Nature's Archives:
Emerson and the Sepulchres of History

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> *No man can quite emancipate himself from his age and country, or produce a model in which the education, the religion, the politics, usages, and arts, of his times shall have no share. Though he were never so original, never so wilful and fantastic, he cannot wipe out of his work every trace of the thoughts amidst which it grew. The very avoidance betrays the usage he avoids. Above his will, and out of his sight, he is necessitated, by the air he breathes, and the idea on which he and his contemporaries live and toil, to share the manner of his times, without knowing what that manner is.*
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> Emerson, "Art"

In his essay "The Poet", Emerson tells us that "language is the archives of history" (*Works*, 3: 21). Among other things, he suggests that we can only give an account of history, of what makes history history, by considering the ways in which it is preserved and enacted within language itself. He also suggests there can be no historical description, interpretation, or analysis of history that does not somehow come to terms with, and therefore become altered by, the movement and difficulties of the language it seeks to study. We could say, more broadly, that he proposes a textual model of history. A thought of history, he says elsewhere, must begin with the presupposition that "all experience has become mere language" (*Journals*, 11: 374).

If history must be thought in relation to language, it is not surprising that Emerson's theory of history is at the same time a theory of reading and writing. Like writing, history is a palimpsest of several shifting figures. What does history become, though, when its facts and figures are transformed, displaced, and decomposed by conditions that no longer obey these facts and figures? Emerson's *Nature* is a text that attaches an unusually great weight to this question –unusual, at least, if measured in relation to the powerful tradition whereby *Nature* is read

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as a text that knows very little about itself as a historical phenomenon, about history in general. I would like to suggest that the questions of Emerson's first book are how reading and writing happen and why they make such a difference in and to history.

These questions emerge the moment we recognize that, in Emerson, writing forms an essential part of the motion that names nature and that nature names. In his essay on Goethe, he suggests that the laws of nature are in fact laws of writing. "Nature will be reported," he writes:

> All things are engaged in writing their history. The planet, the pebble, goes attended by its shadow. The rolling rock leaves its scratches on the mountain; the river, its channel in the soil; the animal, its bones in the stratum; the fern and leaf, their modest epitaph in the coal. The falling drop makes its sculpture in the sand or the stone. Not a foot steps into the snow, or along the ground, but prints, in character more or less lasting, a map of its march... The air is full of sounds; the sky, of tokens; the ground is all memoranda and signatures; and every object covered over with hints, which speak to the intelligent.
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> In nature, this self-registration is incessant, and the narrative is the print of the seal. (*Works*, 4: 261-62)

Nothing exists in nature for Emerson that is not linked essentially to writing and the processes of inscription. If history leaves its traces in the writing that nature is, we can only read *Nature's* relation to history by staying as closely as we can to the movement of its language. Rather than read the entire text, however, I will restrict myself to the opening of the essay. Nonetheless, I would suggest, no reading of *Nature* can neglect the historical and political questions, the challenge to think the nature of history and politics, opened up within the essay's first few sentences. It would be no exaggeration to say that everything that follows in Emerson begins with these sentences, even when his writings would seem to depart from them. Moreover, Emerson himself suggests that no matter how restricted our inquiry might seem to be, it can in principle open onto a world. As he tells us in "The American Scholar," "One must be an inventor to read well....There is then creative reading as well as creative writing. When the mind is braced by labor and invention, the page of whatever book we read becomes luminous with manifold allusion. Every sentence is doubly significant, and the sense of our author is as broad as the world...there is a portion of reading quite indispensable to a wise man. History...he must learn by laborious reading" (*Works*, 1: 92-3). In what follows, I want to offer a reading of *Nature* as a text about the possibility of making a passage from writing to history. In reading some of the political, religious, and literary backgrounds to *Nature*, I focus on Emerson's relation to such figures as Thomas Paine and Daniel Webster as well as to certain theological and economic issues of the period. Emphasizing the relationship among history, politics, and language, I suggest that the essay *Nature* – which generally has been read as Emerson's plea to the American writer to shed

the burden of history in order to begin to write a literature that would be peculiarly "American"– inaugurates Emerson's revolutionary politics.

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In *Nature*'s famous opening lines, Emerson writes:

> Our age is retrospective. It builds the sepulchres of the fathers. It writes biographies, histories, and criticism. The foregoing generations beheld God and nature face to face; we, through their eyes. Why should not we also enjoy an original relation to the universe? Why should not we have a poetry and philosophy of insight and not of tradition, and a religion by revelation to us, and not the history of theirs? Embosomed for a season in nature, whose floods of life stream around and through us, and invite us by the powers they supply, to action proportioned to nature, why should we grope among the dry bones of the past, or put the living generation into masquerade out of its faded wardrobe? The sun shines to-day also. There is more wool and flax in the fields. There are new lands, new men, new thoughts. Let us demand our own works and laws and worship. (*Works*, 1: 3)

The extraordinary strength of this passage no doubt coincides with its effort to inspire intellectual independence. The passage strikes the opening note of a revolutionary "hymn to power". It attempts to provoke us into rethinking our relation to the past and its revolutionary appeal encourages us to overcome the authority of the past by asking us to rethink the nature of our debt to previous forms and meanings. Attentive to the ways that historical forms can limit our independence, Emerson understands his age to be burdened by the memory of its past. No longer inspired by the founding powers of nature, he suggests, America finds itself under the sway of its revolutionary fathers. As Donald Pease has explained, Emerson "thought the age excessively retrospective, too enthralled with the lives of its founders to accomplish anything on its own" (207). It has forgotten the promise of these founders –a promise that implicitly included freedom from their own authority: no one, not even the country's Founding Fathers, ought to presume to govern the thoughts and actions of future generations. *Nature* will be a reminder of this truth. By recalling us to the revolutionary promise of independence, the essay comes to us as a work of reform that will help us recover the "poetry and philosophy of insight" that gives America its special meaning. It tells us that looking to the past is not simply a mistake but a means of ruin and death. "A new day," Emerson tells us in a journal passage that returns to the rhetoric of *Nature's* opening, "a new harvest, new duties, new men, new fields of thought, new powers call you, and an eye fastened on the past unsuns nature, bereaves [us]

of hope, and ruins [us] with a squalid indigence which nothing but death can adequately symbolize" (*Journals*, 8: 329).

That this plea for independence, this invocation of new lands, new men, and new thoughts gains its strength through its fidelity to earlier declarations of independence, however, raises an issue that haunts all of Emerson's writings – that is, the difficulty we experience in trying to overcome inherited representations, the uncertainty within which we must struggle with the past in order to give the future a chance. This dilemma is one that Emerson encounters throughout his career, as he suggests that any discourse must either conduct itself in an old language or reveal the new as a translation of the old.[2] As he writes in his late essay "Quotation and Originality":

> Our debt to tradition through reading and conversation is so massive, our protest or private addition to tradition so rare and insignificant, –and this commonly on the ground of other reading and hearing,– that, in a large sense, one would say there is no pure originality. All minds quote. Old and new make the warp and woof of every moment. There is no thread that is not a twist of these two strands. By necessity, by proclivity and delight, we all quote. We quote not only books and proverbs, but arts, sciences, religions, customs and laws; nay, we quote temples and houses, tables and chairs by imitation...The originals are not original. There is imitation, model and suggestion, to the very archangels, if we knew their history. (*Works*, 8: 178-80)

If, on the one hand, the suggestion that there can be no revolution that does not belong to the structure of repetition drives Emerson to ask why we should "grope among the dry bones of the past, or put the living generation into masquerade out of its faded wardrobe," on the other hand, his sense that such repetition is indispensable, even inevitable, compels him to note that we must always pass through our inheritance in order to appropriate the life of a new language or enact a revolution. There can be no revolution for Emerson that does not revolutionize language, that is not an appropriation and displacement of other language. What gets evoked in Emerson's text is the necessary risk involved in our borrowing the language of what we wish to overcome –the risk of having our critical stance toward any particular form of cultural authority be neutralized by the dominant culture we set out to question. If this risk cannot be avoided, however, it is because it belongs to the possibility of reform. In the *Rights of Man* whatever hope there may be for us to build our own world, Emerson suggests, depends on our being able to renegotiate our relation to the historical and institutional circumstances within which we are always inscribed. This is to say that we can only read Emerson if we learn how to read his language in relation to other language.

