8-1-1965

Emerson's Concepts of Genius

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EMERSON'S CONCEPTS OF GENIUS

by

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B.S. in English, Moorhead State College, 1957

A Thesis

Submitted to the Faculty

of the

University of North Dakota

in partial fulfillment of the requirements

for the Degree of

Master of Arts

Grand Forks, North Dakota

August
1965

This thesis submitted by Edna Swanson Anderson in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree of Master of Arts in the University of North Dakota is hereby approved by the Committee under whom the work has been done.

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The writer wishes to acknowledge her obligations and express her appreciation to Dr. F. Y. St. Clair, Head of the Department of English, for the advice and assistance so freely given during the course of this study. Appreciation is also expressed to Dr. Robert A. Caldwell of the Department of English and Dr. Bernt L. Wills, Head of the Department of Geography, for their encouragement.

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INTRODUCTION

"Genius" was a word used often by Emerson in all his journals, letters, essays and poetry. It appeared in early journal jottings and in his letters of late maturity, sometimes in remarkably similar statements.

Before his seventeenth birthday in 1820 Emerson wrote thus of Socrates:

> His genius resembled Aesop. . . we examine the originality and unequalled sublimity of his conceptions. His powerful mind had surmounted the errours of education. . . He studied nature with a chastised enthusiasm, and the constant activity of his mind endowed him with an energy of thought little short of inspiration.[1]

Fifty-seven years later he praised a friend's ability in a like manner:

> Thoreau was a superior genius. I read his books and manuscripts always with new surprise at the range of his topics and the novelty and depth of his thought. A man of large reading, of quick perception, of great practical courage and ability,--who grew greater every day, &, had his short life been prolonged would have found few equals to the power & wealth of his mind.[2]

Comments on Emerson's use of the word "genius" occur regularly in a large number of essays and studies concerning parts of his works or his works as a whole. Two articles, especially, discuss in some detail an aspect of the word "genius."

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[1] Journals of Ralph Waldo Emerson, ed. Edward Waldo Emerson and Waldo Emerson Forbes (10 vols; Boston and New York: Houghton-Mifflin Company, 1909-14), I, 5-6.

[2] The Letters of Ralph Waldo Emerson, ed. Ralph L. Rusk, (6 vols; New York: Columbia University Press, 1939), VI, 303, Letter to George Stewart, Jr.

The first of these, "Emerson's Power of Human Greatness,"[3] discusses the pattern of Emerson's thought regarding men of outstanding intellectual ability. Mr. McCormick emphasizes Emerson's belief that the quality of genius must express the highest morality and ethics as well as inspiration from God. He states, "Greatness of mind is to be evaluated in direct proportion to the strength of the idea of the Deity in the mind,"[4] and proceeds to cite the chronological influences of Sampson Reed, Coleridge, Gerando, Victor Cousin, and finally Carlyle on Emerson's theory of human greatness. He points out that previous to 1835 Emerson made statements in regard to human greatness that anticipated certain theories of Cousin and Carlyle and were, therefore, original Emersonian conclusions. Mr. McCormick believes that Emerson's idealism was challenged by some contemporaries regarded as great men. He also seems to think that Emerson's theory of greatness underwent a substantial mellowing by the time he published Representative Men. Then Emerson found his nation deficient in great men, and Mr. McCormick seems to believe that Emerson's concepts of what constituted human greatness had evolved into those of a man much better fitted for an aristocracy than a democracy.

Another study touching upon Emerson's interest in outstanding qualities of our nation's leaders is "Emersonian Genius and the American Democracy"[5] by Perry Miller. Mr. Miller says:

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[3]J. O. McCormick, "Emerson's Theory of Human Greatness," New England Quarterly, XXVI (1953), 291-314.

[4]Ibid., 293.

[5]Perry Miller, "Emersonian Genius and the American Democracy," New England Quarterly, XXVI (1953), 27-44.

> From the beginning of his career as a lecturer down to his last series at Harvard in 1871, there is always a discourse on "Genius;" materials from one or another recasting of this draft found their way into "Self-Reliance," "Art," "Intellect," --but never into a full-dress essay on genius. .
>
> Thus early the problem took shape in his mind--never to leave it--of genius and 'my country.'[6]

As a whole, the article analyzes the chronological development of Emerson's judgments regarding attributes of genius possessed by contemporary government leaders.

Both of the above mentioned articles have considered certain limited aspects of Emerson's concepts of the word "genius." However, I have been unable to locate any study which investigated exclusively and exhaustively Emerson's use of the word "genius" in its multiple interpretations and shades of meaning. This, then, is the purpose of the present study.

The method followed is to

1. Survey in detail the use of the word "genius" in Emerson's journals, letters and all available works.
2. Discover the various meanings of the word "genius" as used by Emerson.
3. Discover the importance of these meanings in his life and philosophy.

Generally, this study is divided into four sections which may be described as follows:

1. The history of the word "genius".

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[6] Ibid., 40.

2. Emerson's use of "genius" before 1836 or prior to publication.

3. Detailed examination of traits of "genius" as enumerated by Emerson.

4. Conclusions.

The third, and largest section, chapters three through seven, requires an explanation. It concerns Emerson's peculiar use of the word "genius." His journals indicate that the "genius" of others was a common conversational topic among his friends. In 1861 he recorded a summary of one of these conversations:

> At Mrs.Hooper's, February 23, we had a conversation on Genius, in which I enumerated the traits of genius:--
>
> 1. Love of truth, distinguished from talent, which Mackintosh defined, "habitual facility of execution."
>
> 2. Surprises; incalculable.
>
> 3. Always the term Genius, when used with emphasis, implies Imagination, use of symbols, figurative speech.
>
> 4. Creative. Advancing, leading by new ways to the evernew or infinite.
>
> 5. Coleridge said, "Its accompaniment is the carrying the feelings and freshness of youth into the powers of manhood."
>
> Most men in their life and ways make us feel the arrested development; in Genius the unfolding goes on,--perfect metamorphosis, and again, new metamorphosis, and every soul is potentially Genius, if not arrested.
>
> 5. [Sic] Moral. Genius is always moral.
>
> And, finally, my definition is, Genius is a sensibility to the laws of the world; things make a natural impression on him,--belongs to us as well.[7]

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[7] Journals, IX, 312-13.

Since the preceding summary was recorded in Emerson's late maturity, I felt it was significant enough so that I could use it as a springboard for the discussions in chapters three through seven.

Chapter three, "Talent and Genius", attempts to present a survey of Emerson's thinking regarding "love of truth" as opposed to "habitual facility of execution."

Chapter four, "Nurture and Development of Genius", pursues Emerson's views on the "arrested development" of genius in most men.

Genius "leading by new ways to the ever-new and infinite" must use the powers of the intellect and inspiration. These concepts are detailed in chapter five, "Genius as the Mind and the Soul."

Since Emerson revered the poet as the greatest creative artist, I chose "Genius and Literary Creativity" to explore the creative process of genius as it utilizes "Imagination in symbols and figurative speech." This is discussed in chapter six.

Although to Emerson all great art was moral, his definition of the moral sentiment was so totally his own that one can hardly speak of the "moral sentiment" as Emerson used it without clarifying what he meant by the same. I have attempted this clarification in chapter seven, "Genius and the Moral Sentiment."

CHAPTER I

HISTORY OF THE WORD "GENIUS"

The word "genius" originated from the Latin forms gignere (to beget) and gigno (one who creates or begets). According to early Roman belief the tutelary, guiding spirit of any man was called his Genius. The feminine counterpart was called Juno.[8] His Genius stayed with a man from the moment of conception until death and "fostered the growth of all the intellectual and moral faculties of the individual of whom it was a kind of abstract double."[9]

The Genius shared adulation with other family gods. First represented as the figure of a serpent and later by the figure of a man in a toga if of the head of the family, it was often displayed in the home along with the Lar, a figure representing guardian spirits of agriculture, and the Penates, serpent figures (always in twos) representing spirits responsible for preservation of food and drink.[10]

The task of the Roman genius, the representation of "man's natural optimism"[11] and "the creative force which engendered the

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[8] "Genius," Larousse Encyclopedia of Mythology (New York: Prometheus Press, 1959); Harry Thurston Peck (ed.), Harper's Dictionary of Classical Literature and Antiquities (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1898), p. 720-21; "Genius," Encyclopedia Britannica, 11th ed., Vol. XI.

[9] Larousse Encyclopedia of Mythology.

[10] Ibid.

[11] Encyclopedia Britannica.

individual,"[12] was to mold a man's character and personality and guide him through a happy life. Therefore, offerings were made on a man's birthday to his genius. Also, since the Genius was a god, it was possible to swear by or take an oath by him.[13]

The Romans had numerous geniuses or protective, beneficent spirits assigned to public places and institutions such as streets, markets, baths, cities, villages, armies, and political divisions as well as to the emperor.[14] One reference indicates that it "was a common practice" not only to worship publicly the Genius of the Emperor but "to swear by the genius of the Emperor."[15] Another source cites Farrar's statement about the practice of venerating the Genius of the Emperors during the era of Christian persecution in Rome.[16]

Greek influence is believed to have led to the belief in a good and evil genius for every man.[17] The Greeks called the tutelary spirits Daemons, whose general function was "to watch over men and guard them."[18]

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[12] Larousse Encyclopedia of Mythology.

[13] Encyclopedia Britannica.

[14] Ibid.

[15] Ibid.

[16] OED, ed. Sir James Augustus Henry Murray et al. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1888-1928), IV, Pt. II, p. 112. The entry referred to reads: "In 1871 Farrar Witn. Hist. III 99 Christians . . . who would rather die than fling into the altar flame a pinch of incense to the Genius of the Emperors."

[17] Encyclopedia Britannica.

[18] Harper's Dictionary of Classical Literature and Antiquities, p. 464.

Another type of daemon functioned, as did the personal Roman Genius, as a type of guardian angel throughout life.[19] Perhaps the best known literary example of the latter type was the inner voice or Daemon of Socrates.

From the classical Roman idea the word "genius" came to be used in English as a synonym for Latin ingenium, "'that which is born in a man'"[20] or "natural bent and disposition,"[21] Throughout the seventeenth century the word was often used in this concept to mean "both the endowment of natural ability or capacity, and also, occasionally, the person so endowed."[22]

In 1634 Sir William Alexander wrote, "Every author hath his own Genius, directing him by a secret Inspiration to that wherein he may most excel."[23] Gradually the idea of divine inspiration in connection with the word "genius" was enlarged upon and became more firmly established during the Romantic Movement and the 'Sturm und Drang' period in Germany.[24] During the last half of the eighteenth century a number of essays on genius appeared by such writers as Edmund Burke, Edward Young, W. Duff, Alexander Gerard, and William Sharpe.[25]

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[19] Ibid.

[20] James Bradstreet Greenough and George Lyman Kittredge, Words and Their Ways in English Speech (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1901), p. 223.

[21] Logan Pearsall Smith, Words and Idioms (Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1925), p. 95.

[22] Ibid., 95-96.

[23] Ibid., 98.

[24] Joseph T. Shipley (ed.) Dictionary of World Literature (New York: The Philosophical Library, 1943), p. 553.

[25] Words and Idioms, p. 100.

Dictionary definitions also indicate the development of the meanings of the word "genius." In 1671 it was defined thus:

> the good or evil Spirit attending on every man, or proper to each several place: also a mans nature, fancy or inclination.[26]

By 1735 the definition was almost identical:

> a good or evil Angel or Spirit, supposed to attend upon every Person; also a man's Nature, Fancy, or Inclination. L.[27]

However, the 1756 edition of the same dictionary made some additions:

> Genius (among the Ancients) was used to signify a spirit either good or evil; which they supposed did attend upon every person; they also allowed Genii to each province, country, town, &c. also a man's disposition, inclination, &c.
>
> Genius, the force or faculty of the soul, considered as it thinks or judges; also a natural talent or disposition to one thing more than to another.[28]

Dr. Samuel Johnson's Dictionary included five definitions in the following order:

1. The protecting or ruling power of men, places, or things.
2. A man endowed with superiour faculties.
3. Mental power or faculties.
4. Disposition of nature by which any one is qualified for some peculiar employment.
5. Nature, disposition.[29]

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[26]Edward Phillips, The New World of English Words, 3rd ed. (Printed for and sold by Nath. Brook at the Angel in Cornhill near the Royal Exchange, 1671).

[27]Nathan Bailey, An Universal Etymological English Dictionary, 7th ed. (London, printed for J. J. and P. Knapton, 1735).

[28]Ibid., 4th ed., (London, Printed for T. W. Walker, 1756).

[29]Samuel Johnson, Johnson's Dictionary of the English Language 11th ed. (London; 1816), Vol. I.

