Encyclopedia of American Poetry

The Nineteenth Century

Edited by Eric L. Haralson

Routledge
Taylor & Francis Group
New York and London

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John Hollander, Advisory Editor

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For Howard, of course –
who loved to recite "Buffalo Bill's / defunct" –
and for Kathryn the great

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EDITOR'S NOTE AND GUIDE TO USAGE

"Stop this day and night with me and you shall possess the origin of all poems," beckons the irresistible Walt Whitman in "Song of Myself": "You shall no longer take things at second or third hand / . . . nor feed on the spectres in books, // You shall listen to all sides and filter them from yourself." Sound advice for approaching verse, surely, and please do read every bit contained in the fine two-volume anthology *American Poetry: The Nineteenth Century,* published in 1993 by The Library of America under the editorship of the distinguished poet and critic John Hollander. Then, if you should desire further guidance in possessing the origins of all those poems – or many of them, rather, for more than a thousand appear there – the book you are holding now in hand will be of great use.

As you will have discovered, the Library of America anthology presents selections not only from the usual suspects, such as Whitman and Emily Dickinson, but from numerous other poets – nearly 150 in all – whose contributions are vital to our understanding of the emerging culture – literary, social, and political – of the United States. This reference "companion" – dreamed up some years ago while I was serving as a textual researcher for The Library of America – offers insightful, in-depth accounts of the lives, writings, and other achievements of more than 100 of the authors anthologized, while many of the rest come in for treatment in the topical essays **Nineteenth-Century Versions** of **American Indian Poetry, Popular Poetry, Songs and Ballads,** and **Spirituals.**

As suggested by these four headings, entries are arranged alphabetically, and words or names in **bold** indicate cross-references, directing the reader's attention to related essays and marking either important conjunctions among verse forms or (more often) intersections in the careers of individual poets. This encyclopedia is keyed to *American Poetry: The Nineteenth Century* in a more intimate way as well: contributors have focused their essays, as much as possible, on the works representing their respective poets (or topics) in that collection, and each instance of such a correlation is signaled by a parenthetical citation of the volume and page where the reader can find the verses under discussion. Upon first mention in a given essay, for example, Dickinson's "Wild Nights – Wild Nights!" will be followed by a cue to consult page 233 of volume 2 of the Library of America anthology (LOA, 2: 233), where that poem begins.

Although best read alongside *American Poetry: The Nineteenth Century,* the *Encyclopedia of American Poetry: The Nineteenth Century* stands as a comprehensive reference resource in its own right, well suited to the diverse needs of students, teachers, and scholars. For apart from the obligation to coordinate entries with the Library of America anthology, contributors were given a free hand, on the editorial hunch that an excellent corps of authors, left to their own devices, would know how to construct an excellent group of essays. As you will see, besides furnishing useful facts and dates, biographical background, and information on the provenance of the poetry – as one would expect from any reference volume of this title – each entry amounts to an incisive *critical* essay, delving into the formal features, literary-historical significance, and cultural relevance of the verses being addressed. The larger scope of the entries also permitted contributors to *extend* the Library of America edition by covering many more works per author or verse

category than could reasonably have been anthologized. Moreover, readers who become enthusiastic about a particular poet or topic will be steered toward other pertinent sources by the list of Selected Works at the end of each entry. Those who study the Further Reading portion of enough of these bibliographies will also learn, before long, which broad surveys of the American poetic tradition promise to be most rewarding to their subsequent research.

In its range, then, the *Encyclopedia of American Poetry* participates in the ongoing effort to recuperate "lost" or submerged parts of the cultural heritage of the United States. In content and organization, the book demonstrates the dividends of reading works by relatively well-known poets – William Cullen Bryant, Stephen Crane, Ralph Waldo Emerson, Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, Herman Melville, Edgar Allan Poe, Edwin Arlington Robinson, and John Greenleaf Whittier – in the context of works by less familiar and frequently undervalued figures of the nineteenth-century literary scene. Without detriment to others treated here, these figures include overlooked women poets such as Maria Gowen Brooks, Alice and Phoebe Cary, Sarah Morgan Bryan Piatt, and Lizette Woodworth Reese; African American poets like Paul Laurence Dunbar and Frances E. W. Harper, and Native American poets such as Alexander Posey and John Rollin Ridge; neglected Southern poets, notably Sidney Lanier and Henry Timrod; underappreciated talents like Trumbull Stickney, Frederick Goddard Tuckerman, and Jones Very, or fading "fireside" poets such as Oliver Wendell Holmes and James Russell Lowell; poets who are more famous as writers in other genres (Margaret Fuller, Nathaniel Hawthorne, Henry David Thoreau, Edith Wharton), as painters (Washington Allston, Thomas Cole), as sculptors (William Wetmore Story), as actors (Frances Kemble), or as politicians (John Quincy Adams); and finally, those authors who have vanished, as it were, in the very popularity of their productions, such as "Casey at the Bat," "The Man with the Hoe," "The Purple Cow," and "Curfew Must Not Ring To-Night." Not all of the poetry encountered here will make you feel as if the top of your head were being taken off – to borrow Dickinson's formula for the real, right thing in verse – but all of it, as we are about to prove, will repay your interest.

Acknowledgments

In a project of this scope and duration, the debts incurred are many, but let me try to count the ways. At The Library of America (wonderful enterprise), early endorsements came from Cheryl Hurley and Hannah (Gila) Bercovitch; leads on several invaluable contributors, from Richard Poirier; and periodic enlightenment on textual matters, from Cameron McDonald, Geoffrey O'Brien, Max Rudin, and Derick Schilling. Joan Zseleczsky, Phyllis Korper, and Audrey Leung – three of the finest people in publishing – each gave this book a big push at (respectively) the beginning, middle, and end of the process; and Chuck Bartelt, Jason Goldfarb, Elizabeth Manus, Justin Brent, and Jay McRoy, in their bountiful technical expertise, coaxed it along as well. Lawrence Buell and Tom Bechtle offered timely moral support. My old friend Patrick Cheung knows just what his essential role in the saga was, and how much I appreciate it.

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Henry Adams

(1838–1918)

In his autobiographical sketch for the Life-Book of Harvard's Class of 1858, Henry Adams expressed his desire to lead "a quiet and a literary life." He spent his remaining 60 years pursuing these two somewhat contradictory goals. Naturally reticent, Adams sought to preserve the privacy that would guarantee him a "quiet" life. The tenacity with which he pursued his literary occupation, however, demonstrated an equally compelling desire to reach the very public from which he held himself aloof. In his later years, Adams created his own private "public," the coterie of friends and relatives who were allowed to read his privately printed works such as *Mont Saint Michel and Chartres* (1904) and *The Education of Henry Adams* (1907). The privacy of a printing that ran to 100 or so copies became rather tenuously artificial: when word got out, people beyond Adams's circle of friends clamored for copies. *The Education* became Adams's best known work, and even *Chartres* overshadowed Adams's *History of the United States of America During the Administrations of Thomas Jefferson and James Madison* (1889–91), which some regard as the finest history ever written by an American.

By contrast to his coy but unmistakably published prose, Adams's poetry remained relatively private and confidential. Only one poem was published in his lifetime: "Buddha and Brahma" (LOA, 2: 383). Composed in 1891, this poem did not appear in print until 1915 (in the *Yale Review*). Adams had previously given a copy to his close friend John **Hay** with the injunction that the lines go no further. Another well-known poem, "Prayer to the Virgin of Chartres," written in the winter of 1900–01, went to Elizabeth Cameron, who became the emotional center of Adams's life after his wife's death and who, it is assumed, inspired his idealization of the Virgin. His niece Mabel La Farge published the poem along with his letters to her in 1920.

Although it is impossible to read even Adams's correspondence without sensing that he imagined posterity looking over his shoulder as he wrote, these two poems seem to have served a more personal function for him. They lack the ironic tone used to such effect in both *The Education* and the correspondence. The fruit of contemplation, "Buddha and Brahma" and "Prayer" bear the same relation to Adams's philosophy of life that any liturgy has to the faith of those who repeat it. These private poems, however, reveal not an obscure personal iconography, but a keen intellect grappling with philosophical concerns that speak directly to a late-nineteenth-century context. "Buddha and Brahma" describes the necessity of resigning oneself to an intellectual appreciation of Nirvana rather than its attainment. "Prayer" is less a profession of faith than a lamenting of the desolation caused by the way in which people replace the worship of a recognizably human deity (the Virgin) with an intellectual construct of the universe as an inhuman and indifferent, although manipulable, field of atomic energy. In neither poem can a direct connection to the transcendent realm, whether the Nirvana of Buddha or the Heaven of the Virgin Mary, be taken for granted. The nostalgia for religious experience in these poems, however, belongs neither to a Brahman of the sixth century B.C., nor to a Christian of the thirteenth century, but to an atheistic, or at best an agnostic American of the nineteenth. Both poems are also shaped by intellectual fashions. Buddhism was in vogue among certain American intellectuals, including some friends of Adams. The nineteenth century also saw a revival of interest in medieval architecture and culture – from Scott to Ruskin and the Pre-Raphaelites – stimulated by authors such as the French architectural historian Eugène Viollet-le-Duc.

Adams's poetry constitutes only a tiny fraction of his prodigious literary output. Besides "Buddha and Brahma" and "Prayer" scholars only know about a handful of poems, mostly sonnets, that he shared only with Elizabeth Cameron or other close friends. He also translated poems by Petrarch for his novel *Esther* and medieval chansons and poems by Adam de Saint Victor and Chretien de Troyes for *Chartres*. Adams's other prose works include three biographies, another novel, newspaper pieces, political essays, book reviews, scholarly articles, and a volume of ethnography and Tahitian family history. An inveterate letter writer, Adams left behind a massive correspondence.

Within the Adams family, writing was as much a tradition as political service. Born in Boston, the fourth of seven children of Charles Francis Adams and Abigail Brooks Adams, Henry Brooks Adams was the grandson and great-grandson of two presidents: John Quincy **Adams** and John Adams. As a child, Henry witnessed and perhaps assisted in the editing and publishing of his great-grandparents' (John's and Abigail's) letters and papers, with which his father busied himself from 1840 to 1856. John Quincy Adams, despite six decades of nearly continuous public service, also was a diarist, essayist, and poet. Henry's brothers, Charles Francis II and Brooks, also wrote essays, biographies, and works of history.

Adams entered Harvard in the fall of 1854. During his undergraduate literary apprenticeship, he contributed essays and book reviews to the *Harvard Magazine*, took second place in competition for the Bowdoin Prize, and was elected class orator. The bawdy doggerel he composed to fulfill his duties as "Krokodeilos" of the Hasty Pudding Club was some of his earliest poetry. Among his professors was the poet James Russell **Lowell**. Upon graduation in 1858, Adams traveled to Europe. He spent most of two years in Berlin and Dresden, studying German and attending lectures on the civil law. He toured Germany, Austria, Italy, and Sicily, and visited Paris before returning to the United States in 1860. It was the first long period of travel in a life filled with trips to the Continent and other, more exotic locales. Out of this particular trip came a series of travel letters that recount, among other things, Adams's interview with Garibaldi, the Italian patriot who had just triumphed at Palermo. Although they affect a familiar tone, these letters were self-consciously literary and written for publication in the Boston *Daily Courier*.

Shortly after his return, Adams's father pressed him into service as his private secretary, first in Washington, D.C., on the eve of the Civil War, and then for seven years in London, where Charles Francis Adams served as U.S. minister to Great Britain.

Thus Henry (like Mark Twain, William Dean **Howells**, and the James brothers, Henry and William) experienced the event that defined his generation – the Civil War – at second hand. The years of hobnobbing in London gave Adams cosmopolitan polish. He became acquainted with many notables, including Robert Browning, Edward Bulwer-Lytton, Charles Dickens, Charles Lyell, John Stuart Mill, Algernon Swinburne, John Forster, Richard Monckton Milnes (Lord Houghton), Francis Turner Palgrave, Henry Reeve, and Thomas Woolner, and he began lifelong friendships with Charles Milnes Gaskell and Sir Robert Cunliffe.

Adams honed his writing skills during this period, first by serving as a newspaper correspondent and then by writing scholarly pieces for the *North American Review*, which debunked John Smith's Pocahontas story, treated British finance, and reviewed Lyell's *Principles of Geology.* In general, Adams sought to use these writings to shape public opinion. As "The Great Secession Winter 1860–1861" (not published until nearly 50 years later) demonstrates, however, Adams preferred to take the long view, to interject historical references and philosophical speculation rather than simply to report events. This tendency was also apparent in his articles on current politics, which he produced after he returning to Washington, D.C., in 1868.

In 1870, Adams accepted a joint appointment as editor of the *North American Review* and assistant professor of medieval history at Harvard. In preparation, he immersed himself in the history of institutions, a forerunner of the new discipline of anthropology. The notions about primitive society and social evolution he encountered as a professor influenced later works such as *Memoirs of Arii Taimai* and even *Chartres* and "Prayer to the Virgin of Chartres." As editor of the *North American Review*, Adams wrote numerous reviews of historical works and provided a forum for liberal and reform politics.

In June 1872, Adams married Marian ("Clover") Hooper, an intelligent, well-educated woman from a wealthy Boston family. Through her, he became friends with Henry James. Henry and Marian Adams had no children. The thirteen years they had together before she committed suicide in December 1885 after a long period of depression were, according to Adams, the happiest of his life. They were certainly some of the most productive. Some scholars have regarded the curious gap between the first and second parts of *The Education*, a gap that leaves out Adams's marriage and the writing of his *History*, as a symptom of the guilt and devastation he felt even decades after Marian's death. One can also see this omission as part of Adams's continuing attempt to keep his private life private. The display of emotions he did not allow himself in his ostensibly autobiographical work, however, can sometimes be found in his poetry, which he kept carefully unpublished.

In 1877, Adams resigned from Harvard, and he and Marian moved to Washington, D.C., where she established an exclusive salon and he pursued his researches into American political history. He edited *Documents Relating to New England Federalism* (1877) and *The Writings of Albert Gallatin* (1879) and published biographies of Gallatin (1879) and the Virginia statesman John Randolph (1882). Gallatin, who served as secretary of the treasury under Presidents Jefferson and Madison, is portrayed as a hero, often at the expense of Adams's own grandfather, John Quincy Adams. But in the venomous portrait of John Randolph, family prejudices have full rein. Adams published *Democracy: An American Novel* anonymously in 1880, and *Esther* under the pseudonym Frances Snow Compton in 1884. The protagonist of each is an intelligent, strong-willed woman compelled by conscience to reject the marriage that both plot and convention seem to dictate. *Democracy* satirizes Washington politics and skewers in particular those politicians who sacrifice morality and the public good to party allegiance. *Esther* dramatizes the difficulty of religious unbelief, and thus addresses the same philosophical dilemmas Adams later treated in both "Buddha and Brahma" and "Prayer to the Virgin of Chartres." In this novel, the game of translating and reciting Petrarch's sonnets to his beloved Laura becomes a central element in Reverend Stephen Hazard's courtship of Esther Dudley.

All extant poetry by Adams, excepting the Hasty Pudding doggerel, was written after his wife's death. Unlike the *History*, the poems were not intended for posterity. Moreover, the sonnets written to Elizabeth Cameron, wife of Senator Donald Cameron, have perhaps more value as windows into Adams's emotional life than as literature. Sonneteering was a game he and his friends John Hay and Cecil Spring Rice engaged in to amuse themselves. The poems also served as a decorous, discreet way to "make love" to a married woman. One of these works, "The Capitol by Moonlight," recalls an evening stroll taken in the company of Hay, Cameron, and another woman. The poem evokes an atmosphere of quiet unrest: "Peace broods." Personification and classical allusion abound. The dome of the Capitol is "Endymion, dreaming still that on his Latmian height / He feels Helene's breath warm on his eyes and hair." The "fire of Mars," possibly an allusion to a military installation, flashes in the West, and the Washington monument "mocks us." The poem is sprinkled liberally with exclamation points, which contrast with the understatement characteristic of many of Adams's best prose passages.

Another sonnet consists of an extended metaphor in which the speaker is a musician and his "mistress" the "viol that he chanced upon." Under the musician's touch, the instrument's "notes grow deeper and more sure; / Its scope more ample with each ripening year." The couplet, which concludes the simile, sounds a Shakespearean note: "So I, who, all these years, my mistress task, / Find more and richer charm, the more I ask." The poem seems a veiled commentary on the relationship between the much younger Cameron and the poet, which was, in many ways, that of pupil and mentor. Adams sent the poem "Eagle Head" to Cameron on the eve of his departure for the South Seas in 1890. (Eagle Head is a promontory near Adams's summer house in Beverly Farms, Massachusetts, where Cameron and her young daughter Martha were spending the summer.) With unusually inflated language, the speaker describes the eternal restlessness of the ocean as it beats against Eagle Head, a restlessness echoed in the scream of the eagles that nest there. The sonnet laments an impossible love: the heart "Beats against fate." But it ends by asking the loved one to join the speaker at Eagle Head and share the pain of this impossible love: " – Here let us lie and watch the wave-vexed shore, / Repeating, heart to heart, the eagles' strain, / The ocean's cry of passion and of pain."

Homesickness informs a poem Adams sent to Cameron from Samoa a few months later. The speaker of the poem looks

out upon a Samoan village at dawn but imagines his friends in Washington. The first five stanzas are unaffected and familiar, although somewhat trite (he actually resorts to the "moon"/"June" rhyme). The abrupt shift in the last stanza to a philosophical summation also seems forced and unnatural:

> Death is not hard when once you feel its measure;
> One learns to know that Paradise is gain;
> One bids farewell to all that gave one pleasure;
> One bids farewell to all that gave one pain.

As in "Eagle Head," pleasure and pain are inextricably linked. Adams characteristically seeks philosophical import even in his own longings for friends back home, but in this instance, the intellectualization is awkward.

Another sonnet, "The Slaves of Michael Angelo," compares the struggle evident in the slave figures to the suffering of a Christian martyr, and both struggles are compared to Michelangelo's own agony. Adams apparently shared this poem with his friend the sculptor Augustus Saint-Gaudens sometime before April 1902. It voices a theme that Adams sounded repeatedly during his later years, most memorably in *Chartres*: the decline not only of spirituality but also of artistic sensibility in the post-Renaissance West. "Beauty like this no more to earth descends; / Strength such as his no more with life contends."

"Buddha and Brahma" is a narrative poem written in blank verse. The tone reminds one of Ralph Waldo **Emerson**. The poem dramatizes the search for an answer to the question "Is the world eternal?" Malunka, the young Buddhist disciple who poses the question, receives no verbal response from Buddha and thus seeks out his more voluble Brahman father. The Brahman's response sets forth conclusions similar to those that Adams himself had reached regarding the two Eastern religions: namely, that they are two paths to the same end (union with the Universal) and that Brahmanism (Hinduism) encompasses Buddhism. The silence of the Buddha, although venerated as somehow more pure than speech (his response to Malunka's question is to raise the lotus in his hand – "a mystic sign, / The symbol of a symbol"), is imitated neither by the Brahman nor by Adams. The Brahman represents Adams's nineteenth-century man, who is caught up in a life that requires action and speech and bereft of the "perfect union with the single Spirit" that Buddha achieves through contemplation and silence.

"Prayer to the Virgin of Chartres" seems to have been inspired partly by the appreciation of the figure of the Virgin Mary that Adams acquired through his studies and partly by his visit to the Hall of Dynamos at the Paris Exposition of 1900. The speaker penitently presents himself before the Virgin as the representative of Western humanity, past and present. Although the speaker's tone is earnest, the history lesson he recites belies the preoccupation of the historian-poet. The speaker confesses to having dethroned first the Mother, a metaphor for the Protestant Reformation, and then the Father, a metaphor for the ascendancy of scientific explanation. Nostalgia, not religious belief, thus sets the tone of the poem, and it is a nostalgia rooted in Adams's theories about history. One senses that the Virgin of Chartres was no less an intellectual construct to Adams than the theories of electromagnetic force that, when applied, resulted in dynamos.

The central portion of this poem is the "Prayer to the Dynamo," which expresses a desperate defiance of the "Mysterious Power," the "Primal Force" behind the dynamos. The poem also evinces an intention to control this force and a fear of being controlled by it.

> What are we then? the lords of space?
> The master-mind whose tasks you do?
> Jockey who rides you in the race?
> Or are we atoms whirled apace,
> Shaped and controlled by you?

The "Prayer to the Dynamo" is offered up as evidence of how far the nineteenth-century American, descendant of Protestants, has strayed from the more natural and more comforting worship of the Virgin Mother. In the final section, the narrator addresses the Virgin:

> A curious prayer, dear lady! is it not?
> Strangely unlike the prayers I prayed to you!
> Stranger because you find me at this spot,
> Here, at your feet, asking your help anew.
> . . . . . .
> What immortality our strength shall wring
> From Time and Space, we may – or may not – care;
> But years, or ages, or eternity,
> Will find me still in thought before your throne,
> Pondering the mystery of Maternity,
> Soul within Soul, – Mother and Child in One!

The speaker concludes by begging the Virgin not to intercede on his behalf for divine forgiveness – as a twelfth-century penitent would have – but to help him to see, to know, to feel, and to bear the "futile folly of the Infinite!" The poem must not be mistaken for an attempt to rediscover religious belief. Rather, Adams laments the deadening of sensibility that he sees as the peculiar ailment of turn-of-the-century humanity. The loss of religious belief is a metaphor for, not necessarily a cause of, this loss of sensibility.

The emotion that prompted Adams's poems may have been genuine, but he uses conventional tropes and stilted language. Indeed, the conventionality of the expression serves to render the emotion innocuous. "Buddha and Brahma" and "Prayer" succeed somewhat better than the others. For Adams's best writing, one must turn to his more polished prose works. Passages in *Chartres,* for example, like that in which the Gothic cathedral becomes a metonym for the theology of St. Thomas Aquinas, or in *The Education,* where his eldest sister's death by tetanus is described, display a pared-down elegance, carefully measured phrases, and an adroit use of metaphor.

Restlessness characterized Adams's later years. He may not have been among the best-selling but he was certainly among the best-traveled of American authors. With the artist John La Farge as a companion, Adams traveled to Japan in 1886 and four years later to Hawaii, Samoa, Tahiti, Fiji, Australia, and Ceylon (now Sri Lanka). He also toured the American West, Canada, Mexico, Cuba, and the Caribbean. Adams journeyed repeatedly to Europe, visiting many countries, and from 1899 to 1911, he spent part of every year in Paris. He visited the World's Fairs in Chicago (1893) and St. Louis (1904), as well as the Paris Exhibition of 1900.

Adams's travel experiences may have provided the impetus

for his writings, but these experiences were themselves always mediated by the vast knowledge he obtained through his reading. His travel literature is unmistakably "bookish." For instance, "Buddha and Brahma," written after his visit to Anuradhapura, Ceylon, the ancient Buddhist capital, is based loosely upon an anecdote from *Questions of King Milinda*. Adams's poem thus does not respond to Anuradhapura but to the anecdote – discovered in a Buddhist temple library before his visit – and to all he had previously read about Buddhism and Brahmanism.

