.'<sup>58</sup> However, 'at the same time that authorship came to dominate the theoretical and abstract discourse surrounding copyright law,

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<sup>57</sup> Ibid., 455-456

<sup>58</sup> Oren Bracha, 'The Rise and Fall of Authorship-Based Copyright,' *Owning Ideas: The Intellectual Origins of American Intellectual Property* (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 61-64

the institutional-doctrinal details of copyright remained rooted in traditional pre-authorship patterns.’<sup>59</sup> Furthermore, the subject of ‘originality’ as a claim to ownership and commercial right was the subject of significant scrutiny:

The rift between the new official ideology and actual institutional forms was staggering. Original authors were celebrated as the *raison d’être* of the regime, but copyright had no mechanism whatsoever to identify either authors or works of authorship. The newly recognized author's rights were often described as “property rights,” but copyright, far from bestowing general control or even generalized control over an object of property, remained the traditional printer's entitlement to print and sell copies of the product of the printing press. The 1790 Act described it as “the sole right and liberty of printing, reprinting, publishing and vending” a map, chart, or book. Finally, the object of property, the “thing” owned, was understood to be the intellectual work created by the author, but copyright law lacked any mechanisms for conceptualizing such intellectual objects or for demarcating their boundaries. Instead of ownership of intellectual works, the notion embedded in the traditional scheme adopted by the 1790 A making verbatim copies of a particular text. In short, at the end of the eighteenth century, copyright remained the old economic privilege of the publisher (now conferred on authors) wearing an official rhetorical mask of authorial proper authorship ideology in actual copyright nineteenth century.<sup>60</sup>

Amongst other things, Bracha touches upon how the cultural privilege afforded the American publisher is a direct result of the ways in which new print technologies commercialized and marketized the literary object. A poem was no longer simply a poem, for example, but a form of circulatable property that would carry with it a complex industry.

McGill would concur, suggesting that the powers given to publishers and printers in the early 1800s over and above authors indirectly bestowed a new power to readers over authors in efforts to develop and nurture an American literary culture. Such a hierarchical schema would further impact a public

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<sup>59</sup> Ibid., 198-100

<sup>60</sup> Ibid., 63

understanding of the redolent importance of ‘originality’ to literary enterprise, and this can be evidenced in Bracha’s exploration of the complex philosophical reflections on copyright culture in ascendance parallel to Emerson’s authorship. Referring to the courtroom minutes for a case concerning the disputed ownership of a text, the idea of originality/unoriginality was not only indicated as a slippery, legal subject; but also, as a complex philosophical conundrum for the contemporary author of the 1840s.

Referring to the 1845 case *Emerson v. Davies* (a namesake, Frederick Emerson, and not Ralph Waldo), the justice would pen a succinct ‘anti-romantic’ manifesto that neatly elaborates on such a claim:

In truth, in literature, in science and in art, there are, and can be, few, if any, things, which, in an abstract sense, are strictly new and original throughout. Every book in literature, science and art, borrows—and must necessarily borrow—and use much which was well known and used before. No man creates a new language for himself, at least if he be a wise man, in writing a book. He contents himself with the use of a language already known and used and understood by others. No man writes exclusively from his own thoughts, unaided and uninstructed by the thoughts of others. The thoughts of every man are, more or less, a combination of what other men have thought and expressed, although they may be modified, exalted, or improved by his own genius or reflection. If no book could be the subject of copy-right which was not new and original in the elements of which it is composed, there could be no ground for any copy-right in modern times, and we should be obliged to ascend to very high, even in antiquity, to find a work entitled to such eminence.<sup>61</sup>

This ‘anti-romantic’ sentiment speaks to the cultural championship of the American reader, a pragmatic attempt to define the process of creativity as one of appropriation and mimicry. As already noted in previous sections, Emerson’s understanding of this is crucial for a further examination into his stance on ‘borrowed’ language—both in terms of its commercial ambitions and how it renders a vision of writing as

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<sup>61</sup> Justice, C.C.D. Massachusetts, 1845.; *Ibid.*, 202.; see also, Lyman Ray Patterson, ‘The Early American Copyright,’ *Copyright in Historical Perspective* (Nashville, TN: Vanderbilt University Press, 1968), 180-203

something collective and public. However, such a stance on ‘borrowed’ language also has an industrial foundation.

1816 is a significant date in a history of U.S. publishing. The general duty on books and printed matter imported from abroad was raised from 5% to 15% and, as a direct result, printers began to publish their own pirated editions of all accessible English and continental matter they could. As ‘copyright laws in those years protected U.S. [authors] but did not extend to foreign books,’ Nancy Vogeley notes, an increased receptivity to literature’s mercantile potential took hold. The introduction of such laws has industrial precedent. Look to publisher Mathew Carey’s ‘Manifesto of the Philadelphia Company of Booksellers’ (1802), for example. The manifesto would explicitly cite ‘The growing interests of LITERATURE in this rising Empire’ (Carey’s capitalization, *not* mine), and predicate a need for the public patronage of publishers deigning to circulate ‘vehicles fit to communicate literary information, as well of Books already published, as of those contemplated to be executed.’<sup>62</sup> A culture of ‘outrageous piracy and piratical competition,’ America would not accept international copyright until 1891.<sup>63</sup> Until then, American publishers could and did steal literary material from any source—but especially from Britain. Scott, Byron, Hunt, and the other British writers were very much the rage in the United States. ‘Carey had his agents in England and Scotland who would buy a copy of a newly published work and ship it post-haste to him in Philadelphia,’ Clarkin notes. ‘Arrived there, Carey would have it printed up and bound so as to be shipped to his booksellers throughout the Union. He did this with all speed because, of course, his rivals, the Harpers in New York City, were doing the very same thing. Whoever got the work out first would make great profit. It is small wonder, then, that these books often got themselves published in a sloppy slam-bang manner. It wasn’t very moral, but it was legal.’<sup>64</sup> In 1822, following a minor period of depression in the American economy, Carey wrote and published a series of pamphlets on these present conditions for the American publisher.<sup>65</sup> Under the penname “Hamilton” he would consider the prospective circulation of a

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<sup>62</sup> Nancy Vogeley, ‘Philadelphia,’ *The Bookrunner: A History of Inter-American Relations—Print, Politics and Commerce in the United States and Mexico, 1800-1830* (Philadelphia, PA: The American Philosophical Society, 2011), 44

<sup>63</sup> Ibid.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid.

<sup>65</sup> For an account of Carey’s public writings and political appeals, see James N. Green, ‘For the Common Good,’ *Mathew Carey, Publisher and Patriot* (Philadelphia, PA: The Library Company of Philadelphia), 29-31

new literary work, and declare that ‘any bookseller desirous to republish it, from motives of public spirit or profit has the writer’s Permission.’<sup>66</sup> To widen the circulation of a given work of literature was not an exercise in profiteering, to Carey’s mind, but a moral obligation.

Thus, the complicated iteration of originality and ownership as concepts proves knotty, and yet key to an identification of the cultural atmosphere circumambient to the authorship of Emerson’s early works. Nonetheless, these examples can be argued as indicating the ways in which American literary culture was informed by European Romantic tradition. See Martha Woodmansee’s essay ‘The Genius and the Copyright: Economic and Legal Conditions of the Emergence of the Author’ (1984), for example, wherein she ‘tracks the development of the idea of authorial originality in the writings of authors such as Klopstock, Fichte, and Herder, and argues that the Romantic debate over the nature of authorship responded to the chaotic state of the German book market and lay the groundwork for the recognition of authors’ rights in German law.’<sup>67</sup> Woodmansee’s essay actually has little to say about the technicalities or the legislative history of copyright in Germany. Rather, ‘her aim was to place Romantic ideas about literary property in socioeconomic context and to argue more broadly for interdisciplinary attention’ to be paid to the emergence of the author as a conduit for discussions around the management of information in an era of increasingly complex market relations.<sup>68</sup> Woodmansee’s efforts to express the ‘interplay between legal, economic and social questions’ and ‘philosophical and esthetic’ dimensions that accompany this broadening of an author’s ‘symbolic purchase’ prove more complex within an American sociopolitical and cultural context.<sup>69</sup> In a subsequent essay, ‘On the Author Effect: Recovering Collectivity’ (1994), she argues copyright law as steadfastly ‘rooted’ in a Romanticist view of writing as practice.<sup>70</sup> Envisaging this emerging author as the result of cliché, as ‘a solitary and individual pursuit’ that would itself become

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<sup>66</sup> Ibid., 29

<sup>67</sup> Meredith McGill, ‘Copyright and Intellectual Property: The State of the Discipline,’ *Book History*, 16. (2013), 391

<sup>68</sup> Ibid.

<sup>69</sup> Martha Woodmansee, ‘The Genius and the Copyright: Economic and Legal Conditions of the Emergence of the Author,’ *Eighteenth-Century Studies*, 17. (1984), 440

<sup>70</sup> Martha Woodmansee, ‘On the Author Effect: Recovering Collectivity,’ in (eds.) M. Woodmansee and P. Jaszi, *The Construction of Authorship: Textual Appropriation in Law and Literature* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1994), 27

something of a stand-in for post-enlightenment theories of individuation,<sup>71</sup> Mark Rose admits that the figure of the ‘author’ undergoes a significant process of bureaucratization (and thus socialization, by proxy) in the early nineteenth century.<sup>72</sup> For Rose, the view of the author as a romantic hero turned into an ‘author as owner and originator and the work as the proper object of property established and institutionalized in legal discourse’ is a ‘major aesthetic realignment.’<sup>73</sup> For Emerson, then, such analyses of literary culture brings to the fore what we have hitherto defined as the ‘mechanics of literature.’ Less interested in literature, less interested in what a book *is* than what a book *does*, Emerson knew that ‘literature’ could no longer be read as an isolated medium but should be seen as an ‘an arm or a weapon’ of the country’s ‘interior energy.’<sup>74</sup>

For Charles Sellers, the development of American democracy must also be read in the context of the growth of publishing cultures; cultures that allowed an emergent, populist voice a point of dissemination and enabled the communication of ideas and ideologies vital to the country’s economic and political growth: an assembly of factors that Sellers argues as key to an American ‘market revolution.’ Significant also is the date range of Seller’s revolution—1815 to 1846—a period that reflects the timeline that both McGill and Teichgraber define as of ‘revolutionary’ significance.<sup>75</sup> America was proving increasingly defined by a hybrid political economy in the early antebellum; fed by wage labour and widespread capitalist agriculture in the North and an entrenched slave-based plantation order in the South; the diverse and distinct needs of these two industrial republics was dependent upon the establishment of new communication channels. Emerson is only briefly mentioned by Sellers, who affords Emerson a particularly tendentious kind of cultural resonance as he anoints him ‘the mid-century prophet of the

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<sup>71</sup> Isabella Alexander, ‘Copyright, History, the Public,’ *Copyright Law and the Public Interest in the Nineteenth Century* (Portland, OR: Hart Publishing, 2010), 8-9

<sup>72</sup> Mark Rose, ‘The Author as Proprietor: *Donaldson v. Becket* and the Genealogy of Modern Authorship,’ in (eds.) B. Sherman, A. Strowl, *Of Authors and Origins: Essays on Copyright Law* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), 29

<sup>73</sup> Ibid.

<sup>74</sup> Emerson, ‘Books’ (1870), CW.VII., 214

<sup>75</sup> Although Emerson appears only fleetingly in Charles Sellers’ exploration of America’s “market revolution,” he notes that Emerson would frequently aim to support the upkeep of a market system by enumerating the importance of ‘the planters, the mechanics, the inventors, the astronomers, the builders of cities, and the captains’ invested in its maintenance. See Sellers, ‘The Bourgeois Republic,’ *The Market Revolution*, 377-378

corporate [and] capitalist millennium.<sup>76</sup> But he does cite Emerson as enumerating a relationship with those natural resources harnessed by the expansion of the American marketplace.

Emerson's chief directive, for Sellers, is his 'instruction' that we need exercise and cultivate 'power' enough 'to evoke the sleeping energies of land and water.'<sup>77</sup> According to Sellers, it is in 'Wealth' that Emerson contributes to the development of a capitalist hegemony that Sellers seeks to identify as in ascendance over the course of the antebellum. Arguing capitalist economics as the principal context for Emerson's thinking, Sellers writes: 'Wealth' aimed to establish an idealized distillation of America's 'beneficent marketplace.' The 'merchant's craft,' Emerson claims, consists of 'bringing things from where they abound to where they are wanted.' Looking for analogy, Emerson depicts the 'farmer' who—relocating their produce from country to city (the 'peach' is Emerson's key product in this instance, as mentioned)—gives 'a new look and a hundredfold value over the fruit which grew on the same bough and lies fulsomely on the ground.'<sup>78</sup> This process of movement, and of the effectuation of value, is explicitly inferred as an 'industrial power' and Emerson details the ways in which an awareness of the human element that underpins this 'power' is essential to its application. Mapping its cultural and conceptual significance, he sees this human element as encouraging a certain kind of metonymy; the industrial 'power' can equally be read in the symbolic capacity of 'a horse or a locomotive to cross the land, in a boat to cross the sea; in tools to work with, in books to read; and so in giving on all sides by tools and auxiliaries the greatest possible extension to our powers; as if it added feet and hands and eyes and blood, length to the day, and knowledge and good will.'<sup>79</sup> 'Every warehouse and shop-window, every fruit-tree, every thought of every hour' is indicative of this 'power,' Emerson notes.<sup>80</sup>

We've come upon these lines already in this thesis, as the material that Seller's draws upon is vital to the development of Emerson's 'OTHERISM.' In a fashion redolent of Emerson's sense of the value of 'Another's book'—as would first instigate this long train of thought in Emerson's writings—Sellers argues

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<sup>76</sup> Ibid., 380

<sup>77</sup> Emerson, 'The Young American' (1844), CW.I., 364

<sup>78</sup> Emerson, 'Wealth' (1860), CW.VI., 87.; cited by Sellers, 378-379

<sup>79</sup> Emerson, 'Wealth' (1860), CW.VI., 88

<sup>80</sup> Ibid.



that the function of the market as a metaphor in 'Wealth' is crucial to any consideration of Emerson's cultural worth from the vantage point of twentieth and/or twenty-first century scholarship. As a basis for us to consider Emerson's 'revolution in relation,' these assessments of the economics of print and market are all compounded in Emerson's theorizations of 'relation' and 'power.' Given the mirroring of the historical accounts given by Teichgraeber, McGill and Sellers, our reading of Sellers' 'market revolution' (1815 to 1846) needs be considered in adjacency to McGill's 'print revolution' (1834 to 1853) and Teichgraeber's indication of America's revolution in American publishing (1815 to 1850). If we consider Emerson's own chronology, the significance of this Venn diagram of 'revolutions' in the development of his perspectivism speaks for itself. Enrolling at Harvard in 1817—and at Harvard's New School of Divinity in 1825—Emerson is first published in '22 and delivers his first public address in '33, an almost a fifty-year career up until his death in 1882. Emerson's efforts to merge these three revolutions is vital, and his own history mirrors their advancement; but it is the progress of the market and the rapid industrialization of the American landscape that predominates in recent criticism over and above any effort to picture Emerson's receptivity to its terms of growth and cultural effectivity.<sup>81</sup> However, I would argue that that changes in print and publishing cultures are of a coeval if not greater significance to an analysis of Emerson's use of metaphor.

Parallel to the early phases of Emerson's authorship, the United States is shifting from a static agrarian economy to a mobile commercial society, land (or 'Nature') is accordingly conceptually drawn into the orbit of the market and dethroned from the supreme position it had occupied in the eighteenth-century. By the early 1830s, Nature 'was now perceived as an asset to be developed for profit or an object of speculation,' writes Gilmore; 'liable, like any commodity, to arbitrary and fluctuating assessments of its value.' Under the market regime, 'value itself came to be regarded as subjective, determined not by the inherent properties of an object, but by extrinsic factors such as opinion and desire.'<sup>82</sup> If 'one must be an inventor to read well,' as Emerson notes, and 'reading creatively find simpatico energy in living life

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<sup>81</sup> For example, see Leo Marx, *The Machine in the Garden: Technology and the Pastoral Ideal in America* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1964), in particular, 'The Machine,' 145-227

<sup>82</sup> Gilmore, 'Emerson and the Persistence of Commodity,' *American Romanticism and the Marketplace*, 22

creatively as a work of art,' how we are to then value and use that *art*?<sup>83</sup> As noted previously, Emerson finds himself repeatedly posing such questions. How do 'extrinsic' and personal factors 'such as opinion and desire' enable both an individualized and social delineation of critical worth? Emerson's reaction to such queries—as will preoccupy the following chapter—concentrates on our operation of cultural matter; and the 'mechanical' processes of quotation and appropriation in particular, as he envisages the book as a kind of technology ripe for tooling the terms of both self and social definition.

Emerson's receptivity to new technologies has become a consistent feature of recent revisionist critical engagements with the progressive qualities of his metacritical writings on literary culture. Even the lecture platform and Emerson's celebrity have been argued as mechanical tools consciously instrumentalised and self-reflexively examined by Emerson himself. As Peter Field notes, considering Emerson's formal experimentation with the public address, 'The lecture platform scarcely existed until the 1840s' nor did 'the decade's wholesale proliferation of lyceums, mercantile associations, and other such quasi-educational organizations throughout the northern United States.'<sup>84</sup> Emerson was well-aware of the cultural trend towards public dissemination in this regard, but equally aware of the increased technologization of literary culture. Field summarizes Emerson's receptivity to these changes as follows:

Technological innovations in printing, publishing, and distribution drove down the cost of the printed word and in time provided the means to satisfy affordably the public's budding thirst for knowledge. By the mid-nineteenth century, the first hint of the means to create mass culture came into existence, resulting in what sociologist Alvin Gouldner called "the dialectic of ideology and technology." The rise of a culture industry enabled Emerson's emergence as "an American Prophet," or as peddler-turned-schoolteacher Bronson Alcott grandiosely declared: "there was no public lecture till Emerson made it," that Emerson called into being "a public to listen to the master and his disciples [...]. That were a victory worth a life, since the lecture is the American invention, serving the country with impulse and thought of an ideal cast and conquering virtue. The lyceums are properly *Emersonia*, and we must

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<sup>83</sup> Michael Boatright, 'Emersonian Reading and Ethics: Reading for Developing an Ethical Stance toward Self and Other,' *The Journal of Aesthetic Education*, 50. 4. (2016), 15-30

<sup>84</sup> Field, 'The Transformation of Genius into Practical Power: Ralph Waldo Emerson and the Public Lecture,' 469

substitute the founder's name for the thing he has invented." Emerson both created and was the creation of this novel cultural agency.<sup>85</sup>

The rolling cultural evolution of the antebellum, dependent upon what Gouldner terms the 'dialectic of ideology and technology,' is—as we have seen—continually punctuated by the advent of new technologies and the ways in which information and communication technologies mark the traffic of American ante- and postbellum culture.<sup>86</sup> There is photography and telegraphy in the 1830s; rotary power printing in the 1840s; the typewriter in the 1860s; transatlantic cable in 1866 and the telephone, 1876. These technologies all had a profound effect on our understanding of culture and any attendant theory of labour; Emerson himself draws the links by proposing his own theory of cultural labour in the late address 'American Civilization' (1862):

USE, labor of each for all, is the health and virtue of all beings. *Ich dien*, I serve, is a truly royal motto. [...] God is God because he is the servant of all. Well, now here comes this conspiracy of slavery,—they call it an institution, I call it a destitution,—this stealing of men and setting them to work, stealing their labor, and the thief sitting idle himself; and for two or three ages it has lasted, and has yielded a certain quantity of rice, cotton and sugar. And, standing on this doleful experience, these people have endeavored to reverse the natural sentiments of mankind, and to pronounce labor disgraceful, and the well-being of a man to consist in eating the fruit of other men's labor.<sup>87</sup>

'American Civilization' was delivered as a lecture to a crowd assembled at Washington's Smithsonian Institute 'only a few hundred yards from the site of wartime hospitals standing between the Smithsonian

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<sup>85</sup> Ibid.

<sup>86</sup> See Alvin Gouldner, *The Dialectic of Ideology and Technology: The Origins, Grammar and Future of Ideology* (New York, NY: Seabury, 1976). According to John B. Thompson: 'Gouldner elaborates a richly historical perspective on the concept of ideology. [...] He turns to history in order to recover a specificity which the concept of ideology is today in danger of losing. [...] Gouldner views ideology, not merely as a potential object of social science but as its alleged boundary, a boundary which stems from the simultaneous birth of ideology and social science [as discipline] during the Enlightenment.' Interested in the 'reflexivity' of a social theory relative to technological change, Field's allusion to Gouldner is particularly apt for an investigation of Emerson's experiments with prose and public persona in an antebellum context. See also John B. Thompson, 'Ideology as Rational Project: Alvin Gouldner,' *Studies in the Theory of Ideology* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1984), 83-90

<sup>87</sup> Emerson, 'American Civilization' (1862), CW.XI., 297

and the capitol.’ The aim was to speak directly to the ‘existing’ presidential administration in order to call upon Lincoln to address the ethical bases of his presidency, and the development of the abolitionist movement as the country stands on the brink of war.<sup>88</sup> ‘The end of all political struggle is to establish morality as the basis of all legislation,’ Emerson claims—‘Morality is the basis of all legislation,’ ‘the object of government.’<sup>89</sup> But, seeking to distance himself from wartime ideologies and any direct adulation of the Agrarian south or explicit celebration of Northern industry, he instead ‘coins’ a theory of work:<sup>90</sup> ‘Labor: a man coins himself into his labor; turns his day, his strength, his thought, his affection into some product which remains as the visible sign of his power; and to protect that, to secure that to him, to secure his past self to his future self.’<sup>91</sup> Once again, Emerson’s interest in technology becomes a way to turn his theory of labour into an ‘object’ in its own right. ‘OUR nineteenth century is the age of tools, he notes in ‘Work and Days’ (1870). ‘They grew out of our structure. [...] The human body is the magazine of inventions, the patent office, where are the models from which every hint was taken. All the tools and engines on earth are only extensions of its limbs and senses. One definition of man is ‘an intelligence served by organs.’ Machines can only second, not supply, his unaided senses.’<sup>92</sup>

This notion that a machine should serve to ‘second’ our critical intentions and ambitions is a pungent one, in so far as it rhetorically elevates the intellectual ability of humankind to govern even within a rapidly changing society. As will be explored in the following chapter, the idea of the machine in servitude to the artist and thinker bears crucial similarities to his theory of ‘second use.’ In ‘second use’—or the act or ‘art of appropriation’—the ability to appropriate existing materials emerges as a later, practical mirror for his earlier version of the ‘mechanics of literature,’ and the following chapter will examine how Emerson’s position on appropriation, critical agency and originality is both practically and theoretically made manifest in his later writings and ‘Quotation and Originality,’ in particular.