The influence of the eighteenth century seemed to have established the concept of 'outstanding mental power' or a 'man thus endowed' as synonymous with "genius." Certainly the concept was accepted generally and is well clarified in the New English Dictionary. Therein the editors give as one definition of "genius" "natural ability" or "natural aptitude" but specified that in this sense the word "genius" was used only with "mixture of sense 5":[30]

> Native intellectual power of an exalted type, such as is attributed to those who are esteemed greatest in any department of art, speculation, or practice; instinctive and extraordinary capacity for imaginative creation, original thought, invention, or discovery.[31]

The foregoing paragraphs have elucidated briefly the development of the use of the word "genius" in order to determine generally the concept of the word in ordinary and literary usage during Emerson's lifetime. Now we shall examine the use of the word by Emerson.

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[30] Underlining is mine.

[31] OED, p. 113.

CHAPTER II

EMERSON'S USE OF "GENIUS" BEFORE 1836

The original concept of "genius," that of a tutelary deity or protecting spirit, occurs more often in Emerson's early journals and letters than in his later works. However, it continues to appear in all works throughout his life.

The earliest references seem to reflect merely youthful exuberance and a lively imagination. The first instance is an allusion to the "Tempest-Genius"[32] in a letter written in verse to Emerson's brother in 1817. During the early 1820's Emerson's original verse and journal entries are sprinkled with references such as the "Genii of the Stars"[33] and "Genius of Sophomores"[34].

As might be expected, this casual use appears most often in letters. Emerson describes himself thus to his uncle:

> I expect at every turn to be taken up & burnt alive as the genius of Winter travelling in disguise; for as soon as I come, so do the snowstorms.[35]

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[32] Letters, I, p. 43. Letter to Edward Bliss Emerson. Sept.24, 1817.

[33] The Journals and Miscellaneous Notebooks of Ralph Waldo Emerson, ed. William H. Gilman et al. (4 vols.; Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1960), I, p. 35.

[34] Ibid., 232.

[35] Letters, I, p. 197. Letter to Samuel Ripley. May 3, 1827.

Household deities are mentioned in a letter concerning his mother:

> Mrs. Ladd received her & by accident (if the good gods & genii & lares did not oversee & direct such throws) [sic] Charles got a notice of her being in town.[36]

In speaking of a newly elected candidate, he remarked:

> Tis feared he will rout Mr. Dabney & all the den & college house folk to building a marble Hall; that the Genius of the Mayoralty will expend itself in a reform of the whole system of goodies, & that Gammers Morse & Currier may have to sweat for it.[37]

However, the larger number of references to a tutelar deity are in a much more serious mood. One group expressed Emerson's youthful patriotic exuberance. In 1822, the year in which I found the greatest number of references to a tutelar deity, he dedicated certain notebooks to the "Genius of the Future"[38] as well as to the "Genius of America,"[39] where

> new Romes are growing, and the Genius of man is brooding over the wide boundaries of infant empires, where yet are be drunk the intoxicating draughts of honor and renown.[40]

America is a

> Genius who yet counts the tardy years of childhood, but who is increasing unawares in the twilight, & swelling into strength until the hour, when he shall break the cloud, to shew his colossal youth & cover the firmament with the shadow of his wings.[41]

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[36] Ibid., 410. Letter to William Emerson. April 18, 1834.

[37] Letters, I, p. 262. Letter to William Emerson. Feb. 3, 1829.

[38] Journals, I, p. 205.

[39] Ibid., 174.

[40] Journals, I, p. 201.

[41] Journals and Miscellaneous Notebooks, II, p. 4.

In a notebook excerpt entitled "Aaron Burr's Defence," he said:

> That country I was taught to love from my cradle. I saw her Genius through youthful walking like a giant among her mountains, nourishing his strength in silence until the hour should come of his going forth to battle with the dragon of English tyranny.[42]

During early maturity Emerson often mentioned his own guiding spirit or genius. In 1822 he bemoans the fickleness of his tutelar deity, who allows laxity in his notebooks, wherein is a

> detached morsel intended to be merely the first lines of along treatise upon fate & life, &c, [sic] but it is cropped in the bud by the fiend Caprice.[43]

Early 1820 found Emerson working on his dissertation "The Character of Socrates," in which he presented three explanations of Socrates' daemon or genius.[44] Eight years later he wrote thus about Socrates:

> the wisest certainly of all the pagans that preceded Christ. . . who taught his countrymen that he was always attended by an invisible Genius which governed his actions. . . I suppose that by this Daemon, Socrates designed to describe by a lively image the same judgment which we term conscience. We are all attended by this daemon. We are acquainted with the signal which is as the voice of God.[45]

In 1834 Emerson spoke of the ancients' belief representing "every human being as consigned to the charge of a Genius or Daemon

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[42] Journals and Miscellaneous Notebooks, I, p. 319.

[43] Ibid., 123.

[44] Ibid., 206-208.

[45] Journals and Miscellaneous Notebooks, III, p. 107.

by whose counsels he was guided in what he did best, but whose counsels he might reject."[46] A few pages later he cautioned:

> Keep the eye and ear open to all impressions, but deepen no impression by effort, but take the opinion of the Genius within, what ought to be retained by you & what rejected by you.[47]

Six years previously he had identified "genius" and conscience as synonymous in the case of Socrates; in 1834 he stated:

> Every man hath his own conscience as well as his own genius, & if he is faithful to himself he will yield that law implicit obedience.[48]

Emerson's often repeated belief in the mind's power of reception was foreshadowed in a 1833 lecture:

> All that life demands of us . . . is an equilibrium, a readiness, open eyes & ears, & free hands. Society asks this, & truth & love, & the genius of our life.[49]

Surely the "genius of our life" was none other than the personal tutelary spirit, of whom men had always been aware:

> The faith has always been in the world that every man was in the care of a Genius who befriended him. Traces of this faith are in all story sacred or profane: in the story of Socrates' Daemon; in the poems of Homer; in the belief of fairies, & tutelar saints; in the doctrine of a special providence. All these are symbols or parables of the fact that an infallible adviser dwells in every heart silently. . . to the ear sharpened by

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[46] Journals, III, p. 417.

[47] Ibid, 434-435.

[48] Ibid., 337.

[49] Works, XII, p. 412. "The Tragic."

> faith. . . what is made known by this Teacher is attended by a conviction which the opinions of all mankind could not shake & which the opinions of all mankind could not confirm.[50]

Emerson's numerous references regarding the tutelary spirit ranged from his description of Michaelangelo, who established "his mistress as a goddess or genius who is to refine & perfect his own character"[51] to that of Martin Luther, for whom God was a "Genius or local & partial tutelary Daemon, the lover of his Church, the hater of its enemy."[52]

Of the greatest interest to Emerson was the concept of genius as 'extraordinary mental and creative ability.' Not only did he use the word most often in this sense when he talked of others, but he constantly attempted to define and clarify the term "genius" in this regard.

Emerson respected all artistic creativity, but most of all he venerated literature and poetry, particularly the latter. At the age of fifteen he wrote to his brother regarding his original poetry:

> I am engaged in copying off my work at present --I was going to say for the press, but I fear for the fire, so if it turns out prizeless, I will say it was unjust, for the flame of human genius never blazed brighter.[53]

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[50] The Early Lectures of Ralph Waldo Emerson, ed. Stephen E. Whicher and Robert E. Spiller, Cambridge University Press, 1959, I.

[51] Ibid., 115.

[52] Ibid., 134.

[53] Letters, I, p. 63. Letter to Edward Bliss Emerson. June 12, 1818.

He was quick to praise a fellow student's oration and wished for the "exalted genius"[54] that could compose such language and sentiments.

As he read he considered critically the worth of authors, some of whom had sufficient genius to form a "school"[55] or style copied by others. A man's mental power or "genius" seemed important to young Emerson, who soliloquized in his College Theme Book:

> Honour, wealth, influence are now, always have been, & always will be the reward of distinction in intellectual attainments. For those who think must govern those who toil.[56]

Perhaps Emerson pondered his own "genius" and place in his own age when he said:

> But there is an ambition which is loftier & purer, which the multitude have not the wisdom to estimate or the genius to attain; the desire to leave something to aftertimes which the world shall not willingly let die. . . . This sacred feeling hath filled the world with all which graces it.[57]

Eighteen-year-old Emerson wonders at

> That within the noble frame of man a thing which men call Genius 'tis a thing as indescribable as Heaven.[58]

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[54] Ibid., I, 66. Letter to William Emerson. July 20, 1818.

[55] Journals and Miscellaneous Notebooks, I, p. 165.

[56] Ibid., 169.

[57] Ibid., 175.

[58] Journals and Miscellaneous Notebooks, II, p. 359.

Emerson's natural affinity for ideas that pertained to the mind and spirit may have strengthened his urge to describe genius, a "thing as indescribable as Heaven." In any event, Emerson's works are a witness to his incessant attempt to define genius.

The bases of the main attributes of "genius" as Emerson conceived them were established in early notebooks, journals, and lectures. A survey of these references reveals the tightly enmeshed relationship of "genius" to God, religion, morality, goodness, virtue, intellect, and knowledge. Possibly each of these terms deserves a category by itself, but almost all are so closely interdependent that a reference to one often implies reference to another.

Late in 1822 Emerson wrote rather wistfully of his nation:

> But is not every effort that her sons make to advance the intellectual interests of the world, & every new thought which is struck out from the mines of religion and morality, a forward step in the path of her greatness?[59]

The maturing of a nation's genius is directly dependent on its citizens, and Emerson believed 'religion and morality' to be key factors in the ripening process.

From the earliest days of history,

> the first efforts which the human genius made to commit its ideas to permanent signs were exercised upon the great topic which stood uppermost in an unperverted mind.[60]

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[59] Journals, I, p. 175.

[60] Journals, I, p. 100.

Genius was rare.

> The past. . . The whole of it amounts to what? . . . the monument of its bad example, its terrific wrongs, and its Gothic ignorance, as the mausoleum by the genius of its redeeming minds. Amid this hideous picture, the eye traces a few golden lines, writ specially by heaven; but the darkness sits grosser around.[61]

Also, the knowledge of religion was for the few; in Egypt and the East the consequences of the religious doctrines

> constrained the youthful genius of those laborious nations; that this learned aristocracy chained the minds of the million in an unworthy & unprofitable experience.[62]

As to Emerson's own era in the world, "Virtue grows cold & solitary while vice solicits with the syren sic voice of taste & literature, of fashion & genius."[63]

The church had felt the chilling effect, for

> Our theological sky blackens a little. . . certain it is, that, with the flood of knowledge & genius poured out upon our pulpits, the light of Christianity seems to be somewhat lost.[64]

In a burst of idealism Emerson exclaimed,

> It is impossible for me to believe that God lighted up the beautiful ray of Genius, to be quenched in a premature and ominous night or to mix its celestial illuminations with the lurid fires of malignant & infernal passions.[65]

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[61] Journals and Miscellaneous Notebooks, II, p. 75.

[62] Ibid., 16.

[63] Ibid., I, 155.

[64] Letters, I, p. 127-28. Letter to John Boynton Hill. Jan.23,1823.

[65] Journals and Miscellaneous Notebooks, II, p. 158.

It was almost repulsive to him to realize that sometimes "men of lofty genius turn with aversion from the idea of GOD."[66]

As early as 1821 he said that "an unnatural union with elegance and corrupt genius has accomplished immense mischief by insinuating what we abhor with what we admire."[67] The young Emerson regarded Byron as a typical example of gross misuse of genius. After the poet's death he wrote that Byron left

> no brighter genius behind him than is gone, and no such blasphemer of heaven or pander to sensuality. . . And now he is dead, and is seeing the secrets his paramount genius dared to brave.[68]

Emerson believed that there was between "virtue & genius a natural, an eternal affinity, & where one is found, the other may be looked for."[69] Like power or every degree of wisdom, genius was "a trust"[70] and it was inexcusable for any

> man who pretends to greatness to confound moral distinctions. True genius, whatever faults of action it may have, never does.[71]

Like Michaelangelo's life, which illustrated the "highest class of genius" and contained in it "no injurious influence,"[72] the life of

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[66] Ibid., 147.

[67] Journals and Miscellaneous Notebooks, I, p. 332.

[68] Journals, II, p. 4-5.

[69] Journals, II, p. 165.

[70] Ibid., 408.

[71] Journals, III, p. 117.

[72] Works, XII, p. 215., "Michael Angelo."

a genius should reflect similar blamelessness. A genius was an "awakened soul"[73] who did not "treat the great spiritual nature and aim which make a man a man with silence"[74] but made himself "obedient to the Spirit"[75] that was in him so that he had access to

> the storehouses of Genius and Goodness from which each child of the Universe may pluck out his share.[76]

In such obedience and performance the genius became

> the wider channels thro which the streams of his goodness flow. It was a noble saying of a Stoic that wise men are the perpetual priests of the gods.[77]

Emerson's conviction was, "I cannot believe Atheism and genius to consist."[78]

> As religion is to be regarded as the healthy state of the faculties it will follow that a religious man will have more genius at the end of ten years than the same man would have. . . had he been irreligious.[79]

The creativity of a religious man was beneficial to his fellowmen as was the creativity of Milton, who

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[73] Journals, III, p. 263.

