THE FOREMOST WATCHMAN: IDEOLOGICAL CONSISTENCY AND SOCIOPOLITICAL CHANGE IN EMERSON'S ANTI-SLAVERY ADDRESSES

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LIST OF SYMBOLS

AW *Emerson's Antislavery Writings*, Len Gougeon and Joel Myerson, eds. (New Haven: Yale UP, 1995).

EL *Early Lectures of Ralph Waldo Emerson*, 3 vols. Stephen E. Whicher, Robert E. Spiller, and Wallace E. Williams, eds. (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1964-72).

JMN *The Journals and Miscellaneous Notebooks of Ralph Waldo Emerson*, Vols. I-XIV. William H. Gilman, Alfred R. Ferguson, George P. Clark, Merrell R. Davis, Harrison Hayford, Ralph Orth, J. E. Parsons, Merton M. Sealts, and A. W. Plumstead, eds. (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1960-78).

W *The Complete Works of Ralph Waldo Emerson*, 12 vols. Edward W. Emerson, ed. (Boston: Houghton, 1903-1904).

INTRODUCTION

> Mankind in good earnest have availed so far in understanding themselves and their work, that the foremost watchman on the peak announces his news. It is the truest word ever spoken, and the phrase will be the fittest, most musical, and the unerring voice of the world for that time.
>
> -- Emerson, "The Poet" (1844)

The most common critical perceptions concerning the career of Ralph Waldo Emerson have tended to emphasize the strength and originality of his earliest, and seemingly most influential, works. *Nature*, published in 1836, and the compositions contained in *Essays*, *First Series* and *Essays, Second Series*, published in 1841 and 1844 respectively, provide the foundation upon which Emerson's transcendental philosophy is erected: Emerson hereby introduces a uniquely American agenda that espouses original and independent notions with regard to the individual, his role in society, and the fundamental need for self-determination. *Nature*, "History," "Circles," "The Poet," "Experience," and "Self-Reliance," as well as the texts of "The American Scholar," "Man the Reformer," and other seminal works are readily found in any good volume of *Selected Essays*, a condition which understandably serves to reinforce inherited assumptions that Emerson's was a life and career which was, as Larzer Ziff contends, "punctuated by the excitement of ideas rather than events" (14).[1]

Although a perspective which stresses the power and perception of Emerson's early essays offers a legitimate argument in its own right, this emphasis unfortunately also functions to eclipse the significance of many of his other works and to relegate them either to relative obscurity or to a seemingly lesser place in the shadow of their own precursors. Emerson's career hardly drew to a close in 1844; the publication of *Nature*, and *Essays, First* and *Second Series* occurred during the relatively brief period between 1836 and 1844, a mere eight years of an uncommonly active public life that spanned

nearly five decades. As his early works became more widely known, Emerson's popularity had expanded, resulting in an ever-increasing demand throughout the 1830s and 1840s for his services as a lecturer and public speaker. By 1850, Emerson's lecture tours had taken him across the United States and to Europe, and his fame reached beyond his New England origins to culminate in his becoming "the most widely acclaimed American of his day."[2] To focus too exclusively on essays published prior to 1845 is to overlook the significance of subsequent historical events to Emerson's career as well as the relevance of this personal notoriety and influence.[3] Emerson's work exists as a continuum, a series of essays, lectures, and public addresses that record the development of his transcendental philosophy over time. And Emerson's time was the nineteenth century, a period of profound political and social change in both New England culture and within American society as a whole.

By the time *Nature* was published in 1836, the maturing nation had already left many of its eighteenth-century social and spiritual precedents behind it and was experiencing a wave of reform.[4] Key institutions such as the Federalist party, the church, and even capitalism were called into question, and the notion of the individual ultimately emerged as the new symbol of promise and hope for the America of the coming age (Elkins 142). The Missouri Compromise of 1820, which had forbidden slavery north of the line of 36°30' in the Louisiana Purchase area, tenuously held the longstanding conflict between the North and the South at least temporarily in check, but the anti-slavery impulse had been gaining considerable momentum in New England and would soon become a serious force with which both Emerson and the nation would be compelled to contend. Although he had been philosophically opposed to slavery from his youth,[5] the Emerson who published *Nature* and *Essays, First* and *Second Series* considered himself a philosopher, not a political activist. He was skeptical of organized reform, observing in "New England Reformers" that "[t]he criticism and attack on institutions, which we have witnessed, has made one thing plain, that society gains nothing whilst a man, not himself

renovated, attempts to renovate things around him: he has become tediously good in some particular but negligent or narrow in the rest; and hypocrisy and vanity are often the disgusting result" (*W*, III: 261).[6] Emerson concludes the essay with the observation that "[i]t is handsomer to remain in the establishment better than the establishment, and conduct that in the best manner, than to make a sally against evil by some single improvement, without supporting it by a total regeneration" (261).

The issue of slavery, the "evil" which ultimately attracted and dispersed the greatest amount of antebellum reform energy, overlapped Emerson's career for a period of more than three decades. Although he was by no means "compelled" to support efforts to abolish slavery in the United States, Emerson found himself gradually but irrevocably drawn into the public debate.[7] His wife Lidian and his brother Charles had allied themselves with anti-slavery movements beginning in the 1830s, but Emerson himself initially resisted the repeated requests of abolitionists to publicly support their cause.[8] Avowedly anti-slavery, he nevertheless long refrained from openly identifying himself as an abolitionist or from actively promoting membership in anti-slavery societies.[9] But when Emerson finally committed himself to the abolitionist cause, he pursued it with a vengeance. The unprecedented determination evident in his public addresses from the 1850s exposes a gradual transition from private thought to public action that can initially strike the reader as decidedly un-"Emersonian." Although such a position understandably raises questions regarding the inherently political nature of Emerson's role in the slavery debate and its possible incongruity with his own transcendentalist thought, a thorough examination of his anti-slavery addresses reveals his stance to have been ideologically consistent with his early philosophical notions. Whereas the essays he produced prior to 1845 delineate his personal ideology in essentially abstract terms, his anti-slavery addresses reveal an evolution in his perception of its proper political application over time. Slavery represented a subject for exclusive moral contemplation in the 1840s, but it became a cause for passive and later active civil disobedience throughout the course of

the 1850s. By the time the crisis culminated in the commencement of the Civil War, Emerson welcomed the opportunity as a "favorable moment . . . for the cutting out of our cancerous Slavery" (*JMN*, XV, 141-42).[10]

Addresses that reference slavery cover more than thirty years of Emerson's public career and reveal that he devoted a great deal of intellectual effort to considering the moral, social, and political significance of the anti-slavery issue. Skeptical of political activists, he nevertheless recognized that slavery constituted much more than a run-of-the-mill reform movement and that it in fact represented the major sociopolitical "issue of the times." Between the 1830s and the 1860s, Emerson took both private and public action to compel the abolition of slavery, determined to eliminate the "wild, savage, and preposterous There or Then, and introduce in its place the Here and the Now" (*W*, II: 11). Such an evolution from abstract Thinker to concrete Actor is consistent with the ideology he articulated in *Nature* and *Essays, First* and *Second Series* and represents a demonstration of, rather than a departure from, of the tenets of his own philosophy.

Although Emerson's awareness of the significance of developing historical events and the resulting need for political and social change clearly identify him as a man of his own time, he continued to look toward the promise the future, and his "transparent eyeball" remained consistently focused on the circumference of the next concentric circle. Emerson viewed history as progressive, and he eagerly anticipated the the advance of the American nation that he firmly believed would ultimately exist (Bercovitch 170).[11] Conscious of the potential role that the individual plays in determining the course of history, Emerson recognized that self-reliance included the possibility of the need for positive action on behalf of the moral sentiment. As an Actor as well as a Thinker, Emerson functions as a barometer of social as well as intellectual history. A new picture emerges of Emerson's as a life and career "punctuated by the excitement" of both ideas *and* events (Ziff 14).

CHAPTER I

THE ROOT: SLAVERY AS A MORAL ISSUE

> Beware when the great God lets loose a thinker on this planet. Then all things are at risk. It is as when a conflagration has broken out in a great city, and no man knows what is safe or where it will end.
>
> -- Emerson, "Circles" (1841)

Although reform movements in general experienced a flurry of increased activity throughout the 1830s and 1840s, and the slavery issue in particular, which emerged as the trend's most urgent expression, concurrently gained considerable momentum, slavery represented far from a new subject in American political and social discourse. From its earliest settlements, the United States had existed essentially as an uneasy union of two separate nations, the New England and Middle Atlantic colonies which comprised the North, and the Chesapeake and Lower South states which made up the South (Henretta and Nobles 7-99). Slave ownership was declining in New England and the Middle Atlantic colonies even before the period of the Revolutionary War; the state of Massachusetts had declared slavery unconstitutional as early as 1783.[12] Moral uneasiness over slavery as an institution was abetted by economic factors that resulted in the development of a small-scale agricultural and industrial economy in the North that did not rely upon the continued use of slave labor; consequently, slavery became increasingly confined to the large-scale plantations of the relatively distant South. The invention of the cotton gin in 1793 created an agricultural boom that resulted in the actual expansion of slave ownership in the Southern states through the subsequent importation of 250,000 additional slaves (Henretta and Nobles 183-84).

Slavery represented a divisive American political issue even during the Revolutionary War. Thomas Jefferson, recognizing its obvious incongruity with the

notion of all men having been created equal, included a section regarding the negative aspects of the institution in his original draft of the Declaration of Independence, but the Continental Congress, anxious to avoid alienating the southern states during the war, eliminated the segment from the final draft (Henretta and Nobles 178-79). The framers of the Constitution appeased disgruntled delegates from both the North and the South by including in the final version two compromises which became more significant as the slavery issue grew more contentious over time. The first provided for the counting of each slave as three-fifths of a man for the purposes of census calculation and Congressional representation; the second stipulated that the African slave trade would be abolished in 1808, twenty years hence. Even in the North, few Americans of the Revolutionary era advocated immediate and unqualified emancipation; some states supported the seemingly less economically disruptive concept of gradual emancipation. An early Pennsylvania statute provided for the freedom of slaves born after 1780, but the measure required the so-called "free" slaves to serve their mothers' masters for a period of twenty-eight years prior to actually claiming their freedom. Other proposals included manumission, or the voluntary relinquishing of slaves by their masters, and a program established in 1817 that favored deporting both slaves and free blacks to Liberia. This plan, known as colonization, was supported for obviously different reasons by politicians in both the North and the South; James Madison, James Monroe, John Marshall, and Henry Clay were among its earliest supporters (Elkins 178). This idea was still being considered in the 1830s, along with the theories of philosophical abolitionism, which held that abolition would only occur over time and focused on implementing institutional improvements, and gradual immediatism, or "'immediate emancipation gradually accomplished,'" which was the philosophical foundation of the American Anti-Slavery Society (179). The reformers of the 1830s, far from defining a new social issue, simply added fuel to the simmering fire of an old ethical problem that had haunted the nation from its inception.

Enter Ralph Waldo Emerson. Unlike many of his fellow Transcendentalists, such as Frederic Hedge, James Freeman Clarke, William Henry Channing, and Theodore Parker, Emerson never officially joined any of the anti-slavery societies, and slavery remained for him throughout the 1830s a serious but subordinate social issue that he publicly addressed essentially only in passing. The outspoken advocacy of reform "causes" has been observed to characterize Transcendentalism as a movement; Stanley Elkins asserts that "far from 'revolting' against the age, Transcendentalism embodied in aggravated form certain of its most remarkable features--its anti-institutionalism, its individual perfectionism, its abstraction, and its guilt and reforming zeal" (158). This profile hardly fits Emerson, Transcendentalism's founder and primary spokesman. His declaration in "New England Reformers" of his preference to work within the system establishes his theory of political activism as stopping short of anti-institutional, and his less-than-flattering assessment of the "hypocrisy and vanity" of organized reformers (*W*, III: 261) scarcely suggests a genuine sense of "reforming zeal" on his own part. Emerson may indeed be classified as a Transcendentalist, and he could certainly show concern for the need for social change, but he can hardly be characterized as a "zealous" reformer.

The remaining points of Elkins' evaluation, however, are in many ways characteristic of Emerson's own approach to moral and social issues. Individual perfectionism--or, more accurately, individual perfectibility--lies at the core of Emerson's concept of self-reliance, as it is the individual who publishes his private convictions and offers them for public debate. The emphasis on the importance of individual action is consistent throughout the works of Emerson; even his later encouragement to others to join anti-slavery societies constitutes a personal act of individual moral responsibility. Elkins astutely connects the individual's sense of social responsibility to guilt, which he contends is "always a necessary element in any reform movement anywhere," but "comes to assume a unique and disproportionate role in American reform activity" (161). Elkins explains that Protestant Americans, who lack the European's formal religious and secular

institutions that are designed to absorb and redirect guilt, must project their sense of social responsibility inward, where it can accumulate and become unstable, even to the point of "implacable moral aggression" (161). Although Emerson became neither implacable nor aggressive with regard to the issue of slavery, he did become determined, and his personal sense of social responsibility, once essentially abstract, ultimately became concrete.

Elkins' comments with regard to the notion of moral abstraction deserve particular attention within the contexts of both Transcendentalism and American society throughout the course of the 1830s. Elkins relates that during this period, "Society, institutions, power--all became abstractions, both in letters and in popular oratory. Where now was the setting in which the thinker might locate man, the object of his contemplation? The transcendent 'individual' must be placed not in the society over which he had symbolically triumphed but in a transcendental universe--man himself became an abstraction" (144). This notion ironically functions to distance the reforming agent from his flesh-and-blood beneficiary: slavery becomes a concern not so much for individual human beings in bondage but an ideological issue of right and wrong. Elkins concludes that "[s]ubordinating everything to its rightness or wrongness was the theme of all the Transcendentalists' sermons; slavery became not really a social problem but a moral abstraction. And once they came to the decision that it was wrong, which they all did, the burden of guilt for its continued existence became theirs and that of their hearers" (170). The Transcendentalist Thinkers, including Emerson, were thus understandably drawn to moral abstractions, and the anti-slavery issue, not surprisingly, provided an irresistible opportunity for serious philosophical contemplation. Slavery remained a fundamentally moral issue for Emerson throughout the 1830s and 1840s, the period during which he produced *Nature* and his *Essays, First* and *Second Series*.

Nature itself exists as a bold announcement of the need for perpetual human reconsideration of both institutions and ideas. Denouncing his own age as

"retrospective," Emerson queries, "why should we grope among the dry bones of the past, or put the living generation into masquerade out of its faded wardrobe?" (*W*, I: 3) and immediately responds by pointing out that "[t]he sun shines to-day also" (3). Emerson's carefully-selected metaphors create a philosophical bridge between the dead past and the living present that he proceeds to topple at the end of the very first paragraph with the single emphatic declaration: "Let us demand our own works and laws and worship" (3). In an impressive rhetorical stroke, Emerson dismisses the practical relevance of tradition to the situation of contemporary men and calls for a fresh examination of the nation's moral, political, and social concerns in terms of the needs of the present day. Such a position anticipates his encouragement to "[t]rust thyself" in "Self-Reliance," where he urges the individual to "[a]ccept the place the divine providence has found for you, the society of your contemporaries, the connection of events. Great men have always done so, and confided themselves childlike to the genius of their age, betraying their perception that the absolutely trustworthy was seated at their heart, working through their hands, predominating in all their being" (*W*, II: 47). From his earliest writing, Emerson connects social consciousness and political activity to individual moral perceptions within the context of a given age; the individual emerges as the dominant force, for it is the individual who learns "the secret that he can reduce under his will not only particular events but great classes, nay, the whole series of events, and so conform all facts to his character" (*W*, I: 39-40).

Such a self-reliant individual embodies Emerson's conception of the hero, the person who directs his moral energy outward for the benefit of the collective. Emerson reflects in *Nature* that "[i]n private places, among sordid objects, an act of truth or heroism seems at once to draw itself to the sky as its temple, the sun as its candle" (21). Connecting the image of the hero to his notion of the noble sentiment, he maintains that "[e]very heroic act is also decent, and causes the place and the bystanders to shine. We are taught by great actions that the universe is the property of every individual in it" (20).

The moral force of nature both conditions and compels the heroic deed; Emerson asserts that "[a]n action is the perfection and publication of a thought. A right action seems to fill the eye, and to be related to all nature" (19-20). The hero, therefore, represents for Emerson the inspired individual who elects to act upon self-trust, what Emerson himself would later define as "the essence of heroism" ("Heroism," *W*, II: 251). He adds in "Character" that "[t]he hero sees that the event is ancillary, and must follow *him* (*W*, III: 97): "[c]haracter" thus becomes "nature in the highest form" (105) and "men of character . . . the conscience of the society to which they belong" (96).

Emerson had provided numerous illustrations of men of character in his early lectures: in the "Biography" series of 1835, he pointed to both John Milton and George Fox as "men possessed of rare faculties . . . who had the advantage of rare cultivation" (*EL*, I: 165).[13] Milton represented for Emerson an early example of self-reliance, an individual "drawn into the great controversies of the times, [but] in them . . . never lost in a party" (158). Emerson observes that Milton's

> private opinions and private conscience always distinguish him. That which drew him to the party was his love of liberty, ideal liberty; this therefore he could not sacrifice to any party. Toland tells us, "As he looked upon true and absolute freedom to be the greatest happiness of this life, whether to societies or single persons, so he thought constraint of any sort to be the utmost misery; for which reason he used to tell those about him the entire satisfaction of his mind, that he had constantly employed his strength and faculties in the defence of liberty, and in direct opposition to slavery." (158)[14]

Emerson concludes,

> Truly [Milton] was an apostle of freedom; of freedom in

> the house, in the state, in the church; freedom of speech, freedom of the press, yet in his own mind discriminated from savage license, because that which he desired was the liberty of the wise man, containing itself in the limits of virtue. He pushed, as far as any in that democratic age, his ideas of *civil* liberty. (158-59)

Although Emerson characterizes Milton as an apostle of a notion of "freedom" that is essentially philosophical in nature, he ties Milton's advocacy of liberty to concrete moral, political, and social concepts which his contemporary audience would most likely have venerated. "Ideal liberty" draws upon the perceived moral foundation of American society as conceived during the Revolution, as do the political concepts of freedom of speech, religion, and the press; Milton, according to Emerson, "sought absolute truth" (159), a reflection of Emerson's own conception of the supremacy of the moral sentiment. Milton qualifies as a hero by virtue of his publication of his private thoughts, but Emerson's notion of "liberty" within this context remains relatively distanced from the significant political concerns of his own troubled age.

In his subsequent lecture on George Fox, Emerson connects his subject more directly to the needs of the present day. Fox, whom Emerson depicts in "Manners" as a "[l]over of liberty, friend of the Hindoo, [and] friend of the African slave" (*W*, III: 142), had founded the Quakers, or Society of Friends, a sect which from its inception had refused military service, failed to pay religious taxes, and denied the authority of the English legal system (Henretta and Nobles 48), individual acts of moral conviction of which Emerson would doubtlessly approve. Emerson writes that "[Fox] and his friends made a resolute stand in the English courts for the religious liberty of the subject. Calmly they disputed every oppression inch by inch. He and his friends originated the party in modern times which contends for the principles of Universal Peace" (*EL*, I: 182). Establishing Fox as a hero by virtue of his having exercised self-trust and acted upon a

moral principle of liberty that culminated in an historical fact of religious freedom, Emerson proceeds to extend this heroic influence to encompass the concerns of his own era. Emerson observes that "the Society of Friends have honorably led in the two philanthropic works of our age, the Abolition of Slavery and the Suppression of Intemperance. And slowly and silently their opinions sifted by time have passed into the public opinion of mankind, and whilst the Society founded by Fox remains a sect they now hold almost no peculiar opinion" (*EL*, I: 182). Emerson's assumptions are subtle yet unmistakable: he portrays abolition as an "honorable" cause and notes that views that were once considered radical have evolved over time into essentially mainstream thinking. Like Milton, Fox possesses the character that signals the hero, he who "conquers because his arrival alters the face of affairs" ("Character," *W*, III: 90).

Although the heroic act elevates the individual above society and circumstances, men are nevertheless subordinated to moral law, which "lies at the center of nature and radiates to the circumference" (*W*, I: 41-42). According to Emerson, "The moral influence of nature upon every individual is that amount of truth which it illustrates to him" (42), and "[a]t the call of a noble sentiment. . . . the spells of persuasion, the keys of power are put into his hands" (32). Nature teaches the exercise of the individual's Will as an expression of both moral truth and human heroism; Emerson observes that

> there are not wanting gleams of a better light,--occasional examples of the action of man upon nature with his entire force,--with reason as well as understanding. Such examples are, the traditions of miracles in the earliest antiquity of all nations; the history of Jesus Christ; the achievements of a principle, as in religious and political revolutions, and in the abolition of the slave-trade. (72-73)

According to Emerson, these examples typify "Reason's momentary grasp of the sceptre; the exertions of a power which exists not in time or space, but an instantaneous in-

streaming causing power" (73). But the circumstances of Reason's triumph to which he refers represent human historical events, and if the power which enables exists outside of time and space, the concrete consequences of its exercise do not. Emerson's designation here of the abolition of the slave-trade as the achievement of a moral principle is noteworthy, especially as he equates it with "religious and political revolutions" and "the history of Jesus Christ." Although slavery itself remained to be eradicated at the time of *Nature*'s publication, the international trade had long since been outlawed and therefore offered Emerson a relatively non-inflammatory example of a moral triumph that already existed within the realm of historical fact. A proponent of slavery would hardly celebrate the abolition of the slave trade as an achievement of principle; thus, as early as 1836, Emerson establishes his moral position, both expressly and by implication, as an opponent of the institution of slavery and an advocate of social reform.

If Emerson's public position on the slavery issue in 1836 appeared somewhat tentative, his private sentiments did not. During this same period, Emerson contemplated "[t]he present aspects of the Slavery Question" in his Journal and concluded that "slavery is the most striking example in the history of the world of evil taking one wrong step. The introduction of slaves unfortunately distinguishable by color has entailed all these crimes on the states" (*JMN*, XII: 157-58). Emerson insists that "no man can hold property in Man; that Reason is not a chattel; cannot be bought & sold; and that every pretended traffic in such stock is invalid and criminal," and that "[o]ur great duty in this matter is to open our halls to the discussion of this question steadily day after day, year after year until no man dare wag his finger at us" (152) and "to Settle the right & wrong so that whenever we are called to vote in the matter, we may not dodge the question; we may not trifle with it" (154). Correctly perceiving that "[s]lavery is important as a test of the times" (154), Emerson notes that "[t]he professed aim of the abolitionist is to awaken the conscience of the Northern States in the hope thereby to awaken the conscience of the Southern states: a hope just & sublime. A high compliment they pass upon the integrity

& moral force of New England which I hope we shall not disappoint" (153). Although slavery provided an unparalleled example of evil in the world, it remained for Emerson a moral abstraction, an issue of right or wrong. Even in the privacy of his Journal, he called only for consideration and discussion of the problem for the purpose of persuading others to accept it philosophically as a moral aberration. At this point, Emerson, though asserting the moral integrity of New England and its reformers, distinguishes his own ideological position from that of the abolitionists through his designations of "they" and "we." Not quite an abolitionist in practice, Emerson had nevertheless quietly established himself, both privately and publicly, as fundamentally anti-slavery in principle.