Adams's reintroduction to Gothic architecture during a trip through Normandy in 1895 prompted him to resume his studies of medieval history and culture. This time he immersed himself not in law and institutions but in twelfth- and thirteenth-century architecture, literature, and theology. Nearly a decade later (1904), he privately printed *Mont Saint Michel and Chartres*, a work too impressionistic to be called history but too scholarly to pass as a guidebook. Theories of history, both as a discipline and as a phenomenon, were another late preoccupation. His "Dynamic Theory of History" assumed an ever accelerating pace of change in human knowledge that threatened to outstrip the adaptive capabilities of the human animal. Variations of this theory appeared in two essays – "The Rule of Phase Applied to History" (written 1909) and *A Letter to American Teachers of History* (1910) – that proceed with a curious confidence in the ability of figurative language to bridge the gap between the increasingly distinct disciplines of science and history.

A stroke put an end to Adams's literary activity in 1912, but he lived several years more, dying on March 27, 1918 in Washington, D.C. The first trade edition of *The Education*, published in September 1918, received the Pulitzer Prize for biography in 1919. Indisputably a master of prose style, Henry Adams remained a dilettante, although not an untalented one, when it came to poetry. The few poems he left behind, however, are good enough to suggest that he could have been an accomplished poet, had he chosen to be. More importantly, they provide us with a glimpse into the inner life of a major American intellectual of the late-nineteenth century.

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John Quincy Adams

(1767–1848)

John Quincy Adams maintained a love for writing poetry throughout his long and active career in law and public service for the state of Massachusetts and the federal government. Early in life, he was far more interested in pursuing a literary career than in becoming a lawyer or public servant, but the strong influence of his famous father, John Adams, and the political exigencies of the young republic compelled him to give up his first love. While on a diplomatic tour in Europe in 1796, he longed to return to America and a mode of life that would allow him the leisure to follow his "favorite pursuits and literary studies." Clearly motivated by a spirit of nationalism, he wrote his father from The Hague: "But the Americans have in Europe a sad reputation on the article of literature, and I shall propose to render a service to my country by devoting to it the remainder of my life." To his regret, he was never able to fulfill his ambition. As he wrote in his diary on Christmas day in 1820: "The summit of my ambition would have been by some great work of literature to have done honor to my age and country, and to have lived in the gratitude of future ages. This consummation of happiness has been denied me."

Between 1778 and 1785, Adams was on his second trip abroad, attending school in Paris and Leyden, serving as the private secretary to Francis Dana, the U.S. minister to Russia, and helping his father with diplomatic matters in Holland and England. Adams followed an exacting course of studies in the classics and mastered English and French poetry to prepare himself for his formal studies at Harvard College, a vocation in law and politics, and an avocation in letters. Almost unremitting subsequent studies earned him a widespread reputation as a classical scholar of the highest order. Of the ancient authors, it was Horace, whose *Epistula ad Pisones* (*Ars Poetica*) he had twice translated before 1784, who influenced Adams's aesthetics most. He found appealing Horace's dicta that poetry should be serious, moral, instructive, inspired, and subjected to outside criticism. In his composition of poetry, therefore, Adams never abandoned the classical requisites of order, regularity in meter, common sense, and didacticism that he learned in his early years. Well prepared, he entered Harvard with advanced standing in 1786 and graduated one year later.

As a 15-year-old student abroad, Adams first began to keep composition books in which he wrote verses, translations, and miscellaneous literary matters. He continued the practice until he died at age 81. He wrote poems (about 350 of which survive) regularly over the years, and he often kept duplicates and variant versions in his commonplace books (kept in the Adams Papers at the Massachusetts Historical Society and available on microfilm). Versatile in the genres, Adams wrote short lyrics, odes, sonnets, pastorals, narratives, ballads, epigrams, fables, elegies, prayers, hymns, translations, versifications of the Psalms, and epics. Not uncommon for a poet rooted in neoclassical soil, Adams used a wide range of subjects (although often with much overlapping): fables ("The Eagle and the Worm," "The Crow Playing the Eagle," and "The Plague in the Forest"); science and industry ("To a Magnet," "A Theory of Comets," and "Solar Eclipse"); family ("To Louisa [Catherine Adams]," "On the Birth of a Son," and "An Epistle to My Mother"); Native Americans ("Indian Marriages," "War Song of the Osages"); classics ("The Corinthian Brass," "Paris to Helen," and "Tibullus Elegy II"); historical figures and events ("Our Country," "Charles the Fifth's Clocks," and "Nero, the Reformer"); aesthetics and criticism ("Art," "Proem," and "Song of the Critic"); patriotic ("Our Country," "On Becoming Secretary of State," and "To the Muse of History over the Clock in the House of Representatives"); nature ("The Rising Sun," "To Spring," and "Sonnet to Evening"); and religion ("The Death of Children," "To Chaunticleer" ["Watch and Pray"], and "A Sunday Hymn").

Adams was scarcely influenced by the Romantic trends toward originality, natural rhythms, common diction, and the creation of art for art's sake. Many of his poems were written for his own amusement, for the pleasure and instruction of family and friends, as a diversion from his political labors, and as album gifts for the wives, daughters, and friends of fellow politicians. Many were printed in local newspapers, periodicals, giftbooks, and hymnals. Early in his career Adams wrote anonymously or used pseudonyms to protect his identity and to avoid the stigma of being an idler. In time, however, Adams's avocation as a poet became widely known. Nonetheless, no collection of his poetry was made until shortly after his death, when two of his congressional colleagues, John Davis and Thomas Hart Benton, published the small unauthorized edition *Poems of Religion and Society* (1848). The first edition contained 36 poems, which the editors had collected from periodicals and miscellanies; the 1850 edition added excerpts of his long poem "A Vision."

Back in New York in July 1785 after a six-year stay abroad, Adams read a satirical poem entitled "Receipt [i.e., Recipe] for a Wife." Soon after, he wrote in his diary that the poem had nothing to recommend it, "yet it turn'd me poetaster. I am trying to see if I can say something not so bad in the same way." In the autumn, when he began to write more light poetry in imitation of "Receipt for a Wife," he found that it was not as easy: "The hill [Parnassus] I fear is by far too slippery for me." In December, he completed "An Epistle to Delia," the first of several poems that dealt playfully with the battle of the sexes, love, courtship, and the search for the ideal female. Speaking of one of these poems, which he had written to give away, he remarked: "If it is but insipid flattery, it is no more than what every young Lady expects from Gentlemen; and what few of the Gentlemen refuse them." Between 1786 and 1789, while Adams was a student at Harvard and a law clerk in the office of Theophilus Parsons in Newburyport, he labored to develop his skills as a poet. Referring to the 16-stanza "A Ballad Founded on Fact," he wrote (in January 1788) of his difficulty in completing poems: "I have I suppose begun an hundred times to write poetry. I have tried every measure and every kind of strophe but of the whole, I never finish'd but one of any length, and that was in fact but the work of a day. . . . I fear I shall end this Time, as I always do."

During this period, the Boston newspapers and periodicals

burgeoned with poems by and about beaux and belles; the latter bore such conventional cant names as Belinda, Vanessa, Corinna, Statira, Almira, and Lucinda. These poems were often in the form of acrostics, puzzles, and rebuses. Adams joined in the craze of writing witty verses. Some of his efforts appeared under the names of "Scipio Africanus" in the *Boston Herald* (February 1789); and "Celadon," "Corydon," and "Alcander" were his pseudonyms in the *Massachusetts Magazine* (March and September, 1789). In the latter number of the *Massachusetts Magazine*, Adams also published a pastoral ode, "To Emma: or the Rose." These "fugitive" poems, as he called them, later became parts of "A Vision," a satirical criticism of several belles in fashionable Boston, Cambridge, and Newburyport society, which he began in early 1788 and completed by June 1790. Typical of the regular couplets in "A Vision" are the following on Miss Lucy Knight, first written in Adams's diary in March 1788:

With all the charms of beauty richly fraught,
Lucinda's form my fond attention caught.
A faultless person and a lovely mind,
I found with wonder, were in her combin'd
Deficient only in a single part,
She wanted nothing but a feeling heart.
Calm and unruffled as a Summer Sea,
From Passion's gale's Lucinda's breast is free,
A faithless lover she may well defy,
Recall her heart nor breathe a single sigh
And should a second prove inconstant too
She changes on till she can find one true.

Although circulated by the summer of 1790, "A Vision" was not published until December 1839, when it appeared, printed from a long lost manuscript without Adams's knowledge, in the New York weekly *Brother Jonathan*. Upon seeing it in print, Adams said that "as a poet I have never surpassed it."

By the fall of 1790, Adams was trying to settle down to a serious law practice in Boston and resolved to stop writing light verse for publication. In April 1791, he wrote to Thomas Boylston Adams, his brother, and said that he had given up writing rebuses, elegies, and acrostics about "juvenile Misses"; for the time being, he did so. Years later, he recalled that he had once been "a Volunteer Laureate for the News Carriers" and wistfully added, "But my verses are among the most forgotten things of this world, where I do not know that a copy of them yet exists." In September 1794, Adams was sent abroad by President Washington as a minister to the Netherlands, but finding the country occupied by the French, he went elsewhere in Europe to study, observe, and attend to miscellaneous diplomatic assignments. While in Berlin on this trip (1797–99), he helped himself learn German and translated Christoph Wieland's popular poetic romance *Oberon* (1780), rewriting his English version three times. It remained in manuscript until 1940, when it was printed with an introduction and scholarly notes by A. B. Faust, who described it as "a complete metrical translation of unusual scholarly merit, remarkable for fidelity to the original and its genuine artistry."

Adams returned to America in 1801 to resume his law practice in Boston and to begin his career as a Massachusetts state senator (1802) and U.S. senator (1803). But even before he returned, he was writing for Joseph Dennie's newly begun *Port Folio* in Philadelphia. He wrote his brother Thomas in March 1801: "I am not solicitous of poetical fame, tho' I would like to contribute what I can to excite a taste for poetry among my countrymen." Between January 1801 and May 1805, he contributed to the *Port Folio* a great deal of prose, poetry translations, and original poetry. For the opening number, January 3, 1801, he translated "The Thirteenth Satire of Juvenal," and in May 1805, he produced "The Seventh Satire of Juvenal"; both were praised and often reprinted. He also contributed the rhymed fables "The Ram and the Bull" (May 1801) and "The Dancing Bear" (March 1803). Under the pseudonym of "Batisto," he published the light polemic "The Address" (March 1803). All of these works were invested with political satire. Many years later, when thinking about his early political career and "The Thirteenth Satire of Juvenal," Adams said: "One satirical song, overlooked when first published, was dragged into light nearly twenty years afterward, for political effect against me, because it laughed at the political Lama – Jefferson." In the *Port Folio*, he momentarily lapsed back into his old ways of writing about "juvenile Misses" in "Ballad" (February 1802), a formulaic and saccharine 80-line poem on "Phillida's beauty." As "Batisto," he wrote two light love poems: "The Lucky Fall" (March 1803) and "The Test: To Lucy" (May 1803). He stopped writing for the *Port Folio* about the time he was appointed Boylston Professor of Rhetoric at Harvard in 1806, a position he filled with distinction until 1809. Due to popular demand, his lectures were published in 1810.

In the summer of 1809, Adams entered upon a long period of uninterrupted government service as minister to Russia (1809–14), minister to Great Britain (1815–16), secretary of state (1817–25), president of the United States (1825–29), and (after a three-year respite) U.S. representative (1831–48). Many poems written during these years of federal service survive in his notebooks and in periodicals. One species of poetry very dear to Adams and valued by his contemporaries was his religious verse, which took the form of hymns, prayers, and versifications of the Psalms and other passages from the Old Testament. Citing the admirable hymns and verse paraphrases of Alexander Pope, Joseph Addison, Jean Jacques Rousseau, Philip Doddridge, and Isaac Watts, Adams disagreed with Samuel Johnson, who proscribed such religious poetry. Reverend William P. Lunt included 36 of Adams's religious poems in his popular *The Christian Psalter* (1841). Twenty of the poems in Davis and Benton's collection are Adams's hymns and versified Psalms. One of Adams's popular original hymn was "The Hour Glass" (1829–35), the first stanza of which reads:

Alas! how swift the moments fly!
How flash the years along!
Scarce here, yet gone already by,
The burden of a song.
See childhood, youth, and manhood pass,
And age, with furrowed brow;
Time was – Time shall be – drain the glass –
But where is Time *now*?

Written on his deceased father's birthday in 1827, when John Quincy was in the White House, the sonnet praising his father's love of freedom remains a good example of a poem that combines domestic and national themes:

Day of my father's birth, I hail thee yet.
  What though his body moulders in the grave,
  Yet shall not Death th' immortal soul enslave;
The sun is not extinct – his orb has set.
And where on wide earth shall man be met,
  While time shall run, but from the spirit brave
  Shall learn to grasp the boon his Maker gave,
And spurn the terror of a tyrant's threat?
Who but shall learn that freedom is the prize
  Man still is bound to rescue or maintain;
That nature's God commands the slave to rise,
  And on the oppressor's head to break his chain.
Roll, years of promise, rapidly roll round,
Till not a slave shall on this earth be found.

Biographer Samuel Flagg Bemis finds this to be the best poem Adams ever wrote. Adams wrote it in shorthand so that it would be legible only to himself or someone who would take the trouble to decipher it. In his old age, however, he made a transcription, which someone inserted in the diary. His son, Charles Francis Adams, published it in his father's *Memoirs* under the date of October 30, 1826.

Adams left the presidency in 1829, but his Massachusetts constituency returned him to the House of Representatives in 1831. Between late September 1830, when some supporters urged him to run for office, and mid-October, when he decided to enter the race, he wrote the sonnet "To the Sun-Dial" (LOA, 1: 36). The poem indicates his state of mind about seizing the moment and acting for the public good, whether by running for office or by doing some other useful work. The version below, from *Poems of Religion and Society* (1850), differs only slightly from the 1830 version:

Under the Window of the Hall of the House of Representatives of the United States

Thou silent herald of Time's silent flight!
  Say, could'st thou speak, what warning voice were thine?
  Shade, who canst only show how others shine!
Dark, sullen witness of resplendent light
In day's broad glare, and when the noontide bright
  Of laughing fortune sheds the ray divine,
  Thy ready favors cheer us – but decline
The clouds of morning and the gloom of night.
Yet are thy counsels faithful, just, and wise;
  They bid us seize the moments as they pass –
Snatch the retrieveless sunbeam as it flies,
  Nor lose one sand of life's revolving glass –
Aspiring still, with energy sublime,
By virtuous deeds to give eternity to Time.

In February 1831, shortly before Adams entered Congress, he undertook his most ambitious attempt in writing poetry when he began the epic *Dermot MacMorrogh; or the Conquest of Ireland*. The poem related the twelfth-century story (drawn from Hume) of the intrigues between Henry II, king of England, and the immoral Dermot MacMorrogh, king of Leinster, which resulted in Henry II's conquest of Ireland. Probably prompted by his perceptions of his antagonist Andrew Jackson, who had succeeded him as president, Adams announced in the preface that the poem was intended as a moral piece, "teaching the citizens of these States of both sexes, the virtues of conjugal fidelity, of genuine piety, and devotion to their country." Just as importantly, however, Adams also wanted once and for all to test his ability to write a serious poem of national importance; clearly he felt he had not fulfilled his potential as a poet. In March 1831, he wrote in his diary that his poems sometimes seemed at first to have merit, but when reviewed later they seemed good for nothing: "In a few instances, I have suffered the publication of my effusions, and am accredited as one of the smallest poets of my country." Imitating Byron (whose prosody but not morals he admired), Adams chose ottava rima as his form. He labored over the poem for two months and finished it in mid-April. Viewing his handiwork upon completion, he said: "Beyond this I shall never attain, and now it is an important question whether I shall throw this, and all other verses I have written in the fire."

Adams was not, however, seriously tempted to consign *Dermot* to the flames, but rather saw three editions through the press within three years. Although he was proud of his epic, he resolved not to undertake anything so serious again, saying in his diary in October 1833: "I have pushed my experiment on the public temper far enough." The poem was not well reviewed. A critic in *The Christian Examiner* said that it was "not very good, nor very bad, but . . . very indifferent. . . . But if the reader looks for . . . signs of what is called poetical inspiration he will look in vain" (March 1833). Upon reading his father's poem, Charles Francis Adams expressed in his diary (November 1832) similarly unflattering sentiments: "But as a whole the work wants invention and imagination. It is totally deficient in descriptive imagery and leans as almost all my father's poetry does, too much to the didactic style. . . . My opinion is that he would have done better not to publish it." When the aged poet confronted his son for his opinion, Charles Francis muddled through a candid reply about its defects and later recorded in his diary: "How I got out of the scrape God knows, but I meant well" (October 1833).

Despite his disappointment in not gaining more fame as a poet with *Dermot*, Adams continued to write poems regularly while he was a member of the House. One popular poem that occupied a great deal of his time was "The Wants of Man" (LOA, 1: 29), which he wrote during May and June of 1840. Adams composed much of this poem, as was his habit, while out walking or riding as a relief from the strenuous congressional debates. The wife of William H. Stewart, governor of New York, secured Adams's permission to publish it in Thurlow Weed's Albany *Evening Journal* in September 1841, and the poem was widely reprinted. Stanza I takes the first two lines from Oliver Goldsmith's "The Hermit" (from *The Vicar of Wakefield*). Adams says:

"Man wants but little here below,
  Nor wants that little long."
'Tis not with ME exactly so,
  But 'tis so in the song.
MY wants are many, and if told
  Would muster many a score;
And were each wish a mint of gold,
  I still should long for more.

And then in two hundred lines of iambic tetrameter cross rhyme, the poet catalogs his (mostly temporal) wants. Toward

the end of the poem, however, his consummate want is commensurate with the higher desires expressed so many times previously in his religious poems:

These are the wants of mortal man;
  I cannot want them long,
For life itself is but a span,
  And earthly bliss a song.
My last great want, absorbing all,
  Is, when beneath the sod,
And summon'd to my final call,
  The mercy of my God.

In August 1841, when a House of Representatives colleague from Maryland asked Adams to write some verses for the albums of two young women in his district, Ellen and Sally Bruce, Adams gratified him by writing "To Miss Ellen Bruce" and "A Canzonet to Sally. Imitated from Horace. For Miss Sally B – ." The poems first appeared in the *Southern Literary Messenger* in October 1841, and then in the *Quincy Patriot* in November 1841. Davis and Benton included the canzonet in their collection under the title "To Sally" (LOA, 1: 36). They also added an epigraph from Horace, "Integer vitæ sclerisque purus / Non eget Mauris jaculis, neque arcu" ("He who is upright in his life and pure of guilt, needs not Moorish arrows, nor bow"). In the first three stanzas, the poet moralizes that a righteous man will be directed and protected by virtue, and then playfully illustrates his point:

Else wherefore was it, Thursday last,
  While strolling down the valley
Defenceless, musing as I pass'd
  A canzonet to Sally;
A wolf, with mouth protruding snout,
  Forth from the thicket bounded –
I clapped my hands and raised a shout –
  He heard – and fled – confounded.

Tangier nor Tunis never bred
  An animal more crabbed;
Nor Fez, dry nurse of lions, fed
  A monster half so rabid.
Nor Ararat so fierce a beast
  Has seen, since days of Noah;
Nor strong, more eager for a feast,
  The fell constrictor boa.

Oh! place me where the solar beam
  Has scorch'd all verdure vernal;
Or on the polar verge extreme,
  Block'd up with ice eternal –
Still shall my voice's tender lays
  Of love remain unbroken;
And still my charming SALLY praise,
  Sweet smiling and sweet spoken.

After the young Bruces acknowledged the poems with thanks, Adams wrote his House of Representatives colleague: "I cannot hold [the verses] altogether worthless if they succeed in giving a moment of pleasure to those ladies and to you. . . . Should any of the effusions of my mind in poetical numbers ever be thought worthy of collection and publication in one volume, the names of the two ladies shall certainly be given at full length, to serve as the best passport to them for the acceptance of readers of a future age." Here is one of the few hints that Adams thought someone might someday collect and circulate his poems. Verse of this kind was undoubtedly what Adams had in mind when he wrote in his diary in June 1839 that he had kept copies of all his contributions to albums and sickened at the sight of them; nonetheless, he continued almost to his dying day to write such poems. On February 20, 1848, he penned some lines for a Miss Caroline Edwards of Springfield, Massachusetts. His last day on the floor of the House, February 21, 1848, was a busy one, but he found time to autograph as gifts some stanzas of his poem "To the Muse of History Perched on Her Wheeled and Winged Car Over the Front Door of the Hall of Representatives." That same day, while still at the House, Adams collapsed from a paralyzing stroke; he died two days later.

Adams never deluded himself that he was a great or even a good poet, but he had a passion for poetry, and he could not stop writing. To his credit, he sought honest criticism and strove to improve. In February 1829, he wrote to the influential editor Robert Walsh of Philadelphia, admitting that "I know well enough that the star of my birth did not make me a poet." He further asked Walsh "as a philosopher, critic, and poet," to help him get a correct estimation of himself. Walsh replied: "Whether you were born a poet, I will not pretend to decide; but certain it is that productions like the Stanzas on Fortitude & 13th Satire of Juvenile [*sic*] prove you to be an adept in metre." Among the wants that Adams listed in "The Wants of Man" were "the genius to conceive / The talents to unfold" and "the voice of honest praise / To follow me behind," but all these were denied him as a poet. He moralized to a fault, was never able to distance himself from excessive nationalistic and political sentiment, and could not escape the ossifying influences of the classics in an age when winds of Romantic vitality were beginning to stir. Nevertheless, his poetry deserves to be preserved and read for its abundance of good humor, wit, and satire, nobility of moral and patriotic thought, commentary on important contemporaries and events, and insights into the literary habits of one of America's political and cultural patriarchs.

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Amos Bronson Alcott

(1799–1888)

A self-educated philosopher, essayist, and poet, Bronson Alcott has been the subject of several biographies, the best of which are written by Franklin Benjamin Sanborn and William Torrey Harris (1893), Odell Shepard (1937), and Frederick Dalhstrand (1982). These works tell of Alcott's salient experiences as a youth on the Connecticut frontier, farmer, Yankee peddler, innovative educator, reformer, conversationalist, and miscellaneous author.

Although Alcott produced a significant number of poems, literary historians, critics, and anthologists have given him short shrift as a poet. The reason is not that he failed to write some poems of high quality, but that he was simply overshadowed by friends among the Transcendentalists: Ralph Waldo **Emerson**, Henry **Thoreau**, William Ellery **Channing**, and Jones **Very**. Alcott's relative anonymity may also be attributed to his choice of "the conversation" as his chief métier in art and communication. He frequently employed verse in his conversations, but he was more proud of the conversation itself, which he felt was a distinctively American art and pedagogical form that he himself had helped construct. Alcott, further, has not been duly considered as a poet because much of his poetry has remained ungathered and unedited in letters, periodicals, and more than fifty volumes of unpublished manuscript journals. The journals attest to his lifetime passion for poetry.