[74] Early Lectures, I, p. 231-32.

[75] Ibid., 231-32.

[76] Journals and Miscellaneous Notebooks, II, p. 101.

[77] Ibid., 402.

[78] Journals, II, p. 225.

[79] Journals and Miscellaneous Notebooks, III, p. 165.

> was just and devout. He is rightly dear to mankind, because in him. . . humanity rights itself; the old eternal goodness finds a home in his breast, & for once shows itself beautiful.[80]

Michaelangelo was described similarly:

> Beauty in the largest sense, beauty inward & outward, comprehending grandeur as a part, & reaching to goodness as its soul, . . . this to receive and this to impart, was his genius.[81]

As much as Emerson admired the genius of Lord Bacon, he pointed out that

> We are made sensible, in his example, of the impossibility of welding together vice and genius.[82]

In addition to all qualities relative to religion and morality, "genius" possessed the power of intellect. In all fairness, however, Emerson realized early that chance and circumstances could blight or strengthen the potentialities of genius:

> Greatness never comes upon a man by surprise, and without his exertion or consent; No; it is another sort of Genii who traverse your path suddenly; it is Poverty who travels like an armed man; it is Contempt which meets you in the corners and highways with a hiss, and Anger which treads you down as with the lightning. . . And this is certain that every man may be higher and better than he is.[83]

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[80] Early Lectures, I, p. 154.

[81] Works, XII, p. 216. "Michael Angelo."

[82] Early Lectures, I, p. 336.

[83] Journals and Miscellaneous Notebooks, I, p. 101.

> A man of transcendent genius is sometimes profligate, because his ill habits got a rooted and incurable encouragement in an ill-starred infancy before his intellectual powers were developed, to discriminate & reject the wrong; . . . he walked downward so far that the light which broke in, served only to shew the inextricable labyrinth in whose maze he was lost.[84]

Knowledge was necessary in order that genius could function and create. At twenty Emerson said that

> Profound knowledge is good but profound genius is better. . . in the end when both have arrived at the same amount of knowledge the latter is much the richest.[85]

In 1835 he admitted that "Genius can never supply the want of knowledge, though even its errors can be valuable."[86] However, the spirit or genius of the environment can stifle the development of brilliant minds:

> If the genius of a country is wholly averse to learning, & so warlike, or commercial or dissolute, that they cannot hear the voice of their wise men I have no hope that any expedients will cure their deafness.[87]

A genius is not only a man of knowledge; he is a man of thought who can

> borrow his culture from all objects and events & under the spell of a good cause is equal to the greatest favourites of fortune.[88]

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[84] Ibid., II, 157-58.

[85] Journals and Miscellaneous Notebooks, II, p. 202.

[86] Journals, III, p. 553.

[87] Early Lectures, I, p. 210.

[88] Ibid., 261.

The ability just described was possessed richly by Chaucer, who had

> the faculty of seizing & turning to account everything that strikes us, of coordinating & breathing life into all the materials that present themselves; of taking here marble, there brass, & building a durable monument with them.[89]

No genius, said Emerson, would "be worth much if he pretends to draw exclusively from his own resources,"[90] and "one of the good effects of hearing the man of genius is that he shows the world of thought to be infinite again, which you had supposed exhausted."[91]

Moreover, the man of genius possessed a clear perception,

> Genius seems to consist merely in trueness of sight, in using such words as show that the man was an eye-witness, & not a repeater of what he was told.[92]

Along with the trueness of sight is parallel ability to receive:

> All Wisdom, all genius is reception. The more perfect the character & the more rich the gifts. . . the more unmixed would the truth he possessed appear. He would exist merely to impart & to hang on the first cause--a Socrates, a Jesus. The moment you describe Milton's verse you use words implying not creation but increased perception, second sight knowledge of what is beyong the ken of others.[93]

> It is all reception. More genius does not increase the individuality but the community of each mind. . . we have surprise at recognizing our own truth in that wild & unacquainted field.[94]

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[89] Ibid., 285.

[90] Early Lectures, I, p. 285.

[91] Journals, III, p. 502.

[92] Ibid., 474.

[93] Journals and Miscellaneous Notebooks, III, p. 241.

[94] Ibid., 240.

In this way "genius" is a channel for ideas from the "crystal fountains"[95] or the divine source:

> . . . each fine genius that appears is already predicted in our constitution, inasmuch as he makes apparent shades of thought in us of which we hitherto knew not.[96]

The genius is able to translate and dispense truth to other men through the medium of the printed word:

> . . . all genius has owed its development to literary establishments.[97]

> The manufacture of books is the art of arts that has impelled thought and information like a torrent over the globe. . . Tis the device by which the subtile creations of the intellectual power which come & go in the vision of genius but leave no trace when the soul that entertained them is extinct are invested with the permanent attributes of matter & made to speak to all countries & times. [sic][98]

By 1835 Emerson obviously had established firmly the foundations of his personal concepts of genius. The foregoing survey shows those concepts concentrated in two categories:

First and larger -- Genius as an extraordinary mental and creative power

Second -- Genius as a tutelary spirit or the voice of God

The first group can be further classified into four general groups:

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[95] Ibid., I, 36.

[96] Journals, III, p. 384.

[97] Journals and Miscellaneous Notebooks, II, p. 231.

[98] Journals and Miscellaneous Notebooks, II, p. 297-98.

1. Simply naming a person as a possessor of genius or as a genius with little or no further comment.
2. Naming a person as a possessor of genius, or as a genius, with qualifying remarks as to the definition of or specific attributes of such genius.
3. Simply defining the term "genius."
4. Simply discussing attributes of the term "genius."

The three types named last make the attempt to analyze Emerson's use of the word genius reasonably complicated. By 1835 it was already apparent that to Emerson "genius" was not one quality. "Genius" was a blending and interweaving of many similar attributes fitted together into a kind of mosaic whole.

CHAPTER III

TALENT AND GENIUS

More often than in any other sense Emerson used the word "genius" to refer to extraordinary mental and creative ability or to a person who possessed such ability. Throughout his works he was most specific about the differences between genius and talent. By examining the passages in which Emerson compares and defines "talent" and "genius" we can discover some fundamental attributes of each quality.[99]

One of the earliest of these references is in "Modern Aspects of Letters," wherein Emerson refers to the "distinction . . . between Genius and Talent" or the "thinker and the doer" as "that of the man of talents and of genius."[100]

Emerson seemed to believe that the possibilities for genius or talent exist side by side, although the first quality is the rarer one. He said his friends Margaret Fuller and Frederic Hedge needed "talent in their associates. And so they find that they forgive many defects."[101] As for himself,

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[99]Passages referred to in this chapter are those in which Emerson simultaneously discussed both "genius" and "talent." Although these passages are similar, I believe they are significant enough in context to be worthy of inclusion in a separate chapter.

[100]Early Lectures, p. 378.

[101]Journals, V, p. 248.

> I require genius and, if I find that, I do not need talent: and talent without genius gives me no pleasure.[102]

Emerson reflected that "Genius is sacrificed to talent every day"[103] and spoke of his personal conflict in this regard:

> Yet am I continually tempted to sacrifice genius to talent, the hope and promise of insight (through the sole door of better being) to the lust of a freer play and demonstration of those gifts I have.[104]

Concerning his efforts to promote the cultural atmosphere in Concord he said:

> Talent makes comfort. I propose to set an Athenaeum on foot in this village, but to what end? We know very well what is its utmost, to make, namely, such agreeable and adorned men as we ourselves, but not to open doors into Heaven, as genius does in every deed of genius.[105]

The advantage of talent is its ready conversion into worldly success:

> We are continually tempted to sacrifice genius to talent. . . We like faculty that can rapidly be coined into money, and society seems to be in conspiracy to utilize every gift prematurely, and pull down genius to lucrative talent.[106]

He expresses himself much more vehemently in the essay "Worship":

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[102] Ibid., 248.

[103] Journals, VI, p. 121.

[104] Journals, V, p. 554.

[105] Journals, VI, p. 210.

[106] Works, XII, p. 56-57, "Powers and Laws of Thought".

> What is vulgar, and the essence of all vulgarity, but the avarice of reward? 'T is the difference of artisan and artist, of talent and genius, of sinner and saint. The man whose eyes are nailed, not on the Nature of his act but on the wages, whether it be money, or office, or fame, is almost equally low.[107]

Certainly it is no wonder that "politics and commerce will absorb from the educated class men of talents without genius, precisely because such have no resistance."[108]

Deep-seated scorn for men of mere talent persisted in Emerson's thinking throughout his life. In one of his last lectures he berated the shortcomings of men of talent, which was often developed at the expense of character:

> Men of talent fill the eye with their pretension. They go out into some camp of their own, and noisily persuade society that this thing which they do is the needful cause of all men.[109]

On the other hand,

> Genius has no taste for weaving sand, or for any trifling, but flings itself on real elemental things. . . Genius has truth and clings to it. . . . Genius delights only in statements which are themselves true.[110]

Adherence to truth shapes the genius. To Emerson, what was truth? He said:

> Truth, or the connexion of cause and effect, alone interests us. Talent makes counterfeit ties. Genius finds the real ones.[111]

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[107] Works, VI, p. 231, "Worship."

[108] Works, V, p. 239-240, "Literature."

[109] Works, X, p. 285, "The Scholar."

[110] Ibid., 285.

[111] Works, IV, p. 170, "Montaigne"; also Journals, VII, p. 58-59.

However, the counterfeit was often mistaken for the real:

> . . . each talent links itself so fast with self-love and with petty advantage that it loses sight of its obedience, which is beautiful, and sets up for itself, and makes confusion. Falsehood begins as soon as it disobeys, it works for show, [illegible] for the shop, and the greater it grows, [illegible]e more is the mischief and misleading, so that presently all is wrong, talent is mistaken for genius, dogma or system for truth.[112]

The preceding passage coincides with Coleridge's view, about which Emerson wrote in 1830:

> 'T is a good definition Coleridge gives in the 'Friend,' of Talent, that it pursues by original & peculiar means vulgar conventional ends. 'T is dexterity intellectual applied to the purpose of getting power & wealth. Genius on the contrary finds its end in the means. It concerns our peace to learn this distinction as quick as we can.[113]

Apparently ability capable of becoming genius can deteriorate into mere talent by losing "sight of its obedience, which is beautiful."[114] This "obedience" seems to be the quality Emerson referred to when he said:

> Worship is the height of rectitude. . . Worship, because that is the difference between genius and talent; between poetry and prose; between Imagination and Fancy.[115]

Genius, already defined as "the hope and promise of insight"[116] with the capability of opening "doors into Heaven"[117] exists if there is

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[112] Works, XII, p. 123, "Celebration of Intellect."

[113] Journals and Miscellaneous Notebooks, III, p. 211.

[114] Works, XII, p. 123, "Celebration of Intellect."

[115] Journals, VII, p. 68-69,

[116] Journals, V, p. 554.

[117] Journals, VI, p. 210.

a certain attitude of mind or receptivity to truth.

This attitude of mind is not easily achieved, for

> There is a conflict between a man's private dexterity or talent, and his access to the free air and light which wisdom is; between wisdom and the habit and necessity of repeating itself which belongs to every mind.[118]

To resolve this conflict, Emerson advised:

> Will you let me say to you what I think is the organic law of learning? It is to observe the order, to keep down the talent, to enthrone the Instinct.[119]

In this regard there are two classes of men:

> Each man is born with a predisposition to one or the other of these sides of nature; and it will easily happen that men will be found devoted to one or the other. One class has the perception of difference, and is conversant with facts and surfaces, cities and persons, and the bringing certain things to pass;--the men of talent and action. Another class have the perception of identity, and are men of faith and philosophy, men of genius.[120]

Elsewhere Emerson expresses the foregoing antithesis in a slightly different way: "There are two theories of life; one for the demonstration of our talent, the other for the education of the man."[121] The first theory applies to the development of "practical talent which we have . . . in this direction lie usefulness, comfort, society, low power of all sorts."[122] Contrarily, genius is

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[118] Works, XII, p. 57, "Powers and Laws of Thought".

[119] Ibid, 123, "Celebration of Intellect."

[120] Works, IV, p. 150, "Montaigne."

[121] Works, XII, p. 56, "Powers and Laws of Thought."

[122] Ibid.