Throughout the 1830s and 1840s, Emerson took several opportunities to remark upon many of the philosophical aspects of the slavery issue during the course of his topical lectures. In "Politics," delivered at the Masonic Temple on January 12, 1837, as part of the series on "The Present Age," Emerson identifies the political basis of power in property and the potential abuses that the system may force upon the individual. He explains that

> [i]n a theory of government, this principle lies at the foundation, that property should make the law for property, and persons the law for persons. But to embody this theory in the forms of a government is not easy. For persons and property mix themselves in every transaction. The violences upon persons are oftenest for the sake of property as in robbery and slavery and war. The state often chooses to compound for the offences of persons by property, as fines. And the charge of government in the protection of persons is paid not by personal service but by tax. In fact, the nature of human society does so inextricably mix these two interests, that it becomes necessary that the same

> government, the same King, Council, Bench, Senate, House, should administer both; and the rightful distinction demanded is that the proprietors of the nation should have more elective franchise that nonproprietors. It was a Spartan maxim, "Call that which is just, equal, not that which is equal, just." (*EL*, II: 72)[15]

Emerson recognizes the conflicting "rights" of persons and property within the very structure of slavery, which he lists here among his examples of "violences upon persons . . . for the sake of property" (72). Property ownership effectively elevates the political power of the holder while simultaneously diminishing that of nonproprietors; the result is a hierarchical imbalance, a fundamental division into categories of ruler and subject, oppressor and oppressed. Emerson elaborates that

> No distinction seems to be so fundamental in politics as this of persons and property. Out of an inattention to it arises the whole sophism of slavery. And throughout history the errors of political societies have arisen from confounding these two classes of rights. On the one hand, the obvious inequality of rights of property has led the rich and strong to assume a like difference in personal rights, which assumption legalised is tyranny; on the other, the manifest equality of personal rights has led the many to assume a like equality of rights over property, which is Agrarianism. (73)

Emerson's allusion to the "sophism" of slavery is revealing in its overt suggestion with regard to the inherent philosophical deception of the institution itself, and his immediate equation of property ownership with the notion of legalized "tyranny" creates a subtle connection to slave ownership that is difficult to dismiss. In pointing to "the errors of

political societies that have arisen from confounding" the rights of persons and property, Emerson invites his listener to consider the assumptions which underlie the foundations of, and the justifications for, inequalities in the exercise of political power. Safely operating from within the established boundaries of the lecture format, he is free to encourage moral contemplation without appearing actually to espouse a reformer's "cause."

Emerson accepted that intellectual consideration precedes sociopolitical change; he would write in "Intellect" that "[w]hat is addressed to us for contemplation does not threaten us but makes us intellectual beings" (*W*, II: 327), and that "[i]ntellect is the simple power anterior to all action or construction" (325). Still focusing on slavery as an individual moral issue, he remained publicly distanced from the wave of organized reform movements and viewed their overall effectiveness with hesitance and skepticism. In his "Society" lecture, delivered at the Masonic Temple in Boston on January 26, 1837, as part of the "Human Life" series, he observes,

> Another society is the philanthropic association which aims to increase the efficiency of individuals by making a common purse, organizing their action, and giving to each the countenance of all the members. In our times this species of society has been the chosen mode of action. Societies of Temperance, of Missions, of Useful Knowledge, of Colonization, of Abolition, of Peace, of Prison Discipline, have usurped the whole field of human action. But the gain of power in these cases is much less than it seems. (*EL*, II: 106)

Emerson continues to emphasize that individual reform is necessary before society can be transformed; he provides a poignant example that illustrates the extent to which he believes moral energy is lost when it is collectivized:

> A society of 20,000 members is formed for the introduction of Christianity into India or the South Sea. This is not the same thing as if twenty thousand persons without formal cooperation, had conceived a vehement desire for the instruction of those foreign parts. In that case, each had turned the whole attention of the Reason, that is, the quite infinite force of one man, to the matter, and sought by what means he, in his place, could work with most avail on this point. (106)

Emerson contrasts his ideal reform scenario with that of organized societies, where he argues that "[t]he material integument is so much that the spiritual child is overlaid and lost" (106). He concludes, "It is an objection to these philanthropic societies that in some proportion to the material growth is the spiritual decay" (107). This position predicts his later stance in "New England Reformers," where he insists that would-be reformers must lead by individual example: "The reason why any one refuses his assent to your opinion, or his aid to your benevolent design, is in you: he refuses to accept you as a bringer of truth, because though you think you have it, he feels that you have it not. You have not given him the authentic sign" (*W*, III: 279). Genuine moral reform requires sincere conviction to the essence of higher laws, which "reward actions after their nature, and not after the design of the agent" (283).

Emerson expounds this concept in "Ethics," a lecture given at the Masonic Temple in Boston on February 16, 1837. Introducing an idea that he would later use in "Spiritual Laws," Emerson again distinguishes between individual acts of reform for sincere moral purposes and inauthentic moral posturing which benefits only the conscience (or ego) of the reformer. He contends,

> Manner never did the work of matter. "What hath he done?" is the divine question which searches men and

> transpierces the paper shield of every false reputation. A fop may sit in any chair of the world nor be distinguished for his hour from Homer and Washington; but there can never be any doubt concerning the respective ability of human beings when we seek the truth. Pretension never feigned an act of real greatness. Pretension never wrote an Iliad; nor drove back Xerxes; nor Christianized the world; nor abolished slavery. (*EL*, II: 150-51)

Although Emerson's ideological emphasis on the supremacy of the moral sentiment is consistent throughout his works, the examples he uses here to illustrate its application are significant. Emerson places the abolition of slavery on the same philosophical plane as the Christianization of the world; both are designated in this manner as triumphs of higher truths. Emerson writes in "The Over-Soul" that "[t]he soul is the perceiver and revealer of truth" (*W*, II: 213); truth resides within the realm of the soul, and its agent is thus the reforming individual rather than the reforming movement. Emerson never relinquished faith in the potential of individuals; in his February 23, 1837, speech on "The Present Age," he observes that

> [w]hile externally the period may be distinguished as we have stated by the immense growth of Trade and the acquisition of political importance by individuals, it is more deeply characterized, step by step with this, by the growing moral power of individuals. Every recognition that the principle on which we build our philosophy, that to all men is one mind, every recognition of that truth in church, in literature, in the state, works a revolution. What masses of false theology does it not overthrow. What false tastes in literature it destroys; what whims and amounts of influence

> of great names in art, what iniquities in law; what malpractices in manners and society. Alone it will abolish slavery. (*EL*, II: 167)

Such public pronouncements concerning the eventual abolition of slavery during the course of his standard lectures betray Emerson's consistent belief that the institution would ultimately be eliminated as a consequence of the inherent strength of the moral arguments against it. The philosopher continues to encourage his audiences to consider the matter privately, and to respond in a manner consistent with the findings within his individual soul for the benefit of the higher truth. The anti-slavery remarks that Emerson published in these early lectures reveal his fundamental faith in the ability of individuals to right moral wrongs as a necessary and natural part of the progression of human events.

Emerson's notion of historical progression appears in various forms in his early works; as early as the publication of *Nature*, he encourages his audience to put aside the interpretations of men of earlier generations in order to "enjoy an original relation to the universe" (*W*, I: 3). This theme resurfaces within a different theoretical context in "The American Scholar," an address prepared for the Phi Beta Kappa Society and executed on August 31, 1837. Emerson observes that "[e]ach age, it is found, must write its own books; or rather, each generation for the succeeding. The books of an older period will not fit this" (88). Connecting this to the concept of the soul acting upon principles of moral truth, he elaborates,

> The soul active sees absolute truth and utters truth, or creates. In this action it is genius; not the privilege of here and there a favorite, but the sound estate of every man. In its essence it is progressive. The book, the college, the school of art, the institution of any kind, stop with some utterance of genius. This is good, say they,--let us hold by this. They pin me down. They look backward and not

> forward. But genius looks forward: the eyes of man are set in his forehead, not in his hindhead: man hopes: genius creates. (90)

The focus on the need for progress results in Emerson's expanding his earlier emphasis on the need for philosophical contemplation to include a call for action. Man Thinking still has his moral duties; the Thinker must thus take additional steps in order to evolve into an Actor. Emerson maintains that "[a]ction is with the scholar subordinate, but it is essential. Without it, he is not yet man. Without it he can never ripen into truth" (94). For the first time, publication becomes part of self-reliance, identified here simply as "self-trust." The exercise of the individual Will as an expression of moral truth that Emerson portrays in *Nature* results in "The American Scholar" with "the keys of power" being placed in the scholar's hands: the Thinker becomes the Actor, and society should naturally follow suit as a result of his positive example. The power of the individual is still stressed, and the idea remains in a higher realm than the resulting subordinate action. Emerson concludes "The American Scholar" with the assertion that "[t]he day is always his who works in it with serenity and great aims" (105). He insists that "[i]naction is cowardice, but there can be no scholar without the heroic mind" (94). Emerson thus invites his scholar to trust himself by putting aside any fear in order to be "free and brave" (104) and, by extension, a hero.

Emerson concretizes his consistent connection of the image of the hero with the notion of the noble sentiment in "Heroism," delivered at Boston's Masonic Temple on January 24, 1838, as part of the "Human Culture" series. At the end of the speech, Emerson praises an abolitionist clergyman, Elijah P. Lovejoy, who had been murdered in Alton, Illinois, while attempting to publish an abolitionist newspaper.[16] While showcasing Lovejoy as an heroic *exemplum*, Emerson essentially sidesteps the clergyman's cause, choosing to focus instead on the issue of Lovejoy's martyrdom as the cause of freedom of speech. Still, Emerson's language suggests an underlying awareness

of the potential political ramifications of the event. Observing that "[t]imes of heroism are generally times of terror," Emerson contends that "whoso is heroic, will always find crises to try his edge" (*EL*, II: 337). He identifies Lovejoy as a specific illustration of this abstraction, but his subsequent rhetoric betrays an awareness of more serious political concerns:

> In the gloom of our ignorance of what shall be, in the hour when we are deaf to the higher voices, who does not envy them who have seen the end to their manful endeavor? Who that sees the meanness of our politics, but inly congratulates Washington, that he is long already wrapped in his shroud, and forever safe; that he was laid sweet in his grave, the hope of humanity not yet subjugated in him? (338)

Emerson characteristically poses his philosophical questions in the abstract, but the use of the image of Washington lends a political poignancy to his rhetorical musing. In establishing a connection between Washington and Lovejoy as martyrs in the cause of freedom, Emerson creates a subtle patriotic parallel between the two without actually identifying their respective political purposes and thereby designates them both as "hero[es] of America" (Bercovitch 150).

Despite Emerson's declining to specify the cause of Lovejoy's martyrdom as abolition, it is reasonable to assume that his Boston audience was well aware of this connection. Emerson provides no biographical data concerning the clergyman, referring to him only by his last name and omitting both the date and location of his death. This approach suggests that these details were probably already known to his listeners, but it also provides Emerson with a means of elevating the cause of Lovejoy's martyrdom over that of the martyr himself. Emerson is clearly more concerned with the broader philosophical issue of freedom of speech than in its specific manifestation in the cause of

abolition (Gougeon, "Abolition" 363), and his emphasis on the iconographic figure of Washington (who was, ironically, a slaveholder himself) serves to tie this notion to the patriotic principles upon which the country was founded. Far from a genuine anti-slavery tract, "Heroism" simply illustrates Emerson's concept of freedom of speech and establishes abolition as a proper political expression of that abstract ideal.

Emerson's connection of Lovejoy with the concept of patriotic heroism is consistent with both the Puritan "Myth of America" and his own identification of the character traits of the self-reliant individual/scholar.[17] He portrays "brave Lovejoy" quite clearly as a nonconformist, a man who trusts himself to speak his latent conviction (*W*, II: 47-50) and creates a position for Lovejoy within the company of "great men" who "[a]ccept the place the divine providence had found for [them], the society of [their] contemporaries, [and] the connection of events" (47). Emerson attributes Lovejoy's martyrdom to the narrowness of "the world's opinion"; Lovejoy becomes "the great man . . . who in the midst of the crowd keeps with perfect sweetness the independence of solitude" (53-54). Emerson's prescription for self-reliance includes the possibility of martyrdom in pursuit of a just cause, and Lovejoy's efforts on behalf of free speech are, by Emerson's definition of the moral sentiment, just. "God will not have his work made manifest by cowards," Emerson asserts in "Self-Reliance" (47); Lovejoy thus becomes a hero by virtue of his acting upon his private thoughts and publishing his inner convictions. His elevation in "Heroism" serves both to illustrate the inherent political implications of Emerson's supremely individualistic philosophy and to identify his overall purpose in addressing the slavery issue in early 1838 as still essentially moral (Ziff 23).

As Emerson continued subtly to emphasize the need to consider the question of slavery in terms of its moral implications, his abstract notions regarding the processes by which the Thinker becomes the Actor grew increasingly more prescriptive. Having established the need to take positive action on behalf of the moral sentiment, Emerson

first encourages individual bravery in "The American Scholar," then hints in "Heroism" at the need to carry these convictions through, even to the point of martyrdom. Emerson's subordination of Lovejoy to his moral purpose reinforces Emerson's elevation of the thought above the Actor, but it is the individual who propels history forward by virtue of the "spells of persuasion" and the "keys of power" that result from his intellectual acceptance of "the moral influence of nature" (*W*, I: 32; 42). Human culture must progress; moral thoughts must finally result in their own confirmation through the record of historical facts.

With these perceptions in mind, it is perhaps less surprising than it might initially appear that Emerson would advocate war. Despite Rusk's contention that such a position "was essentially false to his character and philosophy" (410), the need to publish thought through positive action nevertheless constitutes a critical part of Emerson's ideology and remains consistent with the obligations of the Actor as he defines them. In his lecture "War," delivered at the American Peace Society at the Odeon in Boston on March 12, 1838, Emerson notes that

> [i]t has been a favorite study of modern philosophy to indicate the steps of human progress, to watch the rising of a thought in one man's mind, the communication of it to a few, to a small minority, its expansion and general reception, until it publishes itself to the world by destroying the existing laws and institutions, and the generation of new. Looked at in this general and historical way, many things wear a very different face from that they show near by, and one at a time,--and, particularly, war. War, which to sane men at the present day begins to look like an epidemic insanity, breaking out here and there like the cholera or influenza, infecting men's brains instead of their

> bowels,-- when, seen in the remote past, in the infancy of society, appears a part of the connection of events, and, in its place, necessary. (*W*, XI: 151)

As Emerson explains it, war functions as a facilitator of ideas: its "nature and office" become "the subject of all history" (154). It represents "a temporary and preparatory state" that "does actively forward the culture of man" by "shak[ing] the whole society until every atom falls into the place its specific gravity assigns it" (152). Emerson ties war as an institution to concepts he articulates in both *Nature* and "Self-Reliance." He asks his audience, "What does all this war, beginning from the lowest races and reaching up to man, signify?" and replies,

> Is it not manifest that it covers a great and beneficent principle, which Nature had deeply at heart? What is that principle?--It is self-help. Nature implants with life the instinct of self-help, perpetual struggle to be, to resist opposition, to attain to freedom, to attain to a mastery and the security of a permanent, self-defended being; and to each creature these objects are made so dear that it risks its life continually in the struggle for these ends. (154-55)

The promotion of the moral sentiment is thus, in itself, a principle worth dying for, either in traditional war as illustrated here or in a personal war such as Elijah P. Lovejoy's. In Emerson's ideology, the individual's example delivers his moral purpose to other individuals within the larger society; as a result, a clergyman's martyrdom in the cause of abolition resides on a parallel plane with the patriotic death of a soldier on the battlefield. Emerson identifies the actions of each as heroic: the individual sacrifices himself in the name of the noble sentiment; the moral purpose prevails, and human culture progresses.

Emerson suggests in "War" that the abolition of slavery will be accomplished as a natural consequence of the evolution of the moral ideal from thought, to action, and

finally to historical fact. Reminding his listeners that "it is a lesson which all history teaches wise men, to put trust in ideas, and not in circumstances" (163), he entreats them to

> [o]bserve the ideas of the present day,--orthodoxy, skepticism, missions, popular education, temperance, anti-masonry, anti-slavery; see how each of these abstractions has embodied itself in an imposing apparatus in the community; and how timber, brick, lime and stone have flown into convenient shape, obedient to the master-idea reigning in the minds of many persons. (164)

The individual remains the agent of social change, but Emerson has moved beyond the simple consideration of abstract moral concepts to an overt conviction that change will, indeed, occur. He points to the machinery in place: the thought of abolition has been published, individuals are responding to the logic behind its argument, and action is being taken on the sentiment's behalf. Emerson's language concerning the "imposing apparatus" conveys a sense of both power and momentum; "timber, brick, lime and stone" have "flown" into shape (as opposed to, say, falling into place), implying that the "apparatus" operates as a result of the workings of a driving force much greater than its own power. The overall effect upon the listener is to evoke a feeling of eventuality, an anticipatory perception of historical inevitability. Emerson subtly suggests in "War" not only that abolition and other moral reforms *should* happen, but that they, in fact, *will* happen.

Emerson elaborates his notion of the driving force behind the moral sentiment in "Address to the Senior Class of the Divinity School," delivered in Cambridge on July 15, 1838. Here, the Actor emerges not only as heroic, but actually divine. Emerson tells his listeners,

> The intuition of the moral sentiment is an insight of the

> perfection of the laws of the soul. These laws execute themselves. They are out of time, out of space, and not subject to circumstance. Thus in the soul of man there is a justice whose retributions are instant and entire. He who does a good deed is instantly ennobled. . . . He who puts off impurity, thereby puts on purity. If a man is at heart just, then in so far is he God; the safety of God, the immortality of God, the majesty of God do enter into that man with justice. (*W*, I: 122)

Emerson characteristically places the noble thought in the realm of higher law, but here he also elevates the Actor, even nearly to a level with God. Moral truth functions under the force of its own power: the "laws of the soul . . . execute themselves" in tandem with nature and spirit. The soul serves as "the perceiver and revealer of truth" ("The Over-Soul," *W*, II: 279); individuals merely articulate for others the truths that the soul perceives. Emerson contends,

> speak the truth, and all nature and all spirits help you with unexpected furtherance. Speak the truth, and all things alive or brute are vouchers, and the very roots of the grass underground there do seem to stir and move to bear you witness. See again the perfection of the Law as it applies itself to the affections, and becomes the law of society. (*W*, I: 123)

Emerson continues to assert his faith in man's ability to perceive, articulate, and act upon noble sentiments of the soul for the benefit of humankind. His ideological conviction in the notion of nature executing these laws using individuals as agents remains consistent, even as the political power of the individual that emerges as a consequence amplifies and strengthens over time.

Emerson cements his connection between the moral power of individuals and its sociopolitical expression in his introductory lecture to "The Present Age" series, conducted through the winter of 1839-40. Emerson explains that

> [t]he whole hope and vigor of the period centres in the new importance of the individual man. In the faith, that he represents not a private but a universal interest, that no expediency, no laws, no numbers, no property, no state, no church, are or can be equivalent to a man; much less that he is to be sacrificed to them. He is greater than all the geography and all the governments of the world, standing, whilst he is true and simple, for Reason itself, representing in his person in virtue of his possible perfection of all nature and all thought. This faith once admitted, all the movements of the day follow, of course; the attack upon War, upon Slavery, upon Government, upon the systems of Education and the religious Traditions . . . in short a disesteem of the whole Past, a breaking up of all manner of old Idols, out of a supreme reverence of the possibilities of man, an unfaltering Hope, say rather, a perfect Trust in the infinite resources of the soul. (*EL*, III: 199)

The heroic individual deified in the "Divinity School Address" is elevated above the institutions of men of earlier ages; the focus shifts towards the potential of the society of the future rather than a preservation of obsolete systems inherited from the past. Emerson continues to stress the significance of social reform, but his expressed faith in the notion of the historical inevitability of specific reforms, such as abolition, becomes increasingly pronounced. The subordination of government to the individual will assumes greater political relevance as Emerson articulates his ideology: the "old Idols," having earlier

been called into question, have been left behind by historical progress and are actually "breaking up" under the moral force of contemporary Thinkers-turned-Actors. Emerson reinforces this link between noble thought and human progress in "Man the Reformer," where he confidently proclaims that "[e]very great and commanding moment in the annals of the world is the triumph of some great enthusiasm" (*W*, I: 251).

By the time Emerson released *Essays* in March of 1841, many of his philosophical notions regarding the moral sentiment, the importance of individual action, and the potential for heroism in the pursuit of noble causes had already been published in *Nature* or offered in some form or another during the course of his public lectures. Emerson's injunction in "Self-Reliance" that "[w]hoso would be a man, must be a nonconformist" (*W*, II: 50) echoes his long-established doctrine of the necessity of responding to the moral sentiment as expressed through the human soul; however, just as his lectures had begun to assume a distinctive political character throughout the late 1830s and early 1840s, so his essays began to exhibit an implicitly prescriptive political dimension. Emerson writes, "Let us affront and reprimand the smooth mediocrity and squalid contentment of the times, and hurl in the face of custom and trade and office, the fact which is the upshot of all history, that there is a great responsible Thinker and Actor working wherever a man works; that a true man belongs to no other time or place, but is the centre of things. Where he is, there is nature" (*W*, II: 60-61). "Self-Reliance" elucidates man's role as nature's Thinker and Actor, which functions within the philosophical realm, and "History" connects it to historical change, which operates within the sociopolitical. Emerson observes that "[e]ach new fact in [a man's] 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" (*W*, II: 4-5). The ramifications of individual thought include the possibility of

"revolution," here connected not only with the furtherance of moral purposes but openly associated with the exercise of power.

Emerson extends this analysis in both "Circles" and "Compensation." His identification in "Circles" of the eye as the first circle and the horizon it forms as the second draws on the reader's equation of the eye with sight, and his assertion that "every action admits of being outdone" (*W*, II: 301) marries this "vision" to the progression of human historical events. Emerson's contention that "[o]ur life is an apprenticeship to the truth that around every circle another can be drawn; that there is no end in nature, but every end is a beginning" (301) suggests regeneration, and his conception of the natural world as "a system of concentric circles" where "slight dislocations . . . apprise us that this surface on which we now stand is not fixed, but sliding" (313-14) points to the historical sequence of events as time *in motion*. Emerson's philosophy of history accepts change as both natural and desirable; he thus concludes that cause and effect represent "two sides of one fact" (314), and that "[i]n nature every moment is new; the past is always swallowed and forgotten; the coming only is sacred" (319). As a consequence, "[n]othing is secure but life, transition, the energizing spirit" (319-20).

Emerson's insistence on the need for continual change is reinforced by the doctrine he introduces in "Compensation." Rearticulating his notion of the natural power behind the moral sentiment, he reminds his reader, "All things are moral. The soul which within us is a sentiment outside of us is a law" (*W*, II: 102), and adds that "[e]very thing in nature contains all the power of nature" (101). Nature empowers the moral sentiment, and "[t]here is always some levelling circumstance that puts down the overbearing, the strong, the rich, the fortunate, substantially on the same ground with all others" (98); justice, therefore, "is not postponed" . . . [because] perfect equity adjusts its balance in all parts of life" (102). Echoing his assertion in the "Divinity School Address" that the laws of the soul execute themselves, Emerson reemphasizes the moral power of nature that enables the contemplative Thinker to transform himself over time into the potentially

heroic Actor. The key resides in the individual's publication of his own thought; Emerson maintains that "[t]he law of nature is, Do the thing, and you shall have the power; they who do not the thing have not the power" (114-15). The moral sentiments already present in nature thus manifest themselves in the soul of the Thinker, who examines their applicability to present circumstances and offers them for consideration and debate among other individuals. When the idea is deemed sound by the other individuals, each acts upon his private conviction and invites others to follow suit. Nature works with the individual for the benefit of the moral sentiment: society is transformed, changes occur, history progresses, then the cycle recommences. Emerson's doctrine of compensation confirms the duality of "action and reaction" (96); moral power and, ultimately, political power, translate into historical events, or human cultural progress. Emerson concludes that "[c]ause and effect, means and ends, seed and fruit, cannot be severed; for the effect already blooms in the cause, and the end preëxists in the means, the fruit in the seed" (103).