In *Nature* (1836), the manifesto of New England Transcendentalism, Emerson paid tribute to Alcott, calling him an "Orphic poet"; viewing Alcott as a true seer, he later persuaded Margaret **Fuller** to include Alcott's "Orphic Sayings," a series of 50 philosophical epigrams, in the first number of *The Dial* (July 1840). The recondite and mystical nature of the "Orphic Sayings" drew ridicule from the Boston community and even from some within the Transcendentalist circle. The "Orphic Sayings" long militated against Alcott's reputation by stigmatizing him as a misty-brained poet-philosopher, but Alcott was undaunted and continued to speak and write orphically. Although always his most supportive friend, Emerson came in time to realize that Alcott's ability to write poetry or prose would never measure up to his ability as an original thinker. In 1843, Emerson said that Alcott had been writing poetry all winter, but noted with regret that his friend's "overpowering personality destroys all poetic faculty." Alcott once recalled that Emerson was candid with him about his lack of talent: "I ought perhaps to distrust the having of poetic gifts after Emerson telling me I had neither ear nor eye for melody or metre. At any rate, I have written too little verse to claim the poet's inspiration." In "A Fable for Critics" (see LOA, 1: 684), James Russell **Lowell** spoke with humor for most who knew Alcott when he allowed that he was a good talker but a bad writer:

> While he talks he is great, but goes out like a taper,
> If you shut him up closely with pen, ink, and paper;
> Yet his fingers itch for 'em from morning till night,
> And he thinks he does wrong if he don't always write;
> In this, as in all things, a lamb among men,
> He goes to sure death when he goes to the pen.

In the end Emerson, Lowell, and others were not correct, for Alcott continued to write and improve his art, and in his old age produced a body of highly respectable prose and poetry. Alcott's first book, *Conversations with Children on the Gospels* (2 vols., 1836–37), which grew out of his experiences at the Temple School in Boston (1834–37), contains no original poetry. The book incurred the wrath of the Boston community because it recounted Alcott's having involved the schoolchildren in discussions of the socially proscribed subjects of sex and procreation. Following the devastating failure of the Temple School, he published no more books until 1868. But prompted by the successes of his daughter Louisa May Alcott, who became a celebrity with *Hospital Sketches* (1863) and *Little Women* (1868–69), he began to publish increasingly out of his journals. Upon comparing some of his essays with Emerson's, moreover, he was encouraged to reappraise his own abilities as a writer and press on. One outlet that he chose for his poetry was the public journals. In 1863, he published "The Goblet," "The Return," "The Chase," "The Reaper," and "The Patriot" in the *Commonwealth*. In 1866, he published in *The Radical* new versions of "The Patriot" and "The Chase," and "Misrule." Twenty-two of his "Philosophemes" (short philosophical poems) appeared in the *Journal of Speculative Philosophy* in January 1881, followed by the sonnets "Childhood" (January 1882), "R. W. E." (April 1884; read at Emerson's funeral), "Love" (January 1885), "Immortality" (April 1885), and "Ion: A Monody" (on the death of Emerson) in April 1885.

In September 1868, Alcott published *Tablets*, a collection of philosophical essays in which he interspersed some of his best poems: "The Seer's Rations," "Lonely My Dwelling Here," "Tasked Days," "Rise in the Morning," "Friendship," "Man" (also called "Adam"), and variants of "The Return," "The Chase," and "The Goblet." Encouraged by a favorable reception, in 1869 he began his third book, *Concord Days* (1872). It contained less philosophical and speculative matter than his previous books, and more material on his friends, his reading, and his beloved Concord. The poems in the book are "Sing, Sing the Immortals," "'T Is Clear," "Mind Omnipotent Is," "The Patriot" (first published in the *Commonwealth*), "Our Spirits," "Whose the Decree," and "The Path of Felicity."

Alcott's fourth book, *Table Talk* (1877), included more than 100 brief paragraph essays on subjects that he categorized under "Practical" and "Speculative." The pages are filled with verse, but only two poems are Alcott's: "Matter" and "The Heart." His next book was an autobiographical epic poem entitled *New Connecticut* (1881). Published with the help of his friend Frank Sanborn, editor of the Boston *Commonwealth*, the poem dealt only with Alcott's early life. In the first of two sections, Alcott writes of his rural upbringing and formative experiences on Spindle Hill near Wolcott, Connecticut. In the second section, he writes of leaving Spindle Hill to seek his fortune as a Yankee peddler on five trips to Virginia and South Carolina (1817–23). After Sanborn reviewed it favorably, Alcott wrote in his journal: "He seems better satisfied

with the poetic significance of the verses than I am, though I read these with a certain pleasure, sometimes deceived as if they were the work of another." Lawrence Buell is correct when he speaks of *New Connecticut* as being "vapid" and imitative of William Wordsworth's *The Prelude*; read in light of the author's extensive notes, however, the poem gives good insights into rural New England life at the beginning of the nineteenth century (e.g., flax growing and linen making, regional dialect, the business of peddling). At the time Alcott wrote *New Connecticut* in the winter of 1880, he was lamenting the death of his daughter, May, and writing a threnody on her death entitled "Love's Morrow," which he later included in *Sonnets and Canzonets*.

Alcott wrote most of his poems in traditional rhymes and meters; they also exemplify conventions of the neoclassical age: artificial diction, rhetorical flights, questions and exclamations, personifications, references and allusions to the classics, didactic intent, imitative genre structures, and moral tone. Although he greatly admired much of Wordsworth's and Coleridge's thinking, Alcott paid little attention to their call for modern diction, originality, natural sounds, and organic structuring. In the unpublished poems in his journals for 1832–34, however, there are two blank verse poems. Alcott had a restricted range of subjects: philosophical speculations, autobiographical matters, religion, and portraits of family and friends. He rarely attempted to write purely lyrical, descriptive, or entertaining narrative verse for publication.

In his poems, Alcott demonstrates the Transcendental faith that he cultivated between 1831 and 1834 when he plunged into the works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge, Plato, Bishop Berkeley, Immanuel Kant, Thomas Carlyle, Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, Victor Cousin, and Proclus. The upshot of his intense reading program was that he discarded the sensual philosophy of Aristotle, Francis Bacon, and John Locke, and the mechanism of Isaac Newton, and became a thoroughgoing Transcendentalist, believing that the highest order of reality was the spiritual or the ideal; that the material universe is but the dress of the spirit; and that God is immanent in humanity and matter, unifying all, and making all partake of divinity. Alcott firmly placed his faith in intuition, holding it superior to experience. He believed that the universe was moral, well ordered, and alive. He never doubted the doctrine of pre-existence and innate ideas. His Transcendentalism made him oracular, optimistic, didactic, and idealistic in his verse.

In a poem included in the essay "Ideal Culture," from *Concord Days*, Alcott plays a favorite tune – that the ideal is superior to the material:

> 'T is clear
> Mind's sphere
> Is not here;
> The Ideal guest
> In ceaseless quest
> Pursues the Best;
> The very Better
> The while her fetter,
> Her desire
> Higher, still higher;
> Ever is fleeing
> Past Seeming to Being;
> Nor doth the sight content itself with seeing,
> As forms emerge they fast from sense are fleeing,
> Things but appear to vanish into Being.

For Alcott, humanity is a part of the divine Whole or One, and the mind gives form and meaning to the surrounding universe. In "Man" ("Adam") from an essay of the same name in *Tablets*, Alcott writes:

> He omnipresent is;
> All around himself he lies,
> Osiris spread abroad,
> Upstarting in all eyes:
> Nature his globed thought,
> Without him she were not,
> Cosmos from Chaos were not spoken,
> And God bereft of visible token.

The idealism here is much like that of Emerson's "Brahma" (LOA, 1: 319), which held that all is *maya* or illusion. In "Matter" Alcott says, "Nature is the eyeball of the Mind / The fleeting pageant tells for nought / Till shaped in Mind's created thought." In the beautiful "The Chase," moreover, Alcott postulates that beauty is to be found only in the ideal and that the search for the ideal finally ends within one's self. In this poem, the soul reaches the absolute mind by chasing the beautiful in bodily forms.

Alcott's poetry represents nature as efficacious, instructive, and curative; nature ministers to the spirit and the body. In 1847, he wrote in his journal: "I for my part seem always puny and insignificant, a meanness and pretence, when caught in towns, and lose that command of my powers that Nature finds for me whenever I court her presence." Unlike his friend Thoreau, however, Alcott was not a primitivist. As much as he loved external nature, Alcott never abandoned the neoclassical sentiment that humanity should enter into a partnership with nature and improve it by producing gardens, orchards, and idyllic villages. But Alcott also was quite responsive to nature without such improvements. In an aubade in *Tablets* that would have pleased Thoreau, he said:

> Rise in the morning, rise
> While yet the streaming tide
> Flames o'er the blue acclivities,
> And pours its splendors wide;
> Kindling its high intent
> Along the firmament,
> Silence and sleep to break,
> Imaginations wake,
> Ideas insphere
> And bring them here.
> Loiter nor play
> In soft delay;
> Speed glad thy course along
> The orbs and globes among,
> And as yon toiling sun
> Attain thy high meridian:
> Radiant and round the day; –
> Speed, speed thee on thy way.

Nature had recreative powers for Alcott. Written in the wake of one of Alcott's fits of despair (probably after a breakdown

following the failure of the Temple School, or, some say, after his ill-fated Fruitlands experiment in 1843–44), "The Return" tells of fleeing to nature and healing: "Recovered, / Himself again / Over his threshold led, / Peace fills his breast, / He finds his rest." Alcott wrote other poems about despair, such as "Lonely My Dwelling Here," but it was not in the optimistic philosopher to live too much in shadows. He was a part of the divine whole, and he could also find happiness by losing himself in labor.

Perhaps Alcott's finest achievement in poetry was his final book, *Sonnets and Canzonets* (1882). This work consisted mainly of poetic portraits and estimates of his family and beloved friends, most of whom he had outlived. Frank Sanborn, who assisted in editing the volume, said that Alcott's genius resulted from his not being familiar with the "accustomed movement in poetry in our time" and from his lifelong sense of brotherhood with the noble souls about him. Sanborn also stated (quite accurately) that Alcott had written "with little order and number of his rhymes, but with much regard to the spirit of the sonnet as a high form of verse"; Sanborn thus warned readers that the poems were highly suggestive and that they should not expect great definiteness in them. Alcott generously acknowledged Sanborn's help in "The Proem."

Among those pictured in the sonnets are Alcott's wife, Abby May Alcott, his four daughters, an infant granddaughter, a cousin, and friends and public figures, notably Dr. William Ellery Channing, Elizabeth Palmer Peabody, Emerson, Lidian Emerson, Margaret Fuller, William H. Channing, Thoreau, William Ellery Channing (the poet), Nathaniel **Hawthorne**, Wendell Phillips, John Brown (of Harpers Ferry), Theodore Parker, William Lloyd Garrison, and James A. Garfield. The book also included an idyllic poem on Concord ("Calm vale of comfort, peace, and industry").

In Sonnet XIV, from Part I (LOA, 1: 226), Alcott could not escape philosophizing. The poem was first entitled "Childhood" when it was inserted in *Journal of Speculative Philosophy* in January 1882.

Not Wordsworth's genius, Pestalozzi's love,
The stream have sounded of clear infancy.
Baptismal waters from the Head above
These babes I foster daily are to me;
I dip my pitcher in these living springs
And draw, from depths below, sincerity;
Unsealed, mine eyes behold all outward things
Arrayed in splendors of divinity.
What mount of vision can with mine compare?
Not Roman Jove nor yet Olympian Zeus
Darted from loftier ether through bright air
One spark of holier fire for human use.
Glad tidings thence these angels downward bring,
As at their birth the heavenly choirs do sing.

The reference to Pestalozzi relates to Alcott's early faith in the empiricism of educator Johann Heinrich Pestalozzi (1746–1827), which gave way later to his interest in the idealistic doctrines of Plato on the spiritual purity of children, pre-existence, and innate ideas. Alcott, however, also found the latter ideas in Wordsworth, particularly in his "Immortality Ode." But it was more from his own intuition and the life of Christ that he learned about the divinity, innocence, and purity of children. The "babes" could refer to any of the students in Alcott's several schools, but in the context of the family portraits in the volume, they also stood in for his own four daughters, whose education he directed himself.

Alcott's most highly esteemed Concord friend was Emerson, to whom he devoted four sonnets and a reprinting of "Ion." After Alcott and Emerson met in July 1835 and became associated in the Transcendental Club, there followed the closest of friendships for almost 50 years. Alcott was Emerson's "Orphic poet" and "God-made priest." Emerson was Alcott's "Hierophant of the soul" and "Ion." Emerson's patience with and moral and material support of the often impractical and impecunious Alcott were little short of heroic; but Alcott's well of affection for Emerson was bottomless. Praises of Emerson abound in Alcott's journals, and likewise for Alcott in Emerson's journals. Emerson wrote: "It were too much to say that the Platonic world I might have learned to treat as cloud-land, had I not known Alcott, who is a native of that country, yet I will say he makes it as solid as Massachusetts to me." The friendship inspired Alcott to write his best piece of prose, *Ralph Waldo Emerson* (1882), to which he attached his excellent monody "Ion." Emerson is the subject of Sonnet II (Part II).

Misfortune to have lived not knowing thee!
'T were not high living, nor to noblest end,
Who, dwelling near, learned not sincerity,
Rich friendship's ornament that still doth lend
To life its consequence and propriety.
Thy fellowship was my culture, noble friend:
By the hand thou took'st me, and didst condescend
To bring me straightway into thy fair guild;
And life-long hath it been high compliment
By that to have been known, and thy friend styled,
Given to rare thought and learning bent;
Whilst in my straits an angel on me smiled.
Permit me, then, thus honored, still to be
A scholar in thy university.

Next to Emerson, Alcott's most highly regarded Concord friend was Thoreau, to whom he devoted Sonnets XIII and XIV (Part II). Their lifelong friendship began when Alcott met Thoreau in April 1839 on one of his frequent visits to Concord before he moved there. Alcott's journals are rich in praise of Thoreau. At a time when not many were speaking for Thoreau, Alcott recognized and published his merits in "The Forester" in *The Atlantic Monthly* (1862). In Sonnet XIII, Alcott depicts Thoreau as a "Concord Pan" (Thoreau indeed loved to play his flute) who holds up nature as a mirror to his fellows to make them wiser. In March 1847, Alcott entered a thought in his journal that he was to repeat in Sonnet XIV: "Thoreau took his position in Nature, where he was in deed and in spirit – a genius of the natural world, a savage mind amidst savage faculties, yet adorned with the graces of a civilization which he disowned, but celebrating thereby Nature still." In Sonnet XIV, Alcott becomes Thoreau's apologist and sides with his idealism and humanitarianism.

Much do they wrong our Henry, wise and kind,
Morose who name thee, cynical to men,
Forsaking manners civil and refined

To build thyself in Walden woods a den, –
Then flout society, flatter the rude hind.
We better knew thee, loyal citizen!
Thou, friendship's all-adventuring pioneer,
Civility itself didst civilize:
Whilst braggart boors, wavering 'twixt rage and fear
Slave hearths lay waste, and Indian huts surprise,
And swift the Martyr's gibbet would uprear:
Thou hail'dst him great whose valorous emprise
Orion's blazing belt dimmed in the sky, –
Then bowed thy unrepining head to die.

In lines 6–14, Alcott recognizes Thoreau's disdain for the institution of slavery and for his fellow citizens who gave comfort to slavery by their vacillating conduct. Lines 11–14 refer to Captain John Brown. After Brown's capture following his raid at Harpers Ferry, Thoreau delivered an impassioned defense of Brown before his Concord townsmen on October 30, 1859. Few Concordians, however, were sympathetic to either Thoreau or Brown. Alcott was himself to praise Brown as a "prophet of God, Messias of the slave" in Sonnet XXIV (Part II).

Another Concord friend whom Alcott pictured in the sonnets was William Ellery Channing, often called "Ellery." A Harvard dropout, Ellery early dedicated himself to being a poet and, somewhat like Thoreau, resisted a commitment to the ordinary trades and professions by spending much time walking in the woods, boating, and writing poetry. One biographer has characterized him as being "fractious and incalculable as he was brilliant." Alcott felt the same way, but he counted Channing a friend. He often entertained him in his home and boated and walked (Alcott preferred to talk) with him; he held Channing to be a person of subtle thought and wit. In Sonnet XVIII, from Part II (LOA, 1: 226), Alcott says of his friend:

Adventurous mariner! in whose gray skiff,
Dashing disastrous o'er the fretful wave,
The steersman, subject to each breeze's whiff,
Or blast capricious that o'er seas doth rave,
Scarce turns his rudder from the fatal cliff, –
Scorning his craft or e'en himself to save.
Ye Powers of air, that shift the seaman's grave,
Adjust the tackle of his right intent,
And bring him to safely to the port he meant!
Long musing there on that divinity
Who to his hazard had assistance lent,
He verses cons, oft taken by surprise
In diverse meanings, and shrewd subtlety,
That pass quaint Donne, and even Shakespeare wise.

Channing was literally an "adventurous mariner" in that he explored all of the waters about Concord in a skiff. To Alcott, however, he was an "adventurous mariner" because of the remarkable intransigence with which he spurned the conventional and kept on a steady course of doing just what he wanted to do in life: choosing friends and company on his own terms and writing poetry. Lines 7–11 probably refer to Channing's "atomic atheism," which Alcott deplored. In lines 12–14, Alcott, as always, gives unsparing praise to Channing's poetry. "Channing," observed Alcott in his journal in 1871, "writes better lines of verse than any contemporary, if subtlety and exquisiteness of sense and melody are considered." Alcott's journals and published essays are filled with Channing's verses.

In Sonnet XIX, from Part II (LOA, 1: 227), Alcott pictures Hawthorne, whom he came to know well after 1842, when the newly married Salemite and his young bride, Sophia Peabody, moved to Concord to live at the Old Manse. In 1852 before Hawthorne went abroad on a consular tour, he purchased Alcott's house, Hillside, and renamed it The Wayside. In line three, the "baronial keep" refers to an obtrusive study room that Hawthorne had built atop The Wayside as a place for solitude and writing; the reference to the Muse's vexing and teasing Hawthorne recalls his admitted inability to regain his imaginative and creative powers after returning from abroad in 1860. Hawthorne and Alcott lived as next-door neighbors and occasionally visited and walked together; but Hawthorne, to Alcott's disappointment, kept him (and all others) at a distance. Sonnet XIX catches precisely the features that Alcott and most others found in Hawthorne: his feminine reticence, his ability to weave spellbinding dark and mysterious tales in poetic prose, and his fascination with guilt, evil, and retribution.

Romancer, far more coy than that coy sex!
Perchance some stroke of magic thee befell,
Ere thy baronial keep the Muse did vex,
Nor grant deliverance from enchanted spell,
But tease thee all the while and sore perplex.
Till thou that wizard tale shouldst fairly tell,
Better than poets in thy own clear prose.
Painter of sin in its deep scarlet dyes,
Thy doomsday pencil Justice doth expose,
Hearing and judging at the dread assize;
New England's guilt blazoning before all eyes,
No other chronicler than thee she chose.
Magician deathless! dost thou vigil keep,
Whilst 'neath our pines thou feignest deathlike sleep?

In a journal entry in June 1870, Alcott spoke at length of Hawthorne's morbid, gloomy, solitary nature. And then in an essay in *Concord Days*, he wrote sympathetically of Hawthorne's sensitiveness, his love of solitude, and his being coy "as a maiden." The last two lines of the sonnet refer to Hawthorne's keeping a vigil in Concord's Sleepy Hollow cemetery, where he had been buried in May 1864, with Alcott as one of the distinguished pallbearers.

Sonnets and Canzonets appeared in February 1882 to few, but favorable, reviews. Several presentation copies were illustrated with pictures. In mid-April, Alcott gave the aged and ailing Emerson a copy of the poems, several of which Emerson read with "emphasis and delight." Alcott celebrated the memory of Emerson's death (April 27, 1882) at the summer session of the School of Philosophy in July 1882, by reading "Ion." The work on this poem was Alcott's last; he was proofreading it when he had a stroke in October 1882 that virtually ended his physical activities. He died in Boston on March 4, 1888.

Alcott the poet still needs full scholarly treatment by textual and documentary editors. There lie in his journals unedited poems about his family, friends, philosophy, events, and his own life that need to be explicated and put more exactly into the context of his life and milieu. While not always of the highest quality, his poetry and poetic prose (for example, "The Goblet,"

"Matter," and "Orphic Sayings") were now and then good enough in his own time to be mistaken for Emerson's, and some even thought that Emerson's *Nature* was his. Alcott's stature as a poet will never rise to rival that of his Transcendentalist friends Emerson, Thoreau, Channing, or Jones Very (to say nothing of his Brahmin friends Henry Wadsworth **Longfellow**, Lowell, and Oliver Wendell **Holmes**), but scrutiny by scholars will support the conclusion that he was more than a loquacious conversationalist and inept communicator. Upon close inspection, he emerges as a writer who produced a respectable body of philosophical and autobiographical poems and insightful vignettes of the principal New England Transcendentalists.

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Washington Allston

(1779–1843)

"I read the other day some verses written by an eminent painter which were original and not conventional. The soul always hears an admonition in such lines. . . ." These are the first sentences in Ralph Waldo **Emerson's** "Self-Reliance" (1841); the artist was Washington Allston, one of the nineteenth century's most persistent admonishing ghosts. Like many eminent painters, Allston had some notable bad luck. When he first arrived in London in 1801, fresh out of Harvard College, he came with a little training in portraiture (America had little to offer), a limited patrimony, and a letter of introduction to Sir Joshua Reynolds, the founder of the Royal Academy and the author of *Discourses on Art*, the young Allston's bible of art theory. Along with these assets, Allston brought a determination to learn the allegorical style of history – more literally, story – painting, the "grand manner" that Reynolds had helped to glorify above all other styles.

The training served Allston well: he was accepted as a student at the Academy. His patrimony, however, ran out fast. Not only that, Reynolds had just died by the time Allston disembarked, and so the days of the grand manner were already numbered. Moreover, Reynolds's successor as president of the Academy, Benjamin West, was on the way out of favor with the critics and the court and, worst, with many of the Academy's younger painters. Allston, who described West to a friend as the best painter in London, grew up in the rear guard. His paintings were not unpopular or stuffy: in fact, they were universally admired, even within the factious Academy. And the paintings wore their passion fashionably on their sleeve: from an early age, Allston devoted himself to scenes of eighteenth-century romance, Salvator Rosa–style banditti in particular. In his maturity, Allston was not only Emerson's but William Wordsworth's favorite living painter. Yet, Allston painted with an eye to the old distinctions: if (as E. P. Richardson has argued) he was America's first Romantic painter, he was also the last American Romantic to stake his reputation on religious and literary subjects – and to paint these for the connoisseur instead of the admission-paying public.