> . . . that power which is underneath and greater than all talent, and which proceeds out of the constitution of every man: to Genius, which is an emanation of that it tells of; whose private counsels are not tinged with selfishness, but are laws.[123]

This "emanation" seems to be a reference to the creative intelligence that is the source of all life. The two theories are amplified further in the essay "Plato":

> If speculation tends thus to a terrific unity, in which all things are absorbed, action tends directly backwards to diversity. The first is the course or gravitation of mind; the second is the power of nature. Nature is the manifold. The unity absorbs, and melts or reduces. Nature opens and creates. These two principles reappear and interpenetrate all things, all thought; the one, the many. One is being; the other, intellect: one is necessity; the other, freedom: one, rest; the other, motion: one, power; the other, distribution: one, strength; the other, pleasure: one, consciousness; the other, definition: one, genius, the other, talent: . . . the end of the one is to escape from organization,--pure science; and the end of the other is the highest instrumentality, or use of means, or executive deity.
>
> Each student adheres, by temperament and by habit, to the first or to the second of these gods of the mind. By religion, he tends to unity; by intellect, or by the senses, to the many.[124]

This chapter has been limited to an examination of a group of instances in which Emerson related the differences between genius

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[123] Works, X, p. 284-85, "The Scholar."

[124] Works, IV, p. 51-52, "Plate."

and talent. From these samples, certain deductions seem reasonable.

First, to Emerson "genius," as applied to great mental and creative capacity, is the intellectual power subject to spiritual laws. Thereby the productions of genius reflect the presence of God in man. This was still his conviction late in life:

> There is no power in the mind but in turn becomes an instrument. The descent of genius into talents is part of the natural order and history of the world.[125]

> I own I love talents and accomplishments; the feet and hands of genius. . . So I delight to see the Godhead in distribution; to see men that can come at their ends.[126]

Second, the comparison of talent and genius reveals a definite reference to the original concept of genius, that of a tutelary, guiding spirit or voice of the "Godhead." Only as man heeds this still, small voice within himself can his creations express the highest powers of genius.

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[125] Works, X, p. 275, "The Scholar."

[126] Ibid. 276-77.

CHAPTER IV

DEVELOPMENT OF GENIUS

Emerson's prodigious reading as well as his education, choice of profession, associates and whole way of life may have encouraged his constant concern with the artistic and intellectual creations of others. Perhaps his interest was further animated by his self-confessed predisposition to favor quiet, contemplative habits rather than those of busy social intercourse. In any event, "genius" in other men remained a subject of fascination to him.

Not only did Emerson define "genius" repeatedly. He meditated upon the many facets of its nature and never ceased in his attempt to define its anatomy. At eighteen he admitted the impossibility of definition when he said that genius was a "thing as indescribable as heaven."[127] Twenty years later, after numerous endeavors toward elucidation of the same quality he said that

> A man of genius or a work of love or beauty cannot be compounded like a loaf of bread by the best rules, but it always a new and incalculable result like health.[128]

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[127] Journals and Miscellaneous Notebooks, II, p. 359.

[128] Journals, V, p. 449.

In "Art and Criticism" he remarked:

> Do not rattle your rules in our ears;
> . . . we must behave as we can.[129]

In other words,

> Each man has his own vocation. The talent is the call. There is one direction in which all space is open to him. He has faculties silently inviting him thither to endless exertion.[130]

Genius defies description, for

> the reason why this or that man is fortunate is not to be told. It lies in the man; that is all anybody can tell you about it.[131]

Even if a man follows his "call," communication remains difficult:

> Could ever a man of prodigious mathematical genius convey to others any insight into his methods? If he could communicate that secret it would instantly lose its exaggerated value, blending with the daylight and the vital energy the power to stand and to go.[132]

Emerson tried assiduously to enclose within the fence of words the definitions of "genius." His attempts at clarifications are so multitudinous and often repetitive that it is hard to establish a focal point. However, if we start with the assumption that genius lies "in the man,"[133] we may begin with a definition Emerson recorded in late maturity:

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[129] Works, XII, p. 305, "Art and Criticism."

[130] Works, II, p. 140, "Spiritual Laws."

[131] Works, III, p. 92, "Character."

[132] Works, II, p. 134-35, "Spiritual Laws."

[133] Works, III, p. 92, "Character."

> And, finally, my definition is,
> Genius is a sensibility to the laws
> of the world.[134]

This "sensibility" has a close relationship to genius as an "inclination or turn of mind." In 1834 Emerson said:

> There is in every man a determination
> of character to a peculiar end. . .
> This is called his genius, or his nature,
> or his turn of mind.[135]

This potentiality for growth exists in every man, although it is greater in some men. The young Emerson doubted that all potentialities materialize, because

> every man's character depends on great
> part upon the scope and occasions that
> have been afforded him for its
> development.[136]

The direction of the development of "genius" or power of intellectual creativity apparently is established by a man's "nature" or "genius" as a turn of mind. Whatever the turn of mind is, no development occurs without the indefinable something "in the man,"[137] This last element is a third concept of "genius," that of a personal tutelary deity. Fulfillment of potential in any man

> must come in connection with a true
> acceptance by each man of his vocation,
> --not chosen by his parents or friends,
> but by his genius, with earnestness
> and love.[138]

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[134] Journals, IX, p. 313.

[135] Journals, III, p. 416.

[136] Letters, I, p. 220. November, 1827.

[137] Works, III, p. 92, "Character."

[138] Works, VII, p. 117, "Domestic Life."

It is evident that in defining "genius" as a great intellectual and creative power Emerson employed two other concepts, those referring to a natural inclination or turn of mind and to a tutelary spirit within man.

First, every child is born with a 'natural inclination or turn of mind' toward intellectual attainment. This inclination is certainly superior to and supersedes a genius or 'turn of mind' for such activities as "hunting,"[139] "swearing,"[140] or "reading and gardening."[141]

Second, in order that the 'natural inclination' may develop fully, obedience to one's genius or tutelary spirit within is necessary.

Third, if the 'natural inclination' is of sufficient potential and growth is well-favored, the creativity that results is indicative of "genius," the remarkable intellectual and creative ability that interested Emerson so much.

Genius as a certain predisposition inherent within every man must be cultivated and nurtured, or its promise may be nullified:

> There is in every man a determination of character to a peculiar end, counteracted often by unfavorable fortune, but more apparent, the more he is left at liberty. This is called his genius, or his nature, or his turn of mind.[142]

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[139] Works, XII, p. 22, "Powers and Laws of Thought."

[140] Ibid., 288, "Art and Criticism."

[141] Works, VI, p. 116, "Wealth."

[142] Journals, III, p. 416.

A man should submit to his natural inclination. If he is a "mechanical genius, an inventor of looms," he can "achieve nothing if he should dissipate himself on books or horses."[143] If he has "a genius for painting, poetry, music," he "should not fetter himself with duties which will embitter his days and spoil him for his proper work."[144]

A man's education helps him to lay the foundation for the flowering of his genius. At the age of twenty Emerson expressed the necessity for study and self-discipline:

> Habits of labour are paths to heaven . . . mortify the mind. . . The soul is a fertile soil, which will grow rank and to waste, if left to itself. If you wish, therefore, to see it bud out abundantly and bring an harvest richer . . . bind it, bind it with the restraint of cultivation.[145]

Forty years later he said that "nothing can be so important as the severity of training."[146] However, the colleges whose function it was to train minds exhibited certain weaknesses:

> . . . genius, if it is rare in students, is rare in the chairs.[147]

> The college was to be the nurse of human genius, but, although every young man is born with some determination in his

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[143] Works, VII, p. 110, "Domestic Life."

[144] Works, VI, p. 114, "Wealth."

[145] Journals, I, p. 243-44.

[146] Uncollected Lectures, ed. Clarence Gohdes (New York: William Edward Rudge, 1932), p. 10, "Public and Private Education."

[147] Ibid., 9.

> nature as a potential genius, and is at last to be one, it is in most obstructed and delayed, and whatever they may hereafter become, their senses are now opened in advance of their minds.[148]

He admits that some shortcomings of college are unavoidable:

> Young men must be classed and employed, not according to the secret needs of each mind but by some available plan that will give weekly and annual results; and a little violence must be done to private genius to accomplish this.[149]

If a man of potential genius survives the hazards of education, there may be other impediments to his development. The wrong companions can immobilize him, for "in unfit company the finest powers are paralyzed."[150] Under such circumstances,

> Genius is mute, is dull; there is no genius. Ask of your flowers to open when you have let in on them a freezing wind.[151]

Poverty, too, is a potent weapon against genius:

> And who has not seen the tragedy of imprudent genius struggling for years with paltry pecuniary difficulties, at last sinking, chilled, exhausted, and fruitless, like a giant slaughtered by pins?[152]

Perhaps most tragic of all, the promise of genius can be crushed while the man is yet a child.

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[148] Ibid., 9.

[149] Works, XII, p. 124-25, "Celebration of Intellect."

[150] Ibid., 26, "Power and Laws of Thought."

[151] Ibid., 26.

[152] Works, II, p. 233, "Prudence."

> A man of transcendant genius is sometimes profligate, because his ill habits got a rooted & incurable encouragement in an ill-starred infancy before his intellectual powers were developed, to discriminate & reject the wrong. Active imitation, in a forward child, led him in the way of wrong example, & he walked downward so far that the light which broke in, served only to shew the inextricable labyrinth in whose maze he was lost.[153]

Emerson suggests that one of the possible purposes of civilization is to avert such tragedy, when he says:

> What are governments but awkward scaffoldings by which the noble temples of individual genius is reared?[154]

Ideally, if perfect nurture of every man's potential were possible and every man responded in obedience, the world would become a kind of utopia. In that event, true education, or the "drawing out of the soul,"[155] would cause each man to "do somewhat admirable to all men,"[156] and there would be heaven on earth!

> Whilst he serves his genius, he works when he stands, when he sits, when he eats & when he sleeps. . . that every man shall do that which of all things he prefers. . . is the real law of the world; and all good labor, by which society is really served, will be found to be of that kind.[157]

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[153] Journals and Miscellaneous Notebooks, II, p. 157-58.

[154] Journals, VII, p. 324.

[155] Journals, II, p. 412.

[156] Works, XII, p. 82-83, "Instinct and Inspiration."

[157] Ibid., p. 82-83.

> Poverty shall be abolished; deformity, stupidity & crime shall be no more. Genius, grace, art shall abound, and it is not to be doubted but that in the reign of "Attractive Industry" all men will speak in blank verse.[158]

However, in the world as it is, Emerson noted the extreme rarity of genius as well as the very human shortcomings of men of genius. His appreciation of and close personal kinship with their achievements is well expressed in "Powers and Laws of Thought:"

> I must think this keen sympathy, this thrill of awe with which we watch the performance of genius, a sign of our own readiness to exert the like power. I must think we are entitled to powers far transcending any that we possess; that we have in the race the sketch of a man which no individual comes up to.[159]

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[158] Works, X, p. 351, "Life and Letters in New England."

[159] Works, XII, p. 53, "Powers and Laws of Thought."

CHAPTER V

GENIUS AS THE MIND AND THE SOUL

The "sensibility"[160] which was genius constituted a special quality of insight which Emerson explained in several ways. A man of genius is a "deep observer,"[161] who will

> bring the insight, and he will find as many beauties and heroes and astounding strokes of genius close by him as Shakespeare or Aeschylus or Dante beheld.[162]

In another instance Emerson calls the sensibility of a genius "the quality that differences him from every other, the susceptibility to one class of influences."[163] If a scholar possesses this "delicate sensibility to the laws of the world, and the power to express them again in some new form, he is made to find his own way."[164] In other words, "The genius is a genius by the first look he casts on any object,"[165] for

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[160] Journals, IX, p. 313.

[161] Works, XII, p. 129, "Celebration of Intellect."

[162] Ibid.; see also Works, X, p. 233-34, "The Preacher."

[163] Works, II, p. 143, "Spiritual Laws."

[164] Works, XII, p. 128, "Celebration of Intellect."

[165] Works, IV, p. 150, "Montaigne."

> Genius seems to consist merely in trueness of sight, in using such words as show that the man was an eye-witness, and not a repeater of what was told.[166]

This power of perception certainly establishes a fertile field for the entrance of thought and power of expression:

> We define Genius to be a sensibility to all the impressions of the outer world, a sensibility so equal that it receives equally all impressions, and can truly report them, without excess or loss, as it is received. It must not only receive all, but it must render all. And the health of man is an equality of inlet and outlet, gathering and giving.[167]

The sensibility or "intellect receptive"[168] coexists with a facility of the mind that is able to "render all."[169] This facility is known as the "intellect constructive,"[170] and in this latter power

> . . . which we popularly designate by the word Genius, we observe the same balance of two elements as in intellect receptive.[171]

A reiteration of the above statement occurs in "Quotation and Originality:"

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[166] Journals, III, p. 474.

[167] Works, X, p. 76, "Perpetual Forces."

[168] Works, II, p. 334, "Intellect."

[169] Works, X, p. 76, "Perpetual Forces."

[170] Works, II, p. 334, "Intellect."

[171] Ibid.

> Genius is in the first instance, sensibility, the capacity of receiving just impressions from the external world, and the power of coordinating them after the laws of thought.[172]

Intellect

> lies behind genius, which is intellect constructive. Intellect is the simple power anterior to all action or construction.[173]

It seems that every man can possess the special perception, for "if the constructive powers are rare and it is given to few men to be poets, yet every man is a receiver of this descending holy ghost, and may well study the laws of its influx."[174] Most men may lack the second ingredient or "intellect constructive."