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<sup>88</sup> For an in-depth description of the audience reaction to Emerson’s address, and detail of his subsequent meeting with Abraham Lincoln, thereafter, see Stephen Cushman’s essay ‘When Emerson met Lincoln’ in *The Journal of the Civil War Era*, 13.2. (2013), 163-183

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*, 309

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*, 297

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>92</sup> Emerson, ‘Work and Days’ (1870), CW.VII., 157

**ii.iii.**

**Appropriating the American Scholar:  
Emerson's 'Quotation & Originality' (1875)**

*The old animals have given their bodies to the earth to furnish through chemistry the forming race.*

**RALPH WALDO EMERSON**

'Quotation and Originality' (1875)<sup>1</sup>

*What we think & say is wonderfully better for our spirits & trust, in another's mouth.*

**RALPH WALDO EMERSON**

*From his Journals and Miscellaneous Notebooks* (1851)<sup>2</sup>

*Even those we call great men build substructures, and, like Cologne Cathedral, these are never finished. Lord Bacon begins; Behmen begins; Goethe, Fourier, Schelling, Coleridge, they all begin.*

**RALPH WALDO EMERSON**

'Instinct and Inspiration' (1870)<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Emerson, 'Quotation and Originality' (1875), CW.VIII., 200

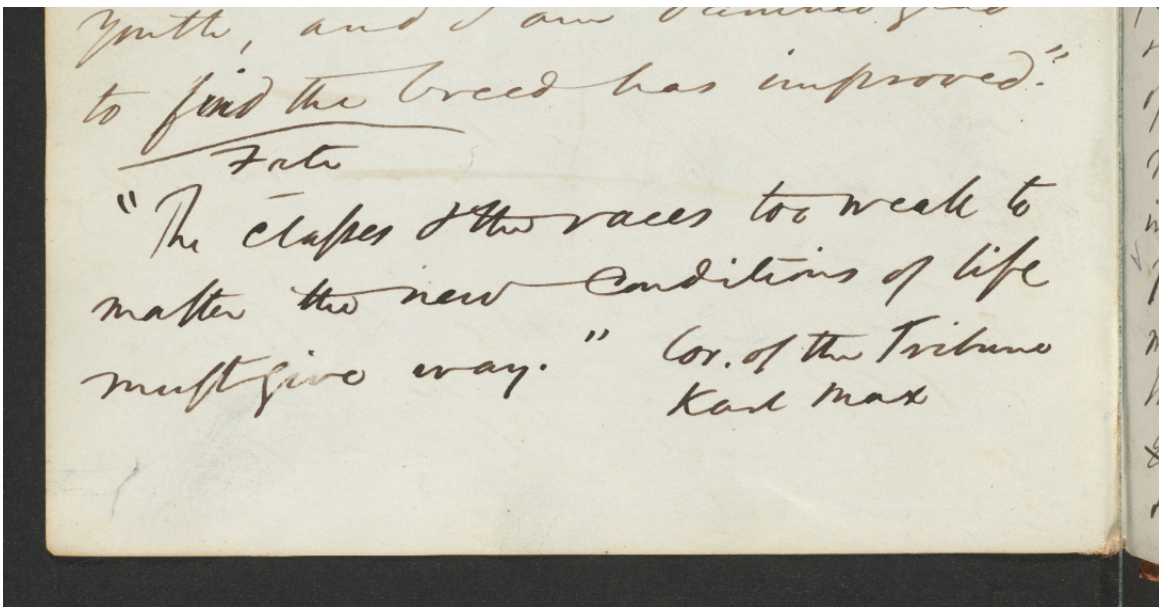
<sup>2</sup> Emerson, 'Journal CO' (May 14, 1851), JMN.V., 423

<sup>3</sup> Emerson, 'Instinct and Inspiration' (1870), CW.XII., 70

*"The classes and the races too weak to master the new conditions of life must give way."*

Cor[respondent] of the Tribune,

**Karl Max** [sic].



**Figure i.** — Emerson's Journal GO, p. 292.  
(MS Am 1280H64, Houghton Library, Harvard University)<sup>4 †</sup>

<sup>4</sup> This entry is reproduced in Emerson, 'Journal GO' (Undated, 1853), JMN.XIII., 127

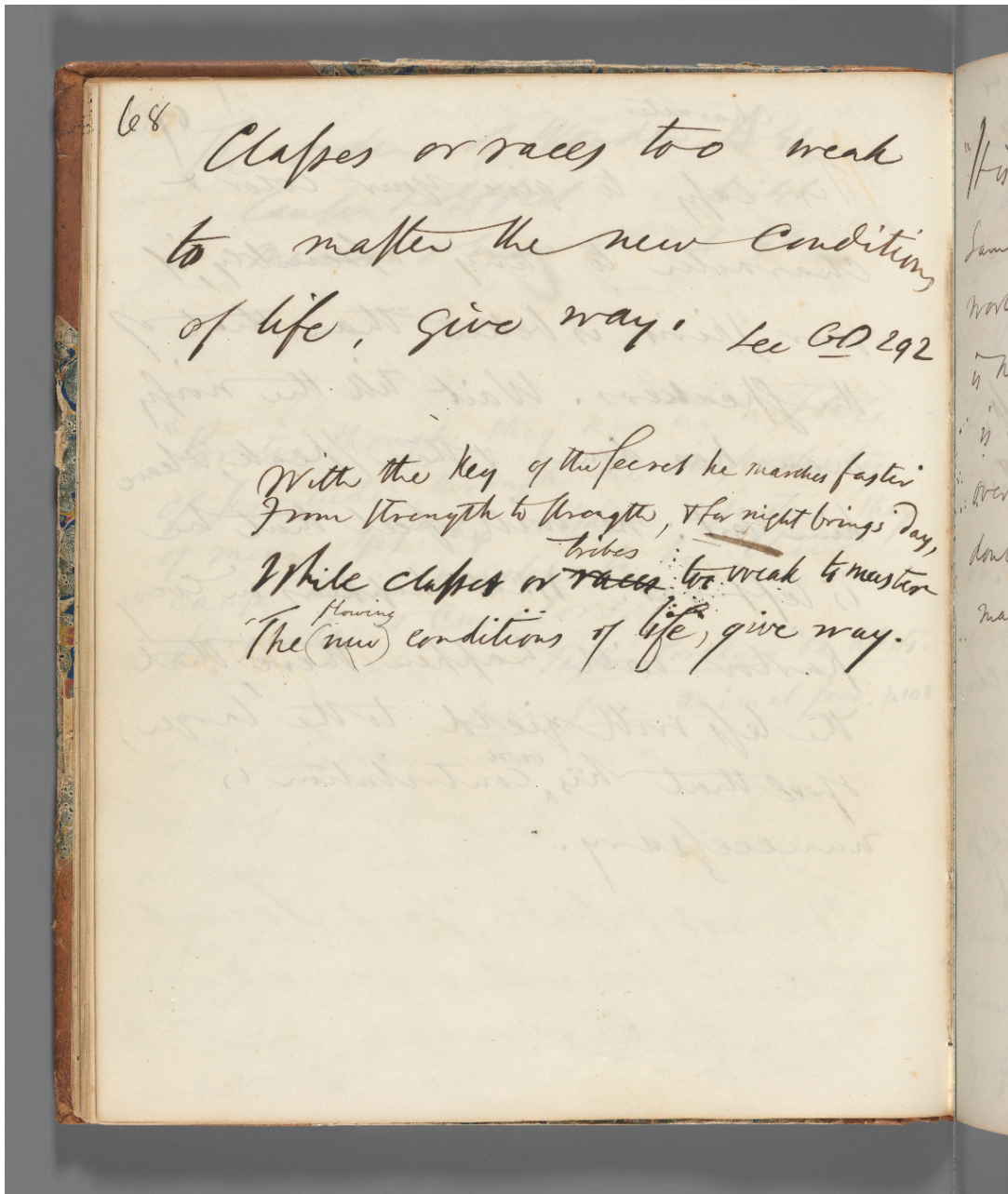


Figure ii. — Emerson's 'Journal XO,' p. 68.  
(MS Am 1280H82, Houghton Library, Harvard University)<sup>5†</sup>

<sup>5</sup> This entry is reproduced in Emerson, 'Notebook XO,' in (ed.) S. Sutton Smith, *The Topical Notebooks of Ralph Waldo Emerson* (Columbia, MO: University of Missouri Press, 1990), 237



In Emerson's 'OTHERISM,' the ways in which he systematized the act of critical exchange lay the foundation for his interest in the act (or 'art') of appropriation as well. In his explicit desire for 'Another' as an adjudicator of value and the sense of the 'force of two in literature', Emerson details a cultural economy in which the circulation of ideas depends upon a participant model of ownership. Aiming to establish a theory of exchange capable of incorporating the 1840 conceptualization of 'subjectiveness,' Emerson explains literary culture. He notes that 'My own book [is] read with new eyes once a stranger has praised it,' suggesting that this 'radical fact' impacts the ways in which we consider how a modification of value functions within literature once the transaction from writer to reader occurs.<sup>6</sup> A reader requires a writer; one requires another; one interchanges goods with that other; and the cycle continues. A network of exchange or economy of ideas is developed through the exchange of an image or idea that incrementally expands by virtue of reciprocal desire and mutual benefit. In this sense, as he writes in 'Literary Ethics' (1838), a literary work is a 'resource' to Emerson's mind. 'The old animals have given their bodies to the earth to furnish through chemistry the forming race,' he suggestively claims in 'Quotation and Originality' (1875).<sup>7</sup> 'Nature decomposes all her harvests for recomposition,' is the essay's closing remark.<sup>8</sup> This chapter will focus on Emerson's practical and theoretical interest in 'recomposition,' both in relation to his characterization of a literary work as a 'resource' and to the 'scientific value' of the socioeconomic circumstances previously discussed.

Emerson's terminology is tendentious whether we look either to the development of 'OTHERISM' or 'Quotation and Originality.' The 'charm of alienation' is that we need 'Another' to define 'alienation' as a both term and concept.<sup>9</sup> The 'force of two in literature' is an allusion to the ways in which the collective work of an author and reader informs a circulation of culture, ensuring the dialectical progress of a thought as it moves between proprietors; altered by each owner; only then to move on again. The former is regarded as a theory of 'commercial value,' the latter, a theory of 'capitalist transaction' (to borrow his terms). The coalescence of these ideas is key to the development of Emerson's economy or 'circle of intelligence,' as he

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<sup>6</sup> Emerson, 'Journal B,' (Undated, 1836), JMN.V., 254

<sup>7</sup> Emerson, 'Quotation and Originality' (1875), CW.VIII., 200

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 204

<sup>9</sup> Emerson, 'Journal B' (Undated, 1836), JMN.V., 254

writes in 'Quotation and Originality.' Emerson here admits that this is a borrowed idea; a play on the 'bodies' of 'old animals.'<sup>10</sup>

Swedenborg threw a formidable theory into the world, that every soul existed in a society of souls, from which all its thoughts passed into it, as the blood of a mother circulates into her unborn child: and he noticed, that, when in his bed, —alternately sleeping and waking—sleeping, he was surrounded by persons disputing and offering opinions on the one side and on the other side a proposition: waking, the like suggestions occurred for and against the proposition as his own thoughts: sleeping again, he saw and heard the speakers as before, and this as often as he slept or waked. If we expand this image, does it not look as if we men were thinking and talking out of an enormous antiquity, as if we stood not in a coterie of prompters that filled a sitting room, but a circle of intelligences [...].<sup>11</sup>

As the editors of the Harvard/Belknap publication of *Letters and Social Aims* note, Emerson's unattributed reference sees him summarize (rather than plagiarize) Swedenborg's thinking. Swedenborg 'discusses the circulation of blood between mother and unborn child' in Part II of *The Generative Organs Considered Anatomically, Physically and Philosophically* (first published in translation 1852); and the remarks on 'sleeping and waking' owe to *The Spiritual Diary of Emanuel Swedenborg* (first published in Latin, 1873, seventy-one years after its author's death).<sup>12</sup> However, Emerson's allusion to 'men thinking'—a pluralist iteration of his assessment of the singular 'thinking man' of 'The American Scholar' (1837)—is significant if we are to consider 'Quotation and Originality' as an essay in correspondence with Emerson's earlier writings. However, it is first necessary that we unravel what role 'this circle of intelligences' exactly play in Emerson's thinking.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Emerson, 'Quotation and Originality' (1875), CW.VIII., 198

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 198-199

<sup>12</sup> See G.M Johnson's notes in Emerson, *Letters and Social Aims; The Collected Works of Ralph Waldo Emerson, Vol. VII* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2010), n. 24; 255

<sup>13</sup> Emerson, 'The American Scholar' (1837), CW.I., 84

Picturing this ‘circle of intelligence’ in practice, Emerson cites ‘all thinkers’ as participants; as engaged in the upkeep of a ‘society of souls.’ ‘Poets, inventors, and wits, men and women, English, German, Celt, Ninevite, Copt, —back to the first geometer—bard, mason, carpenter, planter, shepherd’— ‘our benefactors are as many as the children who invented speech,’ he notes.<sup>14</sup> Repeating his position in the ‘Present Life’ series of the late 1830s, Emerson once again looks to urbanization as a means of explaining the complexities of his thinking. Looking to the kind of co-work necessitated in the development of a national literary culture, he notes that a literary ‘language’ ‘is a city, to the building of which every human has brought a stone.’<sup>15</sup> This a significant remark if we recall Emerson’s allusions to the ‘strength of the builder’ in 1837; noting their contribution to a superlative ideological ‘superstructure.’<sup>16</sup> However, whilst we work individually toward this collective aim, he proposes that act of cultural consumption that underpins our capacity to ‘think’ should encourage ‘the indefeasible persistency of the individual to be himself.’<sup>17</sup>

Every mind is different and the more it is unfolded the more pronounced is that difference. He must draw the elements into him for food, and, if they be granite and silex, will prefer them cooked by sun and rain, by time and art, to his hand. However received, these elements pass into the substance of his constitution, will be assimilated, and tend always to form not a partisan but a possessor of truth.<sup>18</sup>

Emerson’s insistence on the all-important ‘indefeasible persistency’ of selfhood needs to be seen in light of a concept of accreditation as well as the notion of ‘use’ that underpins his engagement with literature, more broadly, and literary criticism, more specifically. Emerson is adamant that our singular contribution to the development of this space should not be recognized, despite his description of ‘language’ as a ‘city’ in its own right. Each individual, each ‘builder’ as he notes in ‘37, ‘is no more to be credited with the grand result

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 199.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> Emerson, ‘Literature’ (1837), EL.II., 64

<sup>17</sup> Emerson, ‘Quotation and Originality’ (1875), CW.VIII., 201

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

than the acaleph which adds a cell to the coral reef which is the basis of this continent.<sup>19</sup> A city is thus built collectively; our uses of the city are archly individualized; and therefore to place too much emphasis on the authors or 'builders' of said city is to undermine the simple idea that we exploit all that the city offers to meet the terms of our own needs and wants. Emerson's 'circle of intelligence,' and his 'city,' are both the products of 'joint work' rather than the 'private enterprise' of authorship (to borrow phrases from both 'The American Scholar' and 'Quotation and Originality'). In this way, Emerson's 'circle of intelligence' relates directly to his theory of 'relation,' 1836, and a range of previously cited ideas in his early works. His position on the establishment of a cultural space as a 'city' speaks to the forms of social betterment or 'public welfare' that underpin 'The Young American' (1844).<sup>20</sup>

Furthermore, his assertion that our outlook is 'unfolded' echoes his insistence in 'Uses of Great Men' (1850) that 'Man is endogenous,' and that 'education is his unfolding,'<sup>21</sup> and the idea that the progress of a culture of ideas necessitates a theory of 'proposition' echoes the dialectical evolution of a literary culture that depends upon both private reflection and publication, as noted in 'History' (1841).<sup>22</sup> Similarly, the comparison he draws between the circulation of ideas and the circulation of blood between an unborn child and its mother echoes his reference to Rabelais in 'Wealth' (1860).<sup>23</sup> Once again, these numerous cross-references and inferences add to the claim that 'Quotation and Originality' is a key essay in Emerson's oeuvre; a work in which he consolidates the centrality of critical agency and exchange in a manner that can be traced back to 1836 and the very beginnings of his authorship. However, it is how Emerson comes to term this position on critical exchange as explicitly 'capitalist' that that needs further extrapolation.

As previously mentioned, Emerson's sense of the 'force of two in literature' connects Emerson's mid-period and later writings. In 1847, Emerson writes:

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<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 199

<sup>20</sup> Emerson, 'The Young American' (1844), CW.I., 374-375

<sup>21</sup> Emerson, 'Uses of Great Men' (1850), CW.IV., 31

<sup>22</sup> Emerson, 'History' (1841), CW.I., 5

<sup>23</sup> Emerson, 'Wealth' (1860), CW.VI., 125-126

Can we not help ourselves as discreetly by the force of two in literature? Certainly, it only needs two well-placed & well-tempered for cooperation, to get somewhat far transcending any private enterprise in literature.

But it requires great generosity & rare devotion to the aim in the parties & not that mean thievish way of looking at every thought as property.

Thought is the property of him who can entertain it. Thought is the property of him who can adequately place it.<sup>24</sup>

In 1875, however, he repeats this through a much more discernibly ‘economic metaphor’ in ‘Quotation and Originality.’<sup>25</sup> Envisaging the practice of quotation and/or appropriation as a form of ‘mental indebtedness,’ he writes, ‘The capitalist of either kind is as hungry to lend as the consumer to borrow.’<sup>26</sup>

[The] transaction no more indicates intellectual turpitude in the borrower than the simple fact of debt involves bankruptcy. On the contrary, in far the greater number of cases the transaction is honorable to both. Can we not help ourselves as discreetly by the force of two in literature? Certainly, it only needs two well placed and well-tempered for coöperation, to get somewhat far transcending any private enterprise! Shall we converse as spies? Our very abstaining to repeat and credit the fine remark of our friend is thievish. Each man of thought is surrounded by wiser men than he, if they cannot write as well. Cannot he and they combine?<sup>27</sup>

The specifically ‘capitalist’ context that Emerson builds around his analysis of critical activity—his assertion of the ‘force of two’—adds to recent revisionist readings of the politics of Emerson’s poetics. As

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<sup>24</sup> Emerson, ‘Journal GH’ (Undated, 1847), JMN.X., 154-55

<sup>25</sup> A phrase I borrow from Arjo Klamer and Thomas C. Leonard who, responding to such cliché as ‘**TIME IS MONEY**,’ explore the ways in which the practical implementation of economic systems facilitates its own poetic language; how an analysis of ‘the nature of work’ in a ‘commercial society’ depends upon a culture of ‘elaborate and systematic metaphor’ They explain their thinking thus: ‘Do Alaskans have trouble keeping their liquid assets from being frozen? Bubbles, bears, bulls, bliss points, sun spots, cobwebs and dirty floats all dot the economic landscape. Our most rigorous scientific expressions [in economic theory] are unabashedly metaphorical.’ Whilst Emerson comments on precisely this fact, it is of note that—at the tail end of his career—his own investigation of economic metaphor comes to describe his philosophical position in more concrete, economic terms. See Arjo Klamer and Thomas C. Leonard, ‘What is an Economic Metaphor?’ in (ed.) Mirowski, *Natural Images in Economic Thought: Markets Read in Tooth and Claw* (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 20-52

<sup>26</sup> Emerson, ‘Quotation and Originality’ (1875), CW.VIII., 189

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 189-190

John Carlos Rowe suggests, 1997, 'Emersonian Transcendentalism had an important ideological function to serve in nineteenth-century America: the legitimation of those practices of intellectual abstraction required to rationalize the contradictions of the new industrial economy,' a point that can be applied to 'Quotation and Originality' unequivocally if we consider the stresses of Emerson's argument and distinct classification of his position as 'capitalist.'<sup>28</sup>

At a technical level, the essay is practical in its interests; invested in 'the use and relevancy of the sentence' taken out of context and put to work elsewhere; interested in the mechanisms of scholarship and how we are to employ (or appropriate) the works of others to build new argument.<sup>29</sup> The fact that Emerson expresses this activity as an economic phenomenon is significant. His 'circle of intelligence,' part of the development of a larger more encompassing intellectual and ideological 'superstructure,' also serves to characterize Emerson's thoughts on the political and poetic significance of the marketplace. This system is built up by virtue of a collectivist kind of 'joint-work,' to borrow a phrase from 'The American Scholar,' with the results of that labour configured as a distinctly 'capitalist' venture.

Recall the link between a commercial society and the isolated 'spender' previously discussed; similar to Emerson's builder, the 'spender' should not be credited for authoring the economic system of circulation in itself; however, their participation helps define and maintain that system. As Joel Porte argues, Emerson thus sought to engineer a 'spiritual' iteration of 'capital' that would ally 'mental mobility to the boom-and-bust cycles of American capitalism,' giving power to each individual so they could assist in the regulation of such an economic system or 'superstructure' (to borrow Emerson's own phrase).<sup>30</sup> In addition to his qualification of critical exchange as a 'capitalist' procedure, Emerson repeatedly draws on the 'debt' as a framework with which to explain this exchange.<sup>31</sup> As we will see, this longstanding fiscal metaphor in Emerson's works, the ways in which Emerson's relationship with appropriation and quotation

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<sup>28</sup> John Carlos Rowe, 'At Emerson's Tomb,' *At Emerson's Tomb: The Politics of Classic American Literature* (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 1997), 5

<sup>29</sup> Emerson, 'Quotation and Originality' (1875), CW.VIII., 194

<sup>30</sup> Leverenz, 'The Politics of Emerson's Man-Making Words,' 41. See also Joel Porte, *Representative Man: Ralph Waldo Emerson in his Time* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1979), 257-66., 292.; See also, Barbara Packer: '[Americans] did not really want money, but the sense of self-esteem and possession it would confer.' See 'Portable Property,' *Emerson's Fall: A New Interpretation of the Major Essays* (New York, NY: Continuum, 1982), 96

<sup>31</sup> Emerson, 'Quotation and Originality' (1875), CW.VIII., 194

serves to signal the importance of ‘debt’ to his thinking, is equally crucial for an understanding of his critical practice.