This is precisely what Emerson tells us in April 1835, approximately one and a half years before the publication of *Nature*. "Every man is a wonder," he

writes, "until you learn his studies, his associates, his early acts and the floating opinions of his time" (*Journals*, 5: 30). He makes his point more precise, focusing on the question of how a writer should be read, when he later claims in "Quotation and Originality" that "we are as much informed of a writer's genius by what he selects" to quote "as by what he originates. We read the quotation with his eyes, and find a new and fervent sense" (*Works*, 8: 194). Taken together, these two statements can provide us with directives for beginning to read at least some of Emerson's more paradoxical claims. The possibility that the meaning of any of Emerson's statements may lie in its relation to other statements, to other contexts beyond or before the text in which the statement is pronounced, opens his texts to questions of history. We can measure the justice of such directives in relation to the degree to which they bring forth the necessity of rereading these texts, the degree to which they oblige us to be responsible to these questions of history.

With *Nature,* we can begin to take on this responsibility by noting that the essay's opening paragraph takes the specific form of a New England jeremiad, a sermon form that by Emerson's day had become not only an important mode of political discourse but also a means of social integration. As the name suggests, the jeremiad was derived from a prophetic model: by revealing present sin and future glory to an erring people, the prophet encouraged their reformation. Viewing themselves as actors in the penultimate scene of sacred history, the Puritans had used the jeremiad to define themselves in terms of the special mission they claimed had been assigned to them by God. They possessed a strong sense of their place within this sacred history and so continually looked to the past for prophetic prefigurations of the present and intimations of the future.

Although the actual form of the jeremiad alters slightly according to the historical circumstances it addresses, it usually begins, as Bercovitch has noted, with a scriptural precedent that defines communal norms. *Nature's* opening sentences allude to chapter 11 of Luke and chapter 13 of Corinthians. This allusion to the scriptures is then followed by a series of condemnations and laments that describe the present state of the community and recall the covenantal promises that will lead to renewal. The sermon ends with a prophetic vision that unveils a promise and announces an errand of recovery. Nevertheless, as Emerson well knows, the jeremiad had been resurrected by younger New England ministers in the late seventeenth century who increasingly were convinced that New England had failed its world-historical mission.[3] For these ministers, New England's fall separated the past from the present, leading them to feel estranged from the sources of religious authority that had given their lives meaning. They associated this authority with the past, with their dead parents, and thereby increasingly idealized the founders of New England. This idealization of the fathers encouraged a sense of inadequacy among the sons, transforming their vision of history as well as their role in it. We can perhaps begin to see that Emerson's revolutionary call for independence seems all the more pertinent at a time when Americans were

being encouraged to revere the past, to imagine themselves unable to meet the same challenges their forefathers had met.

In choosing to frame his opening paragraph as a jeremiad, moreover, Emerson already announces all the issues with which his essay will be concerned. The paragraph exploits the possibilities and contradictions inherent in the traditional themes and features of the jeremiad in order to evoke the major themes and questions of his own essay. The form reinforces his wish to recall America to its destiny as nature's nation. It gives him license to indicate existing elements or tendencies in contemporary America that, for him, betray its founding principles. It permits him to demand that these elements and tendencies realign themselves with the laws of nature. At the same time, his sentences invoke values that clarify, refine, and eventually question the jeremiad itself. Rather than furthering the jeremiad's tendency to promote the idealization of the past over the rights of the living, his "sermon" works to provoke each individual into rethinking his or her relation to this past. His jeremiad can be read as a sermon *against* the jeremiad.

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The politics of Emerson's language becomes more legible when we recognize that several passages in *Nature* are drawn from earlier journal entries in which he is analyzing Daniel Webster's political discourse.[4] Not only does *Nature* begin by evoking the natural rights of liberty and independence, but the essay's first two sentences return us to the scene of America's struggle for independence by alluding to Webster's 1825 speech at the groundbreaking ceremonies for the Bunker Hill Monument. These sentences read as a powerful response to Webster, whom Emerson once referred to as "Nature's own child" (*Journals*, 5: 33). They also indicate that Emerson's admiration for Webster was not as unqualified in the 1830s as we have been taught to believe. Even if Emerson evokes Webster's speech in order to identify his essay with the powers that Webster claims for himself when he speaks –those of the American Revolution– he does so to different effect. Webster appeals to the revolutionary rhetoric of America's beginning in order to encourage his audience to defer to the authority of their forefathers, whereas Emerson appeals to this rhetoric in order to persuade his listeners that they too may effect similar if not more spectacular revolutions. For Emerson, in arguing for obedience and duty, Webster misunderstands and betrays the virtue of independence the revolution sought to guarantee. In order to measure the difference between these two appeals more exactly, we will need to situate them within the specific contexts in which they appear.

On June 17 nearly twenty thousand people gathered to witness the laying of the monument's cornerstone. Webster, the president of the monument association, was to be the principal speaker. "We are among the sepulchres of our fa-

thers," he proclaimed. Saluting the surviving veterans of the Bunker Hill battle who were before him and then turning to his contemporaries, he continued:

> We are on ground, distinguished by their valor, their constancy, and the shedding of their blood...it is natural, therefore, that we should be moved by the contemplation of occurrences which have guided our destiny before many of us were born, and settled the condition in which we should pass that portion of our existence which God allows to men on earth...the great event in the history of the continent, which we are now met here to commemorate, that prodigy of modern times, at once the wonder and the blessing of the world, is the American Revolution....The society whose organ I am was formed for the purpose of rearing some honorable and durable monument to the memory of the early friends of American Independence....We trust it will be prosecuted and that, springing from a broad foundation, rising high in massive solidity and unadorned grandeur, it may remain as long as Heaven permits the works of man to last, a fit emblem, both of the events in memory of which it is raised, and of the gratitude of those who have reared it...our object is, by this edifice, to show our own deep sense of the value and importance of the achievements of our ancestors...and to foster a constant regard for the principles of the Revolution....We consecrate our work to the spirit of national independence....We wish that this column, rising towards heaven among the pointed spires of so many temples dedicated to God, may contribute also to produce, in all minds, a pious feeling of dependence and gratitude....The leading reflection to which this occasion seems to invite us, respects the great changes which have happened in the fifty years since the battle of Bunker Hill was fought....Any adequate survey, however, of the progress made during the last half-century in the polite and mechanic arts, in machinery and manufactures, in commerce and agriculture, in letters and in science, would require volumes. I must abstain from these subjects, and turn for a moment to the contemplation of what has been done on the great question of politics and government....The *principle* of free governments adheres to the American soil. It is bedded in it, immovable as its mountains....let the sacred obligations which have devolved on this generation, and on us, sink deep into our hearts....We can win no laurels in a war for independence. Earlier and worthier hands have gathered them all. Nor are there places for us by the side of Solon, and Alfred, and other founders of states. Our fathers have filled them. But there remains to us a great duty of defence and preservation; and there is opened to us, also, a noble pursuit, to which the spirit of the times strongly invites us. Our proper business is improvement. Let our age be the age of improvement...Let us develop the resources of our land, call forth its powers, build up its institu-