The essentially abstract concepts that Emerson introduced in *Nature* matured throughout the late 1830s and early 1840s to result in an obviously thoroughly-considered philosophy that could then conceivably be applied to practical historical circumstances. In his "Lecture on the Times," read at the Masonic Temple in Boston on December 2, 1841, Emerson insists that "the subject of the times is not an abstract question" (*W*, I: 261) and that "we are not permitted to stand as spectators of the pageant which the times exhibit; we are parties also, and have a responsibility which is not to be declined" (266). Dividing society into the parties of the Past and Future, Emerson elaborates,

> The actors constitute that great army of martyrs who, at least in America, by their conscience and philanthropy, occupy the ground which Calvinism occupied in the last age, and compose the visible church of the existing generation. The present age will be marked by its harvest

> of projects for the reform of domestic, civil, literary, and ecclesiastical institutions. The leaders of the crusades against War, Negro slavery, intemperance, Government based on force, Usages of trade, Court and Custom-house Oaths, and so on to the agitators on the system of Education and the laws of Property, are the right successors of Luther, Knox, Robinson, Fox, Penn, Wesley, and Whitefield. They have the same virtues and vices; the same noble impulse, and the same bigotry. These movements are on all accounts important; they not only check the special abuses, but they educate the conscience and the intellect of the people. How can such a question as the Slave-trade be agitated for forty years by all the Christian nations, without throwing great light on ethics into the general mind? The fury with which the slave-trader defends every inch of his bloody deck and his howling auction-platform, is a trumpet to alarm the ear of mankind, to wake the dull, and drive all neutrals to take sides and to listen to the argument and the verdict. (268-69).

Emerson's juxtaposition of the Calvinism of "the last age" with "the visible church of the existing generation" creates a sense of division between the needs of the past and those of the present and calls attention to the fact that reform movements have initiated a process by which old institutions are being replaced by the strength of new ideas. His equation of contemporary crusaders with historically-validated reformers of the past suggests that reform itself represents a regenerative cycle of Thinkers and Actors, and that today's reformers will be hailed as heroes by future generations, just as yesterday's reformers are venerated by the people of the present. Emerson's examples of reform ideas long since

translated into historical fact leave the listener with the impression that positive change can, and indeed will, occur again; society needs only good leaders to convert ideas into sociopolitical reality. Emerson's emphasis on the human imperfection of reformers themselves is significant; as with his use of the figure of Lovejoy in "Heroism," it subordinates the reformer to the higher purpose of his cause and stresses the supremacy of the moral principles behind the issue itself.

Another important transition occurs in the use of slavery as a specific example among the many broader reform issues Emerson provides. For the first time, the language he uses assumes a tone of righteous indignation. The slave-trader's deck becomes "bloody," his auction platform is "howling," and the whole scene represents "a trumpet to alarm the ear of mankind." Later in the lecture, Emerson alludes to "the compromise made with the slaveholder, [which] not much noticed at first, every day appears more flagrant mischief to the American constitution" (274). The subtle emotion of the language conveys an unmistakably negative judgment of the slave-trade and leaves little doubt as to which "side" the speaker implicitly endorses. Emerson's pointing to the slave-trade as a forty-year-old *ethical* debate over which individuals have begun to take sides suggests that historical change is indeed a slow process, but that in the case of slavery, it is already underway.

Emerson continues his exploration of the political consequences of moral ideology in "The Conservative," a lecture he delivered at the Masonic Temple in Boston on December 9, 1841. Dividing the state first into the parties of Conservatism and Innovation, and then creating an opposition between "Past and Future, . . . Memory and Hope, . . . [and] the Understanding and the Reason," Emerson asserts that such a division marks "the primal antagonism, the appearance in trifles of the two poles of nature," and maintains that the quarrel between the two constitutes "the subject of civil history" (*W*, I: 295-96). He makes no attempt to place these poles on morally parallel planes; his rhetoric exhibits an unmistakable tendency to assign to liberalism the superior attributes

of the noble sentiment. Emerson explains that

> Conservatism stands on man's confessed limitations, reform on his indisputable infinitude; conservatism on circumstance, liberalism on power; one goes to make an adroit member of the social frame, the other to postpone all things to the man himself; conservatism is debonair and social, reform is individual and imperious. . . . Reform is affirmative, conservatism negative; conservatism goes for comfort, reform for truth. (298)

Conservatism is expressed in terms of "limitations"; Emerson significantly connects reform and liberalism to moral notions of truth, infinitude, and power. However, he stops short of actually aligning himself with either pole, choosing instead to focus on the need to consider *both* sides as part of the necessary and desirable balance between opposing elements. He contends that "it may be safely affirmed of these two metaphysical antagonists, that each is a good half, but an impossible whole. Each exposes the abuses of the other, but in a true society, in a true man, both must combine. Nature does not give the crown of approbation, namely beauty, to any action or emblem or actor but to one which combines both these elements" (299-300). Emerson acknowledges commitments to both constancy and change, noting that "[w]e are reformers in spring and summer, in autumn and winter we stand by the old; reformers in the morning, conservers at night" (298). He concludes that "there is no pure reformer, so it is to be considered that there is no pure conservative, no man who from the beginning to the end of his life maintains the defective institutions" (314). Still resisting direct association with organized reform, Emerson nevertheless similarly avoids identifying himself with conservatism. "The Conservative" serves to confirm Emerson's political independence at the same time that it calls into question the desirability of maintaining "defective institutions." Emerson points to the potential power of individuals when he proposes that "[a] strong person

makes the law and custom null before his will" (313-14), suggesting that political and social institutions invariably yield to the inherently superior strength of a sound moral purpose.

Emerson expands the notion of philosophical polarity in "The Transcendentalist" with his division of mankind into the ideological sects of Materialists and Idealists.[18] The Idealist's perception of events as spirits reiterates concepts that Emerson introduced in *Nature*, but contemporary events assumed a concrete political dimension in 1842 that could only be inferred by his readers of 1836. Although the intervening years had witnessed the expansion of Transcendentalism as a moral philosophy, Emerson's attempt to place his own ideology within a specific historical context is conspicuous in its curious focus, not on Transcendentalism as a social movement, but on the character of the Transcendentalist himself. Like Emerson, the Transcendentalist perceives himself as a philosopher, not a political activist; Emerson explains that "they do not willingly share in the public charities, in the public religious rites, in the enterprises of education, of missions foreign and domestic, in the abolition of the slave-trade, or in the temperance society. They do not even like to vote" (*W*, I: 347-48). Echoing the distrust he articulated in "New England Reformers," Emerson contends that "the justice which is now claimed for the black, and the pauper, and the drunkard, is for Beauty,--is for a necessity to the soul of the agent, not of the beneficiary" (355). He explains,

> What you call your fundamental institutions, your great and holy causes, seem to them great abuses, and, when nearly seen, paltry matters. Each 'cause' as it is called,--say Abolition, Temperance, say Calvinism, or Unitarianism,--becomes speedily a little shop, where the article, let it have been at first ever so subtle and ethereal, is now made up into portable and convenient cakes, and retailed in small quantities to suit purchasers. (349)

Emerson continues to advocate the need for reform within the individual as a precedent to social reform, subordinating the "cause" to the moral purpose and the agent of reform to the soul of his beneficiary. His Transcendentalist retains a primary interest in moral rather than social reform, but the fusion of the Thinker and the Actor defined in "The American Scholar" naturally and necessarily yields a power that becomes fundamentally political.

Emerson underscores the implicit political ramifications of Transcendentalism with his assertion that the Transcendentalist "does not respect government, except as far as it reiterates the law of his mind" (333), adding that "[i]n action he easily incurs the charge of antinomianism by his avowal that he, who has the Law-giver, may with safety not only neglect, but even contravene every written commandment" (336). Consistent with *Nature*'s injunction calling for contemporary disregard for outmoded institutions and a moral elevation of the notion of the noble sentiment, "The Transcendentalist" reasserts the individual's function as both facilitator and interpreter of government's usefulness and its validity in human society. However, the subordination of government and its laws to the discretion of the individual will becomes much more explicit: whereas Emerson in *Nature* merely asserted the supremacy of the moral sentiment as expressed through the human soul, he moves beyond simple abstraction in "The Transcendentalist" to allow for the actual contravention of written laws by the conscientious Thinker. However significant this shift may appear, it does not yet represent a genuine call for social or political action on behalf of a given cause. Emerson remained publicly distanced from organized reform movements and even the Transcendentalists: it is noteworthy that he refers to "The Transcendentalist" in terms of "he" or "them," instead of as "I" or "we."

However politically remote Emerson might have appeared in his lectures of the early 1840s, he had by the middle of the decade begun to assume a stronger rhetorical stance and tentatively to move away from a fundamentally abstract contemplation of the role of the individual in society to a consideration of the potential need for genuine

affirmative action. In his lecture "The Young American," read before the Mercantile Library Association in Boston on February 7, 1844, Emerson asserts that "Government has been a fossil; it should be a plant. I conceive that the office of statute law should be to express and not to impede the mind of mankind. New thoughts, new things" (*W*, I: 379). He adds,

> Government in our times is beginning to wear a clumsy and cumbrous appearance. We have already seen our way to shorter methods. The time is full of good signs. Some of them shall ripen to fruit. All the beneficent socialism is a friendly omen, and the swelling cry of voices for the education of the people indicates that Government has other offices than those of banker and executioner. (380)

Although such declarations do not directly translate into acts of revolution, they form an intriguing counterpart to Emerson's accompanying call to "young men, to obey your heart and be the nobility of this land" (387). Emerson's equation of action and nobility connects to his earlier conception of the Actor as hero and with the abolition of slavery as a positive expression of the moral sentiment. He explains,

> If a humane measure is propounded in behalf of the slave, or of the Irishman, or the Catholic, or for the succor of the poor; that sentiment, that project, will have the homage of the hero. That is his nobility, his oath of knighthood, to succor the helpless and oppressed; always to throw himself on the side of weakness, of youth, of hope; on the liberal, on the expansive side, never on the defensive, the conserving, the timorous, the lock-and-bolt system. (390)

Despite his apparent assertiveness on behalf of the noble sentiment, Emerson seems content at this point to call on younger Americans to address the nation's social ills

and to bequeath "the country of the Future" (371) to the subsequent generation of Thinkers and Actors. Even so, he entreats his listeners to avoid impeding the progress that moral reformers have already initiated, explaining that

> We have our own affairs, our own genius, which chains each to his proper work. We cannot give our life to the cause of the debtor, of the slave, or the pauper, as another is doing; but to one thing we are bound, not to blaspheme the sentiment and the work of that man, not to throw stumbling-blocks in the way of the abolitionist, the philanthropist; as the organs of influence and opinion are swift to do. (390)

The notion of the driving force behind the moral sentiment which compels the laws of the soul to "execute themselves" ("Divinity School Address," *W*, I: 122) should not be thwarted by timidity or conservative reluctance; the individual who acts upon his own moral conviction is thus "ennobled" in "The Young American," much like the deified hero described in "Divinity School Address" (122). But "The Young American" subordinates the state in a much more overt manner by elevating the individual not only above the state itself, but over the very notion of "Union." Emerson observes that

> At this moment, the terror of old people and of vicious people is lest the Union of these states be destroyed: as if the Union had any other real basis than the good pleasure of a majority of the citizens to be united. But the wise and just man will always feel that he stands on his own feet; that he imparts strength to the State, not receives security from it; and that if all went down, he and such as he would quite easily combine in a new and better constitution. (*W*, I: 390-91)

Emerson links his subtle reiteration of his requirement in "History" to "do away with this wild, savage, and preposterous There or Then, and introduce in its place the Here and the Now" (*W*, II: 11) with the self-reliant individual's need to speak his latent conviction so that "the inmost in due time [may become] the outmost" (45); the state exists by virtue of individuals who grant its presumed authority rather than those who derive their power from it. The speech marks Emerson's first declaration that the Union survives at the sufferance of its citizens, and that it could be, if moral circumstances warranted, dissolved and recreated.

As "The Young American" represents Emerson's initial foray into the subject of Union, the speech he delivered to the citizens of Concord on August 1, 1844, marks his first open identification with abolitionism and his first public address on behalf of the cause. Approached by the women of Concord's Anti-Slavery Society with a request for an observation of the tenth anniversary of the Act of Parliament, Emerson responded with "Emancipation in the British West Indies," a speech which characteristically stresses the moral implications of slavery and invites the reader to sympathize with the noble sentiment. Citing the oppression of the Negro and his status as "an article of luxury to the commercial nations" (*W*, XI: 102), Emerson's speech outlines the early atrocities of West Indian slaveholders in graphic detail and equates them with moral injustice:

> But the crude element of good in human affairs must work and ripen, spite of whips and plantation laws and West Indian interest. Conscience rolled over on its pillow, and could not sleep. We sympathize very tenderly here with the poor aggrieved planter, of whom so many unpleasant things are said; but if we saw the whip applied to old men, to tender women; and, undeniably, though I shrink to say so, pregnant women set in the treadmill for refusing to work; when, not they, but the eternal law of animal nature refused

> to work;--if we saw men's backs flayed with cowhides . . . if we saw the runaways hunted with bloodhounds into swamps and hills . . .--if we saw these things with eyes, we too should wince. They are not pleasant sights. The blood is moral: the blood is anti-slavery: it runs cold in the veins: the stomach rises with disgust, and curses slavery. (103-04)

Emerson continues his emphatic diatribe by praising the individual Actors in the cause of West Indian liberation and the decisive role played by the British public in effecting Parliament's proclamation of emancipation. He considers that "[o]n viewing this history, I think the whole transaction reflects infinite honor on the people and parliament of England. It was a stately spectacle, to see the cause of human rights argued with so much patience and generosity and with such a mass of evidence before that powerful people" (127). Aligning America's former enemy with a sound moral purpose, Emerson points to England's "bright example" and declares the event "a moral revolution" (135). He concludes that "[t]his moral force perpetually reinforces and dignifies the friends of this cause" (137). Emerson employs his most dramatic approach to date in articulating the abolitionist cause, but his argument remains closely tied to his previously articulated conception of the moral sentiment. Stating his belief in the progress of human society, Emerson "assure[s] [him]self that this coldness and blindness will pass away" and that "[a] single noble wind of sentiment will scatter them forever" (146-47). Appealing to the emotions of his audience, Emerson seeks to elicit sympathy for the plight of the oppressed and offers his hope that all Americans will eventually recognize the need to abolish slavery. He makes no call for direct political action, and his speech both mirrors the philosophical aspects of his earlier works and signals a departure from his previous tendency to address the issue in essentially abstract terms.

Like "Heroism," "Emancipation in the British West Indies" celebrates the triumph

of the self-reliant individual. Emerson cites the efforts of former slaves to assimilate into West Indian society, declaring that "[i]t now appears that the negro race is, more than any other, susceptible to rapid civilization" (141). Insisting that "the black race can contend with the white," he calls for the self-reliant black man to "play his part" and for white society to "let them emerge, clothed and in their own form" (144-45). Emerson praises the British public for standing up for its beliefs by forcing a resolution of the West Indian emancipation issue in Parliament. He observes that "[t]he stream of human affairs flows its own way" (139), echoing his own notion of continual human progression in "History" and "Circles." And by announcing that "[s]lavery is no scholar, no improver" (125), he aligns abolitionism with the concept of man as Thinker and Actor as defined in "The American Scholar" (*W*, I: 84-100).

While these examples illustrate Emerson's ideological consistency in "Emancipation in the British West Indies," other passages reveal an expansion of his slavery concerns beyond exclusively moral considerations and their tentative projection into social and politically active realms. Emerson does not directly indict the South in this address, but he presents an abstract claim that "[t]he planter is the spoiled child of his unnatural habits, and has contracted in his indolent and luxurious climate the need of excitement by irritating and tormenting his slave" (*W*, XI: 119). Any implication of the Southern planter, if intended, is indirect; Emerson questions the economic and moral motives of slaveholders *in general* from a relatively safe distance by addressing the issue as an *English* problem. The same strategy which enables Emerson to equate slaveholding with moral degeneracy provides him with a means of allying abolitionist New England with moral virtue; at one point, he muses, "Forgive me, fellow citizens, if I own to you, that in the last few days that my attention has been occupied with this history, I have not been able to read a page of it without the most painful comparisons. Whilst I have read of England, I have thought of New England" (129).

Emerson often thought of New England, particularly Massachusetts, and many of

his political views centered on the effects of politics and politicians upon the citizens of Massachusetts (Allen 605). In "Emancipation in the British West Indies," Emerson questions the authority of the federal government in allowing Southern states to enslave black citizens of Massachusetts and to detain them on ships in Southern ports. He charges,

> In the sleep of the laws, the private interference of two excellent citizens of Boston has, I have ascertained, rescued several natives of this State from these Southern prisons. Gentlemen, I thought the deck of a Massachusetts ship was as much the territory of Massachusetts as the floor on which we stand. It should be as sacred as the temple of God. . . . If the state has no power to defend its own people in its own shipping, because it has delegated that power to the Federal Government, has it no representation in the Federal Government? . . . The Congress should instruct the President to send to those ports of Charleston, Savannah and New Orleans such orders and such force as should release, forthwith, all such citizens of Massachusetts as were holden in prison without the allegation of any crime, and should set on foot the strictest inquisition to discover where such persons, brought into slavery by these local laws at any time heretofore, may now be. (*W*, XI: 130-32)

Emerson's concern is for the free citizens of Massachusetts, and his accusations of impropriety are significantly directed towards politicians, particularly those within the federal government. Although noticeably vehement in tone, the speech calls not upon individuals but on elected leaders to take action to correct the problem of illegal detention of Massachusetts citizens. In 1844, Emerson still viewed slavery as an essentially moral

issue, but the legal ability of Southern states to hold Northern citizens added a new political dimension to the old moral equation. Formerly confined to the remote regions of the South, slavery was beginning to encroach upon the lives of free citizens in the territory of the North.

Although Allen and Gougeon both mark "Emancipation in the British West Indies" as the occasion of Emerson's active entry into the abolitionist cause,[19] it is important to note that Emerson makes no direct appeal for action on the part of individuals but instead calls upon elected leaders to hold the prevailing balance of political power in check. Rusk's contention that the address represents Emerson's "sudden leap into the political arena in aid of the abolitionists" (303) appears more accurate in light of Emerson's continued emphasis on abstract Thinking as opposed to concrete Acting, and any "hero" who would have answered Emerson's call at this point would more than likely have emerged from the ranks of politicians or government officials. Although the significance of Emerson's public stance in "Emancipation in the British West Indies" cannot be overlooked, several more years would pass before he would actively encourage individual Thinkers to become Actors on behalf of abolitionism. Emerson was still in the process of articulating his ideology, and his focus remained on philosophical abstraction rather than political activism.

Emerson released *Essays, Second Series* on October 19, 1844, soon after his Concord neighbor, attorney Samuel Hoar, returned from South Carolina following an abortive attempt to intervene on behalf of black sailors from Massachusetts being held in Southern ports. Commissioned by Massachusetts Governor George N. Briggs, Hoar and his daughter, Elizabeth, the fiancée of Emerson's late brother, Charles, had been forcibly expelled in response to their presumed insult to South Carolina by an angry mob which threatened to set fire to their Charleston hotel. The incident raised many Concordians' ire against South Carolina,[20] and a pronounced negative attitude towards Southerners in general, and South Carolinans in particular, began to appear in many of Emerson's

speeches. Nevertheless, his essays remained philosophical, and despite the changing sociopolitical climate, no direct condemnation of either Southerners or the South is found in *Essays, Second Series*.

The *Second Series* essays that relate to slavery as a moral issue include "Character," "Politics," and "New England Reformers." Asserting in "Character" that "men of character are the conscience of the society to which they belong" (*W*, III: 96), Emerson recalls the ideology of the moral sentiment in *Nature* when he insists that "[c]haracter is nature in the highest form" (105). But the political dichotomization found in "The Conservative" and "The Transcendentalist" assumes an intriguing angle when Emerson applies it to "Character." He writes,

> Everything in nature is bipolar, or has a positive and a negative pole. There is a male and a female, a spirit and a fact, a north and a south. Spirit is the positive, the event is the negative. Will is the north, action is the south pole. Character may be ranked as having its natural place in the north. It shares the magnetic currents of the system. The feeble souls are drawn to the south or negative pole. They look at the profit or hurt of the action. They never behold a principle until it is lodged in a person. (97)

Although it appears likely that Emerson's alignment of his notion of "character" with the north is not intended as a deliberate political statement, it is nevertheless compelling that he elects to place moral virtue in the northern realm and to associate the south with negativity, profit, and hurt. The presence or absence of a subconscious connection can only be conjectured, but such a bipolar structure turns up more frequently as Emerson continues to address slavery as both a moral and political issue.

The bipolar structure rests at the core of "Politics," an essay Rusk quite accurately describes as "delicately balanced" (303). Maintaining that "[t]he fact of two poles, of two

forces, centripetal and centrifugal, is universal, and each force by its own activity develops the other" (*W*, III: 212), Emerson explains,

> Of the two great parties which at this hour almost share the nation between them, I should say that one has the best cause, and the other contains the best men. The philosopher, the poet, or the religious man will of course wish to cast his vote with the democrat, for free-trade, for wide suffrage, for the abolition of legal cruelties in the penal code, and for facilitating in every manner the access of the young and the poor to the sources of wealth and power. But he can rarely accept the persons whom the so-called popular party propose to him as representatives of these liberalities. They have not at heart the ends which give to the name of democracy what hope and virtues are in it. (209-10)

Emerson balances his assertion with an analysis of "the other side, the conservative party," which he describes as

> composed of the most moderate, able and cultivated part of the population, [but] is timid, and merely defensive of property. It vindicates no right, it aspires to no real good, it brands no crime, it proposes no generous policy; it does not build, nor write, nor cherish the arts, nor foster religion, nor establish schools, nor encourage science, nor emancipate the slave, nor befriend the poor, or the Indian, or the immigrant. (210)

Emerson ultimately finds both parties lacking; neither provides both acceptable and practical answers to the nation's prevailing moral questions. As he does with zealous

advocates of reform in "New England Reformers," he significantly connects politicians to a want of self-reliance when he contends that "[a] party is perpetually corrupted by personality," adding that "[w]hilst we absolve the association from dishonesty, we cannot extend the same charity to their leaders" (208-09). The reformer or politician cannot hope to reform society until he reforms himself; Emerson explains that

> Parties of principle, as, religious sects, or the party of free-trade, of universal suffrage, of abolition of slavery, of abolition of capital punishment,--degenerate into personalities, or would inspire enthusiasm. The vice of our leading parties in this country (which may be cited as a fair specimen of these societies of opinion) is that they do not plant themselves on the deep and necessary grounds to which they are especially entitled, but lash themselves to fury in the carrying of some local and momentary measure, nowise useful to the commonwealth. (209)

Emerson continues to affirm abolition as a worthwhile cause of reform, but his examples in both "Politics" and "New England Reformers" emphasize that actions of politicians and reformers tend to serve "the design[s] of the agent" (283) rather the needs of society at large.