About such men Emerson said:

> I never hear a good speech at caucus or at cattle-show but it helps me . . . The commonest remark, if the man could only extend it a little, would make him a genius, but the thought is prematurely checked, and grows no more. All great masters are chiefly distinguished by adding a second, a third, and perhaps a fourth step in a continuous line. Many a man has taken the first step.[175]

It is possible that some minds are unable to progress beyond that "first step" because

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[172] Works, VIII, p. 201, "Quotation and Originality."

[173] Works, II, p. 325, "Intellect."

[174] Works, II, p. 341, "Intellect."

[175] Works, XII, p. 25, "Powers and Laws of Thought."

> our thoughts have a life of their own, independent of our will. We call genius, in all our popular and proverbial language, divine; to signify its independence of our will, Intellect is universal not individual.[176]

However, the will controls the creativity. The "thought of genius is spontaneous,"[177] but it "implies a mixture of will, a certain control over the spontaneous states, without which no production is possible."[178] Moreover,

> to a great genius there must be a great will. If the thought is not a lamp to the will, does not proceed to an act, the wise are imbecile. He alone is strong and happy who has a will. The rest are herds. He uses; they are used.[179]

Further,

> A master can formulate his thought. Our thoughts at first possess us. Later, if we have good heads, we come to possess them. We believe that certain persons add to the common vision a certain degree of control over these states of mind; that the true scholar is one who has the power to stand beside his thought or to hold off his thoughts at arm's length and give them perspective.[180]

Thought must be transformed into action or a form that communicates with other men. Genius or the

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[176] Ibid., 77.

[177] Works, II, p. 336, "Intellect."

[178] Ibid.

[179] Works, XII, p.46, "Powers and Laws of Thought."

[180] Ibid., 43-44.

> constructive intellect produces thoughts, sentences, poems, plans, designs, systems. It is the generation of the mind, the marriage of thought with nature. To genius must always go two gifts, the thought and the publication. . . But to make it available it needs a vehicle or art by which it is conveyed to men. To be communicable it must become picture or sensible object. We must learn the language of facts. The most wonderful inspirations die with their subject if he has no hand to paint them to the senses. The ray of light passes invisible through space and only when it falls on an object is it seen. When the spiritual energy is directed on something outward, then it is a thought.[181]

A fact born of "trueness of sight" should offer other men a clearer insight even though the genius

> adds nothing; he only detaches from the mass of life a particle not before detached, so that I see it separated.[182]

In this way, Emerson believed, genius was able to acquaint him "with the spacious circuits of the common nature,"[183] for in "every work of genius we recognize our own rejected thoughts; they come back to us with a certain alienated majesty."[184]

> . . . rather is it true that in their grandest strokes we feel most at home.[185]

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[181] Works, II, p. 334-35, "Intellect."

[182] Journals, VI, p. 225.

[183] Uncollected Writings, Ralph Waldo Emerson, (New York: Lamb Publishing Company, 1912), p. 56, "The Senses and the Soul."

[184] Works, II, p. 45-46, "Self-Reliance."

[185] Ibid., 6, "History."

Amazingly, all men seem to share in this potential:

> I propose this law with confidence, because I believe every substantial man has somewhat to contribute.[186]

The production of a genius "appraises us not so much of his wealth as of the common wealth,"[187] and thus "each admirable genius is but a successful diver in that sea whose floor of pearls is all your own."[188]

Genius may surprise us

> with every word. It does not surprise itself. It is moving by the self-same law as you obey in your daily cogitation, and one day you will tread without under the same steps.[189]

When Emerson said that "intellect is universal," what did he mean? His own statement is the answer:

> There is one mind. . . The greater genius, the more like all other men . . . God is the Universal Mind.[190]

Therefore;

> the man of genius should occupy the whole space between God or pure mind and the multitude of uneducated men.[191]

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[186] Journals, VII, p. 322.

[187] Journals, IV, p. 131.

[188] Works, I, p. 162, "Literary Ethics."

[189] Journals, IV, p. 284.

[190] Journals, IV, p. 60-61.

[191] Works, I, p. 182, "Literary Ethics."

If this is true, it is reasonable to believe that "the intellectual power is not the gift, but the presence of God.[192] This "presence of God" is the "same Omniscience" which "flows into the intellect and makes what we call genius.[193] In other words, a genius is a man whose mind is centered in God. However, description falters at this point, because deity is spiritual and therefore relatively indescribable in terms of finite symbols comprehensible to man. Only one word encompasses the spiritual existence of a man; that word is "soul." The part of every man that comprehends God is his soul:

> Light shines through us upon things and makes us aware that we are nothing, but the light is all. A man is the facade of a temple wherein all wisdom and all good abide. . . the soul, whose organ he is, would he let it appear through his action, would make our knees bend. When it breathes through his intellect, it is genius; when it breathes through his will, it is virtue; when it flows through his affection, it is love, and the blindness of the intellect begins when it would be something of itself.[194]

The "intellect constructive" as the

> soul active sees absolute truth and utters truth or creates. In this action it is genius; not the privilege of here and there a favorite, but the sound estate of every man.[195]

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[192]Journals, X, p. 187; also Journals, IX, p. 14.

[193]Works, II, p. 288, "The Over-Soul."

[194]Works, II, p. 270-71, "The Over-Soul."

[195]Works, I, p. 90, "The American Scholar."

When the individual mind creates, it needs a natural fact or symbol to illustrate truth, for

> all genius is reception. The more perfect the character & the more rich the gifts, the more would the individual seem sunk, & the more unmixed would the truth he possessed appear. He would exist merely to impart & to hang on the first cause--a Socrates, a Jesus.[196]

The more perfect the reception, the more religious will be the symbols. Emerson's own statement of faith explains why, for him, this must be so:

> I am of the oldest religion. . . I believe the mind is the creator of the world, and is ever creating;--that at last Matter is dead Mind; that mind makes the senses it sees with; that the genius of man is a continuation of the power that made him and that has not done making him.[197]

Since the genius of man is "the continuation of the power that made him," we can see readily why the productions of genius are

> universally intelligible; that they restore to us the simplest state of mind, and are religious. Since what skill is therein shown is the reappearance of the original soul, a jet of pure light, it should produce a similar impression to that made by natural objects.[198]

Because genius is religious, "it is a larger imbibing of the common heart. It is not anomalous, but more like and not less

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[196] Journals and Miscellaneous Notebooks, III, p. 241.

[197] Works, XII, p. 16-17, "Powers and Laws of Thought."

[198] Works, II, p. 358, "Art."

like other men."[199] To the man of genius the "universe becomes transparent, and the light of higher laws than its own shines through it."[200]

Actually, the man of genius seems to serve as an interpreter to draw men closer to God through his symbols of communication. This is the genius' highest calling, for

> . . . common sense of man requires that, at last, nature be referred to the Deity, be viewed in God. This. . . is the highest flight of genius, the last conclusion of philosophy, the inspiration of all grand character.[201]

It is logical, then, that the man of genius has "two faces, one towards the Infinite God, one towards men,"[202] and that he is able to

> turn to us the axis of his mind, then shall he be transparent, retaining, however, always the prerogative of an original mind, that is, the love of truth in God, & not the love of truth for the market.[203]

The whole history of mankind has been the attempt of great men to explain the power that made them. Thus the emanations of the "original mind" or the "first cause" have directed the inception of symbols by which man is ever trying

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[199] Ibid., 288, "The Over-Soul."

[200] Works, I, p. 34, "Nature."

[201] Journals, IV, p. 36.

[202] Ibid., 114.

[203] Journals, IV, p. 132.

to bridge the gap between the finite and the mystery of the infinite:

> Fortune, Minerva, Muse, Holy Ghost,
> --these are quaint names, too narrow
> to cover this unbounded substance.
> The baffled intellect must still
> kneel before this cause, which refuses
> to be named,--ineffable cause, which
> every fine genius has essayed to represent
> by some emphatic symbol, as, Thales by
> water, Anaximenes by air, Anaxagoras by
> thought, Zoroaster by fire, Jesus and
> the modern by love; & the metaphor has
> become a national religion.[204]

When we read that the man of genius occupies the "whole space between God or pure mind and the multitude of uneducated men,"[205] we are reminded that the intellectual power in every person is the only instrument by which God can speak to man. Genius, in its most exalted concept, seems to be the Universal Mind or Over-Soul, which expresses itself through the creations of all individuals who have "trueness of sight"[206] or "intellect receptive"[207] and "intellect constructive."[208] A man of genius, as the obedient "organ"[209] of the soul, necessarily reflects "the original mind, that is, the love of truth in God."[210]

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[204] Works, III, p. 72-73, "Experience."

[205] Works, I, p. 182, "Literary Ethics."

[206] Journals, III, p. 474.

[207] Works, II, p. 334, "Intellect."

[208] Ibid.

[209] Works, II, p. 271, "The Over-Soul."

[210] Journals, IV, p. 132.

The man of genius is the One; the Universal Mind is All. As every natural fact is a symbol of a spiritual fact, so the creations of a genius are symbols or reflections of the Genius, the Universal Mind, or the Over-Soul.

CHAPTER VI

GENIUS AND LITERARY CREATIVITY

Long before literature existed, man's mind discovered the technique of using words as symbols. This invention made communication possible and resulted in written records that revealed past events. There is no doubt that the use of language is one of man's highest accomplishments:

> Words therefore seem wiser than any man, and to be tools provided by the Genius of Humanity.[211]

The first inventor of a word was someone who glimpsed the divine mind, for

> each word was at first a stroke of genius, and obtained currency because for the moment it symbolized the world to the first speaker and to the hearer.[212]

Language provided a foundation for the expression of ideas and a medium for communicating such ideas to other men. Words strove to explain the mystery of man's existence, and fables and myths were born. When he was nineteen, Emerson wrote:

> We have said that the first nations were remembered by their religion; and in tracing down their history a little

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[211] Journals, VIII, p. 17.

[212] Works, III, p. 21-22, "The Poet."

> farther until the time of written languages, we find that the first efforts which the human genius made to commit its ideas to permanent signs were exercised upon the great topic which stood uppermost in an unperverted mind.[213]

Many years later he referred to the "black daughters of Cadmus"[214] which became the "materials of that complex structure, so vast, so ancient, so energetic, which we call literature."[215] Without such a basis

> not only the power of genius to perpetuate itself is gone, but the bonds that hold a nation together, the laws and traditions that make unity and permanency, are a rope of sand; memory is lost, and instead of a spiritual nation, you have a tribe of dirty savages, extemporizing life from hand to mouth.[216]

Only by means of words can the present generation best examine the past. In "Poetry and Imagination" Emerson says that "the beginning of literature is the prayers of a people,"[217] and probably religious myths and fables are the brightest survivors of ancient eras. As a young student Emerson became most familiar with such accounts, and their significance retained their charm for him throughout his life. In 1832 he commented:

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[213] Journals and Miscellaneous Notebooks, I, p. 7; also Journals, I, p. 100.

[214] Uncollected Lectures, p. 7-8.

[215] Ibid.

[216] Ibid.

[217] Works, VIII, p. 53, "Poetry and Imagination."

> Do we not feel in reading these elemental theories that these. . . primeval allegories are globes and diagrams on which the laws of living nature are explained? Do we not seem nearer to divine truth in these fictions than in less pretending prose?[218]

To Emerson the ability to use words powerfully is a token of a strong intellect:

> The manner of using language is surely the most decisive test of intellectual power, and he who has intellectual force of any kind will be sure to show it there. For that is the first and simplest vehicle of mind, is of all things next to the mind.[219]

In his famous essay "Nature" he clarified his theory of language:

> 1. Words are signs of natural facts.
> 2. Particular natural facts are symbols of particular spiritual facts.
> 3. Nature is the symbol of spirit.[220]

"Spirit" as used in the preceding quotation refers to the "universal soul" known as Reason:

> That which intellectually considered we call Reason, considered in relation to nature, we call Spirit. Spirit is the Creator. Spirit hath life in itself. And man in all ages and countries embodies it in his language as the FATHER.[221]

Emerson said that Nature is the "projection of God,. . . the expositor of the Divine Mind."[222] He believed Nature is the

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[218] Journals and Miscellaneous Notebooks, IV, p. 12.

[219] Journals, II, p. 449.

[220] Works, I, p. 25, "Nature."

[221] Ibid., 27.

[222] Journals, IV, p. 76.

"representative of the universal mind,"[223] and therefore every manifestation of nature or "every cockle. . . is the material symbol of some cast of thought."[224]

Thought originates in the "Divine Mind" as "the child of the intellect"[225] and as such is the "seed of action"[226] toward a communicable symbol. Genius "avails always itself of a fact as language for its abstractions."[227] Choosing precisely the right fact is genius' prerogative because the deep insight of genius makes any other choice impossible. This is why the works of Plato, Homer, Chaucer, Shakespeare and others remain timeless:

> What is genius but the faculty of seizing and turning to account everything that strikes us, of coordinating and breathing life into all the materials that present themselves.[228]

To the poet:

> nothing walks, or creeps, or grows, or exists, which must not in turn arise and walk before him as exponent of his meaning. Comes he to that power, his genius is no longer inexhaustible.[229]

Proper symbols are understood and valued by other men from century to century:

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[223] Works, VII, p. 40, " Art."