> tions, promote all its great interests...Let us extend our ideas over the whole of the vast field in which we are called to act. Let our object be, OUR COUNTRY, OUR WHOLE COUNTRY, AND NOTHING BUT OUR COUNTRY. And, by the blessing of God, may that country itself become a vast and splendid monument, not of oppression and terror, but of Wisdom, of Peace, and of Liberty.[5]

Webster's address works to create a sense of national identity by providing its audience with a series of images within which they can view themselves. An important narrative of national remembrance, the address is filled with references to blood and origins, to the past and the present that is indebted to it. Although it evokes images of the dead and memories of the survivors, the history it presents is less that of the veterans of Bunker Hill than of the audience which has come to commemorate them. Taking its point of departure from the memories of revolution, Webster's entire speech organizes itself around what for him are the interrelated ideas of national memory and progress. It derives its authority from the scene of the nation's founding that serves as its frame. In evoking this scene, it suggests that it springs from the same founding principles. Webster takes his cue from the patriotic occasion and rehearses the special triumphs of our political independence –all of which, he suggests, are perhaps most visible within the realms of industry and manufacturing. If industrialization in America is different from industrialization elsewhere, it is because it has developed within the context of political freedom. Webster's association between America's economic abundance and its republican form of government is essential to his attempt to account for the country's rapid commercial growth in terms of existing socioeconomic conditions. He evokes the authority of the Revolution in order to sanctify and support institutions emerging in the 1820s.

The revolutionary heritage provides him with a powerful trope of independence. If he considers the revolution to be the primary source of America's rapid economic advance, he does so to mobilize the revolutionary values of independence and freedom in justification of a set of values corresponding to the commercialism of his day.[6] Economic and commercial growth, he suggests, is a consequence of the work of the Revolution. Aiming to restore the authority of the revolutionary fathers, Webster tries to heal the divisions in American life that, for Emerson and others, are the result of rapid urbanization, industrialization, and a growing inequality in the distribution of wealth. He praises capitalist expansion and works to neutralize the force of any opposition emerging from the growing numbers of men and women whose lives –because of the declining social and economic status of laborers– are diminished by such expansion. Webster's speech in fact functions precisely by displacing materiality, by abstracting the bodies that lost their life during the war and the laboring bodies that are now subject to the interests of capital. Webster inscribes his audience into a series of images of the nation's dead founders and soldiers. These images gain their force through the absence of the actual bodies which are here evoked and redefined, which might refer to more violent and destructive histories than the one Webster

wishes to present. This work also abstracts the bodies of Webster's audience, which, having been asked to see itself within this image, is somehow removed from its own corporeality, placed within Webster's creation of the nation's political body, and asked to think of its nation as a site of commemoration and remembrance.[7] To suggest that the nation is a monument means that every present of the nation becomes treversed and even possessed by the past. Webster's speech in fact defines a moment in national history that is dominated and displaced by memory.

For Webster, the Bunker Hill Monument will serve to establish a genealogical continuity between "fathers" and "sons." It will also remind the sons of their duties to the fathers. He emphasizes this continuity and duty by characterizing the Union as a hierarchical system based on deference and love. He attempts to reinforce these hierarchies by drawing an analogy between the father who watches over his children and the secondary institutions he wishes to support. Like other social reformers in the Age of Jackson, Webster justifies emerging institutions by claiming that the relation of order and protection that exists among factories, asylums, schools, plantations, political parties, and the people whose lives they affect corresponds to the natural relations of the family, if it does not improve them.[8] Investing the revolution and the landscape of nature with the virtues of liberty and independence, Webster assimilates the glory of the past into a vision of America's rapid and successful expansion.

As Carolyn Porter has noted, however, despite the powerful and patriotic rhetoric of Webster and others, "protests about the ill effects of the factory system, the declining status and waning autonomy of farmers and mechanics, the wage earner's impotence to halt the growing disparity between wages and prices –all effects of an expanding market economy which served the interests of the rising men of the period– persisted".[9] The development of the American manufacturing system from 1815 to the years just after the publication of *Nature* in 1836 was marked by an increased dependence of workers on owners. By the end of the 1830s, factory workers were protesting their decreasing wages, their loss of autonomy and self-respect, and the lack of education for their children. Like Webster, they, too, appropriated the revolutionary rhetoric of their forefathers, but to a different end. Declaring their independence from the oppression of manufacturing powers they believed had been brought from monarchical England, they spoke out against the threats to their humanity resulting from growing specialization and fragmentation within the manufacturing process. Rather than complementing the revolution, the factory system, they argued, betrayed its promises of liberty and independence.

If Emerson's *Nature* also invokes and appropriates a rhetoric of revolution, progress, economy, authority, family, and institutions, it is because he aligns himself with the cause of the laborer. Although Emerson praises progress, he sees the rise of commerce as a reduction of man and nature. The issue at stake in *Nature* is not only the explicit question of the meaning of nature, but also the implicit question of the aesthetic, intellectual, moral, religious, economic, and

political uses to which it can be put –both as a resource and as a metaphor– in order to dissimulate the alienation that occurs when these uses have as their end the imposition of certain values on a people. Emerson's interest in nature, then, should be read in relation to his sense that natural language can be used to manipulate and control a populace as much as to liberate it.

This points to an important difference between Emerson's and Webster's conception of the ethics of nature's laws. When Webster speaks at the Bunker Hill Monument in 1825, he reminds his audience of their debt to their revolutionary fathers and proclaims that, as "a race of children," it is "natural" for them to defend and preserve what their fathers already had created. What Emerson finds most powerful in this speech– Webster's invocation of the power of the revolutionary moment– he also finds most dangerous.[10] Webster's identification of this power with the past as well as with himself works to seduce his audience into obedience. Emerson, by contrast, identifies this power with nature and suggests that it is available to the "race of children" in the same way that it was available to their fathers. The adherence to revolutionary principles, for him, should promote the virtue of self-reliance rather than the weakness of dependence.