It matters not ‘whether your jewel was got from the miner or from the auctioneer,’ writes Emerson in ‘Quotation and Originality.’<sup>32</sup> Whether we examine a first-hand citation, or a quotation dislocated from its source, the process of recontextualization charges each ‘sentence’ with a new significance. ‘We are as much informed of a writer’s genius by what he selects as what he originates;’ ‘We read [a] quotation with new eyes,’ and see the cited material ‘find a new and fervent sense,’ ‘borrowing new interest from the rendering.’<sup>33</sup> Emerson admits that, at times, we give literature too much significance by concentrating on the ultimate value of individual phrases, clauses and images. ‘In hours of high mental activity,’ he suggests, ‘we sometimes do the book too much honor, reading out of it better things than the author wrote: reading, as we say, between the lines.’<sup>34</sup> However, for Emerson, the benefits of ‘reading between the lines’ and the accrual of critical ‘interest’ by comparing the relation of an author and reader to that of a debtor and borrower is highly significant (and again harks back to ideas he would entertain in ‘Nature,’ 1836).<sup>35</sup>

As I will argue, Emerson’s reflections on the practice of quotation and appropriation speak to Rowe’s suggestion that Emerson sought to establish a connection between ‘intellectual abstraction’ and the ascent of a ‘new industrial economy.’ As we’ve already seen, Emerson’s ‘OTHERISM’ is enormously useful in terms of the ways in which it showcases the coherent development of ideas across his authorship. How an idea—first raised in 1836—could recur with such frequency only to find publication in 1860; and thereby chart the arc of Emerson’s major period of activity (from the publication of *Nature* through to the publication of *The Conduct of Life*). Whilst I’ve previously surveyed the ways in which such ideas recur across Emerson’s early writings, I will now turn my attention to the ways in which Emerson’s later position on appropriation consolidates and compounds his earlier writings. Looking to ‘Quotation and Originality,’ the ‘force of two in literature’ will be central to this chapter, and the competition that Emerson outlines

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<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., 197

<sup>35</sup> Emerson, ‘Nature’ (1836), CW.I., 37

between ‘well-tempered coöperation’ and ‘private enterprise’ a principle point of focus.<sup>36</sup> Although Emerson would first announce his ‘art’ in ‘Quotation and Originality’—an essay unpublished until 1875 (although based on lectures delivered in the late 1850s)—I will indicate a range of instances of appropriation in Emerson’s writings that elucidate the significance of this ‘art’ to his authorship more broadly. I will consider the ways in which Emerson can be seen to both practice and preach his ‘art’ through a number of examples that date back to the very beginnings of his career.<sup>37</sup>

Across previous chapters, I’ve identified the significance of ownership and exchange as dominant tropes in Emerson’s conceptualist and pedagogical remarks on the act of reading. Emerson’s thinking is anchored in a poetic system that identifies cultures of criticism and cultures of commerce as conceptual rhymes in his reimagining of the American marketplace as a ‘poet’s economy.’ However, if we look for concrete examples of appropriation in Emerson’s works—and partner such instances with an analysis of the ways in which ‘Quotation and Originality’ illustrates the notion that criticism and commerce intersect—then the act of critical exchange as a form of inherently capitalist ‘transaction’ emerges.<sup>38</sup> As explored in previous chapters, I will investigate the ways in which Emerson’s later and more explicit remarks regarding the economics of cultural and critical enterprise reflect and refract the significance of market practices and ideologies identified in his early works. In conclusion, I will look again to Emerson’s sense that the ‘the silent revolution which the newspaper has wrought’ adds to a theorization of circulation, critical exchange, and complex forms of intellectual ownership and ‘creative’ thought. I will suggest that his position can be expanded to include the value of literature and critical practice within his works more widely despite the fact that Emerson’s theorizations of creativity are more invested in the maintenance of a cultural economy rather than the act of creativity itself.<sup>39</sup>

We can identify both the *act* of appropriation—and an enumeration of appropriation as *art*—as a constant across Emerson’s authorship. In pursuit of this idea and following on from the conceptual appropriations of Francis Wayland and William Ellery Channing previously cited, I will explore Emerson’s

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<sup>36</sup> Emerson, ‘Quotation and Originality’ (1875), CW.VIII., 189

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 200

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 189

<sup>39</sup> Emerson, ‘Seventh of March Speech on the Fugitive Slave Law’ (1854), LL.I., 334



relationship with appropriation through three examples: his appropriation of Gulian C. Verplanck; citation of Johann von Goethe; and his plagiarizing of the works of Karl Marx. The consistency of Emerson's 'borrowed thoughts'—as Emerson refers to them—will be argued as proof of the importance of appropriation to his authorship. The centrality and significance of appropriation as part of Emerson's navigation of the metaphoric qualities of the act of reading will be foregrounded, as will the symbolic significance of intellectual ownership to 'creative reading.' Signalling the importance of appropriation as both *act* and *art* in Emerson's works, the politics of Emerson's poetics will be drawn to the fore, and the importance of market ideologies to his aesthetics argued as incontrovertible.

The variety of appropriation in Emerson's work—both as practiced and preached—has precedence within the wider history of American letters. Emphatic cases that support his interest in culture's itinerancy—in the ways in which an idea changes in terms of intimation and value—can be identified throughout the history of American literature; particularly with regard to the conflict of public or private theories of value and relative to an analysis of the subjective qualities of a text's capacity to inspire. Considering one such example, the public denouncement of Helen Keller's work in the late-nineteenth century (following an accusation of plagiarism) is particularly noteworthy. In 1892, Keller was accused of intellectual theft after her short fiction, 'The Frost King' (1891),<sup>40</sup> was identified as markedly comparable in form and content to Margaret Canby's 'Frost Fairies' (1889).<sup>41</sup> Whilst an official investigation followed—as did a tribunal, during which Keller was eventually acquitted of any crime—Keller later detailed this alleged instance of copyright infringement in her autobiography *The Story of My Life* (1903). Therein, she speaks plainly of the conceptual drive behind her 'habit of assimilating [material] and giving it out again as [her] own.'<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> First titled 'Autumn Leaves' and retitled 'The Frost King,' ahead of its pamphlet publication by Perkins School for the Blind, 1891, a detailed account of both Keller's work and its reception can be found in Hillel Schwartz, 'Discernment,' *The Culture of the Copy: Striking Likenesses, Unreasonable Facsimiles* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1998), 259-260

<sup>41</sup> Margaret T. Canby, 'The Frost Fairies' in *Birdie and his Fairy Friends* (Philadelphia, PN: W.M. Fell and Company, 1889), 110-122

<sup>42</sup> From Hellen Keller's *The Story of my Life*, published in digital facsimile by the Virginia Commonwealth University Library Social Welfare History Project in four parts, 2017. For Keller's commentary on the period of allegation and charge, see part four; <<https://socialwelfare.library.vcu.edu/issues/keller-helen-story-life-part-4/>> (Accessed 22.06.2019)

Discussing the ways in which she sought to ‘reproduce’ and ‘transform’ her sources of ‘inspiration,’ Keller argues that she learned ‘as all young and inexperienced persons learn; by assimilation and imitation,’ by putting ‘new ideas’ into ‘[borrowed] words.’ ‘Everything I found in books that pleased me I retained in my memory,’ she notes; ‘consciously or unconsciously, I adapted material [to my own purposes].’<sup>43</sup> Keller describes her process of assimilation and creative re-creation—of appropriation, in sum—as a kind of ‘mental gymnastics.’ An autopoiesis of remembered and recollected material that, somewhat akin to the experience of ‘déjà vu,’ pictures plagiarism as a ‘recursive’ elemental process of interpretation; ‘irrepressible’ and ‘inevitable as a recipe constantly resurfacing.’<sup>44</sup> Keller’s insistence on the pedagogical value of plagiarism—of our ‘trying on a paradigm’ as Charles Bernstein would later put it—is expanded upon in her memoirs as foundational to a reader’s relationship with literary matter. Plagiarism, or ‘appropriation,’ informs a reader’s project of self-discovery to Keller’s mind; and should be considered a significant form of interpretative labour.<sup>45</sup>

Upon publication of her memoirs, Keller’s case gained greater notoriety and—as a result—Mark Twain wrote to Keller to emphatically offer his support. Rather than involve himself directly in the legal specificities of the tribunal itself, Twain responds more to Keller’s conceptualist directive and would second her definition of plagiarism as an elemental attribute of any author’s work. For Twain, Keller’s case is in fact illustrative of the need to assess the conceptual importance of appropriation and inspiration as interconnected fields *and* as a means of understanding literature’s function as a social form. He effusively terms Keller’s case an ‘object lesson,’ suggesting that the complaints surrounding her work and her ‘assimilation’ of Canby’s writings are of a critical rather than legalistic concern.

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<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

<sup>44</sup> Schwartz, ‘Discernment,’ *The Culture of the Copy*, 259-260

<sup>45</sup> Charles Bernstein describes how—through the process of ‘copying’ convention—we arrive at an original convention of our own. In pursuit of this idea, he cites Emerson only to illustrate a variety of appropriation as Emerson would seek to both question and facilitate: ‘In ‘The American Scholar,’ Emerson talks about a boy standing before water and not realizing that he can swim. It’s an image I find very useful in responding to questions about how people can understand poetry that hasn’t already been written, that they’ve not learned about previously. [...] Trust your private thoughts, Emerson urges his young scholars, because they will speak the most publicly. Trust the associations that make sense to you, even if they appear out of time or inarticulate or inconsistent: allow them to speak. [...] (Why do I mention Emerson here? Is it a purely a rhetorical gesture to try to pull someone with that kind of legitimating authority into an otherwise...) Bernstein does not conclude this point; leaving a redolent pause where a consolidation of this argument would sit. See ‘Optimism and Critical Excess,’ *Critical Inquiry*, 16.4. (1990), 839

‘As if there was much of anything in any human utterance, oral or written, except plagiarism!’ Twain writes in response to Keller’s case; ‘The kernel, the soul—let us go further and say the substance, the bulk, the actual and valuable material of all human utterances—is plagiarism.’<sup>46</sup>

For substantially all ideas are second-hand, consciously and unconsciously drawn from a million outside sources, and daily use by the garnerer with a pride and satisfaction born of the superstition that he originated them; whereas there is not a rag of originality about them anywhere except the little discoloration they get from his mental and moral caliber and his temperament, and which is revealed in characteristics of phrasing. When a great orator makes a great speech, you are listening to ten centuries and ten thousand men—but we call it his speech, and really some exceedingly small portion of it is his. But not enough to signify. It is merely a Waterloo. It is Wellington’s battle, in some degree, and we call it his; but there are others that contributed. It takes a thousand men to invent a telegraph, or a steam engine, or a phonograph, or a telephone or any other important thing—and the last man gets the credit and we forget the others.<sup>47</sup>

Twain thus emphatically frames ‘plagiarism’ as a means of exploring the critical and cultural implications of creative exchange on a wider level in his analysis of Keller’s work. But in so doing, his prose vociferously apes the position Emerson previously set forwards in his own engagements with the act of appropriation and his propositioning of his ‘art of appropriation.’

Twain’s wording—‘for substantially all ideas are secondhand’—is only at a slight remove from Emerson’s effusive study of the ‘secondary use’ in ‘Poetry and Imagination.’<sup>48</sup> Furthermore, whether by accident or design, Keller’s own defence of her position also mimics Emerson’s perspective. Keller’s case functions as a compound of a number of Emerson’s ideas. Interested in the ‘mechanics of literature,’ as Emerson puts it in ‘Philosophy of History,’<sup>49</sup> she shares Emerson’s sense of the value and validity of ‘ready-

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<sup>46</sup> Twain, cited by Schwartz, ‘Discernment,’ *Ibid.*, 313

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>48</sup> Emerson, ‘Poetry and Imagination’ (1875), 11

<sup>49</sup> Emerson, ‘Literature’ (1837), *EL.II.*, 63

made' materials as a creative resource.<sup>50</sup> Furthermore, her allusion to original thought and interpretation as a form of 'mental gymnastics' is itself a rewording of Emerson's insistence in 'Nature' that 'the gymnastics of the understanding' propel the mind towards a need to comprehend and examine the mores and mechanisms of proprietorship.<sup>51</sup>

If we sit Emerson's own 'mental gymnastics' in its original context, he explains his position by way of a fiscal metaphor once again. Correlating 'Property and its filial systems of debt and credit,' he suggests that 'debt' serves a keen pedagogical function above and beyond the lived experience of poverty or social disequilibrium:

Debt, grinding debt, whose iron face the widow, the orphan, and the sons of genius fear and hate;—debt, which consumes so much time, which so cripples and disheartens a great spirit with cares that seem so base, is a preceptor whose lessons cannot be foregone, and is needed most by those who suffer from it most.<sup>52</sup>

Here, in somewhat unforgiving terms, Emerson infers that 'debt' extends beyond the lived experience of poverty to underpin something 'profounder'; the 'hiving' of 'spirit' and 'understanding.'

Moreover, property, which has been well compared to snow, —“if it fall level to-day, it will be blown into drifts to-morrow,” —is the surface action of internal machinery, like the index on the face of a clock. Whilst now it is the gymnastics of the understanding, it is hiving, in the foresight of the spirit, experience in profounder laws.<sup>53</sup>

It is the 'internal machinery' of authorial and interpretative agency that underwrites his 'debt' system in Emerson's 'art of appropriation,' keeping in mind that 'Nature' is Emerson's debut, his first public declaration of his position on mass-produced paper. An engagement with the notion of 'debt' and ownership thus traffics through from the onset of Emerson's career to its end. 'Our debt to tradition through

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<sup>50</sup> Emerson, 'Quotation and Originality' (1875), 200

<sup>51</sup> Emerson, 'Nature' (1836), CW.I., 38

<sup>52</sup> Ibid.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid.

reading and conversation is so massive, our protest or private addition so rare and insignificant,' he writes, that we shall never pay any debt to-day;' 'If we confine ourselves to literature, 't is easy to see that the debt is immense to past thought;' and yet 'This vast mental indebtedness has every variety that pecuniary debt has,—every variety of merit.'<sup>54</sup> In other words, regardless of the importance and extent of this debt, the 'present' is our chief concern: the contemporary 'moment.' 'We cannot overstate our debt to the Past, but the moment has the supreme claim,' Emerson notes. 'The Past is for us; but the sole terms on which it can become ours are its subordination to the Present.'<sup>55</sup> This is the 'merit' of a culture in 'debt'—it cumulatively leads up to the 'present,' inverting 'debt' as a principle. As in any system of accreditation, the 'past' must be read forwards to inform the 'present.'

Whether Keller's reference to Emerson occurs either by accident or by design is not the point—and Twain does not mention Emerson in his comments on Keller's circumstances as an 'object lesson.' Nonetheless, the fact that both Keller and Emerson rephrase the value of appropriation in ways that directly reference Emerson's commentaries on original thought *through* an act of conceptual appropriation, is useful for our current argument. Keller's appropriation of Canby—her act of 'mental gymnastics'—serves to indicate both the complexity of Emerson's thinking in 'Quotation and Originality,' and the power of his perspective through its reappropriation in Keller and Twain. However, before we consider Emerson's own practical relationship with appropriation, we should first look at the ways in which his choice terminology in 'Quotation and Originality' on 'secondary use,' 'quotation' and 'appropriation' operates.

In 'Quotation and Originality,' Emerson envisages the ways in which our management of textual material through quotation and appropriation encompasses both the personal practice of textual analysis and the formation of a common culture. 'Our knowledge is the amassed thought and experience of innumerable minds,' he writes; 'our language, our science, our religion, our opinions, our fancies we inherited. Our country, customs, laws, our ambitions, and our notions of fit and fair, —all these we never made, we found them ready-made; we but quote them.'<sup>56</sup> Whilst the plurality of Emerson's concern is of

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<sup>54</sup> Emerson, 'Quotation and Originality' (1875), CW.VIII., 178, 180, 189

<sup>55</sup> Ibid., 204

<sup>56</sup> Emerson, 'Quotation and Originality' (1875), CW.VIII., 200

note (he stresses this culture as *'ours'* rather than *'mine'* or *'yours'*), little to no academic work has been undertaken to identify the fact that Emerson's use of the phrase 'ready-made' antedates Marcel Duchamp's later popularization of the very same term.<sup>57</sup>

In 1961, reflecting on his creative practice at the beginnings of the twentieth century before a crowd assembled at New York's Museum of Modern Art, Duchamp reiterates the importance of the term 'readymade'—his 'happy idea'—as a term and concept established by himself:

In 1913 I had the happy idea to fasten a bicycle wheel to a kitchen stool and watch it turn. A few months later I bought a cheap reproduction of a winter evening landscape which I called "pharmacy" after adding two small dots, one red and one yellow, in the horizon. In New York in 1915 I bought at a hardware store a snow shovel on which I wrote "IN ADVANCE OF A BROKEN ARM." It was around that time that the word "READYMADE" came to mind to designate this form of manifestation. A point which I want very much to establish is that the choice of these "READYMADE" was never dictated by esthetic delectation. This choice was based on a reaction of visual indifference with at the same time a total absence of good or bad taste... in fact a complete anaesthesia. That sentence instead of describing the object like a title was meant to carry the mind of the spectator towards other regions more verbal.<sup>58</sup>

I have found no evidence that Duchamp ever read Emerson; however, the intersection of their arguments is undeniably significant. Beyond their shared usage of the term 'ready-made' itself, Duchamp echoes Emerson's assertion that 'the receiver's aim is on life, and not on literature;' that our 'indifference to the source' of our inspiration should be maintained; and that our concentration should focus on the interpretation and application of ideas. Duchamp's own theory of 'selection' also depends upon a theory

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<sup>57</sup> Considering Emerson's pluralist concerns in 'Quotation and Originality,' it is worth bearing in mind that he would note his call for 'original relation' as similarly collectivist in its ambitions in 'Nature'—'OUR age is retrospective. It builds the sepulchres of the fathers. It writes biographies, histories, and criticism. The foregoing generations beheld God and nature face to face; *we*, through their eyes. Why should not *we* also enjoy an original relation to the universe? Why should not *we* have a poetry and philosophy of insight and not of tradition, and a religion by revelation to us, and not the history of theirs?' Emerson, 'Nature' (1836), CW.I., 3 — *emphasis my own*

<sup>58</sup> From a talk delivered by Duchamp at the Museum of Modern Art, New York (October 19<sup>th</sup>, 1961); published in *Art and Artists*, 1.4. (1966), 47-48., and reprinted in Marcel Duchamp, (eds.) M. Sanouillet and E. Peterson, *The Writings of Marcel Duchamp* (London: Da Capo Press, 1973), 141-142

of ‘indifference’—of ‘visual indifference’ in this instance—and Duchamp explicitly notes that an alteration of public matter, itself an echo of Emerson’s insistence that every word is ‘tunable,’<sup>59</sup> constitutes an act of intellectual ownership through a form of creative modification.<sup>60</sup> Duchamp’s position—that he aimed to ‘carry the mind of the spectator’ to ‘other regions’ is also distinctly Emersonian. Recall Emerson’s assertion that ‘A certain awkwardness marks the use of borrowed thoughts; but as soon as we have learned what to do with them they become our own.’<sup>61</sup> The assumption is that once we can predict a particular purpose, if we can envisage an alternate ‘use,’ we can transform the object of attention and thus elevate the status of a given object to that of a work of art. As Emerson asserts in ‘The Poet’ (1844): ‘all symbols are fluxional; all language is vehicular and transitive, and is good, as ferries and horses are, for conveyance.’<sup>62</sup> The shared employment of the term ‘readymade’ and investment in cultures of ‘assemblage’ are thus useful for a reconsideration of how artistic practice, in this instance, crosses from a 19<sup>th</sup> century perspective and into the avant-garde tradition of the early to mid-twentieth century.

Duchamp’s final remark to his ‘egomaniac’s discourse,’ as he called his position on the significance of the ‘readymade,’ was that in essence all creative fabrication is a ‘work of assemblage.’ ‘Since the tubes of paint used by the artist are manufactured and readymade products,’ he notes, ‘we must conclude that all the paintings in the world are a kind of readymade.’<sup>63</sup> To quote Emerson’s identical position: ‘Our country, customs, laws, our ambitions, and our notions of fit and fair, —all these we never made, we found them ready-made,’ he writes; ‘we but quote them.’<sup>64</sup> The act of observation, to Emerson’s mind, is itself an act of ‘assemblage’—an ‘art of appropriation.’ Duchamp’s thoughts on the artificiality of the very materials of art, once again, argues comparison between these two thinkers. While the consistency of Emerson’s interest in appropriation in conceptual terms has already been elucidated, the Duchampian angle provides us with a sense of the complexity of Emerson’s treatment of appropriation as an inherently creative form of critical enterprise.

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<sup>59</sup> Emerson, ‘Quotation and Originality’ (1875), CW.VIII., 189

<sup>60</sup> Emerson, ‘Shakespeare, or the Poet’ (1850), CW.IV., 201

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, 198

<sup>62</sup> Emerson, ‘The Poet’ (1844), CW.II., 34

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, 141

<sup>64</sup> Emerson, ‘Quotation and Originality’ (1875), CW.VIII., 200

We can connect, then, Emerson's desire to express 'the internal machinery of self,' as noted in 'Uses of Great Men,'<sup>65</sup> with our aspiration to 'paint out [our] thoughts' to others and to ourselves.<sup>66</sup> Emerson's use of 'paint' as a medium and metaphor becomes then another way to link a distinctly personal perspectivism with the materials of everyday life. In 'Nominalist and Realist' (1844), for example—an essay included in 1844's *Second Series*—Emerson suggests that we read as though we were looking to extract the very base materials for a visual form of art: 'I think I have done well if I have acquired a new word from a good author,' he writes; 'and my business with him is to find my own, though it were only to melt him down into an epithet or an image for daily use: "Into paint will I grind thee, my bride!"'<sup>67</sup> Delivered in unflinching terms, Emerson's statement indicates something both extractive and exploitative in his imaginings of a reader at work on a page. In his characterization of an imaginary painter, Emerson unequivocally pictures the instrumental virtues of literature that interest him—not merely their 'daily use' but their ability to regenerate a new 'epithet or image' (arguably an iteration of his 'silent revolution' in miniature). As Duchamp would later claim, an original idea is an assemblage; built from publicly available cultural forms. As Emerson would suggest, we 'grind' public matter into a material we can use to our own ends; assemble meaning from particle and pigment; to better 'paint out our thoughts to [ourselves].' However, Emerson's position in 'Nominalist and Realist' is more complex than it may first appear.

Note that the above citation concludes with an unattributed citation; the phrase "Into paint will I grind thee, my bride!" that sits suggestively in quotation marks. This textual allusion is lifted from Washington Allston's 'The Paint King' (1809), a gothic ballad in which the titular Paint-King woos a damsel in order to grind her into a paint suitable for a portrait of the Queen of the Fairies.<sup>68</sup> Allston had died just a year before the publication of Emerson's *Second Series*, 1844. Leaving his work behind him, his corpus becomes 'an epithet or an image for daily use' and Emerson's act of appropriation becomes a way

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<sup>65</sup> An idea that Emerson would fleetingly touch upon in *Nature*, and the 'Discipline' chapter in particular: property, which has been well compared to snow,—“if it fall level to-day, it will be blown into drifts to-morrow,”—is the surface action of internal machinery, like the index on the face of a clock. Whilst now it is the gymnastics of the understanding, it is hiving, in the foresight of the spirit, experience in profounder laws. See Emerson, 'Nature' (1836), CW.I., 37-38

<sup>66</sup> Emerson, 'Uses of Great Men' (1850), CW.IV., 31

<sup>67</sup> Emerson, 'Nominalist and Realist' (1844), CW.III., 240-241

<sup>68</sup> Washington Allston, 'The Paint King,' *The Sylphs of the Season, with Other Poems* (Cambridge, MA: Hilliard and Metcalf, 1813), 115-131



to both symbolically and formally frame his argument and detail the process by which his *act* of appropriation becomes *art*. Allston's work now *works* for Emerson, but only in the form of a surplus value which declines any duty to honor the investments of Allston's own labour, personhood, and the productive relations which placed the text in Emerson's hands. Instead, Allston becomes merely another pigment in Emerson's palette of materials.

Emerson's desire to 'melt down' the works of others into materials of his own, into 'paint,' frames an exploration into how we assimilate, absorb and transform existing and past culture only to 'make it new' (to borrow a maxim from Ezra Pound). Where we would previously find Allston behind the text, for example, Emerson is now the 'painter' in question and, to the next reader, his works will be subject to the same process. Emerson is aware that—following the point of publication—he would himself be subject to this circular process of publication, interpretative assimilation and expressive transformation. Further supporting the correlation between Emerson and Duchamp, his own theory of 'assemblage' thus extends a personalist form of critical practice as well as the development of a common, national culture.