[224] Journals and Miscellaneous Notebooks, IV, p. 14.

[225] Works, VII, p. 227, "Clubs."

[226] Ibid., 38, "Art."

[227] Journals, V, p. 370.

[228] Early Lectures, I, p. 285.

[229] Works, III, p. 40, "The Poet."

> A figurative statement arrests attention, and is remembered and repeated. . . . Genius thus makes the transfer from one part of Nature to a remote part, and betrays the rhymes and echoes that pole makes with pole.[230]

In the highest form of literature, the symbol created is simply an outflowing of the Universal Mind, for the

> vision of genius comes by removing the too officious activity of the understanding, and giving leave and amplest privilege to the spontaneous sentiment. Out of this must all that is alive and genial in thought go.[231]

Another name for the "spontaneous sentiment" is "Instinct" or "Intuition,"[232] and

> . . . in that deep force, the last fact behind which analysis cannot go, all things find their common origin. . . We first share the life by which things exist and afterwards see them as appearances in nature and forget that we have shared their cause. Here is the fountain of action and thought. . . when we discern truth, we do nothing of ourselves, but allow a passage to its beams.[233]

However, Instinct needs the assistance of Imagination; genius as a creative power always

> implies imagination; use of symbols, figurative speech. A deep insight will always, like nature, ultimate its thought in a thing. . . Then all men understand him.[234]

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[230] Works, VIII, p. 12, "Poetry and Imagination."

[231] Works, I, p. 165, "Literary Ethics."

[232] Works, II, p. 64, "Self-Reliance."

[233] Ibid.

[234] Works, VIII, p. 17, "Poetry and Imagination."

What is Imagination? It

> is a very high sort of seeing. . . by the intellect being what and where it sees, by sharing the path or circuit of things through forms, and so making them translucid to others.[235]

In other words,

> All physical facts are words for spiritual facts, and Imagination, by naming them, is the Interpreter showing us the unity of the world.[236]

This is the evolution of a thought: Instinct chooses the idea and Imagination ignites it by a symbol to make it whole, for

> a thought which does not go to embody or externize itself, is no thought.[237]

The mantling of a thought with language wherein a natural object becomes

> an exponent of some truth or general law, bewitches and delights men. It is a taking of dead sticks, and clothing about with immortality. . . All opaque things are transparent, and the light of heaven struggles through.[238]

When a genius creates the highest form of literature, he speaks through poetry, or the "piety of the intellect."[239] Its symbols have the integrity and penetrating power to find response in the hearts and minds of all men. Great writers

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[235] Works, III, p. 26, "The Poet."

[236] Journals, IX, p. 127.

[237] Ibid., 175.

[238] Ibid., 277.

[239] Works, VIII, p. 64, "Poetry and Imagination."

of each age found an audience, or their creations would have died with them.

> . . . the appreciation never lags far after the invention. The hearing ear is close to the speaking tongue, and no genius can long or often utter anything which is not invited or gladly entertained by men around him.[240]

The man of genius is the only real interpreter of nature:

> for every thought its proper melody or rhyme exists, though the odds are immense against our finding it, and only genius can rightly say the banns.[241]

He writes not for himself but for mankind; the genius

> does not increase the individuality but the community of each mind, . . . we have surprise at finding ourselves, at recognizing our own truth in that wild unacquainted field.[242]

Since truth is timeless, a good book is always a precious commodity. In his late journals Emerson remarked often on the value of literature, which is a constant delight to the appreciative reader. Thus, the

> good writer is sure of his influence, because, as he is always copying not from his fancy, but from real facts,-- when his reader comes to like experiences of his own he is always reminded of the writer. . . it is indifferent how old a truth is, whether an hour or five centuries, whether it first shot into the mind of Adam, or your own. If it be truth, it is certainly much older than both of us.[243]

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[240] Journals, VIII, p. 503.

[241] Works, VIII, p. 47, "Poetry and Imagination."

[242] Journals and Miscellaneous Notebooks, III, p. 240.

[243] Journals, X, p. 382.

As truth is ageless so the vehicle of its expression is ever new and dazzling. If the author writes "with a stroke of genius, he is instantly modern, though it be Egypt and affairs of mummies, and I see that one fact is as good as another fact."[244]

The piety or 'moral sentiment' that pervades the greatest literature created by genius causes the reader to recognize the perpetual suggestions of "the Supreme Intellect," and "the oldest thoughts become new and fertile whilst he speaks them."[245]

For Emerson a writer of genius must embrace 'moral sentiment' or he fails in his "highest calling," the obligation to inspire and uplift his fellow men. Emerson felt it

> is inexcusable in any man who pretends to greatness to confound moral distinctions. True genius, whatever faults of action it may have, never does. Shakespeare never does.[246]

When a man of genius uses his gifts for worldly advantage and says:

> I will write a play that shall be repeated in London a hundred nights . . . this perversion is punished with instant loss of true wisdom and real power.[247]

Milton was an outstanding example of a writer who adhered to the 'moral sentiment.' His poetry implied

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[244] Journals, IX, p. 469.

[245] Works, VIII, p. 202, "Quotation and Originality."

[246] Journals, III, p. 117.

[247] Works, X, p. 85, "Perpetual Forces."

> . . . not creation, but increased perception, second-sight knowledge of what is, beyond the ken of others. Yet these are prophecy.[248]

Milton, Emerson said, obeyed

> the morale, as in humility, and in the obligation to serve mankind. True genius always has these inspirations.[249]

His gifts are

> subordinated to his moral sentiments; and his virtues are so graceful that they seem rather talents than labors.[250]

Emerson believed consistently that "in general, according to the elevation of the soul will the power over language always be, and lively thoughts will break out into spritely verse."[251]

The man of literary genius has a definite responsibility because he has power to influence other men and future generations. In fact, the young men who read his works

> are more himself than he is. They receive of the soul as he also receives.[252]

Thus did Shakespeare multiply "himself into a thousand sons, a thousand Shakespeares,"[253] for "not by mechanical diffusion, does an original genius work and spread himself."[254]

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[248] Journals, II, p. 364.

[249] Journals, X, p. 154.

[250] Works, XII, p. 262, "Milton."

[251] Journals, II, p. 415.

[252] Works, III, p. 5, "The Poet."

[253] Journals, V, p. 104.

[254] Works, XII, p. 312, "Thoughts on Modern Literature."

Obviously each man of literary genius should "inspire and lead his race."[255] For this he needs every opportunity to speak with divinely inspired perception and power of utterance; he needs a separation from ordinary men, "from living, breathing, reading and writing in the daily, time-worn yoke of their opinion."[256] Meanwhile, he must not forget the ultimate purpose of the truth whose instrument he is. He must take his place in assisting mankind to rise toward an ever higher plane of existence. Genius

> must now set itself to raise the social conditions of man and to redress the disorder of the planet he inhabits.[257]

Such lofty aims can be accomplished best by means of language. Among all of men's creations none endures as well or speaks as clearly as literature:

> Literature being thus the public depository of the thoughts of the human race it becomes a true history of man. Religion is his best hour. War is his worst. Literature is the record of all; the sum and measure of humanity. . . . it represents all human thought. . . It is thus the only source of true prophecy for the future.[258]

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[255] Works, VI, p. 156, "Culture."

[256] Ibid.

[257] Works, X, p. 349, "Life and Letters in New England."

[258] Early Lectures, II, p. 63.

To Emerson the main purpose of books was inspiration. He believed that "the whole use in literature is the moral."[259] Literature should be used as "a decalogue."[260]

As man advances in his understanding he

> discovers how deep a property he has in literature, in all fable as well as in all history. He finds that the poet was no odd fellow who described strange and impossible situations, but that universal man wrote by his pen a confession true for one and true for all.[261]

Such a "universal man" is a man of genius who fulfills his mission of obedience by inspiring others to draw closer to God or the Universal Mind. His chief tool is the power to create with words, and thereby he extends his influence throughout the centuries. This may be why Emerson considered the true poet the most exalted of all creative genuises.

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[259] Journals, VII, p. 250.

[260] Works, X, p. 273, "The Scholar."

[261] Works, II, p. 29-30, "History."

CHAPTER VII

GENIUS AND THE MORAL SENTIMENT

All concepts of genius, with the possible exception of the one indicating 'inclination or turn of mind,' seem intimately related to the moral sentiment. Yet, even this concept cannot be developed fully in any man without adherence to morals.

How did Emerson define the moral sentiment, the possession of which was an absolute requisite of genius? Before he was twenty he spoke of it thus:

> Moral Sense; a rule coextensive and coeval with Mind. It derives its existence from the eternal character of the Deity. . . from a Mind, of which it is the essence. That Mind is God.[262]

As a young man Emerson attacked Byron's works, which had spread "by the ill-fame of genius through all the avenues of civil society" but lacked the moral sentiment and therefore "poisoned the vessels of moral health."[263]

About nine years later he states that church doctrines as a whole hinders the believer from seeing the "divine beauty of moral truth," which is a rule of life, not a rule of faith."[264]

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[262] Journals, I, p. 186-87.

[263] Journals and Miscellaneous Notebooks, II, p. 282.

[264] Journals, III, p. 160.

Emerson said that even the poet Milton had not been any more "enamored of moral perfection" than himself, for whom it had been an "angel from childhood" and was now "in the bottom of his heart. . . the soul of religion."[265] In its place at the "bottom of his heart" moral sentiment seems synonymous with the "genius," or voice within, that religious men of all ages have called by other names, such as

> the light, the seed, the Spirit, the Holy Ghost, the Comforter, the Daemon, the still, small voice. . . In all ages, to all men, it saith I am.[266]

Late in life Emerson equates moral sentiment with the term "justification by faith."[267] Its power

> puts us at the Heart of Nature. . . seems to be the fountain of intellect, for no talent gives the impression of sanity, if wanting this; nay, it absorbs everything into itself. Truth, Power, Goodness, Beauty, are its varied names, faces of one substance, the heart of all.[268]

In "The Poet" he analyzes the moral sentiment thus:

> For the Universe has three children, born at one time, which reappear under different names, in every system of thought, whether they be called cause, operation, and effect; or, more poetically, Jove, Pluto, Neptune; or theologically, the Father, the Spirit and the Son; but which we will call here, the Knower, the Doer, and the Sayer. These stand respectively for the love of truth, for the love of good, and for the love of beauty. These three are

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[265] Journals, III, p. 208-09.

[266] Works, X, p. 97, "Character."

[267] Journals, X, p. 99.

[268] Works, X, p. 95-96, "Character."

> equal. Each is that which he is essentially, so that he cannot be surmounted or analyzed, and each of these three has the power of the others latent in him, and his own patent.[269]

A scholar who truly perceives the world around him is conscious of

> this supreme nature which lurks within all. That reality, that causing force is moral. The Moral Sentiment is but its other name. It makes by its presence or absence right and wrong, beauty and ugliness, genius or depravation.[270]

If the moral sentiment is affirmative in an individual, then he has submitted to the first rule, which is

> to obey your genius. . . But the affirmative of affirmatives is love . . . Strength enters as the Moral Sentiment enters.[271]

Further,

> only what is inevitable interests us, and it turns out that love and good are inevitable, and in the course of things. That Genius has infused itself into Nature.[272]

The moral sentiment is the "presence of the Eternal in each perishing man. . . It is the truth."[273]

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[269] Works, III, p. 6-7, "The Poet."

[270] Works, I, p. 289, "Lecture on the Times."

[271] Works, XII, p. 61, "Powers and Laws of Thought."

[272] Works, I, p. 372, "The Young American."

[273] Works, X, p. 97-98, "Character."

> We are made of it, the world is built by it, things endure as they share it, all beauty, all health, all intelligence exist by it.[274]

Moral sentiment "is absolute and in every individual the law of the world."[275] Therefore, to Emerson the

> truth was in us before it was reflected to us from natural objects; and the profound genius will cast the likeness of all creatures into every product of his wit.[276]

Few men take the final step in submitting themselves to the Universal Mind; this is the difference between talent "for the market" and highest genius. Talent indeed uses the power of the intellect to create but does not allow the outflow of the spirit of "Genius, the Benefactor"[277] through itself. The lack or presence of "moral sentiment" is a "cardinal fact of health or disease."[278] Without it the man of genius fails "in the high sense to be a creator" or "a Redeemer of the human mind."[279] Therefore, the results of perverted talent

> and absurdities that disgust us, is, primarily, the want of health. Genius is health and Beauty is health, and Virtue is health.[280]

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[274] Ibid., 87.

[275] Journals, X, p. 193.

[276] Works, II, p. 341, "Intellect."