Nature's opening remarks, then, can be read as a revision of Webster's major themes: in them, Emerson simultaneously tries to question Webster's synthesis of the possibility of progress with monuments to the fathers and to indict Webster's plea for the authority of an American tradition.[11] We can read this revision in his appropriation of Webster's rhetoric. By substituting his "Our age is retrospective. It builds the sepulchres of the fathers" for Webster's "We are among the sepulchres of our fathers," for example, he both acknowledges and revises his debt to Webster. More particularly, his substitution of the phrase "the fathers" for Webster's "our fathers" works to indict Webster's cultural provincialism as well as any strictly patriarchal form of authority. For Emerson, both provincialism and patriarchy are supported by a rhetoric aimed at enforcing particular and fixed structures of authority. Whereas a provincialist rhetoric attempts to produce the political power of a national identity at the expense of the genealogical heterogeneity that runs through the history of any people,[12] a patriarchal form of government, as he explains in his 1844 essay "The Young American," "readily becomes despotic, as each person may see in his own family. Fathers wish to be fathers of the minds of their children" (*Works*, 1: 375). *Nature* suggests that Webster's evocation of the power of the revolutionary fathers forgets the force with which they themselves fought against patriarchy, not only in the name of America but also in the name of humanity as a whole.

Emerson gives his argument a special twist at this point, since his first sentence also alludes to Paine's *Rights of Man*. Arguing for the rights of men over the rights of institutions and government, he recalls Paine's claims for the sacred rights of the individual. Like Emerson, Paine's "motive and subject" –as he describes it in a letter of 1806 to John Inskeep, the mayor of Philadelphia– had always been "to rescue man from tyranny and false systems and false principles of government, and enable him to be free" (*Complete Writings,* 2: 1480). Emer-

son evokes Paine at this moment in order to set the representative revolutionary father against a Webster who argues for the necessity that we obey the precedents established by these fathers –without thinking the principles of these precedents.[13] In the *Rights of Man*, the particular passage to which Emerson refers occurs in the context of a discussion of the different constitutions of men –in the context, that is, of a characteristically Emersonian pun. Paine writes that "since the Revolution of America, and more so since that of France," the "preaching of the doctrine of precedents, drawn from times and circumstances antecedent to those events, has been the studied practice of the English government." He goes on to say:

> by associating those precedents with a superstitious reverence for ancient things, as monks show relics and call them holy, the generality of mankind are deceived into the design. Governments now act as if they were afraid to awaken a single reflection in man. They are softly leading him to the sepulchre of precedents, to deaden his faculties and call his attention from the scene of revolutions. (*Rights of Man*, 196)

Although Webster evokes the glory of the revolution, his insistence that we become dependent upon the authority of that revolution works to call us away "from the scene of Revolutions" toward the English Constitution against which the revolution was fought –toward the sepulchre that, for Paine, this constitution is.[14] For both Paine and Emerson, freedom is destroyed by dependence. Recalling that Paine's text is an indictment of Burke's pleas for the authority of tradition and hierarchy, we might even say that Webster is Emerson's Burke. Emerson's use of Paine against Webster is particularly pertinent at a time when Paine was enjoying a kind of revival, especially among labor groups who were appropriating Paine's republican language in their arguments against the oppression of the factory and manufacturing systems. Paine's rhetoric of radical egalitarianism encouraged urban workmen and women to defend their right to enjoy the revolutionary promise of independence. In appealing to Paine, Emerson appeals to the cultural frame of reference of his audience. He attacks Webster in the same republican language that American working-class radicals were using to legitimize their demands for political and social reform. His return to the language of the revolution reminds us of the necessity to remain vigilant toward any form of authority that threatens to tyrannize us and reduce all of our actions to empty repetitions –especially when that authority may gain its power over us by recourse to the rhetoric of freedom. For him, there can be no revolution that does not aim to protect an individual's self-reliance.

This argument is complicated further in Emerson's next few sentences, in terms that reinforce and expand my discussion of his reading of Webster's speech. *Nature*'s fourth sentence –"The foregoing generations beheld God and nature face to face; we through their eyes"– alludes to I Corinthians 13: 9-13: "When I was a child, I spake as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child; but when I became a man, I put away childish things. For now we see

through a glass, darkly: but then face to face." Both Emerson's sentence and the biblical passage to which it refers would seem to point to a temporal order between past and present that is characterized in terms of a shift from an earlier moment of revelation to a present condition of mediation. In Corinthians, however, the face-to-face encounter with the divine is projected into the future at the end of history rather than into the past at history's beginning. In reworking the passage, Emerson reverses the priority of its temporal order so that he can once again emphasize the retrospective character of his age. By defining ourselves in terms of a past that we imagine as having had 'an original relation' to the truths of revelation, we overlook the present divinity of nature's laws. We forget, Emerson suggests, the divinity of our own present creative potential. The belief that revelation occurred only in the past keeps us from exercising our power to experience it now. He explicitly repudiates the biblical lament, "now we see through a glass, darkly," in his essay "Illusions," claiming instead that "we see God face to face every hour" (*Works*, 6: 324).

The necessity of this rhetorical strategy becomes clearer when we recognize that, in emphasizing the question of the possibility of revelation, Emerson echoes the vocabulary and arguments of the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century theological and epistemological debates among German biblical scholars such as Herder, Eichhorn, and Schleiermacher and between orthodox Christianity and Deism.[15] More particularly, though –in terms of his rhetorical aims as well as our reading of his reading of Webster– Emerson here echoes the vocabulary and arguments of such Founding Fathers as Paine, Franklin, and Jefferson, whose so-called "religious" writings comprised some of the most influential articulations of the deist tradition in America.[16]

In fact, Paine's 1794 *The Age of Reason* had such a wide and rapid circulation that he quickly became the greatest spokesman of popular deism. Claiming that the introduction and acceptance of deism in America is essential to the constitution of the new state, he writes: "Soon after I had published the pamphlet 'Common Sense,' in America, I saw the exceeding probability that a revolution in the system of government would be followed by a revolution in the system of religion." "Of all the tyrannies that effect mankind," he tells us elsewhere, "tyranny in religion is the worst; every other species of tyranny is limited to the world we live in; but this attempts to stride beyond the grave, and seeks to pursue us into eternity."[17] Throughout *The Age of Reason,* he tries to expose the false character of religious institutions –which, for him, are nothing more nor less than "human inventions, set up to terrify and enslave mankind, and monopolize power and profit" (*Age of Reason*, 50)– by indicting the source of their authority: Scriptural revelation.

For Paine, every religious institution establishes itself "by pretending some special mission of God," which has been "communicated" to certain of its members (*Age of Reason*, 51). The repetition and institutionalization of the meaning or truth which is attached to this communication marks the "beginning" of religious traditions. Moreover, he suggests, even if it were true that:

> something has been revealed to a certain person, and not revealed to any other person, it is revelation to that person only. When he tells it to a second person, a second to a third, a third to a fourth, and so on, it ceases to be a revelation to all these persons. It is revelation to the first person only, and *hearsay* to every other, and consequently they are not obliged to believe it. It is a contradiction in terms and ideas, to call anything a revelation that comes to us at second-hand, either verbally or in writing. Revelation is necessarily limited to the first communication. (*Age of Reason*, 52)

If "the Word of God cannot exist in any written or human language," Paine recommends that we no longer search for revelation in "the book called the Scripture, which any human hand might make," but rather in "the Scripture called the creation" (*Age of Reason*, 63 and 70). Here he follows the deist replacement of the book of scripture by the book of nature.[18] In the universal living gospel, which must neither be interpreted nor preached nor translated into the languages of men, "we cannot be deceived". The creation of nature is "an ever-existing original" in which every man can read God's beneficence (*Age of Reason*, 69). As Paine proclaims, "the creation is the Bible of the Deist." This redefinition of divine authority both parallels and reflects a redefinition of political authority. As an "ever-existing original", Creation questions the establishment of any tradition or institution which might support "the imposition of one man upon another" (*Age of Reason*, 185).[19]