"Politics" emphatically reasserts the supremacy of the moral sentiment introduced in *Nature*; institutions are again subordinated to the will of the self-reliant individual and subject to his reconsideration. "The law is only a memorandum" (200) Emerson maintains; "In dealing with the State we ought to remember that its institutions are not aboriginal, though they existed before we were born; that they are not superior to the citizen; that every one of them was once the act of a single man; every law and usage was a man's expedient to meet a particular case; that they are all imitable, all alterable; we may make as good, we may make better" (199). Emerson stresses that government and

its laws exist by the consent of the citizens, insisting that "[t]he status stands there to say, Yesterday we agreed so and so, but how feel ye this article today? Our statute is a currency which we stamp with our own portrait: it soon becomes unrecognizable, and in process of time will return to the mint" (200). The consequences of Man Thinking include and even necessitate the possibility of change: institutions and laws which no longer serve today's purposes must be put aside in favor of more functional structures that do. Emerson concludes that "the old statesman knows that society is fluid; there are no roots and centres, but any particle may suddenly become the centre of the movement and compel the system to gyrate around it" (199), and that "[g]ood men must not obey the laws too well" (208). Emerson is ideologically consistent in "Politics" with his prescription of the "antidote" to the abuses of government to be found in "the influence of private character, [and] the growth of the individual" (215).

Rusk ponders the possibilities of the political impact of "Politics" had it "reflect[ed] [the] outburst of assured enthusiasm for reform" exhibited in Emerson's speech on "Emancipation in the British West Indies" (303). Rusk quite properly points to Emerson's association with William Lloyd Garrison and other radical abolitionists, but he also acknowledges the "philosophical and academic" tone of "Politics" as it stands (303). Emerson effectively utilized the essay format to articulate his ideology in such an "academic" manner, but to discover practical applications of this philosophy, one must examine the texts of his public addresses. An increasing sense of the urgency of a moral imperative can be discerned in Emerson's anti-slavery speeches beginning in the middle of the decade of the 1840s: his initial decision to speak openly on behalf of the abolitionists in "Emancipation in the British West Indies" was soon followed by additional anti-slavery addresses that embrace the cause of abolition in indisputably decisive terms.

Emerson accepted an invitation to speak before a convention of abolitionists on the "Anniversary of West Indian Emancipation" in Waltham, Massachusetts, on August

1, 1845. Favorably recalling the success of the emancipation of West Indian slaves, Emerson expresses his desire to "look forward to the similar occasion which we hope to celebrate in our own land" (*AW* 35)[21] before addressing the issue of the defense of slavery in America. Correctly discerning "the objection of an inferiority of race" (36), Emerson queries, "And what is the amount of this conclusion in which the men of New-England acquiesce?" and replies,

> It is, that the Creator of the Negro has given him up to stand as a victim of a caricature of the white man beside him; to stoop under his pack, and to bleed under his whip. If that be the doctrine, then, I say, if He has given up his cause, He has also given up mine, who feel his wrong, and who in our hearts must curse the Creator who has undone him. (36)

But Emerson does not allow this conclusion to stand; he immediately reassures his audience that "it is not so; the Universe is not bankrupt" (36) and announces his intention to focus upon the moral aspects of the slavery question.

The moral sentiment, according to Emerson, supports abolition; he declares that "[t]he sentiment of right, which is the principle of civilization and the reason of reason, fights against this damnable atheism" (37), and elaborates that

> It is certain that, if it should come to question, all just men, all intelligent agents, must take the part of the black against the white man. Then I say, never is the planter safe; his house is a den; a just man cannot go there, except to tell him so. Whatever may appear at the moment, however contrasted the fortunes of the black and the white--though the one live in his hereditary mansion-house, and the latter in a shed; though one rides an Arabian horse, and the other

> is hunted by blood-hounds; though one eats, and the other sweats; one strikes, and the other dies--yet is the planter's an unsafe and unblest condition. Nature fights on the other side, and as power is always stealing from the idle to the busy hand, it seems inevitable that a revolution is preparing at no distant day to set these disjointed matters right. (37)

Emerson does not hesitate to employ the bipolar structure to place the slave (and, by extension, the abolitionist) on the side of right and to align the planter with the unintelligent, the unblest, and, significantly, the unsafe. Emerson's prophetic anticipation of a "revolution . . . to set these disjointed matters right" remains philosophically allied with "History"'s notion of the progression of human events: it neither calls for nor advocates direct political action, but merely predicts that abolition will ultimately occur. Emerson asserts that the slaves' fate "depends on the raising of their masters" and encourages his listeners to "[e]levate, enlighten, civilize the semi-barbarous nations of South Carolina, Georgia, Alabama--take away from their debauched society the Bowie-knife, the rum-bowl, the dice-box, and the stews--take out the brute, and infuse a drop of civility and generosity, and you touch those selfish lords with thought and gentleness" (38). Emerson's assumption of the superiority of the moral sentiment enables him to elevate the Northern abolitionists above the "semi-barbarous" Southern planters, but his rather condescending tone is somewhat muted by the moral basis of his injunction to "enlighten" the slaveholders with the fruits of self-reliant Thinking. Despite the stated purpose of the speech, Emerson's focus remains on the exchange of ideas between individual Thinkers; he makes no attempt to promote political Action beyond increasing intellectual communication of the notion of the moral sentiment. Emerson continued to believe that the moral argument would succeed in making the case for abolition on the strength of its own merits. He would, however, grow increasingly frustrated in this hope as events of the decade progressed.

Emerson maintained his nonviolent sociopolitical position throughout the remainder of the 1840s. In his "Antislavery Speech at Dedham," delivered on July 4, 1846, he cautions that "[i]t is of no use to vote Slavery and the wars of Slavery to be damnable, if we go ahead of the sense and civilization of the people: the wolf will show his head very unexpectedly" (*AW* 42). Emerson recognized that the time for direct political action had not yet arrived, but he could and did encourage active support for the abolitionists, who had "[w]ith the noblest purpose in the general defection and apathy . . . been faithful to themselves" (44). Explaining that "[t]he history of this party of freedom, seems to me one of the best symptoms, but it is only a symptom," Emerson contends, "I am glad, not for what it has done, but that the party exists. Not what they do, but what they see, seems to me sublime" (44). Emerson defends the ideology of abolition without actually identifying himself as an abolitionist: he still portrays abolitionists as "they," but he qualifies this presumed distance by claiming, "I am a debtor, in common with all well-meaning persons, to this association. I think they have lessons yet to learn, and are learning them" (44). From Emerson's perspective, the abolitionists run counter to the prevailing trend toward apathy by consistently publishing their ideological views and forcing them into the public forum. The abolitionists thus merit respect by virtue of their willingness to voice their demands for change by courageously arguing against outmoded institutions.

In his address to the editors of the *Massachusetts Quarterly* in December of 1847, Emerson astutely identifies slavery as "in some sort the special enigma of the time . . . [which] has provoked against it a sort of inspiration and enthusiasm singular in modern history" (*W*, XI: 390-91). Although he frequently acknowledged the frustratingly slow pace of the progression of historical events, he fervently believed that abolition was destined to become a sociopolitical reality and that circumstances were already moving to propel it in that direction. In his "Antislavery Remarks at Worcester" on August 3, 1849, Emerson exclaims,

> We are to rejoice in the march of events, in the sequence of the centuries, the progress of the great universal human, and shall I not say, divine, genius, which overpowers all our vices as well as our virtues, and turns our vices to the general benefit. I believe that the ardor of our virtuous enthusiasm in behalf of the slave, and of our indignation at his oppressor, naturally blinds us a little to the fate that is involved alike in our freedom, and in the slaveholding system at the South. (*AW* 47-48)

In this speech, Emerson avoids his characteristic distance from the abolitionists by referring to *our* "virtuous enthusiasm in behalf of the slave" and *our* "indignation at his oppressor." He counterbalances the moral cause of abolition, with which he now openly identifies, with vividly dehumanizing descriptions of the degeneracy of the South, contending that

> One must look to the planters of the South with the same feelings that he would regard the spider and the fly, the tiger and the deer. It is a barbarism. The people are barbarous. They are still in the animal state. They are not accountable like those whose eyes have once been opened to a Christianity that makes a return to evil impossible. Revolutions, as we say, never move backward. In our own history, this has been repeated over and over again. (48)

Change is both necessary and desirable; Emerson declares that "it becomes essential, it becomes imperative, as man rises in the scale of civilization, as the ameliorating and expanding principles find effect in him;--it becomes as imperative that this institution should become discreditable, and should perish, as the old institutions which have gone before" (49). Emerson's demand for "works and laws" suited to the present generation

and its ideas is as old as *Nature*, and his desire to "do away this wild, savage, and preposterous There or Then, and introduce in its place the Here and the Now" (*W*, II: 11) illustrates the practical application of his philosophy of "History." At Worcester, Emerson predicts that "such a relation [between tyrants and slaves] cannot continue" in the South, asserting that "it is the order of Providence that we would conspire heartily in this [abolitionist] work" (*AW* 49-50). In his final anti-slavery speech of the decade, Emerson enthusiastically regards the abolition of slavery as a "triumph which I look upon as inevitable" (49).

Although Emerson may initially appear to have been overly cautious in his reluctance to publicly identify himself with abolition, his speeches throughout the 1830s and 1840s reveal a profound philosophical contemplation of the moral aspects of the issue of slavery and a gradual but persistent willingness to project these ideological considerations into the sociopolitical realm. *Nature*'s demand for original "works and laws and worship" provides an open playing field for Emerson's self-reliant individual, who trusts the perfection of the thoughts his soul reveals to him and publishes them for the benefit of others. The individual Thinker who conveys his private convictions possesses the potential for heroism: the heroic Actor embraces the noble sentiment, which Emerson variously characterizes as both noble and deifying. The Thinker/Actor subordinates himself and any self-serving purposes to the superior power of the moral sentiment; the government and its institutions thus exist at the sufferance of the citizens who consider, create, and empower it. The power of the moral sentiment eclipses all existing power and institutions, including the notion of Union.

The moral philosophy found in *Nature* and in *Essays, First* and *Second Series* provides the ideological framework within which the sociopolitical dimension of Emerson's public speeches operates. *Nature* articulates the need to do away with outmoded institutions, while "History" proclaims the desirability of dismissing the There or Then in favor of the Here and Now. Emerson then introduces the whole issue of

slavery and its abolition to an educated, receptive audience already eager for moral, political, and social reform. Initially abstract examples of slavery as a moral aberration become progressively more concrete: Milton's love of liberty and George Fox's idealism evolve into Elijah P. Lovejoy's martyrdom and the British public's efforts to emancipate slaves in the British West Indies. Each address brings the issue of slavery ever closer to the individual: Emerson moves from scattered references to abolition as a moral issue, to praise of abolitionists in principle, to speaking on behalf of abolition as a cause for reform, to identifying himself openly with the abolitionists. With each step, he narrows the distance between the self-reliant Thinker and the potentially heroic Actor; by the end of the decade, all of the ideological elements are in place to convert philosophical abstractionism to sociopolitical reality. The only thing missing from this potentially volatile mixture was a catalyst, which historical events, in due course, provided.

CHAPTER II

THE BUD: FROM THINKER TO ACTOR

> Action is with the scholar subordinate, but it is essential. Without it, he is not yet man. Without it thought can never ripen into truth.
> -- Emerson, "The American Scholar" (1837)

In 1850, an event occurred which brought slavery sharply to the attention of many Americans who had previously either ignored, sidestepped, or remained on the margins of the issue. In an effort to avoid the threatened secession of Southern states, the United States Congress passed a series of measures designed to strike a balance of power between pro- and anti-slavery forces that included the Fugitive Slave Law. This law required the citizens of free states to assist the slave states in the apprehension of runaway slaves, and the resulting opposition of anti-slavery advocates in the North was met with ever-increasing antagonism on the part of the citizens of the South. The Fugitive Slave Law played perhaps the single most important role in escalating existing tensions between the two factions throughout the 1850s and creating even deeper ideological divisions between the sparring regions. Senator Daniel Webster of Massachusetts delivered a stirring speech to Congress in support of the so-called Compromise of 1850, a move which alienated many of his anti-slavery constituents in Massachusetts and fueled the fury of the Northern abolitionists. Emerson, who had once admired Webster, was enraged by both the Compromise and Webster's advocacy of it, and he responded with uncharacteristic bitterness and anger in the privacy of his Journal.

The volume of entries that Emerson devotes to slavery and the Fugitive Slave Law beginning in September of 1850 attests to the considerable extent to which the law and its potential ramifications affected him in a profoundly personal manner. The editors of *The Journals and Miscellaneous Notebooks* observe that his eighty-six page diatribe in

Journal BO constitutes "a concentration unique, in length and tone, in all of Emerson's journals" (XI: xv). In one entry, Emerson writes,

> Bad times. We wake up with a painful auguring, and after exploring a little to know the cause find it is the odious news in each day's paper, the infamy that has fallen on Massachusetts, that clouds the daylight, & takes away the comfort of every hour. We shall never feel well again until that detestable law is nullified in Massachusetts & until the Government is assured that once for all it cannot & shall not be executed here. All I have, and all I can do shall be given & done in opposition to the execution of the law. (*JMN*, XI: 343-44)

Emerson extends his passionate attack on the law to include Daniel Webster and even the Union itself. He bitterly proclaims that "[t]he fame of Webster ends in this nasty law" (351), then elaborates,

> I may then add *the Union*. Nothing seems to me more bitterly futile than this bluster about the Union. A year ago we were all lovers & prizers of it. Before the passage of that law which Mr. Webster made his own, we indulged in all the dreams which foreign nations still cherish of American destiny. But in the new attitude in which we find ourselves, the degradation & personal dishonour which now rests like a miasma on every house in Massachusetts, the sentiment is entirely changed. No man can look his neighbor in the face. We sneak about with the infamy of crime in the streets, & cowardice in ourselves and frankly once and for all the Union is sunk, the flag is hateful, &

will be hissed. (348-49)

Emerson's Journal evidences an unmistakable shift in both tone and focus: whereas his entries of the 1830s and 1840s had called only for consideration and discussion of the slavery issue for the purpose of persuading others to accept it as a moral aberration, those beginning in 1850 exhibit a decisive condemnation of the institution on both philosophical and sociopolitical grounds. Emerson reacts to the Fugitive Slave Law as an outraged citizen being force-fed a provision which he finds particularly unpalatable, and the establishment he once advocated working within now appears to him to be singularly repugnant.

Perhaps the most startling of Emerson's Journal writings polarizes the North and the South into civilized and "barbarous" states and attacks Southern citizens, the Fugitive Slave Law, and Daniel Webster, all in a viciously uncharacteristic manner. This somewhat lengthy passage, which aptly illustrates the unprecedented extent of Emerson's agitation, merits examination in its entirety by virtue of both its content and noticeably un-"Emersonian" tone:

> In the weakness of the Union the law of 1793 was framed, and much may be said in palliation of it. It was a law affirming the existence of two states of civilization or an intimate union between two countries, one civilized & Christian & the other barbarous, where cannibalism was still permitted. It was a little gross, the taste for boiling babies, but as long as this kind of cookery was confined within their own limits, we could agree for other purposes, & wear one flag. The law affirmed a right to hunt their human prey within our territory; and this law availed just thus much to affirm their own platform,--to fix the fact, that, though confessedly savage, they were yet at liberty to

> consort with men;--though they had tails, & their incisors were a little long, yet it is settled that they shall by courtesy be called men; we will all make believe they are Christians; & we promise not to look at their tails or incisors when they come into company. This was all very well. The convenient equality was affirmed, they were admitted to dine & sup, & profound silence on the subject of tails & incisors was kept. No man in all New England spoke of Ghilanes in their presence. But of course on their part all idea of boiling babies in our caboose was dropt; all idea of hunting in our yards fat babies to boil, was dropt; & the law became, as it should, a dead letter. It was merely there in the statute book to soothe the dignity of the maneaters. And we Northerners had, on our part, indemnified & secured ourselves against any occasional eccentricity of appetite in our confederates by our own interpretation, & by offsetting state-law by state-laws. It was & is penal here in Massachusetts for any sheriff or town- or state-officer to lend himself or his jail to the slavehunter, & it is also settled that any slave brought here by his master, becomes free. All this was well. What Mr Webster has now done is not only to re-enact the old law, but *to give it force*, which it never had before, or to bring down the free & Christian state of Massachusetts to the cannibal level. (354-55)

Despite its bitter language, Emerson's recital of the events leading to the Congressional revival of the long-dormant 1793 law (with the obvious exception of the parts concerning boiling babies and Southerners possessing tails) is historically accurate. But where his

previous public addresses and journal entries had focused on slavery as a moral aberration and indicted only slaveholders in an abstract sense, this passage reveals Emerson's shift towards an all-encompassing condemnation of the entire South, at least in his private writings. His emphasis remains on slavery as a moral issue, but his association of the North with Christianity and virtue and the South with cannibalism and evil projects his consideration of the problem into the sociopolitical sphere. When Emerson asserts that "[e]verything that can walk, turns soldier to fight this down" (358), he explains that

> This is not going crusading after slaves who it is alleged are very happy & comfortable where they are: all that amiable argument falls to the ground, but defending a human being who has taken the risks of being shot or burned alive, or cast into the sea, or starved to death or suffocated in a wooden box,--taken all this risk to get away from his driver & recover the rights of man. And this man the Statute says, you men of Massachusetts shall kidnap & send back again a thousand miles across the sea to the dog-hutch he fled from. And this filthy enactment was made in the 19th Century, by people who could read & write. (411-12)

When Emerson closes this entry with the emphatic assertion that "I will not obey it, by God" (412), the implications of his position become not only philosophical, but political: to express his determination to oppose a legal statute should he be called upon to do so clearly anticipates potential acts of civil disobedience.

Although Emerson's public speeches never quite assumed the uncompromising level of anger apparent in his Journal entries, their tone became noticeably more vehement as the political and social rift between the North and the South deepened over time. By 1851, he was well aware of the celebrity status which accompanied his widespread fame and was prepared to use it in promoting his anti-slavery beliefs.

Emerson publicly opposed Daniel Webster when he addressed the citizens of Concord on the subject of "The Fugitive Slave Law" on May 3, 1851. Feeling personally betrayed (Allen 552-53), he veers from his characteristic habit of avoiding specific references to living persons and bitterly attacks Webster by name, angrily denouncing the senator's "treachery" (*W*, XI: 181).[22] Departing from his previous sense of optimism that the issue would ultimately be decided on the strength of arguments based upon the moral sentiment, Emerson, aware of his audience and conscious of the potential of his personal influence, adopts a more outraged tone and more vehement language than in his earlier anti-slavery speeches. He condemns the "tameness" of the city of Boston for its "passive obedience" to the law on moral, social, and political grounds:

> I thought none, that was not ready to go on all fours, would back this law. And yet here are upright men . . . who can see nothing in this claim for bare humanity, and the health and honor of their native State, but canting fanaticism, sedition and "one idea." Because of this preoccupied mind, the whole wealth and power of Boston--two hundred thousand souls . . . are thrown into the scale of the crime: and the poor black boy, whom the fame of Boston had reached in the recesses of a vile swamp, or in the alleys of Savannah, on arriving here finds all his force employed to catch him. The famous town of Boston is his master's hound. The learning of the universities, the culture of elegant society, the acumen of lawyers, the majesty of the Bench, the eloquence of the Christian pulpit, the stoutness of Democracy; the respectability of the Whig party are all combined to kidnap him. (180-85)

Emerson's emphasis is still primarily moral, but he has expanded the scope of the slavery

issue to implicate not only the slaveholders of the South but the population of the entire country as well. He argues that "[t]he crisis is interesting as it shows the self-protecting nature of the world and of the Divine laws. It is the law of the world,--as much immorality as there is, so much misery. . . . America, the most prosperous country in the Universe, has the greatest calamity in the Universe, negro slavery" (186). Citing historical examples of obviously unjust laws, Emerson encourages his audience to resist the mandate of the Fugitive Slave Law through passive disobedience.

Emerson's call for resistance to the law is consistent with both his concept of the Thinker and his notion of self-reliance; however, the first "Fugitive Slave Law" signals the point at which Emerson departs from mere contemplation to consider crossing the invisible boundary between the Thinker and the Actor. "If one man," he suggests, "had felt the spirit of Coke or Manfield or Parsons, and read the law with the eye of freedom, the dishonor of Massachusetts had been prevented, and a limit set to these encroachments forever" (*W*, XI: 214). Since the dishonor was not prevented, Massachusetts citizens must inhibit further damage through individual acts of resistance. Emerson contends, "It is contrary to the primal sentiment of duty, and therefore all men that are born are, in proportion to their power of thought and their moral sensibility, found to be the natural enemies of this law. The resistance of all moral beings is secured to it" (188). Self-reliant morality is assisted by the "chain of affinity" argument of "History"; Emerson's belief that "[w]e sympathize in the great moments of history, in the great discoveries, the great resistances, the great prosperities of men;--because there law was enacted . . . *for us*, as we ourselves in that place would have done or applauded" (*W*, II: 6-7) is thus realized in courageous acts of civil disobedience of morally reprehensible statutes. Emerson utilizes historical examples of resistance to "immoral laws" to bolster his argument against the Fugitive Slave Law and to encourage his listeners to consider the potential of their individual and collective moral power:

> We must make a small state great, by making every man in

> it true. It was the praise of Athens, "She could not lead countless armies into the field, but she knew how with a little band to defeat those who could." Every Roman reckoned himself at least a match for a Province. Every Dorian did. Every Englishman in Australia, in South Africa, in India, or in whatever barbarous country their forts and factories have been set up,--represents London, represents the art, power and law of Europe. Every man educated at the Northern school carries the like advantages into the South. (*W*, XI: 212-13)

Emerson's seemingly imperialist rhetoric creates an implicit support for colonial expansionism that departs noticeably from his more common egalitarian stance. The passage establishes a clear hierarchy that designates one set of sociopolitical ideas as superior to the other and suggests that supporters of the superior set possess both the power and the privilege to compel its implementation. The historically progressive nature of the "Circles" philosophy both enables Emerson to look toward the future abolition of slavery and provides him with a context within which to explain Webster's failing to look forward; "Mr. Webster," he declares, "is a man who lives by his memory, a man of the past, not a man of faith or of hope" (203). Relegated to the remote regions of a dead past, Webster is pronounced incapable of personal transcendence from the limits of the There and Then to the living reality of the Here and Now (*W*, II: 11), the location to which Emerson predictably assigns his morally-conscious, self-reliant Thinker.

Emerson's political emphasis in his first "Fugitive Slave Law" address continues to center on the implications of the law to the lives of the citizens of Massachusetts. Emerson opens the address by pointing to his own reluctance to speak on the issue at all and by indicating that recent events have drawn his personal attention, as well as that of his listeners:

> Fellow Citizens: I accepted your invitation to speak to you on the great question of these days, with very little consideration of what I might have to offer: for there seems to be no option. The last year has forced all of us into politics, and made it a paramount duty to seek what it is often a duty to shun. We do not breathe well. There is infamy in the air. I have a new experience. I wake in the morning with a painful sensation, which I carry about all day, and which, when traced home, is the odious remembrance of that ignominy which has fallen on Massachusetts, which robs the landscape of beauty, and takes the sunshine out of every hour. I have lived all my life in this state, and never had any experience of personal inconvenience from the laws, until now. They never came near me to any discomfort before. I find the like sensibility in my neighbors; and in that class who take no interest in the ordinary questions of party politics. . . . the whole population will in a short time be as painfully affected. (*W*, XI: 179-80)

The city of Boston's willingness to participate in the apprehension of fugitive slaves illustrates to Emerson the close proximity of the matter and prompts him to go public with his pro-abolitionist views. Emerson underscores the significance of slavery as it has become a *Massachusetts* issue; he contends that "[o]ne thing is plain, we cannot answer for the Union, but we must keep Massachusetts true. It is of unspeakable importance that she play her honest part. She must follow no vicious example. Massachusetts is a little state: countries have been great by ideas" (210-11). Emerson thus equates the notion of patriotism with Massachusetts' self-interest, a characteristic posture which acquires a

political dimension in this and subsequent anti-slavery addresses.