[277] Letters, IV, p. 90, Letter to Mary Moody Emerson.

[278] Works, XII, p. 332, "Thoughts on Modern Literature."

[279] Ibid.

[280] Works, X, p. 43, "Aristocracy."

The health of a soul "requires the upward eye."[281]

> The moral is the measure of health, and in the voice of Genius I hear invariably the moral tone, even when it is disowned in words;--health, melody, and a wider horizon belong to moral sensibility.[282]

The health of man is "an equality of inlet and outlet, gathering and giving."[283] The genius possesses such health:

> Health is genius, the higher tone ...Genius consists in health, in plenipotence of that 'top of condition' which allows of not only exercise but frolic of faculty.[284]

It is not surprising that "genius works in sport."[285] The power of genius unites the individual mind with the universal mind:

> Being, and so doing, must blend, before the eye has health to behold through sympathy and through presence, the spirit. Then all flows, and is known without words. . . To be pure, we must live in God radiant and flowing, constituting the health and conservation of the universe.[286]

In such manner the "soul of God is poured into the world through the thoughts of men. The world stands on ideas. . .

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[281] Journals, VII, p. 320.

[282] Works, X, p. 185, "The Sovereignty of Ethics."

[283] Ibid., 76, "Perpetual Forces."

[284] Journals, VII, p. 98.

[285] Works, VI, p. 264, "Consideration by the Way."

[286] Journals, IX, p. 250-51.

the ether and source of all the elements is moral force.[287] Thus genius, previously defined as the "intellect constructive" and the "soul active," seems to be Emerson's reference when he says that intellect is "the feet of the Moral Power."[288] All worthwhile thoughts and institutions in the world are founded upon it.

The genius attains his height only when he is imbued so thoroughly with moral sentiment that all he does or says is saturated with it. He reflects not himself but the spirit in him.

> The moral sentiment is pure vision, and what is Religion? Religion is the architecture of the sentiment. The sentiment never rests in vision, but wishes to be enacted. It does not pause.[289]

Therefore, it is reasonable "that a religious man will have more genius at the end of ten years than the same man would have in the same time had he been irreligious."[290]

Emerson's view on the moral sentiment remained steadfast from youth to old age. His convictions, always strong, never faltered; they became part of his religion, of which he was the prophet.

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[287] Works, X, p. 88, "Perpetual Forces."

[288] Journals, VII, p. 505.

[289] Journals, X, p. 191.

[290] Journals and Miscellaneous Notebooks, III, p. 165.

> Whoever has had experience of the moral sentiment cannot choose but believe in unlimited power. Each pulse from that heart is an oath from the Most High.[291]

> And one may say boldly that no man has a right perception of any truth who has not been reacted on by it so as to be ready to be its martyr.[292]

There was never a time in Emerson's life when he could not have spoken these words in sincerity:

> I owe to genius always the same debt of lifting the curtain from the common, and showing me that gods are sitting disguised in this seeming gang of gypsies and pedlars. . . Holiness is the only stair to the mount of God. . . Coffee is good for talent, but genius wants prayer.[293]

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[291] Works, VI, p. 29, "Fate."

[292] Ibid., 29-30.

[293] Journals, V, p. 554.

CONCLUSIONS

Emerson's views as a transcendentalist and idealist are reflected in many of his concepts of "genius." A man of the highest genius is an ideal or universal man; he is a man who has learned to follow his intuition. Emerson's romanticism and optimism are emphasized by his insistence that the mission of the man of genius is to make the world better and that all men are capable of infinite good. However, Emerson's practical realism is shown by his conviction that each individual genius must progress by means of self-discipline and self-reliance to become a doer as well as a dreamer. Various functions of "genius" as God, the mind, and the soul reflect Emerson's transcendentalism and mysticism.

Generally, the foregoing chapters have indicated the close connection of "genius" with Emerson's philosophy concerning the mind and the soul. The discussions have centered almost exclusively on the highest concept of "genius as a creative and intellectual power.

How does this power begin? That "genius" is in every man as "an inclination or turn of mind" Emerson states repeatedly. For example, in "Prudence" he admits,

"I have no skill to make money spend well, no genius in my economy."[294] He states in "Art and Criticism" that "some men swear with genius. I knew a poet in whose talent Nature carried this freak so far that his only graceful verses were pretty blasphemies."[295] A man can have a "military genius,"[296] a "mechanical genius,"[297] or a "genius of debate."[298] Perhaps Emerson's best exposition of "genius" in this sense appears in an early lecture:

> When I say that all men have genius and will at some time be as creative as the poet, the orator, the artist it is not because I think society shows now any great degree of reality and life. It is rather wonderful how little leaven is in the lump, how little original action, thought, or art there is. Ordinarily we speak of creators as a small class and intimate difference of kind. One can sketch with invention. Others can draw as well but cannot design. One can sing as he or she has learned... Another's conversation surprises with unheard of combinations at each turn.
>
> I look upon this as difference in degree and that the powers of all are the same.[299]

Here Emerson states clearly that "genius" is a power in every man lying dormant and ready to be aroused into action. In many men it does not develop at all; nevertheless, the potential exists. I feel that this concept is

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[294] Works, II, p. 221, "Prudence."

[295] Works, XII, p. 288, "Art and Criticism."

[296] Works, VIII, p. 218, "Progress of Culture."

[297] Works, VII, p. 110, "Domestic Life."

[298] Works, X, p. 85, "Perpetual Forces."

[299] Early Lectures, II, p. 308.

definitely Emerson's own: a latent power in every man capable of yielding itself to the Universal Mind and thereby expressing truth to other men. It seems to me that this concept certainly is a step above a simple "inclination or turn of mind" because of the possibility suggested that every man "will at some time be as creative as the poet, the orator, the artist."

This power to create is present in every individual.

> A man is like a bit of Labrador spar, which has no lustre as you turn it in your hand until you come to a particular angle; then it shows deep and beautiful colors. There is no adaptation or universal applicability in men, but each has his special talent, and the mastery of successful men consists in adroitly keeping themselves where and when that turn shall be oftenest to be practised.[300]

Each man does what he can do, and all men profit:

> Every carpenter who shaves with a foreplane borrows the genius of a forgotten inventor.[301]

> The wise man sees that we cannot spare any advantages and that the tools are effigies and statues of men also; their wit, their genius perpetuated.[302]

Thus, inventions remain as mute witnesses to the power of Imagination, "creative of genius and of men."[303]

Every man's potentiality or "genius, the quality that differences him from every other, the susceptibility to

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[300] Works, III, p. 57, "Experience."

[301] Works, IV, p. 12, "Uses of Great Men."

[302] Journals, VII, p. 268.

[303] Works, VII, p. 212, "Books."

one class of influences, the selection of what is fit for him, the rejection of what is unfit, determines for him the character of the universe."[304] Whether each man selects and rejects properly will determine whether his latent creative power will show itself. How is a man to make the most of the "aptitude born with him?"[305] Emerson says:

> Do your work. I have to say this often, but Nature says it oftener.[306]

In other words,

> every mind has a new compass, a new north, a new direction of its own, differencing its genius and aim from every other mind.[307]

This is the key to Emerson's theory of self-trust:

> Be master of yourself, and for the love of God keep every inch you gain.[308]

> Reduce the body to the soul. Make the body the instrument through which that thought is uttered. . . Don't shrink from your work. It will never be an example further than it should be; for no other man has the same freak.[309]

The advice just quoted was recorded by Emerson in 1832, the year he resigned from the ministry. He is still grieving the death of Ellen and facing a personal decision as to a new vocation. He seems to have required of himself an absolute integrity of purpose which included the necessity of serving

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[304] Works, II, p. 143-44, "Spiritual Laws."

[305] Works, VII, p. 291-2, "Success."

[306] Ibid.

[307] Works, VIII, p. 306, "Greatness." Underlining is mine.

[308] Journals and Miscellaneous Notebooks, IV, p. 6.

[309] Ibid., p. 15.

others. Actually, he was seeking his own "north." In 1833 he wrote:

> The truth is, you can't find any example that will suit you, nor could, if the whole family of Adam should pass in procession before you, for you are a new work of God.[310]

> The call of our calling is the loudest call. There are so many worthless lives, apparently, that to advance a good cause by telling one anecdote or doing one great act seems a worthy reason for living.[311]

Here Emerson certainly preached self-reliance to himself. The first paragraph of the essay by that name supplies a definition of genius:

> To believe your own thought, to believe that what is true for you in your private heart is true for all men, that is genius.[312]

"What is true for you in your private heart" had a special connotation for Emerson. How is one to "believe your own thought?" In the first paragraph of the same essay Emerson says that "a man should learn to detect and watch that gleam of light which flashes across his mind from within."[313] It is my opinion that this "gleam of light" may resemble the previously quoted "sensibility to the laws of the world,"[314] also called "genius." This "sensibility" or perception of

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[310] Ibid., 240.

[311] Ibid., 252.

[312] Works, II, p. 45, "Self-Reliance."

[313] Works, II, p. 45, "Self-Reliance."

[314] Journals, I X, p. 313.

truth is revealed through "genius" as "the intellect constructive"[315] and the "soul active."[316] It is definitely from within, not from without. Emerson says:

> The highest heaven of wisdom is alike near from every point, and thou must find it, if at all, by methods native to thyself alone.[317]

This is because "every soul has a bias or a polarity of its own, and each new. Every one is a magnet with a new north."[318]

You are safe as

> long as your genius buys. . . Nature arms each man with some faculty which enables him to do easily some feat impossible to any other, and thus makes him necessary to society. . . Nothing is beneath you, if it is in the direction of your life; nothing is great or desirable if it is off from that.[319]

If a man pursues his own "north" or "this self-reliance which belongs to every healthy human being,"[320] material advantages, interruptions or family conditions may become secondary considerations. Of himself he says:

> I shun father and mother and wife and brother when my genius calls me.[321]

The last quoted concept of genius is that of a tutelary deity. This was a concept that Emerson used throughout his

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[315] Works, II, p. 334, "Intellect."

[316] Works, I, p. 90, "The American Scholar."

[317] Works, VII, p. 177, "Works and Days."

[318] Journals, X, p. 140.

[319] Works, VI, p. 112, "Wealth."

[320] Journals, X, p. 186.

[321] Works, II, p. 51, "Self-Reliance."

life; it slips regularly into his essays and even more often into his journals and letters. When he uses the word here in "Self-Reliance" he expressed his deep personal need for periods of meditation and solitude. Numerous journal entries indicate his distaste for the intrusion of everyday duties which left him improperly prepared to pursue his work. At such times he would say his "genius" or tutelary deity deserted him, and he would have to wait for a more favorable time for inspiration. Whenever he refers to his or other men's need for times of solitude, the sense of the word "genius" often shifts to that of a guiding deity, presumably the source of advice within a man. This spirit is

> conceived of as a certain undemonstrable force, a Familiar or Genius, by whose impulses the man is guided, but whose counsels he cannot impart; which is company for him, so that such men are often solitary, who if they chance to be social, do not need society but can entertain themselves very well alone.[322]

It may have been because Emerson was naturally introspective and actually enjoyed periods of solitude that he wrote with such strong feeling in this regard:

> The determination of Genius in each is so strong that, if it were not guarded with powerful checks, it would have made society impossible. As it is, men are best and most by themselves; and always work in society with great loss of power. They are not timed each to the other, they cannot keep step, and life requires too much compromise.[323]

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[322] Works, III, p. 89-90, "Character."

[323] Works, XII, p. 84, "Instinct and Inspiration." My personal interpretation of Genius in this paragraph is that of a tutelary spirit.

This condition is one established by the tutelary deity of all men:

> The cooperation is involuntary, and is put upon us by the Genius of Life, who reserves this as a part of his perogative. 'T is fine for us to talk; we sit and muse and are serene and complete; but the moment we meet with anybody, each becomes a fraction.[324]

In other expressions regarding solitude, the concept of "genius" is again that of creative potential. In an 1837 journal entry Emerson says,

> Always the man of genius dwells alone and like the mountains, pays the tax of snows and silence for elevation.[325]

Another aspect of solitude is explored in "Culture":

> Solitude, the safeguard of mediocrity, is genius, the stern friend, the cold, obscure shelter where moult the wings which will bear it farther than suns and stars.[326]

The quality of self-reliance or complete self-trust is definitely one concept of genius to Emerson. A person who practices self-reliance turns to God in his own mind. Emerson says that "entire self-reliance belongs to the intellect."[327] Thus, it follows that each self-trusting man obeys his own instinct, defined by Emerson as the "essence of genius" and the "lungs of that inspiration which

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[324] Works, VII, p. 8-9, "Society and Solitude."

[325] Journals, IV, p. 202.

[326] Works, VI, p. 155-56, "Culture."

