

NOT WITH SYLLABLES BUT MEN:

EMERSON'S POETICS OF THE WHOLE

John Lysaker

Emory University

*for Garrett Hongo and Terry Hummer,
knowers and sayers*

"Art is the Urge."

Ralph Waldo Emerson,
Journals and Miscellaneous Notebooks, 1840

"Poetry is the *gai science*.
The trait of the poet is that he builds, adds, and affirms."

Ralph Waldo Emerson, "Poetry and Imagination"

There are at least two Emersons, or rather, one, manifold Emerson and no less than two sets of Emersonians. One cluster, currently vigorous, valorizes Emerson's recoiling perspectivalism, his recurring insistence that phenomena like moods and temperament (or tropes, for that matter) foreshorten whatever clarity one might find in 'kingdoms of cause and effect,' in the "middle region," "amid surfaces," or even along the "subterranean and invisible tunnels and channels of life," to invoke the varied, eco-psychic geography of "Experience." Another bunch is drawn to the ecstatic sallies that depart these regions in an effort to map our condition, to "expand our orbit" as "Circles" would have it, to find the shores of our departures and ports for our bearing. But this group has been less vocal of late, which leads me to fear that we might be overly domesticating Emerson, trimming whatever shoots rise above the nominalist, often pragmatic contours of our critical present. I thus offer this essay as something of a counter-swing, a kind of reversal one might find in an essay like "Nominalist and Realist," one that says, in effect, 'yes, but not so fast.'

"Man lives by pulses," Emerson writes in "Experience."¹ I wish to explore a set of such pulses. They arrive courtesy of the muses and stand among the wildest phenomena in Emerson's corpus, namely, art and poetry, and it is precisely their abandon that renders them exemplary for one interested in recalling us to Emerson's boldest affirmations. Moreover, a kind of unbridled enthusiasm for the work of art spans Emerson's corpus. In his lectures, for example, several texts struggle to fathom art's power. Some concern particular artists and poets such as Milton, Michelangelo, Hafiz, and Shakespeare while others pursue more general themes like the nature of art and poetic figuration as well as their import for self-knowledge and self-culture. And these themes appear across his career, from early lectures on "Biography" (1835) and "English Literature" (1835-36) to later ones like "Poetry and English Poetry" (1854), the series "Life and Literature" (1861), and the very late pair, "Imagination" and "Poetry" (1872).

Questions concerning art and poetry also appear in most of the essay collections, e.g. "Art" (*Essays: First Series*), "The Poet" (*Essays: Second Series*), "Beauty" (*Conduct of Life*), "Art" (*Society and Solitude*), and "Poetry and the Imagination" (*Letters and Social Aims*). Equally significant is the organization of the first two collections. *Essays: First Series* closes with "Art" and *Essays: Second Series* commences with "The Poet." On the one hand, essays that begin these collections orient a whole that, by its very nature, eschews an axiomatic or even inferential structure in favor of leitmotifs and whatever pools and eddies their confluence generates. Opening overtures thus resonate throughout the volume, even if those ventures are transformed by what follows, as with "game," which appears in the poems that open "The Poet" and "Experience" and recurs in some central, late lines in "Nominalist and Realist," the rhetorical close of *Essays: Second Series*. On the other hand, essays that are given the final word or words accentuate leading lines of thought, thereby returning the reader to previous essays

¹ Ralph Waldo Emerson, *Essays and Poems* (New York: Literary Classics of the United States, Inc., 1996), p. 482.

with an eye for their more salient concerns, even if the closing essay foregoes a summation, as with "Art," e.g. when it invokes an "aboriginal power," which recalls the "aboriginal Self" of "Self-Reliance."² Or consider the claim that art should "throw down the wall of circumstance on every side," which recalls complementary thoughts in "Circles," e.g. the "only sin is limitation."³ It is thus noteworthy that two of Emerson's most significant collections give pride of place to two essays focused upon the power of art and poetry.⁴

In Emerson's writings on art and poetry, poetry is the favored child, though in a qualified sense, as we will see. Besides being a poet in his own right, Emerson also edited *Parnassus* in 1875, a collection of poems that he copied out over the years from the likes of Herrick, Wordsworth, and Shakespeare, as well as the occasional woman poet, for example, Julia Ward Howe, Lady Anne Lindsay, and a Mrs. Barbauld.⁵ Also, *Representative Men* gives us essays on Shakespeare ("or, the Poet") and Goethe ("or, the Writer"), but none on sculptors or painters, though he praises sculpture in the late lecture, "Art," which he delivered several times between 1861 and 1869. And yet, in order to offer this praise, he quotes, in full, a nine-stanza poem by the English poet, John Sterling, and closes the lecture with that poem,

thus giving the final word to poetry.⁶ But most importantly, none of Emerson's remarks on painting or sculpture rise to the rhapsody of "The Poet," where we read that a poet is the "principal event in chronology" and the "true and only doctor," that poetry is "true science," and that poets are "liberating gods." For Emerson, then, poetry, though not exclusively, best exemplifies the transformative power of art.

Because Emerson finds poetic language so remarkable, I want to come to terms with his assertions on its behalf, to determine why, on his view, poetry is healing and liberatory, and to determine how it manages such remarkable feats. To that end, I will focus on the "The Poet" from *Essays: Second Series*. Presuming that "Poetry and Imagination" (1875) was in part assembled by his daughter, Ellen, and his literary executor, James Elliot Cabot, "The Poet" marks Emerson's most sustained treatment. Moreover, Emerson's feel for poetic figuration does not dramatically change over the course of his career.⁷ But "The Poet" has its limits. Notably, it offers few concrete analyses of how poetic language achieves (or approximates) its end. Other texts must come into play, therefore, including various poems (or parts of poems), though not necessarily Emerson's own.

"Poetry," Emerson writes in a lecture of 1841, "finds its origin in that *need of expression* which is a primary impulse of nature."⁸ "The Poet" from 1844, elaborates:

² *Ibid.*, p. 434, 268.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 437, 406.

⁴ Note also that the last collection, *Letters and Social Aims*, opens with "Poetry and the Imagination," though I hesitate to make too much of that volume given how much of its shape is due to hands other than Emerson's. For a detailed account of the book's editorial history, see Ronald Bosco's massive historical introduction to Volume VIII in *The Collected Works of Ralph Waldo Emerson* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2010).