Paine's persistent questioning of the authority of scriptural revelation, his emphasis on the belatedness of all writing or speaking, and on the necessity of believing in a "religion" of nature and creation, clearly anticipate Emerson's own meditation in *Nature* on the possibility of revelation, on mediation, and the nature of the act of creation. But if *Nature's* opening remarks invoke the rhetoric of deism in general and the deist rhetoric of "revolutionary fathers" such as Paine in particular, it is not simply to echo the very themes with which he is concerned. Emerson also wishes to use the rhetoric of the Founding Fathers against that of Webster. If Webster argues in his Bunker Hill speech for the power and modernity of an "American" tradition –characterized by a correspondence between the expansion of democracy and that of capitalism– by relying on the authority of *his* Founding Fathers, then Emerson reminds us that these same 'Fathers' argued against the establishment of any form of tradition or authority that wishes to impose itself on the destiny of a people, especially when that tradition or authority is patriarchal.[20] "Every age and generation must be free to act for itself, *in all cases*, as the ages and generations which preceded it," Paine writes in his *Rights of Man*, "the vanity and presumption of governing beyond the grave, is the most ridiculous and insolent of all tyrannies. Man has no property in man; neither has any generation a property in the generations which are to follow... It is the living and not the dead, that are to be accommodated... I am contending for the rights of the *living*, and against their being willed away by the manuscript assumed authority of the dead" (*Rights of Man*, 41-42). As Emerson explains, reinforcing

Paine's point, "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" (*Works*, 11: 205). In 1836, Emerson appropriates Paine's republican rhetoric to further his attack not only on the common materialism of the day but also on the obsession with the past that he sees prevailing in antebellum America –a materialism and obsession he sees represented in Webster's Bunker Hill address.[21]

* * *

To be more precise, Emerson evokes Paine's rhetoric in order to appropriate, resituate, and then release its critical potential vis-à-vis Webster. That other texts become *events* inside his texts emphasizes the relationship that he envisions between the past and the present, between an event and its representation. This relationship corresponds to what Emerson terms 'history' and accounts for Emerson's refusal to stay in any single context as well as for his insistent desire to seek new significances in different places. This refusal and desire should be read in relation to his belief in transformation in general and, in particular, in relation to his conviction of the transitory and fugitive character of nature. "What we call nature," he tells us in "The Poet," is a certain "motion or change" (*Works*, 3: 22). Or, as he puts it in a journal entry from 1827, "the ground on which we stand is passing away under our feet. Decay, decay is written on every leaf of the forest, on every mountain, on every monument of art. Every wind that passes is loaded with the solemn sound. All things perish, all are the partakers of this general doom but man is... the prominent mark at which all arrows are aimed. In the lines of his countenance it is written 'that he is dying,' in a language that we can all understand" (*Journals*, 3: 73). This transitoriness has its analogue within Emerson's own language. What characterizes this language is the way in which its figures are always dissolving into one another, questioning their structure before any one of them has a chance to assert itself. They are evoked only to be transformed by different figures or mobilized into different contexts.

We therefore should not be surprised to hear yet another echo in *Nature's* first few lines. For Emerson's opening two sentences –"Our age is retrospective. It builds the sepulchres of the fathers"– allude not only to Webster's "We are among the sepulchres of our fathers," but also, as Porte reminds us, to Christ's angry words to the lawyers in Luke 11: 47-48: "Woe unto you! For ye build the sepulchres of the prophets, and your fathers killed them. Truly ye bear witness that ye allow the deeds of your fathers: for they indeed killed them, and ye build their sepulchres" (see Porte's *Representative Man*, 76). The echolalia of *Nature's* opening sentences here becomes extraordinarily complicated, as each of the three passages works to contextualize and 'read' the other two. When Emerson then invokes the revolutionary fathers, exchanges, recognitions, and reverberations occur whose possibility is, as I will suggest, already inscribed within Luke –a

gospel to which Emerson again refers at the end of *Nature*. Christ's speech to the lawyers is no doubt invoked at this point as part of Emerson's opening meditation on the nature of tradition, institutions, revelation, interpretation, and the language of creation –since these are also the central concerns in Luke. But the text is also appropriated as an aid in Emerson's indictment of such enlightened legislators as Webster.

Christ's accusation of the lawyers is one of three woes that he directs to these interpreters of the Mosaic law. Each of these woes is concerned explicitly with the relations among law, prophecy, and wisdom. Together they repeat and echo the three woes which he has just directed to the Pharisees. He accuses both the Pharisees and the lawyers for their minute and legalistic interpretations of the Mosaic law as well as for their purported respect for the traditions of the elders. He claims that these interpretations create a mass of regulations and restrictions which then become burdens on the people. Moreover, such legalistic interpretation serves as a theological means to justify the policies and institutional practices of these so-called spiritual leaders. It leads to a complacency among such leaders which enables them to rationalize their subjugation of a people. Neither the Pharisees nor the lawyers realize that they are not what they seem to be. Christ metaphorizes this deception by comparing them to unmarked graves with bones of the dead within them –for although these graven leaders seem holy, they deceive others, burying them under the weight of their laws. Rather than hearing and honoring the words of the prophets, the lawyers work to memorialize themselves as well as their interpretations of the law.

Christ's rhetorical entombment of the Pharisees and the lawyers here anticipates his second charge against the lawyers: "Woe unto you! For ye build the sepulchres of the prophets, and your fathers killed them." The words of the lawyers and the Pharisees replace those of the prophets. They entomb the voices and wisdom of the true prophets. The building of monumental tombs for the honor and memory of the prophets –nothing less than the recording of the words of the prophets in the scriptures themselves– marks the lawyers' complicity in the crimes of their fathers. In honoring only dead prophets, the lawyers betray their approval of what their fathers have done to these mouthpieces of God. Christ reinforces this link between the lawyers' efforts to memorialize their interpretation of prophecy and the killing of the prophets in his next sentence: "Truly ye bear witness that ye allow the deeds of your fathers: for they indeed killed them and ye build their sepulchres." Indicating the lawyers' collaboration in the killing of the prophets, Christ not only announces the violence of all legalistic and scriptural interpretation, but he also allegorizes his own situation. As the latest of the prophets, he prophesies the Pharisees' and the lawyers' refusal either to listen to him or to acknowledge him. Christ's indictment works to provoke his listeners into transforming their relation to the past. He encourages them to begin to question the institutionalization of any interpretive tradition. For, separated as they are from the Word of God (the word 'Pharisee' literally means 'separated'), unless such a transformation occurs, they can neither enjoy an original relation to

the law that commands –God himself– nor the justice or wisdom which this law communicates to those who listen well.