Mapping what he terms the 'slow growth' of an idea, and echoing the prospective revolution in public thought and feeling articulated in 'History,' in 'Quotation and Originality' Emerson explicitly argues that this type of critical assimilation is key to the progress of culture.<sup>69</sup> 'Mythology is no man's work,' he notes. Rather, it is a social exercise; an idea or image 'tossed from believer to poet, from poet to believer, everybody adding a grace or dropping a fault or rounding the form, until it gets an ideal truth.'<sup>70</sup> Emerson was transfixed by the 'common stories that circulate';<sup>71</sup> 'the circulation of poems';<sup>72</sup> the 'generalizations [that] circulate in the world,'<sup>73</sup> and his interest in 'circulation'—as detailed in 'Quotation and Originality'—supersedes his concern for the idea or object itself *in* circulation. As discussed throughout this thesis, Emerson's fascination with the mechanisms and implications of an object's movement between contexts

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<sup>69</sup> Emerson, 'Quotation and Originality' (1875), CW.VIII., 182

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, 181

<sup>71</sup> Emerson, 'The Man of Letters' (1863), CW.X., 256

<sup>72</sup> Emerson, 'Thoughts on Modern Literature' (1840), CW.XII., 319

<sup>73</sup> Emerson, 'Literature' (1837), EL.II., 65. For a particularly interesting assessment of Emerson's interest in circulation and our ability to glean meaning from his work outside of the contexts of American cultural history, see David Watson, 'Transcendental Untranslatables: Emerson and Translation,' in (eds.) S. Hegelsson, P. Vermeulen, *Institutions of World Literature: Writing, Translation, Markets* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2016), 209-225

impacts both his pedagogical interests in the qualitative act of reading itself and the ways in which he defines the role of the reader or scholar. The kinship between Emerson and Duchamp in this regard, in terms of their shared investment in a new and industrious form of creative reproduction, alludes to the radicality of Emerson's 'creative' approach. If we are to examine Emerson's own relationship with appropriation—identify instances in which he would 'grind' the works of others into paint—the idea (and importance) of appropriation is only further emboldened.

Detailing the practice of appropriation that underpin the theoretical ideas at work in 'Quotation and Originality,' Emerson cites Johann Wolfgang von Goethe as the source of his 'art of appropriation.' It was Goethe, he notes, who first 'frankly said, "What would remain to me if this art of appropriation were derogatory to genius? Every one of my writings has been furnished to me by a thousand different persons, a thousand things: wise and foolish have brought me, without suspecting it, the offering of their thoughts, faculties and experience."<sup>74</sup> Emerson's interest in this 'art' is hands-on; his allusion to Goethe is more than simply a proof of influence and cultural inheritance; more than simply a practical indication of his interest in cultural 'debt.' It is also indicative of Emerson's desire to investigate the function of appropriation and quotation in the works of others in order to better understand his own relationship with the page, his own relationship with the canon he seeks to be a part of. 'We are as much informed of a writer's genius by what he selects as by what he originates,' Emerson suggests: 'We read the quotation with his eyes, and find a new and fervent sense' of the implications carried by that cited material as it is wrested from its original textual environment.<sup>75</sup> Again, Emerson's position in 'Quotation and Originality' is unequivocally informed by ideas we encounter earlier in his writings; recall his assertion that 'A scholar is a selecting principle,' 1838: 'He takes only his own out of the multiplicity that sweeps & circles by him. He is like one of these nets or frames that are set out from the shore on rivers to catch driftwood, &c.'<sup>76</sup>

Goethe's 'art of appropriation' is first detailed in his journals, 1832, in response to Étienne Dumont's reactions to the cultural effectuality of the French Revolution. The Revolution's cultural

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<sup>74</sup> Emerson, 'Quotation and Originality' (1875), CW.VIII., 200

<sup>75</sup> Ibid., 194

<sup>76</sup> Emerson, 'Journal D' (Undated, 1838), JMN.VII., 40

implications are well documented as a sociocultural and political event of significant magnitude that would impact Dumont's writings and his general outlook on both the philosophical and sociological progress of republicanism and its intellectual and political corollaries (such as utilitarianism and democratic participation, for example).<sup>77</sup> Responding to a reading of Dumont's *Recollections of Mirabeau* (1832),<sup>78</sup> Goethe reflects on his 'second reading' of the text:<sup>79</sup>

The French want that their Mirabeau should be their Hercules. And they are right: —but a Hercules must be abundantly supplied with food. The forget, good people, that this colossus is composed of parts; —that this demi-god is a collective being. The greatest genius will never be worth much if he pretends to draw exclusively from his own resources. What is genius, but the faculty of seizing and turning to account everything that strikes us; — of co-ordinating and breathing life into all the materials that present themselves; of taking here marble, there brass, and building a lasting monument with them? If I were not assured that Mirabeau possessed in the highest possible degree the art of appropriating the knowledge and thoughts of those around him, I should not believe in the stories told of his influence.<sup>80</sup>

He then continues to develop his stance on the significance of this 'art of appropriating the knowledge and thoughts of those around [us]' and it is here that we find the passage that Emerson later draws on:

The most original young painter, who thinks he owes everything to his invention, cannot, if he really has genius, come into the room in which we are now sitting, and look around at the drawings with which it is hung, without going out a different man from what he came in, and with a new supply of ideas. What should I be—what would remain to me—if this art of appropriation were considered derogatory to genius? What have I done? I have collected and turned to account all that I have seen, heard, observes: —

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<sup>77</sup> Cyprian Blamires, 'The Creator of the Bentham Brand: Dumont in the French Revolution,' *The Revolution and the Creation of Benthamism* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 132-180

<sup>78</sup> For the first English-Language translation, see Étienne Dumont, *Recollections of Mirabeau and of the Two First Legislative Assemblies of France* (London: Edward Bull, 1832)

<sup>79</sup> Johann Wolfgang on Goethe, (tr. & ed.) S. Austin, *Characteristics of Goethe; from the German of Falk, von Müller*, Vol. III (London: Effingham Wilson, 1849), 71

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*, 74-75

I have put into requisition the works of nation and of man. Every one of my writings has been furnished me by a thousand different persons a thousand different things—the learned and the ignorant, the wise and the foolish, infancy and age, have come in turn—generally without having the least suspicion of it—to bring me offering of their thoughts, their faculties, their experience: often they have sowed the harvest I have reaped; *my work is that of an aggregation of beings taken from the whole of nature;—it bears the name of Goethe.* Such was Mirabeau: he had the genius of popular oratory; the genius of observation; the genius of appropriation; he detected talent where it existed, —fostered and reared it to maturity; and talent attached itself to him. He turned everything to account that he thought useful or apposite, without thinking himself obliged to quote his sources; his principal art was that of setting in motion a vast number of springs.<sup>81</sup>

In ‘Quotation and Originality,’ Emerson’s citation would plagiarize Goethe’s original verbiage. It is Goethe’s ‘art of appropriation’ that directly points to the creative assemblage of myriad sources into a single, confident critical, philosophical and/or political position: “What would remain to me if this art of appropriation were derogatory to genius? Every one of my writings has been furnished to me by a thousand different persons, a thousand things: wise and foolish have brought me, without suspecting it, the offering of their thoughts, faculties and experience. My work is an aggregation of beings taken from the whole of Nature; it bears the name of Goethe.”<sup>82</sup> Emerson’s own appropriation borrows and paraphrases its original source so that his own appropriation from the ‘amassed thought of innumerable minds’ directly corresponds with Goethe’s insistence that all cultural figures are a form of ‘composite being’ or ‘colossus’ of composite thoughts. Emerson self-consciously describes this process of appropriation as follows:

Most of the classical citations you shall hear or read in the current journals or speeches were not drawn from the originals, but from previous quotations in English books; and you can easily pronounce, from the use and relevancy of the sentence, whether it had not done duty many times before,—whether your jewel was got from the mine or from an auctioneer. We are as much informed

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<sup>81</sup> Ibid., 76-77

<sup>82</sup> Emerson, ‘Quotation and Originality’ (1875), CW.VIII., 200

of a writer's genius by what he selects as by what he originates. We read the quotation with his eyes and find a new and fervent sense; as a passage from one of the poets, well recited, borrows new interest from the rendering. As the journals say, "*the italics are ours.*" The profit of books is according to the sensibility of the reader.<sup>83</sup>

It is significant that Emerson's considerations regarding the appropriation of 'selected' material also refer to the editorial notes that accompany the 1849 translation and collation of *Characteristics of Goethe* (a collection of anecdotes and asides from Goethe's works). In Emerson's appropriation of Goethe's original coining of 'the art of appropriation,' I've left the italics intact at the suggestion of the first editor and translator of the 1849 edition of *Characteristics of Goethe*, Sarah Austin. Austin adds a footnote beneath Goethe's comments on Mirabeau: 'I cannot refrain from calling the reader's attention to these remarkable words,' she writes in a 'Translator's Note,' 'That Goethe would claim '*The italics are ours.*'<sup>84</sup> In a passage that already speaks explicitly to the value of 'secondary use'—Emerson re-establishes the basis of his own interpretation of Goethe's art of appropriation relative to Austin's emphasis. 'The italics are ours,' Emerson writes, implying both ownership and co-ownership of material shared between himself, Goethe, and Austin.<sup>85</sup>

As Robert D. Richardson notes, Emerson's engagement with Goethe's 'art of appropriation' is particularly complex as it both speaks to Emerson's own practice of mining material for his own purposes and, simultaneously references the act of interpretation as a social enterprise. Richardson notes that Emerson's fondness for Goethe's 'art' is significant as it speaks to a longstanding habit of transcribing quotations into his private journals and notebooks. It 'was enormously helpful to Emerson to hear Goethe committing himself so clearly to the extensive and frank reuse of another's material,' Richardson notes, a process that Emerson 'already found so congenial.'<sup>86</sup>As Emerson would state himself in his journals, 1851,

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<sup>83</sup> Ibid., 194

<sup>84</sup> Sarah Austin, 'Translator's Note,' *Characteristics of Goethe; from the German of Falk, von Müller*, 77

<sup>85</sup> Emerson, 'Quotation and Originality' (1875), CW.VIII., 194

<sup>86</sup> Robert D. Richardson, 'The Inner Light,' *Emerson: The Mind on Fire*, 172

‘Goethe was the cow from which all milk was drawn.’<sup>87</sup>

According to Richardson, Emerson was struck by ‘Goethe’s liberating endorsement of literary appropriation’ as it would endorse his own want to stretch and ‘extend’ his thinking beyond the present ‘horizon of thought and tradition.’<sup>88</sup>

Such appropriation does not mean, of course, that one adopts the ideas of others because one has no thoughts of one’s own. It does mean that the individual must be free not only to have his own thoughts but to take up the thoughts of others when they coincide with, restate, or extend his own.<sup>89</sup>

Richardson’s quiet suggestion here is that there is a melancholy streak in ‘Quotation and Originality’—a quality that accompanies Emerson’s sense of the ‘liberating’ virtues of appropriation as a practice rather than simply an act of imitation. Instead, an idea or image is irrevocably altered by virtue of this act of recontextualization. As we have previously noted, Emerson believed that ‘Other men are lenses through which we read our own minds,’ as would assert in ‘Uses of Great Men’ (1850).<sup>90</sup> That a published work of literature is ‘altered, remodeled and finally made [our] own’ through the process of reading.<sup>91</sup> Appropriation, in this sense of the word, is a means of portraying the dialectical progress of an idea; the movement from private reflection to public ordinance that Emerson articulates in ‘History’—his notion that ‘Every reform was once a private opinion, and when it shall be a private opinion again it will solve the problem of the age.’<sup>92</sup> In this sense, the modification of an idea both harkens to cultural progress and the need for cultural progress itself. A state of ‘sad self-knowledge,’ to again borrow Emerson’s phrase. It is worth noting also that, in ‘Man the Reformer,’ Emerson retitles his ‘reformer’ as a ‘Remaker of what man has made.’ Within the ‘mechanics’ of critical enterprise, the ‘remaker’ extends beyond literary institution

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<sup>87</sup> Emerson: ‘It will hereafter be noted that the events of culture in the nineteenth century were the new importance of the genius of Dante, Michel Angelo, & Raffael, to Americans; the reading of Shakespeare and, above all, the reading of Goethe. Goethe was the cow from which all their milk was drawn.’ See ‘Journal CO’ (Undated, 1851), JMN.XI., 382

<sup>88</sup> Richardson, ‘The Inner Light,’ *Emerson: The Mind on Fire*, 172.; see also, Emerson, ‘Quotation and Originality’ (1875), CW.VIII., 180

<sup>89</sup> Richardson, ‘The Inner Light,’ *Emerson: The Mind on Fire*, 172-173

<sup>90</sup> Emerson, ‘Uses of Great Men’ (1850), CW.IV., 5

<sup>91</sup> Emerson, ‘Shakespeare, or the Poet’ (1850), CW.IV., 201

<sup>92</sup> Emerson, ‘History’ (1841), CW.II., 5

alone. As Emerson writes, ‘We quote not only books and proverbs, but arts, sciences, religion, customs and laws; nay, we quote temples and houses, tables and chairs.’<sup>93</sup>

Considering Emerson’s complex reflections on appropriation, it is notable how Emerson himself is often subject to appropriation and critical redirection. Look to Friedrich Nietzsche, for example, who famously cites Emerson’s ‘Circles’ (without proper accreditation) in his essay ‘Schopenhauer as Educator’ (1873) alongside an array of canonical sources (Oliver Cromwell, Michel de Montaigne, Diogenes, and others). The appropriative habit in Nietzsche’s work is indicative of his conceptualist understanding of every author as the beneficiary ‘of the long and sweeping tide of intellectual history.’<sup>94</sup> However, it constitutes more than simply a critical deviation from the practice of citation as an informational or evidential support for an argument. Nietzsche is quilting these authors into something new; into a new fabric of images and ideas entirely distanced from the positioning and thinking of the works he draws upon, and Nietzsche’s quotation of Emerson in this context (or ‘the American,’ as he succinctly terms him) demands that we ask what a text does; what history does to a text; and what we can do to better merge the study of culture and the study of cultural contexts. It draws the concept of context to the fore and asks that we consider not how a text its created or authored but how its social circumstances disrupt its claims and arguments. ‘A new degree of culture would instantly revolutionize the entire system of human pursuits;’ Emerson writes in ‘Circles,’<sup>95</sup> and as Nietzsche would ‘parrot’ in his reflections on Schopenhauer and frailty of institutional philosophy.<sup>96</sup> This new ‘culture,’ as Emerson seems envisage it, is contingent not on the creation of new works of literature; rather, it depends upon a consideration of our ‘use of literature,’ our

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<sup>93</sup> Emerson, ‘Quotation and Originality’ (1875), CW.VIII., 178-179

<sup>94</sup> David LaRocca, ‘Emerson Recomposed: Nietzsche’s Uses of his American Soul-Brother,’ in (ed.) M.T. Conrad, *Nietzsche and the Philosophers* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2017), 227

<sup>95</sup> Emerson: ‘There are degrees in idealism. We learn first to play with it academically, as the magnet was once a toy. Then we see in the heyday of youth and poetry that it may be true, that it is true in gleams and fragments. Then its countenance waxes stern and grand, and we see that it must be true. It now shows itself ethical and practical. We learn that God IS; that he is in me; and that all things are shadows of him. The idealism of Berkeley is only a crude statement of the idealism of Jesus, and that again is a crude statement of the fact that all nature is the rapid efflux of goodness executing and organizing itself. Much more obviously is history and the state of the world at any one time directly dependent on the intellectual classification then existing in the minds of men. The things which are dear to men at this hour are so on account of the ideas which have emerged on their mental horizon, and which cause the present order of things, *as a tree bears its apples*. A new degree of culture would instantly revolutionize the entire system of human pursuits.’ See ‘Circles’ (1841), CW.II., 309-310.

<sup>96</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, (tr.) R.J. Hollingdale, ‘Schopenhauer as Educator,’ in (ed.) D. Breazeale, *Untimely Mediations* (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 193-194

‘use of books.’

As the self-designated judge of ‘so-called culture,’ Nietzsche suggests that the critic or philosopher ‘supervises’ culture from ‘a dignified distance,’ where they should be working towards an ‘amalgamating’ of the disparate spheres of human knowledge.<sup>97</sup> This is also Emerson’s instruction, as David LaRocca notes. For LaRocca, Emerson’s interest in classifying appropriation as an ‘art’ emphasizes the critical authority of context. It tasks us with individually identifying ‘what is not there in the [original] text,’ ‘what is beyond the text,’ and consider the forms of critical and creative opportunism afforded by the ways in which historic and sociocultural development may revitalize and transform the initial meaning of a text and its original terms of argument. LaRocca proposes that Emerson’s allusion to Goethe’s ‘art of appropriation’ engenders such an argument.<sup>98</sup> Appropriation is thus emphatically an ‘art’ to Emerson’s mind—‘a radical and creative amendment and enriching’ of extant literary culture, and not an outright theft—and LaRocca provocatively suggests that Emerson’s engagement with appropriation is enough for us to reconsider his ‘heraldic’ status for our present times.<sup>99</sup> Perhaps Emerson is our ‘patron saint for the creative commons,’ to again recall LaRocca’s remark and consider the contemporaneity of Emerson’s thinking in conceptual terms.<sup>100</sup>

The interest in the practice of decontextualizing, appropriating and re-using literary work in Emerson’s writings is sufficient enough to support LaRocca’s assertion. And perhaps the greatest, practical example of this ‘art of appropriation’ in Emerson’s corpus is his late collection *Parnassus* (1876). A tententiously titled late anthology of aphorisms, allusions, citations and poems that Emerson developed through his journals and notebooks over the course of a fifty-two-year period (the earliest entry dated is 1822; the last, 1874).<sup>101</sup>

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<sup>97</sup> Ibid., 194

<sup>98</sup> LaRocca, ‘Emerson Recomposed,’ 227

<sup>99</sup> Ibid., 223

<sup>100</sup> Ibid.

<sup>101</sup> See Ralph Waldo Emerson, (ed.) E. Emerson, *Parnassus* (New York, NY: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1874); see also the entry on ‘The Parnassus Plays,’ in *The Encyclopedia Britannica*, Vol. XX. (1911): ‘PARNASSUS PLAYS, a series of three scholastic entertainments performed at St John’s College, Cambridge, between 1597 and 1603. They are satirical in character and aim at setting forth the wretched state of scholars and the small respect paid to learning by the world at large, as exemplified in the adventures of two university men, Philomusus and Studioso. [...] The three pieces have but small literary and dramatic value, their importance consisting almost wholly in the allusions to, and criticisms of contemporary literature. Nikhil



*Parnassus* could be classified as an anthology, but it is also—and more interestingly—the single longest book published under Emerson’s name in his lifetime that would itself take the lion’s share of his lifetime to complete. It details the relationship with citation, appropriation, ownership and influence that Emerson elsewhere displays through a continuous and dedicated use of quotations, appropriations and aphorisms. *Parnassus*, which clocks in at over five hundred pages, features almost seven hundred distinct poetic fragments and works from almost two hundred poets. It ‘exhibits the most extensive range of quoted source materials in any of [Emerson’s] works.’<sup>102</sup> As an anthology, theoretically and critically speaking, it foregrounds the more progressive qualities of Emerson’s authorship and conceptualist engagement with reading and interpretation, but it is of vital significance that it percolates across the entirety of Emerson’s career. Emerson confides his rationale for *Parnassus* to his journal (in an undated entry in a journal kept between 1870 and 1873). ‘One reason for *Parnassus*,’ he notes, ‘is that I wish a volume on my own table that [...] shall have nothing but poetry.’<sup>103</sup> However, and as Nikhil Bilwakesh writes, ‘the very difficulty in authorizing such a text makes us attend to the role citation and quotation [stakes] in Emerson’s work.’ It provokes ‘larger proprietary questions of nineteenth-century authorship,’ ‘twentieth-century discourse of the death and rebirth of the author,’ and pre-empting anxieties that would abound in twenty-first century culture; ‘in [our] current age when digital dissemination threatens copyright value and challenges writers to reconfigure [their] conceptions of creative composition in formally innovative works.’<sup>104</sup> Emerson himself seems to have been aware of the theoretical significance of *Parnassus* as a publication and as a reflection of a praxis he had long been cultivating.

Writing in preface to its 1874 first publication, Emerson notes: ‘This volume took its origin from an old habit of copying any poem or line that interested me into a blank book. In many years, my selections filled the volume, and required another; and still the convenience of commanding all my favorites in one album, instead of searching my own and other libraries for a desired song or verse, and the belief that what

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Bilwakesh infers that Emerson’s aims and intentions were broadly similar in scope through comparing Emerson’s efforts to subsequent anthologies of verse and national literature. See Nikhil Bilwakesh, ‘Emerson’s Decomposition: *Parnassus*,’ *Nineteenth-Century Literature*, 67.4. (2013), 520-545

<sup>102</sup> Bilwakesh, ‘Emerson’s Decomposition: *Parnassus*,’ 521

<sup>103</sup> Emerson, ‘Journal ST’ (Undated, 1870-1873), JMN.XVI., 224

<sup>104</sup> *Ibid.*

charmed me probably might charm others, suggested the printing of my enlarged selection.’<sup>105</sup> In terms of the bibliographic extent of the ‘enlarged’ miscellany of texts that feature in *Parnassus*, Bilkawesh summarizes the range of Emerson’s curatorial eye as follows:

Shakespeare is, by far, the most represented poet, with eighty-eight pieces, including nine sonnets. William Wordsworth, Geoffrey Chaucer, Byron, and Walter Scott are also heavily represented. The selection of prominent Americans includes Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, William Cullen Bryant, and Ellery Channing, but no Americans from before the nineteenth century, nor Edgar Allan Poe, Walt Whitman, or Emerson himself. Poems from lesser-known poets like Forceythe Wilson, Felicia Hemans, Emerson’s brother, Edward Bliss Emerson, and from writers not necessarily known for their poetry—John Quincy Adams, Henry David Thoreau, J. J. Garth Wilkinson—are also included. A second edition (1875) added Percy Bysshe Shelley among others, and reprints in 1876, 1878, 1880, 1881, 1882, and 1884 demonstrate the book’s popularity.<sup>106</sup>

The publication of *Parnassus*, going by Emerson’s preface to the first edition, could be easily dismissed as an egotistical endeavour facilitated by his long-life on the public stage and his celebrity status.<sup>107</sup> Despite the possible desire to capitalize on this, Emerson’s ‘old habit’ of copyism provides a theoretical framework that demands further investigation. As Ronald Bosco notes, ‘*Parnassus* is a practical example of a poetic theory’ expressed in Emerson’s later lectures and essays that raises important questions ‘about intertextuality and textual integrity.’<sup>108</sup> However, I would argue that we can track the foundations of Emerson’s interest in intertext back to the very beginnings of his career.