The choice may have been noble, but it may have been crippling as well. History painting had never paid much, even in its glory days, and it paid still less in America, where Allston returned for good in 1818. Despite his relative fame and the subsequent success of his career, Allston became best known in the years after his death for the failure of his most cherished effort, the monumental *Belshazzar's Feast*. He started work on the painting in 1817 and boasted a few months later to a friend that it was near completion. Ten years later, the unfinished *Feast* lifted him temporarily out of debt; promising to produce the painting soon, he in effect mortgaged it to 12 rich subscribers for the extraordinary amount of 10 thousand dollars. The deal made news; several unscrupulous journalists published made-up accounts of the finished work, and the weight of expectation (together with a series of physical ailments) overwhelmed Allston. He would lock himself up with the *Feast* for days only to abandon it for months and years, promising a speedy completion all the while. Sixteen years later, at his death, his friends found the canvas defaced with false starts and second thoughts. Allston the painter would live on in the American imagination less for his own images than for Henry James's image of him – as that type of the artist obsessed, Theobald, in "The Madonna of the Future."

As a poet, Allston enjoyed better luck. Even in youth he had a talent for verse, and he published a number of poems as an undergraduate. Then in 1806, on his first trip to Rome, he met Coleridge. At 33, Coleridge was already an old man. His best poetry was behind him; he was poor, ill, addicted to laudanum, estranged from his wife, and terribly lonely, having already begun to drift apart from the Wordsworths. Allston was a much younger, happier 26, as eager for a mentor as Coleridge was for a disciple. The two became fast friends, with Washington Irving for an occasional third companion. Coleridge in essence finished Allston's education and helped to make him one of the best educated, most refined Americans of his day. Readers recognized Allston's polish; his one volume of verse, *The Sylphs of the Seasons* (1813), was a great success, and poems from this volume were anthologized well into the nineteenth century.

Still, the aims of Allston's poetry often seem more foreign to us than those of his English contemporaries, and Allston sounds surprisingly conservative when we compare him to American poets who were only a little younger than him. As his poem "America to Great Britain" (LOA, 1: 57) shows, he defined himself as a poet in the same way that he defined himself as a painter, by looking back at England, and, more specifically, at the England of his older teachers. In the *Cambridge History of American Literature*, Barbara L. Packer speculates that Allston's poetic conservatism has often put him (and much of his generation) out of the reach of twentieth-century readers. This generation displayed poetic convention proudly, Packer writes, as a sign of cultural maturity:

> Most of [their] exercises in pure invention now seem slight, though the constant distinction they draw between their own world and the world of "Mammon's slaves" [a reference to "Sylphs of the Seasons"] leads one to suspect that what looks to us like dilettantism had strong ideological appeal. Foreign critics loved to sneer that the mercantile spirit of the Americans was hostile to the production of poetry; American poets reacted by trying to create things whose uselessness vouched for their beauty. The result is a kind of innocent decadence, differing from the late nineteenth-century sort chiefly in its ignorance of its own sexual motives.

Allston's most "decadent" mode leans heavily on Coleridge; and yet, Allston's decadence is by far a paler, tamer thing than "Kubla Kahn," "Christabel," or "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner." Sometimes we hear little echoes of particular lines, as in the "Mariner"-like "Mad Lover":

> Thine eyes are glazed, thy cheeks are pale,
> Thy lips are livid, and thy breath

Too truly tells the dreadful tale, –
Thou comest from the house of death!

More often – as exemplified in "The Sylphs of the Seasons" (LOA, 1: 48) – Allston looks to Coleridge for a general model. Allston wrote poems of sheer fancy, in which an ostensible (but muted) allegory lets the poet wander and describe. The poems, however, lack the visionary intensity of John Keats or Percy Bysshe Shelley – and eschew the traditional georgic vehicle of witty, sentimental vignettes used by poets like James Thomson, William Cowper, or, most important, Wordsworth. In longer verse romances like "The Paint-King" and "The Angel and the Nightingale," in his satires, "Eccentricity" and "The Two Painters," and in many short poems like the one quoted above, Allston repeatedly shows his distance from these most enduring strands of Romanticism. His choice of immediate precursor – Coleridge, at his most fanciful, over Wordsworth – also sets Allston apart from most American poets after him. Although he helped introduce both Coleridge and Wordsworth to Boston literary circles, Allston never wrote the kind of nature poetry that would, under Wordsworth's influence, become the standard American mode of serious verse.

What he does learn from Wordsworth – most obviously, to use the Petrarchan sonnet as a record of looking – Allston uses for subjects all his own. And even at his most Wordsworthian, in later poems like "Art" (LOA, 1: 59) or "To the Author of 'The Diary of an Ennuyé'" (which inspired the opening of "Self-Reliance"), Allston takes his subjects from the world of representation rather than from untouched nature. The vices and virtues of artists, the relation of tradition to originality, the experience of looking at a painting: these topics are finally what interest Allston most.

Even when Allston treats subjects outside the world of painting, his interests incline toward problems of artistic representation. It must have come naturally to him to consider these problems of a piece; he insisted that his painting students read widely and that poetry, and even novels, could teach ways of picturing scenes and characters. Allston himself loved to experiment with all kinds of writing. In 1821, he published a short humorous story, "The Hypochondriac," and in 1822, he wrote *Monaldi*, a gothic romance (unpublished until 1841). As an old man, he wrote a short series entitled *Lectures on Art*, America's first such treatise. In his youth, he even dabbled in drama. Although Allston seems never to have had his scripts performed, he loved the theater all his life and maintained close friendships with several actors. As the late poem "On Kean's Hamlet" (LOA, 1: 60) shows, he also remained a shrewd judge of stagecraft. Emerson remarked in his journals that Allston's "merit" was "like that of Kean's recitation merely outlinear, strictly emptied of all obtrusive individuality, but a vase to receive & not a fountain to impart *character*."

Allston's shrewdness and receptivity make "On Kean's Hamlet" one of the most accessible of his poems of looking. He begins by complaining that Shakespeare's characters seem to defy representation. Doomed forever to private readings by individual readers, they seem to move best "as in some necromantic glass" across the forgiving magic mirror of the page. Not even Michelangelo or Raphael could paint them satisfactorily:

And vainer still, methought, by mimic tone,
And feignèd look, and attitude, and air,
The Actor's toil; for self will have its share
With nicest mimicry, and, though it spare
To others largely, gives not all its own.
So did I deem . . .

It is not until the poet sees Charles Kemble's Coriolanus and George Cooke's Shylock that he believes "self" can be momentarily overcome by something besides purely literary study:

. . . these were beings tangible in vice,
Their purpose searchable, their every thought
Indexed in living men; yet only sought,
Plain as they seem, by genius, – only bought
By genius even with laborious price.

Each character comes to life because he is "tangible in vice," compounded of particular desires and actions. The task, Allston discovers, is not after all to mimic "look, and attitude, and air," but to take on purpose and thought and let the look of the thing take care of itself.

But what, Allston now asks, can any actor do with Hamlet, a character entirely familiar in his charismatic outward show – and altogether mysterious underneath? Allston may well have heard Coleridge's lectures on Shakespeare; certainly, his Hamlet is Coleridge's "man who cannot make up his mind," a character defined by conflicted purposes. This makes him almost impossible to play without lame "mimicry" and requires the greatest actor, Edmund Kean, to bring to life the "princely Denmark's form" by playing the purposes as they conflict:

If this be Kean, then Hamlet lived indeed!
Look! how his purpose hurries him apace,
Seeking a fitful rest from place to place!
And yet his trouble fits him with a grace,
As if his heart did love what makes it bleed.

Kean plays the purpose without playing, as it were, the purpose of the purpose, without playing the character. He concerns himself with small actions and leaves these outlines to be filled in by the poet.

The poem ends boldly, even baldly: "Or Kean or Hamlet, – what I see is real!" But we accept Allston's admiration because it comes so thoroughly tempered by fine observation and questioning, because the reality of representation is not so much at issue as the "what." Allston asks: "what starts before me?" It is this curiosity – what combination of need and method makes for successful, real representation? – that animates the poem.

In *Lectures on Art*, Allston defined *line* as "the course or medium through which the eye is led from one part of the picture to another. The indication of this course is various and multiform, appertaining equally to shape, to color, and to light and dark; in a word, to whatever attracts and keeps the eye in motion." Suitably enough, his greatest poetic achievement is a series of five ecphrastic sonnets, each one tracing the eye in motion over the work of a different painter. To these pieces Allston attaches a sixth sonnet, dedicated to Benjamin West ("To My Venerable Friend, the President of the Royal Academy" [LOA, 1: 56]). This celebration of a painter in his official role as a teacher is not at all out of place. Like Allston's *Lectures* at their best, these sonnets teach how to pay attention to the particulars of pictures and then how to look past these particulars for the character of the whole. They also form the best possible

introduction to Allston's short lyrics: they help teach what to listen for in his other sonnets and sonnet fragments.

The first of the five, "On a Falling Group in the Last Judgement of Michael Angelo, in the Cappella Sistina" (LOA, 1: 54), limits its look to one detail, which can be found at the lower right corner of the fresco:

How vast, how dread, o'erwhelming is the thought
Of Space interminable! to the soul
A circling weight that crushes into nought
Her mighty faculties! a wond'rous whole,
Without or parts, beginning, or an end!
How fearful then on desp'rate wings to send
The fancy e'en amid the waste profound!
Yet, born as if all daring to astound,
Thy giant hand, oh Angelo, hath hurl'd
E'en human forms, with all their mortal weight,
Down the dread void – fall endless as their fate!
Already now they seem from world to world
For ages thrown; yet doom'd, another past,
Another still to reach, nor e'er to reach the last!

Although the detail will be familiar to many readers, few will have seen its horrors so distinctly – or return to it without some inkling of Allston's dread. If we read the sonnet without having the picture before us, it is easy to forget that "the thought / Of Space interminable" is just that, a thought. The fresco itself is packed with figures and full of light, and the "waste profound" is a matter of draftsmanship and lives only in the outlines that separate one figure from another.

What happens when we look again at the fresco, when we see it under Allston's tutelage? As before, we see the falling group in the first split second of its fall. Some figures teeter and clutch at the angels who shove them down (the ether seems just to have given way under them). Others topple over or away from each other, abandoning themselves to gravity like dreamers in a nightmare. Now, these details hold the eye in a new way. We see the damned no longer as a group, but as a collection of solitudes. By the strangeness of their poses (we watch them from what should be beneath, behind, or above), by the outward gazes of the peripheral figures, by the central figure's haunting self-contemplation, and by every possible device except the use of actual blank space, Michelangelo has set the crowded figures apart from each other and from us. Like the rose and blue lovers of Edvard Munch's *Encounter in Space*, who sail past each other without contact or recognition, Michelangelo's figures give the feeling, more than the sight, of falling (they are nothing like, say, the views revealed to us by stop photography). In his discussion of the sublime, Edmund Burke compares the effect of "vacuities" in painting to the experience of sitting in a chair and finding it lower than we expect, or to waking "with a most violent start . . . preceded by a sort of dream of our falling down a precipice." Allston's sonnet reverses the analogy: from the shock and imbalance in Michelangelo's figures, Allston lets us extrapolate the void, the actual fall. (It would come as no surprise if the strange, later sonnet "A Word: Man" [LOA, 1: 61] took its inspiration from the same terrible figures.)

Like Reynolds, Allston was in the habit of referring to Michelangelo as the Milton of the visual arts. Although Michelangelo never painted the Fall of the Rebel Angels that he planned for the entry of the Sistine Chapel, Allston suggests that the *Last Judgment* gives us a scene of damnation comparable to Milton's: in it Michelangelo has realized the paradox of "darkness visible," not by making it dark (as a theorist like Burke would prescribe), but by making it clearly, intensely visible.

As always in painting, making the figures visible means holding them still. In this case, the feat is especially remarkable. For Allston, it is the unfulfilled sense that the heels of the main figure are about to tumble forward that makes thought "A circling weight that crushes into nought / [The soul's] mighty faculties": it is the actual stasis of the figure that gets eyes and thought rolling in the first place. In itself, this emphasis on movement, as a mark of sublimity, is not new: contemporary critics had grown up on Longinus's dictum that "It is the nature of the Pathetic and Sublime, to run rapidly along, and carry all before them." Burke, for example, explains the effect of sublimity in paintings as a kind of eyestrain.

But for Allston, the feeling of rapid, helpless circling is part of looking at any great painting; it has as much to do with grace and beauty as with the strainings of sublimity. In the second sonnet, "On the Group of the Three Angels Before the Tent of Abraham, by Raffaelle, in the Vatican" (LOA, 1: 54), Allston also describes his kind of active looking as a purely pleasurable, purely beautiful enchantment:

Oh, now I feel as though another sense
From Heaven descending had inform'd my soul;
I feel the pleasurable, full control
Of Grace, harmonious, boundless, and intense.
In thee, celestial Group, embodied lives
The subtle mystery; that speaking gives
Itself resolv'd; the essences combin'd
Of Motion ceaseless, Unity complete.
Borne like a leaf by some soft eddying wind,
Mine eyes, impell'd as by enchantment sweet,
From part to part with circling motion rove,
Yet seem unconscious of the power to move;
From line to line through endless changes run,
O'er countless shapes, yet seem to gaze on One.

As John Hollander has noted, Allston's aesthetic interest in the painting governs and finally overwhelms the sonnet's Trinitarian allegory. Allston is too fascinated by the way in which the angels look to insist on what they mean; in the end, the mystery of the Trinity becomes a figure for his own response to the painting, a figure for his own willing captivation. From the beginning, Allston receives the sight of the angels as a gift of imminent creative power; this sight constitutes "another sense" that informs (teaches and reshapes) his soul. He feels "the pleasurable, full control / Of Grace" as a control over him and, at the same time, as a control available to him. If this is rapture, the rapture entices without sublimity's violence: Allston joins in his own transport. He is the one who lets himself get swept away.

Reynolds's *Discourses* held up Raphael and Michelangelo as the highest examples of the beautiful and sublime, respectively; as the representative of the sublime, Michelangelo was considered the greater of the two. Allston would replay the contest in his own lectures – with a less definitive outcome: "If any man may be said to have reigned over the hearts of his fel-

lows, it was Raffaelle Sanzio. . . . In this the greatest names in Art fall before him; in this he has no rival." In Allston's sonnet, therefore, we might say that the three dynamic, muscular youths stand in for Raphael himself; they reign over and rejuvenate the viewer's heart at the same time that they enchant Abraham and Sarah's unfaithful, barren marriage.

In both cases, the enchantment attends on a scene of informing. The angels are there to tell Abraham and Sarah something at first unbelievable about themselves – that they will desire each other again and make love – and Raphael reduces this information to the three gestures that organize the painting, so that his angels come, like Eros, to be embodiments of creative power. As often in Allston's poems (see, for instance, the sonnets "Art" or "On the Statue of an Angel, by Bienaimé in the Possession of J.S. Copley Greene, Esq." [LOA, 1: 59]), artistic inspiration feels like divine redemption, if only because it intrudes from outside to inform the self. The episode of the angels gripped Allston in later life as a symbol of young inspiration: in the introduction to his lectures he asks, "Could we read the annals scored on every human heart . . . who will doubt that their darkest passages are those made visible by the distant gleams from those angelic Forms [Beauty, Truth, and Goodness], that, like the Three which stood before the tent of Abraham, once looked upon his youth?" Allston recognizes that the angels' first miracle is not Sarah's conception, but the fact that Sarah and Abraham desire each other anew. In Allston's account, even Raphael's old couple (whose unimportant bodies seem hardly to belong in the same painting with the angels) might be reconciled to love and work in a world that received such visitations.

The third sonnet, "On Seeing the Picture of Æolus by Peligrino Tibaldi, in the Institute at Bologna" (LOA, 1: 55), follows up Allston's interest in paintings as stories of their own inspiration – in this case, inspiration by the kind of awesome sublimity, or *terribilità*, that frightened Allston in the *Last Judgment*. At first, Allston imagines "the mighty spell of Bonarotti" (i.e., Michelangelo) as a kind of magic writing, born on the winds that accompany Pellegrino's Aeolus; then the tribute to both painters grows more complex. The giant Aeolus, glaring down from his ceiling at Allston, provokes (and finally dismisses) the question of how much of Aeolus, or of Michelangelo, Pellegrino actually understands:

> Full well, Tibaldi, did thy kindred mind
> The mighty spell of Bonarotti own.
> Like one who, reading magick words, receives
> The gift of intercourse with worlds unknown,
> 'Twas thine, decyph'ring Nature's mystick leaves,
> To hold strange converse with the viewless wind;
> To see the Spirits, in embodied forms,
> Of gales and whirlwinds, hurricanes and storms.
> For, lo! obedient to thy bidding, teems
> Fierce into shape their stern relentless Lord:
> His form of motion ever-restless seems;
> Or, if to rest inclin'd his turbid soul,
> On Hecla's top to stretch, and give the word
> To subject Winds that sweep the desert pole.

In the first four lines, we are told that Pellegrino's mind owns Michelangelo's spell: Pellegrino reads the spell, and he conjures up interlocutors from "worlds unknown." And yet, Allston never lets us guess how well Pellegrino knows these worlds, or whether he holds his "intercourse" purely by rote, through words that belonged, and still belong, to Michelangelo. The next two lines only thicken the mystery. If Pellegrino deciphers nature's mystic leaves, are these the leaves penned and scattered by Michelangelo? Or are they new leaves, dictated to Pellegrino by Michelangelo's source? And if this source is "Nature," who is she, if not the worlds unknown? The figures in Pellegrino's Large Ulysses Room, where Aeolus appears, have long been said to owe especially much to Michelangelo's Sibyls and Prophets, but if Michelangelo's scenes of prophecy have their source in natural inspiration, does this mean that a true reading of the prophetic scenes can return the later painter to this source?

Allston turns from these riddles in lines six through eight. Pellegrino's "strange converse" with the viewless, or invisible, wind is to be measured in sights, not words: the fact of artistic mastery (not exactly originality) is what counts here, what explains Pellegrino's ownership, and what makes Pellegrino a force to be obeyed. Although "Lord" in the tenth line refers primarily to Aeolus, we can hardly rule out Michelangelo as a secondary referent: the "form of motion" belongs to them equally. For Allston this ambiguity finds a kind of mirror in the Michelangelesque ambiguity of Aeolus's pose (is he springing into action or lapsing into relaxation?). Allston notes the ambiguity and heightens it by a twist of syntax: "His form of motion ever-restless seems / Or . . . [seems] to stretch." The spirits that Pellegrino has tamed are not just the monstrous, puff-cheeked putti behind Aeolus; they stand for every power that Pellegrino owns without understanding or originating, without making fully his.

By glorifying Pellegrino – as a good student of Michelangelo – Allston defends both the minor painter and his task. When we study the strangeness of great paintings, Allston suggests, we learn new powers, new spells bigger than we can understand or originate ourselves. Even a derivative painting, if it is good, distinguishes the hand that painted it, if only by lifting a painter like Pellegrino to heights where he cannot feel quite at home. (So, in the first lines of "On Michael Angelo" [LOA, 1: 62] Allston claims a ray of Michelangelo's light for himself without pretending to benefit the source: "'T is not to honor thee by verse of mine / I bear a record of thy wondrous power.")

In the fourth sonnet, "On Rembrant[*sic*]; Occasioned by His Picture of Jacob's Dream" (LOA, 1: 55), Allston extends the claim. According to Allston, the powers of strange paintings change our minds. Even if we never understand them, we think new things because of them. They seem to talk back to us:

> As in that twilight, superstitious age
> When all beyond the narrow grasp of mind
> Seem'd fraught with meanings of supernal kind,
> When e'en the learned philosophic sage,
> Wont with the stars thro' boundless space to range,
> Listen'd with rev'rence to the changeling's tale;
> E'en so, thou strangest of all beings strange!
> E'en so thy visionary scenes I hail;
> That like the rambling of an idiot's speech,
> No image giving of a thing on earth,

Nor thought significant in Reason's reach,
Yet in their random shadowings give birth
To thoughts and things from other worlds that come,
And fill the soul, and strike the reason dumb.

In his *Lectures,* Allston would defend the Dutch masters (from critics like Reynolds who attacked the "meanness of their characters"). For instance, he concludes his praise of a "coarse" Dutch cottage scene with an appeal to artists: "They, we are sure, will be the last to question the character of the feeling because of the ingredients which worked the spell, and, if true to themselves, they must call it poetry." Here, Allston is not afraid to associate earthy detail with a mysterious spell. It is worth noting that the sonnet is dedicated to Rembrandt as a comment on his work in general; in this dark painting (now thought to have been executed by a pupil, Aert de Gelder, from Rembrandt's sketch), the lighted figures make a kind of foil to their shadows, to the enveloping blackness. And this effect is typical of Rembrandt: the familiarity, the coarseness, the recognizable humanness of what we see turns the eye all the more forcefully back to what we cannot see, what lies hidden in the dark, unfamiliar surrounding.

De Gelder's portly angel (so human that he must lift up his robe to step down to earth) and the heaven hovering only a foot or two above the angel's head strike Allston as "visionary" because they compete for actuality with the black night and the forest billowing around them. If there is something mad in the competition ("like the rambling of an idiot's speech"), it is no less compelling for its madness. The closeness of de Gelder's heaven – in general, the intrusion of dream light on night – startles Allston (as one of his favorite contemporaries, Fuseli, must also have done). He thus cannot help but peer into the "random shadowings" that exemplify motives and wisdoms nonsensical to the reason of his own age and temperament. For Allston, there can be no crossing the gulf that lies between him and Rembrandt; it begs nevertheless to be crossed, and Allston must satisfy himself with this, his own communication (however randomly shadowed) "from other worlds."

In the fifth sonnet, "On the Luxembourg Gallery" (LOA, 1: 56), Allston's subject is once again a painter who is hard for the Age of Reason to accept. The difficulty with Rembrandt is that he tells an unreasonable truth; the trouble with Rubens is that he refuses to tell the truth at all. His art is passionately politic; it mocks every moral and critical system, including Allston's. "The fact is," Allston once told a friend, "Rubens was a liar, a splendid liar":

> and I would rather lie like Rubens than to tell the truth in the poor, tame manner in which some painters do. His pictures are like the sophistical reasonings of a liar, to whom you have only to grant his premises and he will thereon erect a gorgeous fabric, but deny these premises and it all falls to the ground.

This talent for dissimulation shines forth most brilliantly in the cycle that Rubens painted for the gallery of Maria de Medicis's Luxembourg Palace. In these 23 allegorical paintings, commissioned to represent Maria's "very illustrious life and heroic deeds," Rubens had his work cut out for him. He was expected to glorify Maria's rocky political career (her marriage to her father's philandering debtor Henri IV and her notably corrupt reign after his death); to satirize the son, Louis XIII, who in a coup d'état had displaced and imprisoned her; and to offend no one (least of all Louis) in the process.