Although we perhaps can recognize many of the thematic and rhetorical elements in these passages from Luke, their relationship to those in the passages by Webster, Paine, and Emerson that I have already discussed is difficult to ascertain. The various appropriations and misappropriations which Emerson sets in motion by placing all of these texts in conjunction with each other enables each text constantly to reflect and defer each of the other ones. Still, I want to suggest some of the more important connections among them, even if only briefly. To begin with, the entanglement that Emerson produces amongst these texts demands that at some level we read Christ's indictment of the Pharisees and the lawyers as an allegory of Emerson's own indictment of Webster. We can begin to read this allegory by noting that the opening sentences of *Nature* replace Christ's attack on the lawyers for building "the sepulchres of the prophets" with an indictment of an age which "builds the sepulchres of the fathers." Porte is right to suggest that this substitution of "fathers" for "prophets" is an indication of Emerson's sense that, in building monuments to honor and remember the fathers, his age has neglected the prophets, "those with direct knowledge of God." Nevertheless, this suggestion cannot fully and precisely account for what Emerson might mean by either 'prophecy' or 'a direct knowledge of God.' For while Porte goes on to claim that Emerson seeks an unmediated moment of "perfect sight" (*Representative Man*, 78), Emerson's insistence that "we do not see directly; but mediately" (*Works*, 3: 75) is less a plea for the transparency of vision and more a reminder of our irremediable belatedness. What is at stake for Emerson is the possibility of seeing the world as mediated, for the law of nature's politics requires that we recognize the world as the result of man's own labor within time. That Emerson begins by substituting "fathers" for "prophets," and hence by deferring the question of prophecy, suggests that his age suppresses those 'prophets' who see and write of the end of vision. But he also wishes to remind us that, in their most prophetic moments, Webster's "revolutionary fathers" speak out against the possibility of revelation. I will return to this equivalence between prophets and fathers in a moment, but first I want to continue my reading of this passage from Luke and to do so by accepting Emerson's substitution and tracing its implications for Webster in terms of Christ's words to the lawyers.

If we follow Emerson's replacement of "the prophets" by "the fathers," Christ's first two sentences to the lawyers read as: "Woe unto you! Ye build the sepulchres of the fathers; and your fathers killed them." That Webster's fathers killed the fathers whose sepulchres Webster's rhetoric constructs recalls my earlier argument concerning Emerson's reading of Webster and Paine. For Emerson, the same fathers on which Webster wishes to found the authority of an American tradition themselves argued against all forms of patriarchal authority. When Webster forgets the prophetically subversive character of his Founding Fathers, he betrays their genius. Rather than listening to the words of his fathers, Webster memorializes and monumentalizes his own interpretation of them. We need only

recall his prayer at the end of his speech at Bunker Hill. There, Webster turns America itself into a monument. "Let our object be OUR COUNTRY OUR WHOLE COUNTRY AND NOTHING BUT OUR COUNTRY," he says, "and, by the blessing of God, may that country itself become a vast and splendid monument." That this work of monumentalization takes place within language is staged by Webster in his decision to capitalize –to monumentalize– a statement that in turn not only inscribes an allusion to the oath upon which the legal institution to which he belongs is founded (the oath, that is, through which we affirm that we will speak "THE TRUTH THE WHOLE TRUTH AND NOTHING BUT THE TRUTH") but also suggests that he is now speaking the truth of his COUNTRY. Transforming America into a monument for the living, Webster forgets what he had already said earlier in his speech –that "monuments belong to the dead" ("The Bunker Hill Monument", 70). If America is a monument, then Webster's audience lives in a space which is at the same time a site of death. The shape of the present and its people is determined by those who build the monument or tomb of America. What Emerson suggests is that these builders are not the nation's fathers, but rather those who write in the name of the fathers, those who, like Webster, have assumed the founders' authority. Here, it is Webster's address that builds and inscribes, that freezes and rigidifies the nation, transforming it and its people into a kind of sepulchre. Like the words of the lawyers whom Christ addresses, Webster's words replace those of his revolutionary fathers. In so doing, they entomb the words of these fathers. As Dylan Ford has noted, Webster's speech works to inscribe the American people "into a space of the dead that encloses and determines their identity. The text even goes so far as to argue that it has become the duty of the present to kill and bury itself in the name of the past," to become, that is, its own sepulchre.[22] Emerson already had noted the sepulchral quality of Webster's voice in an early journal passage from 7 February 1820. Claiming to be repeating a description of Webster given to him by "Mr. K, a lawyer of Boston," he writes: "Webster is a rather large man... he has a long head, very large black eyes, bushy eyebrows, a commanding expression... His voice is sepulchral" (*Journals*, 1: 9).

Returning to our reading of the opening of *Nature*, we can note that the various metaphorical exchanges between the passages at hand and between Emerson's and Webster's differing readings of the revolutionary fathers accelerate as Christ's speech unfolds in a highly symmetrical fashion: "Truly ye bear witness that ye allow the deeds of your fathers: for they indeed killed them, and ye build their sepulchres." Evoking the words of Christ to suggest that, like the lawyers whom Christ addresses, Webster *allows* the deeds of 'his' fathers, Christ suggests that Webster condones the killing of the fathers as well as that of the prophets. This is not to say that Webster encourages the questioning and undoing of the patriarchal forms that he wishes to perpetuate. Rather, in praising the building of monuments to commemorate the words and deeds of the revolutionary fathers, Webster demonstrates his approval of the betrayal and murder of these very words and deeds. He supports the suppression of the revolutionary fathers' efforts to question the familial authority with which he wishes to justify

the emergence of secondary institutions in nineteenth-century America. As the ventriloquism between Emerson, Christ, and Paine suggests, however, such justification is only a rhetorical and historical means of rationalizing the alienating and enslaving capacity of any institution.

The language of Christ's speech links Webster's rhetorical commemoration of the fathers with the building of their sepulchres. Emerson's *Nature* too suggests this connection when it claims that Emerson's age "builds the sepulchres of the fathers" and "writes biographies, histories, and criticisms." More particularly, within the specific rhetoric of the passages from Luke, we can add that this doubled act of building and writing is complicitous with the murder of the fathers and prophets who are memorialized. Throughout the various passages I have discussed –in Paine, Luke, or Emerson– the emphasis has been on the interpretive violence that occurs when the act of prophetic creation is entombed in speech or writing –in an other's rhetoric. For Emerson, this moment of entombment is the moment of institutionalization, the moment when, as he tells us in "The American Scholar," "the sacredness which attaches to the act of creation, the act of thought, is transferred to the record" (*Works*, 1: 88). The relationship that emerges from this movement between the moment of institutionalization and the process of transference is central to Emerson's historical poetics. This transference must be understood in terms of the various refractions, inflections, appropriations, and transformations that his complex circulation of allusions sets into play. The various ways in which a text entangles itself with other texts, articulates itself in terms of other narratives, or produces articulations with other texts or contexts, are for Emerson the means and conditions for the establishment of an institution.[23] There can be no institution or tradition without the possibility of relation in general. That the internal operations of Emerson's texts articulate themselves necessarily in relation to various institutional conditions and forms, which encourage his sentences to move along particular, yet always heterogeneous lines, indicates that his opening remarks in *Nature* serve as a genealogical allegory of the historical process of institutionalization. The structural entanglement between the 'inside' of Emerson's text and its 'outside' involves the relation between the act of writing and the institutional conditions in which it takes place. Breaking through "the confusion of tradition and the caricature of institutions" (*Works*, 2: 27), he suggests that the question of history must be thought according to this question of relation.