⁵ A review of *Parnassus* indicates Emerson's conception of gender. The text is arranged thematically. Under "Human Life," one finds the sub-topics "Home, Woman, Love, Friendship, Manners, Holy Days, Holidays." Under "Contemplative – Moral – Religious," one finds the sub-topics "Man, Virtue, Honor, Time, Fate, Sleep, Dreams, Life, Death, Immortality, Hymns and Odes." This suggests that Emerson understands men and women to have distinct temperaments or ways of inhabiting the cosmos, and that each is fitted for different subject matters. But that is an issue for another time.

⁶ Ralph Waldo Emerson, *The Later Lectures of Ralph Waldo Emerson. Volume II: 1855-1871* (Athens, Georgia: University of Georgia Press, 2001), pp. 224-225.

⁷ Both "The Poet" (1844) and "Poetry and English Poetry" (1854), for example, present poetry as the true science, and precisely because it finds unity beneath change, wholeness across nature's diverse forms and trajectories. (Notably, "Poetry and Imagination" concurs.) In order to further defend the claim that Emerson maintains a consistent (which is not to say identical) conception of poetry throughout his career, throughout I will illustrate agreements between texts of different periods, although I will not call particular attention to this agreement, if only because there are more interesting matters to discuss.

⁸ Ralph Waldo Emerson, *The Early Lectures of Ralph Waldo Emerson. Volume III: 1838-1842* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1972), pp. 348-349.

For all men live by truth, and stand in need of expression. In love, in art, in avarice, in politics, in labor, in games, we study to utter our painful secret. The man is only half himself, the other half is his expression.⁹

I begin with these remarks because a perceived need lies at the heart of Emerson's high esteem for poets. Humans, he believes, must manifest their character, express it in a wealth of performances, a wealth equal to the richness of that character, or they suffer – "That man is serene who does not feel himself pinched and wronged by his condition but whose condition in general and in particular allows the utterance of his mind; and that man who cannot utter himself goes moaning all the day."¹⁰ Where Adam Smith sees an innate need to truck, barter, and exchange, Emerson sees a broader trajectory: a need to find one's character written into the world that one inhabits.¹¹

Notably, this broader trajectory is at once intellectual and practical. It begins in actions: gardening, clothing, what we buy and where, and so forth. But it culminates in a recognition of the truth of those actions, that is, the expression we seek must successfully reflect us back to ourselves, and for that, we need words. In his concept of expression, therefore, Emerson weds a sense of human restlessness, what Nietzsche later presents as pro-active desires, with the desire to understand that Aristotle finds integral to being human. And it is within that braid of lack and burgeoning surplus that the need for poetry germinates.

Unfortunately, most fail to find adequate expression. "We but half express ourselves," says "Self-Reliance," "and are ashamed of that divine idea which each of us

represents."¹² The problem is not merely one of cowardice, however. As the essay "The Poet" explains: "but the great majority of men seem to be minors, who have not come into possession of their own, or mutes, who cannot *report the conversation they have had with nature*."¹³ This remark is interesting in at least two ways (or three, since it offers a poetic redirection of Kant's claim that pre-enlightenment culture and character has not yet reached maturity or *Mündigkeit*). First, it suggests that many of us, even courageous ones, lack the ability to express all that we are. Second, we now have a better sense of what "expression" (and what a human life) entails: a manifestation of our character as it arises within an ongoing conversation with nature. What is to be expressed is not some internal state of affairs but the truth of our character as it appears to us, as it is disclosed in what the essay "Experience" terms "the world I converse with in the city and in the farms."¹⁴ To be precise, Emerson denies neither interiority, i.e. manifold self-relations like feeling inspired or self-trust, nor its influence. Rather, his claim is that interiority bears the impress of manifold worldly relations such that the truth of our condition is the whole in which the genuine character of all our relations appears. In this at least, Emerson is thoroughly Hegelian: "The true is the whole."¹⁵

Let me underscore that the issue before us is one of genuine relation. The whole that is the true is not an undifferentiated unity, some perpetually congealing globe of divine essence. Instead, it involves multiple interactions and the differences (and the differentiation) those interactions presume. Moreover, for Emerson, as

⁹ Emerson, *Essays and Poems*, p. 448.

¹⁰ Emerson, *The Early Lectures of Ralph Waldo Emerson. Volume III*, p. 349.

¹¹ This need and Emerson's proposals for addressing it are the principal concern of my *Emerson and Self-Culture* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2008). For Smith's observation, see *Wealth of Nations* (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 1981), p. 25.

¹² Emerson, *Essays and Poems*, p. 260.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 448 – emphases added.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 491.

¹⁵ G.W.F. Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. A.V. Miller (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), p. 11. Emerson's sources for metaphysical holism are no doubt manifold (as are Hegel's), drawing from neo-Platonic thought and Vedanta. I note this to underscore Buell's important insistence that Emerson's thought springs from and wishes to return to world culture and neither from nor towards a purely domestic let alone exceptionalist discussion. Lawrence Buell, *Emerson* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003).

for Hegel, our thicket of relations relentlessly becomes, as does all of nature.

That rushing stream will not stop to be observed. We can never surprise nature in a corner; never find the end of a thread; never tell where to set the first stone. ... If anything could stand still, it would be crushed and dissipated by the torrent it resisted, and if it were a mind, would be crazed; as insane persons are those who hold fast to one thought, and do not flow with the course of nature.¹⁶

Bringing this thought from "The Method of Nature" into the task of self-expression, we could say, therefore, that our expressions must keep pace with our perpetual expression, for each marks an expression whose truth must be found.

All is progress, and ascension, and metamorphosis. Chyle becomes blood, bone, tooth, nail, hair, skin, according to exigency, and, so, over the animal, its soul runs out to the expression and incarnation of all its inmost self – as is the bird to the bird's nest. We have not seen the bird till we have seen its egg and its nest. The nest is part of the bird, so is of man the house, the temple, the garden, the laboratory, the school, the state house, the theater, the Academy of Music.¹⁷

This thought from the 1861 lecture "Art" suggests that each new manifestation potentially unveils a new side of our character. If we are to give voice to our existence, therefore, manifest and recognize it for what it is, we must learn to track ourselves wherever we go, even into that very tracking. And so, we who are cowards, or minors, or mutes (or all of the above), come to rely on poets. "For, the experience of each new age requires a new confession, and the world seems always waiting for its poet."¹⁸

¹⁶ Emerson, *Essays and Poems*, p. 119.