[327] Works, II, p. 344, "Intellect."

giveth man wisdom."[328] The instinct allows the "soul to have its way[329] through him. Emerson says:

> Trust the instinct to the end, though you can render no reason. It is vain to hurry it. By trusting it to the end, it shall ripen into truth and you shall know why you believe.[330]

Any man who completely trusts "the instinct" touches the mind of God, that "Omniscience" which "flows into the intellect and makes what we call genius."[331]

A man who is self-reliant in the highest sense observes and speaks truth, which is

> self-evident, self-subsistent. It is light. You don't get a candle to see the sun rise.[332]

The communication of truth to the perceiving man is the

> highest event in nature, since it then does not give somewhat from itself, but it gives itself, or passes into and becomes that man whom it enlightens; or in proportion to that truth he receives, it takes him to itself.[333]

According to Emerson, the man of genius perceives insofar as is possible his identity with his creator:

> For every seeing soul there are two absorbing facts,--I and the Abyss.[334]

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[328] Ibid., 64, "Self-Reliance."

[329] Ibid., 271, "Over-Soul."

[330] Ibid., 330, "Intellect."

[331] Ibid., 288, "The Over-Soul."

[332] Journals, II, p. 516.

[333] Works, II, p. 280, "The Over-Soul."

[334] Journals, X, p. 171.

The self-reliant man or genius sees clearly that all men

> are but several porches into one mind. Each man has his own calling which is determined by his peculiar reception of the Common Reason. There is one direction in every man in which unlimited space is open to him. He has faculties silently inviting him thither to endless exertion. He finds obstruction taken away and he sweeps serenely over God's depths into an infinite sea. . . and this results from his peculiar organization, or the mode in which the general soul is incarnated in him.[335]

In this incarnation of the "general soul" the genius reaches a sense of remarkable closeness to God. Emerson says we can give "to this generalization the name of Being,"[336] for it is the recognition of a kind of oneness or identity with the creator. In "Circles" he expresses it in this way:

> So to be is the sole inlet of so to know.[337]

"Genius is a spontaneous soul. . . It makes; but making always rests in Being."[338] Therefore, such creative experience always has an extraordinary freshness and a kind of wild ecstasy in it, for even to a genius such revelation is limited to scattered moments in a lifetime. To Emerson this experience was real. He said that this is why a poet in his highest moments "speaks somewhat wildly." His words are from the

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[335] Early Lectures, II, p. 147.

[336] Works, III, p. 73, "Experience."

[337] Works, II, p. 320, "Circles."

[338] Early Lectures, II, p. 307-08.

"intellect released from all service and suffered to take its direction from its celestial life."[339] This wild quality exists because a true genius is like a child:

> The child is thoroughly in earnest; and the child's movements are all beautiful. A man as earnest as a child would attract us also. . . .
>
> Our interest in men of genius,-- what is it, but (so to speak) interest in the wild man? for genius is only the listening to the soul and the utterance of the soul.[340]

A man of genius is absolutely spontaneous, and he is rare:

> How beautiful the manner of wild animals, the bird that trims herself by the stream, the habits of antelope and buffalo. Well, the charm of genius is the same: we wish man on the higher plane to exhibit also the wildness or nature of that higher plane, but the biography of genius, so thirsted for, is not yet written.[341]

Truth expressed through this utter spontaneity of the self-reliant man would, in a way, be superior to any creed of man. Thus, "religion must always be a crab fruit; it cannot be grafted and keep its wild beauty. The wilder it is, the more virtuous,"[342] for "in morals, wild liberty breeds iron conscience."[343]

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[339] Works, III, p. 27, "The Poet."

[340] Early Lectures, II, p. 306.

[341] Journals, VII, p. 198.

[342] Works, VI, p. 214, "Worship."

[343] Ibid., p. 64, "Power."

By submitting himself to the Universal Mind a man becomes a person of self-reliance and self-trust. In a sense he is no longer his own agent but the agent of God in that he "believes his own thought; . . . speaks that which he was created to say."[344] Made by nature, the man of genius becomes a spokesman for his fountainhead or source and fulfills a natural law, for "the moral influence of nature upon every individual is that amount of truth which it illustrates to him."[345] Nature is wholly moral; the

> world is a temple whose walls are covered with emblems, pictures and commandments of the Deity.[346]

Who are men of self-reliance? They are men who perceive truth and convert it into action through communicable symbols. Therefore the poet and the scholar must be men of genius; both convert truth into action. Emerson reminds us in "The American Scholar" that the "one thing in the world of value, is the active soul,"[347] which is defined as "genius" when it "sees absolute truth and utters truth, or creates."[348]

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[344] Works, VII, p. 292, "Success."

[345] Works, I, p. 42., "Nature."

[346] Works, III, p. 17, "The Poet."

[347] Works, I, p. 90, "The American Scholar."

[348] Ibid.

In fact, all the duties of a wise man or scholar can be "comprised in self-trust."[349]

Moreover, a scholar is not "Man Thinking" until he "has learned to worship the soul"[350] truly, for only in that attitude can he discover wisdom, which is completely an outgrowth of the moral sentiment:

> Wisdom has its root in goodness, and not goodness its root in wisdom.[351]

Every man of genius has a responsibility to others because he has so much to give to others:

> Power is a trust. So also is genius or every degree of wisdom.[352]

Men of genius "are the First Good," and "this reverence is the reestablishment of the natural orders."[353] This is why they must consider seriously the following questions:

> Which debt must I pay first, the debt to the rich, or the debt to the poor? the debt of money, or the debt of thought to mankind, of genius to nature.[354]

These men actually comprise a sort of priesthood of truth for other men, but sometimes the priesthood becomes corrupt:

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[349] Ibid, 100.

[350] Ibid, 86.

[351] Journals, IX, p. 122.

[352] Journals, II, p. 408.

[353] Works, I, p. 271, "The Scholar."

[354] Works, II, p.316, "Circles."

> The speculative ability of the time feels the bribe of wealth and men of genius are tempted to betray their own word for the more gainful office of gratifying the public taste.[355]

Each poet and scholar is obligated morally to "keep faith with himself. His sheet-anchor is sincerity."[356] To lose his sincerity is to refuse to say "what he was created to say."[357] Not all scholars and poets do keep faith:

> The day is darkened when the golden river runs down into mud; when genius grows idle and wanton and reckless of its fine lustre of being Saint, Prophet, Inspirer to its humble fellows.[358]

Why is the office of a scholar so high? The reason is simple.

> The true scholar is the Church. Only the duties of the intellect must be owned. . . The intellectual man lives in perpetual victory. As certainly as water falls in rain on the tops of mountains and runs down into valleys, plains and pits, so does thought fall first on the best minds, and run down, from class to class, until it reaches the masses, and works revolutions.[359]

> He [the scholar] is here to know the secret of Genius.[360]

In every age truth is newly expressed by geniuses of the times who symbolize it in terms understandable to the contemporary

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[355] Early Lectures, II, p. 161.

[356] Journals, IX, p. 528.

[357] Works, VII, p. 292, "Success."

[358] Works, X, p. 51, "Aristocracy."

[359] Ibid., 249. Underlining is mine.

[360] Ibid., 288-89, "The Scholar."

population. According to Emerson, in this manner the world should improve slowly but steadily, as more and more men catch the vision of the "active soul" or the power of genius. This "active soul"

> every man is entitled to; this every man contains within him, although in almost all men obstructed and as yet unborn.[361]

The scholar's ultimate purpose, then, is the "conversion of the world."[362] He recognizes that

> every man is not so much a workman in the world as he is a suggestion of that he should be. Men walk as prophecies of the next age.[363]

Genius obeys the laws of nature and seeks to build always toward God:

> Genius is the activity which repairs the decays of things, whether wholly or partly of a material and finite kind. Nature, through all her kingdoms, insures herself.[364]

It is the office of each scholar and poet to call forth the slumbering potentiality in every man, for the

> good call out great sentiments, as well as give them out. That which is like you in other minds will start from sleep in your presence.[365]

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[361] Works, I, p. 90, "The American Scholar."

[362] Works, I, p. 115, "The American Scholar."

[363] Works, II, p. 305, "Circles."

[364] Works, III, p. 22, "The Poet."

[365] Journals, II, p. 374.

Great art and literature have ever expressed great sentiments and are ageless; nevertheless, they have been pertinent and meaningful to the contemporary population for whom they were created.

> The true work of genius must proceed out of the wants and deeds of the age.[366]

Slowly man shall advance, for the

> true romance which the world exists to realize will be the transformation of genius into practical power.[367]

Emerson says that "the next age will behold God in the ethical laws"[368] and mankind will

> regard natural history, private fortunes and politics, not for themselves, as wisdom, but as illustrations of these laws, of that beatitude and love. Nature is too thin a screen; the glory of the One breaks in everywhere.[369]

In that age,

> when science is learned in love, and its powers are wielded by love, they will appear the supplements and continuations of the material creation.[370]

The attempts of genius to express truth will have accomplished its sole purpose: namely, that man shall be a genius, a scholar, a poet.

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[366] Early Lectures, II, p. 61.

[367] Works, III, p. 86, "Experience."

[368] Works, X, p. 222, "The Preacher."

[369] Ibid., 223.

[370] Works, II, p. 369, "Art."

> Society can never prosper but must always be bankrupt, until every man does that which he was created to do.[371]

Then every man will be a Universal Man:

> One after another his victorious thought comes up with and reduces all things, until the world becomes at last only a realized will--the double of the man.[372]

One is a bit overwhelmed at the transcendent idealism envisioned in the possibilities for this world if every man becomes a genius. What is almost as overwhelming is to discover that when Emerson made such statements he apparently spoke with utter sincerity and faith that some day the ideal would materialize. To himself, at least, his ideas were concrete, and he was most consistent in expressing them. He says in 1857:

> My philosophy holds to a few laws:
> 1. Identity, whence comes the fact that metaphysical faculties and facts are the transcendency of physical.
> 2. Flowing, or transition, or shooting the gulf, the perpetual striving to ascend to a higher platform, the same thing in new and higher form.[373]

The above statements agree well with comments he had made twenty-four years earlier:

> There is a correspondence between the human soul and everything that exists in the world; more properly, everything that is known to man. Instead of studying things without the principles

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[371] Works, VI, p. 112, "Wealth."

[372] Works, I, p. 40, "Nature."

[373] Journals, IX, p. 134.

> of them, all may be penetrated unto within him. Every act puts the agent in a new condition. The purpose of life seems to be to acquaint a man with himself. He is not to live in the future as described to him, but to live to the real future by living to the real present. The highest revelation is that God is in every man.[374]

One can recognize the one-in-all theory in the phrase "all may be penetrated unto within him"; "shooting the gulf" is the constant reaching toward God "in every man."

Emerson was generous both in praise and censure of great men and their accomplishments, but he was also most specific in elucidating the possibilities of every man. It is true that he often expressed disgust with the crowd, but his basic philosophy belies those statements, as it preaches the dignity of the individual.

Emerson emphasized the responsibility of the man of genius as a "redeemer of mankind." Did he consider himself such a man? The earnestness of his presentations, the steadfastness of his ideas and their importance to him might lead us to think that he regarded himself as a purveyor of truth. We cannot be sure, for even by his own example of extraordinary self-reliance he never commits himself quite to that extent. However, he makes what may be deemed partial commitments. In 1836 he states his goal in life:

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[374] Journals, III, p. 200-201.

> I only aim to speak for the great soul; to speak for the sovereignty of Ideas.[375]

In 1859 he writes:

> Do you not see that, though I have no eloquence and no flow of thought, yet that I do not stoop to accept anything less than truth? That I sit here contented with my poverty, mendicity and deaf and dumb estate, from year to year, from youth to age, rather than adorn myself with any red rag of false church or false association. My low and homely sitting here by the wayside is my homage to truth, which, I see, is sufficient without me; which is honored by my abstaining, not by superserviceableness.[376]

Later the same year he says:

> I am a bard least of bards. I cannot, like them, make lofty arguments in stately, continuous verse, constraining the rocks, trees, animals, and the periodic stars to say my thoughts,--for that is the gift of great poets; but I am a bard because I stand near them and apprehend all they utter, and with pure joy hear that which I also would say, and, moreover, I speak interruptedly words and half stanzas which have the like scope and aim.[377]

By 1865 he writes:

> If I were successful abroad in talking and dealing with men, I should not come back to my library and my work, as I do. When the spirit chooses you for the Scribe to publish some commandment, if it makes you

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[375] Journals, IV, p. 32.

[376] Journals, IX, p. 184. Underlining is mine.

[377] Journals, IX, p. 472. Underlining is mine.

> odious to men, and men odious to you, you shall accept that loathsomeness with joy.
>
> The moth must fly to the lamp; the man must solve those questions, though he die.[378]

In the above journal soliloquies we can detect certain confessions. Emerson speaks "for the great soul;" he accepts nothing "less than truth;" he creates with the same "scope and aim" as the poet; he obeys the "spirit" within him. These are some of the criteria of a man of genius. By them and by his almost incredible sincerity, Emerson may qualify as a man of genius, too.

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[378] Journals, X, p. 98. Underlining is mine.

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