He encourages us to recognize that there can be no self-contained, coherent, meaningful system –be it what we call a self, a community, a nation, an idea, a history, a politics, or even a single word– that is not inevitably caught up in a relation to both history and rhetoric.[24] He makes this point in relation to the concept of an individual, in a passage that anticipates Nietzsche's pronouncement that he was "at bottom all the names of history." "What is our own being," Emerson writes, "but a reproduction, a representation of all the past? I remember the manifold cord –the thousand or the million stranded cord which my being and every man's being is,– that I am an aggregate of infinitesimal parts and that every

minutest streamlet that has flowed to me is represented in that man which I am so that if everyone should claim his part in me I should be instantaneously diffused through the creation and individually decease, then I say I am an alms of all and live but by the charity of others. What is a man but a congress of nations?" (*Early Lectures*, 3: 251). This passage has wide-ranging consequences for our understanding of the Emersonian self. It tells us that once the self experiences its relation to alterity, once it experiences alterity in others, it experiences the alteration that, 'in it', infinitely displaces and delimits its singularity. If the Emersonian self is exposed in this passage, it is because it is posed according to an exteriority that traverses the very intimacy of its being. What Emerson suggests here is that the self that is infused by its relations to others is without self. It no longer has a substantial identity: it in fact deceases. Emerson understands this event as a source of strength rather than of weakness, however. As he explains elsewhere, "we are not strong by our power to penetrate, but by our relatedness. The world is enlarged for us, not by new objects, but by finding more affinities and potencies in those we have" (*Works*, 7: 302).

* * *

I have tried to suggest some of the affinities and potencies raised by the opening of *Nature*. In their invocation of the rhetoric of Webster, Paine, and the Bible, *Nature's* first few sentences open themselves up to questions of history, politics, religion, and language. What may at first seem a complicated and subtle strategy of allusion and displacement becomes less so when we recall that Webster's Bunker Hill speech had been widely circulated in small-town newspapers and had gone through various editions during the eleven years that separated its delivery from *Nature's* publication (Emerson himself owned three different copies of the speech); by 1836 Webster's reputation as a powerful political orator was firmly established within the American imagination; Paine's republican rhetoric had been a pervasive cultural resource in America since the mid-1770s; and the Bible had been America's Book since the Puritan settlement in the early seventeenth century. Whatever we might call *Nature's* political force escapes us as long as we do not recognize the availability of such texts and rhetoric within the America of the 1830s. America's familiarity with these rhetorics defines the conditions of *Nature's* politics. What may seem abstract and opaque to our modern ears may seem so because we no longer have an ear for the conflictual nature of Emerson's language, the history and politics that this language bears within its movement.

It is because *Nature* offers a succession of citations of other texts, all associated with this same meaning and destination, that it should be read as a self-proliferating recitation of American history. A kind of anthology of American figures and history, it is a sepulchre of sepulchres –a history of the surviving language of the past, in particular, of the linguistic phantoms of America's past. We

could even say, as a kind of provocation, that *Nature* is a masterpiece of unoriginality –not because its language reenacts language that already has passed into history, but rather because its language becomes different from itself in each of its utterances and thereby makes itself into a language that passes *into* history. *Nature's* language surrenders itself to an other –be it a Webster, a Paine, a Luke, or any of the other voices encrypted within the movement of its sentences– whose language enters its text only fragmentarily. How can we proceed to read this language historically? In the manner in which Emerson reads his precursors –in the first lines of *Nature*, no differently from in the later ones. Webster, Paine, and Luke are not evoked as names from a positive history and in fact are not evoked as names at all –and yet in Emerson's rewriting they are still legible in their disfigured and transformed linguistic remainders. As we have seen, each of the texts repeats itself in the other, even as their repetition is only the return, the virtually infinite return of what is never the same. It is in the possibility of our being able to read this relation and difference that we can begin to register not only what Emerson means by history but also what he means by language, that is to say, what he means by the archives of history, and not only ours.

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Notes

1. The phrase "hymn to power" is from Laurence B. Holland, "Authority, Power, and Form", 5.
2. I am indebted here to Riddel's discussion of a similar point in "Emerson and the 'American' Signature," in *Purloined Letters*, 55.
3. For analyses of the contradictions in the Puritan errand –contradictions between New England as a new place and as an extension of the old country, between the elect community as church and as nation, between the Calvinist call for purity and the Calvinist expectation of worldly responsibility– see Miller, *The New England Mind*, and "Errand into the Wilderness" in *Errand into the Wilderness*, 1-15; see also Morgan, *The Puritan Dilemma* and *Visible Saints*.
4. For a discussion of some of these appropriations, see Gustafson, *Representative Words*, 351-52, and Pease, *Visionary Compacts*, 213-16. As Gustafson rightly notes, "to compose his theory of language in *Nature* Emerson creates abstractions from concrete references to the practice of American political oratory" [352]. Much of what follows in this chapter will be an effort to demonstrate this claim.
5. "The Bunker Hill Monument" in *The Works of Daniel Webster*, 1: 59-62 and 77-78. Webster had long had an interest in the battle of Bunker Hill and had in fact already expressed many of his views upon its significance to American society and government in a review of Henry Dearborn's *Account of the Battle of Bunker Hill*, written for the July 1818 issue of the *North American Review*, 225-58.
6. On this point, see Porter's *Seeing and Being*, 72.

7. I am indebted here to Dylan Ford's discussion of Webster's speech in his unpublished essay, "Body Politics and the Nation's Insinuations."
8. On the way in which familial rhetoric was assimilated into various efforts to justify the emergence of "impersonal" institutions in nineteenth-century America, see Rogin, *Fathers and Children*, especially chapters 1 and 8; Rothman, *The Discovery of the Asylum*; and Norton, *Alternative Americas*, 39-45. "The family image in asylums, factories, and plantations," Rogin claims, "suggested patriarchy; it did not describe a complexly related, fraternal extended family. The new paternalism disguised exploitation." See *Fathers and Children*, 273.
9. *Seeing and Being*, 79. In what follows, I am indebted to Porter's account of "Emerson's America" in her third chaper.
10. On this point see Pease, *Visionary Compacts*, 214. Emerson's admiration for the power of Webster's rhetoric is well known, but early on Emerson worried over the effects of this rhetoric, over its capacity to overinfluence us. As he writes in a journal entry from 21 December 1834: "Who says we are not chained? He lies. See how greedily you accept the verse of Homer or Shakspear; the outline of M. Angelo; the strain of Handel; the word of Webster; how thoroughly you understand and make them your own; and are well assured, too, that they are only units from an infinite store of the same kinds. Well, now put out your own hands and take one more unit thence. I say you are chained" (*Journals*, 4: 365). He makes the same point in September of 1836, the month of *Nature's* publication. "I dislike the gruff jacobin manners of our village politicians," he states, "but I reconcile myself to them by the reflection that Genius hurts us by its excessive influence, hurts the freedom & inborn faculty of the individual: &, if Webster, Everett, Channing, yea Plato & Shakspear, found such cordial adorers in the populace as in the scholars, no more Platos & Shakspears could arise" (*Journals*, 5: 216-217).
11. Gilmore makes this point more generally when he suggests that Emerson and his contemporaries worked "to liberate the rhetoric of the Revolution from its current function of reinforcing political loyalty." See "Eulogy as Symbolic Biography", 155.
12. As Emerson writes in a journal entry of 1834:

    What is a man but a Congress of nations? Just suppose for one moment to appear before him the whole host of his ancestors. All have vanished; he – the insulated result of all that character, activity, sympathy, antagonism working for ages in all corners of the earth– alone remains. Such is his origin; well was his nurture less compound. Who and what has not contributed something to make him that he is? Art, science, institutions, black men, white men, the vices and the virtues of all people, the gallows, the church, the shop, poets, nature, joy, and fear, all help all teach him. (*Journals*, 4: 351-52)

    He makes this point more succinctly elsewhere when he tells us: "Pray don't read American. Thought is of no country" (*Journals*, 12: 40).
13. Emerson's use of Paine here against Webster has its cinematic version in Woody Allen's *Annie Hall*. While Allen and Diane Keaton wait in line for a movie, Allen overhears a New York University professor in Communications explaining the theories of Marshall McCluhan. Unable to listen without irritation, he confronts the professor and tells him that he doesn't understand McCluhan at all. As the professor insists upon his qualifications, Allen steps away and brings back McCluhan who has been waiting in the wings and who tells the professor that he knows nothing about his theories. Like Allen, Emerson evokes Paine in order to tell Webster that, in arguing for dependence and obedience, he really knows nothing about the value of independence for which the founding fathers fought.