¹⁷ Ralph Waldo Emerson, *The Later Lectures of Ralph Waldo Emerson. Volume II: 1855-1871* (Athens, Georgia: University of Georgia Press, 2001), p. 221.

¹⁸ Emerson, *Essays and Poems*, p. 450. At least two senses of expression are now in play. One is appropriate to the way in which human character is expressed through action while the other binds appearance and reality to ongoing events of nature, e.g. in the neo-Platonic thought of emanation. And yet, because Emerson regards our need to express ourselves as yet another manifestation of nature (one that is thereby

But how does poetry pursue this task? "The Poet" replies: "the poet ... re-attaches things to nature and the Whole..."¹⁹ What we lack and what the poet offers is a sense for the whole drama to which we belong.

Every man should be so much an artist, that he could report in conversation what had befallen him. Yet, in our experience, the rays and appulses have sufficient force to arrive at the senses, but not enough to reach the quick, and compel the reproduction of themselves in speech. The poet is the person in whom these powers are in balance, the man without impediment, who sees and handles that which others dream of, *traverses the whole scale of experience*, and is representative of man, in virtue of being the largest power to receive and to impart.²⁰

We know parts and many of us can analyze them, naming the qualities of things, some primary, most less so, tracing consequents back to their antecedents in discrete ecologies of cause and effect, but most cannot bring together work and play, body and mind, human and animal, life and death, the terrestrial with the celestial. That requires what "Circles" names a "bolder generalization" that takes up diverse accounts and finds in their pools and eddies broader phenomena.²¹

Let's consider some examples. The first comes from Heraclitus, whom Emerson names and implicitly quotes in the first paragraph of "The Poet."

But the highest minds of the world have never ceased to explore the double meaning, or, shall I say, the quadruple or the centuple, or much more manifold meaning, of every sensuous fact: Orpheus, Empedocles, Heraclitus, Plato,

continuous with it), the distinction should not be substantiated.

¹⁹ Emerson, *Essays and Poems*, p. 455.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 448 – emphases added. In the Preface to *Parnassus*, Emerson writes: "The poet demands all gifts, and not one or two only. Like the electric rod, he must reach from a point nearer to the sky than all surrounding objects, down to earth, and into the wet soil, or neither is of use." Ralph Waldo Emerson, *Parnassus* (Boston: James R. Osgood and Company, 1874), p. viii.

²¹ Note that with regard to such expansions, "Circles" also defers to literary works. "Literature is a point outside our hodiernal circle, through which a new one may be described. The use of literature is to afford us a platform whence we may command a view of our present life, a purchase by which we may move it." Emerson, *Essays and Poems*, p. 408.

Plutarch, Dante, Swedenborg, and the masters of sculpture, picture, and poetry. For we are not pans and barrows, nor even porters of the fire and torch-bearers, but children of the fire, made of it, and only the same divinity transmuted, and at two or three removes, when we know least about it.²²

Emerson follows Heraclitus and uses "fire" as a universal figure, one whose manifold meaning names a basic character of all things and sets us along a continuum with everything that comes to be and passes away, and insistently so – we are not pans or barrow or porters but "children of the fire, made of it."²³

One way that poets re-attach things to the whole thus involves universal symbols that purport to name something essential in all things. This means, of course, that for Emerson, "poetry" names the figurative power of language not simply verse. Whenever symbol, allegory, metaphor, metonymy, or synecdoche operate, the gesture is poetic on Emerson's terms. (This is why Plato proves a poet: cave, chariot, divided line, the *demiurgos* slapping form onto matter.)

Note, however, the origin of such figuration: the selfsame conversation with nature that each tries to grasp. "Things admit of being used as symbols, because nature is a symbol, in the whole, and in every part."²⁴
And:

We are symbols, and inhabit symbols; workman, work, and tools, words and things, birth and death, all are emblems; but we sympathize with the symbols, and, being infatuated with the economical uses of things, we do not know that they are thoughts. The poet, by an ulterior intellectual perception, gives them the power which makes their old use forgotten, and puts

²² *Ibid.*, p. 447.

²³ In "Poetry and English Poetry," Emerson aligns figuration of this sort with metonymy, which he defines as "seeing the same sense in divers things." Ralph Waldo Emerson, *The Later Lectures of Ralph Waldo Emerson. Volume I: 1843-1854* (Athens, Georgia: University of Georgia Press, 2001), p. 303. Because this is a rather loose definition that focuses more on analogical sense than actual poetic operations, I am not employing the analysis here.

²⁴ Emerson, *Essays and Poems*, p. 452.

eyes, and a tongue, into every dumb and inanimate object.²⁵

These passages are remarkable in their reflexivity. If poetry re-attaches things to the whole, its own figurative power also must belong to that whole. Otherwise, its figurations are actually detachments and enclosures. Emerson rejects such discontinuities, however, insisting that the "poet names the thing because he sees it, or comes one step nearer to it than any other. This expression, or naming, is not art, but a second nature, grown out of the first, as a leaf out of a tree."²⁶ It is necessary, therefore, that successful figurations track their own figurative sallies, and in a manner that belongs as much to the whole as that which they poetically figure.

A second path lies with particulars through which broad nature appears. According to Emerson, "there is no fact in nature which does not carry the whole sense of nature; and the distinctions which we make in events, and in affairs, of low and high, honest and base, disappear when nature is used as a symbol."²⁷ Begin with a tree and soon you will find the history of soil, the history of planters and woodsman, the history of rain and thus of tides, hence the moon, and of global industry, and of course, one will find the sun both 93 million miles away and yet here in the heliotropic arc of a house plant. All that seemed distant and long gone proves near when some particular is seen as the meeting place of everything else.

One can witness such figuration in Robert Pinsky's "Shirt."²⁸ It begins concretely.

The back, the yoke, the yardage. Lapped seams,
The nearly invisible stitches along the collar
(lines 1-2)

The effect of this concreteness is to open up the assemblage that each shirt is, which allows the stanza to effortlessly continue:

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 456.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 457.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 454.

²⁸ Robert Pinsky, *The Want Bone* (New York: Ecco Press, 1990), p. 55.

...along the collar
Turned in a sweatshop by Koreans or Malaysians.
(lines 2-3)

And so we are off and running, finding in the shirt upon
our backs a history of global labor, though our weavers
may live closer to home.