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<sup>105</sup> Emerson, in preface to (ed.) E. Emerson, *Parnassus* (New York, NY: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1874), iii

<sup>106</sup> Bilkawesh, ‘Emerson’s Decomposition: *Parnassus*,’ 522

<sup>107</sup> Ronald A. Bosco, ‘Poetry for the World of Readers and Poetry for the Bards Proper: Poetic Theory and Textual Integrity in Emerson’s *Parnassus*,’ *Studies in the American Renaissance* (1989), 259. This essay, dealing with the theoretical value of *Parnassus* to a revision of Emerson’s later works, also provides a useful manuscript study; exploring the ways in which Emerson would prepare the final manuscript. Bosco concentrated on Emerson’s notebooks: ‘*Parnassus Scraps*, a now mutilated 32-page notebook which bears early dates (17 February-4 July 1824), and contains two minimal entries relating to *Parnassus* and [another], subtitled *Theory of Poetry*: a 291-page notebook which dates from the late-1860s to the early-1870s and contains transcriptions of many poems for *Parnassus* as well as of material incorporated into the late essay ‘Poetry and Imagination,’ 262-264

<sup>108</sup> *Ibid.*, 259-260

For example, although Emerson would decry our need to ‘parrot of other men’s thinking’ in ‘The American Scholar’, ‘The American Scholar’ is itself emblematic of conceptual appropriation in Emerson’s early writings. Although unmentioned in Emerson’s private or public works of his early period—and entirely unregistered by Emerson’s critics—his ‘American Scholar’ is narrowly preceded by an address of that same title delivered by Gulian C. Verplanck the previous year. Emerson would deliver his ‘American Scholar’ to Phi Beta Kappa Society at Cambridge, Massachusetts, on August 31<sup>st</sup>, 1837; Verplanck would narrowly antedate him with his own ruminations on the socio-cultural responsibilities and implications of critical work in an address titled ‘The Advantages and Dangers of the American Scholar,’ for the proceedings of the Annual commencement of Union College on July 26<sup>th</sup>, 1836.<sup>109</sup> Beyond their shared title, the comparability between Verplanck and Emerson is particularly noteworthy and demands further analysis.

A prominent attorney and public figure with ties to America’s developing financial culture, Verplanck’s work demonstrates the importance that an independent literary culture would play in securing and stabilizing America’s successes as an independent economic nation. In Verplanck’s 1831 oration ‘The Laws of Literary Property,’ he discusses the vital and hegemonic role of literature in the evolutionary development of America’s constitutional basis. However, rather than elucidating an acculturation and education of a general public through the exchange of cultural works, Verplanck was more interested in the legal mores surrounding the question of their ownership. Verplanck sought to develop a philosophical sense of the legal and existential rights of an author; a suite of rights that he saw as ultimately superseding the more ephemeral claims to a work of literature that a reader could possibly stake. Referring to the establishment of a gamut of copyright laws in the early nineteenth century as assuring the ‘security’ of an ‘American’ cultural legacy—and reflecting on James Madison’s successes in proposing such legislation—Verplanck sees such an ‘act of great and useful public policy’ as ‘an early and favourite object of the [the]

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<sup>109</sup> Gulian C. Verplanck, *The Advantages and Dangers of the American Scholar* (New York, NY: Wiley and Long, 1836)

constitution and the fathers of [America's] civil liberties.' For Verplanck, the 'creativity' incarnate to literary work pertains wholly to the concretisation of national and cultural order:<sup>110</sup>

In the convention which framed the present constitution of the United States of America, resolutions and amendments to the same effect were brought forward from different quarters; and when the section giving Congress this power was reported in the form it now bears, it appears to have been adopted unanimously. These venerable and great men judged well and wisely. They knew that the best security of national union and national power was to be sought in the influence of national literature, science, arts, and education. They saw clearly that their own legislation, and that of those who were destined to administer the government they had reared, would be but feeble and temporary without the aid of that more potent and far more lasting, though secret and silent legislation which acts on the mind and the affections. They were deeply read in the history of the past, and all history that had taught them the truth. Philosophy and poetry repeated this impressive lesson.<sup>111</sup>

The lesson of 'philosophy and poetry' is that which underlines the significance of literary culture to the 'national union' and in turn, 'national power' depends upon a 'national literature, science, arts and education.' Verplanck would himself versify these ideas in an unattributed appropriation:

Lycurgus fashioned Sparta's fame,  
And Cæsar gave the Roman name universal sway.  
Where are they? Homer's reverend page,  
Holds empire to the latest age,  
And tongues and climes obey.<sup>112</sup>

A verse lifted from Mark Arkenstone's anthology *The Pleasures of the Imagination* (1819), the importance of literature to the political extension of America's cultural ambitions is unambiguously indicated by

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<sup>110</sup> Gulian C. Verplanck, 'The Law of Literary Property' (1831) in *Discourses and Addresses on Subjects of American History, Arts and Literature* (New York: J. & J. Harper, 1833), 220

<sup>111</sup> *Ibid.*, 220-221

<sup>112</sup> *Ibid.*, 221

Verplanck's reference to the 'reverend page.'<sup>113</sup>

Considering the viability of a national literary aesthetic, Verplanck sees an American literary culture as a diagnostic tool for the economic health of the country. As would Emerson, he notes the absence of the equivalent of an 'American Homer,' and like Emerson's allusions regarding the social significance of literature, Verplanck desires culture to be on a par with other legislative models of governance.<sup>114</sup> He acknowledges the need for a 'silent legislation'—a mirroring of Emerson's later insistence of the importance of beauty as a form of 'legislature,' one in which the 'market' is a 'silent gallery' poised for a 'silent revolution.'<sup>115</sup> But the locus of Verplanck's argument, however, refers us more directly back to the nationalist nuances of Emerson's 'Quotation and Originality.' Once again, American culture must move away from the weight of its European inheritance and assert its own identity. 'It be the rare lot of countries and of ages far apart to produce genius [as] peerless as that of Homer,' Verplanck notes:

Yet our patriots saw that in our state of society the absence of such glory, should that haply be the destiny of our country—we trust far otherwise—would be more than supplied in aggregate effect by the number of powerful and cultivated minds, their activity, intensity, and constancy of action, through every channel of education or instruction, of mental gratification, and amusement. These are causes which, (to use the expressive phrase of an excellent and highly-gifted countryman of ours, who, if he had not been impelled by his genius to aspire at being the Raphael of his native land, might have been its Tasso (I mean Washington Allston,) these are causes and influences "which mould a nation's soul."<sup>116</sup>

It is an evocative accident (but an accident nonetheless) that Allston reappears in this context. Here, Verplanck depicts the reactionary qualities of America's early literary output; the need for an American

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<sup>113</sup> From Mark Arkenstone's 'Ode VII., On the Use of Poetry' in *The Pleasures of the Imagination, and Other Poems* (New York: R. & W.A. Bartow, 1819), 109., cited by Verplanck, 'The Laws of Literary Property,' 224

<sup>114</sup> The editors of the 1904 Riverside edition of Emerson's *Complete Works* note that—answering to the large number of references to Homer as a character in Emerson's essays—'Homer stood for Greece' and argue Emerson was constantly on the hunt for an American equivalent. See 'Plato, or the Philosopher' (1850), CW.IV., n.1, 87

<sup>115</sup> Emerson, 'The American Scholar' (1837), CW.I., 87

<sup>116</sup> Verplanck, 'The Laws of Literary Property,' 225

‘Raphael’ or ‘Tasso’ suggests a receptivity to European cultural influence, but also a need for a creative and contextual critical process able to adapt these cultural terms to an American context. Emerson also states such an idea in ‘Quotation and Originality,’ wherein he cites not only the importance of Tasso’s works alone, but the critical inferences that abound in a generalized reading of Tasso—‘Read Tasso, and you think of Virgil; read Virgil, and you think of Homer.’<sup>117</sup> But as Emerson admits the narrow appeal of this chain of referents, Verplanck and Emerson’s thinking play out as a call and response. ‘The originals are not original,’ Emerson writes, ‘There is imitation, model and suggestion, to the very archangels, if we knew their history. The first book tyrannizes over the second [...] [it] forces you to reflect how narrow are the limits of human invention.’<sup>118</sup>

The comparability between Verplanck and Emerson is further substantiated when we turn our attention to Verplanck’s subsequent addresses of the 1830s. Verplanck’s ‘The Advantages and Dangers of the American Scholar’ continues some of the ideas established in ‘The Laws of Literary Property’ by comparing intellectual property and deed to land. As Manuel Shvartzberg Carrió has argued, the working out of contract and land acquisition inspired America’s early literary culture. As a form of power both paper-based and immaterial, the metaphor of the contract was crucial on multiple levels. It could disrupt any popular consensus as per the mythic understanding of land and ownership, question the Jeffersonian agricultural imperative behind America’s industrial future, and function as a form of critical (or cultural) transaction; not to mention interrogate the dominant, symbolic (and political) ideation of the frontier in antebellum society. Commenting on the development of this contract culture, Carrió remarks on a key shift in public perception with regards to the ways in which the abstraction of value through sales aided in the understanding of individualism:<sup>119</sup> ‘Land was becoming less and less important for how it could sustain a particular community and more important for how it could produce value for an anonymous market—either agriculturally or in itself as a universalized territorial commodity that could be sold in the land market

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<sup>117</sup> Emerson, ‘Quotation and Originality’ (1875), CW.VIII., 180

<sup>118</sup> Ibid.

<sup>119</sup> Manuel Shvartzberg Carrió, ‘Contracts’ in (eds.) Reinhold Martin, Jacob Moore, Susanne Schindler, *The Art of Inequality: Architecture, Housing and Real Estate* (New York: Columbia University Press; The Temple Hoyne Buell Center for the Study of American Architecture, 2015), 134-148

[to the benefit of the private individual].<sup>120</sup>

Carrió continues to allege that this transference of symbolic power from the product itself to the point of purchase ‘made land abstract in the sense of being understood (or represented) as equal to other lands which were comparable to it only by reference to an external figure, the price of a unit area, in a universal sphere, the market.’ Thus, the capacity of an individual to own and work land—in other words manipulating its public value through private effort—could encourage a culture of competition dependent upon the privileging of private labour.<sup>121</sup> For Carrió, the pressures of this kind of abstraction in labour terms lead to a kind of ‘revolution’ in which the ‘radical subjectivism of contracts between private individuals, understood as the simple expression of a meeting of minds,’ facilitated the ascendancy of a merchant class. ‘Legal conflicts could therefore now be determined by reference to the inherent laws of this new realm, a rational-universal market, in which the individual speculator was king,’ he writes.<sup>122</sup> As Morton J. Horwitz has suggested, this had an acute impact on the symbolic qualities of ‘land’ in the popular American psyche. No longer anchored in an abstract view of necessity but rather in an idea of exchange between parties, a right to the acquisition of land (rather than land itself) became key. Land was rendered an indifferent article relative to the more subjective terms of the marketplace; and ‘If value is subjective [...] the function of exchange is to maximise the [...] incommensurable desires of individuals.’<sup>123</sup>

In Verplanck’s ‘American Scholar,’ land and territory are also at the heart of an identification of labour as a facilitator for individualism. He notes that America’s ‘immense extent of fertile territory’ has opened up ‘an inexhaustible field for successful enterprise, assuring to industry a certain reward for its labors,’ and assuring that ‘land’ metaphorically denotes ‘a magnificent [political] system.’<sup>124</sup> That a capacity to work, till, buy and build upon the land serves as a symbol for the interrelation of ‘political system, [...] popular feeling and public opinion’—and the supposed availability of land and resource parallels the

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<sup>120</sup> *Ibid.*, 137

<sup>121</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>122</sup> *Ibid.*, 139

<sup>123</sup> Morton J. Horwitz, ‘The Triumph of Contract,’ *The Transformation of American Law, 1780-1860* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1977), 180-181

<sup>124</sup> Verplanck, *The Advantages and Disadvantages of the American Scholar*, 5

‘unconstrained freedoms of opinion, of speech, [and] of the press.’<sup>125</sup> As with Emerson, Verplanck alleges that this intellectual freedom is only attainable if the ‘American citizen’ will turn on themselves with an ‘attentive eye,’ ‘turn [their] contemplation inward upon [themselves], examine [their] own breast and life, and readily perceive how external causes control his fortunes.’<sup>126</sup> The similarities of these ideas to the instruction that Emerson gives to Fuller and Woodbury is noteworthy, and Verplanck and Emerson’s shared interest in inward contemplation gives their work and theoretical stance a commonality that is more than incidental. The proximity of Verplanck and Emerson’s lectures both in terms of their history and conceptual content has caused Verplanck’s biographers to directly allude to the possibility of Emerson having plagiarised Verplanck. Given the narrowness of Verplanck’s audience and the absence of any palpable acknowledgement of his critical works (compared to Emerson’s status) it would appear as if Emerson’s appropriation of Verplanck was successful in this regard.

Newfield argues that Emerson’s interest in citation as detailed in ‘Quotation and Originality’ ‘is rooted in private property,’ *not* sociality, despite the fact that exchange is a fundamental part of the social sphere. ‘Quotation is of course a borrowing, but it requires no return’ he notes; and Emerson’s interest appears to be in our capacity to assimilate and appropriate material so as to assert ownership of an object or idea.<sup>127</sup> Emerson refers to this critical process as a form of ‘vamping’ in ‘Quotation and Originality,’ a way to follow the ‘slow growth’ of an image as it shifts between cultural contexts:

In romantic literature examples of this vamping abound. The fine verse in the old Scotch ballad of *The Drowned Lovers*—

*Thou art roaring ower loud, Clyde water,  
Thy streams are ower strang;  
Make me thy wrack when I come back,*

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<sup>125</sup> Ibid. Writing in the wake of the discovery of the ‘new world,’ and looking to unpack something of the complexities of his Biblical allusions, Locke would employ America as an explicatory tool; explicitly citing the ‘vacant places,’ ‘wild woods’ and ‘uncultivated wastes of America’ as an opportunity for a philosophical conceptualization of ‘tillage or husbandry’ as a means of conceptualizing intellectual and political freedoms at both a local and national level. See Barbara Arneil, ‘Colonialism: Economic and Ethical Debates,’ *John Locke and America: The Defence of English Colonialism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 110; and John Locke, ‘Of Civil Government,’ *Two Treatise of Government* (London: C. and J. Rivington; *et al.*, 1824), 151-152

<sup>126</sup> Verplanck, *The Advantages and Disadvantages of the American Scholar*, 6-7

<sup>127</sup> Newfield, ‘Late Emerson,’ *The Emerson Effect*, 162



*But spare me when I gang—*

...is a translation of Martial's epigram on *Hero and Leander*, where the prayer of Leander is the same: —

*Parcite dum propero, mergite dum redeo.*

Hafiz furnished Burns with the song of John Barleycorn, and furnished Moore with the original of the piece, —

*When in death I shall calm recline,  
Oh, bear my heart to my mistress dear, etc.*<sup>128</sup>

Emerson's reference to the Roman poet Martial in this context is particularly evocative. The first classical poet to use the term *plagiarius* to refer to literary theft (the term etymologically denotes a "kidnapping," an illegal or improper enslavement), Martial's innovative relationship with the concept of plagiarism goes far beyond his simply coining the term: he distinctly and uniquely treats plagiarism as a poetic process.<sup>129</sup>

Plagiarism, after Martial, terminologically engenders a reflexive discourse on the nature of poetry and its materiality, as evidenced in the fact that Martial would complain of somebody stealing his verses only to then dispute whether such a theft was possible considering the immateriality of an idea. Introduced into English in 1601 as a means to classify an intellectual 'theft' by dramatist Ben Jonson, the word plagiarism also signals the ways in which the materiality of a literary object renders an idea a commercial

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<sup>128</sup> Ibid., 186

<sup>129</sup> See Gideon Nisbet, whose own translations of Martial are used to great effect in his essay 'Martial's Poetics of Plagiarism': *nostris uersibus esse te poetam, / Fidentine, putas cupisque credi? / sic dentata sibi uidetur / Aegle emptis ossibus Indicoque cornu; / sic, quae nigrior est cadente moro, / cerussata sibi placet Lycoris. / hac et tu ratione qua poeta es, / caluus cum fueris, eris comatus.* | 'Do you tell yourself you're a poet, Fidentinus? Do you want people to think it's true, when the lines you're using are mine? Just so does Aegle reckon she has teeth, because she's bought ones made of bone and Indian ivory; and Lycoris, who's blacker than a windfall mulberry, loves how she looks in white lead. Just so, and by the same rationale that makes you a poet, you'll have a full head of hair when you go bald.' See 'Martial's Poetics of Plagiarism,' *The American Journal of Philology*, 141.1. (2019), 55-81. For the supposed first use of the term in Martial's work, see Martial, (tr.) Gideon Nisbet: 'In my little books, Fidentinus, there's just one page that's your own—but one that's branded with the unmistakable style of its master, which exposes your poems to public disgrace as blatant plagiarism. A Lingonian kaftan hung alongside double-dyed city purples dirties them with its greasy tufts—just like this; if a black raven promenades along the banks of the Cayster amidst Leda's swans it attracts mockery—just like this; when a sacred grove swarms with Philomena's birds, the harmonious nightingales, the dastardly magpies clashes with their Cecropian lullabies—just like this. My books have no need of an informer or judge: your own page takes the stand and tells you, 'You're a thief.' I.53., *Epigrams* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 19

entity; written down, a thought becomes a circulatory and sellable property and can thus be bought, sold, and stolen (recall the previous allusion to Emerson's interest in the 'sung' and 'unsung' elements of American society previously mentioned in Chapter ii.i).<sup>130</sup>

As J. Mira Seo notes, Martial's project was to provide a distinction between 'the tangible book and the incorporeal song' as cultural modes, and in so doing propose stark contrast between 'the trendy notoriety of the present' (the 'tangible' book) and 'the eternal glory of the future' (the immaterial song).<sup>131</sup> His question, responding to this categorical distinction of forms, was a simple one. 'If poetry can be stolen, is it an object?' If that object is stolen, can it serve any purpose beyond a self-interested act of attainment?<sup>132</sup> Could this object ever accrue the kind of cultural value that a song is traditionally afforded?<sup>133</sup> Martial's legacy, according to Luke Roman, was thus to confront the economic fiction of literary patronage and the origins of the publishing house by considering literature in terms of its 'utility, discardability [...] and immediate social usages.' The result is a concentrated 'commodification of poetry' that, instead of foregrounding the detail or meaning of a specific poem, portrays culture as a kind of an 'economy,' governed by processes of 'transaction,' that—drawing attention to the transference of an idea or image between reader and writer; and framing the popularity of an idea or image as an attribute of its author—supplants the commonality of oral traditions with a mercantile atmosphere of competition.<sup>134</sup>

As Newfield notes, and as we have seen throughout this thesis, Emerson was alert to the theoretical grounds of such a process of valorisation. However, and this is a crucial distinction, Emerson's interest in appropriation denotes a receptivity to the ways in which 'exchange value' is constituted by relations among various entities rather than by reference to the essence of literature as a singular commodified object. If we return to the 'force of two in literature', explained by Emerson as a 'transaction' of mutual benefit:

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<sup>130</sup> For a good, summative history of the introduction of the term 'plagiarism' into the English language and its conceptual impact on Renaissance theatre and poetry, see Marjorie Garber, 'Over the Influence,' *The Muses on Their Lunch Hour* (New York, NY: Fordham University Press, 2017), 32-57

<sup>131</sup> J. Mira Seo, 'Plagiarism and Poetic Identity in Martial,' *The American Journal of Philology*, 130.4. (2009), 567-570

<sup>132</sup> Considering the idea of plagiarism elucidating a self-interested form of theft or material gain, it's an amusing aside—as noted by Nisbet—that Martial can be argued as founding and popularizing our modern understanding of both 'plagiarism' and 'masturbation.' See Nisbet, 55-56

<sup>133</sup> Seo, 'Plagiarism and Poetic Identity in Martial,' 567

<sup>134</sup> Luke Roman, 'The Representation of Literary Materiality in Martial's *Epigrams*,' *JRS*, 91. (2001), 113-45

The capitalist of either kind is as hungry to lend as the consumer to borrow; and the transaction no more indicates intellectual turpitude in the borrower than the simple fact of debt involves bankruptcy. On the contrary, in far the greater number of cases the transaction is honorable to both. Can we not help ourselves as discreetly by the force of two in literature? Certainly it only needs two well placed and well-tempered for coöperation, to get somewhat far transcending any private enterprise! Shall we converse as spies? Our very abstaining to repeat and credit the fine remark of our friend is thievish. Each man of thought is surrounded by wiser men than he, if they cannot write as well. Cannot he and they combine?

Newfield defines Emerson's thinking here as follows: 'Once on the market, texts commodities or individuals are defined through transaction rather than self-possession, through others rather through inner-being, and through change rather than through absolutes.'<sup>135</sup> Emerson, he argues, was transfixed by the ways in which value was fluid; in constant 'flux,' as Emerson puts it in 'Quotation and Originality.' In this way, Emerson's 'transaction' echoes more widely accepted definitions of the 'market' as a system built of critical negotiation. Barbara Herrnstein Smith describes the idea as follows:

The market does not characteristically operate as the site of desecration but, rather, as the arena for the negotiation, transformation and redistribution of value, including social-symbolic cultural value; and the traditionally despised trader, banker and merchant ('panderer, 'usurer,' 'shopkeeper') are seen, accordingly, as the most visible mediators of change as well as the most obvious profiteers of exchange.<sup>136</sup>

Smith's model of 'social-symbolic value' brings us back full circle to the very beginnings of this thesis in which Emerson's onus on critical sensibility equates to an analysis of the 'profit' of critical exchange.<sup>137</sup> As noted, Emerson's characterization of critical activity depends upon a fiscal symbolism. The '*profit*' of

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<sup>135</sup> Ibid.

<sup>136</sup> Barbara Herrnstein Smith, 'The Critiques of Utility,' *Contingencies of Value: Alternative Perspectives for Critical Theory* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1988), 131

<sup>137</sup> Emerson, 'Success' (1870), CW.VII., 286

critical enterprise;<sup>138</sup> that our ‘*debts* and *credits* [...] are the very best basis of poetry;<sup>139</sup> that we ought ‘*credit* literature with more than the bare word it gives us.’<sup>140</sup> These fiscal terms do more, then, than simply provide a distinct atmosphere for Emerson’s remarks on criticism, they reflect once again a career-long conviction that the mechanisms and mannerisms of market economics are key to Emerson’s established theory of critical or ‘original relation.’ Emerson sees the reader as a ‘mediator of change,’ it is the reader’s ‘sensibility’ and the profit of exchange that evolves into the theory of ‘OTHERISM’, and in more practical terms the type of acts of appropriation seen in Emerson and Verplanck. Once again, literary exchange is read as a form of marketplace.