Even without these political complications, the cycle required extraordinary feats of good taste. How to make a courtship that took two years of papal engineering look like love at first sight – particularly when both principals were remarkably ugly? How to paint a marriage by proxy? How to paint the queen's arrival in France, when the king was too busy (with a second, less fortunate fiancée) to meet her? How to paint, of all things, *The Marriage Consummated in Lyons?* Every subject demanded a new delicacy, a new kind of flattery; nonetheless, each painting must flirt with absurdity. And yet, Allston argues, if we miss the cycle's charm, the fault lies with us:

There is a Charm no vulgar mind can reach,
No critick thwart, no mighty master teach;
A Charm how mingled of the good and ill!
Yet still so mingled that the mystick whole
Shall captive hold the struggling Gazer's will,
'Till vanquish'd reason own its full control.
And such, oh Rubens, thy mysterious art,
The charm that vexes, yet enslaves the heart!
Thy lawless style, from timid systems free,
Impetuous rolling like a troubled sea,
High o'er the rocks of reason's lofty verge
Impending hangs; yet, ere the foamy surge
Breaks o'er the bound, the refluent ebb of taste
Back from the shore impels the wat'ry waste.

Allston answers Rubens's sophistication with what we might call a fiction of imitative form: the verse is unusually tricky. The three strongly significant enjambments, the subtle vowel shifts in lines three through six, the continual suggestiveness of the rhymes, and the complexity of the sonnet's last image, itself suggested by the sea gods that dominate Rubens's *Arrival at Marseilles* (see the poem's shorter version, "Rubens" [LOA, 1: 62]) – all of these complexities make the poem sound modern, all invite close reading.

Allston relies on this fiction of imitation not just to versify, but to sketch Rubens himself. In the casual aristocratic pose that he perfected, the master stands before the cycle like one of his own portraits: charming, lawless, and impetuous all at once. In Allston's sketch, it is as if Rubens's pictures of command were somehow bound up with Rubens's command of pictures. (Allston might well reply that Rubens suggested the lie himself in his later self-portraits.) Confronted with so much mastery, the strongest possible response for Allston is to acknowledge himself beaten.

With this humble gesture of appreciation, Allston draws the series of ecphrastic sonnets to a close. The sonnet to West celebrates another kind of strong humility: the true artist's devotion to work over self. This ideal, "E'en for itself to love thy soul-ennobling art," returns again and again in Allston's letters, in the *Lectures*, and in the aphorisms (published with the *Lectures*) that he pinned to his studio walls. This ideal also constitutes the tragic paradox of *Monaldi*, in which Allston divides the artist's soul between two friends, a self-seeking poet and a self-forgetting painter. Whereas Reynolds could encour-

age his students to strive after lasting fame (rather than passing popularity), Allston preaches what we might call a more thoroughly Protestant idealism: art must be its own reward, a reward untainted by worldly considerations. True fame – which, for Allston as well as Reynolds, always means posterity – must come on its own and cannot be of any concern to the artist: "I cannot believe that any man who deserved fame ever labored for it; that is, *directly*." In the sonnet that follows Allston's best poems, therefore, West stands in for an underlying ideal of the cycle: "the manly race / Of one who felt the purifying grace / Of honest fame."

LORIN STEIN

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Joel Barlow

(1754–1812)

In "The Poetic Principle" (1848), Edgar Allan **Poe** writes: "That the extent of a poetical work is, *caeteris paribus*, the measure of its merit seems undoubtedly, when we state it, a proposition sufficiently absurd. . . . A mountain, to be sure, by the mere sentiment of physical magnitude which it conveys, *does* impress us with a sense of the sublime – but no man is impressed after *this* fashion by the material grandeur of even 'The Columbiad.'" As the quotation illustrates, Joel Barlow's most ambitious work, *The Columbiad* (LOA, 1: 12), was much maligned by the literati and the populace alike in the nineteenth century, a critical disparagement that has remained unrevised. Indeed, most present-day criticism dismisses the epic as a ponderous historical curiosity at best. Generally perceived as an epic poem whose vision exceeds the talents of its creator, *The Columbiad* has become synonymous with works of immense physical magnitude – and meager artistic proficiency.

To judge Barlow's poetry by current aesthetic or critical standards that ignore its historical and political context and its aesthetic milieu, however, is unfair. Twentieth-century readers must examine the prevalent beliefs, issues, and temper of the time in which Barlow's poetry was written. Although it was abruptly terminated by his untimely death, Barlow's poetic and political career (1778–1812) spanned a period characterized by events of great turmoil: the American and French Revolutions, the establishment of the early American republic, and the commencement of the Napoleonic wars.

The American Revolution was not only a political revisionary movement, but a moral and philosophical one as well. For the embattled American colonists, the Revolution became the first viable testing of Enlightenment ideals of benevolence and rationalism, especially the philosophies of John Locke and Jean-Jacques Rousseau, and galvanized exponents of a new Augustan Age on this side of the Atlantic. These self-proclaimed New World Augustans believed that the Revolution would usher in a new age of political and artistic felicity – and, most importantly, an age founded upon democratic ideals.

Despite the fervor and positivism of various politicians and artists, however, the fledgling nation's transformation from a wilderness to a New Athenian order was impeded by postwar worries. In the early years the nation was inauspiciously afflicted with severe economic, political, and social problems. Beset by tenuous relations with Great Britain and increasingly belligerent ones with its former ally France, the new nation faced internal ills as well. Although Alexander Hamilton worked to stabilize the nation's financial situation through the establishment of a national bank and protective tariffs, the monetary system was shaky and commerce was waning. Farmers and other rural inhabitants suffered great economic hardships, and many moved into the cities looking for work. Urban areas rapidly became overcrowded, leading to substandard sanitation, disease, and a marked rise in crime.

During this tumultuous period, the notion of republican virtue surfaced – that is, that the private interests of the individual, no matter how noble, must be subsumed for the good of the republic. Many Americans, especially those who espoused Thomas Jefferson's republican philosophy, viewed the propensity to perpetuate the British way of life – seen as self-indulgent, corrupt, and obsessed with luxury – as a dangerous course. Therefore, they emphasized Lockean and Newtonian ideas of order and discipline, that freedom must be circumscribed by civic obligations. As a result of these ideas, members of the period's two main ideological camps became embroiled in a particularly divisive dispute: the Federalists' fear of the populace spawned an emphasis on the need for governmental constraints, whereas the Jeffersonian republicans championed the idea that reason could emancipate humanity and thus edify the personal and the civic. In addition, after the Revolution public opinion became divided over the role of the arts in society; some saw the arts as an indication of societal degeneration, but others thought they exemplified American progress.

Nevertheless, for many artists in the early republic, such as Barlow, the Revolutionary War and its aftermath were worthy of artistic celebration. And like many of his peers, Barlow adhered to and, through his poetry, promulgated the classical and Renaissance concept of *translatio studii* (or *translatio imperii*). Ostensibly, *translatio studii* is the tenet that the progress of civilization emulates solar movement; like celestial bodies, civilization, too, moves from east to west. Consequently, to those who postulated this idea, North America was the natural future residence of the arts and sciences, a new Athens, and its culture and art would eventually supersede that of the British.

As products of the Enlightenment, Barlow and his Yale classmates were trained in poetic and oratorical imitation of classical and British literary forms. In fact, Barlow was one of the most well-read American citizens of the early republic. His erudition served him well as a poet, but also as a scholar and a diplomat, for Barlow became a judicious and savvy political official of the Jefferson and James Madison administrations. Although Barlow is better remembered for his political adroitness and enlightened philosophical stance than for his art, his poetic opus is worthy of greater scrutiny, especially in relation to his political involvements.

Barlow's beginnings, although not unpropitious, were not providential either. He was born March 24, 1754, the son of Samuel Barlow, a prosperous Connecticut farmer whose forebear, John Barlow, had emigrated to Connecticut one hundred years before, and Esther Hull, Samuel's second wife. As the eighth of nine children (the elder four were from Samuel Barlow's first marriage), young Joel was provided with the most rigorous liberal education the elder Barlow could afford. As a special student under Parson Bartlett's tutelage, in one year Barlow successfully prepared for entrance into Moor's Indian School in Hanover, New Hampshire. After completing his course of study there, he entered Dartmouth in 1774, but left after three months for Yale upon the death of his father. When Yale was temporarily closed because of a potential typhoid epidemic in New Haven, Barlow joined the militia, but he then returned to Yale to complete his baccalaureate degree.

Upon graduation in 1778, Barlow as class poet read "The Prospect of Peace" at commencement. This early work antici-

pates the Commencement Poem of 1781, *The Vision of Columbus*, and *The Columbiad* in both theme and form. Written in heroic couplets (a form Barlow used extensively), "The Prospect of Peace" opens with a grandiose description of the American struggle for independence and optimistically ends with a millennial vision of the United States where "Love shall rule, and Tyrants be no more." Typical of commencement poems of the period, it employs a newly popular poetic form: the prospect poem. Notable examples of this subgenre include John Trumbull's "Prospect of the Future Glory of America" (1770) and Philip **Freneau** and Hugh Henry Brackenridge's "The Rising Glory of America" (1771). The prospect poem subgenre reached its zenith in Francis Scott Key's "The Star-Spangled Banner" (1814; LOA, 1: 46), a foreshortened variant that employed anapestic couplets to emblazon its vision of glory and sovereignty. In general, the prospect poem was patterned after the last two books of Milton's *Paradise Lost*, which deal with the archangel Michael's prophesy. American variants, which primarily used prophesy as a means to praise republican ideals, were typically composed of approximately two hundred to six hundred lines of blank verse or heroic couplets. According to John McWilliams, the "crisis of America's self-definition led patriotic poets to cherish one particular poetic subgenre – an oratorical prophesy"; hence the popularity of the prospect poem (*Columbia History of the United States*, ed. Emory Elliott, 1988).

As a new college graduate, Barlow found few occupations open to him. He briefly settled on a career as a schoolmaster (1778–79), but he always heard the Muse's seductive call. Determined to launch a career as a poet, Barlow convinced his older brother Nathaniel to subsidize his graduate studies at Yale. At this time, Barlow hit upon his idea for the epic that would dominate his poetic efforts: Columbus and the discovery of America. In a letter to his former tutor and friend Joseph Buckminister, Barlow explained: "The discovery of America made an important revolution in the history of mankind. It served the purpose of displaying knowledge, liberty, and religion." Barlow's graduate Commencement Poem of 1781 is of interest because it offers excerpts from the work in progress *The Vision of Columbus*. This abbreviated form of his grand epic opens with laudatory descriptions of Yale and then shifts to a postwar prophesy concerning the millennium. Reverberating with the concept of *translatio studii*, the poem augurs that the literature of the new republic will ultimately fashion a new world.

Unfortunately, although Barlow was respected by his Yale colleagues as a promising poet, he found himself floundering in his search for a profession that would provide a viable income while allowing him to pursue his art. Finally, after acquiescing to friends' entreaties and relying on their influence, Barlow was ordained a minister and became a chaplain in the army. But even though he had enjoyed the study of theology as an undergraduate, his brief ministerial career could be described, at best, as lackluster. Upon his discharge, Barlow embarked on a successful career as a diplomat and served his country in various offices, most notably as minister to France. (Like Washington, Hamilton, and Thomas Paine, Barlow was elected to French citizenship; this award testifies to his skill and success as a politician.)

Despite his political achievements, Barlow never would forsake his Muse, and was constantly honing his craft. For a brief period, he became affiliated with a group of conservative Federalist poets, known as the Connecticut Wits (or the Hartford Wits). A group of Yale graduates, including Barlow, John Trumbull, David Humphreys, and Timothy Dwight, launched a political satire entitled *The Anarchiad* (ominously subtitled "A Poem on the Restoration of Chaos and Substantial Night"), which they published in thirteen installments in the *New Haven Gazette* (1786–87). *The Anarchiad* primarily served as a conservative response to Shays's Rebellion, a series of armed conflicts that grew out of an economic crisis on the Massachusetts frontier and that could not be quelled by the militia until February 1787.

Published soon after Barlow's involvement with the "wicked wits," *The Vision of Columbus* (1787) was a more patriotic poem than his previous ones and espoused a more moderate view. Of course, Barlow's moderate ideas in this poem registered his pre–French Revolution views. Heavy publicity and an impressive subscription list made the poem a financial success. The poem opens with a prose summary of the life of Columbus, which leads into Book I, where an aged, imprisoned Columbus is elaborately and despairingly pondering his fate. An angel mercifully appears and whisks him off to the Mount of Vision so that he can see the future of the New World he has discovered. Over the next three books, the vision chronicles the history of the Incan Empire and its remarkable founder, Manco Capac. (Barlow even inserts a prosaic 15-page essay, "On the Genius and Institutions of Manco Capac.") Book IV concludes with the colonization of the North American continent, and then Books V–VI describe both the French and Indian Wars and the Revolutionary War. Lastly, Book VII commences the hymn to peace. Here the poet glorifies American progress in the arts and sciences, while interjecting diverse philosophical "treatises" on such subjects as the relationship between the Creator and humanity, the problems of extreme passion or extreme reason, and the ultimate union of reason and passion, which the poem claims will result in a future of peace and humanity. The poem concludes with Columbus joyfully musing on a vision of a peaceful millennium.

The Vision of Columbus is ostensibly a summation of Barlow's early conservative beliefs – that is, his New England–influenced faith in progress, his belief in the unchanging constant of the human condition, and his affirmation of spiritual revelation. According to these beliefs, false religion led to excess passion, and reason carried to excess led to error.

After 1788, Barlow broke with such conservative thought. His poetics and politics, which originated from the rather rustic confines of New Haven, expanded to the more global proportions that the views from the drawing rooms of Washington, London, and Paris afforded. Instead of pursuing his friendships and political alliances with conservatives such as Dwight, he aligned himself with proponents of English radicalism, the Girondists of the French Revolution, and American republicans such as Jefferson and Madison.

Between composing the moderate *Vision of Columbus* and its revision, the republican *The Columbiad*, Barlow wrote what is generally considered to be his finest poetic effort, the parodic "The Hasty Pudding" (composed in 1793; published in 1796). This engaging mock-epic paean to cornmeal mush was written in Europe during a fit of homesickness. In brief, the

narrator gleefully discovers the homey dish in the Alps, which causes him to reflect on the recipe. The recipe is an unusual one, for it opens with the planting of the corn, details the harvesting and concocting of the mush, and ends with advice on the type of bowls and utensils one should use when serving this "purest of all food" and a mock treatise on table etiquette. Interspersed within the four cantos is an apostrophe to the corn and a delightful description of the Connecticut countryside.

But Barlow chose to forsake humor for a more serious agenda. *The Columbiad* (1807) is his valiant attempt to use old poetic forms to establish a republican vision. Celebratory in tone, the epic venerates commerce, nature, and the triumph of the common people over the corrupt aristocracy. Although criticized for its loosely episodic construction and its ponderous rhythm (the heroic couplets attempt to emulate the more skillful Alexander Pope), the work has merits other than its magnificent scope. We can more accurately assess these merits by contextualizing the poem in relation to Barlow's own outline of his poetics in the poem's preface. According to the preface, epic poems should be judged according to "the importance of the action, the disposition of the parts, the invention and application of incidents, the propriety of the illustrations, the liveliness and chastity of the images, the suitable intervention of machinery, the moral tendency of the manners, the strength and sublimity of the sentiments; the whole being clothed in language whose energy, harmony, and elegance shall constitute a style every where suited to the matter they have to treat." Also in the preface, Barlow espouses the view that past epics (notably, the *Iliad* and the *Aeneid*) had a pernicious influence on their audiences inasmuch as they promoted the notion of the divine right of kings. One of his purposes in writing *The Columbiad* is to recontextualize the epic, and thereby celebrate republicanism.

A complex, ambitious work, *The Columbiad* is structured as follows:

Books I–V: The various visions of Columbus (very similar to the structure Barlow utilized in the earlier *Vision of Columbus*).

Books VI–VII: An expansion of Barlow's visions, which incorporates American Revolutionary heroes. These heroes, particularly Washington, are depicted as larger than life, and the action within these books is on a grander scale (and therefore more "epic"). The subject matter in these books is also more detailed.

Book VIII: A paean of peace and discourse directed toward Revolutionary War patriots.

Book IX: Barlow's scientific and philosophical ideas (basically, utilitarianism and Lockean rationalism).

Book X: A culmination of the previous books, which ends in a representation of the union of humanity (an historical evolution).

The Christopher Columbus of *The Columbiad* diverges from the popular early-nineteenth-century conception of an explorer whose courage and skill were of mythic proportions. Barlow's Columbus is frail and aged, and wrongfully imprisoned by his former patron (as in *The Vision of Columbus*). The Seraph of the West, Hesper, appears and offers him a series of visions that culminate in the vision of the future glory of America. Hesper ultimately usurps the role of narrator and presents Columbus with vignettes that center on the discovery of America, the founding of the English colonies, and their successful struggle for independence. When the more recent visions are shown, especially those focusing on the Revolution and the surrender of the British at Yorktown, the narrative voice becomes more personal. Hesper's subsequent prophetic pictures evince a utopian concept of a prodigious assemblage of all nations in which political accord and tranquillity prevail. Despite his frailty, Columbus unflaggingly makes the proper republican response to the visions Hesper puts before him. He becomes ecstatic while witnessing republican progress, but despondent at displays of aristocratic and theological corruption. In all, *The Columbiad* is a significant reworking of the *translatio studii* and republican vision.

Barlow's last poem, "Advice to a Raven in Russia" (LOA, 1: 24), was written in 1812, approximately one month before his death. It is a scathing and reasonably skillful criticism of the Napoleonic wars, and of Napoleon's overriding ambition in particular. Beginning on a plaintive note, the narrator confronts a raven scavenging for food. "Black fool, why winter here," the narrator says, when fresh carnage is available in warmer climates? The poem chronicles Napoleon's bloody march across Europe, and as James Woodress has asserted, the final lines provide the most damning indictment of Napoleon's ruthless ambition that ever appeared poetic form:

> War after war his hungry soul requires,
> State after state shall sink beneath his fires,
> . . . . . .
> Each land lie reeking with its people's slain
> And not a stream run bloodless to the main.
> Till men resume their souls, and dare to shed
> Earth's total vengeance on the monster's head . . .

Barlow's poetic passion was cut short when he died of pneumonia in Zarnowiec, Poland, while in the diplomatic service of his country. A marble marker on the parish church commemorates his passing and his life:

JOEL BARLOW
Plentipotens Minister
a Statibus unitis America
ad Imp. Gallorum & Reg. Italia
Itinerando hicce obiit
26 December 1812

Oddly, there is no reference to his poetry.

ANITA M. VICKERS

Selected Works

The Prospect of Peace, New Haven, Connecticut: Thomas and Samuel Green, 1778

A Poem, Spoken at the Public Commencement at Yale College, New Haven, Connecticut: Hudson and Goodwin, 1781

An Elegy on the Late Honorable Titus Hosmer, Hartford, Connecticut: Hudson and Goodwin, 1782

The Vision of Columbus, Hartford, Connecticut: Hudson and Goodwin, 1787

The Conspiracy of Kings, London: J. Johnson, St. Paul's Churchyard, 1792

The Hasty Pudding, New Haven, Connecticut: T. and S. Green, 1796

The Columbiad, ca. 1807, Washington, D.C.: Joseph Milligan, 1825
"Advice to a Raven in Russia," ca. 1812, reprinted in Woodress

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Ambrose Bierce

(1842–1914)

Despite being a dead white male, Ambrose Bierce has always hovered on the margins of the canon. And even there, his place has been secured by his short stories and the epigrammatic definitions in his *Devil's Dictionary*. Most readers will be startled to learn that he wrote any poetry at all. It is not surprising, therefore, that the selections in the Library of America anthology are, for the most part, drawn from the verses appended to the mordant entries in *The Devil's Dictionary*. Yet Bierce, despite his own disclaimers, *was* a poet, one who occupies a unique niche in nineteenth-century American verse. As the sole modern commentator on his poetry, Donald Sidney-Fryer, has observed, "Bierce has remained almost unknown as a poet, qua poet," although he "clearly merits the attention of the discriminating lover and student of poetry."

Born on a farm in Meigs County, Ohio, on June 24, 1842, Bierce moved with his family to northern Indiana in 1846. In 1861, when national tensions exploded in the Civil War, he enlisted while still a teenager in the Ninth Indiana Infantry Regiment and was discharged a first lieutenant in 1865. He was later breveted to the rank of major after he participated in a military expedition through Indian country from Omaha, Nebraska, to San Francisco, California. There, in 1867, he began training himself to be a writer, publishing poems and prose in various publications. In 1872, accompanied by a new bride, Mary Ellen Day, he sailed for England, where his first three books were published and his two sons were born. In 1875, he returned to San Francisco and resumed his journalistic career. His career took a giant leap into security and prominence when he was hired by William Randolph Hearst in 1887 to write for the *San Francisco Examiner*, where almost all of his most famous work appeared initially.

The years from 1887 to 1899 were the most significant in Bierce's life. His anguish over the separation from his wife and the death of his older son in a gun duel over a woman was transmuted into the writing of some of his greatest stories, collected in *Tales of Soldiers and Civilians* (1892; title in England: *In the Midst of Life*) and *Can Such Things Be?* (1893). Moreover, he composed numerous satirical verses against California rogues and fools that were assembled in *Black Beetles in Amber* (1892). He left California permanently for the East in 1899, settling in Washington, D.C. In 1903, he published a second book of poems, *Shapes of Clay*, and in 1906 *The Cynic's Word Book*, as *The Devil's Dictionary* was initially titled.

Bierce continued to write for Hearst's newspapers and *Cosmopolitan* until 1909, when he resigned and began to prepare his 12-volume *Collected Works*. It was completed in 1912, and the next year he left Washington, D.C., in October on the first stage of a trip that he planned would take him through Mexico to South America. After revisiting the battlefields of his Civil War days, he crossed the Texas border at El Paso into Mexico, where at Juarez, he was given credentials to join the revolutionary army of Pancho Villa as an observer. Villa had occupied Chihuahua on December 8. Bierce wrote from Chihuahua, on December 26, 1913, that he intended to join the Villista forces in Ojinaga the next day. On January 11, 1914, there was a fierce battle in Ojinaga during which, the circumstantial evidence convinces me, Bierce was killed (see also *Benét's Reader's Encyclopedia of American Literature*).

Although Bierce regarded great poetry as the "highest, ripest, richest fruit" of all endeavors, his disarmingly modest little verse "Humility" indicates the place he assigned himself:

> Great poets fire the world with fagots big
> That make a crackling racket,
> But I'm content with but a whispering twig
> To warm some single jacket.