It is ideologically significant that Emerson elevates the interests of the citizens of the State of Massachusetts above those of the Union as a whole. His discussion of the notion of "Union" is somewhat equivocal; he refers to himself as a "Unionist" while concurrently pointing to the tenuous philosophical concepts which both unite and divide the nation:

> The destiny of this country is great and liberal, and is to be greatly administered. It is to be administered according to what is, and is to be, and not according to what is dead and gone. The union of this people is a real thing, an alliance of men of one flock, one language, one religion, one system of manners and ideas. I hold it to be a real and not a statute union. The people cleave to the Union, because they see their advantage in it, the added power of each. (205)

Emerson follows what might appear as a requisite praise of the Union with a corresponding passage that indicates the seriousness of its internal divisions and hints at the potential for ultimate dissolution:

> I suppose the Union can be left to take care of itself. As much real union as there is, the statutes will be sure to express; as much disunion as there is, no statute can long conceal. Under the Union I suppose the fact to be that there are really two nations, the North and the South. It is not slavery that severs them, it is climate and temperament. The South does not like the North, slavery or no slavery, and never did. The North likes the South well enough, for it knows its own advantages. I am willing to leave them to the facts. If they continue to have a binding interest, they

> will be pretty sure to find it out: if not, they will consult their peace in parting. But one thing appears certain to me, that, as soon as the constitution ordains an immoral law, it ordains disunion. The law is suicidal, it cannot be obeyed. The Union is at an end as soon as an immoral law is enacted. (*W*, XI: 205-06)

Emerson's view of the Union significantly separates it into two distinct camps and establishes its primary purpose as essentially economic. However, it also reveals Emerson to be an advocate of the principle of states' rights: as long as the Union serves the people of Massachusetts, it should stand. If not, he maintains that the people should put aside the financial advantages of union and embrace the higher purpose of a moral mandate. A subsequent passage clarifies this position:

> Let the attitude of the states be firm. Let us respect the Union to all honest ends. But also respect an older and wiser union, the law of Nature and rectitude. Massachusetts will be as strong as the Universe, when it does that. We will never intermeddle with your slavery,-- but you can in no wise be suffered to bring it to Cape Cod and Berkshire. This law must be made inoperative. It must be abrogated and wiped out of the statute-book; but whilst it stands there, it must be disobeyed. We must make a small state great, by making every man in it true. (212)

Emerson returns to *Nature*'s notions of the supremacy of contemporary perceptions of the moral sentiment and of actions as perfections and publications of private, individual thoughts. And while he adheres to his optimistic expectation of a swift repeal of the Fugitive Slave Law, his underlying implications suggest the possibility of severing the Union if the matter cannot be peacefully resolved.

Three years later, Emerson demonstrated an unwillingness to let up on his opposition to either Webster or the slavery issue. His second "Fugitive Slave Law" address, delivered at New York's Tabernacle on March 7, 1854, commemorates the fourth anniversary of Webster's now-infamous "Seventh of March" speech supporting the Compromise of 1850. Similar in tone and approach to his 1851 address, the speech constitutes "a more finished and dramatic performance" in an even more receptive anti-slavery forum (Allen 556). Echoing his 1851 notion of his compulsory entrance into the fray, Emerson emphasizes the fact that the issue continues to affect him personally. He observes,

> I have lived all my life without suffering any known inconvenience from American Slavery. I never saw it; I never heard the whip; I never felt the check on my free speech and action, until, the other day, when Mr. Webster, by his personal influence, brought the Fugitive Slave Law on the country. I say Mr. Webster, for though the Bill was not his, it is yet notorious that he was the life and soul of it, that he gave it all he had; it cost him his life, and under the shadow of his great name inferior men sheltered themselves, threw their ballots for it and made the law. (*W*, XI: 219)

Emerson utilizes the fact of Webster's recent death to suggest that the odious law actually consumed its most influential supporter, who had been criticized as "the chief of all the slave-catchers in the country" (Current 175). Emerson follows with a compellingly equivocal memoir that both praises Webster's early accomplishments as "the representative of the American Continent" (*W*, XI: 221) and blasts "the defects of this great man's mind" (223). Grouping Webster with politicians in general, Emerson concludes that "the great show their legitimate power in nothing more than in their power

to misguide us" (220). Once a man whom Emerson considered a credible Thinker and Actor, Webster is stripped of his former status as an American hero when he fails to act according to the moral imperatives of the noble sentiment. As Emerson addresses "the readers and thinkers of 1854," he discourages blind obedience and points to the dangers of following leaders.

Although self-reliance constitutes the core of Emerson's argument, his second "Fugitive Slave Law" address is certainly more than just "'Self-Reliance' written as an occasional piece."[23] Emerson speaks to an audience he identifies as scholars, and he calls upon notions previously articulated in *Nature*, "History," "Circles," and "The American Scholar," as well as "Self-Reliance." Citing the "odious and hurtful" nature of speaking on public questions, Emerson declares,

> The one thing not to be forgiven in intellectual persons is, not to know their own task, or to take their ideas from others. From this want of manly rest in their own and rash acceptance of other people's watchwords come the imbecility and fatigue of their conversation. For they cannot affirm these from any original experience, and of course not with the natural movement and total strength of their nature and talent, but only from their memory, only from their cramped position of standing for their teacher. They say what they would have you believe, but what they do not quite know. (*W*, XI: 217)

Emerson's emphasis on "original experience" echoes the original relations theme introduced in *Nature* and recalls his example of ministers who preach from books instead of from real-life experience in the "Divinity School Address." The idea of taking ideas from others represents a reverberation of *Nature*'s characterization of the age as retrospective and "History"'s contention that what each mind does not see and does not

live, it will not know (*W*, I: 3; *W*, II: 10). Those who affirm their acceptance of the watchwords of others by betraying themselves as "the parrot[s] of other men's thinking" run counter to "The American Scholar"'s concept of the Thinker, or he whom the past instructs, and the future invites (*W*, I: 84). Blind adherents follow the past, but genius, according to Emerson, "looks forward" (90). Only he who casts off the aspirations of others can attain the benefits of the self-reliant soul. Emerson asserts in his second Fugitive Slave Law address that "[t]he teachings of the Spirit can be apprehended only by the same spirit that gave them forth. To make good the cause of Freedom, you must draw off from all the foolish trust in others. You must be citadels and warriors yourselves, declarations of Independence, the charter, the battle, the victory" (*W*, XI: 234-35). The self-reliant Thinker and Actor thus recognizes his own position on the circumference of the circle of an age and actively seeks transcendence into the circle of the subsequent realm.

Emerson's ideological consistency is contrasted by a correlating change in his sociopolitical posturing. The expansion of his argument to include the citizens of New York signals a departure from his exclusive emphasis on Massachusetts and is accompanied by a corresponding shift in persuasive strategy. For the first time in an anti-slavery address, Emerson utilizes the second person to illustrate the moral, social, and political significance of the progression of historical events. He asserts,

> You relied on the constitution. It has not the word *slave* in it; and very good argument has shown that it would not warrant the crimes that are done under it; that, with provisions so vague for an object not named, and which could not be availed of to claim a barrel of sugar or a barrel of corn, the robbing of a man and of all his posterity is effected. You relied on the Supreme Court. The law was right, excellent law for the lambs. But what if unhappily

> the judges were chosen from the wolves, and give to all the law a wolfish interpretation? You relied on the Missouri Compromise. That is ridden over. You relied on State sovereignty in the Free States to protect their citizens. They are driven with contempt out of the courts and out of the territory of the Slave States,--if they are so happy as to get out with their lives,--and now you relied on these dismal guaranties [*sic*] infamously made in 1850; and, before the body of Webster is yet crumbled, it is found that they have crumbled. This eternal monument of his fame and of the Union is rotten in four years. They are no guaranty to the free states. They are a guaranty to the slave states that, as they have hitherto met with no repulse, they shall meet with none. (233-34)

Emerson's strategy presents the Fugitive Slave Law as a personal affront to each individual in his audience and points to the ineffective response of government leaders to the progressive developments within each stage of the national crisis. Expressing his unwavering belief in the inevitability of the institution's demise, Emerson suggests taking a less passive approach to the problem:

> Whilst the inconsistency of slavery with the principles upon which the world is built guarantees its downfall, I own that the patience it requires is almost too sublime for mortals, and seems to demand of us more than mere hoping. And when one sees how fast the rot spreads,--it is growing serious,--I think we demand of superior men that they be superior in this,--that the mind and the virtue shall give their verdict in their day, and accelerate so far the progress

of civilization. (240-41)

Emerson's urging of his audience to "accelerate . . . the progress of civilization" constitutes an unmistakable call for genuine action beyond his earlier plea for passive resistance to the mandates of the Fugitive Slave Law. Contending that "Liberty is aggressive" and that "Liberty is the Crusade of all brave and conscientious men" (244), Emerson openly expresses support for the Anti-Slavery Society and urges his audience to side with the moral cause: "It is a potent support and ally to a brave man standing single, or with a few, for the right, and out-voted and ostracized, to know that better men in other parts of the country appreciate the service and will rightly report him to his own and the next age" (241). Emerson contends that self-reliant Thinkers will take action on behalf of the moral sentiment in the "hope we have reached the end of our unbelief, have come to a belief that there is a divine Providence in the world, which will not save us but through our own coöperation" (244). Though Emerson's call for individual action in the cause of abolition hardly makes him "almost an anarchist" (Allen 556), his stance does reflect a progression in his political view of the appropriate response to the Fugitive Slave Law from passive disobedience toward more active forms of civil resistance. Emerson's "Fugitive Slave Law" addresses from 1851 and 1854 reveal an Emerson determined to propel history forward on behalf of the moral sentiment: in the course of the first years of the decade of the 1850s, the philosopher transformed himself into the protester, the private journal writer became the critical public speaker, and the self-reliant Thinker emerged as the politically-conscious Actor.

Emerson articulates the various aspects of his consideration of the slavery issue in his "Lecture on Slavery," initially delivered on January 25, 1855, at the Tremont Temple in Boston.[24] The speech survives as a fitting summary of Emerson's public ideological and sociopolitical positions during the middle of the decade of the 1850s. Still emphasizing the philosophical nature of slavery as an aberration of the moral sentiment, he characterizes the institution as an evil blight upon the nation and proposes concrete

solutions. Echoing *Nature*'s conception of the noble sentiment, Emerson reminds his audience that "[t]he idea of abstract right exists in the human mind, and lays itself out in the equilibrium of nature, in the equalities and periods of our system, in the level of seas, in the action and reaction of forces, that nothing is allowed to exceed or absorb the rest; if it do, it is disease and is quickly destroyed" (*AW* 98). He adds that "[a] high state of general health cannot coexist with a mortal disease in any part. If any one member suffers, all the members suffer. Then, again, we must find relief from the uniform gloom of the theme, in large considerations of history, whereinto slavery and war enter as necessary shadows in the vast picture of Providence" (92). Observing that "the theory of our government is Liberty" and that Liberty "is the severest test by which a government can be tried" (104), Emerson cites the moral failure of public officials to nullify the Fugitive Slave Law. He charges that

> [t]his outrage of giving back a stolen and plundered man to his thieves was ordained and under circumstances the most painful. There was enough law of the State of Massachusetts to resist the dishonor and the crime, but no judge had the heart to invoke, no governor was found to execute it. The judges feared collision of the State and the Federal Courts. The Governor was a most estimable man--we all knew his sterling virtues, but he fell in an era when governors did not govern, when judges do not judge, when Presidents do not preside, and when representatives do not represent. (101)[25]

The failure of leaders to perform their appointed tasks and to act appropriately on behalf of their constituents creates a moral void that nature is compelled to fill. Emerson recalls his own doctrine of compensation when he reminds his listeners that "[s]ecret retributions are always restoring the level, when disturbed, of the Divine justice. It is impossible to

tilt the beam. All the tyrants and proprietors and monopolists of the world in vain set their shoulders to heave the bar:--settles forevermore the ponderous equator to its line, and man and mote and star and sun must range with it, or be pulverized by the recoil" (99). He insists that there is an obvious, if neglected, need for corrective action--an assignment that elected officials have so far declined to accept. Pointing to the government's discrediting of itself, Emerson concludes that "[w]hen the public fails in its duty, private men take its place" (102).

While Emerson continues to play the part of the contemplative Thinker, he combines it with the role of the functioning Actor. Contending that "whilst I insist on the doctrine of the independence and the inspiration of the individual, I do not cripple but exalt the social action" (103), Emerson proposes a decisive settlement of the issue and even offers his own suggestion. He observes,

> It is so delicious to act with great masses to great aims. For instance the summary or gradual abolition of slavery. Why in the name of common sense and the peace of mankind is not this made the subject of instant negotiation and settlement? Why do not the men of administrative ability in whose brain the prosperity of Philadelphia is rooted;--the multitude of able men who lead each enterprize [*sic*] in the City of New York; in Boston, in Baltimore; why not the strong courageous leaders of the south; join their heads and hearts to form some basis of negotiation to settle this dangerous dispute on some ground of fair compensation, on one side, and of satisfaction, on the other, to the conscience of the Free States. (105)

Emerson's proposal to "buy out" the slaveholders derives from one of his own Journal entries and would have cost, by his own estimate, "two thousand millions of dollars"

(106). Never far from his moral purpose, Emerson explains his position in terms which emphasize the superiority of the liberty of the slave while recognizing the potential economic effects on the slaveholder. He contends that

> [i]t is really the great task fit for this country to accomplish, to buy that property of the planters, as the British nation bought the West Indian slaves. I say *buy*--never conceding the right of the planter to own, but that we may acknowledge the calamity of his position, and bear a countryman's share in relieving him, and because it is the only practicable course, and is innocent. (105-06)

Emerson's proposal offers every individual the opportunity to become an Actor on behalf of the cause of abolition; he notes that "here is a right social or public function which one man cannot do, which all men must do" and hopes that "[w]e shall one day bring the states shoulder to shoulder, and the citizens man to man, to exterminate slavery" (106).

Emerson's hope for a peaceful resolution to the slavery issue would be thwarted by historical events when existing tensions between the North and the South were heightened by the passage of the Kansas-Nebraska Act of 1854. In yet another effort to avert the impending national crisis, Congress repealed the Missouri Compromise of 1820, which had prohibited slavery in the Louisiana Purchase area north of an established dividing line at 36°30'. Since all of the Nebraska territory lay within the free area, a compromise was reached which divided the area into the present states of Kansas and Nebraska and left the issue of slavery in each to be decided by popular sovereignty. Having long regarded the 1820 measure as a sacred compromise, the North reacted violently to the Kansas-Nebraska Act, fearing that Kansas would fall victim to the pro-slavery forces; the South responded in kind with its own fear that Nebraska would be overrun by free-soilers (Bailey 334-35). The struggle ultimately centered itself in the Kansas territory, and the ensuing series of events created even deeper divisions between

pro- and anti-slavery forces in the southern and northern regions. It also produced a powerful symbol, John Brown, a violent abolitionist who had migrated to Kansas for the express purpose of promoting the free-soil cause (Villard 93).

Sporadic clashes in the Kansas territory culminated in May of 1856, when the free-soil town of Lawrence was sacked by pro-slavery forces, producing several casualties, including six free-soilers. Believing himself to be an instrument of God, John Brown assembled a small band of followers, which included four of his own sons, and launched a retaliatory raid which resulted in the brutal murders of five alleged advocates of the pro-slavery cause. Meanwhile, Massachusetts Senator Charles Sumner, an abolitionist, delivered in the Senate a two-day address, which harshly denounced Southern slaveholders, in response to the sacking of Lawrence. Reacting to a perceived attack on Southern honor and acting on behalf of Senator Butler of South Carolina (who was absent during the diatribe), Congressman Preston Brooks, also of South Carolina, confronted Senator Sumner in the Senate chamber and beat him to insensibility with a heavy cane. Outraged by the attack on Sumner and the recent events in Kansas, Emerson delivered brief but fiery speeches on both issues during the course of 1856.

Emerson addressed a town meeting of the citizens of Concord on May 26, 1856, on the subject of "The Assault Upon Mr. Sumner." Even more vehement in tone than his "Fugitive Slave Law" addresses, this short but apparently sincere speech reflects Emerson's growing disgust with the South as well as the issue of slavery. Contending that "[t]he events of the last few years and months have taught us the lessons of centuries," Emerson ponders, "I do not see how a barbarous community and a civilized community can constitute one state. I think we must get rid of slavery, or we must get rid of freedom" (*W*, XI: 247). Although the address is far too brief and focused to emphasize many earlier affinities, it dramatically echoes *Nature*'s notion of the moral law's position at nature's center and its influence "upon every individual [as] that amount of truth which it illustrates to him" (*W*, I: 42). It also augments Emerson's earlier contention that "[a]

right action seems to fill the eye, and be related to all nature" (45) by effectively illustrating its antithesis.

To a far greater extent than in his earlier anti-slavery addresses, Emerson creates polarity in "The Assault Upon Mr. Sumner" by drawing lines between the moral values of the *people* of the North and the South. "Life has not the parity of value in the free state and in the slave state," he announces,

> In one, it is adored with education, with skillful labor, with arts, with long prospective interests, with sacred family ties, with honor and justice. In the other, life is a fever; man is an animal, given to pleasure, frivolous, irritable, spending his days in hunting and practising with deadly weapons to defend himself against his slaves and against his companions brought up in the same idle and dangerous way. Such people live for the moment, they have properly no future, and readily risk on every passion a life which is of small value to themselves or to others. (*W*, XI: 247)

By publicly dividing the two regions into honorable and barbarous camps and characterizing the Southern man as an "animal," Emerson initiates the psychological process of dehumanizing his enemy in order to make its extermination possible.[26] His portrayal of Sumner as a virtuous "protector of families" (251), an heroic victim with a "singularly pure character" (248), contrasts sharply with his corresponding depiction of the "bullies" and "assassins" of the South, who carry the mark of "[t]he murderer's brand" (251-52). Emerson's name-calling constitutes a shift in his argument strategy, which was most frequently based on logic and persuasive reasoning. Clearly quite emotional about his subject, he complains bitterly that "[t]he whole state of South Carolina does not offer one or any number of persons who are to be weighted for a moment on the scale with such a person as the meanest of them all has now struck down" (248). Emerson continues

his defense of Sumner, asserting that "I find him accused of publishing his opinion of the Nebraska conspiracy in a letter to the people of the United States, with discourtesy. Then, that he is an abolitionist; as if every sane human being were not an abolitionist, or a believer that all men should be free" (250). "[E]very man of worth in New England loves [Sumner's] virtues," as do "all honorable men and true patriots" (251-52). Emerson thus connects New England with patriotic concepts of virtue and honor and associates the South with the negative qualities of baseness and brutality.

Emerson expands this dichotomy in his "Speech on Affairs in Kansas," which he delivered at a Kansas relief meeting in Cambridge on September 10, 1856, and which Gay Wilson Allen appropriately describes as "one of his most impassioned speeches" (587). Emerson contends that "[t]here is this peculiarity about the case of Kansas, that all the right is on one side. We hear the screams of hunted wives and children answered by the howl of the butchers" (*W*, XI: 255). Appealing for aid on behalf of the Kansas anti-slavery forces, Emerson emphasizes the justness of their cause and its contrast with that of the pro-slavery enemy: "In these calamities under which they suffer, and the worst which threaten them, the people of Kansas ask for bread, clothes, arms and men, to save them alive, and enable them to stand against these enemies of the human race. They have a right to be helped, for they have helped themselves" (256). Emerson suggests that the Kansas anti-slavery forces have earned the support of New England by virtue of their own self-reliance, and he deepens his personal involvement in the abolition cause by contributing to it directly and encouraging others to do the same.[27] He insists, in fact, that relief has become a genuine necessity. He explains that

> [t]his aid must be sent, and this is not to be doled out as an ordinary charity; but bestowed up to the magnitude of the want, and, as has been elsewhere said, "on the scale of a national action." I think we are to give largely, lavishly, to these men. And we must prepare to do it. We must learn

> to do with less, live in a smaller tenement, sell our apple-trees, our acres, our pleasant houses. . . . We must have aid from individuals,--we must also have aid from the state. (256-57)

This passage reveals both the expanding range of Emerson's view of the slavery problem and the extremes to which he is willing to go in his efforts to remedy it. He again invites individuals to participate as Actors and offers suggestions as to how they might contribute. Emerson makes his first call for "national action" and indicates that "the whole world knows that this is no accidental brawl, but a systematic war to the knife" (257). Having previously drawn the moral battle lines, Emerson proceeds to prepare for an actual war.

Emerson's position in "Speech on Affairs in Kansas" remains ideologically consistent with his notions of self-reliance and the moral sentiment, but the concepts have assumed more profound political implications during the course of his anti-slavery monologue. By emphasizing the role of the individual Actor in effecting political change, Emerson effectively elevates the thinking conscience to a level beyond the reach of government. He observes,

> I set the private man first. He only who is able to stand alone is qualified to be a citizen. Next to the private man, I value the primary assembly, met to watch the government and to correct it. That is the theory of the American State, that it exists to execute the will of the citizens, is always responsible to them, and is always to be changed when it does not. (*W*, XI: 258)

Emerson not only questions the federal government, but he also directly implicates it in the slavery issue by faulting its interference in Kansas. He charges that "[i]n this country for the last few years the government has been the chief obstruction to the common weal.

Who doubts that Kansas would have been very well settled, if the United States had let it alone?" (258-59) He pointedly adds that "[t]he President is a lawyer, and should know the statutes of the land. But I borrow the language of an eminent man, used long since, with far less occasion: 'If that be law, let the ploughshare be run under the foundations of the Capitol;'--and if that be Government, extirpation is the only cure" (261).[28]

At this point, Emerson's public anti-slavery pronouncements border on open subversion. He announces, "I am glad to see that the terror of disunion and anarchy is disappearing. Massachusetts, in its heroic day, had no government--was an anarchy. Every man stood on his own two feet, was his own governor; and there was no breach of peace from Cape Cod to Mount Hoosac" (261-62). Although his "heroic" example looks to the past, Emerson's attention here is focused clearly on the present. His glorification of anarchy mirrors his increasing disenchantment with the Union, which intensifies throughout his series of anti-slavery addresses.