Such claims demand that we return to Cornel West, and his exploration of the ways in which Emerson and Marx intersect. As previously noted, West supposes that Marx’s identification of ‘prevailing structures’ acts as a precursor to the development of class consciousness and revolution. Emerson, conversely, is too preoccupied with personality, subjectivity, and ‘sensibility’ for his work to move beyond the domain of a literary culture. Nonetheless, Emerson’s interest in ‘revolution’ is a constant across his works. I’ve previously cited Emerson’s call for a ‘revolution in relation’ in ‘Self-Reliance’ (1841); ‘a revolution of opinion and practice,’ in ‘Domestic Life’ (1870) and, as Emerson writes in History (1841): ‘Every revolution was first a thought in one man’s mind, and when the same thought occurs to another man, it is the key to that era.’ These characterizations of ‘revolution’ are all accompanied by close analyses of the transmission and dissemination of ideas, images, and information—specifically the ways in which a ‘revolution’ is not *written* but *read* into being. As noted in relation to Emerson, reading antedates action allowing for interpretation and the absorption of writing as a form of private property before being made public again to influence the thought and action of an ‘other.’ These ideas coalesce in what Emerson would

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<sup>138</sup> Emerson, ‘Quotation and Originality’ (1875), CW.VIII., 194

<sup>139</sup> Emerson, ‘Journal TU’ (Undated, 1849), JMN.XI., 134

<sup>140</sup> Emerson: ‘Observe moreover that we ought to credit literature with much more than the bare word it gives us. I have just been reading poems which now in memory shine with a certain steady, warm, autumnal light. That is not in their grammatical construction which they give me. If I analyse the sentences, it eludes me, but is the genius and suggestion of the whole. Over every true poem lingers a certain wild beauty, immeasurable; a happiness lightsome and delicious fills the heart and brain, as they say every man walk environed by his proper atmosphere, extending to some distance around him. This beautiful result must be credited to literature also in casting its account.’ See ‘Thoughts on Modern Literature’ (1841), CW.XII., 310

term a theory of ‘silent revolution.’ In his address on the passing of ‘The Fugitive Slave Law’ (1854), Emerson first uses this phrase to detail the socio-political significance of a ‘reading class’ to legislative change in America:

For who are the readers and thinkers of 1854? Owing to the silent revolution which the newspaper has wrought, this class has come in this country to take in all classes. Look into the morning trains which, from every suburb, carry the businessmen into the city to their shops, counting-rooms, work-yards and warehouses. With them enters the car—the newsboy, that humble priest of politics, finance, philosophy, and religion. He unfolds his magical sheets, — two pence a head his bread of knowledge costs [...].<sup>141</sup>

Emerson’s ‘silent revolution’ is a provocative means with which to consider and characterize the kind of political power he believed the written word should be afforded, and the revolutionary potential carried by the act of reading these ‘magical sheets.’ However, if we consider a textual history of the term ‘silent revolution’ we are not only privy to another instance of appropriation in Emerson’s writings—an evocative retooling of work pertaining to a young Karl Marx—but also a concrete example of the process that Emerson describes in ‘Nominalist and Realist.’ His instruction that we need ‘melt down’ the works of others ‘into an image or epithet for daily use.’

In ‘Journal GO,’ a private notebook kept from 1852 to 1853, Emerson quotes a line from an article Marx had published in his capacity as European correspondent for the *New York Tribune* on 22 March 1853, ‘Forced Emigration.’<sup>142</sup> The line in Emerson’s notebook is sub-headed ‘FATE,’ and runs ‘The classes and the races too weak to master the new conditions of life must give way’ attributed to ‘Cor[respondent] of the Tribune, Karl Max [*sic*]’ (see *Fig. I*).<sup>143</sup> It is the only time in his oeuvre that Emerson directly quotes his contemporary Marx, Marx to my knowledge, never read Emerson at all.

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<sup>141</sup> Emerson, ‘The Fugitive Slave Law’ (1854), CW.XI., 218

<sup>142</sup> Karl Marx, ‘Forced Emigration,’ first published in *The New York Tribune*, March 4th, 1853; and reprinted in (eds.) Lev Churbanov and Lev Golman, *Marx and Engels: Collected Works*, Vol. 11. (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1979), 531

<sup>143</sup> Emerson, ‘Journal GO, Undated Entry, 1853,’ JMN.XIII., 127

While the existence of this quotation is relatively well-known, only one critic has ever given it close attention. A brief ‘Memoranda and Documents’ essay of 1960, by Lewis S. Feuer, concludes that any further critical attention to Emerson’s manifestly ignorant quotation of “Karl Max” is not warranted.<sup>144</sup> As Feuer writes, ‘[how] widely read and how influential were the numerous articles which Marx published in the *New York Daily Tribune* from 1851 to 1862?’ and thus leading him to question whether ‘Emerson’s absorption of a strain of Marx’s philosophy more than a solitary instance?’ These questions have never received further attention, and beyond the occasional mention, the evocative reference to Marx in Emerson’s private ledger is rarely treated as of any significant consequence.

In part, this is due to the question of Marx’s development as political and economic thinker than any question of Emerson’s textual habits or relationship with appropriation. Of course, given the chronology of both Emerson and Marx (they were essentially direct contemporaries: Emerson, 1803-1882; Marx, 1818-1883), the Marx (*née* Max) that Emerson borrows from is *not* the totemic Marx so dominant to contemporary thought. However, this critical cameo is not a ‘solitary instance’ of Marx’s appearance in Emerson’s works, and it is not insignificant that this citation substantiates another instance of unattributed appropriation in Emerson’s work. The article in question would likely have gone unnoticed had Marx not gone on to commit the work to paper that he did.

As discussed, Emerson composed through a process of medial re-transcription. He copied journal passages into notebooks, notebook passages into journals; later, both these resources were mined for passages which were composited into lecture manuscripts; and those manuscripts were recomposited with further journal and notebook passages in the composition of work for publication. Marx’s words were subjected to precisely this treatment. Emerson transcribes the line into another journal sometime between 1856 and 1870, and then versifies it:

THE bard and mystic held me for their own,  
I filled the dream of sad, poetic maids,

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<sup>144</sup> Lewis S. Feuer, ‘Ralph Waldo Emerson’s Reference to Karl Marx,’ *New England Quarterly*, 33.3 (1960), 378-379. Feuer notes that this citation was initially falsely dated at 1852 by Emerson’s editors, E. W. Emerson and W. E. Forbes, in 1912; the location of Marx was subsequently reinstated by the editors of the subsequent Harvard University Press publication of Emerson’s *Journals and Miscellaneous Notebooks*; see JMN.XIII., n. 229, 127

I took the friendly noble by the hand,  
I was the trustee of the hand-cart man,  
The brother of the fisher, porter, swain,  
And these from the crowd's edge well pleased beheld  
The service done to me as done to them.

WITH the key of the secret he marches faster,  
From strength to strength, and for night brings day;  
*While classes or tribes, too weak to master*  
*The flowing conditions of life, give way.*<sup>145</sup>

The issue of attribution is more codified by this stage; the indexical reference to 'GO 292' obscures the line of transmission by revealing only the medial step preceding this iteration and there is no reference to the text's initial contexts (*see Fig II*). Thereafter, the versified version of Marx's line is transcribed in Emerson's poetry notebooks NP with indexical cross reference only to XO 68, and three more times in other notebooks without any cross reference at all.<sup>146</sup> Finally, it was included along with a host of Emerson's other unpublished poetic fragments under the heading 'Fragments on Nature and Life' by his literary executors—his children Edward and Ellen Emerson working in partnership James Elliot Cabot—and published posthumously in volume nine of the Riverside Edition of Emerson's *Collected Works* in 1883.<sup>147</sup>

Whilst this second transmission of Marx's work into Emerson's poetry is recorded by the editors of the Harvard/Belknap publication of Emerson's journals, its interest and resonance remains largely academic.<sup>148</sup> For example, we turn to the Library of America publication of Emerson's *Poems and Translations* (published in 1994, and edited by Harold Bloom and Paul Kane), and there is no accompanying

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<sup>145</sup> Emerson, 'Fragments on Nature and Life' (Undated), CW.IX, 357

<sup>146</sup> Emerson, in (eds.) R.H. Orth, A.J. Von Frank, L. Allardt, D.W. Hill, *The Poetry Notebooks of Ralph Waldo Emerson* (Columbia, MO: The University of Missouri Press, 1986), 500; 395; 593; 597

<sup>147</sup> Emerson, 'Fragments on Nature and Life,' (Undated), CW.IX., 335-358

<sup>148</sup> This second use of material from 'Forced Emigration' is cited by the editors of the Harvard edition of Emerson's *Journals*, however attention is only given to its forward movement into 'Fragments of Nature and Life' without any attention given to the original source of the citation or its significance. See JMN.XIII., n. 229, 127

note to indicate the source of this verse in Emerson's 'Fragments,' nor its origin as pertaining to Marx's early journalism.<sup>149</sup>

Although Feuer argues this instance of appropriation as of no consequence, Richardson suggests that our ability to locate Marx in Emerson's writings remains suggestive in terms of Emerson's own engagements with culture, capital, economy, industry and conceptualizations of labour. In *The Mind on Fire* (1995), Richardson argues that the article in question—Marx's 'Forced Emigration'—constitutes a realization of technology as a cultural power effectuating the experience and opportunity afforded the industrial proletariat. This idea recurs in Marx's early writings,<sup>150</sup> and—according to Richardson—is present in Emerson's desire to consolidate his own philosophical position in the 1850s.<sup>151</sup>

The 'application of science to material production' leads to a twofold, critical impasse in Marx's 'Forced Emigration.' New economic and industrial circumstances in the late mid- to late-nineteenth century had cultivated a 'new situation' in which increased productive power 'led landlords and mill owners to limit population by way of the technologization of industrial processes' as 'anything more than a basic minimum workforce constituted a drain on profits.'<sup>152</sup> Furthermore, Marx describes how workers—concentrated in the large manufacturing cities—'are unable to emigrate by themselves and unlikely to be helped by the middle class.'<sup>153</sup> 'Society is undergoing a silent revolution, which must be submitted to,' Marx writes; 'and which takes no more notice of the human existences it breaks down than an earthquake regards the houses it subverts. The classes and the races, too weak to master the new conditions of life, must give way. But can there be anything more puerile, more short-sighted, than the views of those Economists who believe in all earnest that this woeful transitory state means nothing but adapting society to the acquisitive propensities of capitalists, both landlords and money-lords?'<sup>154</sup>

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<sup>149</sup> Ralph Waldo Emerson, 'Fragments on Nature and Life' in (eds.) H. Bloom, P. Kane, *Poems and Translations* (New York, NY: Library of America, 1994), 425.; for notes on this sequence of Emerson's 'Fragments' and their sources (and the notably absent reference to the *New York Tribune*), see 618

<sup>150</sup> In particular, see Karl Marx, (trans.) Martin Nicolaus, 'The Chapter on Capital,' *Grundrisse* (London: Penguin, 1993), 690-712

<sup>151</sup> Richardson, 'Fame,' *Emerson: The Mind on Fire*, 508-509

<sup>152</sup> *Ibid.*, 509

<sup>153</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>154</sup> Marx, 'Forced Emigration,' 531



Richardson notes that Marx's position in 'Forced Emigration' is conceptually appropriated by Emerson in 'Wealth' (a chapter in Emerson's *English Traits*, 1856, and *not* the 1860 essay of the same title collected in *Conduct of Life*); an essay where Emerson's sensitivity to the increasing difficulties posed by industrialization and urbanism is made manifest and where Emerson himself cites the difficult relationship between worker and industrial technologies and the possibility of emigration.<sup>155</sup> In very Marxian terms, Emerson emphasizes the importance of the 'spinning-jenny' in England's industrial revolution and the ensuing problematic social ramifications of industrialization:

Hargreaves invented the spinning-jenny and died in a workhouse. Arkwright improved the invention, and the machine dispensed with the work of ninety-nine men; that is, one spinner could do as much work as one hundred had done before. The loom was improved further. But the men would sometimes strike for wages and combine against their masters, and, about 1829-20, much fear was felt lest the trade would be drawn away by these interruptions to Belgium or the United States. Iron and steel are very obedient. Whether it were possible to make a spinner that would not rebel, nor mutter, nor scowl, nor strike for wages, nor emigrate?<sup>156</sup>

Whilst 'Wealth' showcases his interest in industry and the individual worker, the interesting point is Emerson's awareness of how these pressures traffic into all avenues of cultural production: 'You shall find this sentiment, if not so frankly put, deeply implied in the novels and romances of the present century, and not only in these but in biographies, and in the votes of public assemblies, in the tone of preaching and in table-talk,' he notes.<sup>157</sup> But 'The difference between Emerson and Marx,' writes Richardson, is 'not in their assessment of modern industrial conditions, not in their grasp of the dynamics of industrial production,

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<sup>155</sup> Richardson, *The Mind on Fire*, n. viii, 648; Paul Gilmore also cites Emerson's interest in a technologically facilitated 'silent revolution' as a basis for comparison between Emerson and Marx and Engel's *Communist Manifesto* (1848). See 'Mechanical Means,' n. 19, 257. Emerson's collection *English Traits* (1856), a scrutiny of England's economic and industrial productivity, is a collection founded in the belief that 'America would succeed England in moral leadership,' but was self-conscious of America's relative cultural 'immaturity' as troubling such an ambition. For an interesting account of the aims and authorship of *English Traits*, see Richard Bridgman, 'From Greenough to Nowhere: Emerson's *English Traits*,' *The New England Quarterly*, 59.4. (1986), 469-485

<sup>156</sup> Emerson, 'English Traits' (1856), CW.V., 158

<sup>157</sup> *Ibid.*

and not in their understanding of the alienation of the individual under the conditions of modern production but in the proposed remedy.<sup>158</sup>

Where Marx would seek out social change, Emerson stresses the importance of reflection on the role of industry, technology, culture and their potential for marketization, looking directly to culture's capacity to accommodate or instrumentalize industrial and technological progress. In this sense, his perspective is significantly more hands off. He confesses that he is chiefly interested in the 'what next?' of cultural progress; in the 'kind of curiosity which loves to see the human mill of ingenuity going, and cares little whether the product be an *Identitäts-Philosophie* or a spinning-jenny.'<sup>159</sup>

The philosophical resonance of the rhetorical 'what next?' is of fundamental importance. It illuminates—amongst other things—how Emerson's engagements with the technological developments of his era and the new forms cultural forms indentured by new technologies are not dissimilar to his interest in the railroad and factory as, above all, poetic motifs in the American landscape. Crucially, however, the process of the 'what next?' is still described by Emerson in Marxian terms as a 'silent revolution.'

The phrase 'silent revolution' can be regarded as important in Emerson's works by virtue of its repetition, and the clarity of the term when set in context. Although Emerson's first allusion to 'silent revolution' is accompanied by the desire to better identify his audience—'Who are the readers of 1854?'—he elsewhere tools the term to consider the importance of technologization, economization and the intellectual outcomes of industrialization. In 'Worship,' an essay published in the collection *Conduct of Life* (1860), Emerson notes that a 'faith in chemistry, in meat and wine, in wealth, in machinery, in the steam-engine, galvanic battery, turbine-wheels, sewing-machines, and in public opinion, but not in divine causes' has been shaken by a 'A silent revolution' that 'has loosed the tension of the old religious sects,' positioning a new form of intellectualism 'in place of the gravity and permanence of those societies of opinion.'<sup>160</sup> In

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<sup>158</sup> Richardson, 'Fame,' *Emerson: The Mind on Fire*, 509

<sup>159</sup> Emerson, 'Literary Intelligence' (*The Dial*, January 1843) in (ed.) Ronald A. Bosco, *The Collected Works of Ralph Waldo Emerson: Uncollected Prose Writings, Addresses, Essays and Reviews* (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2013), 240

<sup>160</sup> Emerson, 'Worship' (1860), CW.VI., 208. For a particularly interesting analysis of the power structures addressed in Emerson's *Conduct of Life*, see Michael Lopez, 'The Conduct of Life: Emerson's Anatomy of Power,' in (ed.) J. Porte, *The Cambridge Companion to Ralph Waldo Emerson* (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 243-266

'The Progress of Culture' (1875), he again uses the phrase to suggest that a 'silent revolution' has 'impelled' a new culture of self-determinacy in America's self-governance, underpinning a 'new kind of social science' and effectuating conceptualizations of 'labor; the coöperative societies; the insurance of life and limb; the free-trade league; the improved almshouses; the enlarged scale of charities to relieve local famine, or burned towns, or the suffering Greeks; the incipient series of international congresses.' 'All, one may say, are in a high degree revolutionary' Emerson writes; 'teaching nations the taking of government into their own hands, and superseding kings.'<sup>161</sup>

Emerson's interest in appropriation is thus not only a form of remaking or creative constructionism, but it also serves to elicit a picture of a market revolution in miniature. A 'silent revolution' underpinned by critical receptivity and interpretative agency. As has been argued, such thinking depends upon a circulation of ideas, the very circulation that Emerson systematizes and theorizes across his authorship. From the introduction of '**OTHERISM**' in 1836 to the 'art of appropriation' in 1875, Emerson works to consider not only the theoretical possibility of culture's dialectical progress, but furthermore, the practical forms of work needed to expedite such an evolution; to facilitate a 'silent revolution.'

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<sup>161</sup> Emerson, 'The Progress of Culture' (1875), CW.VIII., 208-209

**CONCLUSION —**

**‘The Market-place is the Louvre of the Common People’**

*A man of Napoleon's stamp almost ceases to have a private speech & opinion.  
[...] Every line of Napoleon's therefore deserves reading as it is the writing of  
France, & not of one individual.*

**RALPH WALDO EMERSON**

*From his Journals and Miscellaneous Notebooks (1849)*<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Emerson, 'Journal V' (Undated, 1845), JMN.IX., 139-141

'The measure of an artist's originality, put into the simplest terms, is the extent to which his selective emphasis deviates from the conventional norm and establishes new standards of relevance,' notes Arthur Koestler, 1964:

All great innovations, which inaugurate a new era, movement, or school, consist in such sudden shifts of attention and displacements of emphasis onto some previously neglected aspect of experience, some blacked-out range of the existential spectrum. The decisive turning points in the history of every art-form are discoveries which show the characteristic features already discussed: they uncover what has always been there; they are 'revolutionary,' that is, destructive and constructive; they compel us to revalue our values and impose a new set of rules on the eternal game.<sup>2</sup>

As I have discussed over the course of this thesis, Emerson's investigation of the 'mechanics of literature' expresses a similar position; a desire to explore the 'revolutionary' aspect of cultural enterprise through the political, economic and creative pressures that 'compel' an artist to 'revalue their values.'

As with Koestler a century later, Emerson's project sought to assess the malleability of 'standards of relevance' relative to various economic and industrial circumstances and, as this thesis has shown, a number of questions operate consistently from the beginning of Emerson's trajectory as a writer and thinker that prove echoic of Koestler's 'measure of an artist's originality.' What 'set of rules' may best accompany the practice of critical engagement? More importantly, how does such a rubric reflect the transformative socioeconomic impetuses of their hour?

Emerson examines such ideas through a thorough investigation of the act of reading, within the contexts of literary cultures more broadly, and Koestler's 'existential spectrum' covers—in this respect—the self-same desire to examine how critical agency can be genuinely 'revolutionary,' that is to say how critical agency can be 'both constructive and destructive' simultaneously. How the act of interpretation underpins the progress of a culture by disrupting, rearranging and diminishing the authority of the 'dry

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<sup>2</sup> Arthur Koestler, 'The Act of Creation,' *The Act of Creation* (London: Hutchinson, 1964), 334-335

bones' of the past; how cultural work effects notions of being in ways both publicly and privately felt.<sup>3</sup> Concentrating on the 'shifts in attention' and 'emphasis' galvanized by cultures of invention and industrialization, Emerson's engagement with the ways in which ideas circulate, both culturally and practically speaking—trafficking from the annals of private reflection through to the public domain—forms the very backbone of his philosophical program. Whether we term Emerson's theoretical position 'OTHERISM;' a theory of 'COMMERCIAL VALUE;' or a more general call to 'learn the meaning of economy,' the kinship he establishes as between the act of reading and cultures of commercialization can be traced across his writings. Culminating in his 'art of appropriation,' his assertion that the 'force of two in literature' parallels the ascent of 'capitalist' ideology and wider societal exchange mechanisms, Emerson's sense that the marketplace serves as a key social structure for the movement and progress of intellectual and critical cultures is undeniable. As shown, he strove to identify the formation of a cultural economics in both practical and conceptual terms as a marketplace of meaning; a space wherein the correlation of various forms of commercial and critical value reflects the developing economic circuitry of America's burgeoning antebellum economy.

Responsive to financial crisis, industrialization and the percolation of a national literary culture, Emerson explored how literary engagement reflected, impacted and refracted the dominant economic ideas of his hour in a career-long study of 'silent revolution,' of processes of cultural and sociopolitical transformation. As we have seen, his investigation of the terms of this 'revolution' does not shy away from an expression of the radical potential of cultural engagement. Examining Emerson's relationship with exchange, creativity and agency, these chapters have explored the ways in which Emerson argued for cultural progress as exegetically bound to America's political and economic progress; how the work of one effects the concept of work for the many; how the work of a reader on a text can be conceived of as a metonym for the progress of America's 'market revolution,' 1815 to 1850; how an ability to read and intuit the value of work is enhanced by the application of a critical eye to an analysis of our social milieu. The fact that Emerson—as discussed in the previous chapter—argues capitalism as a means of articulating the

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<sup>3</sup> Emerson, 'Nature' (1836), CW.I., 3

power and pertinence of his ‘force of two’ nonetheless demands that we review his interest in ‘revolution,’ and consider the ways in which Emerson endeavoured to enlighten and illuminate the ‘neglected aspect of experience,’ and ‘the blacked-out ranges’ of our ‘existential spectrum,’ to again borrow Koestler’s terms. Emerson’s third-hand appropriation of an aphorism from Napoleon—a phrase that gives this thesis its title—may provide some clues: ‘the market-place is the louvre of the common people.’<sup>4</sup>

In this conclusion, I will briefly summarize Emerson’s position on critical exchange and social correlation in relation to his terminological use of ‘capitalism.’ According to Koestler: ‘The decisive turning points in the history of every art-form [...] uncover what has always been there,’ an assertion that is key to Emerson’s interest in the symbolic powers of ‘second use,’ of interpretive agency and literary matter. By exploring the source of his Napoleonic citation in detail, we see once again how the idea of sociality, collectivism, and the role of art figures prominently throughout Emerson’s oeuvre, indicating—amongst other things—the diction of Emerson’s thinking between his early and later works.