He regarded poetry as a complex amalgam of emotion, thought, and imagination. A poet as poet may have a profound thought but must express it so as to produce an emotion: "It is the philosopher's trade to make us think, the poet's to make us feel." Nevertheless, although thought is not essential to poetry, "no elevated composition has the right to be called great if the message that it delivers is neither true nor just. All poets, even the little ones, are feelers, for poetry is emotional; but all the great poets are thinkers as well." In order to achieve the poetic effect on the reader, the poet must have the supreme literary endowment of imagination, which in the poem takes the form of imagery.

Thought, emotion, and imagination have in their turn an intricate relation to the diction through which they are made manifest. Diction is to poetry, Bierce wrote, "what color is to painting. The thought is the outline drawing, which, if it be great, no dauber who stops short of actually painting it out can make wholly mean, but to which the true artist with his pigments can add a higher glory and a new significance." Since the best poetry, like the best prose, is "severely simple in diction," no one "who knows how to write prose can hold in light esteem an art so nearly allied to his own as that of poetic expression." Sidney-Fryer has pointed out that Bierce, in his own poetry, has "a good ear for colloquial speech" and "a good eye for the unexpected and homely detail," anticipating the "modern poetic temper at once ironical and colloquial." Although "a master of the grand manner, . . . in most of his poems he simply uses his own conversational style."

One aspect of diction is verse. And although all poetry is good, not all verse is good, for "poetry is a thing apart from the metrical form in which it is most acceptable," and "some of the finest poetry extant . . . is neither metric nor rhythmic." Still, meter and rhyme induce a sensual pleasure in readers because sounds in harmony with the physical organism that perceives them, including its sense of time, have a natural charm. Versification is thus an intricate art embracing "a multitude of dainty wisdoms."

The age in which poets live has much to do with the practice of their art. Bierce was very much a man of his time in being concerned about the impact of science on contemporary culture, sapping as it did the substructure not only of religion but of art. "I do not regret the substitution of knowledge for conjecture," he wrote, "and doubt for faith; I only say that it has its disadvantages, and among them we reckon the decay of

poesy. . . . The world's greatest poets have lived in rude ages, when their races were not long emerged from the night of barbarism." He voiced the same idea in the concluding stanza of "Geotheos":

Barbaric, O Man, was thy runing
When mountains were stained as with wine
By the dawning of Time, and as wine
Were the seas, yet its echoes are crooning,
Achant in the gusty pine
And the pulse of the poet's line.

But science has revealed nature's secrets and "found them uninteresting to the last degree," narrowing the unknown "to such mean dimensions that imagination has lost her free, exultant stride, and moves with mincing step and hesitating heart."

Nevertheless, poets cannot ignore the epoch in which they live; despite its drawbacks, the poet must assume the mental attitude of doubt and speculation. Joaquin **Miller's** problem was that, being "a rude individual intelligence," he would have been in full sympathy with the barbarism of the ancients. But he was an isolated voice in an age of polish. Alfred Lloyd Tennyson, on the other hand, "the man of culture," full of the disposition of his less-than-vital time, loyally accepted its hard conditions, touching "with a valid hand the harp which the other beats in vain": "As inspiration grows weak and acceptance disobedient, form of delivery becomes of greater moment; in so far as it can, the munificence of manner must mitigate the poverty of matter; so it occurs that the poets of later life excel their predecessors in the delicate and difficult arts and artifices of versification as much as they fall below them in imagination and power."

These views sound astonishingly modern when read in the light of observations by the Nobel prizewinning poet Joseph Brodsky. In "Poetry as a Form of Resistance to Reality," Brodsky dismisses free verse as a "low-calorie diet," arguing that "only content can be innovative and . . . formal innovation can occur only within the limits of form. Rejection of form is a rejection of innovation." He adds: "Form is appealing not because of its inherited nobility but because it is a sign of restraint and a sign of strength."

A knowledge of Bierce's theory of poetry contributes greatly to an understanding of his own output. If he was not by his own standards a great poet, he was nevertheless a good one. And just as he was versatile in the kinds of literature he wrote, so was he versatile in the kinds of poetry he wrote. His subjects ranged from the cosmic to the particular and local. Representative of the former is "The Passing Show" (LOA, 2: 439), and it bears comparison with another poem, "A Vision of Doom," which deserves to be quoted in full:

I stood upon a hill. The setting sun
Was crimson with a curse and a portent,
And scarce his angry ray lit up the land
That lay below, whose lurid gloom appeared
Freaked with a moving mist, which, reeking up
From dim tarns hateful with some horrid ban,
Took shapes forbidden and without a name.
Gigantic night-birds, rising from the reeds
With cries discordant, startled all the air,
And bodiless voices babbled in the gloom –
The ghosts of blasphemies long ages stilled,
And shrieks of women, and men's curses. All
These visible shapes, and sounds no mortal ear
Had ever heard, some spiritual sense
Interpreted, though brokenly; for I
Was haunted by a consciousness of crime,
Some giant guilt, but whose I knew not. All
These things malign, by sight and sound revealed,
Were sin-begotten; that I knew – no more –
And that but dimly, as in dreadful dreams
The sleepy senses babble to the brain
Imperfect witness. As I stood, a voice,
But whence it came I knew not, cried aloud
Some words to me in a forgotten tongue,
Yet straight I knew me for a ghost forlorn,
Returned from the illimited inane.
Again, but in a language that I knew,
As in reply to something which in me
Had shaped itself a thought, but found no words,
It spake from the dread mystery about:

"Immortal shadow of a mortal soul
That perished with eternity, attend.
What thou beholdest is as void as thou:
The shadow of a poet's dream – himself
As thou, his soul as thine, long dead,
But not like thine outlasted by its shade.
His dreams alone survive eternity
As pictures in the unsubstantial void.
Excepting thee and me (and we because
The poet wove us in his thought) remains
Of nature and the universe no part
Nor vestige but the poet's dreams. This dread,
Unspeakable land about thy feet, with all
Its desolation and its terrors – lo!
'Tis but a phantom world. So long ago
That God and all the angels since have died
That poet lived – yourself long dead – his mind
Filled with the light of a prophetic fire,
And standing by the Western sea, above
The youngest, fairest city in the world,
Named in another tongue than his for one
Ensainted, saw its populous domain
Plague-smitten with a nameless shame. For there
Red-handed murder rioted; and there
The people gathered gold, nor cared to loose
The assassin's fingers from the victim's throat,
But said, each in his vile pursuit engrossed:
'Am I my brother's keeper? Let the Law
Look to the matter.' But the Law did not.
And there, O pitiful! The babe was slain
Within its mother's breast and the same grave
Held babe and mother; and the people smiled,
Still gathering gold, and said: 'The Law, the Law.'
Then the great poet, touched upon the lips
With a live coal from Truth's high altar, raised
His arms to heaven and sang a song of doom –

Sang of the time to be, when God should lean
Indignant from the Throne and lift His hand,
And that foul city be no more! – a tale,
A dream, a desolation and a curse!
No vestige of its glory should survive
In fact or memory: its people dead,
Its site forgotten, and its very name
Disputed."
"Was the prophecy fulfilled?"

The sullen disc of the declining sun
Was crimson with a curse and a portent,
And scarce his angry ray lit up the land
Freaked with a moving mist, which, reeking up
From dim tarns hateful with a horrid ban,
Took shapes forbidden and without a name.
And bodiless voices babbled in the gloom.
But not to me came any voice again;
And, covering my face with thin, dead hands,
I wept, and woke, and cried aloud to God!

Metrically the two poems are different, yet the four-line iambic pentameter stanzas of "The Passing Show" (rhyming *aaba*) and the blank verse of "A Vision of Doom" are both appropriate to serious verse. What the poet sees is chilling in its bleak despair, for these poems portray not merely the devolution of a degenerating society, but that of a dying universe. Today, we can see that Bierce is grappling with the concept of entropy, or, according to one dictionary definition, "the degradation of the matter and energy in the universe to an ultimate state of inert uniformity." But he is also presenting an equally abstruse *philosophical* concept: metaphysical idealism. In other words, the dying universe itself has no ontological being; it is a "phantom world" that exists only as "the shadow of a poet's dream."

Other serious poems by Bierce are not on this cosmic scale but deal with his concern over his country's future. His stance was diametrically opposed to the exuberant optimism of Walt **Whitman**, but it was no less the expression of a deeply felt patriotism. His most famous poem in this vein – probably his most famous poem – was "Invocation," composed for a San Francisco Fourth of July celebration in 1888:

Goddess of Liberty! O thou
Whose tearless eyes behold the chain,
And look unmoved upon the slain,
Eternal peace upon thy brow, –

Before thy shrine the races press,
Thy perfect favor to implore –
The proudest tyrant asks no more,
The ironed anarchist no less.

Thine altar-coals that touch the lips
Of prophets kindle, too, the brand
By Discord flung with wanton hand
Among the houses and the ships.

Upon thy tranquil front the star
Burns bleak and passionless and white,
Its cold inclemency of light
More dreadful than the shadows are.

Thy name we do not here invoke
Our civic rites to sanctify:
Enthroned in thy remoter sky,
Thou heedest not our broken yoke.
. . . . . .
The light that fills the patriot's tomb
Is not of thee. The shining crown
Compassionately offered down
To those who falter in the gloom,

And fall, and call upon thy name,
And die desiring – 'tis the sign
Of a diviner love than thine,
Rewarding with a richer fame.

To him alone let freemen cry
Who hears alike the victor's shout,
The song of faith, the moan of doubt,
And bends him from his nearer sky.
. . . . . .
God of my country and my race!
So greater than the gods of old –
So fairer than the prophets told
Who dimly saw and feared thy face, –

Who didst but half reveal thy will
And gracious ends to their desire,
Behind the dawn's advancing fire
Thy tender day-beam veiling still, –
. . . . . .
Whose laws, imperfect and unjust,
Thy just and perfect purpose serve:
The needle, howsoe'er it swerve,
Still warranting the sailor's trust, –

God, lift thy hand and make us free
To crown the work thou hast designed.
O, strike away the chains that bind
Our souls to one idolatry!

The liberty thy love hath given
We thank thee for. We thank thee for
Our great dead fathers' holy war
Wherein our manacles were riven.

We thank thee for the stronger stroke
Ourselves delivered and incurred
When – thine incitement half unheard –
The chains we riveted we broke.
. . . . . .
Let Man salute the rising day
Of Liberty, but not adore.
'Tis Opportunity – no more –
A useful, not a sacred, ray.
. . . . . .
Give thou more or less, as we

Shall serve the right or serve the wrong.
Confirm our freedom but so long
As we are worthy to be free.

But when (O, distant be the time!)
Majorities in passion draw
Insurgent swords to murder Law,
And all the land is red with crime;

Or – nearer menace! – when the band
Of feeble spirits cringe and plead
To the gigantic strength of Greed,
And fawn upon his iron hand; –

Nay, when the steps to state are worn
In hollows by the feet of thieves,
And Mammon sits among the sheaves
And chuckles while the reapers mourn:

Then stay thy miracle! – replace
The broken throne, repair the chain,
Restore the interrupted reign
And veil again thy patient face.

Lo! here upon the world's extreme
We stand with lifted arms and dare
By thine eternal name to swear
Our country, which so fair we deem –

Upon whose hills, a bannered throng,
The spirits of the sun display
Their flashing lances day by day
And hear the sea's pacific song –

Shall be so ruled in right and grace
That men shall say: "O, drive afield
The lawless eagle from the shield,
And call an angel to the place!"

This poem, like "Freedom" (LOA, 2: 434) and "To the Bartholdi Statue" (LOA, 2: 441), embodies a recurrent theme in Bierce's thinking: that liberty was a means, not an end to be pursued for its own sake. This in turn was but one aspect of his adherence to what today we call "situational ethics." He was no ideologue, holding fast to principles through thick and thin. He maintained, rather, that principles should always be considered in the light of circumstances of time and place.

Like "To the Bartholdi Statue," "Invocation" touches on the threat of anarchism, which with its turn toward violence at the end of the nineteenth century had drawn the attention of Henry James and Joseph Conrad as well as Bierce. He also mentions the Civil War ("The chains we riveted we broke"), to which he devoted a number of other poems. Whereas his short stories about the war deal with the immediacies of its horrors – soldiers in the midst of battle – his poetry reflects the contemplative wisdom of an older man looking back on the fiery passages of his youth; it exhibits a serene magnanimity toward a respected fallen foe and expresses doubts about the wisdom of the fratricidal war. Some verses of "The Hesitating Veteran" reveal his mature opinion:

When I was young and full of faith
And other fads that youngsters cherish
A cry rose as of one that saith
With emphasis: "Help or I perish!"
'Twas heard in all the land, and men
The sound were each to each repeating.
It made my heart beat faster then
Than any heart can now be beating.

. . . . . .

Besides, the melancholy cry
Was that of one, 'tis now conceded,
Whose plight no one beneath the sky
Felt half so poignantly as he did.

Moreover, he was black. And yet
That sentimental generation
With an austere compassion set
Its face and faith to the occasion.

. . . . . .

That all is over now – the reign
Of love and trade stills all dissensions,
And the clear heavens arch again
Above a land of peace and pensions.
The black chap – at the last we gave
Him everything that he had cried for,
Though many white chaps in the grave
'Twould puzzle to say what they died for.

I hope he's better off – I trust
That his society and his master's
Are worth the price we paid, and must
Continue paying, in disasters;
But sometimes doubts press thronging round
('Tis mostly when my hurts are aching)
If war for Union was a sound
And profitable undertaking.

. . . . . .

No mortal man can Truth restore,
Or say where she is to be sought for.
I know what uniform I wore –
O, that I knew which side I fought for!

"A Year's 'Casualties'" concludes: "O Father of Battles, pray give us release / From the horrors of peace, the horrors of peace!" These two poems and "At a 'National Encampment'" refer to the speaker's own old wounds. His magnanimity toward the South is presented in both "The Confederate Flags" and "To E. S. Salomon." In the former, he argues for returning the Confederate colors to the troops who had fought under them:

Among the rebels when we made a breach
Was it to get their banners?
was but incidental – 'twas to teach
Them better manners.

They know the lesson well enough to-day;
Now, let us try to show them
That we're not only stronger far than they,
(How we did mow them!)

But more magnanimous. My lads, 'tis plain
  'Twas an uncommon riot;
The warlike tribes of Europe fight for gain;
  We fought for quiet.

If we were victors, then we all must live
  With the same flag above us;
'Twas all in vain unless we now forgive
  And make them love us.
. . . . . .
All human governments must take the chance
  And hazard of sedition.
O wretch! to pledge your manhood in advance
  To blind submission.

It may be wrong, it may be right, to rise
  In warlike insurrection:
The loyalty that fools so dearly prize
  May mean subjection.

Be loyal to your country, yes – but how
  If tyrants hold dominion?
The South believed they did; can't you allow
  For that opinion?
. . . . . .
Give back the foolish flags whose bearers fell,
  Too valiant to forsake them.
Is it presumptuous, this counsel? Well,
  I helped to take them.

And he attacks an orator who protested against decorating the graves of the Confederate dead in "To E. S. Salomon":

The brave respect the brave. The brave
  Respect the dead; . . .
. . . . . .
What if the dead whom still you hate
  Were wrong? Are you so surely right?
. . . . . .
Men live and die, and other men
  Arise with knowledges diverse:
What seemed a blessing seems a curse,
  And Now is still at odds with Then.

The years go on, the old comes back
  To mock the new – beneath the sun
Is *nothing* new; ideas run
  Recurrent in an endless track.

What most we censure, men as wise
  Have reverently practised; nor
Will future wisdom fail to war
  On principles we dearly prize.
. . . . . .
The broken light, the shadows wide –
  Behold the battle-field displayed!
God save the vanquished from the blade,
  The victor from the victor's pride!
. . . . . .
Remember how the flood of years
  Has rolled across the erring slain;
Remember, too, the cleansing rain
  Of widows' and of orphans' tears.

The dead are dead – let that atone:
  And though with equal hand we strew
The blooms on saint and sinner too,
  Yet God will know to choose his own.

The wretch, whate'er his life and lot,
  Who does not love the harmless dead
With all his heart and all his head –
  May God forgive him, *I* shall not.

Related to his poems on the Civil War are those about the Union's commander-in-chief, and later United States president, Ulysses S. Grant. "The Death of Grant" characterizes him as "For anything but duty's deed / Too simply wise, too humbly great." In "Contentment" the Voice of Posterity asks of Grant:

  Why do no statues celebrate thy name,
  No monuments thy services proclaim?
Why did not thy contemporaries rear
To thee some schoolhouse or memorial college?

The voice of Grant's shade replies: "I'd rather you would question why, in park / And street, my monuments were not erected / Than why they were."

Among the shorter serious poems Bierce wrote were a number of elegiac lyrics, despite the fact that "Elegy" (LOA, 2: 434) parodies Thomas Gray's "Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard." But it was typical of Bierce to poke fun at practices he himself followed. His elegies, in fact, are among the most charming lyrics he ever wrote. His impressionistic "A Study in Gray" is a kind of verbal equivalent to Whistler's portrait of his mother. To give a sampling of other poems in this vein:

William F. Smith

Light lie the earth upon his dear dead heart,
  And dreams disturb him never.
Be deeper peace than Paradise his part
  Forever and forever.

Another Way

I lay in silence, dead. A woman came
  And laid a rose upon my breast and said:
"May God be merciful." She spoke my name,
  And added: "It is strange to think him dead.

He loved me well enough, but 'twas his way
  To speak it lightly." Then, beneath her breath:
"Besides" – I knew what further she would say,
  But then a footfall broke my dream of death.

To-day the words are mine. I lay the rose
  Upon her breast, and speak her name, and deem
It strange indeed that she is dead. God knows
  I had more pleasure in the other dream.

Presentiment

With saintly grace and reverent tread,
  She walked among the graves with me;

Her every foot-fall seemed to be
A benediction on the dead.

The guardian spirit of the place
She seemed, and I some ghost forlorn
Surprised in the untimely morn
She made with her resplendent face.

Moved by some waywardness of will,
Three paces from the path apart
She stepped and stood – my prescient heart
Was stricken with a passing chill.

The folk-lore of the years agone
Remembering, I smiled and thought:
"Who shudders suddenly at naught,
His grave is being trod upon."

But now I know that it was more
Than idle fancy. O, my sweet,
I did not think so little feet
Could make a buried heart so sore!

In quite a different vein was his epitaph on the Englishman T. Arundel Harcourt, who assisted the historian H. H. Bancroft, wrote accomplished verses, and translated Emile Zola. He had been a coauthor with Bierce of a little book called *The Dance of Death*, a best-selling literary hoax purporting to attack the obscene appeal of the waltz. After his wife ran away with another man, Harcourt turned to alcohol, then jumped from a window to his death. In the *Examiner* for February 5, 1888 (quoted in Fatout's *Devil's Lexicographer*), Bierce wrote of him that he "went to the everlasting bad through domestic infelicity and foreign brandy, dying in poverty's last ditch upon a golden couch." Bierce had memorialized him in verse:

T. A. H.

Yes, he was that, or that, as you prefer –
Did so and so, though, faith, it wasn't all;
Lived like a fool, or a philosopher,
And had whatever's needful to a fall.
As rough inflections on a planet merge
In the true bend of the gigantic sphere,
Nor mar the perfect circle of its verge,
So in the survey of his worth the small
Asperities of spirit disappear,
Lost in the grander curves of character.
He lately was hit hard: none knew but I
The strength and terror of that ghastly stroke –
Not even herself. He uttered not a cry,
But set his teeth and made a revelry;
Drank like a devil – staining sometimes red
The goblet's edge; diced with his conscience; spread,
Like Sisyphus, a feast for Death and spoke
His welcome in a tongue so long forgot
That even his ancient guest remembered not
What race had cursed him in it. Thus my friend,
Still conjugating with each failing sense
The verb "to die" in every mood and tense,
Pursued his awful humor to the end.
When like a stormy dawn the crimson broke
From his white lips he smiled and mutely bled,
And, having meanly lived, is grandly dead.

By far the greatest part of Bierce's output in verse, however, was satire. The theory it embodied was based on three principles. First, satire should criticize specific individuals, not abstractions. Second, it was a form of punishment, a lashing of rascals. And third, it was the satire itself that would have lasting significance, not its objects. In other words, even if the persons named were obscure, they would achieve a kind of permanence if the verse in which they were pilloried had literary merit. Bierce derived these principles of "applied satire" and its "laws, liberties, and limitations," he said, from "reverent study of the masters." And, indeed, the influence of Alexander Pope and Jonathan Swift, among others, is easy to track in his satirical verses. Characterizing himself as a satirist "who does not accept the remarkable doctrine that while condemning a sin he should spare the sinner," he wrote in "Substance or Shadow":

So, gentle critics, you would have me tilt,
Not at the guilty, only at their guilt! –
Spare the offender and condemn Offense,
And make life miserable to Pretense!
"Whip Vice and Folly – that is satire's use –
But be not personal, for *that's* abuse;
Nor e'er forget what, 'like a razor keen,
Wounds with a touch that's scarcely felt or seen.'"
Well, friends, I venture, destitute of awe,
To think that razor but an old, old saw,
A trifle rusty; and a wound, I'm sure,
That's felt not, seen not, one can well endure.

And in "To a Censor" he scorns those who attack, not specific rascals, but the abstraction Rascality, fearlessly affirming "That wickedness is wrong and sin a vice, / That wrong's not right, nor foulness ever nice," smiting the offense while sparing the offender:

We know that judges are corrupt. We know
That crimes are lively and that laws are slow.
We know that lawyers lie and doctors slay;
That priests and preachers are but birds of pray;
That merchants cheat and journalists for gold
Flatter the vicious while at vice they scold.
. . . . . .
But since, while some are wicked some are good
(As trees may differ though they all are wood),
Names here and there, to show whose head is hit,
The bad would sentence and the good acquit.
In sparing everybody none you spare:
Rebukes most personal are least unfair.

Nevertheless, Bierce did write a few satires on general subjects. Among his favorite targets were Christmas (he was a veritable Scrooge), theosophy, politics (e.g., "The Statesmen" [LOA, 2: 434] and "Egotist" [LOA, 2: 442]), religion, dogs

(the only animals he disliked), science, and law. "Unexpounded" deserves special note:

> On Evidence, on Deeds, on Bills,
> On Copyhold, on Loans, on Wills,
> Lawyers great books indite.
> The creaking of their busy quills
> I never heard on Right.

And he satirizes spelling reformers in "Orthography" (LOA, 2: 436).

The great preponderance of Bierce's satire, however, was directed against particular figures: William Jennings Bryan in "Safety-Clutch" (LOA, 2: 437), James Whitcomb **Riley** in "A Literary Method," and California's Governor George Stoneman in "Matter for Gratitude." He was vituperative against judges ("Judex Judicatus," "A Growler") and above all lawyers ("To a Bully"), and his satires against them should be read in the light of his long essay "Some Features of the Law." In "To an Insolent Attorney," he apostrophizes:

> To you 'tis one, to challenge or defend;
> Clients are means, their money is an end.
> . . . . . .
> Happy the lawyer! – at his favored hands
> Nor truth nor decency the world demands.
> . . . . . .
> His brains for sale, morality for hire,
> In every land and century a licensed liar!