George Herbert, your descendant is a Black
Lady in South Carolina, her name is Irma
And she inspected my shirt. ...
(lines 38-40)

The poem thus sets something seemingly self-contained,
a shirt, into a larger economy of forces and events. And
it sets itself therein as well, continuing:

...Its color and fit

And feel and its clean smell have satisfied
Both her and me. We have culled its cost and
quality
Down to the buttons of simulated bone.
(lines 40-43)

This penultimate stanza is striking in its irony and implicit
reflexivity. On first blush, the speaker appears as a
consumer who shares the inspector's estimation of the
shirt's quality. But on another level, the speaker, who
has recalled sweatshops and the Triangle Factory fire of
1911 in which 146 garment workers lost their lives,
opens a dialogue with the inspector about the cost and
quality of the shirt, "Down to the buttons of *simulated*
bone." In other words, down to the buttons, this is an
unconvincing performance, and neither thinks that what
has passed through their hands is satisfactory. More
importantly, in addressing Irma Herbert in the second
person, the speaker sets the poem into a larger
conversation with other points and persons in the
network of global labor, thus re-attaching itself to the
world to which it has returned our shirts – one in which,
on the poem's own admission, the final word has not yet
been uttered.

It is precisely because the poet unveils an enveloping
world, one that so often eludes us, that he or she proves
a liberating god.²⁹

We are like persons who come out of a cave or
cellar into the open air. This is the effect on us of
tropes, fables, oracles, and all poetic forms.
Poets are thus liberating gods. Men have really
got a new sense, and found within their world,
another world, or nest of worlds; for, the
metamorphoses once seen, we divine that it
does not stop.³⁰

A good deal is at work in this passage. Let us begin with
the notion of liberation, which runs in two directions. "In
my daily work I incline to repeat my old steps, and do
not believe in remedial force, in the power of change
and reform," Emerson says in "Circles." "But some
Petrarch or Ariosto ... breaks up my whole chain of
habits, and I open my eye on my own possibilities. He
claps wings to the sides of all the solid old lumber of the
world, and I am capable once more of choosing a
straight path in theory and practice."³¹ Again, the issue is
intellectual and practical. A genuine poetic disclosure
turns us around; it interrupts old habits as it opens new
vistas.

As Pinsky's poem evinces, concretion is everything in
these transformations. Images focus and convert us. But
atop them, or rather, through them, the poet's
achievement is also somewhat formal. Once we witness
a particular – a shirt, a tree, some pale light – waxing
cosmological, it should dawn on us that any particular
could play that role, even our own lives. In "The System,"
John Ashbery says this to haunting effect.³²

The system was breaking down. The one who
had wandered
alone past so many happenings and events
began to feel, backing

²⁹ I think the use of "god" is designed to both: (a) deify
the poet, rendering him or her a "divine" who provides
ongoing revelation, and (b) continue the process, begun
in "The Divinity School Address," of rendering Jesus
ontologically unexceptional.

³⁰ Emerson, *Essays and Poems*, p. 461.

³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 409.

³² See John Ashbery, *Collected Poems, 1956-1987* (New
York: Literary Classics of the United States, Inc., 2008).

up along the primal vein that led to his
center, the beginning
of a hiccup that would, if left to gather,
explode the center to
the extremities of life ...
(lines 1-5)

If we work toward our center atop the thought that each part relates to each, each belongs to a whole, we will undo the distinction between near and far, high and low, that is, that system of demarcation, including inside and outside, will break down. All at once, the center will be everywhere. This is quintessential Emerson. Again: "there is no fact of nature which does not carry the whole sense of nature..."³³ But that is not all. In our continuity with nature, and in nature's relentless unfolding: "There is no outside, no inclosing wall, no circumference to us."³⁴ But this is a hard thought, difficult to say without risking a circumference, or rather, difficult to hear since everything seems to say it. Ashbery is right therefore to figure this realization as an occasional feeling as does in the opening lines of *Flow Chart*.³⁵

Still in the published city but not yet
overtaken by a new form of despair, I ask
the diagram: is it the foretaste of pain
it might easily be? Or an emptiness
so sudden it leaves the girders
whanging in the absence of wind,
the sky milk-blue and astringent? We know
life is so busy,
but a larger activity shrouds it, and this is
something
we can never feel, except occasionally, in
small signs
put up to warn us and as soon expunged, in
part
or wholly
(lines 1-11).³⁶

With Emerson in mind, particularly the line "... character evermore publishes itself," I want to take "the published city" in terms of a thoroughly symbolic nature, one that

³³ Emerson, *Essays and Poems*, p. 454.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 405.

³⁵ John Ashbery, *Flow Chart* (New York: Farrar, Strauss, and Giroux, 1991).

³⁶ In an early lecture on Michelangelo, Emerson claims that the whole cannot be understood, only felt. Ralph Waldo Emerson, *The Early Lectures of Ralph Waldo Emerson. Volume I: 1833-1836* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1959), p. 101.

includes sentences and sunsets, characters and characters, one worthy of the phrase "larger activity," though it remains (and will remain) to be said what kind of "action" this is.³⁷ Second, I would add that only within the "published city" does the whole appear, that is, each appearing requires some other that indicates the appearing, if obliquely. "Direct strokes she never gave us the power to make," Emerson observes in "Experience," continuing: "all our blows glance, all our hits are accidents."³⁸ And art works are no different. "Our arts are happy hits," we find in *Society and Solitude*.³⁹ But how could it be otherwise? How could a part indicate a self-differentiating, ecstatic whole to another part, except by way of suggestion, one whose reach, affectively effective, exceeds what either part could concretely synthesize?⁴⁰ The whole, this larger "activity" that binds speakers, addressees, and all that concerns them (and no doubt much that doesn't), rushes into us as a feeling, a presence without circumference, a presence felt just at that point where our symbols break open and suggest more than they could possibly mean, a point where we find ourselves "like a traveler, surprised by a mountain echo, whose trivial word returns to him in romantic thunders," to return again to *Society and Solitude*.⁴¹

³⁷ Emerson, *Essays and Poems*, p. 318. Whether "activity" fruitfully accounts for the dynamics of synchronic and diachronic webs of relation is a matter I have addressed in *You Must Change Your Life*, principally through the poetry of Charles Simic, though also in terms of Ammons's *Garbage* and Stevens's "Reality is an August Activity of the Imagination." John Lysaker, *You Must Change your Life: Philosophy, Poetry, and the Birth of Sense* (State College: Penn State University Press, 2002).

³⁸ Emerson, *Essays and Poems*, p. 473.