As discussed, the act and institution of scholarship is central to Emerson’s examination of American culture. In this respect, Emerson intuits—as many of the critics cited here have noted—how the institutionalization of critique fosters an economic system all of its own. In a manner again redolent of Koestler’s remarks on the ‘revolutionary’ properties of art, Emerson’s characterization of scholarly labour is underwritten by a ‘selecting principle’ and by an assessment of the effects of industrial and ideological ‘invention’ on the arts and on creativity in general. In ‘The American Scholar’ (1837), for example, Emerson argues that ‘One must be an inventor to read well,’ that reading needs be addressed as a ‘creative exercise,’ and that—when ‘braced by labor and invention’—‘the page of whatever book we read becomes luminous with manifold allusion.’<sup>5</sup> The *work* of ‘invention’ is the forging of critical connection for Emerson; the widening of an informational economy; the finessing of ‘allusion’ in order to develop a critical reaction and to better compose an argument, idea, or challenge. As we saw, in ‘Quotation and Originality’ (1875), Emerson returns to this idea in his twilight works only to clarify his thinking. Arguing that an original argument is facilitated only by our ‘borrowing’ from extant ideas, Emerson concentrates on the intersection

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<sup>4</sup> Emerson, ‘Napoleon, or the Man of the World’ (1850), CW.IV., 240

<sup>5</sup> Emerson, ‘The American Scholar’ (1837), CW.I., 92



of his theories of creativity, 'second use,' and the importance of 'invention.' 'Only an inventor knows how to borrow,' he notes in the closing remarks to 'Quotation and Originality;' that is, 'every man is or should be an inventor.'<sup>6</sup> 'We must not tamper with the organic motion of the soul,' as it is 'certain that thought has its own proper motion,' that 'the hints which flash from it, the words overheard at unawares by the free mind, are trustworthy and fertile when obeyed and not perverted to low and selfish account.'<sup>7</sup>

Emerson's theory of a 'free mind,' is—as we have seen—intrinsically connected to the cultural merits of free enterprise. His condemnation of the 'low and selfish' strata of critical thought is fundamental to his belief that theories of economy underpin conceptions of 'social labor' in an antebellum context. By tracing existing readings of Emerson's perspectivism and apparent championing of individualism, we saw how Emerson's theory of 'subjectiveness' (1840) was as much about the social implications of a public or published thought as the personal freedoms of critical 'relation.'<sup>8</sup> Looking at the institutional and technical 'mechanics' of literary enterprise, Emerson consistently read the process of writing and reading as a form of social work; an innovative form of 'laborious' thought both social in character and socially minded in its ambitions.<sup>9</sup> 'I embrace the common,' Emerson famously writes in 'The American Scholar.' 'I explore and sit at the feet of the familiar;' that is to say, he works to facilitate a cultural commons; a common ground for critical conversation in which 'the philosophy of the street, the meaning of household life, are the topics of the time.'<sup>10</sup> We 'borrow' from this commons to better explore 'the meaning of household life,' Emerson writes, *or* (and as importantly), 'the meaning of economy.' For Emerson, distancing himself from the cultural institutions of his hour becomes a truly revolutionary way to both define and delimit their power. Be it the university, organized religion, federal government, or the rigidity of a cultural canon, Emerson would reject the diktats of cultural convention turning instead to his 'fellow writers' as a means of regulating America's governance and ideological progress. He surveys a prospective deregulation of power by underlining the 'spontaneous power' of a 'free mind,' and it is here, in the examination of

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<sup>6</sup> Emerson, 'Quotation and Originality' (1875), CW.VIII., 204

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Emerson, 'Thoughts on Modern Literature' (1840), CW.X., 108

<sup>10</sup> Emerson, 'The American Scholar' (1837), CW.I., 110-111

literature's social and political agency that the relationship between a reader and a book; a reader and a writer; a book and its canon; and a book and its cultural contexts comes to the fore.<sup>11</sup> In sum, Emerson is transfixed by the ways in which the work of one requires the work of 'Another' to establish any genuine value; and once again, invention and commonality lead us back to Emerson's interest in appropriation and proprietorship.

'The imitator dooms himself to hopeless mediocrity,' Emerson notes in his famous 'Divinity School' address, 1838 (a lecture that sees him barred from Harvard for a thirty year period).<sup>12</sup> The 'inventor,' conversely, works with 'borrowed' materials 'natural to him' and—owing to their 'charm' and personal value—strives to put ideas to 'use' rather than simply compete for accreditation.<sup>13</sup> Emerson's 'inventor' works with 'borrowed' materials but does not do so to articulate any 'low and selfish account' of their worth relative only to their private appeal or personal resonance. Rather, we borrow, quote and appropriate to more keenly consider the purpose and process of repurposing an idea or image across contexts; to assess the merits of an idea or image in relation to both private and public domains; and to investigate the 'daily use' or implementation of that idea or image. In this way, Emerson is keen to consider what is necessary for us as individuals in order to comprehend the social and dialectical progress of culture—not as a given—but as a product born out of and circulated within the collective. How the work of an isolated 'inventor' or 'reader' serves to impact and affect a characterization of culture more broadly, and how such an activity might correspond with the progress of a 'general mind' dependent on (rather than divorced from) an active form of 'social labor.'<sup>14</sup>

Nonetheless, such a 'revolutionary' theory of 'labor' begins at home. Concerned by the vivacity of the 'epileptic modern muse,'<sup>15</sup> Emerson would call for 'A revolution in all the offices and relations of men; in their religion; in their education; in their pursuits; their modes of living; their association; in their

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<sup>11</sup> Richardson, 'Go Alone: Refuse the Great Models,' *The Mind on Fire*, 287-290

<sup>12</sup> Richardson describes the radicality of this lecture as owing to his belief that 'religion is not served by conventional preaching but only by living discourse.' *Ibid*, 290

<sup>13</sup> Emerson, 'An Address delivered before the Senior Class in Divinity College, Cambridge, Sunday Evening, July 15<sup>th</sup>, 1838,' (1838), *CW.I.*, 145

<sup>14</sup> Emerson, 'Shakespeare, or the Poet' (1850), *CW.IV.*, 199

<sup>15</sup> Emerson, 'Journal K' (Undated, 1842), *JMN.VIII.*, 243

property; in their speculative views,' is an essential aim across Emerson's authorship.<sup>16</sup> This, as we have discussed in part, is a misleading element of Emerson's popular appeal. His stress on the idea that '[every] man is his own star' in 'Self-Reliance' (1841) has led to his dismissal as a thinker of any tangible philosophical, social, or even political worth. Instead, Emerson's interest in self-determinacy has fostered his status as an emissary of a naïve, subjectivist celebration of the self at the expense of an engagement with social exigency, civil unrest, or economic disequilibrium.<sup>17</sup> However, as has been shown, Emerson's politics and poetics are not only deeply enmeshed, and both participate in a language of the marketplace through exploring the connectivity of ideas as within an economic matrix. Considering the especial status that Emerson affords the singular 'star,' he would equally concede that the singular star is nothing without a theory of 'constellation.'<sup>18</sup> 'We want' and work 'for one star more in our constellation, for one tree more in our grove,' as he writes in 'Nominalist and Realist' (1844).<sup>19</sup> A culture requires 'a constellation of genius' to progress in political, cultural and economic terms, as he suggests in 'Plato, or the Philosopher' (1850);<sup>20</sup> much as a culture requires 'a constellation of cities' to better 'animate and illustrate the land' as he would note in 'Civilization' (1870).<sup>21</sup> As with so many of the ideas and metaphors traced in this thesis, the idea of 'constellation' recurs across Emerson's writings as another way to emphatically underline his concern for the connection *between* ideas as opposed to the intendent and independent vitality of a single idea alone. 'What would be base, or even obscene, becomes illustrious, [when] spoken in a new connection of thought,' Emerson notes in 'The Poet' (1844).<sup>22</sup> 'Thought makes everything fit for use,' he notes; and the object of the process of critical reflection is that of a 'a mirror carried through the street, ready to render an image of every created thing.'<sup>23</sup> But the key ambition prevalent in Emerson's reflections on critical thinking is that

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<sup>16</sup> Emerson, 'Self-Reliance' (1841), CW.II., 77

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 43

<sup>18</sup> Emerson: 'When we are dizzied with the arithmetic of the savant toiling to compute the length of her line, the return of her curve, we are steadied by the perception that a great deal is doing; that all seems just begun; remote aims are in active accomplishment. We can point nowhere to anything final; but tendency appears on all hands: planet, system, constellation, total nature is growing like a field of maize in July [...].' See 'The Method of Nature' (1841), CW.I., 202-203

<sup>19</sup> Emerson, 'Nominalist and Realist' (1844), CW.III., 240

<sup>20</sup> Emerson, 'Plato, or the Philosopher' (1850), CW.IV., 40

<sup>21</sup> Emerson, 'Civilization' (1870), CW.VII., 32

<sup>22</sup> Emerson, 'The Poet' (1844), CW.III., 17

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 41

we should aspire to conjugate or ‘constellate’ these images into a coherent whole; a broader and multipart image composed of a myriad number of single stars.

‘Poetry,’ he notes in ‘The American Scholar,’ is one such star. ‘Who can doubt that poetry will revive and lead in a new age, as the star in the constellation Harp,’ he writes, arguing that poetry could serve as a potential ‘pole star’ for America’s cultural progress.<sup>24</sup> This stress on a ‘constellation’ of ideas is also a way to explore the collective force of various avenues of American culture; as a guiding light capable of seeing the country through the intellectual and ideological traumas of financial crisis and industrialization. ‘Who cares what the fact was when we have made a constellation of it to hang in heaven an immortal sign?,’ he writes in ‘History.’<sup>25</sup> The constellation of ‘facts’ supersedes the importance of the isolated fact alone; a ‘national literature’ or ‘poetry’ is of more importance than one definitive and alienable work of art. ‘The capitalized and socially defined link between writing and property has the effect of a shackle in which the human is forever caught,’ Eric Wertheimer writes; and this underpins Emerson’s famous call for an independence of mind.<sup>26</sup> What critics tend to overlook, however, is that Emerson concentrates as much on the links in this chain as he does the ideas of ‘writing’ and ‘property’ themselves.

The relationship between the ‘star’ and its ‘constellation’ is a useful metaphor for our considering the complexities of Emerson’s relationship with quotation and appropriation, in this respect. A star, a pre-existing object of attention, can be appropriated so long as the purpose withstands that we seek to forge its potential partnership with a parallel. The forging of new ‘constellation’ is thus emblematic of the value of the ‘art of appropriation,’ to Emerson’s mind—how a new image can be created out of pre-existent points of light—underscoring the significance of the ‘builder’ as a quintessential figure. Emerson’s individualism stresses an ability to build a new and multipart sign in which each individual point of light is necessary for it to cohere; just as a capitalist economy supposedly serves its consumers, and a literary work, its readers. As such, parallels can be drawn between Emerson’s cultural commentaries and later analyses of cultural criticism’s reticular aims.

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<sup>24</sup> Emerson, ‘The American Scholar’ (1837), CW.I., 82

<sup>25</sup> Emerson, ‘History’ (1841), CW.II., 9

<sup>26</sup> Eric Wertheimer, ‘Boston,’ *Underwriting: The Poetics of American Insurance, 1722-1872* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2006), 120-122

Michael Walzer, in his landmark text *Interpretation and Social Criticism* (1987), articulates what he terms the ‘connected critic.’ A figure who ‘earns his [or her] authority, or fails to do so, by arguing with his [or her] fellows—who angrily and insistently, sometimes at considerable personal risk, [...] objects, protests, and remonstrates.’<sup>27</sup> In many ways, Walzer’s position is a refraction of Emerson’s theory of ‘constellation.’ As Walzer puts it: ‘This critic is one of us;’ ‘their appeal is to local or localized principles; if [he or she] has picked up new ideas on [his or her] travels, he [or she] tries to connect them to the local culture, building on his [or her] own intimate knowledge; [they are] not intellectually detached.’<sup>28</sup> Walzer contends that ‘Social criticism must thus be understood as one of the more important by-products of a larger activity’—‘let us call it the activity of cultural elaboration’—an action he describes as key to processes of social formation and fundamental to an assessment of any sociological or political survey of literary culture. Again, we can see this mirrored in Emerson’s sense of the importance of ‘relation’ and ‘constellation.’<sup>29</sup>

In this sense, Emerson’s call for cultural or critical ‘constellation’ has preoccupied this thesis, as has the way in which the process of ‘constellation’ becomes one of ‘creative principle’ in his writings.<sup>30</sup> Although Emerson argues ‘invention’ as a theory of the ‘preoccupation of mind,’ suggesting that our critical attention irrevocably alters the shape and meaning of the object observed, he is more concerned with the ‘relation’ of ideas; more interested in the circuitry of cultural progress, and in the individual contribution to the betterment of a social whole.<sup>31</sup> Explaining his position, in ‘History,’ he again calls upon the ‘builder’ as a trope:

A Gothic cathedral affirms that it was done by us and not done by us. Surely it was by man, but we find it not in our man. But we apply ourselves to the history of its production. We put ourselves into the place and state of the builder. We remember the forest-dwellers, the first temples, the adherence to

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<sup>27</sup> Michael Walzer, ‘The Practice of Social Criticism,’ *Interpretation and Social Criticism* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1987), 39

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 40

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

<sup>31</sup> Emerson, ‘An Address delivered before the Senior Class in Divinity College, Cambridge, Sunday Evening, July 15<sup>th</sup> 1838,’ (1838), CW.I., 147

the first type, and the decoration of it as the wealth of the nation increased; the value which is given to wood by carving led to the carving over the whole mountain of stone of a cathedral. When we have gone through this process, and added thereto the Catholic Church, its cross, its music, its processions, its Saints' days and image-worship, we have as it were been the man that made the minster; we have seen how it could and must be.

Exploring the 'Gothic cathedral' as kind of material 'constellation' of concerns, Emerson argues for the study of the 'relation of cause and effect' as in essence as another version of his theory of 'creative reading.' On the one hand, our appreciation of this 'Gothic cathedral' needs be read backwards to the process of its construction; the participation of those involved in its construction; and the history of the culture that necessitated its construction in the first instance. On the other hand, the building must inferentially and prospectively command a sense of its present and future purposes as a 'public edifice.' It must be examined relative to its culture, its public function, 'its cross, its music, its processions, its Saints' days and image-worship.' The building is both a codification of its history, a testament to its ongoing cultural purchase, and a means of examining the culture around it that continues to make demands of it. Our responsibility, as such, is to examine any 'edifice' relative to its evolving 'standards of relevance' and resonance, to consider the cathedral not as a composite of the 'dry bones' and 'faded wardrobe' of the past, but as a means of considering the collectivist effort that underpinned its construction.<sup>32</sup> How 'the man made the minister,' so the 'minister' could serve the 'man;' this is the focus of Emerson's practical interest in 'creativity.'

Indeed, the 'minister' is a redolent symbol, in this regard. Emerson's analysis of reading is in essence a theory of mediation; an idea explored here by looking at the comparability of the reader, 'builder,' and 'spender' in Emerson's writings. If we turn again to Emerson's 'Quotation and Originality,' he argues that the same demands put upon the making of the 'Gothic Cathedral' can be applied to a consideration literary culture, and both as convention and tradition. In so doing, he examines the process of canon formation; how 'human invention' effects and extends our 'horizon of thought.' 'The first book tyrannizes

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<sup>32</sup> Emerson, 'Nature' (1836), CW.I., 3

over the second,' he writes, we need work doubly hard to overcome the weight and gravitas of convention and tradition to read a work forwards and consider it both a product of 'invention' and catalyst for a new prospective 'constellation' or 'original relation,' as he calls it in 'Nature.'

If we confine ourselves to literature, 't is easy to see that the debt is immense to past thought. None escapes it. The originals are not original. There is imitation, model and suggestion, to the very archangels, if we knew their history. The first book tyrannizes over the second. Read Tasso, and you think of Virgil; read Virgil, and you think of Homer; and Milton forces you to reflect how narrow are the limits of human invention. The Paradise Lost had never existed but for these precursors; and if we find in India or Arabia a book out of our horizon of thought and tradition, we are soon taught by new researches in its native country to discover its foregoers, and its latent, but real connection with our own Bibles. Read in Plato and you shall find Christian dogmas, and not only so, but stumble on our evangelical phrases. Hegel preëxists in Proclus, and, long before, in Heraclitus and Parmenides. Whoso knows Plutarch, Lucian, Rabelais, Montaigne and Bayle will have a key to many supposed originalities. Rabelais is the source of many a proverb, story and jest, derived from him into all modern languages; and if we knew Rabelais's reading, we should see the rill of the Rabelais river.<sup>33</sup>

In another echo of Koestler's assessment of the aims and ambitions of a 'creative act'—the process of our '[uncovering] what has always been there'—we need consider the movement of an idea or image between stations, and the ways in which its movement and mediation adjusts its meaning. However, Emerson admits that literary tradition encourages a retrospective process of mind. 'If we confine ourselves to literature,' we're bound to read innovation backwards ('Read Tasso, and you think of Virgil; read Virgil, and you think of Homer,' *et cetera*), and Emerson is keen that we work beyond the 'rill' of a cultural river, to instead work dialectically; to plot our progress beyond a given or fixed intellectual 'horizon' rather than work back towards that river's source.

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<sup>33</sup> Emerson, 'Quotation and Originality' (1875), CW.VIII., 180-181

Instead, we must consider the collaborative work involved in establishing a work of literature as a valuable cultural entity, akin to a chapel or a cathedral, that serves a distinct social function:

Mythology is no man's work; but, what we daily observe in regard to the bon-mots that circulate in society,—that every talker helps a story in repeating it, until, at last, from the slenderest filament of fact a good fable is constructed,—the same growth befalls mythology: the legend is tossed from believer to poet, from poet to believer, everybody adding a grace or dropping a fault or rounding the form, until it gets an ideal truth. Religious literature, the psalms and liturgies of churches, are of course of this slow growth, —a fagot of selections gathered through ages, leaving the worse and saving the better, until it is at last the work of the whole communion of worshippers. The Bible itself is like an old Cremona; it has been played upon by the devotion of thousands of years until every word and particle is public and tunable.<sup>34</sup>

'Mythology', 'Religious Literature' are all constituent parts of a wider form of 'social labor' and Emerson's sense of the constitution of 'mythology' as an inherently social practice serves as a significant indicator of the type of coherency and cogency we have seen throughout his various essays. His portrayal of the 'slow growth' of an idea, his sense of 'the charm of alienation or Otherism;' his sensitivity to a broader culture of expenditure in cultural terms; the builder, and the building resultant of their labours, or the ways in which the value of a dollar is dependent on both social and personal contexts as it changes hands. Emerson's sense of the ways in which the movement of ideas effects their meaning is both a conceptual and practical constant in his engagement with the 'mechanics' of critical enterprise. Similarly, a parallel can be drawn between Emerson's conceptualization of what constitutes a 'creative reading' and Walzer's characterization of the 'connected critic.' As Emerson notes in his journals, 1851, event and critical perspective are bound by an 'inevitable tie,' and a responsibility to consider the ways in which our relative social connect is enhanced by historical circumstance is key. 'We think the event severed from the person,'

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<sup>34</sup> Ibid., 181-182



he notes, ‘and do not see the inevitable tie. It is like the nudicaulis plant, —the leaf invariably accompanies it, though the stems are connected underground.’<sup>35</sup> In this way, ‘all events are profitable.’<sup>36</sup>

Emerson’s study of this connect, as shown, is paralleled with an interest in ‘profit,’ privatization, economization and industrialization, which in turn has been (and can be) argued as evidence of an obscurantist tendency as at the heart of his critical theory of ‘constellation.’ In practice, his position is succinctly deontological. We are bound by ‘duty’ to connect the particular and the general—to ‘constellate’ the details of private life with the dimensions of our political or economic being and by necessity wrest ‘meaning from economy,’ as Emerson puts it. In ‘Man the Reformer’ (1841), for example, he argues that ‘The duty that every man should assume his own vows, should call the institutions of society to account, and examine their fitness to him, gains in emphasis if we look at our modes of living.’<sup>37</sup> Responding to his own ‘optative’ perspectivism with a particularly acute cynicism, Emerson’s ‘revolution in relation,’ his ‘silent revolution,’ is nonetheless often underpinned by a sense of his being alienated from the dominant cultural practices of his hour:

I ought to be armed by every part and function of my household, by all my social function, by my economy, by my feasting, by my voting, by my traffic. Yet I am almost no party to any of these things. Custom does it for me, gives me no power therefrom, and runs me in debt to boot. We spend our incomes for paint and paper, for a hundred trifles, I know not what, and not for the things of a man. Our expense is almost all for conformity.<sup>38</sup>

Emerson errs intermittently toward both a left- and right-wing predilection in his exploration of this form of intellectual alienation. The powers of collectivism, the force of economic and cultural participation, the necessary diminution of government, and the ascendance of the private sector all intersect and overlap in his efforts to characterize an American cultural economy, or the ascent of an ‘American sentiment’ as he

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<sup>35</sup> Emerson, in his *Journals and Miscellaneous Notebooks*, 1851, cited by Edward Waldo Emerson in a footnote to the late essay ‘Power’ (1860), CW.VI., n.1, 56

<sup>36</sup> Emerson, ‘History’ (1841), CW.II., 12

<sup>37</sup> Emerson, ‘Man the Reformer’ (1841), CW.I., 243

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 243-244

calls it in 'The Young American.' However, in 'Man the Reformer,' he plainly articulates a sense of estrangement from cultural 'custom.' He draws 'no power' from convention; struggles to understand the worth of 'paint and paper;' and expresses a clear distrust of (and disdain for) the idea of 'conformity' as an intellectual end to social engagement.

In this respect, Emerson's vacillation between engagement and detachment is also key to an unravelling of the conceptualist treatment of the 'mechanics of literature' that we have charted across Emerson's oeuvre. His evocative metaphors of reading is described and explicated by way of an explorative assessment of 'social function,' of 'economy,' of 'feasting,' 'voting' and the 'traffic' of ideas between participants within the country's nascent literary culture. How we are 'party' to this period of transformation—complicit in its ideology, and responsible for its cultivation, sophistication, and 'constellation' of concerns—is vital to his reflections on the 'capitalist' character of 'the force of two.' 'Man the Reformer' frames the gravitas of Emerson's interest in 'social function,' but equally portrays his theory of 'party' or 'constellation' as intimating a hypothetical economic system in which an inclusive market determines a 'revolution of relation' in constant flux, constantly evolving.

His statement of alienation—his inability to stand 'party' to the dominant social determinates of his hour—narrowly precedes his desire to extort 'meaning from economy,' to explore the properties of such 'public edifices' as 'conversation,' 'art,' 'music,' and 'worship' relative to the 'high, human office' of political economy.<sup>39</sup> Emerson both desires to be 'party' to the dominant ideas of his age *and* analyse the fissures that complicate everyone's participation thereof; in addition, he lacks the definitive political direction of his peers. Emerson lacks the single-mindedness of 'The American Marxist before Marx,' Orestes Brownson,<sup>40</sup> the receptivity to class, systems of urbanization lyrically detailed by his progeny, Henry D. Thoreau,<sup>41</sup> and the wayward, categorical commemoration of art we see in the works of Walt

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<sup>39</sup> Ibid., 245

<sup>40</sup> Arthur M. Schlesinger, 'Orestes Brownson: An American Marxist Before Marx,' *The Sewanee Review*, 417 (1939), 317-323. See also, Benjamin Pickford, 'Towards a Fungible Scrip: Orestes Brownson's *Boston Quarterly Review* and the Valuation of American Literature,' *Open Library of the Humanities*, 2.1. (2016), 3-6

<sup>41</sup> See Richard W. Judd, 'Thoreau in the Age of Industry, 1862-1890,' *Finding Thoreau: The Meaning of Nature in the Making of an Environmental Icon* (Cambridge, MA: University of Massachusetts Press, 2018), 25-55

Whitman.<sup>42</sup> Nonetheless, Emerson is arguably at his clearest when he explores his theory of ‘constellation’ relative to economic structures of thought. How the marketplace is a domain conceptually dependent upon processes of exchange, correlation and participation; a social system contingent upon a commercial form of ‘constellation’ to cohere.