He criticized Charles Crocker and Collis P. Huntington, "railrogues" who maneuvered legislators into passing bills to further their own commercial interests at the expense of the public weal in what modern economists call "rent-seeking." But his favorite victim was their colleague "£eland $tanford." Typical of his numerous appearances in Bierce's satirical verses is the following in "Substance and Shadow":

> Behold advances in dignity and state –
> Grave, smug, serene, indubitably great –
> Stanford, philanthropist! One hand bestows
> In alms what t'other one to justice owes.
> . . . . . .
> The fellow's self invites assault; his crimes
> Will each bear killing twenty thousand times!

One of Bierce's untitled epitaphs is also devoted to him:

> Here Stanford lies, who thought it odd
> That he should go to meet his God.
> He looked, until his eyes grew dim,
> For God to hasten to meet him.

Sidney-Fryer characterizes Bierce's satires as "agreeably nasty cast-iron thorns in the Victorian rose-garden." Probably their most significant characteristic is that they embody wit, not humor. Bierce expounded this basic distinction at length in his essay "Wit and Humor," as well as elsewhere. Pitilessly sharp and "as bleak as steel," wit is "a serious matter. To laugh at it is to confess that you do not understand." It "stabs, begs pardon – and turns the weapon in the wound." Bierce also makes frequent use of puns in his satire: a razor is a rusty saw, preachers are "birds of pray," legislators vote "I," and hypochondriasis is the Dumps.

Finally, when we turn to Bierce's poetry as a whole, certain features stand out. Although an autodidact, he was a learned man, and the reader who fails to detect the tracks of other writers in his poetry will miss some of its appeal. Sidney-Fryer has indicated "the line of general poetic descent" in Bierce as running from "Edmund Spenser and the Elizabethans to William Blake and the English Romantics," and then to Tennyson, Edgar Allan **Poe**, and Algernon Charles Swinburne. More specifically, echoes of the Bible and Shakespeare abound, as do those of Greek and Latin writers, notably in his remarkable translation of "Dies Irae," which itself finds an echo in "Matter for Gratitude." Omar Khayyám's *Rubáiyát* in Edward FitzGerald's translation can be traced in some of his verses; and stanza 82 furnished the title, *Shapes of Clay*, for one collection.

He parodied Joaquin Miller in "The Mormon Question," a sly hit at Miller's marital irregularities, and Oliver Goldsmith in "The Perverted Village." Tennyson, Poe, William Wordsworth, Samuel Taylor Coleridge, and Oliver Wendell **Holmes**, as well as François Rabelais, Ernest Renan, and Victor Hugo can also be traced in his poetry. Poe's influence is a rather special one, since it nearly always takes the form of a borrowed metrical pattern and rhyme scheme. But his attitude toward writers who influenced him was not uncritical adoration. Tennyson's "The Northern Farmer" was dismissed as a mere "thing," and his "Charge of the Light Brigade" as "resonant patriotic lines" devoid of poetry; Poe's "The Bells" (LOA, 1: 543) was "rubbishy stuff."

As might be expected given his theory of poetry, Bierce paid a great deal of attention to the arts of versification. He relied heavily on iambic pentameter couplets in his satires, but he essayed blank verse in his serious poems. He made frequent use of the Petrarchan sonnet in apostrophizing women, and one has only to read a number of his poems to discover the variety and extent of the stanzaic forms he employed. Sidney-Fryer, noting that he is "a master of the run-over line" and that his handling of rhyme, meter, consonance, and assonance "is assured and often ingenious," has called him "an adroit and facile versifier" who is "able to make his poetic statement move through difficult and demanding traditional forms with singular ease."

Bierce's poetic voice was a distinctive one and deserves far more attention than it has received. Interestingly enough, it was recognized in his own time by a fellow poet and critic, Edmund Clarence **Stedman**, who, with tact and taste, included seven poems by Bierce in *An American Anthology*: "The Death of Grant," "The Bride," "Another Way," "Montefiore," "Presentiment," "Creation," and "T. A. H." By and large, however, Bierce's poetry was ignored until the appearance in 1980 of Sidney-Fryer's excellent selection, *A Vision of Doom*. A thoughtful introductory essay describes Bierce's best poems as "compact, imaginative, and powerful, or – quite unexpectedly – tender." In deference to the two lonely voices who appreciated Bierce's abilities as a poet, it seems fitting to conclude by turning once again to his own work, a little tercet called "Creation" that they both included in their anthologies. Sidney-Fryer indeed thought it was probably Bierce's greatest poem, a

"little masterpiece of boldness and compression": "God dreamed – the suns sprang flaming into place, / And sailing worlds with many a venturous race! / He woke – His smile alone illumined space."

M. E. GRENANDER

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Benjamin Paul Blood

(1832–1919)

Benjamin Blood can best be described as a bardic philosopher-poet, whose independent mind and spirit typify the Emersonian age. Little known today, he was, in his prime, lavishly praised by his intellectual cohorts, among them, the philosopher William James. Perhaps more daring than the established men of letters who admired his work, Blood as a young man refused to compromise his innate desire for self-fulfillment to worldly ambition. In his foreword to the posthumously published 1924 collection of Blood's poems, John Edmund Willoughby portrays Blood as a man who "lived life to the full, during his eighty-six years, and savored it as few men do." A self-professed "healthy mystic," whose health of mind and body "was still notable in advanced age," Blood was, according to Willoughby, a man among men; one who "never lost touch with earth and with the common things of life. He knew ordinary men and their ways; he enjoyed mingling with them and drawing them out."

At the same time, Blood's intellectual prowess and extensive learning, specifically his brilliance in the area of speculative philosophy, set him somewhat apart from "ordinary men." In his temperament, Blood resembled Romantic iconoclasts such as William Blake, Percy Bysshe Shelley, and Lord Byron. By his own confession, Blood disdained public opinion and professed to have led his life to his own satisfaction. He knew that he "could never value things at others' rates – never was respectable or conforming."

His rebellion, however, did not take the shape of a restless, journeying quest. A man of considerable means, Blood saw no need to leave the comfort of his home on the south bank of the Mohawk river, in east-central New York, where he lived until his death. His independence revealed itself in his freedom of thought and expression and in his steadfast resolution to live his life on his own terms. During his lifetime he was an inventor, a gambler, a gymnast, a poet, and a metaphysician.

A survey of his published works and lectures reveals the multifaceted nature of Blood's talents. His essays in the *Journal of Speculative Philosophy* were erudite and provocative and garnered him respect from such men as Ralph Waldo **Emerson**, Alfred, Lord Tennyson, and Robert Louis Stevenson. William James also was profoundly moved late in his life by Blood's recounting of an experience he had while under anesthesia, an experience he referred to as *The Anaesthetic Revelation* (1874). Blood's experience under anesthesia occurred 14 years prior to his published account of it. His explanation for delayed publication was that at 40 he could better withstand the risk of being "called a mad one" than he could have when he was a youthful 24. Blood's discovery was, as he put it, "unutterable," and his portrayal of it, by necessity, turns on the philosophical dilemma of the identity and difference of the same and the other, of being and knowing. The philosophical "The Gist of Philosophy" serves as a preface to *The Anaesthetic Revelation* and thus provides a contextual envelope for Blood's account. Citing the words of Fichte, Blood observes that most men vainly strive to bring the divine or the infinite into perceived human form. "For of God [Fichte] said: '*Thou art*,' etc. – 'but I now and ever must conceive of being *Thou art not*.' This sort of confession cost [Fichte] his professional chair; for to his wise censors, who fancied God as some shape with ideas, this was atheism."

Blood's description of faith, which helps to explain his revelation and his subsequent philosophical interpretation of it, mirrors the Puritan concept of divine grace. "It arrests us rather than is assumed by us . . . [it is] 'the gift of God.'. . . For Him who has done his best there is an honest ignorance that shall face the highest inquisition." Having established this framework, Blood goes on to describe the "anaesthetic revelation" as a tool that helps us understand the "genius of being." According to Blood, the "anaesthetic revelation" is an *un*condition that remains formless and forgotten until we return to it: "As here we find in trances, men / Forget the dream that happens then, / Until they fall in trance again." Blood confesses that he is able to attain this trance-like state only through the "use of anaesthetic agents" and that it is during that period of "coming to" or crossing the threshold from stupor to sensibility that "the genius of being is revealed." Blood admits, however, that once consciousness is fully regained, the revelation is then irretrievable.

For Blood, this experience substantiates the eternal mystery of Christianity while confirming a pluralistic, relative solution to the crux of being and knowing. After conferring with dentists and surgeons about this strange experience, Blood claimed that many patients at the moment of recall seem to have discovered something in their own natures but that when attempting to speak of it, they invariably fail in a lost mood of introspection. Having moved from philosophy through religious mysticism to end up, at last, in the realm of the imagination, Blood concludes his revelation by quoting Shakespeare's Prospero:

> We are such stuff
> As dreams are made of, and our little life
> Is rounded with a sleep

Blood clearly belongs to that tribe of Romantic philosopher-poets for whom the transition from conventional thought into the ranges of speculation and experimental form meant nothing less than a spiritual awakening or moral conversion. Whether as in William Wordsworth's Immortality Ode, Coleridge's "Kubla Khan," or John Keats's expression of "negative capability," each experience brings with it the insights that creative inspiration is dream-given or surreal and that the boundaries between self and other for that brief moment of encounter are virtually dissolved. Keats's definition of the poet remains the best starting point for an understanding of Blood's concept of the poet. As Philip Levine explains of Keats, "he rejects the conventional notion of the world as a 'vale of tears' . . . and prefers to conceive of the world as 'The Vale of Soul Making.' . . . His notion of what is required of a poet, that is of a person who lives fully and morally, is surprisingly contemporary." For Keats, the poet must possess the capability "of being in uncertainties, mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after

fact and reason." In what is perhaps Benjamin Blood's most Keatsian poem, *The Bride of the Iconoclast* (LOA, 2: 318), the spiritual quest of the heroic bard is recounted in Spenserian stanzas that echo the sensuous, surreal quality of Keats's masterpiece, "The Eve of St. Agnes."

Published when Blood was only twenty-two, *The Bride of the Iconoclast* exhibits a remarkable skill with metrical romance. In the preface, Blood recommends that his poem be perused "where the grim hills bristle in the sunshine": "Where truth dwells in nature's nakedness rough hewn and wild, would I hang these visions on the vacant walls of imagination." He goes on to apologize "for many points whereat this poem is faulty. . . . Be the work good or bad, it is from the hand of a minor."

The poem, which consists of five cantos with a varying number of segments, dramatizes the love between the bardic hero, Barron, and his virgin bride Hermia, who suffers a tragic fate at the hands of ruffian pirates. Their story is also an allegory of the human spirit, the soul quest of Barron, Blood's "iconoclast." The opening canto describes a stagnant, joyless city, whose aged king lies dying in his tomb.

> There was a city on whose sultry domes
> Stood bright the dazzle of the tropic blaze,
> 'Bove streets deserted, courts, and haunted homes,
> Luring the ocean from his reckless ways.
> An autumn, sober stillness, and a haze
> Sabbath and dreamy as life's buried years,
> Was th' atmosphere. The gold sun's muffled gaze
> Sent light, but little joy; and thoughtful tears
> Stole up the cool, sad eyes that looked, not void of fears.

The second section introduces the beautiful Hermia, gliding inland in her sumptuous shallop on "the orange morning": "A bauble shallop was it, bulging wide / Of shell-shaped bow with velvets lined of rose." Hermia, "In mist-light robes all gauzily bedight / . . . Did look a seraph wafted from the sight." Blood introduces Barron in the third section of the first canto, "Proud, daring, generous, a god in face, / With brain of energy, and heart untamed." Barron, the iconoclast, son of the dying king, "did greet / One Power alone – one Deity adored." Before dying, his father bid him "Bring / The virgin Hermia to this clay shore's side: / I wed these linked hands: be blessed!" Hermia's love for Barron is limitless: "As thou dost trust thy formless God and mine, / So shall I trust thee, Barron. . . / . . . 'round thee are these arms – I have no god but thee!" At the conclusion of the first long canto, Barron and Hermia, pledging eternal troth, fall into a deep sleep, from which they awaken to a new world.

> They slept, and ocean, like a lethean lake
> Bedrowzed with slumbrous, opiate influences
> Of stars dream-smothered – nodding half awake
> In downy mist ethereal, did confess
> Himself was sleepy; and a damp'ning stress
> Did blear his weltry eye. Fitful and low
> The Wind, faint-breath'd in silent wakefulness,
> Moved not the boom hung o'er the shallop's bow
> With muffled sail – so soft on tip-toe crept she now.

Canto II opens to a "soft dawning light. . . / Warm, red, and sultry in the leaden east." The lovers "Stood up alone in that wide universe / Large souled and calm, true nature-worshipers." Barron invokes the blessing of his "Power Ubiquitous," as he and Hermia begin their quest for a new life, a life in which "death shall end not all," where "We two, made seraphs, winging far away / From Heaven's serene and ancient battlements / May poise our snowy vans of purest light, / And say, 'the Earth – lost emerald – was here.'" The shallop is borne to a strange island teeming with eerie natural presences: "A cold, white flower, with red and pimply spots – / Like milk-faced maiden budding crimson sores, / Would not look up." On the island live a wise man, known as the Ancient, and a boy of twelve, and it is here that Hermia and Barron dally.

Throughout the romance, the narrative voice of the poet intrudes, giving the poem its storylike atmosphere, distancing the action and controlling the tone. A vivid example of this strategy can be found toward the end of Canto II. "Leave we yon pair to wander where they will," the narrator advises us, as he invites us to "belounge the turret-tops." At this point in the romance, the story takes an ominous turn that is truly reminiscent of Keats's "silver, snarling trumpets" and "carved angels, ever eager-eyed" in "The Eve of St. Agnes." The poet commands us, "Stop! – Gaze thro' this hushed gallery! The air / Is beat by wild-limbed statues: how they glow / with life and action!" In the gallery hangs a solemn portrait with deep gazing eyes that seem to pierce the souls of all who look upon it. The warning is clear:

> WITH EVERY CONSCIENCE DEALETH DEITY.
> BUT ONE EXPERIENCE DOTH ONE SOUL
> AVAIL.
> THOU FEEL'ST THE EYE ON THEE. THOU CANST
> PROVE
> NO MAN'S TALE. –

The poet offers us a vision of life in which human souls, like barks on a tossing sea, "Life-vessels" on "the Pool of Death," are drawn to their destruction: "with few flags half-mast, the fated barks go down."

The third canto initiates the tragic conclusion to Blood's romance, when a band of drunken pirates plot to abduct Hermia. With names like Hyena and Turtle, they epitomize a fatal brutishness in nature that strikes without warning. In Canto IV, the Barron is taken unawares and comes too late to save his bride, who even in death "was beautiful": "The taper chin upthrown, revealed the curvings of a throat / Of grained marble." Hermia's body is cast into the sea, where she is received by a "golden Siren":

> Come to the last in my ocean hold
> Thou bride of a hapless day!
> . . . . . .
> A royal grave is the ocean wave, –
> And white sails the grave-stones be!
> For the wise and the simple, the dastard, the brave,
> The jewels of beauty, the chains of the slave,
> Were lost in the deep, deep sea.

In the final canto, Barron suffers a last encounter with the pirates, who are given the death blow by a storm at sea. Barron's crew survives the storm, and the words of the poet offer a final warning to all humanity; in the voyage of life, humankind has only conscience as its guide: "Be brave, for thou art watch-

ing thee; be kind, / Thou ever shalt keep company thyself." Or, as Emerson admonished, "Trust thyself: every heart vibrates to that iron string."

Another long poem, more sophisticated in its intent, is *The Colonnades* (1868). It consists of a "Proem" and nine sections and again uses a classical mythical framework. In this poem, the poet embarks on a spiritual journey through history. With the aid of Charon, he speaks with the dead, with Socrates, Aesop, Praxiteles, Plato, Emanuel Swedenborg, James Thomson, Shakespeare, Robert Burns, Byron, Alexander Pope, William Cowper, and Abraham Lincoln. The influence of Swedenborg and the ideas of Henry James Sr. are apparent in this poem. Blood opens the "Proem" with the following proclamation:

> Welcome as Christ into his father's house,
> To hands divine soothing the sobbing locks
> Which the dews drenched upon Judean hills,
> Should bard be to the world.

One can easily perceive the Christ/poet of Walt **Whitman** and Henry James Sr.'s poet as divine man in Blood's scheme. Blood's poet, as redeemer, "climbs downward into failures for success. / Man's justice pays him not." The final section is devoted to a controversy concerning the comparative happiness of Hell and Heaven. Loyola, an Angel, debates Gladiola, Champion of the Damned. The poet concludes by proposing a visit to the kingdom of Lucifer.

Collected in the posthumous volume *Heirlooms,* Blood's shorter poems display the poet's skill with dialect and the ballad form. "The Broken Spear" tells the story of a wounded soldier who returns to the farm to work the land with his one remaining arm. "'Come, lively now!' cried Farmer Buck, / And donned his harvest frock, / 'Let's have that fifteen-acre field / All in by six o'clock!'" "Late" (LOA, 2: 317), also from *Heirlooms*, is reminiscent of Wordsworth's odes. In this work, the poet longs for that innocent youthful joy when "title-pages opened into Heaven," and when, as a boy, the poet's "days lay open to the universe" and he "saw the One of all things. . . / . . . and saw, beyond, / The field transcend the One." Feeling no need to relinquish his despairing tone, the poet laments, "Late, oh, late! / The westering pathos glooms the fervent hours. / Again my gray gull lifts against the nightfall, / And takes the damp leagues with a shoreless eye."

In his intellectual diversity and in his extraordinary energy, Benjamin Blood typified his age. Not content to be merely a philosopher or merely a poet, he set out to investigate many areas of thought and action, coming into contact, as he did so, with the great thinkers and artists of his time. His volumes of poetry are matched by his lectures and published speculations – *The Anaesthetic Revelation*, *Pluriverse: An Essay in the Philosophy of Pluralism* (1920), and a historical lecture, *Napoleon I* (1863). He was, like all poets, fascinated by the power of language, and in his speculations concerning the psychological effect of sounds and the prospects for a universal language, Blood shares an affinity with Edgar Allan **Poe**, George Bernard Shaw, Ezra Pound, Wallace Stevens, and, of course, Ferdinand de Saussure. In *Suggestions Toward the Mechanical Art of Poetry* (1854), Blood maintains that each letter of the alphabet "has in some sense a suggestive character of its own": "O, which is the letter of wonder and loftiness, is the sound most fit and easy to the facial muscles of a wondering man." He quotes, for illustration, lines from Poe's "The Raven" (LOA, 1: 535):

> Ah! distinctly I remember it was in the bleak
> December,
> And each separate dying ember wrought its ghost
> upon the floor.

Blood might well have quoted from his own poetry, from what many considered to be his most magnificent poem, "The Lion of the Nile":

> Whelped in the desert sands, and desert-bred
> From dugs whose sustenance was blood alone –
> A life translated out of other lives,
> I grew the king of beasts. . . .

LYNDA S. BOREN

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Manoah Bodman

(1765–1850)

The eldest of seven children of Joseph and Esther (Field) Bodman, Manoah (or Noah) Bodman was born on January 28, 1765 in Sunderland, Massachusetts. His family moved to the recently incorporated town of Williamsburg, Massachusetts, when he was 14, and this village remained his home for the rest of his life. Located in the Hampshire Hills seven miles west of the Connecticut River, the village was still surrounded largely by wilderness. When the Bodmans arrived, the only route to the next settlement was a bridle-path through what Josiah Gilbert **Holland** described as "dark, dismal, swampy ground, known as 'The Cellars.'"

His uncles, William and Samuel Bodman, had settled in Williamsburg earlier. William, who served for many years as a selectman and state representative, was considered the town's "most influential man," according to Alason Nash's account (*Hampshire Gazette*, February 1861). "Distinguished for his eloquence," William Bodman was Williamsburg's delegate to the Massachusetts convention that was called to ratify the federal constitution. In a speech at this convention that gave him considerable local fame, he argued that by giving unlimited power to Congress to raise taxes, the constitution posed a grave threat to state sovereignty.

Manoah Bodman was a lawyer and, like his celebrated uncle, an orator, but while his uncle was greatly respected, Bodman was a village oddity. The editor of a local newspaper recalled that when he was boy, he heard Bodman speak: "He used good language, and an abundance of it, but whether his reasoning and appeals were convincing, I never could comprehend, as the flood of words always eclipsed the force of his logic."

Bodman did not marry until he was almost thirty-five, and his wife, Theodocia Green, died within a year. He never remarried, living instead with his brother Joseph Jr., an austere Calvinist and staunch Federalist, who became as powerful in the community as his uncle had been. Joseph served as selectman, state representative, justice of the peace, and deacon; in the latter capacity, he was known for the vigor and doctrinal rectitude with which he managed church affairs. Manoah was once jailed for bankruptcy, and Joseph posted the bail.

Bodman published one book, *An Oration on Death, and the Happiness of the Separate State, or the Pleasures of Paradise* (1817; reprinted 1818; see LOA, 1: 27), and three pamphlets, *An Oration Delivered at Williamsburgh, July 4, 1803*, *Washington's Birth Day, An Oration* (as by "Noah" Bodman, 1814), and *Oration on the Birth of Our Savior* (1826). A broadside privately printed in 1837 contains two poems, which the poet Lewis Turco believes may be Bodman's, although neither poem has the rough energy and linguistic invention of his other work. Turco has also suggested that the 1803 oration may be a parody of Bodman; this idea has some plausibility since this oration is much less accomplished than the other orations. The differences in accomplishment could also exist, however, because the 1803 oration was written much earlier than the others, before Bodman had mastered the diction and cadences that characterize his work at its best.

The pamphlets are quite brief (four, 17, and 26 pages, respectively), but the *Oration on Death* (printed on a press in his uncle Samuel's tannery) is a substantial volume of 300 pages, including preface, introduction, poems, and two long orations – "An Oration on Death" and "An Oration, on the Outpourings of the Spirit of God." The book also includes "Four Poems, on Solemn and Divine Subjects," printed together at the end of the book, and four short poems quoted in the orations themselves.

Aside from two early orations on patriotic subjects, all of Bodman's writings are concerned with spiritual and theological matters. During his youth, the churches in his and surrounding towns were all Calvinist, and the influence of Jonathan Edwards, who had been the minister in the neighboring community of Northampton, remained strong. Edwards left his pastorate in 1750 because of a doctrinal dispute, but he left behind a strong revivalist temper. Williamsburg, like other towns in the area, was periodically swept by revivals that were part of the Second Great Awakening. During one of these revivals in 1779, Bodman "supposed" that he received divine grace.