Emerson offers his most fervent criticism of the Union in "Speech on Affairs in Kansas"; by 1856, the Union has become for him a mockery of its own original purposes and a genuine impediment to the cause of abolition. Emerson asserts,

> Language has lost its meaning in the universal cant. *Representative Government* is really misrepresentative; *Union* is a conspiracy against the Northern States which the Northern States are to have the privilege of paying for; the *adding of Cuba and Central America* to the slave marts is *enlarging the area of Freedom. Manifest Destiny, Democracy, Freedom,* fine names for an ugly thing. They call it otto of rose and lavender,--I call it bilge-water. They call it Chivalry and Freedom; I call it the stealing of the earnings of a poor man and the earnings of his little girl and boy, and the earnings of all that shall come from him, his

children's children forever. (259-60)

Emerson seems to reverse the colonialist stance he briefly assumed in his first "Fugitive Slave Law" address, an inconsistency which points to his apparent willingness to adapt the significance of historical events to suit specific rhetorical purposes. In "Speech on Affairs in Kansas," he seeks to undermine any lingering support for the existing political structure and queries, "What are the results of law and union?" He responds that "[t]here is no Union. Can any citizen of Massachusetts travel in honor through Kentucky and Alabama and speak his mind? Or can any citizen of the Southern country who happens to think kidnapping a bad thing, say so? Let Mr. Underwood of Virginia answer" (260). Decidedly one-sided, Emerson's argument is nevertheless significant in its public declaration of his own belief that the Union no longer exists. Sounding the death knell on the notion of "union" paves the way for Emerson's subsequent introduction of his even more dire prediction of a second revolution. He declares that

> the hour is coming when the strongest will not be strong enough. A harder task will the new revolution of the nineteenth century be than was the revolution of the eighteenth century. I think the American Revolution bought its glory cheap. If the problem was new, it was simple. If there were a few people, they were united, and the enemy three thousand miles off. But now, vast property, gigantic interests, family connections, webs of party, cover the land with a network that immensely multiplies the dangers of war. (262-63)

Emerson's clear recognition of the possibility of war is given added poignancy by his obvious awareness of the identity of the "enemy." Appreciating the potential ramifications of the conflict, Emerson nevertheless appears prepared to welcome a final solution to the American slavery problem.

As frequent clashes in "bleeding Kansas" exacerbated existing tensions between the North and the South during 1856, Emerson responded with speeches which employed a more uncompromising rhetoric and a noticeably more inflammatory tone than of his earlier anti-slavery addresses. In equating abolition with patriotism and virtue and aligning slavery with moral degeneracy in "The Assault Upon Mr. Sumner," Emerson establishes polarity between free and slave states and begins to speak of the North and the South in terms of direct political opposition. By the time of his "Speech on Affairs in Kansas," Emerson pointedly refers to the burgeoning conflict as a "war," speaks openly of "the enemy," and ponders "these times full of the fate of the Republic" (257-63). Following the attack on Sumner, Emerson moved away from his original emphasis on the slavery issue as it affected the people of the state of Massachusetts and embraced a collective Northern position in the anti-slavery cause. Not quite an anarchist in 1854, Emerson by 1856 was teetering on the brink of political extremism, seeking self-determination through more subversive means that did not discount the possibility of a second revolution.[29] Frustrated by repeated delays in realizing the results of their endeavors, Emerson and other Actors began to seek more decisive methods for resolving the slavery dispute.

In February of 1857, Emerson met John Brown, who had come to Massachusetts to seek funding for his abolitionist activities in Kansas. Impressed by Brown's speech at the Town Hall, Emerson entertained Brown as a guest in his home. Brown returned to Concord for the same purpose two years later, and Emerson and others, believing that Brown intended to work to make Kansas a free state, contributed generously to the cause. But Brown had another goal, which was to launch a raid on the federal arsenal in Harper's Ferry, Virginia. His purpose was to provide weapons to slaves to enable them to rise up against their masters and to establish a free-soil region within the territory of the South.[30] Brown's October 16 excursion at Harper's Ferry was both poorly planned and clumsily executed, and he and six of his followers were captured and placed on trial for treason by

the State of Virginia. All were found guilty and ultimately hanged, but John Brown was celebrated by the North as a courageous martyr who gave his life in the relentless pursuit of a just and noble cause.

As the North gained a martyr, the South was provided with a suitable villain (Bailey 338). Northern newspapers rushed to Brown's defense, while the South expressed its outrage that a man who would incite rebellion and steal their property could be revered as a savior and regarded as an instrument of God (Villard 474-76). Many suspected that Brown actually courted martyrdom; some believed that he was genuinely insane. In any case, few felt that Brown was anything other than completely sincere in his cause, and he gained many admirers, including Southerners, who regarded his raid as a demonstration that the North was capable of paying more than just lip service to the anti-slavery cause (474-76). Brown's abortive raid also provided a preview of coming events, as many observers on both sides recognized the potential for conflict and bloodshed that was going to be played out on a much larger stage within a very short period of time (474).

During Brown's trial in November of 1859, Emerson delivered an address on the subject of "Courage" at the Music Hall in Boston. Although Emerson's subsequent textual revisions resulted in a noticeably subdued tone when he converted it to essay form,[31] the address is stirring in its undisguised admiration for its *exemplum*, John Brown. Cataloguing the qualities of courage, Emerson contends that "'[t]is said courage is common, but the immense esteem in which it is held proves it to be rare" (*W*, VII: 255). He identifies courage as "[t]he third excellence [following disinterestedness and practical power] . . . the perfect will, which no terrors can shake, which is attracted by frowns or threats or hostile armies, nay, needs these to be awake, and fan its reserved energies into a pure flame, and is never quite itself until the hazard is extreme; then it is serene and fertile, and all its powers play well" (255). He then recalls the affairs in Kansas, observing that

> [o]ne heard much cant of peace-parties long ago in Kansas

> and elsewhere, that their strength lay in the greatness of their wrongs, and dissuading all resistance, as if to make this strength greater. But were their wrongs greater than the negro's? And what kind of strength did they ever give him? It was always invitation to the tyrant, and bred disgust in those who would protect the victim. What cannot stand must fall; and the measure of our sincerity and therefore of the respect of men, is the amount of health and wealth we will hazard in the defence of our right. (260)

Emerson again dichotomizes, indirectly equating the South with tyranny and the North with the defense of "right." "Sacred courage," according to Emerson, "indicates that a man loves an idea better than all things in the world; that he is aiming neither at pelf nor comfort, but will venture all to put in act the invisible thought in his mind" (274). John Brown's courage is thus, by Emerson's definition, sacred, for he seeks truth within himself and acts upon his own inner convictions. Brown appeals to Emerson and other abolitionists by virtue of his unfaltering "'faith in ideas'" (Perry 252). He personifies the notion of self-trust, and so embodies Emerson's conception of the quintessential self-reliant Actor.

Although Emerson defines many of his characteristics of courage in an abstract manner, Brown and Governor Wise of Virginia are the only living individuals within the text whom he identifies by name. Many of his assertions appear tailor-made for Brown, such as his belief that Nature helps those who help themselves. He observes that "Nature has charged every one with his own defense as with his own support, and the only title I can have to your help is when I have manfully put forth all the means I possess to keep me, and being overborne by odds, the by-standers have a natural wish to interfere and see fair play" (*W*, VII: 260). Emerson appears to play the bystander, a witness to Brown's stirring example of self-reliance. A possible reference to Brown's serenity throughout the

ordeal of his trial, the passage suggests that right action provides its own defense and compels spectators to support it in principle. Emerson's concept of the power of self-trust is even more explicit in his closing passage:

> If you accept your thoughts as inspirations from the Supreme Intelligence, obey them when they prescribe difficult duties, because they come only so long as they are used; or, if your skepticism reaches to the last verge, and you have no confidence in any foreign mind, then be brave, because there is one good opinion which must always be of consequence to you, namely, your own. (277)

The "difficult duties" subtly suggest Brown's predicament, and Emerson adroitly creates a connection between "thoughts as inspirations" and "Supreme Intelligence," a compelling notion in light of Brown's belief in himself as an instrument of God. Pointing to Brown's example, Emerson touts courage as the highest expression of individual self-reliance.

Emerson also portrays Brown as a Thinker and an Actor, which he ties to the notion of self-trust. "Knowledge," he contends, "is the antidote to fear,--Knowledge, Use and Reason, with its higher aids" (262). This passage connects with "The American Scholar," in which Emerson explains,

> In self-trust all the virtues are comprehended. Free should the scholar be,--free and brave. Free even to the definition of freedom, "without any hindrance that does not arise out of his own contribution." Brave; for fear is a thing which a scholar by his very function puts behind him. Fear always springs from ignorance. (*W*, I: 104)

Although Brown, imprisoned in Virginia at the time of Emerson's address, could hardly be considered "free" by conventional definitions of the word *freedom*, he is nevertheless "free" within the context of Emerson's, which advocates a much broader philosophical

view. Emerson indicates in "Courage" that Brown is "free" by virtue of the "higher aids" of his knowledge, his self-trust, and his inner assurance of the justness of his own cause. Emerson maintains that "[k]nowledge is the encourager, knowledge that takes fear out of the heart, knowledge and use, which is knowledge in practice. They conquer who believe they can" (*W*, VII: 262-63). Brown's knowledge is self-knowledge, the source of all power in Emerson's transcendental philosophy.

As his earlier address elevates Elijah P. Lovejoy by virtue of his "Heroism," Emerson equates John Brown with his own notion of "Courage." It does not appear accidental that both figures are martyrs; Emerson seems, in fact, to be drawn to those who martyr themselves in the noble defense of a righteous cause. In "Courage," he asserts,

> Pain is superficial, and therefore fear is. The torments of martyrdom are probably most keenly felt by the by-standers. The torments are illusory. The first suffering is the last suffering, the later hurts being lost on insensibility. Our affections and wishes for the external welfare of the hero tumultuously rush to expression in tears and outcries: but we, like him, subside into indifferency and defiance when we perceive how short is the longest arm of malice, how serene the sufferer. (265)

Emerson presents a second image of the bystander, who stands in awe of the hero's serenity, but he significantly points to the futility of the bystander's concern for the martyr's "external welfare," since the martyr himself transcends these considerations by focusing on his internal motivations. Emerson contemplates the idea that "[t]here is a persuasion in the soul of man that he is here for cause, that he was put down in this place by the Creator to do the work for which he inspires him, that thus he is an overmatch for all antagonists that could combine against him" (273). Convinced that Brown represents

such a man, Emerson directly addresses Brown's case:

> The true temper has genial influences. It makes a bond of union between enemies. Governor Wise of Virginia, in the record of his first interviews with the prisoner, appeared to great advantage. If Governor Wise is a superior man, he distinguishes John Brown. As they confer, they understand each other swiftly; each respects the other. If opportunity allowed, they would prefer each other's society and desert their former companions. Enemies would become affectionate. Hector and Achilles, Richard and Saladin, Wellington and Soult, General Daumas and Abdel-Kader, become aware that they are nearer and more alike than any other two, and, if their nation and circumstance did not keep them apart, they would run into each other's arms. (271)

Although Emerson considered intervening with Governor Wise on Brown's behalf and actually went so far as to draft a letter appealing to the governor's self-interest, he ultimately realized that there was very little he could do for the ardent abolitionist (Allen 590-91). Brown was found guilty of treason and sentenced to be hanged on December 2, 1859.

On November 18, Emerson made a plea for the relief of the family of John Brown at the Tremont Temple in Boston. Pointing to Brown as "the hero of Harper's Ferry" and "a representative of the American Republic" (*W*, XI: 267), Emerson provides a brief history of Brown's life and holds him up as an example of true American patriotism. "Many of you have seen him," he observes, "and every one who has heard him speak has been impressed alike by his simple, artless goodness, joined with his sublime courage. He joins that perfect Puritan faith, which brought his fifth ancestor to

Plymouth Rock with his grandfather's ardor in the Revolution" (268). Extending this notion, Emerson creates both Biblical and patriotic parallels:

> He believes in two articles,--two instruments, shall I say?--the Golden Rule and the Declaration of Independence; and he used this expression in conversation here concerning them, "Better that a whole generation of men, women and children should pass away by a violent death than that one word of either should be violated in this country." There is a Unionist,--there is a strict constructionist for you. He believes in the Union of the States, and he conceives that the only obstruction to the Union is Slavery, and for that reason, as a patriot, he works for its abolition. (268-69)

Although Emerson's definition of "Union" here is hardly controversial, it demonstrates his constant reconsideration of the concept when examined within the context of his previous anti-slavery speeches. Emerson appears at this point to hold little hope for the Union's preservation and points to the travesty of justice that he considers Brown's condemnation to represent. He asserts that

> [n]othing can resist the sympathy which all elevated minds must feel with Brown, and through them the whole civilized world; and if he must suffer, he must drag official gentlemen into an immortality most undesirable, of which they have already some disagreeable forebodings. Indeed, it is the *reductio ad absurdum* of Slavery, when the governor of Virginia is forced to hang a man whom he declares to be a man of the most integrity, truthfulness and courage he has ever met. Is that the kind of man the gallows is built for? (269-70)

Despite the public sympathy for his cause expressed by Emerson and others, Brown was executed as scheduled on December 2, 1859. Emerson, Thoreau, and other anti-slavery supporters held a memorial service that was attended by advocates from neighboring towns, but the controversial nature of the figure of Brown was illustrated that same night when a separate crowd burned him in effigy (Allen 590-91). Although disillusioned with the lack of progress in the anti-slavery cause, Emerson continued to applaud Brown's efforts, and he presented another brief but emotional "John Brown" speech in Salem on January 6, 1860. Employing a new strategy, Emerson relates the story of a young Brown's early encounter with slavery in the form of a twelve-year-old slave. After observing the mistreatment of the boy, including his witnessing the beating of the boy with an iron shovel, Brown, according to Emerson, "swore an oath of resistance to slavery as long as he lived" (*W*, XI: 278). Emerson continues to elevate Brown and to refer to him in glowing terms, contending that "[i]f he kept sheep, it was with a royal mind; and if he traded in wool, he was a merchant prince, not in the amount of wealth, but in the protection of interests confided to him" (280). He counters his positive portrayal of Brown with a now characteristically negative depiction of politicians:

> I am not a little surprised at the easy effrontery with which political gentlemen, in and out of Congress, take it upon them to say that there are not a thousand men in the North who sympathize with John Brown. It would be far safer and nearer the truth to say that all people, in proportion to their sensibility and self-respect, sympathize with him. For it is impossible to see courage, and disinterestedness, and the love that casts out fear, without sympathy. All women are drawn to him by their predominance of sentiment. All gentlemen, of course, are on his side. I do not mean by

> "gentlemen," people of scented hair and perfumed handkerchiefs, but men of gentle blood and generosity, "fulfilled with all nobleness," who, like the Cid, give the outcast leper a share of their bed; like the dying Sidney, pass the cup of cold water to the dying soldier who needs it more. For what is the oath of gentle blood and knighthood? What but to protect the weak and lowly against the strong oppressor? (280-81)

Emerson equates justice and right with the North, and his proclamations concerning Brown's supporters become increasingly all-inclusive. He immediately counters this upbeat notion of right thinking with a gloomy image of "the strong oppressor":

> Nothing is more absurd than to complain of this sympathy, or to complain of a party of men united in opposition to slavery. As well complain of gravity, or the ebb of the tide. Who makes the abolitionist? The slave-holder. The sentiment of mercy is the natural recoil which the laws of the universe provide to protect mankind from destruction by savage passions. And our blind statesmen go up and down, with committees of vigilance and safety, hunting for the origin of this new heresy. They will need a very vigilant committee indeed to find its birthplace, and a very strong force to root it out. For the arch-abolitionist, older than Brown, and older than the Shenandoah Mountains, is Love, whose other name is Justice, which was before Alfred, before Lycurgus, before slavery, and will be after it. (281)

Emerson's condemnation of slavery, and by extension the South, is by no means new at

this point, but his crediting the slaveholder with creating the abolitionist makes a very compelling sociopolitical argument. Emerson continues to blame the South for the crisis, and his reference to slavery as "this new heresy" demonstrates an increasing tendency to view the issue in essentially religious terms. By 1860, abolition is firmly established as a kind of crusade for Emerson, a just war to be waged at virtually any cost.

Although Emerson's advocacy of John Brown was certainly consistent with the views of many citizens of the North during the late 1850s, it was nevertheless a unique phenomenon in other ways. Emerson's public support of Brown constituted a departure for Emerson, a man who had, until the passage of the Fugitive Slave Law, characteristically avoided addressing controversial subjects. It would have been difficult to find a more contentious topic in 1859 than Brown, who was, after all, a political extremist, a man who had justified murder in Lawrence, Kansas, on the basis of his own "eye for an eye" philosophy. If Emerson had been concerned with the opinions of people in the South, he would certainly have been aware of the potential ramifications of extoling a man who was obviously vilified there. But Emerson appears to have been drawn to the sincerity of Brown's conviction, the depth of his personal faith, and his self-reliant willingness to act aggressively in defense of his own beliefs. Regardless of whether or not Brown replaced Webster as Emerson's "champion of Union" (Simpson 59-60), the fact remains that Brown emerged as a powerful symbol for Emerson. In electing to ally himself with Brown, Emerson irrevocably linked himself both personally and historically to the public promotion of the Northern anti-slavery cause. The Thinker of the 1830s and 1840s had become the Actor of the 1850s, and once Emerson crossed the boundary between the two realms, he refused to abandon his desire to replace the There or Then with his self-delineated version of the Here and Now.

Beginning with the first "Fugitive Slave Law" address in 1851, Emerson's speeches assume a more insistent moral tone, accompanied by a progressively more vehement sociopolitical message. Disgusted with the repeated efforts of Northern

politicians to appease the South, Emerson reacted by transferring his hopes for effecting a permanent solution to the problem from political leaders to self-reliant individuals. While Emerson's ideas remained philosophically consistent throughout the 1850s, his notion of their application to the specific historical moment shifted substantially. The events which precipitated Emerson's anti-slavery speeches of the 1850s suggest that his evolving sociopolitical posture resulted more from a growing dissatisfaction with government leadership than from any change in Emerson's ideology. The initial affront of the Fugitive Slave Law was succeeded by political and personal attacks on Charles Sumner and John Brown, fellow Actors for whom Emerson expressed unqualified admiration. These events understandably heightened prevailing hostilities by pitting just, courageous abolitionists of the North against the seemingly barbarous, pro-slavery forces of the South. Continued political appeasement only exacerbated existing tensions; by 1856, Emerson's anti-Union sentiment constituted a fairly typical Northern response to the escalating domestic conflict.[32] A confirmed advocate of states' rights, Emerson continually elevated the interests of Massachusetts and the North above those of a Union which compelled support for slavery and the South. Although his political position assumed a more forceful and urgent character over the course of time, it nevertheless remained ideologically consistent with his early essays and addresses and his concept of self-determination. Only when traditional social and political remedies continued to fail his purpose did Emerson resolve to "accelerate . . . the progress of civilization" (*W*, XI: 241) by voluntarily making the transition from Thinker to Actor and encouraging others to do the same. Significantly (and characteristically), he never permitted his idealism to become "divorced from the material facts of his age" (Matthiessen 11). By the close of the decade of the 1850s, Emerson was prepared to propel American historical events forward at virtually any cost.

CHAPTER III

THE FRUIT: TO THE NEXT CONCENTRIC CIRCLE

> There are no fixtures in nature. The universe is fluid and volatile. Permanence is but a word of degrees. Our globe seen by God is a transparent law, not a mass of facts. Our culture is the predominance of an idea which draws after it this train of cities and institutions. Let us rise into another idea; they will disappear.
>
> -- Emerson, "Circles" (1841)

The possibility that emancipation of the slaves might be achieved only at the cost of disunion and a bloody civil war neither deterred Emerson from his philosophical purpose nor diminished his enthusiasm for his sociopolitical cause. In Emerson's view, the moral sentiment dictated that all conscientious Thinkers acknowledge the inherent justness of abolition in principle, and that self-reliant Actors should support it in practice through the combined strength of their individual and collective efforts. Although he continued to focus his attention on Massachusetts politics, Emerson decided in 1860 that the Republicans offered the greater chance for realizing his abolitionist hopes and elected to support Republican candidates (Allen 605-06). Allen observes that Emerson "was slow to work up enthusiasm" for Abraham Lincoln because Lincoln was determined to work to preserve the Union, which Emerson had already determined to be expendable in the greater moral crusade against the institution of slavery (606). Emerson was not interested in compromises or partial solutions to the nation's social and political problems; he was determined to see the abolitionist effort through to what he regarded as its natural and inevitable conclusion in the total eradication of American slavery and its resulting historical and cultural progression toward the next concentric circle.

Both Rusk and Allen point out that Emerson's *The Conduct of Life*, which was published in November of 1860, makes no mention of slavery, politics, or the mounting

contention between the fractious regions (Rusk 406; Allen 604). Rusk contends that Emerson "frankly gave up any debate on the spirit of the times in favor of the eternal question, 'How shall I live?'" (406), but it should be noted that such an ideological stance remained characteristic of Emerson's written works in general. Journals and essays served as the primary media for the articulation of Emerson's philosophy, providing both a private avenue for considering abstract ideas and a public means of exploring them within the safety and comfort of a controlled (and ultimately closed) environment. The sociopolitical realm occasionally invades the journals, but it generally enters the essays only in the form of specific illustrations of the philosophical arguments Emerson presents within other contexts. Emerson's essays concentrate on the consideration of abstract concepts, and to phrase such a focus, as Rusk does, in terms of a single all-encompassing question such as "'How shall I live?'" appears fundamentally accurate at the same time that it seems to oversimplify a rather complex personal ideology. Since day-to-day living involves both thinking and acting, it is important to recognize the diverse and potentially far-reaching implications of such a deceptively simple assertion as "'How shall I live?'" within an ideology as thoroughly articulated as that of Ralph Waldo Emerson.

If Emerson the Thinker confined his ideological contemplation to the relative privacy of his journals and essays, Emerson the Actor allowed the consequences of this philosophy to emerge through the public forum of his anti-slavery addresses. In January of 1861, The Thinker still regarded the abolition of slavery as an inevitable conclusion; Emerson writes in his Journal that "[t]he furious slaveholder does not see that the one thing he is doing, by night & by day, is, to destroy slavery. They who help & they who hinder are all equally diligent in hastening its downfall. Blessed be the inevitabilities" (*JMN*, XV: 91). The Actor predicted a similar outcome; a few days before the Civil War commenced, Emerson considered the potential "'downfall of our character-destroying civilization'" in one of the six lectures in the "Life and Literature" series (Cabot, II: 603;

774). Emerson explains that

> [t]he facility with which a great political fabric can be broken, the want of tension in all ties which had been supposed adamantine, is instructive, and perhaps opens a new page in civil history. These frivolous persons with their fanaticism perhaps are wiser than they know, or indicate that the hour is struck, so long predicted by philosophy, when the civil machinery that has been the religion of the world decomposes to dust and smoke before the now adult individualism; and the private man feels that he is the State, and that a community in like external conditions of climate, race, sentiment, employment, can drop with impunity much of the machinery of government, as operose and clumsy, and get on cheaper and simpler by leaving to every man all his rights and powers, checked by no law but his love or fear of the rights and powers of his neighbor. (Cabot, II: 603-04)

Emerson's perception of the potential political power of the self-reliant Actor is expressed overtly and with confidence: individuals have succeeded in appropriating "ownership" of the government in order to perpetuate the ideals dictated to their souls by the higher purpose of the moral sentiment. The moral will of the individual thus merges with the social and political "will" of the machinery of government; the government becomes the powerful accessory of self-reliant individuals seeking to convert moral ideology into sociopolitical reality.