In this sense Emerson is, as noted in my introduction, an ‘Ayn Rand beforehand.’ A figure not only fascinated by the structure and efficacy of market systems; but keen to propose the marketplace as an aesthetic, philosophical and ideological domain crucial to America’s sociopolitical and cultural identity. Emerson’s efforts to ally economics and criticism as twinned domains is emblematic of his want to establish a critical praxis capable of correlating the ‘common’ with the ‘ephemeral’—the ‘low’ with the ‘transcendent’ and how these are key to the formation and development of the American marketplace. The social ambitions of both Emerson and his contemporaries are nonetheless often overlooked. In an 1846 review of Margaret Fuller’s *Papers on Literature and Art* in *The American Whig Review*, for example, the anonymous reviewer describes Fuller’s works as enumerating a ‘new kind of criticism,’ an ‘aesthetic criticism,’ but nonetheless argues that the American Transcendentalist movement, should be broadly condemned.<sup>43</sup> Tarring Fuller, Emerson and their associates with a rhetorical stain, the article notes that ‘[the] Transcendental school, embracing the new aesthetic model of criticism,’ works solely ‘to discover and reproduce the veritable spirit of [its] author,’ an apotheosis—in other words—of critical and socio-political detachment.<sup>44</sup>

According to Jeffrey Sklansky, Emerson’s early works thus represent an ‘explicitly non-economic kind of psychological self-expression or self-representation;’ an elicitation of a philosophical stance ‘that rejected principles of socio-economic dependency’ and was therefore ‘sharply in tension with [the then current models] [. . .] of classical political economy.’<sup>45</sup> However, whilst Sklansky reads Emerson’s ‘economic thought’ in historical terms, stressing the theories of ‘spontaneous thought’ and endogeneity that

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<sup>42</sup> Matt Miller, ‘Poems of Materials,’ *Collage of Myself: Walt Whitman and the Making of Leaves of Grass* (Lincoln, NA: University of Nebraska Press, 2010), 161-215

<sup>43</sup> A review of Margaret Fuller’s ‘Papers on Literature and Art,’ *The American Whig Review*, 4. (1846), 515-518

<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

<sup>45</sup> Sklansky, ‘Transcendental Psychology,’ *The Soul’s Economy*, 42

we encounter in Emerson's early writings, he overlooks the revolutionary (and archly contemporary aspects) of Emerson's engagement with American capital. Over the course of this thesis, I have argued a counter position to Sklansky's assertion. Reading Emerson's 'Transcendental Criticism' as a practical theory of attachment or 'constellation' rather than as a detached 'aesthetic,' Emerson's 'economic thought' constitutes an explicitly 'economic' form of 'psychological self-expression' designed to maintain an economic system of thought able to accommodate theories of flux, productivity and creativity as well. 'Politics is an afterwork,' in this regard, and literary culture is argued as a means of considering the 'market' as a significant cultural system dependent upon cultures of critique and creativity.<sup>46</sup> Thus, the phrase that Emerson purloins from Napoleon provides an evocative means to consider the broader aims of his engagement with America's fledgling commercial cultures: 'The market-place is the louvre of the common people.'

In *Representative Men* (1850), Emerson 'approvingly' cites this aphorism, indicating Napoleon as its source.<sup>47</sup> If we identify the original contexts of this citation, we not only encounter yet another instance of appropriation, we also see the constancy and coherency of Emerson's interest in both the 'mechanics of literature' and the cultural significance of the 'mechanics' of the market. Emerson's first encounter with this phrase, with this assertion that 'the market-place is the Louvre...', more likely owes more to the popularity of the anthological compendium *Anecdotes and Characteristics of Napoleon Bonaparte* (1840) than to Napoleon's writings themselves.<sup>48</sup> Amassed by an anonymous editor (who in the collection's front matter is simply referred to as "AN AMERICAN"), *Anecdotes and Characteristics* is a portrait penned by a panoply of voices that collated 'the writings of Napoleon himself' alongside excerpts from 'the memoirs and military histories' in order to paint a public and personal portrait of Napoleon.<sup>49</sup> Rather than a biased

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<sup>46</sup> Emerson, 'Journal CO' (Undated, 1851), JMN., XI., 416

<sup>47</sup> Emerson, 'Napoleon, or the Man of the World' (1850), CW.IV., 240

<sup>48</sup> Emerson, 'Journal V' (Undated, 1845), JMN.IX., 140

<sup>49</sup> An American (ed.), *Anecdotes and Characteristics of Napoleon Bonaparte* (Philadelphia, PA: C.F. Stollmeyer, 1840). Although the citations themselves run without attribution in the book, the title page lists the collection's sources as 'The writings of Napoleon himself, and from the memoirs and military works of Bourrienne, Las Cases, Bertrand, Antomarchi, Walter Scott, Montholon, Lavalette, Rapp, Savary, Meneval, Fain, Thibadeau, Bignon, Gourgaud, Soult, Real, MacDonald, Davoust, St. Cyr, Suchet, Grouchy, Berthier, Mathieu Dumas, Iomini, Pelet, Belliard, Reynier, Miot, Chambray, Marbot, Segur, &c. &c.'

commemoration of his political history, Emerson's mixture of analogy and anecdote seeks to remedy the degree of heroism associated with Napoleon's character. In an introduction addressed 'TO THE PUBLIC,' Napoleon is portrayed as 'a man whose influence extends further than the confines of his native land,' who 'belongs to the world' and therefore needs be 'arraigned before its tribunal' for critical assessment.<sup>50</sup> Emerson's own study of Napoleon in *Representative Men* is fittingly subtitled 'The Man of the World,' reflecting and compounding the aims of this editorial; and his private reflections on Napoleon's cultural and critical worth are indicative of a want to study forms of cultural 'influence' within the 'confines' of his own 'native land.'

As Emerson notes in his journals, 1849, 'A man of Napoleon's stamp almost ceases to have a private speech & opinion. [...] Every line of Napoleon's therefore deserves reading as it is the writing of France, & not of one individual.'<sup>51</sup> Such remarks serve as an indication that Napoleon's public persona supersedes his ability to harbour 'private speech & opinion,' and—above all—is thus emblematic of Emerson's belief that a certain kind of publication facilitates a form of public ownership. 'A man is to ride alternately on the horses of his private and public nature,' Emerson notes in his journals, 1851; and Napoleon's reflections are representative of the voice of a country and culture rather than of an individual mind (a potential moment of transferal from Napoleon to Emerson, as Emerson would so vocally pronounce his fears and ambitions for the voice of America as well).<sup>52</sup> Taken singularly, such an assertion appeals to the popular notion that Emerson's works serve to Americanize a Carlylean iteration of the 'great man'—a study of cultural heroism that considers the living metonymies of a national culture through the antics and ideas of its 'Representative Men.' But we must remember that Emerson is not interested in the fact of representation alone; he is, as the introductory essay to *Representative Men* suggests, more absorbed by our 'Uses of Great Men' than he is the semiotics of cultural celebrity.

Scarcely read outside of the contexts of Emerson's own corpus, *Representative Men* is seldom historicized according to the circumstances in which its manuscripts were developed. Emerson spent nine

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<sup>50</sup> Ibid., iii

<sup>51</sup> Emerson, 'Journal V' (Undated, 1845), JMN.IX., 139-141

<sup>52</sup> Emerson, 'Journal CO' (Undated, 1851), JMN.XI., 377

months in Europe, 1847 to 48, fine-tuning his forthcoming book on the lecture circuit before visiting Paris in 1848 in time to experience the revolutionary mood first-hand.<sup>53</sup> More importantly—with Emerson’s appropriation of Marx as discussed in the previous chapter in mind—Emerson’s study precedes Marx’s own analysis of that period, and specifically of the ‘representative man’ Louis Bonaparte’s efforts to direct historical development, *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte* (1852). These two texts are seldom noted in parallel.<sup>54</sup> Nonetheless, considering Emerson’s rolling interest in ‘revolution,’ his adoption of Marx’s phrasing in his exploration of this ‘silent revolution,’ and Marx’s own famous investment in a prospective ‘poetry of the future’ as documented in the *Brumaire*, Emerson’s interest in ‘use’ is stridently revolutionary in character.

Marx, in the *Brumaire*, establishes his own theory of creativity as he considers the creative construction of history:

Men make their own history, but they do not make it just as they please in circumstances they choose for themselves; rather they make it in present circumstances, given and inherited. Tradition from all the dead generations weighs like a nightmare on the brain of the living. And just when they appear to be revolutionising themselves and their circumstances, in creating something unprecedented, in just such epochs of revolutionary crisis, that is when they nervously summon up the spirits of the past, borrowing from them their names, marching orders, uniforms, in order to enact new scenes in world history, but in this time-honoured guise and with this borrowed language. [...] The social revolution of the nineteenth century cannot create its poetry from the past but only from the future. It cannot begin till it has stripped off all superstition from the past. Previous revolutions required recollections of world history in order to dull themselves to their own content. The revolution

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<sup>53</sup> Lee Rust Brown comments on Emerson’s first visits to Paris in the 1830s as a particularly influential phase in his later development. Emerson refers to Paris as a ‘loud New York of a place,’ inspiring in him a sense of the complex character of urban capitalism. Emerson lists his activities (‘I go to the Sorbonne and hear lectures. I walk in the Jardin des Plantes. I stare and stare at the thousands of shop windows. I go to the Louvre, the King’s Library, the Theatre.’), a flâneurial relationship with the city market marked by the commercialism of its shops and boutiques and the cultural exhibitions of its museums and galleries. See Lee Rust Brown, ‘Paris and the Scientific Eye,’ *The Emerson Museum* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997), 157. See also Ralph Waldo Emerson, (ed.) Ralph L. Rusk, *The Selected Letters of Ralph Waldo Emerson*, Vol. I. (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 1939), 387-388

<sup>54</sup> For a recent exception, see Elizabeth Duquette, ‘The Man of the World,’ *American Literary History*, 27.4 (2015), 635-664

of the nineteenth century must let the dead bury the dead in order to realise its own content.<sup>55</sup>

Emerson arguably emanates a similar line of argument in *Representative Men* two years previously. However, where Marx would concentrate on a prospective 'poetry of the future,' Emerson would look to the 'Poets' responsible for the authorship of progress; the intellectual 'producers,' as he terms them, that forge the ideological basis of the 'city-building market-going' culture to which he belongs:

Among Eminent persons, those who are most dear to men are not the class the economist calls producers; they have nothing in their hand; they have not cultivated corn, nor made bread: they have not led out a colony nor invented a loom. A higher class in the estimation and love of this city-building market-going race of mankind, are the Poets, who, from the intellectual kingdom, feed the thought and imagination with ideas and pictures which raise men out of the world of corn and money, and console them for the shortcomings of the day and the meanness's of labour and traffic. [...] Wherever the sentiment of right comes in, it takes precedence of everything else. For other things, I make poetry of them; but the moral sentiment makes poetry of me.<sup>56</sup>

This is key to Emerson's thinking on critical exchange. Recall Emerson's aforesaid remark in 'History' (1841), that 'Every revolution was first a thought in one man's mind, and when that same thought occurs to another man, it is the key to that era.'<sup>57</sup> Recall also Emerson's remarks on Napoleon in his journals, 1849, that reflect his sense that the publication of thought heralds a key, political and progressive function; that Napoleon's word is 'the writing of France, & not of one individual.' In 'History,' Emerson asserts that 'Every reform was once a private opinion,' that 'when it shall be a private opinion again, it will solve the problem of the age.'<sup>58</sup> He pluralises the process of thought that he would acknowledge in the public ownership of Napoleon's 'private opinion' and, in so doing, again reasserts the significance of his

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<sup>55</sup> Karl Marx, 'The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte' (1853) in (ed.; trans.) T. Carver, *Marx: The Later Political Writings* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 32-34

<sup>56</sup> Emerson, 'Swedenborg, or, the Mystic' (1850), CW.IV., 93

<sup>57</sup> Emerson, 'History' (1841), CW.II., 4

<sup>58</sup> Emerson, 'Swedenborg, or, the Mystic' (1850), CW.IV., 93

‘OTHERISM’ as a critical position. ‘I make poetry of [another],’ Emerson writes, knowing full well that ‘the moral sentiment’ of the time ‘makes poetry of [him].’ That, in publishing private thought, he is contributing to the dialectical progress of this revolution; that his word, made public, is malleable (or ‘tunable’ to borrow Emerson’s term) and thus revolutionary.

Here, the idea of appropriation and that of publication synthetically move towards a declaration of a poetic futurity, another version of the process he details in his journals through the publication of Napoleon’s private reflections. It is because of Napoleon’s public persona that his writings belong more to the public domain than to Napoleon himself. This, however, is not a declaration of creative defeat, nor any diminution of persona. As we saw over the course of these chapters, the ways in which Emerson enumerates a marketplace of meaning is precisely through the ‘reforming,’ ‘remodelling,’ or ‘remaking’ of ideas; through considering the activity of thinking as a means of considering persona as both the subject, object and ‘lens’ of critical labour. ‘All thinking is analogizing,’ Emerson famously writes in ‘Poetry and Imagination’ (1875); ‘tis the use of life to learn metonymy.’<sup>59</sup> Every idea is metonymic of a broader culture of ideas, to Emerson’s mind—a mirror carried through the street—and as Richard Poirier notes, Emerson’s philosophical effort was (broadly speaking) to conceive of a critical, hermeneutic mode driven by the idea that we need recognize the simpatico between the language we use to explore our surroundings and the same language that we use to ‘know ourselves.’<sup>60</sup> We charter a sense of belonging through our capacity to disrupt that language (‘by means of troping, punning, parodistic echoings’) and ‘by letting vernacular idioms play against revered terminologies,’ are able to occasion a social self; ‘a private body built out of public materials.’<sup>61</sup>

Emerson believed that a public voice should be imbued with a political atmosphere. ‘Fame of voice or of rhetoric will carry people a few times to hear a speaker,’ he notes, ‘but they soon begin to ask, “What is he driving at?” If this speaker ‘does not stand for anything, [they] will be deserted.’ ‘A fact-speaker of any

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<sup>59</sup> Emerson, ‘History’ (1841), CW.II., 4-5

<sup>60</sup> Richard Poirier, ‘The Question of Genius,’ *The Renewal of Literature: Emersonian Reflections* (New York: Random House, 1987), 67-95

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, 72-73



kind,' conversely, 'they will long follow.'<sup>62</sup> The political positionality of a thought made public—its capacity to reflect the demands of our space and time—is of fundamental significance to Emerson's reflections on the act of reading. In this sense—and considering *Representative Men* in the historical contexts of its authorship—the fact that the Louvre reorganized its collection in 1848, parallel to the regime change following the February Revolutions in France that same year, undoubtedly impacted Emerson's thinking as well. With an emphasis on prioritizing French painting from 1710 on, the museum's curatorial restructure became a lens for the form, function and social seating of a national and cultural voice, a way to hone the self-reflection of a society dealing with a post-revolutionary fervour and imperialist aspirations simultaneously (not unlike the United States in some ways). The restructuring of the Louvre antedates the publication of *Representative Men* by just two years, setting the scene for the type of exploration of culture and voice that Emerson himself would so vividly engage in.<sup>63</sup> We can see, then, the appeal and value of Napoleon's assertion that 'The market-place is the louvre...', to Emerson's mind.

The fact that this phrase appears as a second-hand source in *Anecdotes and Characteristics* is also key. Napoleon's phrase is reported anecdotally: 'The emperor directed particular attention to the embellishments of the markets of the capital. He used to say, *The market-place is the Louvre of the common-people.*' The adoption of this citation is a curious means with which to entertain the connection between culture, the marketplace, and the practical structures of cultural memory in Emerson's writings.<sup>64</sup> Furthermore, the practice of 'grinding truisms' or the works of 'others' into the pigment that enables Emerson to 'paint' and illustrate the actual work or labour of critical engagement further sophisticates the function of the 'museum' as a metaphor in Emerson's writings.<sup>65</sup> Emerson's aforementioned citation of Washington Allston, for instance, is also based on his claim that we need 'grind' the material of a published author or article into an 'epithet' fit 'for daily use.'<sup>66</sup> Consider also his claim in 'Swedenborg, or the Mystic'

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<sup>62</sup> Emerson, 'Eloquence' (1870), CW.VII., 94

<sup>63</sup> For a detailed account of the changes made to the Louvre's institutional governance and revised policy for collection and display in the 1840s, see James Kearns, 'From Store to Museum: The Reorganization of the Louvre's Painting Collections in 1848,' *The Modern Language Review*, 102.1. (2007), 58-73

<sup>64</sup> An American (ed.), *Anecdotes and Characteristics of Napoleon Bonaparte*, 47

<sup>65</sup> Emerson, 'Literary Ethics' (1838), CW.I., 165

<sup>66</sup> Emerson, 'Nominalist and Realist' (1844) CW.III., 241

that we make ‘poetry of [others],’ or—in ‘Plato, or the Philosopher’—his claim that the facets of ‘external biography’ serve only to facilitate another corpus of materials. ‘Plato has no external biography,’ Emerson notes; ‘If he had lover, wife, or children, we hear nothing of them. He ground them all into paint.’<sup>67</sup> As we’ve seen, Emerson both preaches and practices such a position, using the figure of the painter (as he did the builder) as a model for revolutionary change more widely and our capacity to radically ‘remodel’ an idea; however, a space was needed to accommodate the resulting produce of the radical forms of cultural engagement he envisaged.

In his 1841 ‘Lecture on the Times,’ Emerson suggests that we need ‘draw for these times a portrait gallery.’ Here—stretched ‘across the wall’ of a ‘silent gallery’—it will be the painters and creators themselves that are ‘painted.’<sup>68</sup>

Let us paint the agitator, and the man of the old school, and the member of Congress, and the college professor, the formidable editor, the priest and reformer [...]. Could we indicate the indicators, indicate those who most accurately represent every good and evil tendency of the general mind, in the just order which they take on this canvas of Time, so that all witnesses should recognize a spiritual law as each well-known form flitted for a moment across the wall, we should have a series of sketches which would report to the next ages the color and quality of ours.<sup>69</sup>

Rather than simply a rendering of a parade of figures that define the ‘times,’ Emerson’s interest in the process of ‘painting’ supersedes his interest in the portrait as a product. In other words, the work of the painter is more important than the elevation of the portrait as a work, and the value of a ‘portrait’ is only in its indication of a possible prospect; a possible future—or as Emerson puts it—an actualized ‘canvas of time.’ The relation between painter and painting is akin to that of the silent partner to the progress of the ‘silent revolution,’ and ‘Paint’ is another means of considering how the qualities of Emerson’s interest in capitalism and cultural progress coalesce. As he later notes in ‘Politics’ (1844), ‘What the tender poetic

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<sup>67</sup> Emerson, ‘Plato, or the Philosopher’ (1850), CW.IV., 43

<sup>68</sup> Emerson, ‘Lecture on the Times’ (1841) CW.I., 264

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, 264-265

youth dreams, and prays, and paints to-day, but shuns the ridicule of saying aloud, shall presently be the resolutions of public bodies.<sup>70</sup> Emerson is not simply detailing the authority of the portrait as a cultural tool; he is arguing that culture's 'ephemerality' needs to be registered if we are to consider its appropriation and indeed re-appropriation into more art, more creativity, and consider the social effects of this process.

The aim is to consider 'life' and 'not literature' and to activate the terms of his 'Transcendental Criticism.' The painter paints a catalyst; a cause; knowing not what that cause may drive towards, only that the exchange of ideas mirrors the commercial dynamics of a market mentality. To focus so on the painter's process and subject—rather than the results of their work—points to the creative potential of labour and how it may enlarge the 'general mind.' However, the painter's work requires a context; a space able to support both intellectual freedom and commercial enterprise. Again, as Emerson claims by way of Napoleon, 'the market-place is the louvre of the common people;' the market—a 'silent gallery'—accommodates the work of the 'common' labourer and elevates the work produced to the status of high art. Paralleling the culture of growth, expenditure and exchange in ascendance with the culture and institutionalization of criticism, a theory of critical engagement and critical agency undeniably contributed to the dialectical progress of a 'silent revolution' to Emerson's mind; one in which writer and reader—'other' and 'Another'—stand on equal footing as symbolic subjects in a nation built on equal parts commerce and culture.

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<sup>70</sup> Emerson, 'Politics' (1844), CW.III., 201



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## A Note on Primary Sources

Whilst I will employ the Harvard/Belknap edition of Emerson's *Complete Works* for the purposes of further annotation (as indicated in footnotes), I have elected to use the 'Centenary' Edition (1903-1904) as a primary source due to the digitization of each volume in this series by the University of Michigan. As a revision of the 'Riverside' edition of Emerson's collected works (1883-1893; a nine-volume sequence supervised by Ralph Waldo Emerson himself and his literary executor, James Eliot Cabot, between 1841 and 1875), this public and accessible concordance of the 'Centenary' publication of Emerson's collected works for the University of Michigan Digital Content Collection (UMDL, 2006) is an important resource that allows for the subjection of Emerson's writings to new kinds of research.

Expediting critical engagement by allowing for a field searches Emerson's published works, the UMDL 'Centenary' edition encourages investigation of the occurrence and re-occurrence of single words and phrases; repetition of word and phrase in a single collection, work, page or paragraph; and the co-occurrence of words or phrases across his publications. This enables revisionist assessment of the coherency and congruency of Emerson's use of language previously only possible through archival and manuscript study. Used concordantly with the Harvard/Belknap publication of Emerson's *Journals and Miscellaneous Notebooks*, I have utilized the UMDL Centenary concordance to undertake research into the consistency of approach, language and symbol in Emerson's use of metaphor and—as will be shown—concentrate on the repetition of materials across Emerson's private and public writings.

The digitization of the 'Centenary' edition is also symbolically significant if we are to consider Emerson's own habit of revising and recycling materials across his essays and addresses. Emerson would regularly mine his private writings for the purpose of embellishing his public works with intertextual aphorisms and allusions, but this habit would also extend to his own writings and we can trace the traffic of a single word or phrase from his notebooks through to his public matter for either the page or stage. Assessing the significance of reappearing words, phrases, motifs and metaphor in Emerson's corpus, the UMDL Emerson concordance represents an extension of what has come to be termed as 'The Emerson

factory.’\* A systemic project begun during Emerson’s own lifetime that has sought to revise and reframe his ‘cultural presence’ by way of an array of paratextual devices such as bibliographic notes, historical and textual introductions; but that also allowed for the continuous, automatic authorship of a series of Emerson’s later essays. Under the editorship and stewardship of Cabot and Emerson’s circle, these works would be authored through a process of drawing together unpublished materials from Emerson’s private notebooks (indexed by Emerson himself) into thematic projects (on subjects such as ‘Greatness,’ and ‘Love,’ for example), quilting aphorisms and asides into more coherent textual entities.

Whilst serious work still needs be undertaken on this machinic process of composition/recomposition in Emerson’s later works, and the project of this ‘Factory’ more broadly, this thesis has explored the ways in which the industrialization and, indeed, commodification is both theorized and antedated in Emerson’s earlier writings and consolidated in his later works.†

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\* A phrase I borrow from Ronald A. Bosco’s ‘Historical Introduction’ to the Harvard edition of Emerson’s *Letters and Social Aims* (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press, 2010), Vol. VIII in Emerson’s *Collected Works*, xxxvii.

† See also Joseph M. Thompson, ‘Late Emerson: *Selected Poems* and the Emerson Factory,’ *ELH*, 65. (1998), 971-994.



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## † — A NOTE ON THE ILLUSTRATIONS

The two pages from Emerson's *Poetry* and *Topical Notebooks* (pp. 238-239), detailing his reference to "Karl Max," are excerpted from the unpublished essay 'SOUNDING A SILENT REVOLUTION: RALPH WALDO EMERSON'S MARXIST BURLESQUE' (Dr. Benjamin Pickford, Université de Lausanne and Dominic Jaeckle, Goldsmiths, University of London). Emerson's notebooks and journals are housed in his archives at Houghton Library, Harvard. The reproduction of the US Post Office 'Ralph Waldo Emerson' 3¢ stamp from the 'Famous Americans' Series (1940), is the author's own.

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