Ten years later, while suffering under a "great outward trouble," he experienced the first of many mystical visitations. "All at once," he wrote in the *Oration on Death*, "I perceived an invisible being, that seemed to be coming to comfort and console me, with a language that was sweet and endearing." Bodman never identified this "great outward trouble," but in that year, 1789, his 19-year-old brother Samuel died. In later visitations, the "invisible being" assumed the shape of "one of my deceased friends." At other times, Bodman believed that he was visited by God Himself. The visitations eventually ceased but suddenly resumed in 1799 during his wife's final illness. After her death, she supposedly came to Bodman repeatedly, assuring him "that she had arrived at glory."

Bodman wrote that he had many spiritual visitors. They supposedly told him that the millennium was coming, that heavenly hosts would be descending to earth, and that they would "carry on a perfect correspondence with its inhabitants." In these visions, God, or the being Bodman had until this time identified as God, told him that he would be party to remarkable truths, which he should publish, and which "would pass through the world like a shock of electricity." At this point, according to Bodman, God Himself intervened, telling Bodman – by means "not now necessary to relate" – that the visitations had all been the work of Satan. Although Bodman immediately resolved "to defy all the powers of darkness," it seemed at first a struggle he would lose. The visitor Bodman now called Satan then supposedly tried to convince him that he had committed the unpardonable sin and on one occasion Bodman went into convulsions during which Satan supposedly told him that "he would [be shaken] . . . into hell the next time."

The minister and the doctor were called: the former to pray and the latter to bleed the distraught man. Another violent seizure followed, and although Bodman survived it and other torments, he concluded at last that he would "never do any

thing but sin, and blaspheme against God." Deciding, therefore, "to shut [his] mouth, lest it should be so," he felt "immediate relief," realizing that he had never in fact committed the unpardonable sin and "could go unto God, as a child unto his father." It is possible, as some have conjectured, that Bodman suffered from epilepsy or that he was schizophrenic. Whatever the organic origins of his visions, they were as real to him as his family; the critical problem for Bodman was to place them, like his writings, within a theologically approved context.

Experiences like Bodman's were not altogether unknown in his part of the world. Charles Grandison Finney's vision of Christ on the streets of Adams, New York, in 1821, for example, was widely reported and accepted as fact. Indeed Bodman himself indicates that "in the view and opinion of all candid and substantial people, [his visitations] were perfectly supernatural." Bodman's spiritual visitors were clearly important to him for they offered comforting proof of salvation. He also said that they became his special guardians. However astonishing they may have sounded to his fellow townspeople, his experiences certainly posed no threat to the order of the community, but when he began believing that God would soon make him His prophet, Bodman effectively claimed for himself a role far above the church and the town's leaders. Another person in his situation might have been simply dismissed as a crank, but Bodman belonged to a respected, influential family, and he was the brother of the town's foremost citizen.

What were the means "not now necessary to relate" by which God informed Bodman that he had been deluded by Satan? Bodman says only that "no supernatural voices, or communications" were involved. Was he in fact "reasoned" out of his "delusions" by family members, townspeople, or the local minister (felicitously named Henry Lord), a man of such tenacity in the refinements of theological disputation that he once preached forty Sundays in a row on the doctrine of election? And if Bodman was argued into believing that God did not chose him as His prophet, what could the troubled man do – since his visions had certainly seemed real – other than reconceive them as diabolical?

But if Bodman was denied the mantle of a prophet, he was still able to use his beliefs and experiences to transcend the isolation and provinciality that life in his community necessarily entailed. He could not announce the millennium, but he could powerfully affirm his convictions and beliefs as long as they remained orthodox. Stated another way, he could not be a prophet, but he could be a writer and a very compelling one as well. Given the consummate importance that religion conferred on every Christian in matters of salvation, Bodman could still consider an account of his struggle with the powers of darkness as potentially beneficial to "the whole world," and it was with this conviction that he recorded his experiences.

In this account, Bodman pictures himself at one moment as "a worm of the dust" and at another as the center of a moral crisis of momentous import. Both characterizations permitted him to project a powerful, agonized presence; his works never retreat to the cool theological refinements one finds in the published sermons of Henry Lord and other local ministers. Nevertheless, Bodman remained acutely sensitive to the more liberal manifestations of orthodox Calvinist theology. He accepted the fundamental doctrines of election and reprobation, but only in the modified form promoted by the "New Divinity." According to this interpretation, God was a "Moral Governor," and humans were His "moral agents" in a cosmic drama exemplifying His authority. At the least, such a role conferred on the individual a spiritual function of supreme importance. Bodman, as he argued in one of the orations, could not accept the doctrine of election in "every preconceived notion of it": individuals, he asserted, were "moral agents," not "eternal machines."

In Cummington, a few miles west of Williamsburg, William Cullen **Bryant** grappled with problems much like Bodman's. Bryant, too, was obsessed with death as seen through the Calvinist lens, but he resolved the problem by adopting the deistic view expressed in "Thanatopsis" (published in 1817, the same year as Bodman's *Oration on Death*; see LOA, 1: 122) – and then by leaving the Calvinist hilltowns and settling in New York City. Bodman took the more conservative route, remaining at home and writing poems and orations that hewed to theological and social norms, yet he achieved in language an expressive intensity that his contemporaries, including Bryant, rarely equaled.

Aside from the broadside of 1837, if it is indeed his, Bodman's only known poems are the eight works he published in his *Oration on Death*. The orations themselves, however, frequently use poetic analogies to illustrate their arguments. "The holiness of all the saints in heaven" is compared, for example, to the sun reflected "on a piece of polished metal," and "the notices that we obtain by the light of grace, or the gospel here on earth" are likened to "the moon at midnight shining upon a dark world." Sinners, he says, flock to Christ like "doves to their windows."

The orations also anticipate the kind of poetry Walt **Whitman** developed two generations later. Bodman used an "abrupt method," arguing, that is, more through assertion than logic. He said that "An Oration on Death" and "An Oration, on the Outpourings of the Spirit of God" were delivered extemporaneously and recorded by a clerk; statements in other orations, as well as internal evidence in all of them, suggest that they, too, were composed in this manner. At its best, this method encouraged a fervently cadenced diction: "Ah! grim messenger! rightly art thou named King of Terrors! Dost thou indeed transmit to regions of woe, as well as of bliss; and open the gates of the infernal prison, to receive the poor, guilty, trembling fugitive from our earth, and fast lock the adamantine bars upon him?" Whitman never approximates this tone, but when his rhetorical techniques draw on political oratory and the cadences of the King James Bible, he can sound very much like Bodman. In "A Song of the Rolling Earth," for example, Whitman wrote, "Say on, sayers! sing on, singers! / Delve! Mould! pile the words of the earth! / Work on, age after age, nothing is to be lost."

Although Bodman's orations use rhetorical techniques with which Whitman devised a transformative poetry, he did not himself make that leap; yet he came near it and, in the process, discovered a language of conviction that at times reaches toward poetic rapture and religious transport. In any case, Bodman found in oratory a vehicle for the immediate, and seemingly unmediated, expression of his convictions. His orations have the force of personal testimony – a value not to be lost on a lawyer like himself.

Bodman's verse appears at first to be less inventive than the

orations. Superficially, Bodman seems a latter-day Augustan poet, and a very imitative one at that, who describes his spiritual insights and feelings in traditional poetic forms. His model was Isaac Watts (1674–1748), whose hymns, collected in *Christian Psalmody* and *The Psalms, Hymns, and Spiritual Songs*, were common throughout New England at that time. Bodman thought Watts had been the world's supreme poet and was surely now in heaven, "elucidating the grand theme of poetry in the face of heavenly day." As a consequence, Bodman never ventured beyond the types of metrical and stanzaic conventions seen in the following lines from Watts's "The Penitent Pardoned."

Black heavy thoughts, like mountains, roll
O'er my poor breast, with boding fears,
And crushing hard my tortured soul,
Wring through my eyes the briny tears.

Here, for comparison, is the opening stanza from Bodman's "A Soliloquy, or Rather Conference, Between the Divine Attributes of Mercy and Justice, Relative to the State of Fallen Man":

The spirit of the gospel comes,
To call dead sinners from their tombs;
Then hear and see and taste and feel,
The grace that vanquishes all hell.

Bodman seems to be imitating Watts, but the copy is not exact. His stanzas are less neatly groomed than his mentor's, and this roughness gives them their peculiar strength. That effect does not by any means result from carelessness or happy accident, however; Bodman was an exceedingly painstaking craftsman. The spondees in the second and fourth lines in the opening stanza from "A Soliloquy," for example, emphasize "dead" and "all" – words central to the argument. The spondees also interrupt the tripping rhythm that the iambic tetrameter easily establishes but that would obviously be inappropriate here. The off-rhymes further slow the rhythm ("comes"/"tombs," "feels"/"hell"), which in turn helps to give the stanza a rugged and serious tone.

If Bodman's orations have the virtues of their extemporaneousness, his poems have the virtues of this careful and inventive construction, and their difference from Watts's canon can be seen as partly owing to differences of setting and culture. Bodman's verse is never genteel, like that of his mentor from London, but employs a diction more appropriate to a hometown that was largely wilderness during his lifetime. In his search for suitable expression, he turned, as Turco has pointed out in "Poet of the Second Awakening" (*Costerus* 8 [1973]), to "standard, non-literary contractions, a natural speech, and such . . . techniques as slant-rhyme long before anyone else of consequence had attempted them [on] his side of the Atlantic Ocean." (In "Manoah Bodman: Poet of the Second Awakening," Turco reprints "A Soliloquy" and four poems he identifies as being by Isaac Watts, which Bodman wove into the text of his *Oration on Death*.) The result is a poetry as intimately of its region and time as Robert Frost's a century later.

Although Bodman did make some poetic innovations, verse also offered him the advantages of precedent; if Watts or another admired poet had written in a given way, could it be wrong to do it again? In the note preceding "A Soliloquy," for example, Bodman observes that "somewhat in conformity to the usages of ancient poets and orators," the speakers in his poem include "invisible beings or things . . . from the animate, inanimate, or intellectual worlds." Perhaps recalling the spiritual confusions into which he had been led by his visitations, he added that in personifying "divine attributes" he meant "nothing more, than that this would probably be their language, should they appear and consult in person."

Bodman's anguished battle with the powers of darkness, the defining episode in his imaginative life, began when he was 24. The *Oration on Death* was published when he was 52. In between passed almost 30 years of a life lived more intensely than his neighbors may have imagined, and which culminated in one of the most accomplished works to emerge in the literature of the early republic. After the publication of his *Oration on Death*, however, Bodman almost disappeared from literature and history. He announced in that book that he would be writing and publishing a work to be called *A Brief of the Author's Life* (a good title, certainly, for a lawyer's autobiography), and in the prefatory note to his *Oration on the Birth of Our Savior*, he said that this particular work was not the one (under the same title) to which readers had subscribed but rather a continuation of it. He further stated that "the other work shall be published as soon as may be." He also said that he also hoped to write a work proving Christ's divinity on the basis the Old Testament, thereby demonstrating to those who believed otherwise "and the world, that they are wrong, totally wrong; and that the doctrine if it be wrong carries death in its train." We know nothing further of these works, if indeed they were written.

On January 15, 1850, the *Hampshire Courier*, a local newspaper, carried the following notice: "In Williamsburg, Jan 1, Manoah Bodman, Esq., age 83 [he was in fact 84]. He was usually [*sic*] well at 3 o'clock in the morning when he arose and dressed himself, mistaking the bright moonlight for the approach of day; but on discovering his error he again retired, without undressing, and at daybreak was found a corpse." This was the totality of the obituary and the only one of any substance to appear that recorded the fact that one had passed from the earth whose struggle with the powers of evil was of such weight that, in the words of the *Oration on Death*, "the whole world ought to be benefited by the relation."

EDWARD HALSEY FOSTER

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George Henry Boker

(1823–1890)

George Henry Boker himself best described the figure he has cut in American literary history. In the sonnet "If history, that feeds upon the past," he proposed a design for his own memorial monument:

> A radiant form, almost sustained in air,
> . . . Another form, mere man in shape and mind,
> Turning his churlish back against mankind,
> Forever kneeling to that lady fair.

And so posterity has remembered him, the devoted servant of a timeless ideal of beauty, a champion – against the tide of his own times – of poetry for poetry's sake. Modern readers, schooled to equate nineteenth-century American poetry with the formally and topically radical verse of Walt **Whitman** and Emily **Dickinson**, are baffled and even embarrassed by Boker's consistent conventionalism in form and subjects.

Current definitions of nineteenth-century American poetic style and substance derive from Whitman's poetics, as put forth in the preface to *Leaves of Grass* (1855). Whitman's disdain, in *Democratic Vistas* (1871), for those his generation called "American poets" – "flood[ing] us with their thin sentiment of parlors, . . . the five-hundredth importation, . . . chasing one aborted conceit after another, and forever occupied in dyspeptic amours with dyspeptic women" – might well express a modern student's response to Boker's life and work. Reacting against these "dandies and ennuyees," Whitman boldly marketed himself, the author of a "great psalm of the republic" with a form as "unerring" and "loose" as "lilacs or roses on a bush," as the answer to Ralph Waldo **Emerson's** call for American poets who would dare to let their argument, "like the spirit of a plant or animal," make the meter of their poems.

Boker's poetics are directly opposed to Whitman's: his meter always determines his argument. Instead of breaking open the poetic line to accommodate what Emerson termed the "barbarism and materialism of the times," Boker conformed his song to the most hallowed forms and set meters of the English poetic tradition: odes, elegies, blank verse, ballads, and, most of all, sonnets. In a letter of August 1865, he boasted to Bayard **Taylor** that he had "written more sonnets . . . than any poet in the language, except Wordsworth, and I shall outnumber him if I keep on." Boker wrote, in fact, the type of poetry *against* which Whitman defined his poetics in "Song of Myself"; he produced the sort of verse that the nineteenth-century American public had "practiced so long to learn to read." Today, American readers practice to read Whitman, and Boker, in comparison, seems unreadable, alien, and un-American.

Neither Boker nor Whitman secured the contemporary fame that he sought. Neither figures significantly in poetry anthologies published in the nineteenth century; neither ascended to Emerson's *Parnassus* (1874). Their responses to the world's neglect, however, were very different. In 1856, the year after Whitman published *Leaves of Grass*, Boker compiled the two-volume *Plays and Poems* and called it his "last dash at the laurel," "a life's venture on the cast." Having set such stakes on the work's success, the 33-year-old poet was crushed by the lack of critical enthusiasm. Much later, in 1882, he claimed he was "choked off and silenced" by the reading public's indifference. Whitman, by contrast, understood why fame was not his. His *Leaves of Grass* offended aesthetic and moral convention – he *meant* them to offend – and he consoled himself in "A Backward Glance O'er Travel'd Roads" (1888) by saying that his song of insurrection was his "*carte de visite* [visiting card] to future generations."

Boker imagined the poet's role differently, not as the prophet of the future, or even the singer of the present, but as the preserver of past traditions and truths. In January 1850 he advised Richard Henry Stoddard, his friend and fellow poet, "Get out of your own age as much as you can"; he further argued in "The Lesson of Life" (1848) that the poet must not "pander to the present time." Resenting European critics who "bid us work within ourselves," he countered that America's "grandest regions" were "all bare of legendary lore, / . . . the scenery, not the play" ("Ad Criticum," in *Königsmark* [1869]). Even the pastoralized scenery of Boker's poems – like the dewy "glades" and "yon dreary yew" of "The leaden eyelids of wan twilight close" (Sonnet XXV, *Sequence on Profane Love*, dated 1858) – is thus more specific to Arcadia than to the eastern United States.

Whitman's judgment of his rival poets, "those *genteel* little creatures," does, however, suggest the proper context for understanding Boker's poetic career, which constituted part of the "genteel endeavor" (the phrase is John Tomsich's) of a close-knit group of upper-class literary men, including Boker and Taylor, who were attempting, in the words of one member, Edmund Clarence **Stedman**, to "creat[e] a civic Arcadia of our own." Born in Philadelphia on October 6, 1823, to what Rufus Griswold has called "a life of opulent leisure," Boker was tutored at home until age seven. He then attended Sears Walker's and John Seely Hart's Edge Hill schools between 1830 and 1838, when he matriculated at Princeton. According to his lifelong friend, the poet and scholar Charles Godfrey **Leland**, Boker became the Princeton campus "swell." Tall and graced with "the form of an Apollo," and a head like "the bust of Byron," Boker was "quite familiar, in a refined and gentlemanly way, with all the dissipation of Philadelphia and New York." Outwardly, he "trained himself . . . to self-restraint, calmness, and the *nil admirari* air"; privately, however, he played the libertine.

The contrasts between public conformity and private transgression, public calm and private turmoil, pervade Boker's life and art. Two years after graduating from Princeton in 1842, he married Julia Riggs, who came from a wealthy Washington family, and settled down in the house provided by his businessman-banker father, Charles. By 1851, however, he was involved in the first of the series of love affairs that continued into his sixties. Elizabeth Barstow Stoddard, the novelist and wife of his friend R. H. Stoddard, wrote Stedman that Boker was "the sort of man that would have taken the Virgin Mary from the Ass, before Joseph, and helped her kindly into an adjoining hedge."

During the first years of his marriage, Boker halfheartedly studied law to please his father, but soon gave it up to pursue the glorious vocational course he had laid out in "The Pre-eminence of the Man of Letters" (1843). He completed eight plays and two books of verse between 1848 and 1856, and the productions of six of his plays in Philadelphia and New York between 1850 and 1855 brought him some renown. This fame did not satisfy Boker, however. He felt the playwright's authority was too compromised in the move from text to stage. He insisted to Taylor in October 1855: "My theatrical success I never valued. . . . If I could not be acknowledged as a poet I had no further desire, and no further active concern in literature."

Two circumstances forced Boker's attention away from his belletristic pursuits to the real world of money, law, and politics that he had sought to avoid. First, after his father's death in 1858, Charles Boker's employer, Girard Bank, brought a suit against the estate, charging fraud. Although he eventually succeeded in vindicating his father, the suit dominated Boker's life for the next fifteen years. The second determining event was the Civil War. Emphatically pro-Union, Boker cofounded the Union League of Philadelphia in 1862. He served as the league's secretary for the next nine years and turned his pen to the service of the state, writing a pro-Lincoln pamphlet, "The Will of the People," and a book of verse, *Poems of the War* (both 1864). These poems, most of them circulated on broadsides or printed first in newspapers, commemorate specific military engagements ("On Board the Cumberland," "The Ballad of New Orleans") and honor characters both generic ("The Sword-Bearer," "The Black Regiment") and specific (General Joseph Hooker in "Hooker's Across," General William T. Sherman in "Before Vicksburg").

After his play *Francesca da Rimini* (first produced in 1855), Boker's exhortations and memorials comprise his best-known contribution to American letters. He figures prominently in actor James Murdoch's wartime lecture series, *Patriotism in Poetry and Prose* (1865), and Boker's "Dirge for a Soldier" is his most anthologized poem. These poems are uncharacteristically occasional, but it is not simply that, as Murdoch claims, "when our flag was assailed, [Boker] threw off his indifference to national subjects." Rather, as Boker himself implies in "Our Heroic Themes" (1865), American materials had finally become worthy of his song:

> Find me in history, since Adam fell,
> This story's rival or its parallel:
> A nation rising to undo a wrong
> Forged by itself, and to its mind made strong
> By every word its angry tongue had hurled
> In stout defiance at a sneering world.

Emphasizing the high tragic irony of the conflict – the United States' own boasts of freedom and equality have lent symbolic force to the nation's failure – Boker sees here the richest epic subject since Milton sang *Paradise Lost*. Boker thus calls upon his fellow poets to "strike the sounding lyre, / To touch the heroes of our holy-cause / Heart-deep with ancient fire" ("Ad Poetas"). His high-flown language here confirms that it was not his poetics but the world that had changed.

In three of the four sonnets in *Poems of the War* – placed toward the end and spoken by a nonparticipant observer – Boker expresses a more clearly personal and dissenting view of the war. (The fourth sonnet, "Grant," casts the Union general as the nation's "Moses" and helped secure Boker's postwar commission as minister to Turkey from 1871 to 1875.) For instance, "Blood! Blood! The lines of every printed sheet" protests that the war has imposed a bloody preoccupation upon the nation's writers, himself included: all "printed sheet[s]," like the "dark arteries" of the body politic, "reek with running gore"; the speaker further resents how "gory Death" has displaced "our very Love." The lover-speaker of "Oh! craven, craven! while my brothers fall," an "easy vassal to [his] own delight," feels "shamed in [his] manhood," but he still resists giving up his suitor's pen for the soldier's sword.

In the third sonnet, "Brave comrade, answer! When you joined the war," the speaker interrogates a soldier in his effort to understand "that simple duty, conscience-plain and clear / To dullest minds" ("Oh! craven, craven!"). Even as the rhythm and breaks of their dialogue strain the sonnet's flow – Oliver Evans notes that, in all his sonnets, Boker "limits his liberties to the placement of the turn" – the poem moves steadily toward the soldier's paean to

> Duty! Something more than life.
> That which made Abraham bare the priestly knife,
> And Isaac kneel, or that young Hebrew girl
> Who sought her father coming from the strife.

Boker's second allusion here sounds a subtle note of protest. The reference to Jephthah's daughter (Judges 11:34–39) is neither syntactically nor sensibly parallel to the first allusion. Abraham consciously strove to prove his faith by sacrificing his son, and God, impressed, spared Isaac (Genesis 22). Jephthah, however, obliviously pursued his dreams of military glory; his virgin daughter's sacrifice is the accidental result of his prideful promise and her own innocent devotion. The poem leaves the reader awaiting the verb that describes her action; the silence inclines us to compare her situation to the soldier's.

An earlier poem, "Lear and Cordelia! 't was an ancient tale," likewise conjoins the sonnet and the articulation of a complex attitude toward authorities, both paternal and political. In this first sonnet of his 1852–54 "To England" sequence, written to declare America's support of England as the parent country moved toward the Crimean War, Boker casts America as daughter Cordelia to England's father Lear: America/Cordelia,

> . . . an outcast, dowerless, and pale,
> . . . in a foreign gale
> Spread her young banner, till its sway became
> A wonder to the nations.

Now that England's "destiny / Storms on thy straw-crowned head, and thou dost stand / Weak, helpless, mad, a by-word in the land," the poet prays, "God grant thy daughter a Cordelia be!"

Boker's figure of America as Cordelia also provides a context for understanding his lifelong devotion to the sonnet. In *The Book of the Sonnet* (1867), S. Adams Lee claims that Boker did not "pursu[e] a conventional system of versification from any blind reverence for authority." His sonnets are not thus merely symptomatic of the "vassalage of opinion and style" of which Rufus Griswold complained in *Poets and Poetry of America* (1842). Boker's poetry is, to quote Shakespeare's