It is not surprising, then, that when the war finally arrived on April 19, 1861, Emerson welcomed it as a fundamental opportunity to further the abolition of slavery as a just and moral sociopolitical cause. Asserting in "Civilization at a Pinch" that

"declared war is vastly safer than war undeclared" (Cabot, II: 601), Emerson queries, "'How does Heaven help us when civilization is at a hard pinch?'" and replies,

> "Why, by a whirlwind of patriotism, not believed to exist, but now magnetizing all discordant masses under its terrible unity. It is an affair of instincts; we did not know we had them; we valued ourselves as cool calculators; we were very fine with our learning and culture, with our science that was of no country, and our religion of peace;-- and now a sentiment mightier than logic, wide as light, strong as gravity, reaches into the college, the bank, the farm-house, and the church. It is the day of the populace; they are wiser than their teachers." (600)

Emerson's enthusiasm for war as a facilitator of ideas is anticipated in his 1838 lecture on "War," where he extols its virtues as "a temporary and preparatory state" that "does actively forward the culture of man" by "shak[ing] the whole society until every atom falls into the place its specific gravity assigns it" (*W*, XI: 152). Having established the moral sentiment as an heroic principle worth fighting and dying for in earlier lectures such as "Heroism," "War," and "Courage," Emerson prepares himself and his audience of fellow Actors for the final, decisive phase of the promotion of his moral (and now patriotic) purpose. Despite the potential need for individual sacrifice and even martyrdom in the name of the cause, he actively seeks to compel the final step of this evolutionary process of the moral ideal from thought, to action, to its ultimate resting place within the realm of historical fact.

Emerson publicly expressed his support for the war in "American Nationality," an address delivered at the Music Hall in Boston on November 12, 1861. Emerson contends that

> [a]ll the evils that have yet ensued are inconsiderable,

> compared with the relief it has operated to public and private health. Do you suppose that we shall crawl into that collar again? I hope the war is to heal a deeper wound than any it makes; that it is to heal that scepticism, that frivolous mind, which is the spoiled child of great material prosperity. The war for the Union is broader than any state policy or sectional interest; but, at last, the Union is not broad enough, because of slavery; and we must come to emancipation, with compensation to loyal States. This is a principle. (Cabot, II: 783)[33]

Emerson continues to subordinate the preservation of the Union to what he considers to be the greater issue of freeing the slaves, but at this point, he appears willing to make good on his 1855 proposal to "buy out" the slaveholders, at least those in "loyal States," in order to compensate for their material "losses." However, his position remains noticeably uncompromising in its insistence upon the abolition of slavery as the primary goal of the war and the maintenance of the Union as a subordinate (and, if necessary, expendable) cause. Emerson explains that "[t]he result at which the government aims, and rightly, is repossession of all its territory. But, in the present aspect of the war, separation is a contingency to be contemplated; and I say, in view of that, it is vastly better than what we called the integrity of the republic, with slavery" (783-84). For Emerson, the moral purpose remains consistently paramount: the territory of the United States, and even the Union itself, are considered relevant only as far as they serve the noble sentiment and promote its philosophical mandates.

Despite Emerson's apparent enthusiasm for the war as a potential remedy for the "disease" of American slavery, there is little evidence upon which to base Rusk's assertion that, in the aftermath of the "American Nationality" speech, "[t]he partisan had almost swallowed up the philosopher" (413). Despite his political activism, Emerson

continued to view abolition as a fundamental moral issue and to perceive actions taken on its behalf as the publication of the moral sentiment as it had been dictated to individual Thinkers. Just as he believed that the Fugitive Slave Law had forced citizens otherwise engaged into the realm of politics, so he saw the war as the natural and inevitable outcome of the processes of human Thinking. In the Journal he titled "War," Emerson wrote in 1862 that "[i]t is impossible to /disengage/extricate oneself from the questions in which your age is involved. You can no more keep out of politics than you can keep out of the frost" (*JMN*, XV: 182). Emerson's focus remains on the notion of *compulsory* political participation, and war, while hardly desirable under ordinary circumstances, becomes morally acceptable when philosophically considered as the practical means to a noble end.

Despite the war's ideological potential, Emerson in no way underestimated the possible toll it would exact on the nation nor dismissed its capacity for human pain and individual sacrifice. In "American Civilization," an address delivered at the Smithsonian Institution in Washington on January 31, 1862, Emerson contends that "[t]he war is welcome to the Southerner; a chivalrous sport to him, like hunting, and suits his semi-civilized condition. . . . It does not suit us" (*W*, XI: 304). Asserting that "[e]mancipation is the demand of civilization" (304), he calls upon Congress to abolish slavery and to "pay for such slaves as we ought to pay for" (305). Although Emerson would later recognize the impracticality of his own plan to "buy out" the slaveholders (Allen 610), he would steadfastly maintain his commitment to emancipation throughout the remainder of the war. Observing in "American Civilization" that "[t]he end of all political struggle is to establish morality as the basis of all legislation" (*W*, XI: 309), he insists that the act of emancipation, "which costs so little (the parties injured being such a handful that they can very easily be indemnified), rids the world, at one stroke, of this degrading nuisance, the cause of war and ruin to nations. This measure at once puts all parties right" (308).

Emerson continues to emphasize the ideological polarity between the North and

the South as a practical reason for encouraging the progress of human civilization. Emerson explains that

> [w]e have attempted to hold together two states of civilization: a higher state, where labor and the tenure of land and the right of suffrage are democratical; and a lower state, in which the old military tenure of prisoners or slaves, and of power and land in a few hands, makes an oligarchy: we have attempted to hold these two states of society under one law. But the rude and early state of society does not work well with the later, nay, works badly, and has poisoned politics, public morals and social intercourse in the Republic, now for many years. (298-99)

Although he queries, "Why cannot the best civilization be extended over the whole country, since the disorder of the less-civilized portion menaces the existence of the country?" (299), Emerson has softened his earlier rhetorical condemnation of the South and redefined it in terms of human culture and historical progress. The earlier division between "civilized" and "barbarous" states is replaced by a philosophical representation of the "old" order of the South and the more desirable "new" order promoted by the activists of the North; Emerson thus shifts his argument strategy away from angry accusation to focus on emancipation as the practical end of both moral and historical processes. His faith and idealism remain intact: he asserts that "[i]n this national crisis, it is not argument that we want, but that rare courage which dares commit itself to a principle, believing that Nature is its ally, and will create the instruments it requires, and more than make good any petty and injurious profit which it may disturb" (302). The advance of civilization compels thinking men to act; Emerson concludes with a now-characteristic observation that "Nature works through her appointed elements; and ideas must work through the brains and the arms of good and brave men, or they are no better

than dreams" (310).

Emerson elaborates this concept in "Moral Forces" and "Perpetual Forces," two addresses which he delivered during the course of 1862. A presidential declaration of a Fast Day for April 13 in which all were encouraged "to take thankful remembrance of the better aspect of our affairs" occasioned the "Moral Forces" speech, which Emerson presented to the Twenty-Eighth Congregational Society at the Music Hall (Cabot, II: 786). Affirming "[w]hat an amount of power released from doing harm and now ready to do good!" Emerson reiterates his support for the war by virtue of its potential to abolish slavery and asserts that "the moral powers are thirsts for actions" (787).[34] He remains characteristically optimistic with regard to what he perceives as the imminent triumph of the moral sentiment, asserting that "[t]hings point the right way" and encouraging his audience, "Let us rejoice in every success and in every overthrow, which a wise and good soul, whether among our enemies or in other nations, would see to be for the right, for the good of humanity. We are rightly glad only in as far as we believe that the victories of our cause are real grounds of joy for all mankind" (787).

Emerson's positive view of the war as an episode that would result in the moral, cultural, and historical furtherance of the whole of humankind is ideologically consistent with the notion of "Compensation" that he introduced in his *First Series* of essays. In his assertion that "dualism underlies the nature and condition of man" (*W*, II: 98), Emerson maintains that "[e]very sweet hath its sour; every evil its good" (98). He explains that "[t]he absolute balance of Give and Take, the doctrine that every thing has its price,--and if that price is not paid, not that thing but something else is maintained, and that it is impossible to get anything without its price,--is not less sublime in the columns of a leger [*sic*] than in the budgets of states, in the laws of light and darkness, in all the action and reaction of nature" (115). Emerson considered the war a reasonable price to pay on behalf of the moral sentiment that supported abolition; in July of 1862, he considered the matter in his Journal, where he ponders, "I suppose the war does not

recommend slavery to any body. If it cost ten years of war, & ten to recover the general prosperity, the destruction of slavery is worth so much" (*JMN*, XV: 273-74). Recognizing the potential losses of the war in both economic and human terms, Emerson offsets them with corresponding moral gains that he believed could be realized if the sacrifice was freely made. In "Compensation," Emerson observes that "[t]he law of nature is, Do the thing, and you shall have the power; but they who do not the thing have not the power" (*W*, II: 114-15). Emerson had long acknowledged the need for action, and he was now more than prepared to "do the thing" to effect the exchange that would definitively empower the anti-slavery forces. In "Perpetual Forces," he observes that

> [t]he power of man increases steadily by continuance in one direction. He becomes acquainted with the resistances, and with his own tools; increases his skill and strengths and learns the favorable moments and favorable accidents. He is his own apprentice, and more time gives a great addition of power, just as a falling body acquires momentum with every foot of the fall. (*W*, X: 79)

Emerson never retreated from what he regarded as the sanctity of his purpose; once moved to action on behalf of abolition as a concrete expression of the moral sentiment, he continued along the course he had set for himself with determination and conviction. In the second half of 1862, he would encounter even greater cause for optimism.

That occasion was President Lincoln's Preliminary Emancipation Proclamation, which was issued on September 22. This measure, which was scheduled to take effect on January 1, 1863, announced the scheduled emancipation of the slaves in the rebel states, but it had little practical force since the slave states had already seceded from the Union and were not then subject (at least from their perspective) to the president's direct authority. Bailey points to the "dubious legality" of Lincoln's Preliminary Emancipation, noting that "[t]o deprive disloyal citizens of hundreds of millions of

dollars worth of private property by a few strokes of the Executive's pen is stretching assumed war powers, even against fellow Americans regarded as enemies" (389). Doubts regarding legality and enforceability notwithstanding, many Northerners, including Emerson, understandably viewed the Proclamation as a victory, and both privately and publicly rejoiced in its publication. When approached to address an abolitionist rally concerning the Proclamation in Boston on October 12, Emerson happily consented.

In his speech on "The Emancipation Proclamation," Emerson celebrates both the apparent triumph of the moral sentiment and the heroic individual responsible for forcing affirmative action in the effort to propel it forward. Emerson declares,

> In so many arid forms which states encrust themselves with, once in a century, if so often, a poetic act and record occur. These are the jets of thought into affairs, when, roused by danger or inspired by genius, the political leaders of the day break the else insurmountable routine of class and local legislation, and take a step forward in the direction of catholic and universal interests. . . . Forget all that we thought shortcomings, every mistake, every delay. . . . call these endurance, wisdom, magnanimity; illuminated, as they now are, by this dazzling success. (*W*, XI: 315-17)

Emerson replaces his previous impatience for decisive action on the part of political leaders with undisguised enthusiasm for both Lincoln and his Proclamation. The president's move on behalf of abolition elevates him considerably in Emerson's estimation: Emerson's once-lukewarm perception of the Republican candidate has become unqualified admiration, as he publicly admits,

> great as the popularity of the President has been, we are beginning to think that we have underestimated the

> capacity and virtue which the Divine Providence has made an instrument of benefit so vast. He has been permitted to do more for America than any other American man. . . . Against all timorous counsels he had the courage to seize the moment; and such was his position, and such the felicity attending the action, that he has replaced government in the good graces of mankind. (317-18)

As he does with Elijah P. Lovejoy and John Brown, Emerson assigns Lincoln a hero's status by virtue of the president's moral courage and willingness to cross the border between the Thinker and Actor and thus to further the progress of human civilization in the name of the moral sentiment. Emerson affords Lincoln the highest honor he has bestowed to date: the president has not only performed an heroic act, he has done "more for America than any other American man" (317), a considerable compliment in light of Emerson's well-established esteem for self-reliant individuals. Emerson observes that Lincoln's act "commits the country to this justice" (319) and thus to cultural and historical progress.

According to Emerson, "This act makes that the lives of our heroes have not been sacrificed in vain. It makes a victory of our defeats" (319). Emerson alludes to the "inevitableness" of the war and insists that

> [t]he war existed long before the cannonade of Sumter, and could not be postponed. It might have begun otherwise or elsewhere, but war was in the minds and bones of the combatants, it was written on the iron leaf, and you might as easily dodge gravitation. If we had consented to a peaceable secession of the rebels, the divided sentiment of the border states made peaceable secession impossible, and the slaves on the border, wherever the border might be,

were an incessant fuel to rekindle the fire. . . . The war was formidable, but could not be avoided. (322-23)

Although Emerson's previous blistering condemnation of the South has considerably abated, he continues to blame Southerners for the advent of the war, proclaiming that "those states have shown every year a more hostile and aggressive temper, until the instinct of self-preservation forced us into the war" (325). With Lincoln's executive action, Emerson can both justify Northern participation in the war and look forward to a future free of the "cancer" of slavery. He asserts that

> the aim of the war on our part is indicated by the aim of the President's Proclamation, namely, to break up the false combination of Southern society, to destroy the piratic features in it which makes it our enemy only as the enemy of the human race, and so allow its reconstruction on a just and healthful basis. Then new affinities will act, the old repulsion will cease, and, the cause of war being removed, Nature and trade may be trusted to establish a lasting peace. (325)

Emerson's enthusiasm is to be expected: after years of Thinking and Acting on behalf of emancipation, he can actually peer beyond the horizon to glimpse within the realm of the next concentric circle.

Although 1863 commenced with the Proclamation as promised, Americans would still have to suffer through another two years of war before the complete Union victory could finally be claimed. The war continued to occupy Emerson's thoughts; in April, he wrote in his Journal,

> And yet it must be confessed that the new world lies in chaos & expectation until now; that this mad war has made us all mad, that there was no minority to stand fast for

> eternal truth, & say, cannons & bayonets for such as
> already knew nothing stronger: but we are here for
> immortal resistance to wrong: we resist it by disobedience
> to every evil command, and by incessant furtherance of
> every right cause. (*JMN*, XV: 337)

Perhaps Emerson's clerical background contributed to his persistence in viewing the war as a moral crusade, but his sincerity of purpose may be attested by his consistent and unwavering support of military action when assumed on behalf of the noble sentiment. His doctrine of compensation enabled him to perceive benefits as well as losses: in one Journal entry, he contends that "[a] benefit of war is, that the appeal not being longer to letter & form, but now to the roots and strength in the people, the moral aspect becomes important, & is urgently presented & debated" (351). Emerson adheres to his earlier insistence that government exists at the sufferance of its citizens: as a tool of the people, even a martial one, it functions properly only when it serves the will of individual Thinkers and Actors in furthering the causes of humankind. An action undertaken for the common good, however costly it may appear in the present, is ultimately measured by the benefits it offers to the future. As a former clergyman, Emerson could perhaps appreciate the notion of the fruits of earlier efforts even more than many others. He was content to await the noble harvest that he was certain the war would yield.

As Emerson could view abolition in terms of a moral crusade, so he could perceive those who acted upon its principles as heroes and its Thinkers as their prophets. In his address on "The Man of Letters," delivered before the literary societies of Dartmouth and Waterville Colleges during 1863, Emerson once again defines the role of the scholar and his place within the context of the historical moment. The scholar, who occupies a "high office in evil times," is someone

> too good for the world; he is in advance of his race; his
> function is prophetic. He belongs to a superior society, and

> is born one or two centuries too early for the rough and sensual population into which he is thrown. But the Heaven which sent him hither knew that well enough, and sent him as a leader to lead. (*W*, X: 241-42)

Although "evil times" may perplex men, "[t]he inviolate soul is in perpetual telegraphic communication with the source of events. He has earlier information, a private despatch which relieves him of the terror which presses on the rest of the community. He is a learner of the laws of Nature and the experiences of history; a prophet surrendered with self-abandoning sincerity to the Heaven which pours through him its will to mankind" (242). The doctrine of compensation ensures that every right action serves its higher purpose: Emerson reemphasizes that "[t]here is no unemployed force in Nature. All decomposition is recomposition. War disorganizes, but it is to reorganize" (248).

However the war had disorganized daily life, it continued to hold for Emerson the key to a brighter future and the solution to the problems that consumed the present day. Reitering his contention that "[i]t is impossible to extricate oneself from the questions in which our age is involved" (257), Emerson explains that

> War, seeking for the roots of strength, comes upon the moral aspects at once. In quiet times, custom stifles this discussion as sentimental, and brings in the brazen devil, as by immemorial right. The war uplifted us into generous sentiments. War ennobles the age. . . . We will not again disparage America, now that we have seen what men it will bear. (257)

Emerson celebrates both the war and its heroes, proclaiming that "[t]he times are dark, but heroic. . . . Slavery is broken, and, if we use our advantage, irretrievably" (258). The war provides Actors not only with opportunities for heroism, but the potential for martyrdom--a concept which reaches as far back in Emerson's anti-slavery addresses as

the heroic *exemplum* of Elijah P. Lovejoy in "Heroism." But where the figure of Lovejoy had functioned in 1838 to illustrate Emerson's belief in abolition as a proper political expression of free speech as an abstract moral ideal, the greater number of potential martyrs in 1863 draws the more ominous assignment of effecting the implementation of emancipation as a sociopolitical reality. Emerson encourages personal sacrifice on the part of would-be heroes and even glorifies martyrdom on behalf of a worthwhile cause. He closes "The Man of Letters" with the intriguing query, "Who would not, if it could be made certain that the new morning of universal liberty should rise on our race by the perishing of one generation,--who would not consent to die?" (258)

Emerson maintains this optimistic tone in what Gougeon appropriately terms "one of the most powerful addresses of his career" ("Historical Background" lii), "The Fortune of the Republic," which he delivered in Boston on December 1, 1863. Connecting his conception of the moral sentiment with notions of patriotism and the progress of civilization, Emerson voices his continued support for the war and articulates his hopes for the America of the approaching age. He observes that "[t]here have been revolutions which were not in the interest of feudalism and barbarism, but in that of society. And these are distinguished not by the number of combatants nor the numbers of the slain, but by the motive" (*W*, XI: 514-15). Emerson's expresses his belief in the sanctity of abolitionist motives in militaristic terms when he asserts,

> When the cannon is aimed by ideas, when men with religious convictions are behind it, when men die for what they live for, and the mainspring that works daily urges them to hazard all, then the cannon articulates its explosions with the voice of a man, then the rifle seconds the cannon and the fowling-piece the rifle, and the women make the cartridges, and all shoot at one mark; then gods

join in the combat; then poets are born; and the better code
of laws at last records the victory. (515)

Emerson's battle imagery builds upon the notion of the conflict as a holy war and its participants as moral crusaders. The armaments "voice" the will of the holy warriors; the ultimate "victory" is a "code of laws," a scenario reminiscent of the biblical Ten Commandments. It appears doubtful that Emerson was attempting to create a direct connection between his hopes for emancipation in 1863 and the freeing of Hebrew slaves as recounted in the book of Exodus, but the possibility that the parallels between the two might have occurred to the former minister does not seem too remote to consider. In both cases, release of the slaves involves higher law, human action, and divine intervention--with the final result in the rebirth of a nation with new promise of virtually limitless potential.

Emerson envisioned the democratic America of the future residing on a higher moral plane: with the noble sentiment as its guide, the nation, following its presumed military victory, could conceivably proceed forward, and thus in a progressive, direction. Emerson concludes that "[t]he new conditions of mankind in America are really favorable to progress, the removal of absurd restrictions and antique inequalities" (516). He connects these hopes to patriotic concepts when he observes that "[o]ne hundred years ago the American people attempted to carry out the bill of political rights to an almost ideal perfection. They have made great strides in that direction since. They are now proceeding, instructed by their success and by their many failures, to carry out, not the bill of rights, but the bill of human duties" (517). Emerson ingeniously equates contemporary motives with venerated ideals from the pages of American history; in this way, he creates subtle yet tangible links between the moral and patriotic ideology of the past, the present, and the future. He then ties these notions to spiritual allusions, suggesting that "[o]ur helm is given up to a better guidance than our own; the course of events is quite too strong for any helmsman, and our little wherry is taken in tow by the

ship of the great Admiral which knows the way, and has the force to draw men and states and planets to their good" (543). Emerson's final thoughts leave a positive impression; he tells his audience that "[i]n seeing this guidance of events, in seeing this felicity without example that has rested on the Union thus far, I find new confidence for the future" (544).

Emerson maintained his confidence for the future throughout the remainder of the war; and at one point in 1864, he wrote in his Journal that "War ennobles the Country; searches it; fires it; acquaints it with its resources; turns it away from false alliances, vain hopes, & theatric attitudes; puts it on its mettle; 'in ourselves safety must be sought'; gives it scope & object; concentrates history into a year, invents means; systematizes everything. We began the war in vast confusion; when we end it, it will be in system" (*JMN*, XV: 453). The entry echoes the sentiment of his "Man of Letters" speech, which asserts a similar claim that "[w]ar ennobles the age" (*W*, X: 257), but here, Emerson looks towards the war's resolution, which he appears to anticipate in the not-so-distant future. His private records indicate that he continued to consider the war a worthwhile expenditure for which the imminent gains offset the potential losses; he ponders that "The War has cost us many valuable lives; but perhaps it has compensated us, by making many lives valuable that were not so before,--through the start & expansion it has given them. It has demoralized many rebel regiments; but I hold that it has *moralized* many of ours" (*JMN*, XV: 434-35). The final remark reflects Emerson's consistency in viewing both slavery and the war in moral terms: in 1864, the notion of sacrificing oneself in the name of the noble sentiment remains an open opportunity for heroic Thinkers to act upon their convictions and to publish their courage, character, and essential self-reliance. Individuals continue to possess the potential power to effect sociopolitical change: "Great men," according to Emerson, "serve us as insurrections do in bad governments" ("Character," *W*, X: 102). In "Resources," he adds that "[t]he whole history of our civil war is rich in a thousand anecdotes attesting the fertility of

resource, the presence of mind, the skilled labor of our people" (*W*, VIII: 143-44).[35]

Emerson revisits his concept of individual heroism in "Character," an address he delivered during the winter of 1864-1865. Reasserting his early claim that "[t]he moral sentiment is alone omnipotent" (*W*, X: 96), Emerson reminds his listeners that "[h]e who doth a just action seeth therein nothing of his own, but an inconceivable nobleness attaches to it, because it is a dictate of the general mind. We have no idea of power so simple and so entire as this. It is the basis of thought, it is the basis of being" (94). He adds that "[t]he sentiment never stops in pure vision, but will be enacted. It affirms not only its truth, but its supremacy" (103). Thinking thus leads predictably to Acting, and then, finally, to change and historical progression, but Emerson is quick to remind his audience that while ideas and events prove transient, the spirit that drives the moral sentiment remains a permanent fixture in nature. Recalling notions first articulated in *Nature*, he observes that "[t]he changes are inevitable; the new age cannot see with the eyes of the last. But the change is in what is superficial; the principles are immortal, and the rally on the principle must arrive as people become intellectual" (108).

