

American Romanticism
Prof. Bruce Harvey

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Emerson, miscellaneous Journal selections

May 26, 1837.

Who shall define to me an Individual? I behold with awe & delight many illustrations of the One universal Mind. I see my being imbedded in it. As a plant in the earth so I grow in God. I am only a form of him. He is the soul of me. I can even with a mountainous aspiring say, *I am God*, by transferring my *Me* out of the flimsy & unclean precincts of my body, my fortunes, my private will, & meekly retiring upon the holy austerities of the Just & the Loving—upon the secret fountains of Nature. That thin & difficult ether, I also can breathe. The mortal lungs & nostrils burst & shrivel, but the soul itself needeth no organs, it is all element & all organ. Yet why not always so? How came the Individual thus armed & impassioned to parricide, thus murderously inclined ever to traverse & kill the divine life. Ah wicked Manichee! Into that dim problem I cannot enter. A believer in Unity, a seer of Unity, I yet behold two. Whilst I feel myself in sympathy with Nature & rejoice with greatly beating heart in the course of Justice & Benevolence overpowering me, I yet find little access to this Me of Me. I fear what shall befall; I am not enough a party to the Great Order to be tranquil. I hope & I fear. I do not see. At one time, I am a Doer. A divine life, I create scenes & persons around & for me & unfold my thought by a perpetual successive projection. At least I so say, I so feel. But presently I return to the habitual attitude of suffering. I behold; I bask in beauty; I await; I wonder; Where is my Godhead now? This is the Male & Female principle in nature. One man, male & female created he him. Hard as it is to describe God, it is harder to describe the Individual. A certain wandering light comes to me which I instantly perceive to be the Cause of Causes. It transcends all proving. It is itself the ground of being; and I see that it is not one & I another, but this is the life of my life. That is one fact then; that in certain moments I have known that I existed directly from God, and am, as it were, his organ. And in my ultimate consciousness Am He....

June 29, 1837.

Almost one month lost to study by bodily weakness & disease.

June 24(?), 1840.

Now for near five years I have been indulged by the gracious Heaven in my long holiday in this godly house of mine entertaining & entertained by so many worthy & gifted friends and all this time poor Nancy Barren the madwomen has been screaming herself hoarse at the poorhouse across the brook & I still hear her whenever I open my window.

November, 1842.

Transcendentalism is the Saturnalia of faith. It is faith run mad. Nature is transcendental, primarily, necessarily exists & works & proceeds yet takes no thought for the morrow. Man feels the dignity of the life that exults around him in chemistry & tree & animal & in his own body, heaves the heart & the lungs, & forms the limbs, & makes himself a spectacle to him yet is

balked when he tries to fling himself into this enchanted circle where all is done without degradation.

December, 1842-January, 1843.

The harvest will be better preserved & go farther laid up in private bins, in each farmer's cornbarn, & each woman's basket, than if it were kept in national granaries. In like manner, an amount of money will go farther if expended by each man & woman for their own wants, & in the feeling that this is then- all, than if expended by a great Steward, or National Commissioners of the Treasury. Take away from me the feeling that I must depend on myself, give me the least hint that I have good friends & backers there in reserve who will gladly help me, & instantly I relax my diligence, I obey the first impulse of generosity that is to cost me nothing, and a certain slackness will creep over all my conduct of my affairs. Here is a bank note found of 100 dollars. Let it fall into the hands of an easy man who never earned the estate he spends, & see how little difference it will make in his affairs. At the end of the year he is just as much behindhand as ever, & could not have done at all without that hundred. Let it fall into the hands of a poor & prudent woman, and every shilling & every cent of it tells, goes to reduce debt or to add to instant & constant comfort, mends a window, buys a blanket or a pelisse, gets a stove instead of the old cavernous fire place all chimney.

April, 1851.

We are glad at last to get a clear case, one on which no shadow of doubt can hang. This is not meddling with other people's affairs, —this is other people meddling with us. 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. I will not obey it, by God.

August, 1852.

I waked at night, & bemoaned myself, because I had not thrown myself into this deplorable question of Slavery, which seems to want nothing so much as a few assured voices. But then, in hours of sanity, I recover myself, & say. God must govern his own world, & knows his way out of this pit, without my desertion of my post which has none to guard it but me. I have quite other slaves to free than those negroes, to wit, imprisoned spirits, imprisoned thoughts, far back in the brain of man,—far retired in the heaven of invention, & which, important to the republic of Man, have no watchman, or lover, or defender, but I.

October(?), 1852.

The worst of charity, is, that the lives you are asked to preserve are not worth preserving. The calamity is the masses. I do not wish any mass at all, but honest men only, facultied men only, lovely & sweet & accomplished women only; and no shovel-handed Irish, & no Five-Points, or Saint Gileses, or drunken crew, or mob, or stockingers, or 2 millions of paupers receiving relief or miserable factory population, or lazzaroni, at all.