³⁹ Ralph Waldo Emerson, *The Collected Works of Ralph Waldo Emerson. Volume VII: Society and Solitude* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007), p. 23.

⁴⁰ In *Emerson's Fall*, Barbara Packer also finds the inevitability of suggestion in Emerson's poet. See Barbara Packer, *Emerson's Fall: A New Interpretation of the Major Essays* (New York: The Continuum Publishing Company, 1982), p. 193. For her, this primarily is due to nature's ongoing ecstasies. I would add that part-whole problems thicken the issue, and further note that suggestiveness has affective dimensions.

⁴¹ Emerson, *The Collected Works of Ralph Waldo Emerson. Volume VII*, p. 23.

In a more general way, feeling is integral to the full range of poetic liberations that Emerson imagines.⁴²

Introducing *Parnassus*, he says:

Whatever language the bard uses, the secret of tone is at the heart of the poem. Every great master is such by this power... The true inspiration always brings it. Perhaps it cannot be analyzed; but we all yield to it.⁴³

Here we enter the murky field of voice, that characteristic tone with which a poem or occasionally a corpus addresses its subject matter and readership. Perhaps these lines from Whitman's "I Sing the Body Electric" will prove concrete.⁴⁴

O my Body! I dare not desert the likes of you in other men and women, nor the like of the parts of you;
I believe the likes of you are to stand or fall with the likes of the Soul, (and that they are the soul;)
I believe the likes of you shall stand or fall with my poems – and that they are poems;
(lines 131-33)

This poem overflows with enthusiasm, e.g. in the great length of each line. Interestingly, Emerson himself says: "the length of lines in songs and poems is determined by the inhalation and exhalation of the lungs," which I take to image a certain capacity for expression and thus for life.⁴⁵ But not just by way of line length, at least not in the case of these lines from Whitman, which brim with affirmation in the exclamation and declaration that open each line recalled: "O my Body!" "I believe..." "I

⁴² This is true on the side of the text and the reader, as Richard Deming notes. "At the very least, I would venture to say that affect, emotional valence, is one measure of response and investment." Richard Deming, *Listening on All Sides: Towards an Emersonian Ethics of Reading* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2007), p. 128. I suppose I would say that it is the principal measure, even for poets as presumably "intellectual" as Ashbery, at least in efforts like "The System" and *Flow Chart*.

⁴³ Emerson, *Parnassus*, p. x.

⁴⁴ See Walt Whitman, *Complete Poetry and Collected Prose* (New York: Literary Classics of the United States, Inc., 1982), pp. 250-258.

⁴⁵ Ralph Waldo Emerson, *The Collected Works of Ralph Waldo Emerson. Volume VIII*, p. 24.

believe..." And the repetition deepens the thematic point: the body is a fit subject for praise, even veneration, since the repeated "I believe" recalls a *Credo*.

For Emerson, the poem's mood creates a space wherein one can assume the possibilities it figures. In "Persian Poetry," he writes: "Every song in Hafiz affords new proof of the unimportance of your subject to success, provided only the treatment is cordial."⁴⁶ In this context, "cordial" has powerful overtones, though one might miss them if one only thinks of a sweet aperitif or chocolate. But a return to the 1828 edition of Webster's dictionary gives us two other applicable meanings: (1) hearty and sincere as well as (2) invigorating and reviving.⁴⁷ What Emerson finds in Hafiz is a tone or mood that both radiates sincerity and invigorates whoever receives it. And in invigorating the reader, such a tone re-attaches us to the whole at the level of affect and action, that is, it recalls us from dulled habit, possibly despair, and allows us to find and pursue possibility in the world at our door.⁴⁸

If we focus on the invigorating tones of certain poets, I think we can see why Emerson terms the poet the "true and only doctor." She or he gives us back a kind of youth, renewed vigor. In "Culture," Emerson suggests: "Incapacity of melioration is the only mortal distemper."⁴⁹ Whitman's lines, in their verve and exultation, cure such distemper. With rhythm and sound and sense they instill a visceral confidence in a life that will not treat the body as the soul's poor relation. And even Pinsky's poem is never overcome by disclosures that remind us of the bleak entanglements we wear. In

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 133.

⁴⁷ In "Poetry and Imagination," Emerson laments: "And the fault of our popular poetry is that it is not sincere." *Ibid.*, p. 15.

⁴⁸ Emerson reports: "It is much to know that poetry has been written this very day, under this very roof, by your side. What! that wonderful spirit has not expired! these stony moments are still sparkling and animated! I had fancied that the oracles were all silent, and nature had spent her fires, and behold! all night, from every pore, these fine auroras have been streaming." Emerson, *Essays and Poems*, p. 451.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 845.

fact, at the level of tone, and in the poise of its lines and images, there is a confidence that these stories can be told, and that conversations with the likes of Irma Herbert can be pursued, and that poems will help us pursue them.

In several ways, then, poets re-attach us to the whole, thus empowering, Emerson believes, our own self-expression. Poetic figures help us see the world to which we belong (and the worlds within those worlds as well as what is, properly speaking, not a world but a "larger activity"), and in such a way that we inhabit that world with greater richness. In fact, on this view, the opening of such futures is the yet to be written verse of every truly great poem. As Emerson suggests: "He is the true Orpheus who writes his ode, not with syllables, but men."⁵⁰ The suggestion is not as strange as it sounds. Every poetic figuration is an action – it "adorns nature with a new thing" and "Words are also actions" – and every action a symbolic expression of the character of the actor and the ecology in which that action arose.⁵¹ Emerson can thus, in a somewhat strict sense, regard the world as a poem in need of further elaboration, and he can regard each elaboration as the initiation of futures whose future poems we will be, as "principal events in chronology," to recall one of his more robust phrases. Turning to Emerson's figurations, then, the world is less a stage than a poem in the process of perpetual revision or turning, as in the turns of a trope, from *tropos*, meaning manner and style, or even way of becoming, given the root verb *trepein*, to turn. "Nature itself is a vast trope," Emerson writes in "Poetry and Imagination," continuing: "and all particular natures are tropes."⁵² I am

⁵⁰ Emerson, *The Collected Works of Ralph Waldo Emerson. Volume VIII*, p. 37. This line from "Poetry and Imagination" has a partner in "Art" from *Essays: First Series*. "There is higher work for Art than the arts. ... Nothing less than the creation of man and nature is its end. A man should find in it an outlet for his whole energy. ... Art should exhilarate ... and its highest effect is to make new artists." Emerson, *Essays and Poems*, p. 437.