14. On this point see Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class*, 90-95.
15. For an excellent summary and analysis of Emerson's relation to the German Biblical criticism, see Packer, "Origin and Authority: Emerson and the Higher Criticism." See also Grusin, *Transcendental Hermeneutics*, especially chapters 1 and 2; Kalinevitch, "Turning from the Orthodox: Emerson's Gospel Lectures"; and Ellison, *Emerson's Romantic Style*, 61-66 and 104-113.
16. For discussions of the Deist movement in America as well as of its European backgrounds, see Morais, *Deism in Eighteenth-Century America*; May, *The Enlightenment in America*; and Reventlow, *The Authority of the Bible and the Rise of the Modern World*. For discussions of Paine's, Franklin's, and Jefferson's relationship to this tradition, see Philip S. Foner's biographical introduction to Paine's *The Age of Reason*, 7-42; Aldridge, *Benjamin Franklin and Nature's God*; Breitwieser, *Cotton Mather and Benjamin Franklin*, especially pages 171-204; and Sheridan's "Introduction" to *Jefferson's Extracts from the Gospels*, 3-42.
17. *Complete Writings of Thomas Paine*, 2: 727. This passage opens Paine's famous letter to Thomas Erskine, who had in 1792 defended Paine's right to publish his *Rights of Man*, but who in 1797 led the prosecution of Thomas Williams, a London publisher and bookseller, accused by the Society for the Suppression of Vice and Immorality with printing a copy of *The Age of Reason*.
18. For a discussion of the way in which Emerson and the Romantics shifted the source of inspiration from the Bible to Nature, see Bercovitch, "Emerson the Prophet".
19. Emerson's sensitivity to Paine's point may have been accentuated by Coleridge's own similar suggestion in his *On the Constitution of the Church and State*. There, Coleridge writes: "the idea of an ever-originating social contract, this is so certain and so indispensable, that it constitutes the whole ground of the difference between subject and serf, between a commonwealth and a slave-plantation. And this, again, is evolved out of the yet higher idea of person, in contra-distinction from thing –all social law and justice being grounded on the principle, that a person can never, but by his own fault, become a thing, or, without grievous wrong, be treated as such." See *On the Constitution of Church and State*, in *The Collected Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*, 10:15. For Coleridge's response to Paine, see his *Lectures on Revealed Religion* (1795), in *The Collected Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*, I.
20. As Fliegelman has suggested, the American Revolution was a "revolution against patriarchal authority –a revolution in the understanding of the nature of authority that affected all aspects of eighteenth-century culture" and that "was not confined to America." See *Prodigals and Pilgrims*, 5.
21. If Emerson's strategy here is to appropriate and then mobilize the critical potential of texts such as Paine's and Franklin's in Webster's direction, he does not leave these texts untouched either. He may claim, in a journal entry from September 1836 (the very month of *Nature's* appearance), that "Paine and the infidels began with good intentions" (*Journals*, 5: 202), but he nevertheless sees their reliance upon principles of Reason as the beginning of their end. Although these writers question the reliability and authority of scriptural revelation, they fail to question their own belief in reason as "the most formidable weapon against errors of any kind" (*Age of Reason*, 49). They fail to recognize that Reason itself grounds the religious or patriarchal forms they so decidedly wish to undo. As Tannenbaum argues, although the higher criticism regarded the Bible as poetic, deists were "in essential agreement about the authority of reason" (Tannenbaum, 14).
22. See Ford's unpublished "Body Politics and the Nation's Insinuations."
23. I am indebted here to Brown's discussion of similar issues in his essay "Tristram to the Hebrews: Some Notes on the Institution of a Canonic Text."

24. As Emerson suggests in "Quotation and Originality," this 'alterity' –always 'present' in one form or another– can never be overcome: "it is as difficult to appropriate the thoughts of others, as it is to invent. Always some steep transition, some sudden alteration of temperature, or of point of view, betrays the foreign interpolation" (*Works*, 8: 183).

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Eduardo Cadava
Nature's Archives: Emerson and the Sepulchres of History

Το άρθρο επικεντρώνεται στις σχέσεις μεταξύ του δοκιμίου του Έμερσον *Η Φύση* και μερικών από τα σημαντικότερα κοινωνικο-πολιτικά και θρησκευτικά θέματα των ημερών του –θέματα που εκφράζονται σε κείμενα των Thomas Paine και Daniel Webster– και παρουσιάζει τους τρόπους με τους οποίους οι λέξεις και οι προτάσεις του Έμερσον όχι μόνο ανοίγονται προς την ιστορία που είναι σφραγισμένη μέσα τους, αλλά επίσης, μέσω αυτού του ανοίγματος, λειτουργούν με τρόπο που να καταγράφουν ήδη μεταβαλλόμενες ιστορικές και πολιτικές σχέσεις, αυτό που αλλού ονομάζει "εφήμερα σύννεφα των περιστάσεων". Προσπαθώ, λοιπόν, να κατανοήσω τι εννοεί όταν ισχυρίζεται ότι "η γλώσσα είναι το αρχείο της ιστορίας". Ισχυρίζομαι ότι για τον Έμερσον δεν υπάρχει γεγονός τέτοιο που να θεωρείται ότι 'εγκαινιάζει' την ιστορία. Το ότι δεν μπορεί να υπάρξει γλώσσα που να μην αναφέρεται στην ιστορία, ούτε ιστορία που να μην αναφέρεται σε γλώσσα έχει ως επακόλουθο, για αυτόν, ότι το έργο της ιστορικής ανάγνωσης σημαίνει εντοπισμό όχι μόνο του τρόπου με τον οποίο ένα κείμενο μοιράζεται τη γλώσσα του με άλλα κείμενα (πώς είναι τοποθετημένο μέσα σε ένα συγκεκριμένο ή γενικό ιστορικό πλαίσιο, πώς εγγράφεται σε μία αλυσίδα έργων), αλλά επίσης και εντοπισμό αυτού που παραμένει ιδιωματικό στο κείμενο (πώς επιβεβαιώνει αυτό το πλαίσιο ακόμα και όταν το προδίδει, ακόμα κι όταν το προδίδει για να το σεβαστεί). Στην ανάγνωσή μου, λοιπόν, της αρχής του δοκιμίου του Έμερσον προσπάθησα να παραμείνω πιστός σε αυτό το έργο της ανάγνωσης.