For Emerson and the abolitionists, the "new age" which they had so long anticipated was about to materialize. Robert E. Lee surrendered to Union forces on April 9, 1865, and Emerson expressed his considerable enthusiasm in the pages of his Journal. In one entry, he proclaims, "We see the dawn of a new era, worth to mankind all the treasure & all the lives it has cost, yet, worth to the world the lives of all this generation of American men, if they had been demanded" (*JMN*, XV: 64). Emerson viewed the war as "a new glass through which to see things"; he contends that "[t]he war has made the Divine Providence credible to a good many people. They did not believe that Heaven was quite honest" (65). Victory appeared to mark the triumph of the moral sentiment and to signal the beginning of the next phase in the progression of American culture and history: the Thinkers had thought, the Actors had acted, and society was poised on the very perimeter of the next concentric circle. A considerable price had been

paid for the privilege, but the victorious moment made the weighty sacrifice seem worthwhile. Emerson felt genuine gratitude towards the individual Actors who had played their heroic parts, and his doctrine of compensation enabled him to perceive the loss of lives that resulted from the war as a fair exchange for the final emancipation of American slaves. When the rebels surrendered, Emerson and others had no way of knowing that one more sacrifice remained to be made.

Emerson drew the unhappy task of addressing the citizens of Concord at the funeral services for President Lincoln on April 19, 1865. In this speech, Emerson eulogizes the fallen leader as the truest of American heroes. He observes that

> [i]n four years,--four years of battle-days,--his endurance, his fertility of resources, his magnanimity, were sorely tried and never found wanting. There, by his courage, his justice, his even temper, his fertile counsel, his humanity, he stood a heroic figure in the centre of a heroic epoch. He is the true history of the American people in his time. Step by step he walked before them; slow with their slowness, quickening his march by theirs, the true representative of this continent; an entirely public man; father of his country, the pulse of twenty millions throbbing in his heart, the thought of their mind articulated by his tongue. (*W*, XI: 335)

Emerson elevates Lincoln on both moral and sociopolitical grounds: identifying him as an heroic Actor, Emerson places the president in the historical center of both the nation and its people. Emerson creates a patriotic parallel between Lincoln and Washington in his designation of the former as "father of his country," and he praises the president's suitability to the historical moment in terms of his self-reliance. Emerson observes that "[h]is mind mastered the problem of the day; and as the problem grew, so did his

comprehension of it. Rarely was man so fitted to the event" (334). The sentiment recalls his contention in "Self-Reliance" that "[e]very true man is a cause, a country, and an age" (*W*, II: 61). For Emerson, Lincoln had functioned admirably as a Thinker, as an Actor, and as a facilitator of human progress. And as the fruits of that progress were finally to be realized, the hero became a martyr.

Lincoln's martyrdom in pursuit of a noble purpose places him on a parallel plane with Emerson's earlier martyred heroes, Elijah P. Lovejoy and John Brown. With his lament for Lincoln, Emerson's elegies on behalf of abolitionist leaders come full circle: Lovejoy perishes trying to publish his anti-slavery thoughts; Brown is executed for acting upon his abolitionist convictions; and Lincoln is assassinated after he announces emancipation and thus propels history forward into the next concentric circle. Emerson suggests in "Abraham Lincoln" that the president had fulfilled his historical role; he queries, "Had he not lived long enough to keep the greatest promise that ever man made to his fellow men,--the practical abolition of slavery?" (336). Emerson appears to believe that Lincoln served the interests of humankind as much by his death as he had by his life; he ponders,

> And what if it should turn out, in the unfolding of the web, that he had reached the term; that this heroic deliverer could no longer serve us; that the rebellion had touched its natural conclusion, and what remained to be done required new and uncommitted hands,--a new spirit born out of the ashes of the war; and that Heaven, wishing to show the world a completed benefactor, shall make him serve his country even more by his death than by his life? (336)

Emerson's alluding to Lincoln as both a "deliverer" and a spirit who could serve the needs of humanity through his death creates a subtle yet unmistakable christological connection. Of all of Emerson's martyrs, Lincoln most closely approaches Christ in the

single distinction that, he, at the time of his death, had successfully completed his assigned tasks. Like others of his generation, Emerson recognized the fallen president as "first American," an image that Bercovitch explains as "neither *earliest* nor *greatest* nor *most Christ-like*, but *most like America*" (151). Although Emerson clearly perceived Lincoln in many ways as Christ-like, it is important to note that he assigned an equal degree of significance to his patriotic purposes.

After the war ended, Emerson acknowledged other patriot/martyrs who had promoted and defended the abolitionist cause. In his "Harvard Commemoration Speech," delivered on July 21, 1865, Emerson analyzes the results of the war in philosophical terms and proclaims it a moral and sociopolitical victory. He equates military success with a higher purpose, observing that "[t]he War has lifted many other people besides Grant and Sherman into their true places. Even Divine Providence, we may say, always seems to work after a certain military necessity" (*W*, XI: 341-42). Emerson believed that the North had won the war on the strength of its moral advantage; at one point in the address, he informs his audience that "[t]he war gave back integrity to this erring and immoral nation" (342). This slight hint of a religious undertone, which in the given context seems rather reminiscent of the jeremiad, adds a spiritual element which functions in a subtle manner to convert Union soldiers into genuine holy warriors. Emerson exclaims, "What an infusion of character went out from this and other colleges! . . . The experience has been uniform that it is the gentle soul that makes the firm hero after all" (342).

The heroic actions of both the martyrs and the survivors have succeeded in setting things "right"; the undesirable, outmoded There or Then has been defeated by conscientious Thinkers and Actors seeking to replace it with the long-desired, morally superior Here and Now. Society has proceeded into the next concentric circle, and Emerson and his audience welcome historical progression and the apparent promise and potential of the coming age. Emerson creates an analogy between past and present

military triumphs when he asserts, "The old Greek Heraclitus said, 'War is the Father of all things.' He said it, no doubt, as science, but we of this day can repeat it as political and social truth. War passes the power of all chemical solvents, breaking up the old adhesions, and allowing the atoms of society to take a new order" (341). Emerson characteristically focuses on the role played in the war by Massachusetts and its citizens, referring to the state as "the parent of all the North" and "the diffuser of religious, literary and political opinion" (343). He credits Massachusetts with definitive leadership in the Union effort and asserts, "when I see how irresistible the convictions of Massachusetts are in these swarming populations,--I think the little state bigger than I knew. When her blood is up, she has a fist big enough to knock down an empire. And her blood was roused" (343-44). Recalling the courage of Massachusetts soldiers, he concludes the speech with a sincere expression of recognition, pride, and gratitude. Addressing the surviving heroes as "manly defenders, Liberty's and Humanity's bodyguard!" he contends that "[w]e shall not again disparage America, now that we have seen what men it will bear. We see--we thank you for it--a new era, worth to mankind all the treasure and all the lives it has cost; yes, worth to the world the lives of all this generation of American men, if they had been demanded" (344-45).

Fortunately, the war did not require a sacrifice in Massachusetts lives to the extent that it consumed an entire generation; nevertheless, the cost was a great one, and Concord alone lost forty-four of its young men in pursuit of the Union victory. In a speech delivered on the occasion of the dedication of the soldiers' monument in Concord on April 19, 1867, Emerson recounts the history of Concord's war effort and evaluates the sacrifice in terms of gains and losses. He devotes a great deal of attention to the heroes, including his own "next neighbor," Captain Charles E. Bowers, who survived, and courageous Colonel George L. Prescott, who did not.[36] Emerson creates a connection between Bowers and his earlier hero, John Brown, by identifying both as possessing "an integrity incorruptible, and an ability that always rose to the need" (*W*,

XI: 360). But he focuses most of his efforts on lionizing Prescott, the martyr, to whose character and heroic exploits he devotes nearly half of the somewhat lengthy dedicatory address. Emerson traces the progress of Prescott and his 32nd Regiment through many of the major events of the war, including the Battle of Bull Run, McClellan's retreat in the Peninsula, and additional battles at Harrison's Landing, Antietam, Fredericksburg, Gettysburg, Rappahannock Station, Baltimore, and Laurel Hill. This approach enables him both to recall the setbacks and successes of the army in general and to feature Colonel Prescott individually as a local heroic *exemplum*. Emerson is aided in his identification of the war as a sacrifice in the name of a spiritual cause by the martyrdom of Prescott, who was ultimately mortally wounded. He quotes a letter from a member of Prescott's regiment, who wrote that "'[Colonel Prescott] was one of the few men who fight for principle. He did not fight for glory, honor, nor money, but because he thought it was his duty'" (373).

Like Lovejoy, Brown, and Lincoln, Prescott becomes a martyr on behalf of abolition as a sociopolitical expression of the notion of the moral sentiment. But the example of Prescott enables Emerson to bring various aspects of the war experience into clear focus and to bring them home to Massachusetts and, finally, Concord. He declares that "[t]his new Monument is built to mark the arrival of the nation at the new principle,--say, rather, at its new acknowledgment, for the principle is as old as Heaven,--that only that state can live, in which injury to the least member is recognized as damage to the whole" (352). Emerson analyzes the results of the war in moral and spiritual terms, asserting that "[t]he war made Divine Providence credible to many who did not believe the good Heaven quite honest. . . . the country was at heart abolitionist, and for the Union was ready to die" (354-55). In Emerson's view, the war finally made the country "right" by providing an effective means by which individuals could act upon the principles of the moral sentiment to eradicate slavery in the United States, and thereby progress to the next concentric circle in the cycle of human events. Emerson concludes

the dedication with the observation that

> The world is equal to itself. The secret architecture of things begins to disclose itself; the fact that all things were made on a basis of right; that justice is really desired by all intelligent beings; that opposition to it is against the nature of things; and that, whatever may happen in this hour or that, the years and the centuries are always pulling down the wrong and building up the right. (354)

In his "Address at the Dedication of Soldiers' Monument in Concord," Emerson finally lays the long fight for emancipation of the slaves to rest with Prescott and the other anti-slavery martyrs. The moral purpose which had commanded his thoughts and actions and had pervaded his Journal and addresses for more than three decades had finally prevailed, and this unusual chapter in Emerson's life and career would close in the very same place at which it had opened: "close to home" in Concord, Massachusetts.

CONCLUSION

A CAUSE, A COUNTRY, AND AN AGE

> Men are as they think. A certain quantity of power belongs to a certain quantity of truth. And the man who knows any truth not yet discerned by other men is master of all other men, so far as that truth and its wide relations are concerned.
>
> -- Emerson, "The Celebration of Intellect" (1861)

Although Ralph Waldo Emerson continues to be recognized primarily as a transcendentalist philosopher, the record of his thirty-year struggle with the issue of American slavery reveals his to have been a life punctuated by both ideas and events. As he articulated his influential ideology in *Nature* and *Essays, First* and *Second Series*, Emerson remained acutely aware of the significance of human events occurring in the world around him. While the essays he produced prior to 1845 delineate his personal philosophy in essentially abstract terms, Emerson's public addresses provide concrete illustrations of these moral principles as responses to developing historical circumstances. Ideologically consistent with the concepts explored in the early essays, Emerson's anti-slavery speeches reveal an evolution in his perception of their appropriate sociopolitical application from exclusive moral contemplation in the 1840s, to passive and later active civil disobedience throughout the 1850s, and finally to unqualified support for the Civil War as a means to eradicate "this cancerous slavery" (*JMN*, XV: 145). By the time the war commenced, Emerson had perceived and published the notion of slavery as a moral aberration, had taken both private and public action to compel its abolition, and was morally and politically prepared to eliminate the "wild, savage, and preposterous There or Then, and introduce in its place the Here and the Now" (*W*, II: 11).

Emerson's anti-slavery addresses reflect an acute awareness of the significance of developing historical circumstances and the resulting need for social and political change.

Emerson perceived reform as a moral process which originated within the souls of self-reliant individuals and radiated outward from them toward society as a whole. As the moral sentiment arises, the individual Thinker contemplates it from within the privacy of his own mind to consider its potential significance to other individuals before releasing it for public debate. Release constitutes publication of the thought; the Thinker thereby offers his notion for contemplation among other Thinkers and introduces the possibility of both individual and collective action on its behalf. If the idea compels the sympathy of other Thinkers, heroic individuals can then become Actors for the benefit of the moral sentiment. Once Actors produce tangible sociopolitical results, society can move forward: human culture gains, history progresses, and the cycle recommences with the next appearance of the moral sentiment within the soul of an individual Thinker.

Emerson observes in *Nature* that "[a]t the call of a noble sentiment. . . . the spells of persuasion, the keys of power are put into [the individual's] hands" (*W*, I: 31-32). Nature facilitates the movement from Thinker and Actor, and the heroic act elevates the individual above both society and circumstances. In his early examples of John Milton and George Fox, Emerson illustrates the importance of publication and action on behalf of the principles of liberty within the context of a specific historical era. With his elevation of Elijah P. Lovejoy in "Heroism," Emerson creates a connection between the image of the hero and the notion of the noble sentiment that insists upon the necessity of carrying the notion through to its ultimate conclusion, even to the point of martyrdom. Emerson's outspoken advocacy of John Brown and his identification of Brown's as a sacred and spiritual purpose reveals the practical extent of such an all-consuming need for individual action. Near the end of the pre-war period, Brown personified for Emerson the notion of self-trust, and so embodied the Emersonian conception of the quintessential self-reliant Actor. As the war itself closed, this heroic role would be played by Abraham Lincoln, the martyr among Emerson's heroic *exempla* who most closely approaches the figure of Christ in his achievement of specific goals on behalf of the moral sentiment.

Emerson's appreciation of martyrdom in pursuit of a noble cause continued throughout the war and to its final resolution; at the dedication of the Soldiers' Monument in 1867, he brings his heroes home to Concord and acknowledges the extent of the human sacrifice exacted as payment for the moral and sociopolitical victory achieved by emancipation.

Although Emerson never truly dismissed his skepticism for organized reform, it is important to recognize that he did not view the abolition of slavery as a typical reform cause. As early as 1836, he had privately ascertained that slavery was the definitive moral issue of his age, and even in 1841, he had publicly insisted that "the subject of the times is not an abstract question" (*W*, I: 261). Only an issue of the moral sentiment could have commanded Emerson's attention to such an unprecedented extent, and only a notion that he had contemplated, considered, and concluded to be a moral aberration would have prompted him to take self-reliant action. Emerson did not take his evolution from philosopher to political activist lightly: all indications point to the conclusion that he would have preferred to remain in his ivory tower and continue to consider the nature of Man and of the universe from which he proceeds. But when the opportunity arose to illustrate the principles of his own ideology, Emerson did not hesitate to "assume the post" that fate had seemingly assigned him. He followed his own advice in "Self-Reliance" and "[a]ccept[ed] the place the divine providence [had] found for [him], the society of [his] contemporaries, the connection of events" (*W*, II: 47). When his task was completed, he resumed his previous course on the lecture circuit as if the three-decade episode had never occurred, and found himself in even greater demand as a speaker than he had been before the war. Allen attributes Emerson's popularity during the 1860s to his having become "the conscience of the nation--at least in the North and West" (626), and Sherman Paul contends that "a halo of veneration settled over his later years" (6). Emerson had maintained an active interest in abolition as a developing sociopolitical issue, but recognizing its inherent transience in the history of human events, he moved on to other subjects once the issue had finally been settled.

Emerson's recognition of the transient nature of human history represents perhaps the most consistent aspect of his personal ideology. "Every revolution," he writes in "History," "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" (*W*, II: 4-5). Viewing change as a positive sign of human progress, Emerson perceived the need for a continual reevaluation of the present and a willingness to adapt it to suit the fluctuating reality of changing personal, social, and political conditions. Initially content to allow the slavery issue to reach what he believed would be its inevitable conclusion, Emerson grew impatient with its apparent stagnation in the hands of political leaders and elected to take action by exerting his considerable influence to publicly voice his private concerns and to call for decisive action on behalf of the moral sentiment. Emerson realized that both he and the nation were riding the circumference of a smaller circle that was about to yield to the strength of a larger one. Ultimately, he actively sought transcendence into the subsequent realm, secure in the soundness of his convictions and completely optimistic concerning his hopes for the final success of the endeavor.

In "Intellect," Emerson contends that "[a]ll our progress is unfolding, like the vegetable bud. You have first an instinct, then an opinion, then a knowledge, as the plant has root, bud and fruit. Trust the instinct to the end, though you can render no reason. It is vain to hurry it. By trusting it to the end, it shall ripen into truth and you shall know why you believe" (*W*, II: 330). Like his own self-reliant heroes, Emerson trusted his anti-slavery instinct from its private beginning to its public end: he allowed himself to develop his initial instincts by considering slavery as a moral issue; he published the opinions at which he arrived by making the public transition from contemplative Thinker to politically-conscious Actor; and he accompanied the knowledge of his convictions into the next concentric circle in the cycle of human events. In doing so, he created for himself, however inadvertently, an indisputable place within the intellectual, social, and

political history of his own era. He had essentially become what he refers to in "The Poet" as "the foremost watchman," he who announces the news of the age (*W*, III: 11). On behalf of the moral sentiment as expressed through the issue of slavery, Emerson had articulated and published his unique version of "the truest word ever spoken," and his would ultimately represent perhaps "the fittest, most musical, and the unerring voice of the world for that time" (13).

Notes

[1] Ziff also observes that the common belief that Emerson's work peaked in the years prior to and including 1844 is "a judgment in need of reexamination" and that "his reputation continued to grow beyond that year, and his essays continued to kindle new lights and shape new shadows" (16). Ziff's comments naturally emphasize Emerson's later essays; the present study will focus on Emerson's public addresses. Ziff points to Emerson's own admission that his creative powers diminished following the Civil War, but such a decline did not adversely affect his popularity as a speaker, which steadily increased throughout his long career.

[2] Cayton contends that "[w]ith the completion of an 1850 lecture swing through the Ohio and Mississippi valleys, Emerson had become a man of national stature. By the time of his death in 1882, he had published ten books, lectured all over the United States and the British Isles, and served as an overseer of Harvard University (which had for many years following the Divinity School Address barred his presence there). Admired throughout the United States and Europe as the very model of the truthful man, the dissident in time became the most widely acclaimed American of his day" (238).

[3] In a claim similar to Ziff's observation concerning the common belief that Emerson's work declined after 1844, Cayton establishes 1845 as the date of Emerson's "metamorphosis of philosophy" from "the implications of republicanism" to "the culture of bourgeois individualism" (239).

[4] See Elkins 27-34 and 140-222.

[5] See Allen 97-98 and Barish 116-17.

[6] References to Emerson's works are from *The Complete Works of Ralph Waldo Emerson*, henceforth abbreviated *W*, unless otherwise indicated.

[7] I take exception to Cayton's contention that the antislavery issue constituted a reform movement that Emerson "could not refuse to support actively" (240). Like any

activist, Emerson retained the right of refusal; his election to enter the public debate constituted a choice based on personal character, consideration, and consistency rather than some means of (external) "compulsion."

[8] See Gougeon "Abolition" and Ellen Tucker Emerson 83-84.

[9] Rusk declares Emerson "avowedly an abolitionist" as of January, 1861 (408); Allen notes Emerson's suggestion to his listeners that they support the Anti-Slavery Society in his Second Fugitive Slave Law Address in New York on March 7, 1854 (556-58).

[10] All material from Emerson's Journals is cited from *The Journals and Miscellaneous Notebooks of Ralph Waldo Emerson*, henceforth abbreviated *JMN*, unless otherwise noted. Emerson's quote "it is felt. . . . so poor" is from one of his own letters to James Elliot Cabot.

[11] See Bercovitch 1-71 and 136-86.

[12] See Henretta and Nobles 178-85 and Bailey 61-63.

[13] These and many of the subsequent lectures are taken from *Early Lectures of Ralph Waldo Emerson*, hereafter designated as *EL*.

[14] Whicher et al identify John Toland as an early Milton biographer.

[15] Whicher et al indicate that Emerson utilizes "Plutarch's Symposiacs," Book VIII, *Morals*, III, 432: "'. . . no other opinion . . . which is equal, just' (*W*, III: 203)" (72).

[16] See Gougeon, "Abolition" 345-64.

[17] For more on the "Myth of America," see Bercovitch 136-86.

[18] "The Transcendentalist" was read at the Masonic Temple in Boston in January of 1842.

[19] See Allen 424-30 and Gougeon's "Historical Background" to *Emerson's Antislavery Writings* xxvii-xxxi.

[20] For accounts of the Hoar incident, see Allen 429-30, Rusk 303-06, and Gougeon's "Historical Background" xxx-xxxi.

[21] Speeches taken from *Emerson's Anti-Slavery Writings* hereafter cited in the text are abbreviated *AW*.

[22] See Johnson 171-89.

[23] See Hughes 273-86.

[24] In his "Historical Background" to *Emerson's Antislavery Writings*, Gougeon notes that the lecture marked the first time Emerson had presented an antislavery lecture so frequently since his first Fugitive Slave Law address and asserts that Emerson "undoubtedly felt that the times demanded it" (xliii).

[25] According to Gougeon's note, "Emerson may be referring to any one of the four governors of Massachusetts during this period: George N. Briggs (1796-1861), governor 1844-1851; George S. Boutell (1818-1905), governor 1851-1853; John H. Clifford (1809-1876), governor 1853-1854; and Emory Washburn (1800-1877), governor 1854-1855" (217).

[26] John W. Dower observes that image-makers during World War II used "images of apes and vermin" to illustrate the "subhuman" nature of the enemy and to demonstrate the presumed "inferiority" of its ideology and "'national character'" (9). Emerson's characterization of the people of the South as "animals" is consistent with this approach; having already criticized leaders for their failure to resolve the slavery issue, he redirects his accusations to implicate the people who support the enemy position. By questioning the character and integrity of the people of the South, Emerson perpetuates and intensifies his long-established dichotomy between "right" and "wrong" causes, firmly placing the North on the side of "right" and equating the South with "wrong." See Dower 3-14.

[27] See Edward Emerson, "Notes" (*W*, XI: 595-97).

[28] The president to whom Emerson refers is Franklin Pierce, whose administration sided with the pro-slavery forces in Kansas.

[29] See Allen 556-87.

[30] For a detailed description of Brown's raid on Harper's Ferry, see Villard 391-466. For analysis, see Bailey 350-52. For more on Emerson's response to the raid, see Allen 588-92.

[31] According to Edward Emerson's "Notes," the text of "Courage" represents an edited version of Emerson's actual speech. Published eleven years subsequent to Emerson's address, the essay "underwent many changes, passages written during the shame and anger of the dark days before the war disappearing when the essay took on its more classic form, and some proud memories of that great struggle taking their place" (*W*, VII: 427).

[32] The South threatened secession in 1856, a move which was delayed by the election of James Buchanan. Although the South won a temporary victory with the Dred Scott decision in March of 1857 (which determined that the territories could not legally prohibit slavery prior to attaining statehood), the election of Lincoln in 1860 shattered pro-slavery hopes for a continuation of the institution and prompted the actual secession. For additional information, see Bailey 337-56.

[33] Cabot appears to paraphrase Emerson's speech here rather than to quote it directly. He indicates his source as the *Boston Evening Transcript* for November 13, 1861.

[34] In this apparent synopsis, Cabot again seems to be paraphrasing Emerson; he does not indicate a source for the speech and does not use quotation marks. In the introduction to his Appendix "F," Cabot announces his intention to provide "abstracts" of Emerson's unpublished papers, "as far as possible in his own words, with reference to passages which have been printed" (II: 710). Neither "Moral Forces" nor "American Nationality" appears in Emerson's *Works*.

[35] "Resources" constituted one of six weekly lectures delivered before the Parker Fraternity at the Melodeon in Boston during the winter of 1864-1865.

[36] Emerson's anecdote does not specifically name Captain Bowers or label him

as Emerson's "next neighbor"; this information is provided in Edward Emerson's "Notes" (*W*, XI: 619). Colonel Prescott is directly identified by Emerson in the address.

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