⁵¹ Emerson, *Essays and Poems*, p. 450.

⁵² Emerson, *The Collected Works of Ralph Waldo Emerson. Volume VIII*, p. 7.

happy to confess, then, that I find something startlingly plausible in Whitman's wild suggestion that the likes of bodies should stand and fall with his poems and that they are poems.

I have been working my way into some of Emerson's strongest claims on behalf of poetry, e.g. that the poet is a liberating god, the true doctor, and the inception of a chronology. I have also tried to show how and why Emerson thinks of nature and our role therein as an ongoing poem of visions and revisions that a moment might replace. But I have yet to pursue the thought that poetry is in some way a "true science." Admittedly, the claim is somewhat odd, as is the later assertion that the "Poet is a better logician than the analyzer."⁵³ I think we can track these thoughts, however. Moreover, doing so should lead us into a variety of critical contexts that will help us evaluate the position I have been elaborating.

Emerson's decision to present poetry as a kind of knowledge stems in part from a struggle with Plato that appears at various points within "The Poet," most often through rhetorical revisions. According to Emerson, the poet, contra arguments found in the *Republic*, possesses a higher kind of seeing that brings him or her closer to what is to be known, and it is on that basis that the poet leads us out of the fabled cave.⁵⁴ Moreover, that higher seeing does not result from the *elenchus* but from the kind of rhapsody that makes poets such a threat in the *Republic* and such silly geese in *Ion*. Moreover, in a revision of a core image from the *Phaedrus*, Emerson orients the soul away from a mind-governed chariot towards an instinct propelled steed. "The traveler who has lost his way, throws his reins on his horse's neck and trusts to the instinct of the animal to find his road, so must we do with the divine animal who carries us through this world."⁵⁵ At various points, then, Emerson, often by mere inversion, insists that Plato is wrong to

⁵³ Emerson, *The Later Lectures of Ralph Waldo Emerson. Volume I*, p. 304.

⁵⁴ Emerson, *Essays and Poems*, p. 456, 461.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 460.

distrust inspiration and its persuasions, and wrong to claim that poetry only offers replicas of replicas.

And yet, a recurring thought underwrites these revisions. According to Emerson, the poet, *qua* sayer, surpasses the knower because the poet "uses forms according to life, and not according to the form," which leads Emerson to conclude: "This is true Science."⁵⁶ The key to this thought is Emerson's claim that the bird can only be known through the egg and the nest. The suggestion is that the character of any being lies in its expressions (including its relations), and that no single expression – no particular form, e.g. wing, beak, flying creature, egg layer, etc. – provides the whole story of any being that becomes. It inevitably omits dimensions and mistakes a partial for a complete development. And the problem only intensifies if we move to the whole, which is Emerson's principal concern in "The Poet." Not only is the whole manifest in every part, but also in unity through dynamic differentiation such that the whole is at once tern and warbler, minnow and pitcher plant, gravity, and RNA codon. And no form can capture this dynamic multiplicity, nor its movement, nor its differentiated continuity within and across that movement, nor its appearing to poets and dullards alike. As Emerson says, "because ecstasy is the law and cause of nature, therefore you cannot interpret it in too high and deep a sense," that is, again, there is no circumference, and forms, by definition, exact just that.⁵⁷ But the Emersonian poet does not rest with forms. Instead, she or he presents forms that, in their

evolving interanimation, suggest the life therein, and so his or her "speech flows with the flowing of nature."⁵⁸

"This preference of the genius to the parts," writes Emerson, "is the secret of that deification of art, which is found in all superior minds."⁵⁹ No one expects to find the meaning of a poem in one word or in all its words taken as an aggregate. So too, Emerson thinks, no one should seek a form for the whole or assemble it one necessary and sufficient condition at a time. Or, in his words: "Natural objects, if individually described, and out of connection, are not yet known, since they are really parts of a symmetrical universe, like words of a sentence..."⁶⁰ So too with us, that is, we are parts of a whole and our lives are drawn there-from (and there-on). And so poetry, which can indicate that whole through figure and feeling, can claim a kind of knowing that trumps a knowledge assembled out of universals, no matter how broadly (or compositely) drawn.⁶¹

Emerson's feel for poetry's power is thus epistemologically ambitious, which makes him an interesting interlocutor for someone like Richard Rorty who also prefers the poet to Platonic metaphysics, particularly with regard to languages of self-expression, or, in Rorty's words, self-creation. But Rorty eschews any epistemic register at this point, setting practices of self-creation in direct contrast to practices of self-knowledge.⁶² As we have seen, Emerson binds the two; deeper self-knowledge enables broader and richer self-creation. Now, on one level, Rorty could agree. Given a vocabulary, e.g. a neo-Platonic, expressivist metaphysics, certain forays might count as self-knowledge and one

⁵⁶ Ibid., p. 456. "The Poet" actually addresses a triumvirate: the sayer, the knower, and the doer. In the first Shakespeare lecture of 1835, the trio includes the Imaginative, the Reflective, and the Practical. Emerson, *The Early Lectures of Ralph Waldo Emerson. Volume I*, p. 303. Interestingly, in the 1841 lecture, "The Poet," the poet is the "universal knower and singer." Emerson, *The Early Lectures of Ralph Waldo Emerson. Volume III*, p. 357. Finally, the trio sayer, knower, doer also appears in an 1845 journal entry. See Ralph Waldo Emerson, *The Journals and Miscellaneous Notebooks of Ralph Waldo Emerson. Volume IX: 1843-1847* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1971), p. 338.

⁵⁷ Emerson, *Essays and Poems*, p. 127.

⁵⁸ Ibid., p. 456.

⁵⁹ Ibid., p. 579.

⁶⁰ Emerson, *The Collected Works of Ralph Waldo Emerson. Volume VIII*, p. 4.

⁶¹ Emerson's critique of Platonism is akin to his critique of sensuous science. "Science was false by being unpoetical. It assumed to explain a reptile or mollusk, and isolated it, – which is hunting for life in graveyards. Reptile or mollusk or man or angel only exist in system, in relation." Emerson, *The Collected Works of Ralph Waldo Emerson. Volume VIII*, p. 5.

⁶² Rorty, Richard, *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), p. 27-8.

might revise a life on that basis, e.g. one might no longer eat animal flesh upon discovering that nature does not admit of fundamentally distinct natural kinds but is rather continuous. But vocabularies are invented not discovered and thus local gains in self-knowledge lose their epistemic sheen when their dependence on non-referential, hence non truth-functional vocabularies becomes apparent.

If we follow Emerson here, an interesting argument awaits. First, Emerson could agree that there are no finished or final vocabularies. As he says in "Circles," in a line partially cited above:

Every ultimate fact is only the first of a new series. Every general law only a particular fact of some more general law presently to disclose itself. There is not outside, no inclosing-wall, no circumference to us.⁶³

Moreover, Emerson acknowledges the perspectival nature of every orientation. In "The Poet," he locates creativity in moods to which the poet resigns him or herself.⁶⁴ And then in "Nominalist and Realist," he exclaims: "If only we could have security against moods!" and be certain that today's inspiration would not be replaced by tomorrow's despair or, worse still, the "same immeasurable credulity will be demanded for new audacities."⁶⁵ But does it follow from our subjection to apparently inevitable and incalculable successions that we should abandon any epistemic sense with regard to phenomena like vocabularies?

I think Emerson believes that at least one epistemic dimension persists in events of poetic figuration; call it a concern for phenomenological fit. According to Emerson, poetry involves an "abandonment to the nature of things," which requires "suffering the ethereal tides to roll and circulate through him: then he is caught up into the life of the Universe..."⁶⁶ As the language of

"abandonment" and "suffering" indicate, phenomenological fit is not determined according to egological acts that compare concepts and sense data. Rather, mood and feel run the show, as when we say that something doesn't sit right with us. But let me be more concrete.

Rorty presents psychoanalysis as an instance of strong poetry fit for projects of self-creation.⁶⁷ He valorizes it because it grants everyone their own personal, epic drama, as opposed to Nietzsche, who reviews most lives like Peter Warlock purportedly reviewed the music of Vaughan Williams: "a little too much like a cow looking over a gate." But is a democratic air sufficient to recommend psychoanalysis as a language for self-creation? Rorty prefers this line of evaluation because it relies on terms like "useful" and "interesting" as opposed to "true" or "false." But doesn't a vocabulary have to make sense in a general way? Doesn't it have to sit right with us? Repression, displacement, and sublimation – these terms make a good deal of sense in our conversation with nature, whereas the thought of libidinal energy running like steam through pipes fares less well for many. But the issue is not whether Freud works *for you*. Rather, my point concerns how it *works or does not work*, and to that question, phenomenological fit seems relevant. Emerson thus seems justified when he claims: "The condition of true naming, on the poet's part, is his resigning himself to the divine *aura* which breathes through forms, and accompanying that."⁶⁸

I suppose Emerson would have another worry about Rorty's impatience with the language of self-knowledge within practices of self-expression. What are we to make of tropes like "vocabulary"? I ask because it seems to function like a circumference beyond which we cannot

⁶³ Emerson, *Essays and Poems*, p. 405.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 458.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 586-587.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 459.

⁶⁷ Rorty, *Contingency*, pp. 30-36.

⁶⁸ Emerson, *Essays and Poems*, p. 459. This is not to suggest that phenomenological fit, any more than a feeling of certainty, will answer the skeptic or secure a path to things in themselves. But Emerson does not take those projects to have the last word on whether epistemic concerns should persist in our efforts to arrive at genuine self-expression.

reach, even though it invites all kinds of questions. For example, how are vocabularies acquired in the process of human development? One might reply, 'they are acquired as we learn a language,' but what learning processes are operative in that transition? The question is a forceful one because it indicates that in order for the form "vocabulary" to do the work it does, it arises in the course of a life already unfolding, that is, in order to account for its own emergence, the rhetoric of a "vocabulary" must reach beyond its limits. Similarly, one can ask: are vocabularies discrete? Clearly not, so how do they interact? How do Newtonian mechanics and psychoanalysis interact? Where do they meet? Again, the questions have force because they rush to the limit that "vocabulary" marks and push into questions of genesis, of emergence, transformation, and decay.

At points of genesis and transformation, Rorty begins to appear rather Kantian. I say this because the term "vocabulary" seems to frustrate lines of inquiry that the term itself awakens. Ask about the genesis of a vocabulary and one will meet with the claim that such questions only can arise and be pursued within a vocabulary. In other words, for Rorty, "vocabulary" functions as an a priori condition for the possibility of experience, inquiry, or poetry, and I think Emerson would resist the drift of "vocabulary" to the point of a quasi-Kantian limit. "There is not outside, no inclosing-wall, no circumference to us," he insists, and rightfully so. Not only do vocabularies have origins and porous limits, thus indicating a site where they emerge and interact, but the very term has its own porous lineage as well, e.g. in Dewey's "pattern of inquiry," Quine's "web of inquiry," and Kuhn's "paradigms," as well in the various situations to which each term is a response. It thus strikes me that "vocabulary" itself gives the lie to the limit it would police. Or, to put the matter in Emersonian terms, whenever "vocabulary" marks a limit that cannot be surpassed its advocates use life according to a form when they should be using forms according to life.

Given Rorty's pragmatism, I realize the irony of my charge. But Rorty's focus on the "useful" and "interesting" takes its leave from certain commitments that do not seem open to revision, and the rhetoric of "vocabulary" is one. Another, one Emerson would also resist, involves the pragmatic strategist who picks and chooses among vocabularies according to his or her purposes, e.g. psychoanalysis for private lives, liberalism for public ones. According to Emerson, it is unthinkable that we could choose our basic orientations in the cosmos, and poetry makes this plain. "In our way of talking," Emerson writes, "we say, 'That is yours, this is mine,' but the poet knows well that it is not his; that it is as strange and beautiful to him as to you..."⁶⁹ On Emerson's terms, our bearings take their leave from events that claim us prior to anything like choice. "He is the poet, and shall draw us with love and terror, who sees, through the flowing vest, the firm nature, and can declare it."⁷⁰ But we need not be swayed by Emerson's account – call it a phenomenology of conversion – in order to see a more general point. To the degree that the pragmatic reckoner is a rhetorical figure which functions as a practical substratum in Rorty's thought, it circumscribes our condition in a manner that, like "vocabulary," unconvincingly suppresses its own genesis and the waves of relations that circulate along, through, and beyond the hem of any circumference.

In this recollection of Emerson's feel for poetry, I have been defending Emerson's enthusiasms against possible objections from the likes of Plato and Richard Rorty. My hope is that such contrasts allow the power of Emerson's position to appear in starker relief. I think the same might result from another contrast, though this one involves one of Emerson's strongest readers, Stanley Cavell. In particular, I want to use Emerson's career-long affirmation of poetry to resist Cavell's efforts to set Emerson along a continuum shared by Wittgenstein's pronouncement in section 116 of *Philosophical Investigations*, namely that: "What we do is lead/bring

⁶⁹ Emerson, *Essays and Poems*, p. 466.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 465.

[führen] words back from their metaphysical to their everyday use."⁷¹

Cavell connects Emerson's thought to section 116 of *Philosophical Investigations* in several places.⁷² I find the richest connection in the "Introduction" to *Conditions Handsome and Unhandsome*.

Wittgenstein's return of words to their everyday use may be said to return words to the *actual life of language* in a life momentarily freed of illusion; Emerson's return of words may be said to return them to the *life of language*, to language and life transfigured, as an eventual everyday.⁷³

What strikes me as odd is the perceived analogy between (1) a return to the "actual life of language," what Wittgenstein names their *Heim*, their home, which he casts in terms of the everyday, the *alltäglich*, and (2) a return to the "life of language," what in Emerson's terms can only be the whole, and thus a good deal more than language, as we have seen, though one should also note that for Emerson, the poet "has no definitions, but he is commanded by nature, by the living power which he feels to be there present."⁷⁴ But even setting aside Cavell's presumption regarding life and language, I don't see how the "life of language" on Emerson's terms can be thought in terms of the everyday uses that

⁷¹ See Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 2001). To be clear, my resistance is not to the whole of Cavell's reading; far from it, as my *Emerson and Self-Culture* makes clear. Cavell's feel for Emerson's non-conformist, revisionary writings, like Poirier's feel for Emerson's punning, is exemplary.

⁷² I know of five: Postscript A to "Being Odd, Getting Even," in: *In Quest of the Ordinary* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988), pp. 130-136; "Finding as Founding: Taking Steps in Emerson's 'Experience'," in: *This New Yet Unapproachable America: Lectures after Emerson after Wittgenstein* (Albuquerque: Living Batch Press, 1989), pp. 77-118; the "Introduction" to *Conditions Handsome and Unhandsome* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990), pp. 1-32; "Aversive Thinking" from the same volume (pp. 33-63); and "Emerson's Constitutional Amending," in: *Philosophical Passages: Wittgenstein, Emerson, Austin, Derrida* (Cambridge: Blackwell Publishers, 1995), pp. 192-214.

⁷³ Cavell, "Introduction," p. 21 – emphases added.

⁷⁴ Emerson, *Essays and Poems*, p. 454.

Wittgenstein presents as the home of philosophical terms like knowledge, being, object, I, sentence, name, etc. I say this because Emerson repeatedly presents the poet as abandoning conventional usages. "His mastery of his native tongue was more than to use as well as any before," Emerson says of Milton; "he cast it into new forms. He uttered in it things unheard before."⁷⁵ And all to the good since everyday usage often fails to keep pace with souls that become – "the experience of each new age requires a new confession, and the world seems always waiting for its poet."⁷⁶

Now, one might recall me to Emerson fondness for the low and the common, to use the language of "The American Scholar," or to his observation in "The Poet" that the "meaner the type by which a spiritual law is expressed, the more pungent it is, and the more lasting in the memories of men."⁷⁷ Fair enough, but these mean types are not left in the hands of everyday usage, hence Emerson's insistence that the person of "poetic temperament ... delights in this victory of genius over custom."⁷⁸ In short, I think poetry names an event that transgresses the dictates of everyday usage in a manner that is difficult to square with Wittgenstein's language of "everyday" and "home." And one sees this in Pinsky's poem "Shirt." The poem transforms our sense of "shirt," turning the word and the clothes we wear into allegories of global labor, alienated labor, and the history of exploitation that haunts the garment industry. But it does not do so by returning the word to any everyday meaning. Now, to be fair, achievements like Pinsky's may underwrite an "eventual everyday," which is to say, they may transform us (to recall Cavell's gloss of Emerson), but again, the how of this transformation seems to have little in common with the labor of returning philosophically twisted words to their home in ordinary language.

⁷⁵ Emerson, *The Early Lectures of Ralph Waldo Emerson. Volume I*, p. 153.

⁷⁶ Emerson, *Essays and Poems*, p. 450.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 545.

⁷⁸ Emerson, *The Early Lectures of Ralph Waldo Emerson. Volume I*, p. 346.

Emerson's "The Poet" is a rich and remarkable essay and his occasionally wild affirmation of poetic figuration is provocative and instructive to those willing to track its celebrations and aversions. Of late, the theme and the essay have been eclipsed by essays like "Experience," which square more easily, at least initially, with a generation willing to live with the masters of suspicion and their fiercest heirs. Buell does devote an entire chapter of *Emerson* to "poetics," but his discussion strongly favors the self-interrupting style that characterizes "Experience,"⁷⁹ as does Richard Deming's *Listening on all Sides*, which claims that Emerson's poetics "enact a constitutive skepticism."⁸⁰ I hope I have managed to provide a broader expanse for the more affirmative dimensions of Emerson's thought, one in which they can soar more freely.

In another context, or in a larger one, it would be nice to bring "The Poet" into dialogue with "Experience," first by showing how the affirmations of "The Poet" occur in the fifth section of "Experience" (though I more or less do this in the fifth chapter of *Emerson and Self-Culture*), and then by arguing that "The Poet" only offers what "Experience" relentlessly works to embrace – that we "thrive by casualties," that the life of a fragment essayed from a fragment of self-knowledge is still a life of possibilities well worth essaying. But that is not the context of this essay and thus I'll let Emerson have the final word in a passage that, flush with the cordiality of Hafiz, offers a voice re-attached to the whole.

An air of sterility, of incompetence to their proper aims, belongs to many who have both experience and wisdom. But a large utterance, a river that makes its own shores, quick perception and corresponding expression, a constitution to which every morrow is a new day, which is equal to the needs of life, at once tender and bold, with great arteries – this generosity of ebb and flow satisfies, and we should be willing to die when our time comes, having had our swing and gratification.⁸¹

⁷⁹ See Buell, *Emerson*.

⁸⁰ Deming, *Listening*, p. 4.

⁸¹ Emerson, *The Collected Works of Ralph Waldo Emerson. Volume VIII*, pp. 131-132.